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A Confessional Response to North American Lutheran–Reformed Ecumenism

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The *Formula of Agreement* between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and three mainline Reformed churches, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ, building on the Leuenberg Agreement in Europe and heralded as an ecumenical breakthrough, raises important questions for confessional Lutherans. This article will primarily examine Lutheran–Reformed relationships in the North American context in light of the earlier work of Leuenberg.[1] There are similarities and differences between Europe and the United States that contribute to the conciliatory stance between these confessional groups. Unlike the sixteenth-century reformers, however, many contemporary Protestant ecumenists are indifferent to the question of salvation, at least when viewed as rescue from the wrath of God. Since salvation from God's judgment upon sin is no longer on our theological radar, the previous disagreements over doctrine have become mere formalities that are easily sidestepped.

Those North American Reformed bodies which view themselves as orthodox, such as the Christian Reformed Church and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as their counterparts among Lutherans, such as the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod, still frame the discussion in terms of the classical disagreements. These church bodies attend largely to christological issues such as the *genus maiestaticum*[2] and Christ's bodily

[1] The most extensive study of the research involved in the development of the Leuenberg Agreement is found in Elisabeth Schieffer, *Von Schauenburg nach Leuenberg: Entstehung und Bedeutung der Konkordie reformatorischer Kirchen in Europa* (Paderborn: Verlag Bonifatius-Druckerei, 1983).

[2] "We believe, teach, and confess that the assumed human nature in Christ not only has and retains its natural, essential characteristics but also that through the personal union with the deity and, afterward, through the exaltation or glorification, this nature was elevated to the right hand of majesty, power, and might over all things that can be named, not only in this world, but also in the world to come [Eph. 1:20–21]" (SD VIII, 12), Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord*, trans. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 618. One inference of the *genus maiestaticum* is drawn later in SD VIII, 19: "The union between the divine and human natures in the person of Christ is a much different, higher, indescribable communion. Because of this

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presence in the Lord's Supper.[3] Disagreements over these loci remain important because orthodox church bodies, like the reformers, are committed to a christology and soteriology that assume that we are being saved not only from our own misdeeds, but also from God's judgment.

At stake for Lutherans is salvation itself, in keeping with the view that God does not save what he does not assume.[4] But it is this very claim that is put in question by the so-called *extra Calvinisticum*.[5] The Reformed affirm a reserve in the Godhead with respect to the incarnation. If there is such a reserve, however, then how are we saved? No doubt, if all of Christ in both natures comes and assumes all human space and time, then human agency is ruled out. There would be nothing left over with which we could exercise our free will and thus claim the law as our own righteousness.[6]

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union and communion God is a human being and a human being is God. Nevertheless, through this union and communion neither the natures nor their characteristics are mixed together with the other, but each nature retains its own essence and characteristics." Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 619.

[3] Criticism of the Calvinistic view of Christ's presence in the Supper as "spiritual," since his body is supposed to be limited to heaven as a location, can be found in SD VII, 2–128, Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 592–615.

[4] Speaking colloquially, Steven Paulson notes, "Luther completely reversed normal descriptions of 'assumption' found in so-called Logos Christologies, where an incarnate God somehow subsumes humanity and makes it more perfectly 'divine.' Luther's assumption theory is not preoccupied with how humans get up into the divine but how the divine goes so deep into our flesh that he gives his weight to sinful human flesh (our desire to escape into 'spiritual' matters that we think are 'higher' than body). When God sits his corpulent mercy down in this world, no spiritual diet or holy crane will ever get him out again. Sinners 'go up' to being real human beings for the first time because he 'came down' like an enormous divine weight that won't move. Consequently for Luther, salvation is not taking leave of humanity and becoming like God; it is becoming really and fully human as God's own trusting creature in Christ's new kingdom." Steven D. Paulson, *Luther for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 144.

[5] The *locus classicus* for the *extra Calvinisticum* is Calvin's *Institutes* II.13.4: "For even if the Word in his immeasurable essence united with the nature of man into one person, we do not imagine that he was confined therein. Here is something marvelous: the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be borne in the virgin's womb, to go about earth, and to hang upon the cross; yet he continuously filled the world even as he had done from the beginning." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford L. Battles, Library of Christian Classics 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:481.

[6] Commenting on Luther's critique of Nestorius (with parallels to the Reformed), Paulson notes that "if the preacher says, 'There goes *God* down the street fetching water,' Nestorius would get all flustered because this wasn't the sort of thing God did—more to the point, it wouldn't leave any water for *humans* to fetch. That is why Luther called Nestorius proud and stubbornly stupid. He [i.e., Nestorius] did not want God

Our free will *coram deo* would be excluded. It is not, of course, as if the Reformed teach free will *coram deo*. But free will always wants to stake a claim wherever it can. A consistent Lutheran christology is thoroughly informed by grace and thus leaves no place for free will. Such a negation of our free will liberates us from its illusions, giving us real freedom from the self-deifying ego and allowing us to be creatures living by faith. But if there is some reserve in the incarnation, as the Reformed maintain, then God is less a threat to our space, being, and self-definition.[7]

In contrast to the Reformed objection that Lutherans confuse the two natures of Christ, we must, for the sake of the clarity of the gospel, affirm that the incarnate God is thoroughly enfleshed, that there is no reserve in the second Person of the Trinity as he is incarnate. The entire person of the Son is incarnate in the man Jesus. The resurrected Christ is therefore inexorably attached to a human soul and body, now omnipresent through Christ's exaltation. It is this very body which on the cross bore the sin of the world and expiates God's wrath, and which is given as a testament in the Supper for our forgiveness.[8] Reformed theology is simply incompatible with such a view, so fundamental for Lutheran theology and life.

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sullied by bodily things, and he wanted to save room for humans to do the works of the law. He did not want to preach that 'God died,' nor did he want to preach that 'this man Jesus created the world.'" Paulson, *Luther for Armchair Theologians*, 140–141.

[7] While informed by Reformed theology at several points, the Episcopalian theologian Paul Zahl, through his own deep reflection on grace, has helpfully grasped the pastoral significance of a bound will. "The point for theology is that we are not subjects; we are objects. We do not live; we are lived. To put it another way, our archaeology is our teleology. We are typically operating from drives and aspirations generated by our past. What ought to be free decisions in relation to love and service become un-free decisions anchored in retrospective deficits and grievances. This is the message of tragic literature. . . . Free entities are subjects. Un-free entities are objects. Christ Jesus, the body of God on earth, was free. The world to which he came was un-free. It is un-free still. There is therefore only one Subject in the world today, and he is surrounded by countless beleaguered objects. St. Paul famously wrote, 'Faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love' (1 Corinthians 13:13). I would describe an obverse trio this way: original sin, total depravity, and the un-free will abide, these three; and the root of the thing is the un-free will." Paul F.M. Zahl, *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 113–114.

[8] "For if God is to make a testament, as he promises, then he must die; and if he is to die, then he must be a man. And so that little word 'testament' is a short summary of all God's wonders and grace, fulfilled in Christ." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works,* American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 35:84.

I. The Agenda of North American Protestant Ecumenism

Mainline Lutherans and Reformed, it seems, can agree so quickly about their historic differences because they are no longer governed by a belief that we need salvation from God's wrath. The agenda behind many Lutheran and Reformed ecumenists is well expressed in *An Invitation to Action*, the summary of the 1981–1983 North American dialogues:

> Humankind seems bent upon bringing the end of the world upon itself and all creatures of God by nuclear holocaust. Our churches are already enlisted in a common mission: participation in God's preservation of the world, God's struggle for justice and peace, and evangelization.[9]

What ties these ecumenical partners together, at least in North America, is the fact that

> each of our churches independently has addressed issues common to our local communities, our nation, and the world, such as: nuclear armament, peace, justice for the poor of our country and the world, prison reform, sex, marriage, and the family, economic justice, the yokes of race and class, ecology, and the advocacy of all persons denied their right to achieve their potential.[10]

Hence, the classical differences are not nearly as important as other issues, such as saving the world from humanity itself or becoming all we can possibly be. In my judgment, mainline Protestants should be challenged on this very point. The church has no more important outreach than that of proclamation, not primarily of the law but of the promise, which alone saves from sin, death, the devil, and the wrath of God.

This is not said in order to undermine the achievements of the Arnoldshain Theses (1957), which affirm that Christ's body and blood are imparted in the consecrated bread and wine, or the various agreements which led to Leuenberg.[11] But it is to note that the overall direction of

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[9] James E. Andrews and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., *An Invitation to Action: The Lutheran–Reformed Dialogue Series III 1981–1983* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 2.

[10] *An Invitation to Action*, 2.

[11] Marc Lienhard notes that Leuenberg's view of the Lord's Supper goes beyond Zwingli's, since the Lord's Supper is not merely commemorative but actually conveys Christ's presence either through the Spirit or through bodily presence, but differs from Calvin in that double predestination is denied. See "The Leuenberg Agreement: Origins and Aims," in William G. Rusch and Daniel F. Martensen, eds., *The Leuenberg Agreement and Lutheran–Reformed Relationships: Evaluations by North American and European Theologians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), 29. Conservative reactions to Leuenberg were published in "Leuenberg Concord: Three Responses. Confessional

Lutheran–Reformed ecumenical discussions has been to see the disagreements of the reformers as anachronistic. We "cultured despisers" have moved beyond these issues. But on what basis have we moved beyond them? It would seem that we agree with Schleiermacher:

> There are in our Augsburg Confession certain imperfections, and because of them I did not really want us to accept and endorse it anew word for word, so to speak, as our own confession. Among these imperfections is the fact that one finds in it still far too much talk about the wrath of God.[12]

Instead of whistling away God's wrath via academic fiat, we need to distinguish God as he comes in his promise from God outside his promise. As Steven Paulson comments:

> For Luther, distinguishing God in and outside the proclaimed word is what theology is for. This theology is the business of the church. This is the only theology that lives under a living God, and does not

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Lutherans React to Leuenberg Concord," *Springfielder* 36 (December 1972): 185–199. There, Hans-Lutz Poetsch noted that Jacob Preus "called attention to the dangerous lack of distinction between the Law and the Gospel which would call into question any proposed concept of the church" (186). And, similarly to my claim in this essay, Gerhard Rost criticized Leuenberg for "a soft-pedaling of the Holy Trinity and of Christ's nature as true Son of God; a *suppression of God's wrath*, with the attendant danger of covering up the mystery of God's love; a suppression of the apocalyptic return of Christ and in connection with that a reinterpretation of the Kingdom of God into a development of peace and justice within this world" (191, emphasis added). He went on to say that "all recognized that this Concord is not a document making for true unity between the Lutheran and the Reformed churches, but it is the artificial product of current liberal theology. It actually expresses infinitely less than the genuine ecumenical unity that is already present now in the Christian churches" (191). Finally, Eugene F. Klug noted, "Surely there must be an awareness that much of European theology at this time, Lutheran and Reformed, moves with an aversion to the blood atonement and vicarious satisfaction for sins, that Christ bears, satisfies, placates the avenging wrath of God against sin and sinners" (195). Likewise Lowell C. Green, four years later in his article "What Was the True Issue at Marburg in 1529? A Glance at Erasmus, Zwingli, and Luther, as well as Today's Ecumenical Problems," *Springfielder* 40 (April 1976): 106, outlining the roots of the *extra Calvinisticum* in Neo-Platonic philosophy, as mediated for Zwingli via Erasmus, asked, "Have today's Reformed theologians declared their readiness to surrender the maxim of their forefathers that the finite cannot be grasped by the infinite (*finitum infiniti non capax*)? Until such a concession is made, 'agreement' on the sacrament is meaningless, since the sacramental teaching of the Reformed fathers was but the application of their philosophy and their Christology. Whenever clarity on this point is lacking, not only the doctrine of the sacrament is in jeopardy, but also the doctrine of Christ and human salvation. On this matter there can be no yielding."

[12] Friedrich Schleiermacher, quoted in Steven Paulson, "The Wrath of God," *Dialog* 33 (1994): 246.

> speculate about God according to human designs or desires. It is what makes humanity aware that God always comes to hearers as a person: as the Father who speaks, the Son who is spoken, and the Holy Spirit who hears by creating new beings through the church's message.[13]

Across the vast spectrum of confessional traditions, no two groups seem to be as close as Lutherans and the Reformed. For this very reason, Lutheran identity has been forged through argumentation with the Reformed as much as with Roman Catholicism. Historically, the debate has been heated precisely because of our similarities. If only differences prevailed between these two confessional traditions, there would be little to discuss. Efforts to find doctrinal agreement between the two traditions, however, can only be sustained for the sake of the proclamation of the gospel promise and for no other reason—even one as noble or good as progressive social agendas. The criterion for any ecumenical rapprochement can only be the adequacy of the confessional tradition accurately to proclaim the gospel promise in both word and sacrament.

II. The ELCA as "Ecumenical Catalyst"

Retired Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, H. George Anderson, has spoken of the ELCA as an "ecumenical catalyst," specifically noting that ecumenical proposals with mainline Reformed denominations in the United States "ask that we recognize in print what we probably all believe in our hearts—that we are not the only church body with the truth."[14] In so designating the ecumenical role of the ELCA, Anderson was only hearkening back to the ELCA Constitution,

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[13] Paulson, "The Wrath of God," 250. Paulson identifies the problem of mainline Protestantism's issue with God's wrath in this way: "If there is a God who operates outside his own law *ex lex*, Ritschl argued, there is no basis for certainty or a standard of justice. God must not operate outside the revelation of his will in law or in Christ if faith is to make any sense. Therefore, Luther's tendency to talk about God (and especially God's wrath) outside God's own word, and even outside Christ, must be exorcized" (247). Paulson argues that this contention also actually distances Luther from Nominalism: "We can conclude that Luther's distinction between God preached and not preached is not meant to 'protect' God's freedom, as a Nominalist might attempt, but is rather the protection of the preaching office entrusted to the church. God's wrath is not an attribute that needs protection, but is the necessary presupposition of the church's work on earth" (250–251). In this light, our interest in ecumenism waxes to the degree our interest in evangelism wanes.

[14] See Edgar Trexler, *High Expectations: Understanding the ELCA's Early Years, 1988–2002* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 113.

adopted in 1988 by those Lutheran bodies which merged into the ELCA,[15] whose ecumenical agenda reads:

> (4.02) To participate in God's mission, this church shall: . . . f. Manifest the unity given to the people of God by living together in the love of Christ and by joining with other Christians in prayer and action to express and preserve the unity which the Spirit gives.
>
> (4.03) To fulfill these purposes, this church shall: . . . e. Foster Christian unity by participating in ecumenical activities, contributing its witness and work and cooperating with other churches which confess God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[16]

In little over a decade, the ELCA was close to fulfilling these ambitious ecumenical goals. As Edgar Trexler, former editor of *The Lutheran*, the official magazine of the ELCA, noted,

> Even though harsh language and organized resistance to ecumenical relationships stretched both the patience and unity of the young

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[15] These were The American Lutheran Church (TALC, 1960), the Lutheran Church in America (LCA, 1962), and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC, 1976). TALC was composed largely of Upper Midwest and West Coast Lutherans, including the American Lutheran Church of German background, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norwegian background, and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, which had a Danish background indebted to the "Inner Mission." In 1963, another Norwegian–American group, the Lutheran Free Church, joined TALC. The LCA was composed of East Coast Lutherans of German ancestry, many of whom settled in the United States before the Revolution, Swedish Lutherans from the Augustana Synod, and much smaller groups of Finns (the Suomi Synod) and Grundtvigian Danes. The AELC was formed from congregations that left the Missouri Synod in the wake of the Seminex controversy. A summary of the ecumenical ventures of these church bodies can be found in chapters 14–17 of Joseph Burgess, ed., *Lutherans in Ecumenical Dialogue: A Reappraisal* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990). In the late 1960s, TALC theologian Eugene M. Skibbe presented a study of the Arnoldshain Theses affirming its ecumenical role and encouraging its impact in North America entitled *Protestant Agreement on the Lord's Supper* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968). Commenting on Thesis 8.2 and Thesis 4 of Arnoldshain, Skibbe, departing from the historic practice of closed communion in TALC, advocated for open communion: "The Lord calls to his Supper not just certain people, but all men. This sentence does not say that all people are saved by Christ, as though it did not matter whether a person believed in Christ or not. Nor does it say that all who come to the Lord's Supper come worthily, for some among them might come hypocritically or with evil intentions. But it does say that he calls all—regardless of their past sins, their lack of understanding, or even their wrong theories—that he calls all in his church to his Supper, and that to all who long for God's righteousness he gives the forgiveness of sins" (116).

[16] See William G. Rusch, *A Commentary on "Ecumenism: The Vision of the ELCA"* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 151–152.

> ELCA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by 1999 completed a series of ecumenical actions that left it poised to enter the 21st century at the forefront of the world's ecumenical scene. No other church had adopted official ties with such a spectrum of Christendom—full communion with the Episcopal Church, with three churches of the Reformed tradition, and with the Moravian Church. As a member of the Lutheran World Federation, the ELCA was a participant in the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification with the Vatican, a document that brought agreement on the key doctrinal issue that divided the churches and produced the Protestant Reformation. Quite a track record for a new church's first 15 years.[17]

In this same ecumenical trajectory, most recently the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly declared full communion with the United Methodist Church.

With respect to the enactment of *A Formula of Agreement*, which places the ELCA in full communion with the leading mainline Reformed churches in the United States, Trexler notes,

> On August 28, 1997, at 10:02 AM, by a vote of 839–193 (81.3 percent) the ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted the Lutheran–Reformed *A Formula of Agreement*, marking the first time confessional churches took official steps to mend the divisions between them since the 16th century.[18]

Describing the celebration which followed this vote a year later, Trexler writes,

> On October 4, 1998, more than a year after the favorable vote on the Formula, some 1,500 worshipers came together in Rockefeller Chapel, Chicago, for a service that Presiding Bishop H. George Anderson called "the celebration of a miracle milestone reached" that is "only the beginning of an unfolding relationship." Entering the gothic nave from four directions and pausing at a font to acknowledge the brokenness of their separation and their oneness in baptism, leaders of the three Reformed churches and the ELCA symbolized their churches' "full communion" by forming a single procession. Heads of each church distributed the Eucharist.[19]

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[17] Trexler, *High Expectations*, 105.
[18] Trexler, *High Expectations*, 115–116.
[19] Trexler, *High Expectations*, 117.

It should be noted that full communion does not seek the organic union of a transconfessional church, like the United Church of Canada (originally a union of Methodists and Presbyterians) or the historic Union Church in Germany, which has confessionally different congregations within one church. Instead, altars, pulpits, and preachers can be exchanged indifferent to the historic doctrinal differences between these churches.

III. Disagreement over Ecumenical Direction

The struggle to which Trexler earlier alluded was due not primarily to organized resistance to any ecumenical endeavors in the ELCA on principle, as if a non-ecumenical agenda were an option, but instead to the question toward which ecumenical directions the ELCA should lean. One party, composed primarily of former LCA theologians such as Yale's George Lindbeck, urged that ecumenical endeavors be directed toward Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue "in part from a conviction that Lutherans should operate in continuity with the reformers at Augsburg in 1530. They sought reform within the Catholic Church as Christians who stood in accord with authoritative Catholic sources."[20] For this party the affirmation of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* by the August 1997 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA with a vote of 958–25 is considered an impressive achievement.[21]

By contrast, other ELCA leaders, many of TALC background, see the Reformation as not only corrective but also constitutive and therefore give priority to dialogue with other Protestants.[22] With respect to the Leuenberg Agreement, one advocate for ecumenical rapprochement with the Reformed, Walter Sundberg of Luther Seminary, challenged Robert Jenson, his opponent on the pro-Roman Catholic side: Where does Leuenberg err? Sundberg contended that a fair evaluation of Leuenberg would reveal nothing that would violate the *satis est* of Augustana VII.[23] It was Jenson's contention, on the other hand, that the North American Lutheran context was not commensurable with the European: European Protestants respond

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[20] Keith F. Nickle and Timothy F. Lull, eds., *A Common Calling: The Witness of Our Reformation Churches in North America Today. The Report of the Lutheran–Reformed Committee for Theological Conversations, 1988–1992* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 32.

[21] Trexler, *High Expectations*, 154.

[22] Trexler, *High Expectations*, 154. TALC had established pulpit and altar fellowship with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Reformed Church of America in 1986.

[23] Rusch and Martensen, *The Leuenberg Agreement*, 95. A representative voice of this party is the late James Kittelson. See "Enough is Enough! The Confusion Over the Augsburg Confession and Its *Satis Est*," *Lutheran Quarterly* 12 (1998): 249–270.

to a cultural hegemony of Roman Catholicism, while North American Lutherans respond to a cultural hegemony of a Reformed ethos.[24]

Such disagreements over ecumenical direction invite disputes over matters of polity and worship. The camp in favor of agreement with Rome has tended to favor the adoption of the "historic episcopate," a prerequisite of ELCA agreement with the Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA), and to desire that worship be done as much as possible in continuity with the Roman Catholic mass. The camp in favor of agreement with the Reformed has tended to react negatively to the adoption of the "historic episcopate" and favors worship that has a Protestant shape. In some ELCA circles, opposition to the *Accord* of the ELCA with the ECUSA, which went into effect on January 1, 2001, was so great that even prior to its realization, in March 2000, pastors and laity established the Word Alone Network as a renewal movement, specifically in opposition to the "historic episcopate." In March 2001, the Word Alone Network oversaw the formation of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC), a new ecclesiastical body for congregations breaking away from the ELCA.[25] The polity of LCMC is decidedly "post-denominational" and congregationalist, unlike the historic polities of most North American Lutherans which had, over time, avoided both episcopal and congregationalist stances, adopting instead a Presbyterian-like form of governance.

Reflecting on such wide-ranging ecumenical rapprochement, which was reached with Roman Catholics and Episcopalians on the one hand and with the Reformed on the other, former ELCA Ecumenical Officer William Rusch claimed that the Augsburg Confession itself allows the ELCA to enter into such extensive negotiations: "Article VII is freeing, for it permits confessional Lutheranism to seek fellowship without insisting on doctrinal or ecclesiastical uniformity, while at the same time striving to achieve common formulation and expression of theological consensus on the gospel."[26]

IV. The Role of Leuenberg

The basis for "full communion" between the ELCA and the three mainline Reformed Churches is *A Formula of Agreement*. While familiarity

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[24] Robert Jenson, "The Leuenberg Agreement in the North American Context," in William G. Rusch and Daniel F. Martensen, eds., *The Leuenberg Agreement and Lutheran–Reformed Relationships: Evaluations by North American and European Theologians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), 100–101.

[25] Trexler, *High Expectations*, 145.

[26] Rusch, *Commentary on "Ecumenism,"* 32.

with the Leuenberg Agreement is attested to in North American Lutheran–Reformed dialogues and affirmed in *A Formula of Agreement*, that document was never adopted, since dialogue participants sought an indigenous North American approach. *A Formula of Agreement* built upon earlier Lutheran–Reformed dialogues, such as *Marburg Revisited—1962–1966* and especially *A Common Calling: The Witness of Our Reformation Churches in North America Today*.[27] In light of the disagreements over ecumenical directions for the ELCA—whether to verge more toward Rome or more toward Geneva—predecessor church bodies of the ELCA developed different responses to ecumenical ventures with the Reformed. Trexler notes of TALC and the AELC, the latter of which was formed from congregations that left the Missouri Synod in the mid-1970s, that they

> virtually adopted full communion with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Reformed Church in American as churches "in which the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments administered according to the ordinances of Christ," approving the sharing of pastors and occasional joint services of communion. The LCA, however, was not sure about the Reformed commitment to the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament and never adopted Invitation to Action, choosing instead to adopt a less far-reaching statement of friendship and cooperation. When the ELCA was formed, the ALC and AELC relationship with the Reformed churches ended on December 31, 1987.[28]

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[27] For an overview, see Keith Bridston and Samuel Nafzger, "Lutheran–Reformed Dialogue," in Joseph Burgess, ed., *Lutherans in Ecumenical Dialogue: A Reappraisal* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 33ff. See also John Reumann's discussion about the influence of Leuenberg in the North American context in *The Supper of the Lord: The New Testament, Ecumenical Dialogues, and Faith and Order on Eucharist* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 99–100.

[28] Trexler, *High Expectations*, 110. For TALC and AELC, see above, 7n15. The *Study Guide* developed for TALC members to help them examine Lutheran–Reformed ecumenism noted, "In the past Lutheran pulpits and altars were restricted to Lutherans, perhaps for good and sufficient historical reasons. Now practice has changed. This is not because of unionism or theological relativism. To the contrary, this is a sign of theological health. No longer are we a settled people. We wander to and fro, and any attempt to fence the altar is misunderstood as snobbery rather than as a concern for truth and holiness. Only the one who denies the real presence of the risen Christ who forgives sins should be excluded from the altar. Other than this we can safely leave it to the Lord to fence his table. Nor do Lutherans hold strictly any longer to 'Lutheran pulpits for Lutheran pastors.' Guest preachers are common. Pulpit exchange is common. But guests are not invited if there is any question about the clarity of the gospel that is going to be preached." The American Lutheran Church, *Lutheran and Presbyterian–Reformed Agreement 1986: A Study Guide* (Minneapolis: Office of the Presiding Bishop,

1986), 10. The statement here indicates that doctrine follows practice, but is this not a case of the tail wagging the dog? Additionally, why single out the Reformed for pulpit and altar fellowship when *de facto* the Table has become open to all confessional groups? There can be no doubt that the ancient church practiced "closed communion," as Werner Elert has shown in *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. Norman E. Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966). To translate this practice into a more contemporary idiom, the Lord's Supper is not to be seen as a service to the public but as a ministry of the Lord for the assembled congregation. Admittance to the Lord's Table is a privilege, not a right, and should not be construed as a right. No doubt, closure at the Lord's Table comes across as offensive to democratic sensibilities, as well it should. God's kingdom is not a democracy. Commenting on Joachim Jeremias's interpretation of the Supper as akin to and grounded in Jesus' table fellowship with outcasts, John Pless notes, "Jeremias makes the move from Jesus' meals with those deemed outcasts and unrighteous to the Lord's Supper. He sees a continuum between these meals and the sacrament. The contrast between the meals where Jesus sits at table with sinners and the Last Supper is overlooked by Jeremias. In the Last Supper, Jesus gathers only the twelve. It is not an open meal, but a supper with those called to the life of discipleship; they had followed Jesus throughout his public ministry. It is no ordinary meal that Jesus partakes of with his followers, but the last supper where he institutes the sacrament of the New Testament—the meal of his body and blood." John Pless, "Can We Participate Liturgically in the Atonement?" *Logia* 19, no. 2 (Eastertide 2010): 40. What TALC's *Study Guide* did indicate accurately is the fact that we are a mobile society whose members are interlocked with others of many confessional traditions. Given that fact, we may wish to reflect upon the statement on communion practice of The American Association of Lutheran Churches, a small group which broke away from TALC at the time of the formation of the ELCA in 1988. Their position states: "A faithful steward of the mysteries of God sees that each communicant has the tools to examine himself or herself, whether he or she be in the faith (1 Cor 11:28; with 2 Cor 13:5). The faithful steward knows who among his flock has been catechized in the faith, who has transferred their membership from elsewhere, and who is living in open and unrepentant sin. Visitors are handled in the same way as any other communicant; the faithful steward sees that they share the confession of the church within which they wish to commune, knows whether they are engaged in open and unrepentant sin, and ensures they have the tools with which to examine himself or herself. Nevertheless, exigent circumstances exist; we do not bind a man's conscience in such matters. We call this, our practice, 'Responsible Communion.'" This document is available at http://www.taalc.org/Assets/Communion_Practice-TAALC.pdf. On a different note, I cannot help but wonder if openness to pulpit and altar fellowship with the Reformed in TALC was not due at least in part to the fact that many of the denomination's teaching theologians had received their doctorates from historically Reformed institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Chicago. Likewise, North Americans tend not to like doctrinal differences that separate them from their fellow Americans. I will never forget a pastoral visit in which a retired parishioner, a veteran of WWII, after showing me shrapnel wounds to his leg received at the Battle of the Bulge, said, "Pastor, you can say what you want, but I fought beside Catholics, Jews, and Baptists, and when it comes right down to it, there are no real differences between us." This man represents a sentiment quite common in the United States. Hence, American Christians do not tend

Such divergent tracks were brought into the ELCA and contributed towards ecumenical in-fighting amongst ELCA theologians.

The ecumenical goal with the Reformed, and with the Episcopalians as well, is not what in earlier days was called "pulpit and altar fellowship," but instead "full communion." What is meant by this? As a result of ecumenical cooperation, bilateral and multilateral dialogues, and preliminary Eucharistic sharing and cooperation, ecumenical partner churches enjoy the interchangeability of clergy and venture in joint efforts such as publications, the planting of mission congregations, and the like. "Full communion" does not entail confessional agreement. In this way, it is exactly like the fellowship attained by the Leuenberg Agreement. As Johannes Friedrich, the Presiding Bishop of Bavaria and the new Presiding Bishop of the VELKD, notes, "The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), according to our founding documents, is a church fellowship based on the model of the Leuenberg Agreement." Specifically, for our purposes, he says,

> The Leuenberg Agreement, the foundational document for fellowship among churches of varying confessions, pronounces the way to productive ecumenism via Augsburg Confession 7: The binding confessions of the churches that have joined it are not negated. The Leuenberg Agreement does not presume to be a confession per se, but allows for various confessions to enter into fellowship as they grow in mutual recognition, which follows from a common understanding of the Gospel.[29]

V. Differences between the European and American Contexts

It is important to acknowledge that there are differences between the background of Leuenberg and that of North America. Of particular note is the church struggle in the 1930s, the reaction of the "confessing" Protestants to the pro-Nazi "German Christians," which was bound to result in cohesion between Lutherans and Reformed against a common enemy. Likewise, Leuenberg itself acknowledges "historically-conditioned thought forms" and spells out the greater affinity between Lutherans and Reformed in Europe:

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to see themselves as belonging to different confessional traditions, but instead to different "denominations," a term taken from currency implying that you receive *the same* amount of change back per each dollar given.

[29] Johannes Friedrich, *The Significance of Lutheranism for Fellowship among Christians*, trans. Kristian T. Baudler, available at http://www.crossalone.us/2006/HeavyLifting/CCM/SignificanceOfLutheranismForFellowship.pdf.

> In the course of four hundred years of history, the Churches of the Reformation have been led to new and similar ways of thinking and living; by theological wrestling with the questions of modern times, by advances in biblical research, by the movements of church renewal, and by the rediscovery of the ecumenical horizon.[30]

As noted, Robert Jenson argued that not only the *Kirchenkampf* but also joint opposition to Rome, whose cultural legacy is pervasive in Europe, tends to unite Lutherans and the Reformed.

Perhaps the most significant difference between the contexts of European and North American heirs of the classical reformation is that of the spiritual and political edge that Evangelical or "born-again" (decision-theology) Protestantism muscles in North America.[31] Such "born-againism," an heir of revivalism, historically so important to American religious life especially as it moved into the frontier, trumps matters of classical doctrinal disputes in favor of the born-again experience, in which one accepts Jesus as one's personal Savior and Lord, independently of the formalities of rituals and sacraments, and which establishes one on a path of upright living. Of course, such "trumping" of doctrine is only a ruse. Born-again religiosity is permeated by doctrinal stances and assumptions through and through. But a cardinal "doctrine" of Evangelicals is that academic doctrinal debate is of little value. The assessment of truth for such born-againism is deeply pragmatic: Accepting Jesus as your savior "works." Embedded within American Evangelicalism is a deeply anti-intellectual attitude. Arguments over matters of traditional doctrine, such as the validity of infant baptism, or Baptism as regenerative, are passed over by means of a pragmatic criterion of truth—the liveliness of born-again experience and the growth of their suburban churches are what impress. Some mainline congregations, including those from North American Lutheran synods of all stripes, are numerically successful by copying these very tactics of Evangelicals.

North American Lutherans, especially after the waves of German and Scandinavian immigrants to the United States during and after the 1840s, increasingly reacted negatively toward such revivalism. Not only did confessional renewal in Europe at Erlangen and Christiania (Oslo) lend

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[30] Robert Jenson, "The Leuenberg Agreement in the North American Context," 100–101.

[31] I hesitate to use the term "born-again religiosity," since being "born again" or "born from above" are Jesus' own words (John 3:3). The basic problem is that unlike Jesus' teachings in John's Gospel such religiosity assumes the freedom of the will. A campaign promoting the proper understanding of regeneration seems to be in order.

Lutherans a vigorous polemic against revivalism, but homegrown Lutherans such as Charles Porterfield Krauth in Pennsylvania, the original heartland of North American Lutheranism, also sought to reclaim the Reformation heritage as "conservative" and distanced themselves from the Reformed.[32] The doctrine of justification by faith, as well as a wholesome appropriation of the sacraments as external means of grace, was affirmed not only in opposition to Roman Catholicism, but particularly against revivalism. The basis of faith is not grounded in a subjective experience of a new birth, but in the objective promise as mediated through word and sacrament. In opposition to revivalist-minded Lutherans, who sought to alter the wording of the Augsburg Confession and to make it more palatable to revivalistic and sometimes Enlightenment ears,[33] Krauth with his colleagues in the General Council led a charge to appropriate a confessional heritage for North American Lutherans in both theology and worship. The direction of this initiative, which lasted for well over a century, did not lead American Lutheranism closer to Rome or Canterbury, but it surely distanced it from Geneva and Zurich, which had fewer resources to combat revivalism.

Krauth's directions for North American Lutheranism were furthered by the more recent European immigrants, especially those indebted to the work of Loehe (the Joint Synod of Ohio and the German Iowa Synod) or Walther (the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod), as well as Lutherans from Scandinavian, Slovak, and Finnish backgrounds. In other words, for almost a century, the majority of North American Lutherans distanced themselves theologically from the Reformed, who were viewed as all too similar to and without resources to counteract revivalism. Today, some ELCA members favor ecumenical partnering with the Reformed for the very reason that the Reformation is not only corrective but also constitutive and others oppose it for the opposite reason. But surely ELCA ecumenism should not be based on such teeter-tottering but instead on a fundamental agreement about the gospel. In the overall scheme of things,

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[32] See Charles Porterfield Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963). Commenting on Col 2:9, Krauth notes that "If all the fullness of the Godhead in the second person of the Trinity dwells in Christ bodily, then there is no fullness of that Godhead where it is not so dwelling in Christ; and as the human in Christ cannot limit the divine, which is essentially, and of necessity, omnipresent, the divine in Christ must exalt the human. The Godhead of Christ is everywhere present, and wherever present, dwells in the human personally, and, therefore, of necessity renders it present with itself" (507).

[33] See E. Clifford Nelson, ed., *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 217–227.

it would seem that what makes unity with the Reformed today not only palatable but desirable is that the ecclesiastical agenda has altered over the last several decades. ELCA leaders are far more apt to oppose Evangelicals less on matters of salvation, as would have been done in the past, and more on matters of politics. Such moves reveal the most important agenda for the ELCA. Mainline Protestants have tended to adopt the program of the political left, which favors greater government intervention in the economy but a *laissez fair* approach to matters of sexuality, privacy, and the family. Evangelicals go just the opposite route, favoring the political right and thus approving of a *laissez fair* approach to the economy but greater regulation of sexuality, privacy, and the family. Some of us find ourselves in neither camp, since we favor neither an economy run amok nor families in fragmentation.

VI. The Basis for *A Common Calling*

While many mainline Protestant denominations, such as the Episcopal Church USA, the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Methodist Church, have lost virtually half of their membership over the last forty years—a period in which the population of the United States doubled—Evangelical, charismatic, and increasingly "non-denominational" (albeit Baptist-like) churches have grown, often taking in young families, the parents of which were confirmed in declining mainline Protestant churches. Likewise, beginning after Roe v. Wade, born-again religion actively sought to capture the Republican Party and use it for a specific "pro-family" agenda, often working in tandem with the ideals of free market capitalism. The result is that North American Protestants side up on a political divide: Mainliners favor a "peace and justice" agenda and a "mix and match" approach to the family, while Evangelicals favor *laissez faire* capitalism and the traditional family. In this light, the contention of the editors of *A Common Calling* (1988–1992) needs to be put in context:

> To some observers it seems that the most important divisions within American religion today are not those that separate one denomination from another, but those that divide members within denominations along a conservative–liberal fissure. The civil rights movement, the protests against the Vietnam War, and the movement for women's rights have all contributed to the political tensions within American denominations.[34]

[34] *A Common Calling*, 31.

This paragraph, written almost two decades ago, is no longer accurate. The truth of the matter is, more "liberal" perspectives have gotten the upper hand in all mainline Protestant denominations. The divide has for some time moved out of a liberal–conservative debate *within* mainline churches, where "conservatives," insofar as they survive in them, are given little voice, and more *between* mainliners and Evangelicals. Ironically, more conservative pro-life Roman Catholics side with Evangelicals, while more liberal Roman Catholics side with mainliners.

VII. Sidelining the Classical Differences

Another similarity between Leuenberg and North American Lutheran–Reformed ecumenism is the perception that classical issues such as predestination, the mode of Christ's real presence,[35] the priority among uses of the law, and the ordering of the ministry seem no longer to obtain. Those who try such an approach are seen as anachronistic. As the editors of *A Common Calling* note, "Whatever we may think of it, however, the reality of church life in the twentieth century has become increasingly oblivious to the sixteenth-century controversies between reformed and Lutheran churches."[36] It is not as if they are unaware of the historical differences between Lutherans and Reformed, which they nicely summarize. Lutherans historically have affirmed:

> 1. The corporeal presence of Christ in the elements of the Lord's Supper based on their firm conviction of an incarnational soteriology.
>
> 2. The objectivity of God's saving presence in the consecrated elements of the Lord's Supper.
>
> 3. The *manducatio impiorum* or *indignorum*, the eating of Jesus' body and blood by unbelievers or gross sinners who come to the Lord's Supper.
>
> 4. The *communicatio idiomatum*, the exchange of divine and human attributes in the one person of Jesus Christ. As the editors note, only a

[35] Talk of the "mode" of Christ's presence in the Supper is misleading. John Pless notes that "it was from the Formula that [Hermann] Sasse would argue that the difference between the Lutherans and the Reformed on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper is as lively today as it was in the sixteenth century. It is not merely a debate over the *how* of Christ's presence but rather *what* is present. No Christian believes in a *real absence*. That was not the issue at the time of the Reformation, nor is it the issue now. Thus communion announcements that ask that those who come to the altar 'believe in the real presence of Christ in the sacrament' are meaningless. As Albert Collver has demonstrated, the language of the real presence is not yet a confession of Christ's body and blood." See "Can We Participate Liturgically in the Atonement," 41.

[36] *A Common Calling*, 43.

complete exchange of predicable properties seemed to allow for the full incarnational paradox of the presence of the divine and human person of Christ in the Supper. Historically, Lutherans feared a Nestorian division of the one Christ into two, of whom only one, the divine person, is present in the Supper.

5. The ubiquity (omnipresence) of Christ's human and divine natures. Again, Lutherans feared a local circumscription of the risen Lord that would curtail the divine omnipotence

By contrast, the Reformed historically have emphasized:

1. The presence of the Lord at the Lord's Table by means of the Spirit. Calvinists feared the perversion of a spiritual reality into carnal eating and drinking and the assumption of human control over the divine promise.

2. The bread and wine as signs: believers partake of the flesh and blood of Jesus in the Spirit. Historically Calvinists have feared approaching the sacrament as crude sacramental magic.

3. The Holy Spirit as the bridge between sign and thing (*res*). The bridge work of the Holy Spirit is seen in the "lifting up" of the hearts of the faithful (*sursum corda*) and the *epiclesis*. Historically, Calvinists feared an unwarranted reification of the gift in the community of faith and a loss of the trinitarian understanding of gift and giver.

4. That a Lutheran christology of deified human nature is no longer true human nature.

5. The local circumscription of Christ's body in heaven. For Calvinists, the ubiquity of Christ's human nature would jeopardize the reality of the historical incarnation and make the soteriological work of the Spirit redundant.[37]

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[37] In *Marburg Revisited*, Presbyterian theologian Joseph C. McLelland notes the Reformed objection to the Lutheran view of Christ's presence in the Supper: "The Calvinists were not convinced that the Lutherans had not divinized the glorified humanity. For them it was the ascension and descent of the Spirit that provided the proper 'moment' in Christological–Eucharistic discussion. They took them as two sides of the one event; ascension means that the living Christ is not essentially discontinuous with the divine–human One whose presence was circumscribed; Pentecost means that the dynamic of Christ's presence is not a question in the abilities of his new body but in the peculiar power of the Spirit" (50). Hence, in Calvinism, the role of the Holy Spirit is crucial in how Christ is present in the Supper: "It is in this context that the distinctive reformed doctrine of the Holy Spirit is to be understood. The Spirit fulfils his office by bringing us into contact with Christ's substance, which Calvin interprets in terms of a *virtus*, a power judged by its effects in the human realm. Just as much as Luther he

The editors admit that with respect to these debates, "A common language for this witness which could do justice to all the insights, convictions, and concerns of our ancestors in the faith has not yet been found and may not be possible."[38] Similar to the spirit of Leuenberg, the editors note that

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wished to preserve objectivity in the Sacrament, the objective presence of the personal Lord" (48). As helpful as this is, the *non capax* approach to Christology is best expressed by Calvin himself: "There is a commonplace distinction of the schools to which I am not ashamed to refer: although the whole Christ is everywhere, still the whole of that which is in him is not everywhere. And would that the Schoolmen themselves had honesty weighed the force of this statement. For thus would the absurd fiction of Christ's carnal presence have been obviated. Therefore, since the whole Christ is everywhere, our Mediator is ever present with his own people, and in the Supper reveals himself in a special way, yet in such a way that the whole Christ is present, but not in his wholeness. For, as has been said, in his flesh he is contained in heaven until he appears in judgment." Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.30. The contrast between this Reformed perspective on Christology and the Lord's Supper and that of a Lutheran like J. Michael Reu is significant. Reu writes, "The first generation of Christians was definitely convinced that the Lord after the resurrection spent a number of days in physically perceptible communion with his own. If such fellowship has been terminated and superseded by a different sort of communion, and if the believers now address their Lord—who is at the right hand of God—as king and high priest, then they thereby affirm that the risen Lord has ascended to heaven some time after his resurrection. In keeping with common scriptural usage 'heaven' is here used in contrast not only with the earth but with the universe, the sense being that Christ has entered into a state of supramundaneness, a state of existence which makes it possible for him to be present everywhere; not only have 'the heavens received him,' Acts 3:21, but he ascended far above the heavens that he might fill all things (Eph. 4:8–10). His resurrection changed his relation to the human nature; his ascension changed his relation to the whole created universe, it marks the transition from a mundane to a transcendent mode of existence." J. Michael Reu, *Lutheran Dogmatics* (Dubuque, IA: Wartburg Seminary Press, 1963), 234. As a follow-up to this christology, Reu concludes his *Two Treatises on the Means of Grace* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1952) with this stance on Holy Communion: "If the possibility of the real presence of Christ's body and blood is questioned, we answer that our exalted Lord is omnipresent also according to his human nature and therefore able to offer His body and His blood where– and whenever He desires to do so. His marvelous power is unlimited. If the dogma of the *unio sacramentalis* is stigmatized as unreasonable or contra-rational, we reply that, measured by this criterion, every mystery of faith would ultimately have to be surrendered. . . . If it is objected that bread and wine, being earthly and transitory substances, could not serve as vehicles for the body and the blood of Christ, we would refer to the incarnation of Christ as the plainest proof that the finite may comprehend the infinite. If we are told that it is unworthy of God that we orally receive His body and blood, we praise Him who in grace has condescended to our level in order to assure us of our salvation" (117–118).

[38] *A Common Calling*, 49.

> these theological differences are . . . crucial for the ongoing ecumenical relations between these traditions. We view them not as disagreements that need to be overcome but as diverse witnesses to the one gospel that we confess in common. Rather than being church-dividing, the varying theological emphases among, and even within, these communities provide complementary expressions of the church's faith in the triune God.[39]

As an alternative to this perspective, lively and respectful discussion in which we dared to disagree with our fellow Christians and explain why we think doctrinal matters are important would garner more esteem. Non-Christians are not impressed with a fuzzy "let's get along" spirituality—they can get that at the "New Age" section of the local bookstore or conversation at the local coffee shop.

VIII. Leuenberg at the Core

A Formula of Agreement makes ready use of Leuenberg. With respect to the historic "condemnations," *A Formula of Agreement* quotes Leuenberg: "The condemnations expressed in the confessional documents no longer apply to the contemporary doctrinal position of the assenting churches (LA, IV.32.b)." Likewise, with respect to the Lord's Supper, *A Formula of Agreement* affirms LA, III.1.18:

> In the Lord's Supper the risen Jesus Christ imparts himself in his body and blood, given for all, through his word of promise with bread and wine. He thus gives himself unreservedly to all who receive the bread and wine; faith receives the Lord's Super for salvation, unfaith for judgment.[40]

With respect to the mode of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, *A Formula of Agreement* likewise looks to Leuenberg:

> In the Lord's Supper the risen Jesus Christ imparts himself in his body and blood, given up for all, through his word of promise with bread and wine. He thereby grants us forgiveness of sins and sets us free for a new life of faith. He enables us to experience anew that we are members of his body. He strengthens us for service to all men. (LA, II.2.15)

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[39] *A Common Calling*, 66.

[40] *A Formula of Agreement* also quotes LA, III.1.19: "We cannot separate communion with Jesus Christ in his body and blood from the act of eating and drinking. To be concerned about the manner of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper in abstraction from this act is to run the risk of obscuring the meaning of the Lord's Supper."

> When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we proclaim the death of Christ through which God has reconciled the world with himself. We proclaim the presence of the risen Lord in our midst. Rejoicing that the Lord has come to us we await his future coming in glory. (LA, II.2.16)

The specific mode of Christ's presence is not acknowledged. As mentioned earlier, the ELCA has not adopted the Leuenberg Agreement. But perhaps this needs to be qualified. *De jure* the ELCA has not adopted Leuenberg, but *de facto* it has. In essence, the ELCA has used Leuenberg to shore up its agreement with the three mainline Reformed Churches. The glue that binds Lutherans and the Reformed together in America today allows them to sidestep traditional theological matters because they have a common opponent: born-again Americans and the political right, with whom Evangelicals are aligned. They also share a common view of salvation as ultimately social, political, and ecological "peace and justice."

IX. One Basis for the Sidelining

Since it is clear that Lutherans and the Reformed are not in doctrinal agreement, on what basis can fellowship as we see it in Leuenberg or *A Formula of Agreement* be established? No one has responded more elegantly to this question than the late Warren Quanbeck in the first round of US Lutheran–Reformed discussion, *Marburg Revisited*:

> When the traditions are set alongside each other and examined in a sympathetic way, it can be seen that one does not necessarily have to choose one doctrinal tradition to the exclusion of all others. To be a loyal Lutheran does not mean that one can see no value in the dogmatic or liturgical tradition of the Eastern Orthodox churches, or that one must condemn the total doctrinal statement of the Roman Catholic or Calvinist traditions. The New Testament witnesses to a rich variety of theological motifs in interpreting the Lord's Supper: memorial, communion, thanksgiving, sacrifice, mystery, anticipation. No tradition in the church has done justice to them all; each tradition has sought to develop one or more of them. What is seen in the study of the scriptures, and noted again in the development of the church's doctrine, becomes real and existential in ecumenical discussion.[41]

In light of this rhetoric, can it be at all surprising that while disagreement over the mode of the Lord's presence in his Supper—bodily (Lutheran) or via elevation by the Spirit (Calvinist)—persists, Lutherans and the Reformed can affirm that they substantially share a common

[41] *Marburg Revisited*, 51.

faith?[42] With respect to Quanbeck, the question needs to be raised: Does a diversity of metaphors in the New Testament entail a diversity of doctrine? The one doctrine in scripture can express itself through a variety of metaphors. Diversity of doctrine in the New Testament would have to be established on other grounds. To be sure, an appreciation of doctrinal differences among Christians is progress over mindless caricatures and mean-spirited judgments. All in all, however, this tells us precious little about what we should believe, teach, and confess. The issue is further complicated by the fact that Lutherans and Reformed do not see eye to eye with respect to what it means to be a confessional church.[43] Underneath doctrinal disagreements is the real concern of the teaching of the gospel: Is the gospel properly being distinguished from the law such that our "solipsistic self-preoccupation" comes to an end and that we are given a "sure foundation and thus a sure comfort in another—Christ"?[44]

X. Conclusion

That traditional disagreements between Lutherans and the Reformed are now considered anachronistic, at least by mainliners, is due to the fact that our attitudes about the gospel, specifically about from what the gospel saves us, have changed. The reformers, both Lutheran and Reformed, were so zealous over doctrinal differences because they believed they needed to be precise about the gospel, since after all it is the gospel that saves people from God's wrath. But it would seem that today we no longer really believe in God's wrath. Prior theological disagreements with the Reformed are therefore non-issues. Today we are apt to say of death that it is something natural, not "guilt made visible," as Karl Rahner once put it.[45] Even born-again Christians are likely to tell you to accept Jesus as your

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[42] *Lutheran–Reformed Consultation, Series II, 1972–1974*, 111.

[43] "Since the Reformed traditions have neither agreed on a single common confession nor codified an authorized book of confessions, none of their historical statements of faith have equivalent status to documents gathered together in the Lutherans' Book of Concord. Since Lutherans have effectively elevated the ecumenical creeds and the confessions of the sixteenth century above later statements of faith, they have declined to add new documents to their confessional corpus. Thus they continue to assert the sufficiency of the historical creeds and confessions for the contemporary faith and life of the church. By contrast, the Reformed communities have shown a greater willingness to develop new confessions in response to contemporary problems and issues. By asserting the principle *reformata semper reformanda*, the Reformed churches seek to preserve a dynamic relation between the churches' confessions and the living Christ to whom these confessions witness." *A Common Calling*, 29.

[44] Quote from Notger Slenczka, in Werner Klän, "Aspects of Lutheran Identity: A Confessional Perspective," *Concordia Journal* 32 (2006): 14.

[45] Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1961), 49.

Savior not because you will be saved from wrath but because Jesus will give you a "purpose-driven" life.[46] But our assumptions beg the question: Do we in fact encounter God's wrath daily, and will we—outside of Christ—encounter it eternally? Do we not deal with God's judgment in, with, and under all other judgments, not because judgments of others or even of oneself are true but because they are a result of a fallen world—and that ultimately it is God's judgment that counts? We live, move, and have our being within a world swamped in judgment, but ultimately, behind all such judgments that we make or that are made about us, we live in a fallen world which holds the equivalent of a death sentence over our heads. Do we not need an external word (*verbum externum*) to save us? And do we not need a Savior whose divine nature is not only capable of the finite, but capable of absorbing and even becoming our sin so that we might become his righteousness?

If that is the case, must not we Lutherans affirm precisely what we have confessed in the past? We must confess a robust view of the incarnation, the *infra Lutheranum*, not only because of the *communicatio idiomatum*, but because the Redeemer took on not only human life, but on the cross, sinful human life, indeed was judged the "greatest sinner"[47] (*maximus peccator*, *peccator peccatorum*) in order to bear away sin and its wages of death, so that we can have eternal life now and forever.

The impulse for ecumenical dialogue is salutary, but not at the expense of budgets that could be geared for evangelism, world mission, or, for that matter, social mercy. In that light, we need to distinguish an ecumenism "from above" from an ecumenism "from below." In ecumenism "from above," churchwide budgets are used to legitimate bureaucratically pre-established harmony between various denominations which are already "birds of a feather" with respect to their social and political agendas. And a major assumption of these denominations, shared with their Evangelical counterparts, is that classical doctrines are relatively unimportant. Make no mistake: Many of the social agendas raised by mainline Protestants urging our support for the poor and the downtrodden merit our attention and action. But the quest for justice as such is not salvific but is instead a matter of social ethics. It entails fidelity to the Golden Rule. Its exercise is highly complicated, since we live in a global economy in which tracing accountability for decisions can be murky but from which no one is scot-free. On the exercise of justice, intelligent people of good will do disagree

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[46] See Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life: What On Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

[47] *LW* 26:277.

about how to rectify inequality of opportunity and establish basic human rights. Even so, that is no excuse for Christians along with all other citizens to fail to work for basic human rights to freedom and dignity, along with equality of opportunity, as a natural consequence of their vocations within democratic societies.

Contemporary ecumenism involves church bureaucrats initiating or sponsoring high-level committees that put together written agreements embodying some sort of doctrinal agreement—or doctrinal avoidance—so that clergy can be officially exchanged. North American ecumenism has tended to be focused on such upper-level church structures. It should be contrasted with the ecumenism "from below" which has been in place for some time in many parishes. This entails Christian cooperation among varying groups by operating food banks, clothing racks, homeless or domestic abuse shelters, home rehabilitation projects, literacy and educational opportunities for underprivileged children and adults, opportunities to recover from alcohol and drug addictions, and other such venues. These activities extend social mercy to those in need. Likewise, open, genuine, and honest discussion and disagreement among thoughtful and informed Christians of good will can help us better understand ourselves, our mission, and others. Until doctrinal agreement is established between different confessional groups, however, neither "full communion" among differing confessional traditions nor "open communion" at the altar should be our goal. Rather, the first step is to establish doctrinal agreement, and that for the sake of the purity of the gospel which alone saves.

Classical differences between Lutherans and the Reformed are anachronistic only to those already bewitched by Enlightenment "dogmas" of human progress and tolerance.[48] Not everything about these Enlightenment views is wrong. Surely, for example, a democratic approach to governance is preferable to a feudal approach. Nevertheless, such views secularize Reformation teachings, reframing a conscience captive to the word of God as a conscience captive to the autonomous "self." Hence, Enlightenment doctrines need to be tested in light of law and gospel. In that light, we flee from God as wrath to God as mercy. It is Jesus Christ, who stands by his promise, bears God's wrath, and gives us his very righteousness, whom we must uncompromisingly confess.

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[48] See Wayne Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

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Father, Son, and Spirit Is God: What Is the Point?

William C. Weinrich

In the words of the Nicene Creed, we confess as follows:

> I believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God . . . God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made . . . who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man.

Here the fathers of Nicaea confessed the central and foundational significance of the biblical assertion that the Word became flesh. Two features of this Nicene confession must be highlighted. The first is the christological foundation of human redemption and salvation: "who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate . . . and was made man." In these words the reality of human redemption is given a place and a form. The place and the form are the same: it is the man who is the Word incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary. *Extra Christum non salus est* (outside of Christ there is no salvation). Christ is not merely the instrument through which or by which our redemption is effected. He is himself the reality and substance of our salvation. Salvation is not simply to be with Christ or to be close to him. Salvation is to be "in Christ" (ἐν Χριστῷ), to use a Pauline phrase. Christ may be our friend, but the fathers of the Nicene Council never used the category. "Friend" is not sufficient to indicate the central and eternal significance of Jesus. I want to emphasize this point. Christ is not merely the instrument of God's will toward us, although he is also that. Christ is the instrument of God's will to save because he is himself the incarnation of that will. We may say it also this way: God's will to save is not only the cause of the sending of the Word into the flesh. God's will to save is the very content of the sending of the Word into the flesh. God's will to save is itself enfleshed, so that the life of the Christ, his words and his works, reveals and effects and is itself God's will to save, that is, God's will to make man new.

The second feature to be noted in the confession of Nicaea is that the man who is our salvation is not just any man. He is the man born of Mary, that human mother who is also confessed to be the "Mother of God," Theotokos. She is this because the man born of her is confessed to be the

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Word made flesh. In the one born of her, the one who from all eternity is and has been the Word of God is now flesh, flesh from her flesh. And this man has a name: Jesus. "I believe . . . in one Lord, Jesus Christ." The Gospels and the rest of the New Testament do not present an elaboration of the trinitarian mystery of God. What they do present is a narrative of the life, death, and resurrection of this man Jesus. The Word became flesh. Yes, that is so. But the one incarnate lived and spoke in such and such a manner; he died as the sacrifice for sin; and his resurrection revealed the new life that lay hidden within his death. At the end of it all, this man, who was the Christ, gave the Holy Spirit: "As the Father has sent me, so do I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:21–22). As Word, the Son is from all eternity the "place" of the Spirit. In the economy of the flesh, as man, the incarnate Word is the human place of the Holy Spirit. As the incarnate Word, Jesus, and none other than Jesus, is the human reality of the eternal Spirit. This means that the man Jesus, the humanity of the Christ, is the revelation and the reality for us of the eternal life-giving Spirit. It means also that Jesus is the true and perfect image of the eschatological existence of man, that is, that he is the image of what man is to become and will become when the dead are raised by the Spirit of him who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

All four Gospels begin with the story of the baptism of Jesus. This is not intended as mere historical report, *was eigentlich geschehen ist* (what really happened). The baptism of Jesus reveals that he who from all eternity is the possessor of the Spirit of the Father is become, as man, the human bearer of the Spirit. The Word incarnate is baptized, anointed with the Spirit, and so, as man, is the Christ. The man Jesus, and none other than the man Jesus, is the human place of the eternal Spirit, for he is the Word made flesh. As the one who is the Christ, Jesus is the one who baptizes others with the Spirit. Through this baptism of the Spirit, Christ does not give that which is separable from himself. He is the Spirit-bearer, and so Christ gives the Spirit through and in that gift which is himself. In Baptism Christ unites the baptized with himself and makes them to be of himself. They are "in Christ" and so in him are Christs, bearers of that Spirit which Christ himself possesses. Receiving the Spirit of the Christ in their baptism, those who are in Christ have received the foundation as well as the reality of their own present and future eschatological life. "Baptism does now save you," as the Scriptures say (1 Pet 3:21). The apostle Paul speaks of this participation in the Spirit in this way: "God sent his own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and because of sin, and so condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteousness of the Torah might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom

8:3–4). As the fourth-century treatise *On the Incarnation and against the Arians* put it: "For this reason the Word and Son of the Father, having been united with flesh, became flesh, a perfect man, in order that men, having been united with the Spirit, might become one Spirit. Therefore, he is God who is a flesh-bearer, and we are men who are Spirit-bearers."[1]

Do you hear the elaboration of the Nicene Creed in the words of this treatise? The Nicene Creed says, "For us men and for our salvation"; the treatise says, "in order that man might become a Spirit-bearer." Salvation is not to arrive at some safe place, some gilded city on a hill, some Nordic Valhalla, nor some Islamic paradise with ten thousand virgins. Salvation is nothing other than the true participation of man in the life of God through the reception of that which God alone has to give: the gift of himself. To put this in another way: Salvation is to be united with God the Word in the humanity which for us he took as his own from the Virgin Mary. Jesus is the Savior of the world because he is the substance of salvation itself. As the eternal Son of the eternal Father in whom eternally the Spirit rested, Jesus is the revelation of God as the triune God. To believe in God is to believe in Jesus as God. However difficult it may seem, there is no God but Jesus. In his book *The Trinitarian Faith*, the Scottish theologian Thomas Torrance speaks of this centrality of Jesus as follows:

> It is not too much to say that the relation of the Son to the Father revealed in Jesus Christ provided Nicene theology with its central focus and basis, for the incarnation of the Son opened the way to knowing God in himself. . . . In Jesus Christ the Son of God took our human nature upon himself and made it his own so completely that he came among us *as man*; and by what he was *as man*, he revealed to us what he was and is *as God*. That is to say, without giving up his divine nature, he united himself to us in our human nature so completely, that by living out his divine life within our human life as a real human life he revealed something of the innermost secret of his own divine life as the Son of the Father. But precisely in revealing to us his own nature as the Son, he revealed the nature of the Father, not just by word, teaching us what God is like, but by being what he was and is, the very Son of the Father incarnate in our human life."[2]

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[1] Athanasius, *De incarnatione et contra Arianos* 8: καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὁ Λόγος καὶ Υἱὸς τοῦ Πατρὸς ἑνωθεὶς σαρκὶ γέγονε σάρξ, ἄνθρωπος τέλειος, ἵνα οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἑνωθέντες Πνεύματι, γένωνται ἓν Πνεῦμα. Αὐτὸς οὖν ἐστι θεὸς σαρκοφόρος καὶ ἡμεῖς ἄνθρωποι πνευματοφόροι. *Patrologia cursus completus: Series graeca*, 162 vols., ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1857–1886), 26:996 [henceforth PG].

[2] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 55.

There is, however, one further crucial elaboration to be made. The Nicene Creed does not stop with a statement of the Word's incarnation. The Creed immediately continues: "and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven." The Word was incarnate not because man was small, weak, and limited. In comparison to God, every creature is small, weak, and limited. We were created that way, and God called it "good." No, the Word was incarnate because man was a sinner and under the power of death and the devil. The life of the Christ was, therefore, not merely a model of good ethics, it was the revelation of that life free from sin and lived as the obedience of faith to the glory of God the Father. As the Son of the Father, Christ was the image of all sonship. As the Gospels depict it, the life of the Christ was the way of the cross. As the Spirit-bearer, as the Christ, Jesus goes obediently to the cross. For the salvation of mankind, in Jesus the life of the eternal Spirit is none other than the condescension of divine love. God is love, as the apostle witnesses (1 John 4:8). Thus, as the one who eternally possessed the Spirit, the Word incarnate is led by the Spirit to the cross, and there from the cross he hands over the Spirit (John 19:30).

It is at the cross that Jesus is supremely the Christ for us, for there he gives that life which he possesses, namely, the life according to the Spirit. In the forgiveness of sins is life and salvation. As the event of divine love, the cross is the life-giving act of the Christ, revealed in the fact of his resurrection. Thus, to be united with Christ in his death is to be resurrected with him and to receive that Spirit which is his by right and by nature. *To believe in God is to believe in the crucified Jesus.* In the humility of his death, Jesus reveals himself to be the true Son of the Father who from all eternity receives what he is and has from him who is the Father. He is the "only-begotten Son, God of God." The humble obedience of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, therefore, is not the resignation of the creature before the majesty of the divine will. This "not my will but thine be done" is the revelation of man partaking in the eternal subordination, if I might say that, of the Son to the Father. Unlike in the garden of man's primal sin, in *this* garden man partakes of the eternal sonship of the Son. It is Jesus who there speaks, the man who willingly places himself at the disposal of his heavenly Father. But he does so as the Son made flesh, and so makes known the eternal fact of the reality of God. The Son is the eternal image of the Father's will; the Son is the instantiation of that will, freely accepted and freely lived. Therefore, as the human enactment of divine love, the death of Jesus is the revelation of man as son of the Father. As Paul says: "We have not received the spirit of slavery, but the Spirit of the adoption

of sonship, by which Spirit we cry out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Rom 8:15). That is the language of Baptism, through which we are baptized into the death of Jesus and from the waters rise to the newness of life. "Our Father, who are in heaven." In the early church no one prayed that prayer unless baptized, for only the baptized had been made sons in him who is the true and eternal Son of the Father. The baptism of Jesus (water, Spirit, Father's voice: 'this is my Son') is the form and basis of all Baptism: "Unless one is begotten of water and the Spirit, one cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

In Christian discourse concerning God, Jesus matters. He matters, not tangentially or as something important among other things of importance. Jesus matters substantially and essentially. We must recognize that Christian discourse concerning God and Christian prayer to God is rooted in Christology and is expressed christologically. Christian discourse and Christian prayer is concrete and particular because the substance of all theology and the substance of all prayer to God is found in the Gospel narratives of the New Testament. For example, consider this collect for Easter Sunday: "Almighty God the Father, through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ you have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life to us. Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of our Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit."[3] Note that the story of Jesus is the basis and the content of the life of faith lived by the life-giving Spirit. Note also that the collect is addressed to "Almighty God the Father." The power and majesty of the Father is not abstracted from the work of his only-begotten Son. The transcendence of the Father is not above and beyond the reality of Jesus. The transcendence of the Father, his power and his majesty, is revealed precisely in the work of the Son because the Son is the eternal habitation of the Father's majesty. As the evangelist says: "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand" (John 3:35). God the Father is almighty, and his might is revealed not in his sheer power or in his sheer otherness. The Father's might is revealed *as* the power to give that life which is of God himself. And in the reception of that life by faith we come to know that "Almighty God" whose reality is love. If you wish to define God, read the Gospel of Matthew, or the Gospel of Mark, or the Gospel of Luke, or the Gospel of John. You can say nothing of the God who is, that is, of the God who is trinitarian love, that is not already there in the canonical narratives of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The trinitarian

[3] The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 49.

reflection of the church did not begin as a speculative attempt to systematize biblical data. The trinitarian dogma arose as an effort to articulate the reality of that God who reveals himself *as he is* in the death and resurrection of the man Jesus.

It is important and necessary that we emphasize the fundamental position of the man Jesus in Christian theology, faith, and life. Strangely enough, the fundamental position of Jesus in Christian revelation does not always seem to be recognized. Not too long ago the phrase "all theology is Christology," advocated by some of us at Concordia Theological Seminary, was heavily criticized as unhelpful and even errant. It was asserted by some that the phrase compromised the reality of both the Father and the Spirit as distinct and equal persons. Even Luther's famous hymnic words describing Jesus as the valiant one who fights for us, "Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, Of sabaoth Lord, And there's none other God," sung with gusto in "A Mighty Fortress is Our God,"[4] was not enough to bring light to some well-known, traditional, and highly honored LCMS personalities. On one occasion a leader of the LCMS asked me if it was not equally true to say that "all theology is Patrology."[5] I knew immediately that the man did not understand the theological assumptions of the Nicene Creed. And so I responded to him that one could, to be sure, say "all theology is Patrology," but only if one wanted to be an Arian heretic. As Athanasius once wrote, one cannot even know the name "Father" apart from the Son, for the Father as the Father is revealed in the Son.[6] Philip's statement put to Jesus is, as it were, the question for which the Nicene Creed is the response: "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." Jesus' answer to Philip shows with brilliant clarity the christological focus of biblical trinitarian faith: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father and

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[4] *Lutheran Worship*, hymn 298, stanza 2; The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), hymn 262, stanza 2.

[5] Here "Patrology" is used as a dogmatic category for teaching about "the Father," not, as it is oftentimes used, to denote historical study of "the early Church fathers."

[6] For example, Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 1.34: "Therefore it is more pious and accurate to signify God from the Son and call him 'Father,' than to name him from his works only and call him 'unoriginate.'" *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, 14 vols., ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952–1957), 4:326 [henceforth NPNF²]; PG 26:81. For further discussion, see William C. Weinrich, "Trinitarian Reality as Christian Truth: Reflections on Greek Patristic Thought," *CTQ* 67 (2003): 336–340.

the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works" (John 14:8–11). The whole point of the Nicene struggle against Arian subordinationism was to assert that only in the reality and work of the incarnate Son is the Father known.[7] The point was made already in the second century by Irenaeus: "For the manifestation of the Son is the knowledge of the Father."[8] The hermeneutical insistence that "all theology is Christology" must be maintained if the New Testament identification of the God of Israel as including the man Jesus and as revealed by him is to be confessed.

More recently, a missiologist in the LCMS has suggested that the practice of addressing prayer to the name "Jesus" is unhelpful as Christian witness in a Muslim context. He claims "strong biblical authority" for using the term "Lord" rather than the name "Jesus" in Christian prayer. The use of "Lord," he argues, would not reinforce Muslim misconceptions that Christians worship a human being. As laudable as the motive may be, a more mistaken analysis and prescription can hardly be imagined. There is no biblical warrant for the use of the term "Lord" as an embarrassed substitute for the name "Jesus." Indeed, if the term "Lord" is used in order to *avoid* the name of Jesus, one has left the New Testament proclamation altogether and has compromised the biblical foundations for the Christian doctrine of God. The fact is we do worship a human being, namely, Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, Word incarnate. "I believe . . . in one Lord, Jesus Christ . . . true God of true God." One ought not assuage Muslim misconceptions by eviscerating the very content of the Nicene confession of the New Testament evangel.[9]

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[7] Hence the necessity of asserting the deity of the Son. If the Son were not "of the same essence" with the Father (ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρί), then the Father would not be known in the Son. See also Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 4.6.3: "For no one can know the Father, unless through the Word of God, that is, unless by the Son revealing [Him]"; also 4.6.4: "For the Lord taught us that no man is capable of knowing God, unless he be taught of God; that is, that God cannot be known without God"; also 4.6.5: "The Father therefore has revealed Himself to all, by making His Word visible to all; and, conversely, the Word has declared to all the Father and the Son, since He has become visible to all." *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325*, 10 vols., ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 1:468 [henceforth ANF].

[8] Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 4.6.3 (ANF 1:468).

[9] Note this from Luther, *Sermon* 48 on John: "Outside this Man Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary and who suffered, you must not seek God or any salvation and help; for He is God Himself." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 22:494. See also The

As we have attempted to express in our comments above, the content of the term "God" or the content of the term "Lord" is unknown and unknowable if they remain defined only by abstract power and might. To know God only according to will is not to know God at all. It is to know God only by his power and might. To paraphrase how Irenaeus expressed it: We do not know God according to his power; we know him according to his goodness and mercy.[10] Nor is God's power beyond and above God's mercy, as though, so to speak, there were the deity of omnipotence apart from or perhaps even higher than the deity of mercy. As illustration of the point, let us consider the confession of Arius concerning God:

> We acknowledge one God, alone Ingenerate, alone Everlasting, alone Unbegotten, alone True, alone Immortal, alone Wise, alone Good, alone Sovereign, Judge, Governor, and Providence of all things, unalterable and unchangeable, just and good.

Nothing could express the transcendent unknowability of God more than this Arian confession. Note the strong and repeated insistence on God's unique otherness, that is, the insistence on God's *isolation* from all others—alone, alone, alone; μόνος, μόνος, μόνος. In another passage Arius describes God as the one who is ἄναρχος μονώτατος, he who is "without beginning and utterly alone" (note the superlative form). The unipersonalism of Arian monotheism did not allow God to be conceived as a being capable of self-communication. For the Arian, the movement of God toward any other was necessarily an act of will. Therefore, that other toward whom God moves must necessarily be a creature, not only distinct but also separate from God. Hence, for God "to beget" his Word or Son was for God "to create" his Word or Son. For the Arian, to know God according to his will and power, that is, to know God as "creator," was to worship God rightly and sufficiently. To this claim Athanasius responded that to speak of God as "creator" was not to speak of God as he is according to his nature. It is merely to speak of God as he is toward his works. "What likeness is there between Son and work, that [the Arians] should parallel a father's function with that of a maker . . . ? A work is external to the nature, but a son is the proper offspring of the [Father's]

Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary, "Religious Pluralism and Knowledge of the True God: Fraternal Reflection and Discussion," *CTQ* 66 (2002): 295–305.

[10] Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 4.20.1: "As regards his greatness, therefore, it is not possible to know God, for it is impossible that the Father can be measured; but as regards his love (for this it is which leads us to God by his Word), when we obey him, we do always learn that there is so great a God" (ANF 1:487).

essence."[11] The term "proper offspring" is important. It expresses the central and determinative claim of the Nicene Council that apart from the Son there is none who is or can be called God. God's works are external or extrinsic to the reality and nature of God. The Son, on the other hand, is internal or intrinsic to the being of God. The eternal existence of the Son is proper to the identity of God. If, however, the Son is internal to the reality of God, then the Son is proper to the fatherhood of God. The name "Father" is correlative to that of "Son" such that God can be confessed to be eternally the Father only as that divine person who exists in relation to another who is eternally his Son. The Father–Son relation is constitutive of the reality of God. There is strictly and ontologically nothing that can be called "God" that is other than or apart from that Father–Son relationship.

In the Gospel narratives, this eternal relation of Father and Son is revealed in the baptism of Jesus: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). Thus spoke the paternal voice from heaven as the Spirit descended upon the person of Jesus. The life of this man, anointed as the Christ, is the revelation of the inner life of God. Jesus is the Christ only as the human reality of the Spirit. The man Jesus, or, if you will, the humanity of the Christ, is the human form of the life of God. But the point that I wish to emphasize is this: The revelation of the Trinity at the baptism of Jesus is the revelation of that gift given in the baptism of the church. True deity gives, bestows, and communicates, and that which true deity has to give and to communicate is itself. As Paul says, "We have received the Spirit of the adoption of sonship, by which Spirit we cry out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Rom 8:15). Paul says this concerning Baptism. United and bound to Christ in his death and resurrection, we are ushered into the inner life of God himself. In the Spirit we address God as "Our Father," even as Jesus did in the revelation of that filial relation to his Father which is the content of his own deity.

G.K. Chesterton claimed that if one wishes to understand the essence of a religion, then one should attend to its images. What a person believes to be ultimately true will be given expression through those forms used to express what is true. Whatever exists in the world exists through forms. Therefore, a religion that expresses itself in the world will do so by those forms and images which reflect its truth. To illustrate the difference between Christianity and Buddhism, for example, Chesterton reflected upon the difference between the figure of the Buddha and that of the Christian saint. The Buddha is corpulent, at rest, with the sly smile of one

[11] Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 1.29 (NPNF[2] 4:323).

who is holding back secrets. The figure of Christianity is that of the saint, gaunt, tired, and worn from struggle with the devil, fingers often folded in the plea for assistance and rescue.

To illustrate the central points we have attempted to make, perhaps it would be helpful to engage in a little Chestertonian phenomenology. Let us consider the topic "What is the point?" of the confession that God is triune by considering some comparative images. In emphasizing the man Jesus as the *locus* of the revelation of God and the foundation of the confession that God is Father, Son, and Spirit, we have necessarily emphasized that the one God is such in his nature that he gives, bestows, and communicates. God addresses us; he speaks to us not through the reality of his sheer deity or through commands of exalted might, but in the humanity of the Word, so that through the work of the cross the eternal sonship of the Word may be given to those who through water and the Spirit are made to be children of God.

Islamic piety and belief is expressed in the "witness," in the Shahada: "God is God," or "There is no god but Allah/God." I have given expression to what we might call the Christian "Shahada": "The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is God" or "There is no God but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

Let us consider first the so-called "Verse of the Throne" of Islam:

> Allah, there is no God but he, the Living, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep seizes him. To him belongs what is in the heavens and in the earth. Who can intercede with him, except by his permission? He knows what lies before them and after them and they know nothing of his knowledge, save such as he wills. His throne encompasses the heavens and the earth and he never wearies of preserving them. He is sublime, the Exalted.[12]

In a way similar to that of Arius but in fact more strictly and absolutely than Arius, the reality of God is expressed by words of exalted abstraction. God's transcendent otherness is emphasized, and there is no knowledge of God himself. God gives knowledge only by his will, and that is given in the book of the Quran. God is sublime and exalted, but that sublimity is such that it not only distinguishes God from all others but separates him from all others. The exalted status of God is coordinated with the submissive obedience of the believer. As is well known, the term "Islam"

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[12] Quoted in Robert Clarence Bush, ed., *The Religious World: Communities of Faith* (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers; New York: Macmillan, 1982), 316.

comes from the Arabic verb which means "to submit." A Muslim is thus one who submits. The word "mosque," the term for Islam's house of prayer, means the place of submission, or the place where one submits. How does this way of belief express itself in the form of worship and in the form of prayer?

It is instructive to compare the posture of prayer assumed by the Muslim and by the Christian. Corresponding to the high majesty of Allah, the Muslim worshipper assumes the posture of submission, indeed, of abject submission. This posture is that of placing one's forehead upon the ground, an indication of total submission to the will of Allah, whatever that may be. This posture of prayer signals the distance between Allah and those who pray to him. Of course the distance is one not of space but of relation. At every point the Muslim worshipper assumes the posture of submission. As the "Verse of the Throne" puts it, "He is sublime, the Exalted." Of course, the Christian also knows the righteous God before whom he must ask for mercy. Petition on bended knee as confession of sins is offered is also essential to Christian piety. It is, however, as sinners repentant that Christians fall upon their knees. As sinners forgiven through the cleansing waters of Baptism and the words of absolution, Christians pray standing, a mark of their status as children of God addressing their heavenly Father. As we know from early Christian art, the primitive posture of Christian prayer was that of standing with arms outstretched in the form of the cross. The event of the cross had freed the sinner of guilt and shame and from the bondage of sin. One who in faith was united to Christ in his death was no longer a slave but a son. A classic text of this new status is John 8:32–36:

> "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." [The Jews] answered him, "We are Abraham's descendents, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, 'You will be made free?'" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

The story of the prodigal son is the well-known parable of this new status in the household of God. Note the climactic meeting (Luke 15:20–24):

> When [the prodigal son] was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him,

> and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." And they began to be merry.

One cannot imagine this restored son bowing before his father with forehead to the ground. In the midst of festive celebration, such a posture would simply be out of place and inappropriate. Within the context of the church's worship, this merriment is called the "Eucharist," or the "Lord's Supper," or simply "Communion." None of these names suggests submission to one exalted. Consider these words, for example: "Take, eat, this is my body given for you; take, drink, this is the new testament in my blood." The one who submits here, the servant who gives food and drink, is, as we confess, none other that the eternal Son of the eternal Father made flesh "for us men and for our salvation." This is the central and defining posture of prayer in the Christian communion: receiving that which the Lord has to give, the gift of himself in his body and blood.

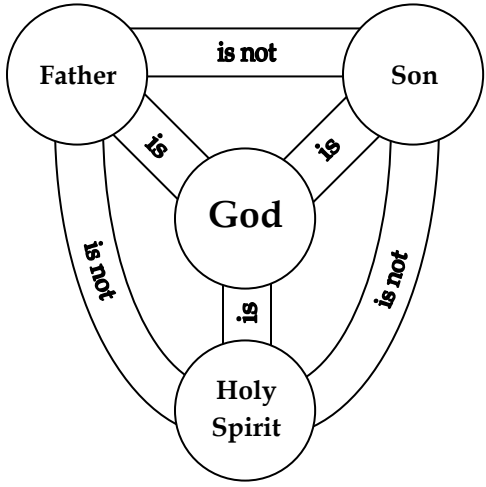

Figure 1.

Finally, let us consider two very different representations of the Christian "Shahada": "There is no God but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." The first is a well-known symbol of the Trinity (see figure 1 above). When I was a small boy, this symbol was often displayed in liturgical covers over the altar or pulpit, and I have seen it displayed often in other churches as well. Of course, as a symbol it is wholly correct in its overt claims. One may think of it as a symbolic attempt to express the statements

of the Athanasian Creed. There are three distinct persons, each of whom is God. As doctrinal statement the symbol is fully accurate and orthodox. As symbol of the Trinity, however, the living God who is made known in the incarnate Son and in his innocent sufferings and death, this symbol is decidedly insufficient. First of all, the symbol suggests that there is something called "God" which is outside of the reality of the three persons. This is precisely what the Council of Nicaea wished to deny. When we say "God," we mean nothing other than "Father, Son, Holy Spirit." Of course, that is not the doctrinal intent of the symbol, but as a symbol it fails precisely at this point, and it is a significant failure. But perhaps the most important limitation of this symbol of the Trinity is its pure abstraction. God is depicted as a series of circles giving rise to a triangle. Not the reality of Person, but that of geometry dominates the symbolic vision. The symbol is incapable of suggesting that this God, precisely because he is the Trinity, is not only capable according to his nature of communicating himself and his divine life but has, in fact, done so in the incarnate servitude of his Son. The Nicene Creed says, "who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven . . . and was made man." Abstract symbols of the Trinity cannot and do not represent the biblical fact that only in the life of the incarnate Christ is God known to be Father, Son, and Spirit of holiness. Moreover, abstract symbols of the Trinity cannot and do not indicate the biblical fact that in the economy of divine love the sinner's humanity is assumed by the divine Son in order that the humanity of the sinner may be redeemed and made whole. "Was made man," that is, made to be what we are to become in union with him who was made man. In devotional contemplation of the symbol of Figure 1, we might conclude that in faith we are to become a circle or a triangle!

How very different is the representation of the Holy Trinity given in Figure 2 (see p. 40). This painting by the Spanish artist José de Ribera (1591–1652) presents the Holy Trinity in all the splendor of its biblical and salvific reality.[13] In contemplating this image of the Trinity one really can confess the Nicene Creed in all of its incarnational and cruciform dimensions. Several aspects of Ribera's painting deserve emphasis. First of all, in this painting the so-called immanent Trinity is depicted as the economic Trinity. That is, God as he is in himself is depicted as he is in his redemptive work. Second, the Father is depicted as the one who presents his Son to us as the sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. It is as though the Father, who is looking straight ahead at the viewer, is saying: "Here is my Son, the crucified, who is the very reality of my fatherhood for you. In him,

[13] Ribera's painting of the Holy Trinity is in the Prado Museum, Madrid, Spain.

and only in him, am I your Father in heaven." Note that with his left hand placed upon the head of Christ the Father expresses his love and blessing and with his right hand, as it were, points toward the sacrificial Son as the sign of his paternal blessing. Note also that the legs of the Son protrude outward toward the viewer as though to indicate that the Father communicates his fatherhood to us in the giving of the Son: "In this manner did God love the world, that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). Third, note the Holy Spirit, who is the bond of love between the Father and the Son and whose outstretched wings mirror the outstretched arms of the crucified. The life of God granted to us through the person of the Holy Spirit is the life of the crucified, that is, the life of love which is the reality of God.

Figure 2. José de Ribera, *The Holy Trinity*, c. 1635–1636. Oil on canvas, 226 x 118 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

The Holy Trinity: What is the point? The point is this: In Christ we are no longer slaves with foreheads on the ground, but brought out and up from the dust of death, we are exalted as sons in the house of God the Father. The great ascension hymn of Christopher Wordsworth, "See the Conqueror Mount in Triumph," expresses this exaltation of man (the real theme of the Festival of the Ascension of our Lord):

See, the Conqueror mounts in triumph;
See the King in royal state,
Riding on the clouds, His chariot,
To His heav'nly palace gate!
Hark, the choirs of angel voices
Joyful alleluias sing,
And the portals high are lifted
To receive their heav'nly King.

Who is this that comes in glory
With the trump of jubilee?
Lord of battles, God of armies,—
He hath gained the victory.
He who on the cross did suffer,
He who from the grave arose,
He has vanquished sin and Satan;
He by death hath spoiled His foes.

While He lifts His hands in blessing,
He is parted from His friends;
While their eager eyes behold Him,
He upon the clouds ascends;
He who walked with God and pleased Him,
Preaching truth and doom to come,
He, our Enoch, is translated
To His everlasting home.

Now our heav'nly Aaron enters
With His blood within the veil;
Joshua now is come to Canaan,
And the kings before Him quail.
Now He plants the tribes of Israel
In their promised resting place;
Now our great Elijah offers
Double portion of His grace.

Thou hast raised our human nature
On the clouds to God's right hand;
There we sit in heavenly places,
There with Thee in glory stand.
Jesus reigns, adored by angels;
Man with God is on the throne.
Mighty Lord, in Thine ascension
We by faith behold our own.

Glory be to God the Father;
Glory be to God the Son,
Dying, risen, ascending for us,
Who the heavenly realm hath won.
Glory to the Holy Spirit!
To One God in Persons Three
Glory both in earth and heaven,
Glory, endless glory, be.[14]

[14] *The Lutheran Hymnal*, hymn 218.

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God as Secondary Fundamental Doctrine in Missouri Synod Theology

David P. Scaer

In our circles, the five-hundredth anniversary of the birth of John Calvin passed unnoticed, but it aroused attention elsewhere. *Christianity Today*'s September 2009 issue featured his picture on its cover with the words "John Calvin: Comeback Kid." In a letter to the editor, William Inne summarized matters nicely: "[Calvin] had an encyclopedic knowledge of the Bible, the church fathers, and the classical writers, and created a systematic theology that harmonized them into a consistent work. At that, he has never been bested."[1] Agreed! His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* puts everything in its proper place, but consistency has its drawbacks. To answer the question why some are saved and others not, Calvin taught double predestination. His dogmatics is divided into four volumes, which are in turn divided into chapters, which are in turn divided into sections. "2.4.19" translates into book two, chapter four, paragraph nineteen—easy to maneuver, but such precise arrangement hauntingly resembles a code of law. For some, a well-crafted outline provides relief from implied biblical confusion. Orderliness may be a virtue, but consistency is less so.

I. Lutheran Dogmatics and the *Sedes Doctrinae*

Lutherans have their own rich heritage of dogmatics,[2] but unlike Calvin, Missouri Synod dogmatician Francis Pieper did not resolve why some are saved and not others.[3] Other Lutherans did resolve the issue, however, by holding that God chose those he knew would believe, *intuitu fidei* (in view of faith). So ended any hope for Lutheran unity in America.[4] The Augsburg Confession lists one doctrine after another, as did the

[1] "Calvin's Resurrection," *Christianity Today* 53 no. 11 (November 2009): 58.

[2] Robert D. Preus showed this first in his *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1955) and later in his *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970–1973).

[3] Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950–1957), 2:3–52; 3:473–501.

[4] On the Predestinarian Controversy of the nineteenth century, see Kurt E. Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion: Missouri in Lutheran Perspective* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1977), 25–28.

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creeds. The Apology (1530/31) followed, providing extended discussions responding to Roman Catholic agreements and disagreements. In laying out what Lutherans believed and how they differed from others and among themselves, the Formula of Concord (1577) could qualify as a dogmatics. Luther laid out the articles of faith one by one, as he did in his catechisms and the Smalcald Articles, but he was a polemicist, not a dogmatician in the classical sense. In engaging current issues, dogmatics should be the most contemporary of all the theological disciplines, but by referencing classical dogmatic works to resolve current issues, all traditions easily lapse into historicism. In the strictest sense, an earlier dogmatics cannot be updated. Robert D. Preus set out to do this with his Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, and in spite of often authoritarian editorial supervision, each contributor went his own way.

By advancing certain doctrines and refuting others, dogmatics favors some passages, *sedes doctrinae* (seats of doctrine), also called the *loci classici* (standard passages), over others. These are presumed to possess a clarity that others do not, and each tradition has its favored set of indisputable *sedes doctrinae*. Attention to the contexts in which they were first spoken, preserved, and written down is not crucial to the dogmatic task. Exegetics does not necessarily interact with or inform dogmatics, which is satisfactorily fueled by the *loci classici* functioning as a normative canon for how other passages are interpreted. Passages not making the *sedes doctrinae* cut are given a subsidiary role. Though well-intentioned, this approach to dogmatics challenges the perspicuity of Scripture and renders plenary inspiration non-functional. Unspoken is the axiom that the Spirit speaks more clearly in one place than in another, and the dogmaticians have already separated the chaff from the wheat. This biblical favoritism is evident when certain passages appear repeatedly and without analysis in lectures and sermons. Sectioning the Bible into numbered verses may give the idea that the Holy Spirit inspired detached passages strung out like pearls on a string, but he did not. Like Jesus, the Spirit preached discourses. A dogmatics based on the *sedes doctrinae* raises the question of how many passages are necessary to support a doctrine. This uncovers an inherent weakness of a theology derived from isolated passages and shows a lack of awareness of the fact that if Christ is found in one place, he is in all the others. In this sense, the Scriptures have no surprises.

II. A Side Issue: Unsustainable Principles

There are other unexamined principles that are taken as gospel truth. For example, it is often said that passages from the *antilegomena*, the contested books of the New Testament, can only be used to support a

doctrine if they are corroborated by passages from the *homologoumena*, books that have near-universal attestation in the early church. This can be devastating to a dogmatics based on inspiration, since 2 Peter 1:20–21 is foundational for this doctrine. If the *antilegomena* only play a subsidiary role, their functional authority would be no more than such post-apostolic writings as *The Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Didache*. Some critical scholars reverse the argument and hold that since the Gospels cannot be associated with the apostles, they are no more useful in locating the apostles' persons and teachings than are the apocryphal writings.[5] For Lutherans, which books constitute an operative canon is a historical and not a theological matter, but this is not a *carte blanche* to dismiss or add biblical books which do not fit into an *a priori* conceived theological system. With his doctrine of justification, Luther did just this, assigning Hebrews, James, and Revelation to the shelf. Had he used historical criteria, he might have hesitated and refined his theological expressions. In this environment the distinction between *homologoumena* and *antilegomena* is moot.

Another principle waiting to be thrown under the bus is that the one intended meaning of any passage is the literal one (*sensus literalis unus est*). Another is that for each parable there is only one point of comparison (*tertium comparationis unum est*). Still another is that any given prophecy has only one fulfillment. Though this is widely assumed, the biblical writers were not bound to these principles, but had a varied hermeneutic.[6] Assumed principles for exegetics, historical theology, homiletics, and pastoral practice, the *prolegomena*, are subject to evaluation and present a modicum of modesty through the recognition that they could be wrong. Method easily becomes an end in itself and substitutes for content.

III. Biblical Unity Is Christological

Biblical unity is supplied by the Spirit's inspiration but is recognized by its christological content. We do not first conclude that the Spirit inspired the Scriptures and then look for Christ, but in hearing the

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[5] *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Bart D. Ehrman (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.) See in particular the table of contents (v).

[6] *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 4th ed., ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009). This mammoth 1239-page double-columned volume shows how New Testament writers may have made use of the Old Testament. Another volume is needed to show how the New Testament writers made use of one another's writings. Its usefulness is not diminished from its having been written by Evangelicals, who cannot do justice to the sacramental perspectives.

Scriptures we hear Christ speaking and then believe in him who sent the Spirit to inspire the Scriptures. From our perspective, Christology precedes inspiration, and hence a biblically derived theology is inherently christological. This is as true for the Old Testament doctrine of God as it is for the New, where the name Jesus is explicit. What is biblical is christological and what is christological is biblical. This might be reasoning in a circle, almost an axiom, a self-standing and commonly accepted principle not requiring proof, similar to the *autopistia* argument that the Scriptures are God's word because they claim to be.[7] All systems of thought are based on unproven axioms—or so it seems—but axioms are subject to challenge. This, however, is not a pure axiom because Jesus of Nazareth, a figure in history, is included in what is christological. Christology is anchored in ordinary history by the *crucifixus sub Pontio Pilato*. Theology begins in encountering Jesus, from which point we jump on the theological circle, and in him we encounter God. What the church believes, the *fides quae*, begins with the person of Jesus.[8] Inspiration can only be a factor in theology if the Spirit who inspires is recognized as the Spirit of both the Father and the Son, the *Filioque*. The crucified and resurrected Jesus sends the Spirit upon his apostles, who provide the ministry, the church, and the Scriptures, all of which are apostolic. What Jesus spoke became the content of the Spirit's inspiration, and so is fulfilled Jesus' promise that the Spirit would take what the Father had given him and give it to the apostles (John 16:13–15). Thus at the end of the reading of Paul's epistles, the lector says, "This is the word of the Lord," not "This is the word of the apostle."

Confined to Saxony, Luther could not engage in the burgeoning politico-theological discussions with Roman Catholics and the Reformed, so he devoted his last ten years to the *Genesis Lectures*. This was not a topically laid-out dogmatics but a theological commentary in which the Reformer saw everything in christological and sacramental terms. Since Christ and the sacraments were his presuppositions, he found them under every bush and tree and in some cases in the trees themselves, but Paul had already found Christ in the rock (1 Cor 10:4). Luther was not imposing

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[7] "Since Scripture is infallible and authoritative, it goes without saying that its testimony must be accepted *a priori*. In other words, Scripture is αὐτόπιστος. Its authority is absolute." Preus, *Inspiration of Scripture*, 89. "Every word is ἀξιόπιστος and αὐτόπιστος and must be believed *per se* simply because it is the Word of God, because God has declared it and said it, even though our reason may not understand or grasp it." Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 296–297.

[8] Preus shows that the Lutheran dogmaticians saw the unity of the Scriptures in Christ. *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 331–332, and *Inspiration of Scripture*, 21.

an alien element onto Genesis, because for him Christ spoke in the Scriptures that spoke in turn about him.[9] A biblical book's christologically inspired character inheres in itself, but is also possessed in relation to writings that come before and after. This is as true for such seemingly christologically unpromising books as Esther and Proverbs as it is for the New Testament. Like the persons of the Trinity, in their christological content and inspired quality "none is before or after another," though we might see one as subordinate to another, which is another trinitarian idea. Moses projects his authority to future prophets (Deut 18:18–22), who in turn see their authority as a continuation of what Moses said (Josh 1:17; 23:6; Ps 103:7). This pattern of one prophet grasping the hand of another finds its culmination in Jesus, who appears as the new Moses (Matt 5:1–2) and then replaces Moses (John 1:17; cf. Heb 1:1; 3:4–5).[10] If the dependency of one book upon another is a defensible hypothesis, it follows that no Gospel arose independently, but the later ones saw themselves as supplementing an earlier one. Matthew wrote to complement the Old Testament and bring it to the smashing conclusion that Jesus had fulfilled it. Luke readjusted Matthew's data by adding two claims that Jesus had fulfilled all of the Old Testament (Luke 24:27, 44). So the pattern is that one biblical event is understood in the light of a previous one and anticipates a future one to form a continuous narrative. If we agree that there is rhyme and reason to the Scriptures and that the Gospels are not collections of random events or sayings, there is reason enough to question the existence of Q, a hypothetical document of random sayings attributed to Jesus and later supposed to be incorporated into Matthew and Luke.[11] Random events, like random sayings, are without one agreed-upon meaning.

IV. Critical Methods and Their Assumptions

A critical method may be objective in that it applies its principles consistently to the biblical texts, but the principles may contain unproven

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[9] Following the Lutheran dogmaticians, Preus held biblical inspiration and justification as central to theology and also saw Christ as the Scriptures' author and content, but this was undeveloped in his theology. "The personal Word of God is not merely the author of the prophetic Word, He is not merely the logos through which God speaks to man; He is more than all this: He is the heart and content and meaning of the prophetic Word, He is the message and purpose of all the Scriptures." Preus, *Inspiration of Scripture,* 21.

[10] Dale Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993).

[11] John S. Kloppenborg has attempted a reconstruction with an interpretation of the Q document. *The Earliest Gospel: An Introduction to the Original Stories and Sayings of Jesus* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

assumptions that often are first recognized by others. A method's value consists in the promise of unearthing previously undiscovered items in the biblical texts. A method productive with one biblical document may be less so or even sterile with another. No method has a permanent claim on center stage. Consider that in the middle of the last century Rudolf Bultmann's demythologizing of the gospel appeared as an immovable fixture in biblical studies. The Hellenistic elements which he wanted to rid from the Gospels as foreign to Jesus' preaching had been present in Palestine already for over two centuries.[12] Greek was the lingua franca of Galilee, and so was its literature. While our church was struggling with Bultmann's methods, his disciples were dethroning him. When the demythologizing method that allowed for the denial of the miraculous surfaced at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in the 1960s and 70s, it was labeled "the" historical-critical method, but there was no one method.[13] One assumption long used and considered by some to be basic in some forms of biblical criticism is that events reported in the Bible as miraculous belong to the realm of faith and hence are not open to historical investigation.[14] Gotthold Lessing, for example, held that reports of events are open to examination, but not the events themselves.[15] Rationalism held that events reported as miraculous did in fact happen, but natural causes for them could be found (e.g., the healing of Peter's mother-in-law). F.F. Bruce, an Evangelical scholar, said that attitudes and techniques that dogmatically rule out the supernatural before the texts are examined are in

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[12] See, e.g., Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974).

[13] "The Historical Critical Method: A Short Historical Appraisal," *Springfielder* 36 (1973): 294–309.

[14] Espousing this view is Bart D. Ehrman's *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Used widely in colleges, many of our parishioners may know of it. Ehrman's separation of fact from faith permeates the entire book. See "Excursus: Some Additional Reflections: The Historian and the Believer" (10–11). See also chapters 10, "The Historical Jesus," (158–184) and 11, "From Jesus to the Gospels" (185–194). See also Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament*: *A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 2nd ed (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 210–212. "As events that do *not* happen all the time, as events that defy all probability, miracles created an inescapable dilemma for historians. Since historians can only establish what probably happened in the past, and the chances of a miracle happening, by definition, are infinitesimally remote, they can never demonstrate that a miracle *probably* happened" (210–211) (emphasis original).

[15] See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power," in *Lessing's Theological Writings: Selections in Translation*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1956), 51–56.

themselves uncritical.[16] More recently, C. Stephen Evans notes "that scholarly disciplines are subject to fads and tendencies in much the same way as other groups of humans."[17] Any method that finds no room for the supernatural really is, as N.T. Wright puts it, "a philosophy of historiography and historical method," a "'projection of an undiscussed metaphysics.'"[18] Narrative, literary, structural, canon, and redaction criticism go under the banner of historical criticism and in looking for themes can be productive for dogmatic theology. Since they do not go behind the biblical texts back to the events, they are not strictly speaking historical methods. In taking the texts as they stand, as these methods do, they can have either a certain "Fundamentalist" tinge, and ironically, since they are historically agnostic, they have an appeal to skeptics. For both, the history is left unexamined. The past can never be recovered the way it once was. Those who participated in it would see it in different ways, but a Word-made-flesh theology requires getting down to the nitty-gritty of what happened. Some methods are simply off the board and come with dogmatic chips on their shoulders, as, for example, postcolonialism, which applies egalitarianism to the biblical texts. It affirms the texts for their hierarchical, patriarchal, and ethnocentric models of community, but censures them for not going far enough in recognizing the value of women, democracy, or other religions.[19] When translated, this means that the ideal religion has women clergy or no clergy at all, and Christ can be replaced by various gods.

Another widely held critical principle is that simplicity precedes and tends towards complexity. This is used to support the nearly universally held scholarly view that the short Gospel of Mark was first and was used by Matthew and Luke.[20] Brevity is seen as nearly synonymous with simplicity. This idea appeared in the Enlightenment and held that the religion of Jesus was a simple unitarianism that through accruements

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[16] F.F. Bruce, *In Retrospect: Remembrance of Things Past* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 207.

[17] C. Stephen Evans, "The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 95.

[18] Beilby and Eddy, "The Quest for the Historical Jesus: An Introduction," in *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 37.

[19] *Review* of *Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and R.S. Sugirtharajah, in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19 (2009): 608–609.

[20] See again Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament,* 64–115.

developed into a dogmatic and organized Catholicism. As abhorrent as this may be to sincere Christians, it is foundational for a general Protestant disdain for creeds and liturgical worship. Lay-led prayer groups are seen as closer to the simple religion of Jesus than are the Sunday services. Baruch Spinoza initiated the common critical view that the synoptic Gospels saw Jesus differently than did Paul.[21] The charge that Paul encumbered the Jesus religion with unnecessary theological baggage is now being challenged.[22] Dissimilarity and similarity, principles that oppose each other in method and results, are regularly used by biblical critics. Looking for the simple religion of Jesus uses dissimilarity: take Paul out of the equation to find the true Jesus. James D.G. Dunn, on the other hand, turns the tables and holds that Paul's theology was dependent on Jesus, the principle of similarity.[23] Some hold that Jesus differed from Judaism, the principle of dissimilarity, and others that he did not, the principle of similarity.[24] This is at the heart of the New Perspective on Paul, which claims that Pauline Christianity and Judaism were both religions of grace.[25] Similarity locates Jesus in his environment, but does not explain why the Jewish authorities wanted to put him out of the way. Dissimilarity answers that question, but has no explanation of how Paul contrived a religion so different from that of Jesus.

Some forms of criticism, such as feminist and postcolonial criticism, come with such an upfront bias that their value is questionable from the start. Literary and redaction criticisms are useful in seeing a Gospel in its totality, but often what is identified as the storyline or themes seems questionable or even artificial. For all its negatives, Bultmann's form criticism opened to research the time between the events and their being inscribed, a period which traditional dogmatics and classical liberal

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[21] David L. Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem: The Canon, the Text, the Composition, and Interpretation of the Gospels* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 172–173.

[22] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008) and James D.G. Dunn, "Remembering Jesus: How The Quest of the Historical Jesus Lost Its Way," in *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 199–225.

[23] James D.G. Dunn, "Jesus-tradition in Paul," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research,* ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (New York: Brill, 1994), 155–178.

[24] Beilby and Eddy, "The Quest for the Historical Jesus," 40–41. See also Dunn, "Remembering Jesus," 216–219.

[25] See further Charles A. Gieschen, "Paul and the Law: Was Luther Right?" in *The Law in Holy Scripture*, ed. Charles A. Gieschen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 113–147.

theology generally ignored. His demythologizing of the Gospels forced us to see that Hellenization was a factor in Jesus' preaching, and that perhaps a writer like Luke retold events in the life of Jesus in a way that would recall to his audience accounts they knew from Greek literature.

No one principle is embraced by all scholars, and any principle has a dogmatic and often unproven component later open to challenge. In classical dogmatics, certainty of the biblical events is supplied by the Holy Spirit, but inspiration, like faith, is an ahistorical phenomenon and is not open to critical examination to determine authenticity. We can agree with a standard premise of critical studies that we can come no closer to Jesus than the written records of the early church. This is hardly unsettling, since all our knowledge of the events at which we were not present depends upon others' observations, some of which are eventually written down, now electronically. Even eyewitness accounts are never pure eyewitness accounts because over time they are enhanced, shaped, and interpreted by other observers and those who heard other accounts. The *loci* method offers an easy-to-grasp handle in resolving theological issues, since the *sedes doctrinae* match up the answers to the theological questions. Its use of the so-called historical-grammatical method assumes but does not examine the historical character of the events behind the biblical texts. Left unaddressed is how the report developed from the event to its being recorded and later used.[26] Like form criticism, it dismantles the biblical texts by identifying the grammatical forms, but also like form criticism, the result is not necessarily usable theology. Within a Lutheran context the deficiencies of these methods are compensated for by the *sedes doctrinae* and the Lutheran Confessions, an approach used by the St. Louis faculty in 1970 in its defense of its use of form criticism.[27]

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[26] Take, for example, Matthew's use in 1:23 of Isa 7:14 for presenting the virgin birth. For dogmatics, this is simple prediction and fulfillment. Dogmatics does not consider how Isaiah understood his prophecy when he first delivered it, how it worked itself out in his ministry, how he mused on it before he wrote it down, and, finally, how Matthew saw it as fulfillment. A clue that this is more than a case of simple prediction and fulfillment is left by the evangelist: instead of the child's mother calling him Immanuel, Matthew says that "they" shall call his name Jesus. This comes to a climax in 28:20, where the name in the prophecy comes to further conclusion in the promise that Jesus will remain with his church. Matters here are more complex, but this is just for starters.

[27] Paul A. Zimmerman, *A Seminary in Crisis: The Inside Story of the Preus Fact Finding Committee* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 179. At first glance it would seem that any church statement of faith would have no place in the practice of a critical

The *loci* method begins with a doctrine and proceeds to the *sedes doctrinae.* Historical-critical studies take into account the complete texts of the four Gospels plus those that appeared in the subsequent centuries to determine which passages, if any, can most likely be traced to Jesus as authentic. Those chosen as most likely to be authentic form a kind of *sedes doctrinae*, though the phrase would hardly be used, in determining what Jesus probably taught and who he was. Ironically, the Jesus Seminar put this method in democratic perspective by giving each participant an equal voice in determining what was most likely to be authentic and unauthentic. Passages most likely traceable to Jesus serve in this system as the *sedes doctrinae*.

V. Christology as Unifying Principle

Shortly after my coming to the faculty at Springfield, then seminary president J.A.O. ("Jack") Preus, Jr., suggested that Christology swap with prolegomena and Scriptures as the first course in the dogmatics curriculum. He may have wanted to circumvent the impending synodical crisis on the nature of the Bible by beginning with a common understanding of Christ as a basis for unity. Before 1966, a course on the person of Jesus came before a course on his work, following Francis Pieper's outline in *Christian Dogmatics*.[28] Beginning dogmatics with Christ's deity corresponds to John's Gospel, which begins with the Word in the presence of God, in whose being he shares and who creates through him. Historical criticism begins the other way round, first introducing Jesus, in whom God is found. This "coming from below" typifies the synoptic Gospels. Since biblical authority was being challenged in the 1960s, favored was the traditional sequence beginning with prolegomena, biblical inspiration and authority, God and Trinity, creation, sin, and then Christology, though it was a bit puzzling how Christ's person could be defined without examining what he had done. John the Baptist's doubts were assuaged by Jesus saying what he did and not who he was (Matt 11:4–5). A church not troubled with challenges to the historical character of Jesus could follow the order of the fourth Gospel by beginning theology with Jesus' divine pre-existence; the "from above" approach, however, requires answering the question how a divine transcendence becomes immanent. For Lutherans, Reformed answers were proof of a defective doctrine of the incarnation. Divine and human lie side-by-side in Jesus, but not in, with, and under him. There is no real perichoresis. Lutherans

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method, but in the faculty's defense every method had its own *a priori*. Uncertain is whether the faculty at that time thought in those terms.

[28] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:55–394.

overcame the hurdle by ascribing the operative divine attributes, like omnipotence, completely to Jesus and asserting that the quiescent attributes, like eternity, only indwell in him.[29] Of course, God incarnates his own self, not attributes. A theology "from below" can avoid these problems. Besides, there is something Luther-like in following the "from below" approach of the synoptic Gospels. By first confronting Jesus and his claim to deity, Christology and theology appear as one thing and some dogmatic issues are put to the side, at least for the time being.

While the Old Testament creed, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord," may allow that theology properly begins with God, in Genesis 1:1 God appears as the creator of heaven and earth. The First Commandment provides a commentary on this by prohibiting the polytheistic confusion of the creator with his creation (Exod 20:2–3). Just as God was known through Israel, so he is now known through Jesus, not only in the glory of his exaltation, as demonstrated in the transfiguration, but especially in his humiliation, where faith grasps him. Jesus is what God is and God is what Jesus is. The Scriptures know of no abstract or philosophical discussion about God.[30] Job broaches the subject and then backs off. Jesus in his humiliation and not just in his glorification is the image of the Father who gives of himself totally in begetting his Son and extends his self-giving love in the procession of the Spirit.[31] It is significant that the most explicit reference to God's trinitarian life is placed at the end of Matthew, something to be grasped as a consequence of Jesus' death and resurrection. By placing discussion of God's trinitarian existence at the

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[29] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:236.

[30] "Like the whole apostolic testimony, John knows of no theodicy—the incarnation replaces it." Martin Hengel, "The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 276.

[31] While some scholars see John 1:14, "We have seen his glory," as a reference to the transfiguration, within the context of this Gospel an appealing option is that it refers to Christ's fleshly existence culminating in the crucifixion, in which the Father's glory is seen. Paul N. Anderson, "On Guessing Points and Naming Stars," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 330–349, esp. 340. Tard Larson provides a brief historical summary of views of how God is revealed in John. Luther follows Erasmus in seeing the revelation in the cross. D. Moody Smith took the lead in identifying God's glory with Jesus' suffering. "Glory or Persecution: The God of the Gospel of John in the History of Interpretation," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 82–88.

conclusion of his *The Christian Faith,* Friedrich Schleiermacher followed Matthew and Luke's order.[32] Schleiermacher located biblical inspiration in the Spirit's presence in the early Christian community's reaction to Jesus, a view expanded by form criticism's claim that the early Christian faith was passed along orally from one community to another in liturgies and other forms whose content was subsequently preserved in the Scriptures. Problematic is that in classical form criticism, the forms do not go back beyond communities to those who witnessed Jesus' deeds and heard his preaching, which led them to recognize him as the Son of God (Luke 1:14; John 1:18; 1 John 1:1–4). Until recently, most critical methods did not go back to the events, but this issue has been corrected effectively by Richard Bauckham and Larry W. Hurtado, who trace the Gospels to the eyewitnesses.[33] The Gospels were not comparable to depositions recorded by attorneys or diaries, but were based on what the apostles saw. Their witness to Jesus before his crucifixion was interpreted in the light of his resurrection.

A threefold creedal outline for dogmatics is compelling for a creedal church, especially since it has become cliche to speak of first, second, and third articles of theology, as if they ever existed. Strikingly, the Gospels individually and collectively begin with Jesus and not with God (Matt 1:1; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:2; John 1:1). Matthew goes back beyond Jesus in titling his Gospel "the book of Genesis of Jesus Christ" (1:1) and factors into the person of Jesus Israel's history starting with Abraham.[34] Only then does he identify Jesus as Immanuel, the "God with us" (1:23), who gave Judah victory over Israel, Syria, and Assyria (Isa 7). Now Jesus will live up to his name of being "God with us" by saving his people from their sins (Matt 1:21–23). Deity is reached not directly but through the humanity of the infant Jesus.[35] Jesus introduces God and not the reverse. Only after Jesus is

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[32] See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H.R. Mackintosh and James S. Stewart (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2003). This 751-page volume ends with a 14-page conclusion on the Trinity.

[33] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006) and Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003).

[34] The Holy Spirit is responsible for Jesus' conception (1:20), but as a distinct person in relation to the Father and Son comes last in the trinitarian formula. Matthew has no place for him in the Johannine thunderbolt (11:27).

[35] Only by implication and not explicitly in 2:15 is the Father introduced in the passage, "Out of Egypt I have called my son," and again at Jesus' baptism, "This is my beloved Son" (4:17). First in the Sermon on the Mount does the Father explicitly enter the Gospel, being introduction by Jesus in 5:48. This fits with the claim in 11:27 that the

recognized as God are there two implied references to that identification in the words "my Son" (Matt 2:15 and 4:17). Theology begins not by asking who God is but by asking who Jesus is (Matt 16:13–16). Though parts of the trinitarian mystery are trolled out throughout Matthew, as, for example, in 11:27, only after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is it fully revealed (Matt 28:19). The trinitarian conclusion is greater than any one divine person.[36] John, known as the theologian among the evangelists, begins not with God but with the hypostatic Word, the λόγος ἄσαρκος, who exists side-by-side and face-to-face with God as his creating agent (John 1:1–2). While Matthew waits to the end to unveil the divine mystery, John goes right back to the prehistory of Genesis to provide what Martin Hengel calls the "history" of the Word who is not known, λόγος ἄσαρκος, but in the flesh, λόγος ἔνσαρκος (John 1:14).[37]

VI. Fundamental and Non-Fundamental

Pieper notes that Lutherans, and by extension other Christians, are not agreed as to what the fundamental doctrine is, but with support from Luther he settles unsurprisingly on justification. Designating doctrines as either fundamental non-fundamental allowed the Reformed to find a basis for fellowship with Lutherans, but the distinction took on a life of its own.[38] Even where the distinction is unknown, it is useful in determining whether marginal church members have met a minimum faith

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Son reveals the Father. In the Sermon the Father's name appears so often—ten times to be exact—that it may properly be called Jesus' discourse on the Father.

[36] By saying that what he has written he obtained from "the eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word" (1:3), Luke begins with Jesus as Matthew does. Luke's implicit formula is similarly placed at his Gospel's conclusion (24:19). In his Gospel's title, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ" (1:1), Mark presumes that we know who Jesus is, just as we are presumed to know who John the Baptist is (1:4).

[37] Hengel, "The Prologue of the Gospel of John," 271–273. It is tempting to see John as already speaking of the λόγος ἔνσαρκος in 1:1–3, because vv. 6–11 speak of John the Baptist and Israel's rejection of Jesus by his own people. In this case, "the Word becoming flesh" would refer to Christ's humiliation by taking on our sinful existence. Thus the Johannine prologue begins with the λόγος ἔνσαρκος and not the λόγος ἄσαρκος. This interpretation parallels Col 1:15–20, where Jesus is described as the firstborn of all creation, through whom all things were made and are held together.

[38] Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:144–154. Paul E. Kretzmann's expanded list includes "the existence of divine revelation, the resurrection of the dead . . . the necessity of piety and love toward one's neighbor as a fruit of faith, original sin (Quenstedt)." The only articles consistently making the non-fundamental list are the pope as Antichrist and angels. "Fundamental and Non-fundamental Doctrines and Church Fellowship," n.d., Concordia Theological Seminary archives, Fort Wayne, IN.

requirement so as to expect salvation at death and a clerically led funeral. Without first identifying a common fundamental doctrine, discussions leading to fellowship are compromised. Since the Reformed do not see sacraments as fundamental, they can live with Lutherans who see them as fundamental, but Lutherans cannot, or at least should not, return the favor. Discussions with Roman Catholics on the christological substance can be productive, as in the Augsburg Confession, until it comes to the non-negotiability of papal supremacy. Ideally, justification as the fundamental doctrine would provide a basis for Lutheran unity, but diverse definitions have not been resolved since they surfaced at the Lutheran World Federation in 1963.[39] An existentially formed definition of justification that did not include the historical character of Jesus as a necessary component was at the root of difficulties with the Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, faculty in the 1960s and 70s. Justification was accomplished by preaching the gospel, but the historical quality of the virgin birth and the resurrection was a separate issue. The old nineteenth-century classical liberal separation of the Christ of faith (justification) from the Jesus of history came to life and was unrecognized by the examining committee.[40] For the

[39] In spite of disagreements on justification, Lutherans found themselves to be substantively closer to Roman Catholics (and the Eastern Orthodox by extension), especially on the Lord's Supper, than to the Reformed, as pointed out by John R. Stephenson, review of *Usus und Actio: Das Heilige Abendmahl bei Luther und Melanchthon* in *Logia* 18 no. 3 (Holy Trinity 2009): 73. Proximate unity on one issue may be compromised by divergence on another, as with the Eastern Church's non-acceptance of the *Filioque*, which reveals a different understanding of the Trinity. Roman Catholics do not see the doctrine of justification informing all other doctrines as Lutherans do. Reformed communions see the creeds only as approximations of the biblical truth. *Quia* subscription is foreign to them. Evangelicals and Lutherans may speak of justification by faith, but they understand faith and its creation so differently that agreement on justification is more apparent than real. Recent events in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America confirm its earlier departure from the Confessions by their entry into fellowship with the Reformed, Episcopalians, Moravians, and Methodists. The Lutheran substance has evaporated, and now even the outer shell is shattering. See Gottfried Martins, "JDDJ After Ten Years," trans. Jacob Corzine, *Logia* 18 no. 3 (Holy Trinity 2009): 11–26.

[40] Zimmerman, *A Seminary in Crisis*, 61–62. Faculty members accepted the virgin birth and the resurrection, but some would allow others to raise questions about their "reality, actuality, and historicity." In spite of this, the committee found, "It was comforting to find unanimity on the central doctrine of Holy Scriptures." Thus justification is seen operative apart from the historical Jesus. In response to Paul L. Maier's *Lutheran Witness* article "Reservations about the Resurrection?" another committee member asserted "that ultimately we do not accept the Resurrection story on the basis of historical 'proofs.'" Rather we accept the resurrection and Christ's victory over death by faith. Karl L. Barth, "By Faith," *Lutheran Witness* 128 no. 6/7 (June/July

faculty, the chief doctrine had morphed into the only necessary one and the standard for all the others. Some trace current ELCA troubles back to this interpretation. This might be a reason for justification to be restated so as to include Jesus of Nazareth as its first and necessary component.[41] Another problem in the justification-by-faith formula is that for Evangelicals faith is a self-conscious act of the will, a view that crops up among well-intentioned Lutherans. A denial of infant baptism, or a tendency to see it as a tolerable but still aberrant practice, is probably based on a defective doctrine of justification, but this is a side issue.

Since the Enlightenment, Early Church and Reformation concerns about the relationship of Christ's two natures to each other and the value of his atonement have been replaced at the center of theological enterprise by questions about the historical accessibility of Jesus, a multifaceted discipline that comes under the general heading of the quest for the historical Jesus.[42] A dogmatically formulated christology is not possible

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2009): 4. Jesus' resurrection is an article of the faith, that is, what the church believes, but like his crucifixion, his resurrection belongs to history.

[41]The claim of our Confessions that justification is the chief article could hardly refer to its articulation, since the church thrived and spread before the Reformation definition. Add to this that infants and children cannot define it. Our late colleague Donald Deffner often expressed amazement that most Lutheran also could not, but this is no surprise, since the people cannot be expected to express themselves in the theologically acquired terms. To set matters straight, only by preaching of Christ's sacrifice and not by articulating the doctrine is a sinner justified. Lutherans settled on justification as the fundamental doctrine because Rome held that works and not faith in Christ determine our standing *coram deo* (before God). At the final judgment *coram mundo* (before the world) works determine this, but the Reformation issue was about the certainty of salvation here and now. For Lutherans, justification was all about God accepting us *propter Christum* (for the sake of Christ). It was not even *propter fidem* (for the sake of faith) but always *per fidem* (through faith). Rome places works alongside Christ, and it is not faith that is thus compromised but Christ. For Lutherans, justification is not a separate article of faith but really a part of Christology, who Jesus was and what he did. Differences Lutherans had with other churches all had to do with Christ. To some it seems we can make common cause on biblical inspiration with Evangelicals, but since they cite the Scriptures without recognizing their christological content, they offer a different religion from ours. Theology is not simply a matter of who can accumulate the most *sedes doctrinae* in the defense of a position but rather how every doctrine is seen as an extension of Christology.

[42] An updated and easy-to-read overview of this issue is provided in *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009). Chosen to represent the wide diversity of views are Robert M. Price, who finds virtually no evidence for Jesus; John Dominic Crossan, a Jesuit scholar who sees Jesus as a wandering peasant philosopher; Luke Timothy Johnson, who argues for

without a prior commitment to the historical character of Jesus of Nazareth. Left unaddressed, Christology collapses, justification disintegrates, and the sacraments become cultic rites. With the often unrecognized fiction of *The Da Vinci Code* and the faux scholarship surrounding the Gospel of Judas and the other apocryphal Gospels, the first issue for clergy and people has shifted from how I am saved to how we come to know Jesus and what we can know about him. By beginning theology with the man Jesus and not with Christ or God, the Lutheran distinctiveness is maintained in that Christology begins with the lowliness of Jesus and not with the majesty of God, as among the Reformed.[43]

Recognition of the historical figure of Jesus as God is the first theological topic and should penetrate all theology. Without a historically affirmed Jesus, his maleness is no longer a factor in Christology, which degenerates into a Gnosticism with a "relentless purging of masculine images and pronouns for God," a phenomenon Benne sees in the ELCA.[44]

VII. God as Secondary Primary Fundamental Doctrine

After insisting that justification is the chief article, Pieper hedges his bets by giving the same honor to the knowledge of sin, the theanthropic nature of Christ, and the Trinity, but returns to give the honor of the *articulus omnium fundamentalissimus* to justification. He must have known that a superlative can only have one point of reference.[45] So in effect sin, Christ, and the Trinity amount to "secondary primary fundamental doctrines," though Pieper does not speak this way. Recognizing Christ as the chief doctrine may be implied in that the Lutheran dogmaticians saw Christ as the author and content of all the Scriptures, even though they did not integrate this christological aspect into their doctrine of inspiration.

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the historical reality of Jesus, but not much more; James D.G. Dunn, who argues against the distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith; and Darrell L. Bock, who holds that Jesus saw himself at the center of God's plan. Each contribution is followed by a response often in the form of a critique from the other four contributors.

[43] Gustaf Wingren notes that for Luther, theology began with Christ's lowliness, in contrast to the Reformed, who began with God's honor. *The Living Word*, trans. Victor G. Pogue (2nd printing; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 205.

[44] Robert Benne, "The Christ of Culture and the ELCA," *The Cresset* 72 no. 2 (Advent–Christmas 2009): 31–33. Benne speaks of a church's "full accommodation to culture" by citing Richard Niebuhr: "'A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross'" (31). He offers this critique: "It [the ELCA] was the first confessional church of any size to succumb to liberal Protestantism's allure. A harsh critic might say that it rendered itself a sect and became schismatic at the same time" (31).

[45] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:80–91.

The historical Jesus component of the christological aspect in the doctrine of justification was not discussed in the St. Louis faculty interviews prior to the 1974 walkout. One reason for questioning the traditional dogmatic order of the natural knowledge of God, his trinitarian existence, and his attributes before Christology[46] is that it does not correspond to the Gospels, which begin with Jesus and then identify him with God. Christology and theology in the narrow sense, that is, what is known about God, comprise one topic or *locus*, not two. Bauckham provides an extensive discussion in showing that the whole New Testament "identifies Jesus as intrinsic to who God is."[47] Hurtado's research, as indicated in the subtitle of his book, *Devotion to Jesus in the Early Church*, shows that from the very beginning Jesus received the same honors due to God. He notes that "in Pauline Christianity we see a remarkable 'overlap' in functions between God and Jesus, and also in the honorific rhetoric used to refer to them both."[48] These approaches release dogmatics from the restrictive *sedes doctrinae* approach, which assumes that some passages are of more value than others, and frees us to roam throughout the New Testament in hot and always successful christological pursuit. Homiletically a less-than-promising Gospel appointed for that Sunday no longer has to be propped up by *sedes doctrinae* taken from other places in that Gospel or from other books, typically John 3:16.

Bauckham challenges the widely held view that patristic christology far exceeded what the New Testament could deliver. He shows that the New Testament "is already a fully divine Christology, maintaining that Jesus Christ is intrinsic to the unique and eternal identity of God."[49] There is no need to wait for Nicaea and Chalcedon. New Testament christology has to do with "not only the pre-existent and the exalted Jesus . . . but also the earthly, suffering, humiliated and crucified Jesus [who] belongs to the unique and eternal identity of God."[50] The crucifixion is not at odds with who God is. No longer does theology have to explain how divine

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[46] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:372–463.

[47] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 31.

[48] Hurtado, *Devotion to Jesus in the Early Church*, 142. This massive work of 746 pages is devoted to demonstrating that Jesus was revered as God right after the resurrection. Jesus found a place within Jewish monotheist worship.

[49] Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel,* 151. Bauckham continues, "These were seen as the principles that governed the development of the Nicene and Chalcedonian dogmas with the faith of the first Christians in God and the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ."

[50] Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, x.

transcendence became immanent. The *homo factus est* is not alien to God's trinitarian life. There are not three theologies, but one, and that is Christology. Because the Spirit derives his life not only from the Father but also from the Son, *Filioque*, within the Trinity, and because he is sent by the crucified and resurrected Jesus, he is christological in forming the church in Christ's image.

All the ramifications of doing theology by beginning and remaining with the christology of the Gospels in all of the *loci* cannot be expanded upon here. Such thinking, at least on my part, was at the heart of the seminary's new curriculum courses on the Gospels and Theologia I, II, and III. Dogmatics and biblical studies blend into two disciplines returning to the form of the Gospels. Traditionally justification informs all the articles of faith, but this honor more appropriately belongs to Christology, which begins with Jesus, in whom we are justified.

Above the letter section in the issue of *Christianity Today* commemorating Calvin, there appears in bold print: "John Calvin trusted the consequence of all his actions to the triune God. In that, we all can find someone to admire." Belief in the Trinity is indisputable, but Jesus is where the Trinity is encountered. A raw doctrine of the Trinity presents its own problems if it allows us access to God through the Father and Spirit as optional alternatives to Jesus. A false trinitarian egalitarianism exists in Jurgen Moltmann's definition, which sees each divine person living in mutually reciprocal relationship with the others.[51] This is great as far as it goes, but the distinctiveness of each person is lost. Left unexplained is why the Father sent the Son and did not come himself. The answer is provided by Paul N. Anderson:

> Because the agent is to be regarded in all ways like the sender, the Son is to be equated with the Father precisely because he does nothing on his own. Therefore, subordinationism and egalitarianism are wrongly seen as opposing christological categories in John; they are flip-sides of the same coin.[52]

Now for a contemporary application: The *loci* method advances its argument against women clergy by referencing Paul's prohibitions in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. Proponents of the practice have their quiver of passages, especially Galatians 3:28: In Christ male and female are equal.

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[51] Jürgen Moltmann, "God in the World—the World in God: Perichoresis in Trinity and Eschatology," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 374.

[52] Anderson, "On Guessing Points and Naming Stars," 324.

Voila, women pastors. While we have the *sedes doctrinae* on our side, or so we like to think, the issue should be addressed christologically and then in a trinitarian persepective. In becoming man, Christ was replicating his relationship as the Son to the Father. Within the Trinity, the subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father is not an infringement upon or a challenge to their equality. In doing the Father's bidding by coming to our aid, the Son reflected his place within the Godhead. Our salvation was not effected by an arbitrary decision of a sovereign God, but it flowed out of the inner trinitarian recesses. This is reflected in how Christians live together as priests all equally justified by and before God, but each a servant of the other and nevertheless each having his proper place in the body of Christ. This sounds a little like Paul—or maybe Luther. Every Christian is lord of all but servant to all. We also feel at home with the *loci* method, a passage here and a passage there—good, but not good enough. A theology worthy of the name must be primarily and thoroughly christological, a theology in which God is accessible only through Jesus' humility. Dogmatics might take its clue from Matthew 11:25–30:

> At that time Jesus declared, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one 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."

Is God a secondary primary fundamental doctrine? Your call.

CTQ 75 (2011): 63–90

Luther and Calvin on God: Origins of Lutheran and Reformed Differences

Roland F. Ziegler

I. The Doctrine of God

The doctrine of God is traditionally not one of the doctrines that is controversial between Lutherans and Calvinists. There were in the past some rather nasty polemics, since some Lutherans were strongly opposed to the doctrine of double predestination and thought that it would change the character of God. But in the ecumenical dialogues between Lutherans and Reformed churches, the issue of the doctrine of God did not come up. Instead, the usual suspects—the Lord's Supper, predestination, law and gospel, Christology—were topics of discussion.

But is the difference in the doctrine of Christology such that there is also a difference in the doctrine of God? After all, the *genus maiestaticum*, the doctrine that the human nature of Christ shares in certain attributes of the divine nature, is a classical point of controversy between Lutherans and the Reformed. The problem is, though, that this is a classical difference not only between Lutherans and the Reformed, but also between Lutherans and the Roman Church. Thus, the *genus maiestaticum* was vehemently rejected by the post-Tridentine polemical theologian Robert Bellarmine, who attacked Chemnitz and continued to be written against in the school theology afterwards.[1] Thus, if there is a difference in the doctrine of God specific to the relation between Luther and Calvin or

[1] Cf. Robertus Bellarminus, *Opera Omnia* (Paris, 1870; repr., Frankfurt am Main: Minerva-Verlag, 1965), vol. 1, book 3, chap. 9: "Secundo, ex unione hypostatica sequitur communicatio idiomatum, quae quidem communicatio non est realis respectu ipsarum naturarum, quasi ipsa Divinitas facta sit passibilis, et humanitas realiter sit facta omnipotens, ut volunt Lutherani" (281). (In the second place, from the hypostatic union there follows the communication of attributes, which is not, to be sure, an actual communication with respect to the natures themselves, as if the divinity itself were made passible, and the humanity made actually omnipotent, as the Lutherans intend.) [Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.] Ludwig Ott offers the following definition of the hypostatic union from the Roman Catholic perspective: "The nature of the Hypostatic Union is such that while on the one hand things pertaining to both the Divine and the human nature can be attributed to the person of Christ, on the other hand things specifically belonging to one nature cannot be predicated of the other nature." Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (St. Louis: Herder, 1957), 161.

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Lutherans and the Reformed, it cannot be connected with the *genus maiestaticum*. A more promising way seems to be to focus on predestination and its consequences for the doctrine of God. I will give special attention to Luther's *On the Bondage of the Will*, since Luther singled out this work together with the catechisms for its significance among his many writings, and because this writing has been used by Calvinists to claim the unity of Luther and Calvin versus a later Melanchthonian shift on the side of the Lutherans—a different "Melanchthonian blight."

II. Luther's Doctrine of God

Deus Absconditus

Luther's interest is soteriological, not metaphysical. He is interested not in God as he is in himself, but in how God encounters us in a saving way. For Luther, God is not a distant reality. Though Luther stresses the distinction between creation and creator and therefore the ontological difference between God and the world, God nevertheless permeates and is present everywhere and in everything. He sustains and governs his creation in every respect. But not every encounter with God is an encounter with the salvific God. There are at least three distinct ways of this encounter which cannot be easily unified. First, God encounters us as the creator who governs and sustains his creation according to his good will, rewarding those who obey his commandments and punishing those who transgress them, as Luther summarizes in the Small Catechism in the Conclusion of the Commandments. Second, God also encounters us as the Redeemer in Christ. Finally, there is the reality of the hidden and puzzling rule of God, God as the hidden God.[2] There is no christological revelational monism in Luther's theology as one finds in, for example, Karl Barth. Rather, there is a tension in Luther's understanding of God, so much so that in Luther research the question has been asked whether there is a dualism in Luther and if Luther has a unified concept of God.[3] The tension is between God hidden and God preached, God as the one who works everything and God as the one who sustains and executes his law and redeems humanity.

In the nineteenth century, Theodosius Harnack, in his two-volume work on Luther's theology, opposed Albrecht Ritschl's monistic understanding of God, writing:

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[2] Cf. Oswald Bayer, "God's Omnipotence," *Lutheran Quarterly* 23 (2009): 85–102, esp. 90–92.

[3] Cf., e.g., Frederik Brosché, *Luther on Predestination: The Antinomy and the Unity Between Love and Wrath in Luther's Concept of God*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studiae doctrinae Christianae Upsaliensia 18 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1978).

> God is in a double and equally real relation to the fallen world, outside of Christ and in Christ. Outside of Christ, as the one who, in his majesty as creator, transcends creation and is unattainable by it, who carries and governs it as by the immanent power of his will, but only in this way, that he governs it in his wrath and therefore can only be experienced by the world as the averted, unbearable, and terrible God. In Christ, though also as the God hidden and absolute, but who has not only turned and revealed himself to us in his saving grace, but has in this manner made himself accessible, has bound and pledged himself, in such a way that we can know and grasp him, tolerate him and be comforted by his certainty.[4]

There are several ways in which Luther can talk about the hiddenness of God. God can be hidden *sub contrario*, that is, in the sense of the Heidelberg Disputation, God is hidden in weakness and shame and the despised, or God is hidden in ordinary things. These we shall not investigate here.[5] Rather, we are looking at the way in which God is hidden so that he deals with us but is inaccessible and even dangerous for humanity.

God Hidden in His Majesty

God in his majesty is of no concern to us, as Luther says in his exposition of Genesis 22:16:

> But when they say this, they imagine most of all that God is untruthful, unjust, and unwise; for they have no other knowledge of God than a philosophical or metaphysical one, namely, that God is a being separate from the creatures, as Aristotle says—a being that is

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[4] "Gott in einer doppelten und gleich realen Relation zu der gefallenen Welt steht, außer Christo und in Christo. Außer Christo, als der in seiner Schöpfermajestät sie weit transzendierende und von ihr unerreichbare, welche sie zwar als der zugleich ihr immanente Kraft seiner Willensmacht trägt und regiert, jedoch nur so, daß er in ihr seinen Zorn walten läßt, und darum auch von ihr nur als der abgewandte, unerträgliche und schreckliche Gott erfahren werden kann. In Christo, zwar auch als derselbe in seiner Majestät verborgene und absolute Gott, der sich aber in seiner Erlösergnade nicht nur zugewendet und geoffenbart, sondern sich als diesen für uns so faßbar gemacht, sich uns so gebunden und versichert hat, daß wir ihn erkennen und ergreifen, ihn dulden und uns seiner gewiß getrösten können." Theodosius Harnack, *Luthers Theologie: mit besonderer Beziehung auf seine Versöhnungs- und Erlösungslehre*, Neue Ausgabe, 2 vols. (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1927), 1:103.

[5] Cf. Hellmut Bandt, *Luthers Lehre vom verborgenen Gott: Eine Untersuchung zu dem offenbarungsgeschichtlichen Ansatz seiner Theologie*, Theologische Arbeiten 8 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1958), 24–84; David C. Steinmetz, "Luther and the Hidden God," in David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 23–31.

> truthful and contemplates the creatures within itself. But of what concern is this to us? The devil, too, has such a knowledge of God and knows that He is truthful. But when knowledge is imparted about God in theology, God must be known and apprehended, not as remaining within Himself but as coming to us from the outside; that is, we must maintain that he is our God. That first Aristotelian or philosophical god is the god of the Jews, the Turks, and the papists; but he is of no concern to us. But our God is he whom the Holy Scriptures show, because He gives us His epiphany, His appearance, Urim and Thumim, and speaks with us.[6]

For Luther, the issue is not that the beliefs of the philosophers, Jews, Muslims, and Papists are wrong. They are right in their belief that God is a transcendent reality. The point is simply that theology deals with a God who comes to man and gives himself as God for humanity. Here again Luther shows his basic soteriological interest. He is not interested in God in himself, but God for us, without denying that God in himself is a reality.

But not only is this God of no soteriological interest, he has to be avoided. God in his majesty is humanity's enemy. Muslims and Papists deal with God in his majesty, which, or rather who, creates nothing but despair in the hour of death.[7]

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[6] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 4:145 [henceforth *LW*]. "At illi ipsi cum maxime hoc dicunt, maxime omnium Deum mendacem, iniustum, insipientem, esse sentiunt. Non enim aliam notitiam de Deo habent, quam Philosophicam aut metaphysicam. Quod Deus est ens separatum a creaturis, ut ait Aristoteles, verax, intra se contemplans creaturas. Sed quid haec ad nos? Diabolus etiam sic Deum congnoscit et scit esse veracem, sed in Theologia quando de agnitione Dei docetur, agnoscendus et appraehendendus est Deus, non intra se manens, sed ab extra veniens ad nos, ut videlicet statuamus eum nobis esse Deus. Ille prior Aristotelicus vel Philosophicus Deus Iudaeorum, Turcarum, Papistarum Deus est, nihil vero is ad nos. Sed quem sacrae literae monstrant: is nobis Deus est, quia dat nobis sua Epiphania, suam apparitionem, *Urim* et *Thumim,* et loquitur nobiscum." Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Schriften*], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 43:240,21–32 [henceforth WA].

[7] "Cum isto deo sey vnuerborren [sc. unverworren]; qui vult salvus fieri, relinquat deum in Maiestate, quia iste et humana creatura sunt inimici. Sed illum deum apprehendas, quem David, qui est vestitus suis promissionibus, ut Christus adsit, qui ad Adam dicit: 'Ponam inimicicias,' 'et ipsum,' etc. Den Got mus man haben, Ne sit nudus deus da cum nudo homine. Cum Papa et Mahomete est praesumptio, donec ad mortis horam, da ghet desperatio er [sc. her] nach." (Let him not be confused with that God; let him who wants to be saved leave God in his majesty, because he and the human creature are enemies. But you should apprehend that God whom David

apprehended, who is clothed in his promises, so that Christ may be present, who says to Adam, "I will put enmity," "and him," etc. For God must have a man, lest he be a naked God there with a naked man. The pope and Mohammed are presumptuous up to the hour of death; despair follows.) WA 40.II:329,9–330,3 (MS). "Sepe audivistis hunc Canonem urgendum in sacris litteris, ut debeamus abstinere a speculatione maiestatis; humano corporis non est leydlich ista speculatio, taceo mentis." (You have often heard that this rule is to be urged in the Holy Scriptures, that we ought to refrain from speculation on the majesty; such speculation is unbearable for the bodily man; I keep silence in my mind.) WA 40.I:75,9–76,1, Lectures on Galatians (MS) 1531, on Gal 1:4. "Neque enim coram Maiestate quisquam consistere potest, sed in solum Christum est respiciendum. . . . Deus enim omnibus aliis modis incomprehensibilis est, in sola autem carne Christi est comprehensibilis. In quo Christo nihil vides nisi summam suavitatem et humanitatem, qui pro nobis mortem crucis sua sponte adiit, ut nos liberati a peccatis suam iusticiam per fidem in ipsum haberemus et vitam aeternam. Hoc objecto erigitur animus et concipitur vita. Reliqua omnia sunt spectra irae et mortis, inter quae tamen nullum est pericolosius quam spectrum Maiestatis divinae." (For no one is ever able to endure before the Majesty, but one must consider Christ alone. . . . For God is incomprehensible in all other ways, but comprehensible in the flesh of Christ alone, and in this Christ you see nothing but the greatest sweetness and humanity, who for us went freely to the death of the cross, that we, having been freed from sins, might have his righteousness and life eternal through faith in him. When he has been placed in the way, the spirit is encouraged and life is affirmed. All the rest are specters of wrath and death, among which nothing is more perilous than the specter of the divine Majesty.) WA 25:107,2–4, 11–15 (Scholia in Isaiam, from the second edition 1534, on Isa 4:6). "Sepe dixi vobis et semper dico et mortuo me recordamini, quod omnes diabolici doctores heben oben an et deum praedicant a Christo abgescheiden ut not in scholis olim. Si vis securus esse contra mortem, peccatum etc., laß dir nicht einreden, quod non sit alius deus quam qui est missus. Incipe sapientiam et scientiam tuam a Christo et dic: nescio alium deum quam in illo homine et ubi alius ostenditur, claude oculos." (I have often said to you, and I always say—remember it when I am dead!—that all the devilish teachers go on and preach God divorced from Christ, as was once our distress in the schools. If you wish to be safe from death, sin, etc., do not let them convince you, because there is no other God than he who has been sent. Let your wisdom and knowledge begin with Christ, and say: I do not know any other God than the one who is in that man, and where another appears, shut your eyes.) WA 28:101,1–7 (Sermons on John 16–20, 1528/9, on John 17:3). "Hic primus gradus erroris est, cum homines derelicto Deo involuto et incarnato sectantur nudum Deum. Postea cum hora iudicii venit et sentiunt iram Dei, iudicante Deo ipsorum corda et examinante, tum desinit Diabolus eos inflare, desperant igitur et moriuntur. Ambulant enim in nudo sole et deserunt umbraculum, quod liberat ab aestu, Esa. 4 [Isa 4:6]. Nemo igitur de Divinitate nuda cogitet, sed has cogitationes fugiat tanquam infernum et ipsissimas Satanae tentationes. Sed hoc curemus singuli, ut maneamus in Symbolis istis quibus ipse Deus nobis revelavit: In Filio nato ex virgine Maria, iacente inter iumenta in praesepi, In verbo, in Baptismo, in coena Domini et Absolutione. Nam in his imaginibus videmus et invenimus Deum, quem sustinere possumus, qui nos consolatur, in spem erigit, salvat. Aliae cogitationes de voluntate beneplaciti seu substantiali et aeternae occidunt et damnant." WA 42:295,26–38. "This is the first stage of error, when men disregard God

God Outside His Word vs. In His Word

Luther can call this distinction also the nude God versus the clothed God. God as he is in himself is not available to us; God has to clothe himself to interact with us. The object of faith is not simply God, but God clothed in his promise.

> Therefore He [sc. God] puts before us an image of Himself, because He shows Himself to us in such a manner that we can grasp Him. In the New Testament we have Baptism, the Lord's Supper, absolution, and the ministry of the Word. These, in the terminology of the Scholastics are "the will of the sign," and these we must consider when we want to know God's will. The other is His "will of good pleasure," the essential will of God or His unveiled majesty, which is God Himself. From this the eyes must turn away, for it cannot be grasped. In God there is sheer Deity, and the essence of God is His transcendent wisdom and omnipotent power. These attributes are altogether beyond the grasp of reason; and whatever God has purposed by this "will of His good pleasure" He has seen from eternity. An investigation of this essential and divine will, or of the Divine Majesty, must not be pursued but altogether avoided. This will is unsearchable, and God did not want to give us an insight into it in this life.[8]

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as He has enveloped Himself and become incarnate, and seek to scrutinize the unveiled God. Later on, when the hour of judgment arrives and they feel the wrath of God, when God is judging and investigating their hearts, then the devil ceases to puff them up, and they despair and die. For they are walking unsheltered in the sun and are abandoning the shade, which gives relief from the heat (Is. 4:6). Let no one, therefore, contemplate the unveiled Divinity, but let him flee from these contemplations as from hell and the veritable temptations of Satan. Let it be the concern of each of us to abide by the signs by which God has revealed Himself to us, namely, His Son, born of the Virgin Mary and lying in His manger among the cattle; the Word; Baptism; the Lord's Supper; and absolution. In these images we see and meet a God whom we can bear, one who comforts us, lifts us up into hope, and saves us. The other ideas about 'the will of His good pleasure,' or the essential and eternal will, slay and condemn." *LW* 2:47–48 (Lectures on Genesis, on Gen 6:6).

[8] *LW* 2:46–47 on Gen 6:6. "Ergo imaginem sui proponuit, quia se nobis ita ostendit, ut apprehendere eum possimus. Nos in novo Testamento habemus Baptismum, coenam Domini, Absolutionem et ministerium verbi. Haec sunt, ut Scholastici vocarunt, voluntas signi, in quae intuendum est, cum Dei voluntatem scire volumus. Alia est voluntas beneplaciti, substantialis voluntas Dei seu nuda Maiestas, quae est Deus ipse. Ab hac removendi oculi sunt. Non enim potest apprehendi. In Deo enim nihil est nisi divinitas et substantia Dei est immensa sapientia ac omnipotens potentia. Haec rationi simpliciter sunt inaccessabilia: Quicquid hac voluntate beneplaciti Deus voluit, ab aeterno vidit. De hac voluntate substantiali et divina nihil scrutandum, sed simpliciter

The revealed God and God in his majesty are not simply identified; otherwise the counsel to avoid and to flee God in his majesty would be superfluous. Rather, God in his majesty is unfathomable, so that human beings cannot deal with him. What seems especially to characterize him is his infinite wisdom and omnipotence, but not his love. This coincides with the characteristics of God enumerated in Rom 1. Thus, one can venture that it is God in his majesty of which the Gentiles have a glimpse in creation. The absolute will of God, the *voluntas beneplaciti* (will of good pleasure), is hidden to human beings. Christians are to cling to the signs he has given, in which he has made himself accessible, but has not emptied himself in such a way that there is no God outside of word and sacraments anymore. But there is no God *pro me* (for me) outside of them, that is, no God in whom human beings are to trust.

How, then, can one speak of this God in his majesty at all? Luther is not going in the direction of a neoplatonic mysticism à la Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita or John of the Cross. No, the hidden God, or God in his majesty, is not absolutely unknowable—otherwise, of course, there would not even be the term "hidden God." Human beings can know that God is there and working.[9] Actually, it is unavoidable that human beings be aware of the hidden God: his presence impresses itself on them.[10] This

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abstinendum est, sicut et a maiestate divina: est enim inscrutabilis nec voluit eam Deus proponere in hac vita." WA 42:294,32–295,3.

[9] Cf. Th. Harnack, *Luthers Theologie*, I:93: "Der verborgene Gott ist ihm nicht der schlechthin jenseitige und unbekannte, sondern 'der glorreiche Gott, wie er, verborgen in seiner Majestät, wirket Tod und Leben und Alles in Allem,' oder Gott allein nach seinem transzendenten und immanenten *Schöpferverhältnis* betrachtet. Insofern ist freilich Gott auch hierbei der offenbare, als er sich uns in der Schöpfung, näher in der Vernunft, dem Gewissen und auch dem Gesetz manifestiert hat, aber damit ist weder der scharfe und feste Unterschied aufgehoben, der zwischen ihm und der Kreatur besteht, noch haben wir ihn hier anders, als in seiner unerforschlichen, unerreichbaren und für uns Sünder unleidlichen Majestät." (The hidden God is for him not merely the distant and unknown God, but "the glorious God who, hidden in his Majesty, works death and life and all in all," or God dealt with only according to his transcendent and immanent *creator relationship*. Thus far God is indeed the revealed God, as he has manifested himself to us in creation, and more closely in reason, the conscience, and even in the law, but in this way, neither is the sharp and immovable distinction that exists between him and the creature removed, nor do we have here anything else than in his insearchable, unreachable, and—for us sinners—insufferable Majesty.) This is the same way in which Elert coordinates law and the hidden God.

[10] Cf. Luther's comment to the effect that all pagans agree on God being omnipotent and foreknowing: "Mansit nihilominus semper aculeus ille alto corde infixus tam rudibus quam eruditis, si quando ad rem seriam ventum est, ut sentirent necessitatem nostrum, si credatur praescientia et omnipotentia Dei. Atque ipsamet ratio naturalis,

distinction is not metaphysical speculation, and the hidden God is a reality of which all mankind is aware. If this seems to be paradoxical, maybe one should meditate on Romans 1:20: "For since the creation of the world God's *invisible* qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly *seen*."

God Working in Everything

This God rules and does everything in the world:

> For what we assert and contend for is this, that when God operates without regard to the grace of the Spirit, he works all in all, even in the ungodly, inasmuch as he alone moves, actuates and carries along by the motion of his omnipotence all things, even as he alone has created them, and this motion the creatures can neither avoid not alter, but they necessarily follow and obey it, each according to its capacity as given by God; and thus all things, even including the ungodly, cooperate with God.[11]

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quae necessitate illa offenditur et tanta molitur ad eam tollendam, cogitur eam concaedere, proprio suo iudicio convicta, etiam si nulla esset scriptura." WA 18:719.17–22. "Nevertheless, there has always remained deeply implanted in the hearts of ignorant and learned alike, whenever they have taken things seriously, the painful awarenes that we are under necessity if the foreknowledge and omnipotence of God are accepted. Even natural Reason herself, who is offended by this necessity and makes such efforts to get rid of it, is compelled to admit it by the force of her own judgment, even if there were no Scripture at all." Martin Luther and Desiderius Erasmus, *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson, Library of Christian Classics 17 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 244 [henceforth *Luther and Erasmus*].

[11] *Luther and Erasmus*, 288–289. "Hoc enim nos asserimus et contendimus, quod Deus, cum citra gratiam spiritus operatur omnia in omnibus, etiam in impiis operatur, Dum omnia quae condidit solus, solus quoque movet, agit et rapit omnipotentiae suae motu, quem illa non possunt vitare nec mutare, sed necesario sequuntur et parent, quolibet pro modo suae virtutis sibi a Deo datae, sic omnia etiam impia illi cooperantur." WA 18:753,28–33. Cf. Luther's *Exposition of the Magnificat*, 1521: "'Der do mechtig ist.' Damit nympt sie doch alle macht und krafft allen creaturn und gibts allein gotte. O, das ist ein grosse kunheit und grosser raub von solchem jungen, kleynenn Megdlin, darff mit einem wort alle mechtigen kranck, alle grosztettigen krafftlosz, alle weysen narren, alle berumpten zuschanden machen, unnd allein dem eynigen got alle macht, that, weysheit und rum zueygen. Den das wortlin 'der do mechtig ist' ist alszo viel gesagt: Es ist niemant, der etwas thue, szondern, wie sanct Paulus Eph. i. sagt: 'Allein got wirckt alle ding, in allen dingen, und aller creaturn werck sind gottis werck,' wie wir auch sprechen ym glauben: 'Ich gleub in got vatter, den almechtigen.' Almechtig ist er, das in allen unnd durch allen unnd ubir allen nichts wirckt, denn allein seine macht." WA 7:574,3–13. "'He who is mighty.' Truly, in these words she takes away all might and power from every creature and bestows them on God alone. What great boldness and robbery on the part of so young and tender a maiden! She dares, by this

Luther is not afraid to apply this strong view of God's rule also to the events of his day. On August 29, 1526, King Louis II of Hungary lost a battle, his kingdom, and his life at Mohacz, beaten by the Turkish army. From this battle came the Turkish rule over Hungary that was to last for one hundred fifty years. Earlier, Luther had started a book for the king's wife, who was sympathetic to the Reformation. After the news from the battle had arrived, Luther revised the book and published it as *Four Comforting Psalms to the Queen of Hungary*, stating in his preface that this misfortune had happened through God's power and ordination (*Versehung*, a word also used for predestination), and that it was a visitation from God and a sign intended not, as Luther hoped, to express God's wrath or displeasure, but to encourage the queen to trust alone in the heavenly Father.[12] Here and in similar cases where Luther takes on the prophet's mantle and interprets history one may ask whether he does not do what he otherwise decries: To interpret the hidden will and government of God without the word of God.[13]

God and Evil

Such a strong view of God's involvement in the world raises the question whether God does evil things. In 1525, Luther wrote a letter to the Christians in Antwerp in the Spanish Netherlands warning against one of the prophets who had visited him. Among other issues, the question of God's relationship to evil came up. Luther wrote:

> Most of all he insisted that what God decrees is good and that God does not want sin, which without a doubt is true, and it did not help that we too confessed that. But he did not want to go so far as to say that God, even though he does not want sin, nevertheless orders that it happen, and such ordering does not happen without his will, for who forces him to order it thus? Yea, how could he order it, if he did not want to order it? Here he went aloft with his head and wanted to grasp how it is that God does not want sin and yet wants to impose it,

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one word, to make all the strong feeble, all the mighty weak, all the wise foolish, all the famous despised, and God alone the Possessor of all strength, wisdom, and glory. For this is the meaning of the phrase: 'He who is mighty.' There is none that does anything, but as St. Paul says in Ephesians 1: 'God accomplishes all in all,' and all creatures' works are God's works. Even as we confess in the Creed: 'I believe in God the Father, the Almighty.' He is almighty becase it is His power alone that works in all and through all and over all." *LW* 21:328.

[12] WA 19:552,16–20; 553,2–9.

[13] For Luther as a prophetic interpreter of history, cf. Hans Preuss, *Martin Luther: Der Prophet* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1933), 210–237; Heinz Zahrnt, *Luther deutet Geschichte: Erfolg und Mißerfolg im Lichte des Evangeliums* (München: Paul Müller, 1952).

> and he intended to scoop out the abyss of the divine majesty to see how these two wills might coexist. . . . I say, God has forbidden sin and does not want it; this will is revealed to us and is necessary for us to know. But how God orders or wills sin, this we are not to know, because he has not revealed it to us."[14]

In *On the Bondage of the Will*, Luther compares the connection between God's rule and evil to the rider riding a lame horse or a craftsman using a bad tool.[15] The outcome will be determined in some respect by the weakness of the horse or the defectiveness of the tool, but there is no action without the craftsman, that is, God, wielding the tool. God does not create evil, he finds it. Whence evil comes Luther does not address.[16] Since God is the one who continually acts in his creation and whose creation can do anything only because it is upheld by the "movement of divine power," Luther cannot follow Erasmus, who denies any involvement of God in evil actions, since the price Erasmus pays is to make God a bystander.[17] But God cannot cease from this movement without ceasing to be God.[18]

A special case of the question of God and evil is the hardening of hearts. The classical passage for this is of course the hardening of Pharaoh in Exodus. Against Erasmus, who rejects God as the author of the hardening of Pharaoh and sees Pharaoh as the one who hardens himself, Luther insists on the literal reading of the texts. God not only gives opportunity to Pharaoh to harden himself, God actually hardens. For

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[14] "Am meysten aber facht er da hart, Das Gotts gepot gut were, und Gott nicht wollt sunde haben. Willchs on zweyffel war ist, und halff nicht, das wyr solchs auch bekanten. Aber da walt er nicht hynan, das Gott, wie wol er die sunde nicht will, so verhenget er doch, das sie geschiihet, und solch verhengnis geschicht ia nicht on seynen willen, Denn wer zwingt yhn, das er sie verhenget? Ja wie künd ers verhengen, wenn ers nicht wollte verhengen? Hie fur er mit seinem kopff hynauff, und wollt begreyffen, wie Gott sunde nicht wollt, und doch durchs verhengen wollt, und meynet, den abgrund Göttlicher maiestät, wie diese zween willen möchte miteynander bestehen, auszuschöpffen. . . . Ich sage, Gott hat verbotten die sunde und will der selben nicht. dieser wille ist uns offenbart und not zu wissen. Wie aber Gott die sunde verhenget odder will, das sollen wyr nicht wissen, denn er hats uns nicht offenbart." WA 18:549,29–38; 550,6–9.

[15] WA 18:709,28–36; *Luther and Erasmus*, 233.

[16] "Non igitur quispiam cogitet, Deum, cum dicitur, indurare aut malum in nobis operari (indurare enim est malum facere), sic facere, quasi de novo in nobis malum creet." WA 18:710,31–33. "Let no one suppose, therefore, when God is said to harden or to work evil in us (for to harden is to make evil), that he does so by creating evil in us from scratch." *Luther and Erasmus*, 234.

[17] For the movement of divine power, cf. WA 18:709,10–26; *Luther and Erasmus*, 232–233.

[18] WA 18:712,19–24; *Luther and Erasmus*, 236.

Luther, a God who only watches is like the God of Aristotle.[19] Luther explains the hardening thus:

> God confronts his [sc. Pharaoh's] badness outwardly with an object that he naturally hates, without ceasing inwardly to move by omnipotent motion the evil will which he finds there; and Pharaoh in accordance with the badness of his will cannot help hating what is opposed to him and trusting in his own strength, until he becomes so obstinate that he neither hears nor understands, but is possessed by Satan like a raving madman.[20]

In the discussion of the hardening of Pharaoh, Luther addresses the objection that this seems to be unfair of God, even evil. Luther rejects this argument. Whatever God does is by definition good. There is no law for him. True, if man would do it, it would be evil. If man does not understand that, it is his problem.[21] One could therefore say that God is truly outside of the law; he is the font of the law.[22]

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[19] WA 18:706,22–23; Luther and Erasmus, 228.

[20] *Luther and Erasmus*, 235. "Quare induratio Pharaonis per Deum sic impletur, quod foris obiicit maliciae ejus, quod ille odit naturaliter, tum intus non cessat movere omnipotente motu malam (ut invenit) voluntatem. Illeque pro malicia voluntatis suae non potest non odisse contrarium sibi et confidere suis viribus, sic obstinatur, ut neque audiat neque sapiat, Sed rapiatur possessus a Satana, velut insanus et furens." WA 18:711,33–38.

[21] "Sed ego non intelligo, quod est bonum. Pharao obduratur, est malum in oculis tuis, videtur malum, et si tu ipse faceres, malum esset, sed quia deus facit, bene facit. Non habet regulam, mass, gesetz, ergo non potest transgredi ea." (But I do not know what is good. Pharaoh is hardened, this is bad in your eyes, it appears bad, and if you were to do that, it would be bad, but because God does it, he does well. He has no rule, measure, law, therefore he cannot trasgress them.) WA 16:141,3–6, Sermons on Exodus (MS), 1524–1527. Cf. *De servo arbitrio*: "Deus est, cuius voluntas nulla est caussa nec ratio, quae illi ceu regula et mensura praescribatur, cum nihil sit illi aequale aut superius, sed ipsa est regula omnium. Si enim esset illi aliqua regula vel mensura aut caussa aut ratio, iam nec Dei voluntas esse posset. Non enim quia sic debet vel debuit velle, ideo rectum est, quod vult. Sed contra: Quia ipse sic vult, ideo debet rectum esse, quod fit." WA 18:712,32–37. "He is God, and for his will there is no cause or reason that can be laid down as rule or measure for it, since there is nothing equal or superior to it, but it is itself the rule of all things. For if there were any rule or standard for it, either as cause or reason, it could no longer be the will of God. For it is not because he is or was obliged so to will that what he wills is right, but on the contrary, because he himself so wills, therefore what happens must be right." *Luther and Erasmus*, 236–237. "Non dignatur Deum caro gloria tanta, ut credit iustum esse et bonum, dum supra et ultra dicit et facit, quam definivit Codex Iustiniani vel quintus liber Ethicorum Aristotelis." WA 18:729. "Human nature does not think fit to give God such glory as to believe him just and good when he speaks and acts above and beyond what the Code of Justinian

> Why, then, does God not simply change the evil will of men?
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> This belongs to the secrets of his majesty, where his judgments are incomprehensible (Rom. 11:33). It is not our business to ask this question, but to adore these mysteries. And if flesh and blood is offended here and murmurs (cf. John 6:61), by all means let it murmur; but it will achieve nothing; God will not change on that account. And if the ungodly are scandalized and depart in great numbers (John 6:66f.), yet the elect will remain. The same must be said to those who ask why he permitted Adam to fall, and why he creates us all infected with the same sin, when he could either have preserved him or created us from another stock or from a seed which he had first purged.[23]

Luther is aware of the problem. There seems to be a glaring contradiction between the God who is preached as merciful and good and the God who nevertheless permits men to remain in sin and even hardens them in their sin. Luther confesses: "I myself was offended more than once, and brought to the very depth and abyss of despair, so that I wished I had never been created a man, before I realized how salutary that despair was, and how near to grace."[24] Thus, Luther does not provide a solution to the problem.

Deus Absconditus and Predestination

Luther's *On the Bondage of the Will* is not *per se* on predestination; rather it is on the question of the free choice of fallen man. But Luther's strong view of God's rule, together with his thesis that human freedom in the sense of Erasmus, that is, the freedom to choose good and evil

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has laid down, or the fifth book of Aristotle's *Ethics*." *Luther and Erasmus*, 258. It is therefore quite obvious how Luther would answer the so-called Euthyphro dilemma.

[22] An analogy is the traditional position of the monarch of the United Kingdom: The monarch can do no wrong and cannot be prosecuted; cf. Book 1, chap. 7 of William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 4 vols., ed. Thomas McIntyre Cooley and James De Witt Andrews (Chicago: Callaghan and Co., 1899), 1:214.

[23] *Luther and Erasmus*, 236. "At cur non simul mutat voluntates malas, quas movet? Hoc pertinet ad secreta maiestatis, ubi incomprehensibilia sunt iudicia eius. Nec nostrum hoc est quaerere, sed adorare mysteria haec. Quod si caro et sanguis hic offense murmuret, Murmuret sane, sed nihil efficiet, Deus ideo non mutabitur. Et si scandalisati impii discedant quam plurimi, Electi tamen manebunt. Idem dicetur illis, qui quaerunt: cur permisit Adam ruere, et cur nos omnes eodem peccato infectos condit, cum potuisset illum servare et nos aliunde vel primum purgato semine creare." WA 18:712,24–31.

[24] *Luther and Erasmus*, 244. "Ego ipse non semel offensus sum usque ad profundum et abyssum scirem, quam salutaris illa esset desperatio et quam gratiae propinqua." WA 18:719,9–12.

independently from God, is incompatible with God's omnipotence and foreknowledge, has consequences for predestination. It means, first, that God is the author of salvation, because human beings since the fall cannot choose to believe. This choice has to be created in them by God. But what about those who do not believe? Does it not follow from the connection between providence and predestination that Luther has to conclude that they do not believe because God does not want them to believe? What about the passage in Ezekiel 33:11 that says that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked? For Luther, this passage refers to the revealed God, the preached God, not "that hidden and awful will of God whereby he ordains by his own counsel which and what sort of person he wills to be recipients and partakers of his preached and offered mercy."[25]

Erasmus protests that this is absurd, since it presumes that God at the same time deplores the death of his people which he works in them. Luther readily admits that there is a contradiction. The hidden God works "life, death, and all in all," he "neither deplores nor takes away death."[26] Luther can go so far as to say that God does will the death of the sinner "according to that inscrutable will of his."[27] But this is not for us to speculate about or investigate. It is enough that we know that God is in charge and that God does many things that he has not revealed to us in his word. Here the tension in Luther's view of God becomes an open contradiction: the hidden and revealed God, the God who works life and death and all things and the God who saves, cannot be synthesized to form one concept. The unity of God cannot be imagined. God can be respected, adored, feared, and trusted, but never understood or conceptualized. The practical solution to this is simply to follow God's orders, revealed in his word, and to trust this word, trust in Christ, and avert one's eyes from the reality of the hidden God.[28] Here God is against God, and no theodicy or solution to the problem of continuing unbelief can be given. Luther is confident that the unity of God will be revealed in the eschaton, and then we will understand. Until then, though, Christianity continues to offend

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[25] *Luther and Erasmus*, 200. "Non de occulta illa et metuenda voluntate Dei ordinantis suo consilio, quos et quales praedicatae et oblatae misericordiae capaces et participes esse velit." WA 18:684,35–37.

[26] *Luther and Erasmus*, 201. "Caeterum Deus absconditus in maiestate neque deplorat neque tollit mortem, sed operator vitam, mortem et omnia in omnibus." WA 18:685,21–23.

[27] *Luther and Erasmus*, 201. "Sic not vult mortem peccatoris, verbo scilicet, Vult autem illam voluntate illa imperscrutabili." WA 18:685,28–29.

[28] One sees here why Luther counsels that one avert one's eyes from the hidden God: looking at the hidden God or God in his majesty will lead to despair.

not only reason in its quest for conceptual unity but also the ethical feeling of humanity. But this is necessary in order to destroy both the hubris of reason and the desire of man to judge God according to his own standards.

Change in Luther?

But did not Luther change his mind, retreat from his extreme statement in *On the Bondage of the Will*, and soften his language in his Lectures on Genesis? After all, the Formula of Concord itself wants his comments on Genesis 26 to be read as the final interpretation in this question.[29] A careful look at the Formula, however, reveals that there is no confessional warrant for softening Luther's original position. First, the Formula does not say that Luther changed his mind. Second, a close reading of the relevant Genesis lectures shows that Luther does not address all the questions discussed in *On the Bondage of the Will*, and certainly retracts nothing.[30] Luther is addressing two questions: How does one combat a fatalistic misunderstanding of the doctrine of predestination that leads to contempt of word and sacrament, and how can a Christian be certain of his election?

Luther sees the fatalistic misunderstanding as a despising and negation of God's revelation. He who argues from the omnipotence and rule of God against honoring God's revealed will is blaspheming. But Luther does not argue against the premise that salvation depends on predestination or that God knows everything and that therefore everything happens by necessity. The premise is true; the problem is the relation of this premise to the revealed God in such a way that the revealed God is effectively denied. Faith knows this premise, but faith relates to the promise of God in Christ and clings to it. The hidden God is to be left in his mystery and this question is to be left alone. The same is true for the problem of dealing with somebody who is afflicted by the question of predestination. The only way this can be addressed is through the present action of the preached God. "Am I elected?" Yes, if "you listen to Him, are baptized in His name, and love His Word, then you are surely predestined and are certain of your salvation. But if you revile or despise the Word, then you are damned; for he who does not believe is condemned (Mark 16:16)."[31]

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[29] FC SD II, 44.

[30] WA 43:457,31–463,17. An English translation can be found in *LW* 5:42–50.

[31] *LW* 5:25. "Si hunc audieris, et in nomine eius baptizatus fueris, et diliges verbum eius, tum certo es praedestinatus, et certus de tua salute. Si vero maledicis aut contemnis verbum, tum es damnatus. Quia, qui con credit, condemnatur." WA 43:459,31–34.

III. Calvin's Doctrine of God

The Quest for a Principle in Calvin

During the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, it was popular to assert that the doctrine of predestination was the central dogma of Calvin and the Reformed churches. This thesis, however, has long since been rejected.[32] The quest for such a center of Calvin's theology is ongoing and need not concern us here. In the present study, I will mainly use Calvin's *Institutes*, for the sake of convenience. His *Institutes* was fundamentally reworked twice: in 1539, when it changed from a catechism to a manual on dogmatics, and in 1559, the last edition published during Calvin's lifetime, when he changed it to be more or less an exposition of the Apostles' Creed.[33] Contrary to Luther, who subdivided the Creed into three articles, Calvin chose four chapters, following patristic expositions, which see the work at the end of the Creed not as the work of the Holy Spirit alone, but

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[32] Cf. Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 244–248; Wilhelm Niesel, *Die Theologie Calvins*, Einführung in die evangelische Theologie 7 (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1938), 152. Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, 13 vols. (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1948–1970), II/2:92, called the thesis that predestination is the fundamental article of Calvin's theology from which all other articles are derived "heller Wahnsinn" (utter madness). Cf. also Fred H. Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 14: "The claim that predestination was the central doctrine in Calvin's theology, an *a priori* principle from which he drew out his whole theological system by logical deduction, is without warrant. He did not engage in speculative, frigid, theoretical reasoning in discussing predestination." Charles Partee, in his article "Calvin's Central Dogma Again," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987): 191–199, finds the central point of Calvin's theology in the concept of "union with Christ." Albrecht Schweizer, who, according to Partee, *Theology of John Calvin*, 244, subscribed to this opinion, in fact does not. His book *Die protestantischen Centraldogmen in ihrer Entwicklung innerhalb der reformierten Kirche. 1. Hälfte: Das 16. Jahrhundert* (Zürich: Orell, Fuessli und Co., 1854) is about the "central Protestant dogmas" (plural), and he says of Calvin only that he "vollendet abschliessend den Lehrbegriff in seinem ganzen Inhalte, geleitet von der Idee der ewigen Rathschlüsse" (completes in a concluding manner the doctrinal statement in its entire content, led by the idea of the eternal decrees). The central Protestant dogmas are, according to Schweizer: grace and faith, election and the power of the will, foreknowledge, predestination, and the necessity or chance of all occurrences and human acting (Schweizer, *Die protestantischen Centraldogmen*, 16).

[33] For the discussion on the structure of the *Institutes*, cf. Partee, *Theology of John Clavin*, 35–43. For the Latin original of the *Institutes* of 1559, the following edition is used: Petrus Barth and Guilelmus Niesel, eds., *Joannis Calvini Opera selecta*, vol. 3–5 (Monachii: In aedibus Chr. Kaiser, 1928–1936) [henceforth OS]. The English translation used is *John Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) [henceforth ET].

of the Spirit in communion with the Father and the Son.[34] Thus, the trinitarian dogma structures the *Institutes*. Calvin has no other locus on God in the *Institutes* except this locus on the Trinity, and there is no discussion of God's essence and attributes.

Knowledge of God as Practical, not Speculative

Calvin opens his *Institutes* with this statement: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves" (1.1.1).[35] In good Augustinian tradition, Calvin desires to know God and the soul, and nothing else. But a true knowledge of oneself is not possible unless one knows God (1.1.2).[36] It is the worship of God that solely distinguishes man from animals. Man is the being that worships God (1.3.3).[37] True knowledge of God is not the mere conviction that there is a God, but also that we "grasp what befits us and is proper to this glory, in fine, what is to our advantage to know of him. Indeed, we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where there is no Religion or piety" (1.2.1).[38] Calvin is not interested in an abstract knowledge of God: "What help is it, in short, to know a God with

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[34] Thus Jan Koopmans, *Das altkirchliche Dogma in der Reformation*, Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie 22 (München: C. Kaiser, 1955), 110. This division is present already in the first edition of the *Institutes*; see Petrus Barth, ed., *Joannis Calvini Opera selecta*, vol. 1 (Monachii: In aedibus Chr. Kaiser, 1926), 68–96. It is also present in the Geneva Catechism of 1545; see E.F. Karl Müller, ed., *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Reformierten Kirche: in authentischen Texten mit geschichtlicher Einleitung und Register* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1903), 118,15–17.

[35] ET 1:35. "Tota fere sapientiae nostrae summa, quae vera demum ac solida sapientia censeri debeat, duabus partibus constat, Dei cognitione et nostri." OS 3:31,6–8.

[36] "Rursum, hominem in puram sui notitiam nunquam pervenire constat nisi prius Dei faciem sit contemplatus, atque ex illius intuitu ad seipsum inscipiciendum descendat." OS 3:32,10–12. "Again, it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinizing himself." ET 1:37.

[37] "Unum ergo esse Dei cultum, qui superiores ipsos reddat, per quem solum ad immortalitatem aspirator." OS 3:40,26–27. "Therefore, it is worship of God alone that renders men higher than the brutes, and through it alone they aspire to immortality." ET 1:47.

[38] ET 1:39. "Iam vero Dei notitiam intelligo, qua non modo concipimus aliquem esse Deum, sed etiam tenemus quod de eo scirer nostra refert, quod utile est in eius gloriam, quod denique expedit. Neque enim Deum, proprie loquendo, cognosci dicemus ubi nulla est religio nec pietas." OS 3:34,6–10. Cf. 1.12.1: "Dei notitiam non esse positam in frigida speculatione, sed secum trahere eius cultum; ac obiter attigimus quomodo rite colatur." OS 3:105,8–10. "The knowledge of God does not rest in cold speculation, but carries with it the honoring of him." ET 1:116.

whom we have nothing to do?" (1.2.2.).[39] Calvin is not interested in what God is in himself, but what God is in relation to the world and humanity. In the context of Exod 34:6–7 he says:

> Here let us observe that his eternity and self-existence are announced by that wonderful name twice repeated [sc. Jehovah]. Thereupon his powers are mentioned, by which he is shown to us not as he is in himself, but as he is toward us: so that this recognition of him consists more in living experience that in vain and high-flown speculation. (1.10.2)[40]

With the theological tradition, Calvin upholds that God's "essence is incomprehensible; hence, his divineness far escapes all human perception" (1.5.1).[41] The only way to know God, therefore, is not by speculation or direct access to his essence but through his works (1.5.9).[42] The works of God are essentially twofold: creation and redemption.

Natural and Revealed Knowledge of God

God reveals himself in two ways: first as the creator, then as the redeemer. The universal revelation of God leads to a certain "awareness" of God that is innate. The *consensus gentium* ("consensus of the Gentiles," i.e., the universal opinion of mankind) shows that this knowledge of God is part of the human condition; pagan idolatry is the sign of a distorted and twisted knowledge of God. True atheism is therefore impossible (1.3.3). In fallen man this innate knowledge is nevertheless either suppressed or corrupted. Through sin, mankind rejects God as he has revealed himself

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[39] ET 1:41. "Quid denique iuvat Deum cognoscere quocum nihil sit nobis negotii?" OS 3:35,16–17.

[40] ET 1:97. "Ubi animadvertamus eius aeternitatem καὶ αὐτουσίαν, magnifico illo nomine bis repetito, praedicari: deinde commemorari eius virtutes, quibus nobis describitur non quis sit apud se, sed qualis ergo nos: ut ista eius agnitio vivo magis sensu, quam vacua et meteorica speculatione constet." OS 3:86,14–19.

[41] ET 1:52. "Essentia quidem eius incomprehensibilis est, ut sensus omnes humanos procul effugiat eius numen." OS 3:45,4–6.

[42] "Unde intelligimus hanc esse rectissimam Dei quaerendi viam et aptissimum ordinem: non ut audaci curiositate penetrare tentemus ad excutiendam eius essentiam, quae adoranda potius est, quam scrupulosius disquirenda: sed ut illum in suis operibus contemplemur quibus se propinquum nobis familiaremque reddit, ac quodammodo communicat." OS 3:53,18–23. "Consequently, we know the most perfect way of seeking God, and the most suitable order, is not for us to attempt with bold curiosity to penetrate to the investigation of his essence, which we ought more to adore than meticulously to search out, but for us to contemplate him in his works whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself." ET 1:62.

and creates an idol. Additionally, man follows his evil impulses and because of his sin destroys and distorts the knowledge that has been given to him (1.4.1–2). The content of this natural knowledge is the divine wisdom, as it can be seen in creation, especially in the creation of man, since man is a "clear mirror of God's works" (1.5.4).[43] The governance of the world ought to inspire worship, but man despises the creator. Ultimately, creation shows the goodness of God and should therefore induce love in man (1.5.6).[44] This is all obvious, even though not one in a hundred sees it:

> In no greater degree is his [sc. God's] power or his wisdom hidden in darkness. His power shows itself clearly when the ferocity of the impious, in everyone's opinion unconquerable, is overcome in a moment, their arrogance vanquished, their strongest defenses destroyed, their javelins and armor shattered, their strength broken, their machinations overturned, and themselves fallen of their own weight; and when their audacity, which exalted them above heaven, lays them low even to the center of the earth. (1.5.8)[45]

God's power in creation should also lead man to expect greater deeds of God in the afterlife, and to belief in the punishment of the wicked after death (1.5.10). But all of that comes to naught, since sinful man corrupts this revelation of God, so that even the wisest philosophers are stupid in regard to God (1.5.11). Natural revelation results only in condemnation, so that God had to speak in a different way. Thus in his revelation he first restores the knowledge of himself as the creator to Adam, Noah, and the Patriarchs (1.6.1). Special revelation, as it is collected and codified in the Scriptures, thus serves first to identify who the true God is and to distinguish him from idols. Men do not believe the Scriptures because of rational arguments, but because the Spirit, who spoke through the prophets, creates faith. Thus, Scripture is self-authenticating (1.7.4–5).

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[43] ET 1:55.

[44] Cf. 1.14.2, where Calvin says that the creation of man at the end of the six days should lead the Christians "to contemplate God's fatherly love toward mankind, in that he did not create Adam until he had lavished upon the universe all manner of good things." ET 1:161–162. "Considerandus est paternus Dei amor erga humanum genus, quod non ante creavit Adam quam mundum omni bonorum copia locupletasset." OS 3:154,11–14.

[45] ET 1:61. "Nihilo magis aut potentia aut sapientia in tenebris latent; quarum altera praeclare emergit dum impiorum ferocia, omnium opinione insuperabilis momento uno retunditur, arrogantia domatur, diruuntur validissima praesidia, tela et arma comminuuntur, vires infringuntur, machinationes everturtur, et sua ipsarum mole concidunt: quae supra caelos se efferebat audaci, in centrum usque terrae postternitur." OS 3:52,32–38.

The knowledge of God in and through the Scriptures confirms the truth of the natural knowledge of God, namely, that he is wise, good, the governor of the universe, punishing and rewarding. But this is not enough; to distinguish God from idols, he has to be confessed as triune: "Unless we grasp these [sc. the three persons of the Trinity], only the bare and empty name of God flits about in our brains, to the exclusion of the true God" (1.13.2).[46] True knowledge of God is therefore always trinitarian. The Old Testament must therefore also be understood in a trinitarian way. "God" can refer to the Father, but it can also refer to Christ, as he too is called Jehovah (1.13.23).[47] Calvin agrees with Irenaeus that "the God who of old appeared to the patriarchs was no other than Christ" (1.13.27).[48]

Providence

Providence is for Calvin a part of knowing God as the creator of the world. As the creator, he has not retired. Without seeing God as the one who is present and active in his creation, man does not truly understand what it means for God to be creator (1.16.1). The providence of God excludes for Calvin any concept of fortune and mere chance. Everything is part of God's governance, which is not only some kind of oversight or simply a description of God as the first mover or the first cause (1.16.3). God gives good or bad weather, rich or poor harvest; all is in his hand (1.16.5). He gives children to men and refuses them (1.16.7). Such a view, according to Calvin, is not Stoic, that is, deterministic. The Stoics assume a causal determinism: because every action is caused by a natural entity, it is therefore determined. In Christianity, however, it is God who is "the ruler and governor of all things, who in accordance with his wisdom has from the farthest limit of eternity decreed what he was going to do, and now by his might carries out what he has decreed" (1.16.8).[49] There is therefore no true chance or contingency.[50] Calvin adds, however, that for mankind the

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[46] ET 1:122. "quas nisi tenemus, nudum et inane duntaxat Dei nomen sine vero Deo in cerebro nostro volitat." OS 3:109,21–23.

[47] "Nam si est Iehovah, negari non potest quin idem sit ille Deus qui per Iesaiam alibi clamat, Ego ego sum et praeter me non est Deus [Iesa. 44. a. 6.]." OS 3:141,17–20. "For if he is Jehovah, it cannot be denied that he is that same God who elsewhere proclaims through Isaiah, 'I, I am, and apart from me there is no God' [Isa. 44:6 p.]." ET 1:150.

[48] ET 1:156. "Deum qui olim apparuit Patribus non alium fuisse quam Christum." OS 3:148,4–5. Cf. *Corpus Reformatorum*, 101 vols., ed. Karl G. Bretschneider et al. (Halle, Berlin, Leipzig, and Zurich, 1834–1962), 9:706.

[49] ET 1:207. "Deum constituimus arbitrum ac moderatorem omnium, qui pro sua sapientia ab ultima aeternitate decrevit quod facturus esset." OS 3:198,26–28.

[50] Calvin, 1.16.8, claims for this view Basil and Augustine.

true reasons for this are hidden. The "order, reason, end, and necessity" of events are hidden to humanity and are therefore "in a sense" fortuitous (1.16.9).[51] For the Christian the future is open; he waits in suspense to see what will happen, but knows on the other hand that nothing that will happen has not previously been seen and ordained by God (1.16.9). This also means that the Christian in the midst of trouble has to suspend judgment, never doubting God's governance and the goodness and justice of God's secret plan (1.17.1). Christians rather have to adore the mystery (Rom 11:33–34), in keeping with what Deuteronomy 29:29 says of God's providence: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but what is here written, to you and your children" (Deut 29:29), that is, Christians are to follow the will of God as it is communicated in the words of the Scriptures, but are to leave the mystery to God (1.17.3–5).

As for the relationship between providence and evil, Calvin follows the Christian tradition in stating that the devil, though a creature of God, is evil through a perversion that was not caused by God. Evil is "utterly alien" to God (1.14.16).[52] Also in keeping with the Christian tradition, Calvin, referring to Job 1:12; 2:6 and to the deception of Ahab through a lying spirit sent from God (1 Kings 22:20–22), asserts that the devil is under God's rule and can therefore do nothing without the will and assent of God.

> Therefore Satan is clearly under God's power, and is so ruled by his bidding as to be compelled to render him service. Indeed, when we say that Satan resists God, and that Satan's works disagree with God's works, we at the same time assert that this resistance and this opposition are dependent upon God's sufferance. (1.14.17)[53]

Thus, there is no dualism. Calvin adds, however: "I am not now speaking of Satan's will, nor even of his effort, but only of his effect" (1.14.17).[54] God uses the devil in his governance of the world to educate the faithful, who cannot be overcome by the devil. Sinners, nevertheless, are rightfully handed over to the devil (1.14.18). God also uses sinners: "Thieves and murderers and other evildoers are the instruments of divine providence"

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[51] ET 1:208.

[52] ET 1:175; "alienissimum," OS 3:166,20.

[53] ET 1:176. "Constat ergo sub Dei potestate esse Satanam, et sic ipsius nutu regi ut obsequium reddere ei cogatur. Porro, quum dicimus Satanam Deo resistere, et illius opera cum huius operibus dissidere, hanc repugnantiam ethoc certamen a Dei permissione pendere simul asserimus." OS 3:167,21–26.

[54] ET 1:176. "De voluntate iam non loquor, nec etiam de conatu, sed de effectu tantum." OS 3:167,26.

(1.17.5).[55] God is not the cause of their evildoing; that lies in the wicked themselves. Ultimately, they have to serve the good according to God's plan. God therefore not only permits evil, he uses it.

> Absalom, polluting his father's bed by an incestuous union, commits a detestable crime [II Sam 16:22]; yet God declares this work to be his own; for the words are: "You did it secretly; but I will do this thing openly, and in broad daylight" [II Sam 12:12 p.]. (1.18.1).[56]

The same is true for the execution of God's judgment on Israel through the Assyrians and Babylonians. It is God who uses the cruelty, imperialistic ambition, and utter barbarity of these great nations to execute his judgments, without thereby making the deeds of the Assyrians or Babylonians right (1.18.1).

Election and Reprobation

The chapter on election had a continually shifting place in the *Institutes*. In the first edition, which was patterned after Luther's Small Catechism, there was no chapter on election. In the editions from 1539–1554, providence and predestination are connected, but in the last edition of 1559 they are separated from one another.[57] Whereas providence is part of knowing God as the creator, predestination is the final chapter of soteriology, after Christology, and is thus part of knowing God as the redeemer, not as the creator. No true knowledge of grace is possible without the knowledge of predestination (3.21.1). Calvin wants to discuss predestination only within the parameters of Scripture. He insists, however—probably against Melanchthon—that such a discussion is necessary and salutary, even though human curiosity can be a problem. Foreknowledge and predestination are distinguished, and a ranking—as if God first knows and then predestines—is rejected. Foreknowledge extends over everything, while predestination is the decision about the eternal fate of mankind:

> We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he determined with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not

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[55] ET 1:217. "Fures et homicidas, et alios maleficios, divinae esse providentiae instrumenta." OS 3.208,25–26.

[56] ET 1:230. "Absalon incesto coitu, patris torum polluens, detestabile scelus perpetrat. . . . Deus tamen hoc opus suum esse pronuntiat; verba enim sunt, Tu fecisti occulte: ego vero palam faciam, et coram sole hoc." OS 3:220,35–221,4.

[57] Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination*, 21, sees in Calvin's study of Romans, undertaken between the first and second editions of the *Institutes*, the reason for the inclusion of predestination in the *Institutes*.

> created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death. (3.21.5)[58]

Israel as a people, as well as individuals within Israel, are examples of God's free election. The elect are sealed by call and justification, while the reprobates are shut off from the knowledge of God and sanctification; thus it is revealed what awaits them (3.21.5). Election does not depend on any foreknowledge of merits on the side of those who are elected. Thus far there is no difference between Calvin and the Lutherans. The problem, of course, starts when the second part of Calvin's thesis, reprobation, is defended. Reprobation pertains to those "whom he created for dishonor in life and destruction in death, to become the instruments of his wrath and examples of his severity" (3.24.12).[59] Evil men do not convert, even though God could convert them. Why he does not convert them is God's mystery, as Calvin quotes Augustine (3.24.13).[60] The same is true with respect to the fall of Adam. Why God did not prevent the fall is not known to us. It is known, however, that it did not happen outside and against God's rule, so there must be some good purpose to it.[61] No injustice is done to the

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[58] ET 2:926. "Praedestinationem vocamus aeternum Dei decretum quo apud se constitutum habuit quid de unoquoque homine fieri vellet. Non enim pari conditione creantur omnes: sed aliis vita aeterna, aliis damnatio aeterna praeordinatur. Itaque prout in alterutrum finem quisque conditus est, ita vel ad vitam vel ad mortem praedestinatum dicimus." OS 4:374,11–17.

[59] ET 2:978. "Quos ergo in vitae contumeliam et mortis exitium creavit, ut irae suae organa forent, et severitatis exempla." OS 4:423,22–23.

[60] The quote is from Augustine, *On Genesis in the Literal Sense*, 11.10.13.

[61] Cf. Calvin's comment on Gen 3:1: "When I say, however, that Adam did not fall without the ordination and will of God, I do not so take it as if sin had ever been pleasing to Him, or as if he simply wished that the precept which he had given should be violated. So far as the fall of Adam was the subversion of equity, and of well-constituted order, so far as it was contumacy against the Divine Law-giver, and the transgression of righteousness, certainly it was against the will of God; yet none of these things render it impossible that, for a certain cause, although to us unknown, he might will the fall of man. It offends the ears of some, when it is said God willed this fall; but what else, I pray, is the *permission* of Him, who has the power of preventing, and in whose hand the whole matter is placed, but his will? I wish that men would rather suffer themselves to be judged by God, than that, with profane temerity, they should pass judgment upon Him; but this is the arrogance of the flesh to subject God to its own test." John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 2 vols., trans. John King (Edinburgh: Printed for the Calvin Translation Society, 1847–1850; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 1:144. Cf. Heinz Otten, *Prädestination in Calvins theologischer Lehre* (München: Kaiser, 1938; repr., Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1968), 97: "Calvin aber lehnt es ausdrücklich ab, Gott

reprobates. After all, they are evil and deserve the judgment they receive from God. But this is not enough; God created them so that "by the just but inscrutable judgment of God" he shows "forth his glory in their condemnation" (3.24.14).[62] Calvin does admit that we do not completely understand the reason for the reprobation, but, he asserts, we should simply admit our ignorance before the mystery of God (3.24.15). God does not make man sin; rather, sin proceeds from the will of man. Thus man is responsible for his own sin: it is his sin, and he is the doer. The ultimate cause of reprobation, though, is God himself.[63] With this distinction Calvin

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zum Billiger oder gar zum Urheber der Sünde Adams zu machen; er weist darauf hin, daß das Wie eines Gesehens, das Gottes Praescienz und Dekret unterliege, der menschlichen Beurteilung unzugänglichste; der Mensch aber habe festzuhalten, daß Gott völlig unschuldig sei, und im übrigen sein Nichtwissen einzugegnehen. Die Heiligkeit Gottes verbietet eine Lösung, die die Alleinschuld für den Abfall nicht mehr dem Menschen zuschiebt. Damit ist aber auf jede Lösung überhaupt verzichtet; es müssen solche einander aufhebende Aussagen nebeneinander stehen bleiben und miteinander gesagt werden." (Calvin, however, expressly refuses to make God into the assenter or, indeed, into the author of Adam's sin; he indicates that the character of the perspective that underlies God's prescience and ordinance is utterly impenetrable by human judgment; man, however, has to maintain that God is completely guiltless and, in the end, admit his own ignorance. The holiness of God forbids a solution that no longer pins the blame for the fall exclusively on man. In this way, however, every solution is completely abandoned; the two mutually exclusive expressions must remain standing alongside one another and be said simultaneously with one another.) NB: Lutherans like to accuse Calvin of rationalism and a lack of respect for the mysteries of God. I think this charge is unjustified. Calvin is not a rationalist, whatever that means, and he readily accepts the mystery in stating that the reprobation of the wicked is a part of the inscrutable will of God which has to be revered and not inquired into; cf. the conclusion of Calvin's treatment of predestination, *Institutes* 3.24.17: "Now when many notions are adduced on both sides let this be our conclusion: to tremble with Paul at so deep a mystery; but, if froward tongues clamor, not to be ashamed of this exclamation of his: 'Who are you, O man, to argue with God?' [Rom. 9:20 p.]. For as Augustine truly contends, they who measure divine justice by the standard of human justice are acting perversely." ET 2:987. "Porro ubi multa ultro citroque adducta fuerint, sit haec nobis clausula, ad tantam profunditatem cum Paulo expavescere: quod si obstrepant petulantes linguae, non pudeferi in hac eius exclamatione, O homo tu quis es qui litigas cum Deo [Rom. 9. d. 20]? Vere enim Augustinus perverse facere contendit qui iustitiae humanae modo divinam metiuntur." OS 4:432,2–8. Cf. also Calvin's assertion that godly minds cannot "reconcile the two matters that man when first made was set in such a position that by voluntarily falling he should be the cause of his own destruction, and yet that it was so ordained by the admirable counsel of God that this voluntary ruin to the human race and all posterity of Adam should be a cause of humility." Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, quoted in Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination*, 81.

[62] ET 2:981.

[63] Cf. Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination*, 70–71.

avoids making God the author of sin, a charge he always rejected. But what about statements like Ezekiel 33:11, "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live," or 1 Timothy 2:4, "[God] will have all men to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth"? Calvin really can only deal with Ezekiel by conditioning the gospel: All this passage says, according to Calvin, is that God is willing to forgive sinners

> as soon as they are touched by repentance. . . . But experience teaches that God wills the repentance of those whom he invites to himself in such a way that he does not touch the hearts of all. . . . So it seems to be deceptive on the side of God, but it is not, because it makes those who do not believe inexcusable (3.24.15).[64]

Calvin has to redefine completely what "not willing the death of the sinner" means in order to be able to uphold his doctrine of reprobation. As for 1 Timothy 2:4, this and similar passages deal not with the eternal decree but with the *ordo salutis*, that is, they describe how God saves: "they proclaim that there is ready pardon for all sinners, provided they turn back to seek it" (3.24.15).[65] With this interpretation, however, these passages are no longer gospel in the Lutheran sense—which is the biblical sense—but are turned into law.

The Systematic Question: Predestination, Providence, and Christology

As we have seen, the development of the place of predestination in the *Institutes* shows a shift towards Christology. What is the driving force behind the doctrine of election? Is it Christology? Christian Link sees two different motives in Calvin.[66] One is the christological impetus, that is, that God elects in Christ. The other is that whereby predestination becomes part of providence and governance, and Christ is only the medium of election. Link characterizes the problem thus: "Calvin distinguishes methodically (and altogether consistently) between the 'secret election of God' and its christological 'mirror,' just as he substantially distinguishes between the 'heavenly decree' and its execution and consequence, the

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[64] ET 2:983–984; cf. 3.24.17: "For by so promising he merely means that his mercy is extended to all, provided they seek after it and implore it." ET 2:985. "Sic enim promittendo nihil aliud vult quam omnibus expositam esse suam misericordiam qui modo eam expetunt atque implorant." OS 4:430,7–9.

[65] ET 2:984.

[66] Christian Link, "Calvins Erwählungslehre zwischen Providenz und Christologie," in *Calvin im Kontext der Schweizer Reformation: Historische und theologische Beiträge zur Calvinforschung* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2003), 169–193. What follows is a summary of Link's argument.

salvific work of Christ."[67] The christological foundation is seen in the beginning of the discussion of predestination in the *Institutes* of 1559 (2.21.1).

Calvin therefore directs Christians who want to be certain of their election not to the secret counsel of God, but to Christ, in whom salvation is found.[68] The problem is the doctrine of reprobation. It cannot be seen in Christ.[69] Rather, reprobation has its foundation in the special providence of God. The fall was ordained by God, and the reprobation is carried out according to God's secret will (3.23.1).[70] Also, in the conflict or tension between providence and Christology, between God as the one who does everything and God's particular work of salvation, the particular work is inscribed into the general work. That leads to a particular emphasis on certain attributes of God as opposed to others, for example, the sovereignty of God and his freedom as opposed to his condescending love.[71]

IV. Comparison between Luther and Calvin

A comparison between Luther and Calvin shows both similarities and differences. Both men see God as the one who governs everything and is intimately in charge of his creation. Against a tradition that sees God leading his creation on a long leash and thus allowing it freedom from him, both Luther and Calvin abhor such a *deus otiosus* (inactive God). Both face the same question: if God is so much in control and active in everything that change and contingency have no real place in the world, how is it that God is not responsible for evil? Both refuse to say that God is the cause of evil. Both uphold that God is the sole author of salvation, and that salvation is based on an eternal election in Christ. The logic of this view of God leads toward a doctrine of double predestination, and Calvin follows this path. The price he pays is that the statements on universal grace can no longer be taken literally. Luther chooses differently. Because of the distinction of the hidden and revealed God, Luther can maintain the

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[67] "Calvin trennt methodisch (und zwar durchgängig) zwischen der 'heimlichen Erwählung Gottes' und ihrem christologischen 'Spiegel,' so wie er sachlich zwischen dem 'decretum caeleste' und dessen Ausführungen und Folge, dem Erlösungswerk Christi, trennt." Link, "Calvins Erwählungslehre," 189. This distinction also occurs in Otten, *Prädestination in Calvins theologischer Lehre*, 133.

[68] Cf. John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. John Kelman Sutherland Reid (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1961; repr., Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 113–114.

[69] Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination*, 77.

[70] The incomprehensible and hidden decree of God is situated in the doctrine on providence (1.17.2; 1.18.4).

[71] Otten, *Prädestination in Calvins theologischer Lehre*, 134.

universal and direct rule of God while avoiding double predestination. If one wishes, one could say that according to Luther the sovereignty of God, his absolute rule, and his omnipotence are attributes of the hidden God, whereas the rule of the preached God is resisted and thwarted by the sin of man. This leads to a tension which is almost unbearable—or to the charge of dualism, or simply of logical inconsistency. Luther can live with this tension, because the alternative would be the loss of the comfort of the gospel—which is, after all, the point of God's revelation—either through double predestination or through synergism. Calvin can live with his doctrine only because, when push comes to shove, in the predestinarian affliction, he argues solely christologically and points the troubled Christian to Christ.

Later Lutheran and Reformed Teaching

The Lutheran Church did not simply continue with Martin Luther's theology. Even though the Formula of Concord names Luther as the foremost teacher of the Church of the Augsburg Confession, Melanchthon's influence is, though not discussed, nevertheless very much felt. Especially in the doctrine of predestination, FC XI takes up Melanchthon's concerns and excludes certain aspects of Luther's teachings in *On the Bondage of the Will*.[72] This was possible because Luther himself had not repeated these teachings in his later writings, but had focused instead on the pastoral application of evangelical comfort to the person afflicted by *Prädestinationsanfechtung* (predestinarian affliction). What, then, were Melanchthon's concerns? Melanchthon was anxious to avoid determinism and the resulting fatalism. He was afraid that a strong understanding of God's universal rule and the necessity of all things would, as he had proposed in the first edition of his *Loci*, lead to making God responsible for evil.[73] Additionally, determinism would lead to fatalism, thus destroying the moral fiber of the people and making education and admonition impossible. Thus, in his later years, Melanchthon favored the three causes of conversion (i.e., the word of God,

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[72] The FC quotes *On the Bondage of the Will* only in article II. Article XI does not quote Luther once. Compared to the wealth of citations from Luther in articles VII and VIII, this is in itself a remarkable sign.

[73] Cf. Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1521: Lateinisch-Deutsch*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1993), §134 (p. 96): "Contra spiritus omnia necessario evenire docet [sc. caro] iuxta praedestinationem." (Against the spirit, [the flesh] teaches that all things happen by necessity, according to predestination.) Cf. Kolb, *Bound Choice, Election and Wittenberg Theological Method: From Martin Luther to the Formula of Concord* (Grand Rapids and London: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 81–94.

the Holy Spirit, and the human will), at least giving the impression of synergism.[74] Chemnitz, as one of the authors of the Formula, as well as many others who were consulted in the process leading to its composition and adoption, were students of Melanchthon, even though, like all good students, they had developed a critical and nuanced appreciation of their teacher. But they framed the doctrine of predestination along the lines of Melanchthon's concerns, not along the lines of Luther in *On the Bondage of the Will*. That means that the entire discussion of the hidden God is avoided and the revealed God is the sole subject of the article. Thus, there is no contradiction with Luther, but rather a reduction.[75] One could argue that this is actually following Luther's intention, after all: "Quod supra nos, nihil ad nos" (What is above us is of no concern to us). But I would suggest that there is a certain loss in FC XI. It was probably necessary to combat Calvinism, but the question remains whether the distortion of predestination, as it soon arose in orthodox Lutheranism with the introduction of the doctrine of *intuitu fidei*, is due to the fact that the reality of the hidden God was ignored.[76] The gain was that the gospel, unlike in Calvinism, was not conditioned or rendered questionable because of predestination; and this, after all, is a great success.

On the other side, in Calvinism, the doctrine of the divine decrees of salvation and damnation soon switched its place from soteriology to a position directly after the doctrine of God, before creation, and thus was severed from Christology. Theodore Beza, the successor of Calvin as the leader of the church in Geneva, was the most influential proponent of such a shift.[77] If it was not the central doctrine for Calvin, it seems to have

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[74] But see Lowell C. Green, "A Review Article: *Law and Gospel: Philip Melanchthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over* 'Poenitentia,'" *CTQ* 64 (2000): 66–67.

[75] Cf. Gottfried Hoffmann, "Luther und die Konkordienformel zur Prädestination," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 5 (1981): 25–56.

[76] Cf. Edmund Schlink, *Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften*, 2nd ed. (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1946), 392.

[77] Cf. John S. Bray, *Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Predestination*, Bibliotheca Humanistica & Reformatorica 12 (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1975), 70–81; Gottfried Adam, *Der Streit um die Prädestination im ausgehenden 16. Jahrhundert: Eine Untersuchung zu den Entwürfen von Samuel Huber und Aegidius Hunnius*, Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der Reformierten Kirche 30 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), 48: "Beza hat den Bezug zwischen Prädestination und Christusverkündigung nicht genügend bedacht. Seine Theologie zeigt leidlich eine Antinomie zwischen Theo-logie [sic!] und Christologie. Die Christologie ist hier leidlich nicht mehr fundamental. Denn das Gottesverständnis wird nicht an Christus gewonnen, sondern Christus dem Gottesgedanken ein- bzw. Untergeordnet." (Beza did not sufficiently establish the relationship between predestination and the preaching of Christ. His theology

become the central doctrine for a certain form of Calvinism. The debates between supralapsarians and infralapsarians brought even more to the fore the emphasis on the sovereignty of God and lend themselves to the one-sided location of the doctrine of predestination in the locus on the providence of God. Thus, the answer to the question of how somebody can be certain of his salvation shifts from an emphasis on Christ as the mirror of election to what is known as the practical syllogism: I do good works; good works are done by the elect; therefore I am elect.

V. Conclusion

What, then, is the moral of the story? I think that what divides Luther and Calvin is what Edmund Schlink called the "problem of the theological syllogism."[78] How much can one deduce from Scripture, and how far can one integrate statements of Scripture into a logically coherent form? That God governs everything and nothing happens outside of his rule and will is true. Combined with the doctrine of bound choice, the theological train is on the track to double predestination. But this begets problems regarding the universal statements of the gospel, which have to be reinterpreted. The answer is not irrationalism or a rejection of logic and reason but an acknowledgment of the limits of both. Luther upheld not only the tension but the contradiction between our knowledge of God and the desire for metaphysical unity. In that he was truly a scriptural theologian.

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unfortunately betrays an antinomy between theo-logy and Christology. Here Christology is unfortunately no longer fundamental. For the knowledge of God is not acquired in Christ, but Christ is subordinated as an "etc." to the concept of God.) Cf. also Ernst Wolf, "Erwählungslehre und Prädestinationsproblem," in Otto Weber, Walter Kreck, and Ernst Wolf, *Die Predigt von der Gnadenwahl: Karl Barth zum 10. Mai 1951*, Theologische Existenz heute NF 28 (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1951), 94.

[78] Edmund Schlink, "Der theologische Syllogismus als Problem der Prädestinationslehre," in *Einsicht und Glaube, Festschrift Prof. D. Dr. Gottlieb Söhngen*, ed. J. Ratzinger and H. Fries (Freiburg: Herder, 1962), 299–320.

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Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin on the Significance of Christ's Death

John A. Maxfield

A systematic theologian may have the luxury of treating Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin as pure mind, succinctly sorting out their differences on the atonement. By training and inclination, however, the present writer is more a historian than a systematician, and even his interest in church history is more in the area of the complexities of its characters and the contingencies of their various contexts than in the pure history of dogma. What is of particular historical interest here are the pastoral concerns that brought each of these reformers to his break with the Roman Church and to the evangelical convictions that shaped his reformatory work. Here the historian detects more in the way of similarities than of differences. Therefore, while I will later explore the critical differences on Christ's person that shaped the understanding of his death in the thought of these reformers and, more importantly, led to disunity in the Reformation over the understanding of how the benefits of Christ's atoning death are bestowed upon believers for salvation, the main thesis of this article is that the atonement wrought by the death of Christ is at the center of the *coherence* of the Protestant Reformation, and that confessional Lutherans, even those who bristle somewhat at the very term "Protestant," should not ignore or deny this coherence.

Recent scholarship of the sixteenth-century Reformation has tended to focus so much on the diversity and divisions of the period that there is a tendency to speak of "Reformations" in the plural rather than "Reformation" as a coherent, definable event.[1] By doing so, church historians have perhaps unwittingly played into the hands of social historians—even materialist or Marxist historians—who de-emphasize or even deny the historical significance of great ideas and great men in the sweep of human history, and who therefore often deny that the Reformation is a definable, significant period of the history of Western civilization. If the sixteenth century was marked not by *the* Reformation but rather by a multiplicity of reform movements, then the question must be posed as to what marks the period as different from any other period in

[1] See, e.g., Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

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the history of Western civilization, which can be viewed from the rise of Christendom out of the Roman world as one movement of reform after another.[2]

Reformation historian Scott Hendrix has responded to this trend of seeing only plurality and division in the sixteenth-century movements for reform with a recent book focusing on the *coherence* of the Reformation.[3] Hendrix argues that the various divergent movements of reform in the era—from the Erasmian reformers, who never broke with the Roman Church, to Luther, to the city reformers like Zwingli and Calvin, to the radicals like Münzer and the Anabaptists, to the reform of Roman Catholicism culminating in the Council of Trent—had a common agenda of re-Christianizing a Christendom that had devolved by the late Middle Ages into something that was not just institutionally corrupt or theologically flawed, but fundamentally less than Christian. The significance of the Reformation as a distinct period of human history is that in this temporal space of about thirty to fifty years, in the geographic space of central and western Europe, Christian doctrine, governance, worship, piety, and institutions were reformed, restructured, and reinvigorated in ways that dramatically changed Western civilization and indeed the world—ways that continue even now to shape not only our Christianity but also our very concepts of modernity and civilization.

Here I would like to explore how for the Lutheran Reformation, and likewise for the city reformers who gave birth and shape to Reformed Christianity,[4] the atonement through the death of Christ was at the center of their reformatory work. All three of these reformers criticized the Roman Church for obscuring the significance of Christ's death in its doctrine, liturgy, and piety. All three defined the church's mission of

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[2] See esp. Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). For the Reformation as springing out of the myriad of reform movements in the later Middle Ages, see, e.g., Steven E. Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250–1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale, 1980).

[3] Scott H. Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Louisville; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

[4] Most historians, while not ignoring the crucial differences between the Lutheran Reformation and the city reform movements that developed into the Reformed confessions, nevertheless consider them together under terms like "magisterial Reformation," emphasizing the role of civil authorities in implementing concrete reforms, and contrasting these with the various "radical" and spiritualist movements of the sixteenth century on the one hand, and Catholic reform culminating in the Council of Trent on the other.

proclaiming the gospel as announcing to sinners the forgiveness of sins and the hope of salvation brought about through the atoning death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate. All three were willing—though reluctantly and only after their confession of the gospel and their efforts toward reform of the Western Catholic Church were rejected and persecuted by the papal magisterium at its various levels—to witness discord and eventually the division of Western Catholicism because they believed that the central mission of the church to proclaim the good news of the atonement through the death of Christ had been obscured and even persecuted within the Catholic Church of their time.

I. A Common Background and Context: The Intellectual Movement of Humanism

There was also commonality between these three reformers in the impulses of their time that led to reformation. Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin all shared the influence of the intellectual movement called humanism. So central was this movement to the Reformation of the sixteenth century that a generation ago Bernd Moeller could successfully defend the stark thesis, "No humanism, no Reformation."[5] Yet among historians, including Moeller, there has been quite a bit of confusion regarding the definition of humanism. Consequently, the close relationship between the Reformation and humanism has sometimes been described as the result of a misunderstanding: humanists like Erasmus were at first enthusiastic about Luther's call to reform, but then grew skeptical about the theological radicalism of his agenda, eventually breaking with Luther and the Reformation. Some historians have viewed this break as a break between humanism and the Protestant Reformation.

Humanism, however, was generally a movement for reform—intellectual, pedagogical, societal, and institutional. When the older generation of humanists like Erasmus generally decided against Luther and his drive for theological and ecclesiastical reform, while a younger generation of humanists in central Europe, such as Melanchthon and later Calvin, more frequently took up the cause of the Protestant Reformation, there was indeed a generation gap.[6] But there was not a decision against

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[5] Bernd Moeller, "The German Humanists and the Beginnings of the Reformation," in *Imperial Cities and the Reformation: Three Essays*, ed. and trans. H.C. Erik Midelfort and Mark U. Edwards, Jr. (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1982), 19–38.

[6] On this generation gap, see Lewis W. Spitz, "The Third Generation of German Renaissance Humanists," in *The Reformation: Basic Interpretations*, 2nd ed., ed. and with an Introduction by Lewis W. Spitz (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1972), 44–59.

reformation and for humanism and vice-versa. Rather, it became clear that humanism was an ideologically diverse movement whose adherents found themselves in every party of the sixteenth-century religious divisions while retaining their commitment to humanism.

That commitment was the belief that scholarship—specifically, the liberal arts, especially the study of ancient languages—could make a vital impact for the betterment of life. Humanists shared the slogan *Ad fontes*—to the sources!—and for humanists committed to Christianity that meant study of the Scriptures in the original languages. For Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and other humanists adopting the Reformation, it came also to mean that reform of theology and church life had to be steered by the teaching of Scripture as the highest authority—what came to be known as the *sola scriptura* principle of the Protestant Reformation.

II. Humanism and the Protestant Reformation

I have here purposely included Luther among the humanists. It is true that Luther's theological education at Erfurt was chiefly an education in Scholastic theology. His humanist training may have been second-rate, but Luther's growing commitment to the intellectual movement of humanism can no longer be called into question.[7] This is true even though Luther bitingly criticized humanists like Erasmus and, later, other Christian humanists who were championing the study of the Hebrew Old Testament by way of pure philology, influenced by the exegesis of rabbinic Judaism.[8] Luther's personal discovery of the gospel was so tied to his experience of crisis and faith that Bernd Moeller called it not a humanist discovery but a "monastic discovery"[9]—yet Luther's development as a theologian and reformer was deeply influenced by Erasmus's Greek New Testament, by his own study of the Scriptures in the original languages, and finally by his careful study of the sources of church history available to him during the process of his trial, his debate with John Eck at Leipzig, and throughout his career as professor at the University of Wittenberg. Luther's commitment to a reform of studies at Wittenberg along humanist lines has also been

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[7] On Luther's development as a humanist, see Helmar Junghans, *Der junge Luther und die Humanisten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1985); on Luther as a humanist in his view of history see John A. Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity*, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 80 (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008), 141–179.

[8] On Luther's critique of humanist biblical study, especially for its dependence on rabbinic Judaism for the study of the Old Testament, see Maxfield, *Luther's Lectures on Genesis*, 48–59.

[9] Moeller, "German Humanists," 23.

well established.[10] In short, Luther's break with Erasmus on the freedom of the will was just that—a break with Erasmus on the freedom of the will—and no break with humanism.

Zwingli and Calvin can be described similarly to Luther, excepting of course Luther's monastic experience and his deeply personal discovery of the gospel. Zwingli's humanism is well known. He was deeply influenced by Erasmus's erudition, wrote with deep affection not only of Christian antiquity but also of classical antiquity, and had a deep admiration for Plato's philosophy. Zwingli guided the reform movement in Zurich by his understanding of the Bible and his study of the early church fathers—just as we would expect from a Christian humanist. Nevertheless, Zwingli firmly rejected Erasmus's belief in the freedom of the will for the same reason that Luther did, namely, because to posit the freedom of the will and the capacity of man to contribute something to his own salvation is to obscure the absolute necessity and all-encompassing significance of the atonement through the death of Christ. For if fallen man has the inherent, natural capacity to "do what is within him," and thus by using the power of the human will to contribute meritorious works of love toward his salvation, as Scholastic theology had concluded—and here Erasmus agreed—then the death of the Son of God on the cross has only a partial and not a total significance for the salvation of the sinner. Luther, Zwingli, and later Calvin all came to precisely the same conclusion from their study of the Bible: Christian teaching at its very heart is the proclamation that the Son of God became a man in order to fulfill the law of God perfectly and then suffer and die on a cross as the perfect Lamb of God in a substitutionary, sacrificial atonement for sinners. The justification of the sinner before God is accomplished not through a free will cooperating with God's grace, contributing its essential part to the process of conversion and producing meritorious works of love, but by receiving the benefits of Christ's atonement through faith alone.

Perusing the chapter headings in a recent study of John Calvin's doctrine of the atonement conveys the coherence of Protestant teaching that Lutheran pastors should also recognize as familiar to their own confession. First, the starting point of the atonement is the free love of God in Jesus Christ; second, the prerequisite of the atonement is the incarnation; third, Christ has a threefold office of Prophet, King, and Priest;

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[10] See Timothy J. Wengert, "Higher Education and Vocation: The University of Wittenberg (1517–1533) between Renaissance and Reform," in *The Lutheran Doctrine of Vocation*, ed. John A. Maxfield, Pieper Lectures 11 (St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute; Northville, SD: Luther Academy, 2008), 1–21.

fourth, Christ is the obedient Second Adam; fifth, Christ is the Victor over sin, death, and the devil; sixth, Christ is our legal substitute; seventh, Christ is our sacrifice; eight, Christ is our merit; and finally ninth, Christ is our example—specifically, the supreme example of faith in God in the midst of human suffering.[11] All of these are vital themes of the atonement also in Lutheran theology.[12] In fact, even the one issue that has come to characterize the difference between Lutheran and Reformed theology regarding the atonement—namely, the extent of its significance—is a development of later Reformed theology and is not worked out in the theology of Zwingli or Calvin,[13] although in important ways the doctrine of predestination in these two Reformed theologians perhaps led directly to this development. Nevertheless, both Zwingli and Calvin, like Luther, taught that the atonement through the death of Christ was a universal and not a limited atonement.[14] It is noteworthy that the Lutheran Formula of Concord in its condemnation of Calvinism never condemns the Reformed doctrine regarding the atonement; indeed, it does not identify the teaching

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[11] Robert A. Peterson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Atonement* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1983).

[12] Gustaf Aulén's attempt in *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A.G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1961) to describe Luther's understanding of the atonement strictly within the *Christus victor* motif and in opposition to the theme of *satisfactio* is unsuccessful, I believe. Like Calvin after him, Luther's understanding incorporates all the major motifs—legal substitute whose death satisfies and propitiates the righteous wrath of God against sin, victor over the devil, and example of faith in the midst of suffering. Regarding theories, Ian D. Kingston Siggins, in *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ*, Yale Publications in Religion 14 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), concludes that "Luther has no *theory* of the atonement" (109; emphasis added) and that "only the timid and affrighted conscience knows how to say, 'Christ died for me.' [Luther] needs no theory of the atonement to interpret to himself what the 'for me' means" (111).

[13] Peterson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 90.

[14] There is some disagreement on this among historians of Reformed theology. See G.M. Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus (1536–1675)* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1997), who concludes that Calvin sometimes "spoke of redemption as limited by election, while at other times as unrestricted [universal]. In this way the reformer left to his successors a theology that was indeed a *complexio oppositorum*, and therefore inherently unstable" (34). Both Calvin's defenders and his detractors have posed a consistency and systematic harmony in his thought that is perhaps not there. Among his biographers, William J. Bouwsma, in *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 5, 230–234, has denied that Calvin was a systematic thinker. For an analysis that posits Calvin's teaching of union with Christ as the means of salvation and therefore reconciles specific election with universal atonement, see Kevin Dixon Kennedy, *Union with Christ and the Extent of the Atonement in Calvin*, Studies in Biblical Literature 48 (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

of a limited atonement as a threat to pure teaching of the gospel in the many specifics of Calvinist teaching that it does condemn.

III. Divergences on Christ's Person and Work between Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin

Where Luther did combat Zwingli and the Swiss and South German theologians allied with him, and where later Lutherans combated crypto-Calvinism and the Philippist party in the midst of *discordia* amongst adherents of the Augsburg Confession, the matter under controversy was closely related to the atonement and its significance in Christianity. The dispute broke out over the understanding of the Lord's Supper, but it turned on the understanding of Christ's person.[15] At issue between Lutherans and the Reformed is not the atonement itself but the way in which the benefits of the death of Christ are communicated to individual Christians for their personal redemption and salvation. At the heart of the difference between Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin is not the propitiation of God's wrath and reconciliation with sinners, and the consequent objective or universal justification of a humanity dead in sin, but rather the means through which God accomplishes the subjective or individual justification of a specific sinner, conveying Christ's righteousness to and bestowing salvation upon that sinner. In presenting this crucial difference between these three reformers, I will treat Zwingli and Calvin first, only because I wish to devote the most detailed attention to how Luther proclaims the atonement for the salvation of the sinner, thus following the example of Jesus and the wedding host at Cana by saving the best for last.

Zwingli's *Commentary on True and False Religion* (1525) has been called the pioneering, original systematic presentation of the Protestant faith.[16] Addressing the French monarch Francis I, Zwingli first defines the word "religion" by turning in typical humanist fashion to the use of the word in antiquity, in this case, in the works of Cicero. Religion is about God and man, and therefore about discerning God and knowing man. Zwingli

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[15] For a thorough dogmatic treatment of Luther's christology, see Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ. Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982).

[16] Willim Walker Rockwell, Preface to Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1981), iii. Rockwell does not fail to note that Philip Melanchthon's *Loci Theologici* predates Zwingli's *Commentary* by four years, but he opines that Melanchthon's text "does not deal with the full-orbed Protestant faith, emphasizing rather special points in controversy," and that it cannot be described as an original system, based as it is on the sequence of topics in St. Paul's epistle to the Romans.

criticizes as false religion "that the [Scholastic] theologians have adduced from philosophy as to what God is" and turns instead to the Bible, for "we wish to learn out of His own mouth what God is, lest we become corrupt and do abominable works."[17] It is chiefly through the Bible's testimony about God's Son that Christians come to know God:

> For this purpose, then, He delivered up His Son for us, that we, seeing that what was highest as well in heaven as on earth had been made ours, might be sure that nothing could be denied us. For He who has given His Son has given His all. . . . This will, perhaps, be enough to show the untaught that as God is the fountain-source of all good, so He is bountiful and by no means niggardly or inexorable, but is so lavish and prodigal of Himself for the benefit of those who enjoy Him that He delights to be taken, and held, and possessed by all.[18]

Religion, then, is between God and man and consists of the knowledge of God and of man. But what is the content of this religion? Here Zwingli turns to the doctrine of creation, specifically of man in God's image, and then to the fall and to the first promise of the gospel, Genesis 3:15. The Christian religion is all about the fulfillment of this gospel, when "our Creator sent one to satisfy His justice by offering Himself for us—not an angel, nor a man, but His own Son, and clothed in flesh, in order that neither His majesty might deter us from intercourse with Him, nor His lowliness deprive us of hope."[19] This Son of God, through whom man was created, born of the ever-virgin Mary—this Son of God "in whom there is no sin, and from whom we had gone astray," appeased the divine justice against sin and sinners by bearing what sinners "had deserved through sinning." So clearly does Zwingli proclaim the atonement worked by the God-man. The gospel proclaims "that sins are remitted in the name of Christ; and no heart ever received tidings more glad."[20]

Zwingli, however, separates himself from the sacramental theology of both the Roman Church and the Lutheran Reformation when he discusses Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are symbols only and cannot convey to the sinner the purification for sin won by the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross. "Hence it is manifest," Zwingli writes, "that the famous baptizing of Christ by John in the water is nothing but an initiatory rite, and not a washing away of the filth of the soul, for that is the function of

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[17] Zwingli, *Commentary*, 56–58, 62.

[18] Zwingli, *Commentary*, 74.

[19] Zwingli, *Commentary*, 87–89, 106.

[20] Zwingli, *Commentary*, 114, 119. On Zwingli's biblical defense of the perpetual virginity of Mary, see 112–114.

the blood of Christ alone." A true believer, receiving the mark of Baptism, will be ashamed "openly to defile [himself] with the old vices."[21] But this work of repentance in the inward man is worked by God directly, not through Baptism. Zwingli writes:

> I heartily wish this word "sacrament" had never been adopted by the Germans without being translated into German. For when they hear the word "sacrament" they think of something great and holy which by its own power can free the conscience from sin. Others again, seeing the error of this, have said it was the symbol of a sacred thing. This, indeed, I should not entirely disapprove, unless they also insisted that when you perform the sacrament outwardly a purification is certainly performed inwardly. A third group has asserted that a sacrament is a sign which is given for the purpose of rendering the recipient sure that what is signified by the sacrament has now been accomplished. I do not like to differ from great men, especially at this time when they are so flourishing and are writing with such success that they seem to have clothed the world in a new guise and to have changed it from a rude to a very refined state. But I beg them to consider what I am here going to adduce in the same manner in which I always weigh their own writings.[22]

This third group is of course the Lutherans. Zwingli took the polemic against sacraments working *ex opere operato*, from the mere performance of the deed even apart from faith, and extended it to the Lutherans, who said that faith was indeed necessary to receive the benefits of the sacrament but that in the sacrament itself God is at work efficaciously, conveying the forgiveness of sins. Zwingli writes:

> They are wrong, therefore . . . who think that sacraments have any cleansing power. The second group [that is, the Lutherans], seeing this, taught that sacraments are signs which when they are performed make a man sure about what is performed within him. But this was a vain invention; as if . . . when a man is wet with the water something happens in him which he could not possibly have known unless water had been poured over him at the same time![23]

For Zwingli, the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not means through which the Holy Spirit regenerates, bestows and nurtures

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[21] Zwingli, *Commentary*, 121.

[22] Zwingli, *Commentary*, 179.

[23] Zwingli, *Commentary*, 182. Zwingli continues in this section by condemning the Anabaptists, who refused Baptism "to all who have not previously so well learned and confessed the faith that they can respond to all its articles" (183).

faith, and gives the promise of the forgiveness of sins, thus conveying to the sinner the benefits of Christ's atonement. Rather, the sacraments are solely "signs or ceremonials . . . by which a man proves to the Church that he either aims to be, or is, a soldier of Christ, and which informs the whole Church rather than yourself of your faith."[24] As Zwingli later stated at the Diet of Augsburg, sharply separating himself from the Lutheran confession regarding the means of grace: "I believe, indeed I know, that all the sacraments are so far from conferring grace that they do not even convey or distribute it."[25]

Zwingli therefore viewed the benefits of Christ's atoning death as conveyed by the Holy Spirit to the individual, that is, to all whom God has elected and called to salvation by His providential power, without means, sometimes even apart from the external word, that is, the preaching of the gospel. It was this internal working of the Spirit and providential conveying of the atonement directly, apart from means, and not a form of Pelagianism, that led to Zwingli's curious assertion in a later work that amongst the believers in heaven would be included various pagans of pre-Christian antiquity, including the Greek philosophers Socrates and Aristides and the Roman heroes Numa, Camillus, the Catos, and the Scipios.[26]

Calvin, who preferred Luther to Zwingli in terms of their respective theologies,[27] nevertheless followed Zwingli in holding the benefits of Christ's atonement to be granted separately from the physical elements of the sacraments.[28] Calvin does have an understanding of the sacraments as

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[24] Zwingli, *Commentary*, 184.

[25] Ulrich Zwingli, *Fidei ratio*, quoted in Hermann Sasse, *This is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959), 282.

[26] See W.P. Stephens, "Zwingli and the Salvation of the Gentiles," in *The Bible, the Reformation and the Church: Essays in Honour of James Atkinson*, ed. W.P. Stephens, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 105 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 224–244.

[27] Of Luther and Zwingli, Calvin wrote to Guillaume Farel on February 28, 1539, "If they are compared, you know yourself how much Luther excels." Quoted in Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, 241n47.

[28] The rather extreme anti-sacramentalism of Zwingli's position in *Fidei ratio* had already been transcended by Calvin's time through the First Helvetic Confession of 1536, yet there remained a clear distinction between the physical elements and the spiritual working of Christ in the sacraments: "We do not believe that the body and blood of the Lord is naturally united with the bread and wine or that they are spatially enclosed in them, but that according to the institution of the Lord the bread and wine are highly significant, holy, true signs by which the true communion of His body and

means of grace, but God works through them spiritually in the activity of their faithful administration and not through the physical elements.[29] Thus Calvin could believe himself to be an adherent of the Augsburg Confession and the Wittenberg Concord of 1536, professing belief in the presence of Christ's true body and blood spiritually in the believer's participation in the Lord's Supper, while at the same time agreeing and maintaining fellowship with the Zwinglians, who denied the presence of Christ's humanity in the elements of the Lord's Supper because the humanity of Christ was supposed to be enclosed locally in heaven at the right hand of God. Also like Zwingli is Calvin's focus on the predestination of God and God's freedom in applying the benefits of Christ's universal atonement to sinners even apart from the external preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Both Zwingli and Calvin are therefore condemned in Articles VII and VIII of the Formula of Concord, the former focusing on the reality of Christ's humanity in the physical elements of the Sacrament of the Altar, the latter dealing with the related subject of the person of Christ, whose distinct natures as true God and true man are united in one, inseparable person.

IV. Luther's Preaching of the Atonement: Sermons on the Gospel of John

How did Martin Luther view the atonement in relation both to the person of Jesus as the God-man and to the means of grace that Luther believed communicated the benefits of Christ's atonement to sinners for their justification before God? To answer that question I will explore briefly the way in which Luther actually preached the gospel of the atonement to the congregation in Wittenberg, specifically in a series of sermons on the Gospel of John that the Reformer delivered during the course of many months in 1537 through 1540, when Pastor Johann Bugenhagen was away implementing the Reformation in Denmark.

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blood is administered and offered to believers by the Lord Himself by means of the ministry of the Church—not as perishable food for the belly but the food and nourishment of a spiritual and eternal life." Quoted in *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. with historical introductions by Arthur C. Cochrane (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 108.

[29] A reliable guide is Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957). Calvin treats "the way in which we receive the grace of Christ: What benefits come to us from it, and what effects follow" in Book 3 of the *Institutes*, and in Book 4 he treats "the external means or aids by which God invites us into the society of Christ and holds us therein." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960).

Twenty-eight of these sermons were on the third chapter of John's Gospel, delivered mostly on Saturdays in late March 1538 through September or October 1539.[30] An overview of the major themes treated in these sermons reveals a remarkable focus in Luther's preaching on salvation as the atoning work of Jesus Christ, true God and true man united in one person, proclaimed in external word and sacraments through the Holy Spirit working through these means, received through faith which justifies the believer—or rejected by the unbeliever, who therefore remains under the judgment of God.

These sermons show that at the heart of Luther's concern regarding salvation is the preaching of genuine faith in Christ's atonement into the hearts of his hearers. "Faith should be preached above all else," the Reformer told the congregation in his first sermon on John 3, "and then good works are to be taught. It is faith that takes us to heaven, without and before good works; for through faith we come to God."[31] The miracle of faith that Jesus describes to Nicodemus in the conversation recorded in this chapter is the miracle of new birth, worked "by the Holy Spirit and by water."[32] A life without faith, as, for example, the life of the papists, who were indeed baptized, but who focus their teaching and confidence of salvation on their works, or the Turks, who have all kinds of works but no new birth of faith in Christ, is not the new life produced by the Spirit. Though these perform all sorts of so-called good works, they should be told "that all this counts for nothing, that these are evil works, nothing but thistles and thorns. Why? Because the tree is evil; that is, the person is no good. Therefore whatever this person may do, whether he reads or prays,

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[30] No date is given in the manuscripts for the last sermon on chapter 3, but the second-last sermon is dated September 13, 1539. The first sermon on John 4 is dated March 6, 1540, so there was a break of several months in Luther's preaching on John. See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works,* American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 22:488n174; 503n1 [henceforth *LW*].

[31] *LW* 22:276. "Aber den glauben soll man am hochsten treiben, darnach von den guten wercken leren, und muss uns der glaube gehn himmel bringen, ohne und führ den guten wercken, denn durch den glauben kommen wir zu Gott." Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Schriften*], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 47:2,18–21 [henceforth WA].

[32] *LW* 22:280. "Die Christliche lere unterrichtet uns also, das wir erstlich mussen andere leute werden, das ist: neu geborn werden. Wie geschiecht aber das? durch den heiligen geist und durchs wasser. Wenn ich denn neu geborn bin, from und gottfurchtig worden, so gehe hin, und was ich in der neuen geburtt thue, das ist gutt." WA 47:7,17–21.

it is all evil. It belongs to the old birth and is accursed."[33] In his second sermon on John 3, Luther directly ties the word, Baptism, and faith together as those means through which God brings about the spiritual birth that Jesus impresses upon Nicodemus.[34] Luther then ties this all to the atonement through the death of Christ, bestowed through the word and Baptism:

> Physical birth entails physical things, such as diapers and pap, father and mother; it concerns physical life and no more. But if you want salvation, you need different parents, who will bring you to heaven. This Christ does. By means of Baptism and the Word of God He placed you and your Christianity into the lap of our dear mother, the Christian Church. This He accomplished through His suffering and death that by virtue of His death and blood we might live eternally.[35]

A second theme that appears strongly throughout these sermons is that this atonement could be worked only by the Christ who is true God and true man, with two natures inseparably united in one person, and whose two natures communicate their attributes one to the other (*communicatio idiomatum*). Here the polemic against Zwingli is strong, though Luther never mentions the Swiss reformer by name. While Zwingli held that the divine nature in Jesus is said to suffer only through a figure of speech, seeking to preserve intact the teaching of Chalcedon that the two natures in Christ are not confused, Luther's language suggests a communication of attributes that appears to go beyond the definition of

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[33] *LW* 22:281. "Aber hie saget man: Ej, die papisten thun warlich viel gutter werck, denn sie beten, fasten und halten mess. Do antwortte du drauff: sie gelten gar nichts, es sind bose werck, eittel distel und dorner. Worumb? Der Baum ist böse, das ist: die person taug nicht, darumb was sie thutt, sie lese oder bete, so ists alles bose, denn sie sind eine aldte geburt und vermaledejet, und dieweil sie bose sind, so konnen sie nichts gutts thun. Wer das nun die Papisten und Turcken bereden kondte, das sie alle distel und Dorner weren. Denn sie sind nicht new geborn, sondern noch alle hehr von der aldten geburtt." WA 47:8,15–21.

[34] *LW* 22:290. "Also geschiecht die Geistliche geburt durchs wort gottes, durch die tauffe und den glauben, Und wir sind albereit in dieser geburt, dieweil wir noch alhier auff erden leben, wenn wir gleuben, und habe droben gesaget, das man die neue geburt oder das geistlich leben nicht mit den funff sinnen fhulet." WA 47:19,3–6.

[35] *LW* 22:291. "Dann das leiblich geborn ist, das gibt leibliche dieng, als windeln, brey, vater und mutter, und gebraucht alleine dieses gegenwerttigen lebens. Aber du must andere Eldtern haben, die dich ghen himmel bringen. Das thut Christus, der dich in deinem Christentumb durch die Tauffe und wortt gottes in den schoss der Christlichen kirchen, als unser lieben Mutter, leget, das hatt er erlanget durch sein leiden und sterben, auff das wir durch den Tod und bluth Christi ewiglich leben mochten." WA 47:20,17–23.

Chalcedon.[36] Luther proclaimed to the people of Wittenberg that distinguishing too sharply between the two natures in Christ leads to a conception of Christ as two persons, which "would nullify our redemption and the forgiveness of sin. No, the two natures must be the one Christ. Otherwise no satisfaction could have been rendered for our sins, and nothing would come of our salvation."[37] Yes, God suffers in the atonement through the death of Jesus:

> If the Son of God died for me, let death consume and devour me; for he will surely have to return and restore me, and I will stand my ground against him. Christ died; death devoured the Son of God. But in doing so death swallowed a thorn and had to get rid of it. It was impossible for death to hold Him. For this Person is God; and since both God and man in one indivisible Person entered into the belly of death and the devil, death ate a morsel that ripped his stomach open.[38]

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[36] Most historians, despite Luther and the Lutherans' charge that Zwingli and Calvin have Nestorian tendencies or worse, defend their positions as preserving intact the careful distinctions of Chalcedon, and respond either positively or negatively that Luther's position tended toward the Monophysitism that rejected aspects of the Chalcedonian formula. On Calvin's Christology see E. David Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1966). On Luther, see Dennis Ngien, "Chalcedonian Christology and Beyond: Luther's Understanding of the *Communicatio Idiomatum*," *Heythrop Journal* 45 (2004): 54–68; and Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, who concludes that there is a Monophysite tendency in Luther that distinguished his Christology not only from the Reformed but also from the "Nestorian tendency" of the Latin Middle Ages. Luther, he concludes, has gone "back to an earlier Eastern Christology, emphasizing the unity between the two natures and developing, in the course of the struggle over *Patripassionism*, the conception of the communication of attributes, even the theme of the suffering of God" (387).

[37] *LW* 22:324. "Wenn aber Christus gescheiden wird, das zwene sohne sind, so sinds auch zwo personen, so ist dan meine erlosung nichts, auch ist keine vergebung der Sunde, sondern es muss also sein, das die zwo naturen sind der einige Christus. Sonst kondte nicht fur unsere Sunde gnung geschehen, und wurde alsdenn aus unser seligkeit nichts werden." WA 47:52,22–26. This statement (and other similar ones) appears to me to contradict the view of Siggins, who develops his systematic study primarily from Luther's sermons and biblical expositions, concluding: "Luther's struggles with the formal categories of christological theory arise from traditional familiarity, not from evangelical concern; and he is therefore unsuccessful in reinterpreting the old orthodoxy in terms of his new and living faith." Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ*, 239.

[38] *LW* 22:355. "Ist der Sohn gottes fur mich gestorben, so fresse mich der tod hin und verschlinge mich, ehr soll mich wohl widergeben, und ich will fur ihme wohl bleiben. Christus ist gestorben und hatt der Tod den Sohn Gottes verschlungen, aber der tod hatt an ihme einen angel geschlungen, das er ihnen hat mussen widergeben, den es wahr unmuglich, das her im tode bleiben soltte. Den die person ist gott, und do Gott

A third theme that comes through strongly in these sermons is the new reality that Jesus brings about in the life of the believer through the atonement and the bestowing of its benefits through the word and sacraments, benefits received only through the miracle of faith. In a sermon devoted to John 3:16–18, the Reformer teaches his people that Christ sometimes has a stern and rebuking demeanor in this Gospel, but always for the purpose of working salvation:

> He wants us to accept Him; He does not want us to hate the light; He wants us to become new persons, to cleave to Him with all our heart, to rely on Him, and to say: "Thou didst not come to condemn me but to save me." People will believe in Him; yet at the same time they will want to retain their old nature. But this is not the way. Those who are addicted to vice cannot love or follow Christ, for Christ and Belial cannot reside side by side. Faith must change the heart. . . . Such a faith will not fail you in the hour of death, for this faith will support you in all kinds of trials. This is what faith accomplishes if it is not false or counterfeit."[39]

Subsequent sermons develop this theme of false or counterfeit faith, against which Luther warns his people. Where faith is genuine, "there is no love for sin," for a true believer shuns sin.[40] Luther prophesies

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und Mensch in einer person, unzertrennet, in des todes und Teuffels bauch gesharen ist, so hatt der todt ein bisslein an ime gessen das ihme den Bauch zureist." WA 47:80,11–19.

[39] *LW* 22:377–378. "Das ehr aber hin und wider im Euangelio also rumpelt, rumoret und strafft, das ist alles dohin gericht, das her die welt gerne woltte selig machen, und sie nicht verdampt und gericht wurde, den sie sind zuvor gericht und verdammet, wie ehr alhier im text saget, aber er wil, das wir ihnen annemen sollen und das liecht nicht hassen und neue menschen werden, an ime das hertz hangen lassen, ihme vertrauen und sagen: du bist nicht kommen, das du mich verdammest, sondern ich durch dich selig wurde. Aber man wil also an in gleuben, das man gleichewol im aldten wesen bleibe. Aber das thuts nicht, den die in den lastern liegen, konnen Christum nicht lieben oder ihme nachfolgen, den Christus und Belial konnen nicht bej einander bleiben. Der glaube mus das hertz endern, und wen der glaube wird verhanden sein, so wirstu nicht mehr bauen auff dein geldt und guth, noch stoltz oder sicher sein. . . . So bestehet her dan wider den Tod. Den diese wortt ehalten dich in allerlej anfechtung. Das thut der rechte glaub, wen er nicht falsch ist oder ein wechselbalg etc." WA 47:100,17–28, 38–40.

[40] *LW* 22:389. "So hore nun diesen text: wer an den Sohn gleubet, der hatt das ewige leben, und ist das Gericht hinweg. Wo den ein rechter glaube ist, so liebet man die Sunde nicht, man bleibet auch nicht in Sunden, sondern man meidet Sunde und spricht: Sind die Sunde vergeben, so mus ich nicht drinnen bleiben, gleich wie ein krancker, der gesunth wird und geheilet worden, nicht mus gefallen an der kranchkheit haben oder das thun, was zur gesuntheit schedlich were. Also auch wer in falsche lehre und in ergerlichem leben verharret, der ist im gerichte und warhafftig verdammet." WA 47:110,30–37.

judgment upon Germany, for "our ungrateful people fairly devour their pastors," but there follows an appeal to faith among his hearers:

> The fact that a blind world prefers death to life, prefers hell to heaven, bodes a terrible judgment. Therefore accept the Light, Christ, the Savior, who has removed our sin. For whoever despises the Light and loves darkness will come into judgment.[41]

Summarizing in the very next sermon, Luther emphasizes that John associates three things in his Gospel: Christ's true divinity; his true humanity, in which the Son of God bears the sin of the world; and sincere faith, which, in contrast to false or hypocritical or even merely "historical" faith, stakes everything on Christ's atoning work of salvation and therefore receives the benefits of that atonement.[42]

V. The Reformation and Lutheran Proclamation Today

The thesis was formulated above that the atonement through the death of Christ is at the center of the *coherence* of the Protestant Reformation, and

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[41] *LW* 22:390. "Der Turcke ziehet dohehr auffs Deuttschland, nun ist sie reiff und fleust voller bluths der armen ihre pfarrer auff, das ich sorge hab, wiewohl ich nicht gerne ein Prophet bin, das eine grosse strafe werde uber das Deutschland kommen, und so gross, das kein menschlich hertz moge aufreden. Das vorige Gerichte ist gerieng. Aber das ist ein erschrecklich gericht, das die blinde welt den Tod furzeucht dem leben und die helle dem himmel. Darumb so nemet dast Liecht, Christum, den Heiland, an, der unser sunde hat hinweg genommen. Den wer das Liecht veracht und die Finsterniss liebet, der kommet in das Gerichte, wie den die welt sicher fort fehret in ihren wollusten, fressen und sauffen, Pract, Geitz, Hass, neid und in andern Sunden, und man lests nicht darbej bleiben, sondern hassen und verfolgen auch die prediger des wortts Gottes, jha Gott selbst, und wollen von den predigern noch darzu ungestrafft sein, und fallen in sein die Antinomer zu, das man die leuthe nicht schelten noch straffen solle." WA 47:111,20–35.

[42] *LW* 22:391. "Diese drei stuck pfleget S. Joannes offt zusamen zu setzen, den sie konnen auch in der warheit eins vom andern nicht geschieden werden. Erstlich machet her Christum zum Gott, und das treibet her schier in allen wortten, das her warhafftiger Gott sej, geborn vom vater yn Ewigkeit, nicht gemacht, und umb des Artickels willen hatt her auch diess Euangelium geschrieben. Darnach so machet her diese person, so Gottes Sohn ist, auch zum warhafftigen menschen, der von der Jungfrauen Marien geborn sej. Zum Andern, das niemands durch seine gute werck selig werde, Sondern alleine durch den Sohn Gottes die seligkeit bekomme. Den der sej darumb in die welt gesanth und mensch worden, auch zum lamb Gottes gemacht, das her die Sunde der Welt wegneme. Sonst werde niemands von der sunde und dem tode erloset den alleine durch in, den her und kein ander ist darzu gesanth, das man durch in solt selig werden, und so es auch ein ander hette thun konnen, was hette Gott seinen Sohn durffen schicken? Zum Dritten, so soll der glaub rechtschaffen und nicht lugenhafftig, falsch oder ein heucherlej sein, sondern so eigentlich wisse, das es also sej, und wagets dan alles drauff." WA 47:112,3–18.

that confessional Lutherans should not ignore or deny this coherence. Coherence, however, is not the same as unity. As I have attempted to show, even while Lutherans and the Reformed both placed the proclamation of the death of Christ for sinners at the heart of their reformatory work, and while both proclaimed that God justifies the sinner solely on account of faith in Christ's atoning death and victorious resurrection, nevertheless there is considerable disagreement regarding the way in which the benefits of Christ's death are distributed to the believer, in particular through the sacraments, but also through the written and proclaimed word of God, which Luther calls the "external word." This should be no new revelation to pastors and laymen educated in and committed to a Lutheranism defined by the Book of Concord. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that this brief investigation and some conclusions drawn from it will help us to highlight in our preaching and teaching the significance of Christ's atonement and the absolutely essential role of faith for receiving the benefits of that atonement, while also helping to clarify certain patterns of language that seem to be overwhelming our self-understanding as heirs of the Reformation in an age of confessional malaise and theological muddiness.

First, confessional Lutherans should never surrender the term "Protestant" or, more importantly, the name "Evangelical" to the mainline liberal or to the revivalist and enthusiast versions of conservative Christianity in the world today. At its very heart, Luther's Reformation, and indeed the Protestant Reformation as a whole, was the protest that Roman Catholicism, and in some respects Christianity going back to the early church of the fourth and fifth centuries, had through its sacramental system obscured the atonement through the death of Christ. Roman Catholic doctrine and piety had substituted various ways of achieving salvation through works for the biblical gospel that proclaimed salvation through faith alone in Christ's atoning work. Luther's early protest regarding penance grew into a protest against a papal magisterium that had constructed walls preventing true evangelical reform, resulting finally in the term "Protestant" being coined in 1529 to describe the *Lutheran* Reformation's resistance to the threat of a resurgent Roman Catholic Christendom acting through imperial legislation, political oppression, and judicial murder to crush the free preaching of the gospel and reformation of church life. As participants in and promoters of the Reformation even when it was rejected by ecclesiastical and imperial authorities, the early Lutherans were more similar to the Reformed than they were different, as historians have duly noted with terms such as the Protestant or Magisterial Reformation.

The term "Evangelical" gets at the heart of our Lutheran identity in an even more central way, for at the heart of Luther's preaching and his polemic both against the papal church and the Sacramentarians and Anabaptists was the evangel, the gospel. It seems a weak surrender that the name used most widely to describe Luther's movement for reform and the churches that adopted it has become in much discourse today a derogatory term to denote a theological and liturgical populism descended from eighteenth-century pietism and nineteenth-century revivalism in Britain and America, as well as unionism in Germany. Let us rather treasure the name Evangelical, and use it descriptively of our endeavor to keep the gospel at the center of our preaching and our understanding of the life of faith in Christ.

Central to Luther's gospel and that of the Lutheran Confessions is the doctrine of faith, namely, that righteousness comes through faith alone. Divinely instituted sacraments and humanly developed liturgies and other patterns of devotion are not conceived as means through which God pours grace as a substance, resulting in meritorious love that justifies sinners. Nor are the sacraments and the church's liturgies focused in the Reformation on the celebration of the presence of Christ in the midst of his church. Rather, in Luther's understanding, God instituted sacraments and churches develop liturgies and other practices of piety as means through which the promise of the gospel is announced and proclaimed. The benefits of Christ's death—that is, the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation—are bestowed through preaching and the sacraments. As a truly sacramental theology, Luther's understanding differs from that of Zwingli and Calvin and their Reformed successors in that God does work through the physical elements combined with God's word. But in contrast to medieval sacramental theology Luther did not view the sacraments as effective in themselves by their mere performance (*ex opere operato*). The sacraments are promises of God to which faith clings. This touches upon a phrase sometimes used today among confessional Lutherans, "the objective means of grace"—a phrase open to misunderstanding even though surely it is meant to say that God's promise is presented in the sacraments even if it is not received by faith. Luther frequently in his preaching highlighted the tragic reality that, among the baptized, there are hypocrites, false believers, indifferent despisers of the gospel, and even enemies of the gospel. Luther's response was to proclaim the law for repentance and the gospel for faith, and to proclaim to the stricken sinner that the benefits of Baptism lost through unbelief are yet there in Baptism as the promise of God to which faith can and must return and cling. As he said in the Large Catechism, correcting an image from St. Jerome: Baptism

is God's ship that cannot founder, for it is God's work and not ours. "But it does happen that we slip and fall out of the ship. If anybody does fall out, he should immediately head for the ship and cling to it until he can climb aboard again and sail on it as he had done before."[43]

Luther's concern in his preaching and sacramental theology and practice was to highlight God's call to believe in Christ the God-man as Savior by virtue of the atonement worked on the cross. Only when that call is received in faith, when Christ the Savior is received as Christ *for me*, can it be said that one has heard the gospel and received the sacraments for salvation.[44] Where this happens—when not only a person has been baptized but also that baptism lives in the present through a life of faith in its promise—there the Holy Spirit has brought about a new reality in the life of the Christian. By faith Christ's righteousness, which in itself is an alien righteousness—a righteousness *extra nos*, outside of us—does not remain outside of us but becomes our possession, together with Christ's kingship and priesthood, just as the bride receives in marriage all the possessions of the bridegroom together with his very body.[45]

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[43] Martin Luther, Large Catechism (4.82), in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 446. I agree with Phillip Cary, "Why Luther is Not Quite Protestant: The Logic of Faith in a Sacramental Promise," *Pro Ecclesia* 14 (2005): 447–486, that Luther understands faith as certainty in God's promises given in the word and sacraments, rather than the reflective faith that looks to its own existence and vitality for certainty of salvation. Cary, however, only touches upon a problem that Luther deals with extensively in the catechisms and his preaching, namely, the problem of unbelief amongst the baptized. I would also amend Cary's title to the tautological "Why Luther is Not Quite Calvinist." Also to be demonstrated carefully rather than asserted is Cary's view that the Formula of Concord "assimilated the Calvinist emphasis on conversion" (485).

[44] Consider the following from *On The Freedom of the Christian*, 1520: "I believe that it has now become clear that it is not enough or in any sense Christian to preach the works, life, and words of Christ as historical facts, as if the knowledge of these would suffice for the conduct of life; yet this is the fashion among those who must today be regarded as our best preachers. Far less is it sufficient or Christian to say nothing at all about Christ and to teach instead the laws of men and the decrees of the fathers. . . . Rather ought Christ to be preached to the end that faith in him may be established that he may not only be Christ, but be Christ for you and me, and that what is said of him and is denoted in his name may be effectual in us." *LW* 31:357.

[45] This real sharing and thus possession of Christ's righteousness through faith, rather than a deification of the human creature through mystical union with the divine Christ, is the meaning, I believe, of the wondrous exchange that Luther describes in *On the Freedom of a Christian*. See *LW* 31:351–352. On the believer's receiving of Christ's

Luther's followers in the sixteenth century believed that not since the New Testament and the apostolic age had the righteousness of faith proclaimed in the gospel been so clearly confessed and proclaimed as in Luther's preaching and teaching as well as in his major doctrinal and polemical works. Neither the other Protestant reformers, nor the papal magisterium, nor the medieval theologians, nor even the early church fathers and councils had spoken so clearly regarding the doctrine of faith. As Nicholas Selnecker expressed it, "We do not place our faith in Luther, as we place our faith in no other human being, but we love Luther because he leads us to Christ and because his writings are subject to the Word of Christ. He instructs us out of this Word."[46] In our preaching and teaching today, in the liturgies we celebrate and the hymns we sing, may it be said of Lutherans today that we lead people to Christ that they may believe and so receive the benefits of his death for the sins of the world.

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spiritual kingship and priesthood, a central corollary to Luther's doctrine of justification, see *LW* 31:354–357.

[46] Nicholas Selnecker, *Recitationes aliqvot* (Leipzig: Georg Defner, 1581), quoted in Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, and Hero: Images of the Reformer, 1520–1620* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books and Paternoster Press, 1999), 72.

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Post-Reformation Lutheran Attitudes Toward the Reformed Doctrine of God

Benjamin T.G. Mayes

Doctrinal dissent has been raging for many years with the Reformed, the spiritual heirs of Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin.[1] Lutherans have been falling away from the faith of their fathers and following the dictates of their reason, becoming Calvinists, or worse, Unitarians. Society is more pluralistic than ever before. It is no wonder, then, that pastors and people are confused. They ask: How should we relate to the Calvinists? Can we accept their baptisms? Do they worship a different god? Are they heretics? Thankfully, we have seminary faculties who have answered these questions on the basis of God's word. One of these seminaries is located in Wittenberg. The year is 1619. The question is, "Is Calvinism a damnable sect?" And what is the answer? In this article, I will show that for Johann Gerhard, Philipp Nicolai, and the Lutheran faculty opinions collected by Georg Dedekenn, the "high orthodox" Lutheran opposition to Calvinism centered on the will of God and on Christology, but not on essential attributes of God such as simplicity, immutability, and eternity. Lutheran perceptions of Reformed error in the first few decades after the Formula of Concord show us what the burning issues of those days were, and can provide us with zeal and tools for our tasks today.

When I speak of the age of "orthodoxy" or the time of "high orthodoxy," I mean the time from the Book of Concord of 1580 through the death of Johann Gerhard in 1637. This was a period of scientific flourishing in theology, of a deeper use of Aristotelian scholastic philosophy, of a comprehensive systematization of dogmatics, and of omnifaceted apologetics.[2] In the period of Lutheran orthodoxy, the Lutheran churches defended the Christian message made normative in the Lutheran

[1] Hans Leube, *Kalvinismus und Luthertum im Zeitalter der Orthodoxie* (Leipzig, 1928; repr., Aalen: Scientia-Verlag, 1966).

[2] Robert Kolb, "Lutheran Theology in Seventeenth Century Germany," *Lutheran Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2006): 431–433. Other periodizations exist. See Markus Matthias, "Orthodoxie: I. Lutherische Orthodoxie," q.v. in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. G. Krause and G. Müller (Berlin, 1977–) [henceforth TRE]; Wallmann, "Lutherische Konfessionalisierung—Ein Überblick," 49–50; Kenneth G. Appold, *Orthodoxie als Konsensbildung: Das theologische Disputationswesen an der Universität Wittenberg zwischen 1570 und 1710* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 89–90.

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Confessions and did so with the use of Aristotelian philosophy, developing a unified churchly doctrine and defending it with sharp polemic against the other confessions.[3]

I. Johann Gerhard: Theological Commonplaces

Johann Gerhard has been called the "arch-theologian of the Lutheran Church" due to his penetrating insight and voluminous writing.[4] His *Theological Commonplace on the Nature of God* addresses many topics of contemporary interest regarding the doctrine of God, such as social trinitarianism, open theism, language for God, and divine suffering.[5]

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[3] This is how Hermann Schüssler describes Lutheran theology of this period, though he does not use the term "orthodoxy." Kenneth Appold, however, notes a significant degree of academic freedom among orthodox Lutherans at Wittenberg from 1570 through the end of the seventeenth century. Appold, *Orthodoxie als Konsensbildung*, 11, 317. See also Walter Sparn and Jörg Baur, "Orthodoxie, lutherische," in *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon: Internationale theologische Enzyklopädie*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch and Ulrich Becker, vol. 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 953–959. With the term "orthodox," the churches of the Reformation claimed for themselves the concept of the church found in the ancient Christian confessions. By claiming to be "orthodox," they claimed continuity with the Christendom of the Bible, of the ancient church, and of the first centuries. Matthias, "Orthodoxie: I. Lutherische Orthodoxie," 464–465; Johann Anselm Steiger, "The Development of the Reformation Legacy: Hermeneutics and Interpretation of the Sacred Scripture in the Age of Orthodoxy," in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 2, *From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 691–757, here at 702. Luther himself used the term "orthodox" to describe his teaching, and thus the term does not belong only to Lutheranism after the Formula of Concord, according to Jörg Baur, "Orthodoxie, Genese und Struktur," q.v. in TRE, here at 25:501–505. Opponents of the term "orthodoxy" in reference to Lutherans after the Formula of Concord include Heiner Kücherer, *Katechismuspredigt: Analysen und Rekonstruktionen ihrer Gestaltwerdung*, Predigt in Forschung und Lehre (Waltrop: Spenner, 2005), 154. Ernst Koch does not use the term. *Das Konfessionelle Zeitalter – Katholizismus, Luthertum, Calvinismus (1563–1675)* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2000). Unfortunately, the period of Lutheran orthodoxy has suffered from neglect, due especially to a view stemming from radical Pietism, which saw orthodox theology as lifeless, sterile, and focused on doctrine to the exclusion of piety. This same myth continues in the minds of many, though the period is now getting a fair amount of respectful and balanced attention; cf. Steiger, "The Development of the Reformation Legacy," 697–698.

[4] Erdmann Rudolph Fischer, *The Life of John Gerhard* (Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 2001), 295–296. See also C.F.W. Walther, "Lutherisch-theologische Pfarrers-Bibliothek," *Lehre und Wehre* 1 (1855): 300–301; Wilhelm Löhe, "Why Do I Declare Myself for the Lutheran Church?" trans. Holger Sonntag, *Logia* 17, no. 3 (2008): 28.

[5] Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces: On the Nature of God and on the Most Holy Mystery of the Trinity*, ed. Benjamin T.G. Mayes, trans. Richard J. Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007). See the chapters on the unity of the divine essence, on divine omniscience, eternity, justice, and immutability.

Gerhard marks a turning point in the Lutheran presentation of the doctrine of God. Before Gerhard, all the Lutheran dogmaticians started their presentation of the doctrine of God by discussing the Trinity, and they omitted any discussion of the divine attributes. Gerhard, on the other hand, began with the divine names before moving to the attributes, and only after that dealt with the Trinity. Later dogmaticians generally followed Gerhard in discussing the divine essence and attributes before the eternal relations of the divine persons in the Trinity. Robert Preus regretted this move of Gerhard's, but said that it was a necessary development, since it had not been discussed previously. Preus's wish was that Gerhard and the later orthodox Lutherans had begun with the Trinity and moved to the divine attributes after that.[6] Despite his displeasure with the ordering, Preus defended the Lutheran orthodox doctrine of God overall:

> the old Lutheran theologians, although discussing a number of philosophical questions and using a good deal of philosophical vocabulary, do not see God as some sort of neuter First Cause, but as the Lord of history who is also Creator of all. Theirs is a Biblical rather than a philosophical notion of God.[7]

A closer look at Gerhard's commonplace *On the Nature of God* shows, however, that some of Preus's concerns have a simple explanation. First, regarding the ordering of the systematic presentation—whether essence and attributes or Trinity should be taught first—an examination of Gerhard's presentation shows that he speaks of God as Trinity and that he confesses Christ the God-Man throughout his commonplace *On God.* Gerhard is not starting with a blank slate nor pretending not to know that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He takes the divine revelation as a whole and lets its wholeness shine through, even when he is discussing one part of that revelation in particular, such as the essence and attributes of God.[8] Gerhard never loses sight of the fact that the one true God is none other than the Holy Trinity.

Second, a reason for Gerhard's method of dealing with the attributes in such detail is the contemporary threat of Socinian unitarianism. At Gerhard's time, Socinianism had a home in Raków, Poland (Latin:

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[6] Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 2, *God and His Creation* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 16, 53–54.

[7] Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2:51.

[8] See how the Trinity and Christology are embedded in Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 5, 11–15, 57, 63, 90–95, 97–98, 102–105, 116, 137, 160–162, 170, 176, 190–191, 204 (*De natura Dei*, §§ 2, 12, 14–15, 58, 64, 82–87, 93, 95, 98, 105, 134, 166–167, 176, 182, 195, 213).

"Racovia"). Here, the unitarian theology of Fausto Sozzini and the Germans Valentin Schmalz (1572–1622) and Christoph Ostorodt (d. 1611) thrived by means of a secondary school (1603–1638), a seminary, and a publishing house, which produced over 250 unitarian titles between 1600 and 1638. One of their most popular books was the "Racovian Catechism," first published in 1605 in Polish and then translated into German in 1608 and Latin in 1609. The "Racovian Catechism" was an important piece of propaganda for the unitarianism promoted by Fausto Sozzini,[9] which Johann Gerhard called "Photinianism," after the early church heretic Photinus. In Gerhard's commonplace *On the Nature of God,* he constantly defends the dogmas of the Trinity and of the person of Christ against these "Photinian" objections. The Photinians were taking certain positions on the essence and attributes of God in order to undermine the doctrine of the Trinity. Faced with a serious threat, Gerhard first had to respond to this threat before he could proceed to the doctrine of the Trinity. For example, without first discussing God's eternity, the doctrine of the eternal begetting of the Son lacks a context. In many places it is clear that Gerhard discusses the essence and attributes of God with a view to defending the Nicene dogma of the Trinity against the Photinians. There is more work to be done here, but it would make sense if the incursion of Photinianism into Germany by means of the "Racovian Catechism" explained much of why Gerhard was the first Lutheran to bring in a detailed discussion of the divine attributes.[10]

Most of Gerhard's commonplace *On the Nature of God* deals with the divine attributes. Gerhard makes clear that the divine attributes are one with the divine essence and that they are distinguished only because of our conceptual weakness. He bases this claim upon the utter "simplicity of the divine essence, which excludes every composition of essence and of accidents without exception."[11] That is, God is utterly one. He is not made up of parts. So when we are talking about God's eternity, for example, this is nothing other than speaking of the one divine essence, yet as we conceive of it as being infinite with respect to time. This is an important

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[9] John C. Godbey, "Socinianism," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand, vol. 4 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 84.

[10] Richard Muller likewise notes the impact of the Socinians in provoking detailed discussions of the divine essence and attributes among the Reformed; see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed., vol. 3, *The Divine Essence and Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 91–92.

[11] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 114–115 (*De natura Dei*, §§ 104–105). See also Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism,* 2:55–59; cf. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics,* 3:289.

aspect of the standard Lutheran teaching on the divine attributes, an aspect that we will see already in Philipp Nicolai, and that has great importance for Lutheran views on the Reformed doctrine of God.[12]

How, then, did Gerhard, the writer of so many warm devotional writings,[13] approach the differences between Lutherans and the Reformed in general? In his theological commonplace *On the Church*, Gerhard argues against the Roman Catholics on behalf of "Protestants," not just Lutherans. He appeals to Geneva's burning of the antitrinitarian Michael Servetus in 1553 as proof that "we" do not agree with Servetus's heresy.[14] Gerhard also defends English Calvinists against the false accusations and slander of the Jesuit Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621).[15] But in his commonplace *On the Church*, Gerhard is also careful to distance himself from Calvin, and he agrees with Bellarmine that Calvin corrupts passages of the Old Testament that prove the Trinity and the divinity of the Son of God.[16] When discussing whether the leaders of the Reformed confession died a happy or a calamitous death, Gerhard writes, "We do not care very much how Oecolampadius, Zwingli, Carlstadt, and Calvin ended their lives."[17] At various times in his *Theological Commonplaces,* Gerhard uses the writings of Reformed authors such as John Calvin as witnesses to the truth; yet we

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[12] Gerhard's treatment in the *Commonplaces* is not the exhaustive presentation of his views on the divine essence and attributes. Within the *Commonplaces*, Gerhard refers to another work of his as being a fuller treatment of this topic. He refers his readers at many points to his series of disputations *De gloria Dei*; Johann Gerhard, *Disputationum Theologicarum, In Qvibus Gloria Dei Per Corruptelas Pontificias, Calvinianas & Photinianas labefactari ostenditur* (Jena: Tobias Steinmann, 1618) = Johann Gerhard, *Disputationum Theologicarum. A Johanne Gerhardo D. In Academia Jenensi conscriptarum & publicè habitarum Pars Prima* (Jena: Steinmann, 1625), 1–544. The translated title of this series of disputations is "Theological disputations in which the glory of God is shown to be undermined by the corruptions of the Papists, Calvinists, and Photinians."

[13] E.g., Johann Gerhard, *Meditationes sacrae (1606/7): lateinisch-deutsch*, ed. Johann Anselm Steiger (Stuttgart- Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2000); Johann Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations*, trans. C.W. Heisler (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1896; repr., Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 2000).

[14] Johann Gerhard, *Loci theologici cum pro adstruenda veritate tum pro destruenda quorumvis contradicentium falsitate per theses nervose solide et copiose explicati*, ed. Edward Preuss, vol. 5 (Berolini: Gust. Schlawitz, 1867), locus *De ecclesia*, § 213. (Preuss ed. 5:464). This commonplace has now appeared in English as *Theological Commonplaces: On the Church*, ed. Benjamin T.G. Mayes, trans. Richard J. Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010). See also Helmut Feld, "Servet, Michael," in *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* (Verlag Traugott Bautz), http://www.bautz.de/bbkl, accessed January 16, 2010 [henceforth *BBKL*].

[15] Gerhard, *Loci theologici*, locus *De ecclesia*, § 210, 224 (Preuss ed. 5:462–463, 473).

[16] Gerhard, *Loci theologici*, locus *De ecclesia*, § 214, 216 (Preuss ed. 5:464, 466).

[17] Gerhard, *Loci theologici*, locus *De ecclesia*, § 297 (Preuss ed. 5:590).

must also realize that when he does this he is simply using the testimonies of his adversaries against themselves, a tactic he uses against all of his theological opponents, whether Reformed, Roman Catholic, or Unitarian (which he calls "Photinian").[18] Are they heretics? When the Reformed speak about Christology and deny the real communication of divine properties to the humanity of Christ while trying to use the same vocabulary as the Lutherans, Gerhard calls this "the mark of heretics."[19]

When Gerhard turns his attention to the doctrine of God, he often notes and refutes Calvinist errors. These errors occur throughout the 1625 *Exegesis* commonplace *On the Nature of God*,[20] but they can be reduced to three main problems: (1) errors stemming from the Reformed view of the divine decrees (e.g., predestination), (2) errors stemming from Christology, and (3) errors stemming from the misuse of reason.

The errors stemming from the divine decrees occur in several places. In Gerhard's view, the Calvinist teaching of absolute double predestination conflicts with divine simplicity—that is, the fact that God is not composed of parts, but is utterly one. According to Theodore Beza (1519–1605) and Jerome Zanchi (1516–1590), God reveals in his word that he wants to save all human beings; but in his secret counsel he has willed that some people be saved and others be damned, regardless of Christ's atonement or their persistence in sin and unbelief. These are contrary wills of God. So Gerhard explains the conflict with divine simplicity: "Those who attribute contrary wills to God undermine the simplicity of the divine essence, for wherever there are contradictions of will, there is no room for the supreme and most perfect simplicity."[21] Thus, this Calvinist error on the doctrine of God's simplicity does not stem from what they say about simplicity itself, but from what they say about predestination. Similar errors arising from the Calvinist doctrine of absolute double predestination arise in the chapter

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[18] Johann Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 89 (*De natura Dei*, § 86).

[19] Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces: On Christ*, ed. Benjamin T.G. Mayes, trans. Richard J. Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 176 (*De persona et officio Christi*, § 183).

[20] In 1625, after Gerhard had finished his *Theological Commonplaces*, he published another volume, addressing Holy Scripture, the nature of God, the Trinity, and the person and work of Christ under the title *Exegesis, or a More Copious Explanation of Certain Articles of the Christian Religion.* They were often published with the earlier *Theological Commonplaces* and were not meant to be a replacement for the original commonplaces on these topics, but a supplement: Johann Gerhard, *Exegesis Sive Uberior Explicatio Articulorum De Scriptura Sacra, De Deo Et De Persona Christi in Tomo primo Locorum Theologicorum concisius pertractatorum* (Jena: Steinmannus, 1625).

[21] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 136 (*De natura Dei*, § 131).

on divine immutability, or "unchangeableness."[22] The Calvinist doctrine of immutability *per se* is not the problem. Gerhard does not oppose it, for example, as he opposes the doctrine of Conrad Vorstius on this point.[23]

The Calvinist teaching on the divine decrees especially runs against the divine attributes of goodness, mercy, justice, and perfection. On divine goodness, various Calvinist doctrines undermine this, though Gerhard only mentions them briefly. They are all related to the divine decrees. The doctrines are:

> (1) The absolute decree of reprobation without any consideration of unbelief. (2) The absolute decree of election through which the good and beneficial will of God, which is serious in seeking the salvation of humans, is restricted to a few. (3) The absolute decree of Adam's fall. (4) The absolute and fated necessity of all things and actions. (5) The cause of sin being referred to God.[24]

The Calvinist errors on divine mercy are the same as on divine goodness: absolute reprobation, God as the cause of Adam's fall, and limited grace. All of these undermine God's mercy. Likewise, the Calvinists err when they say that God's mercy itself is absolute, that is, not based or founded on anything, not even on something like the merit of Christ.[25]

On the attribute of divine justice, we find an interesting Lutheran teaching on the relation of God's will to the moral law. Here, Gerhard stresses that God's justice has no higher norm than itself and that God's justice does not act "contrary to the norm of equity set forth to us in the divine Law." "You see," Gerhard says, "though God may not receive a law from a superior, nevertheless He is the law to Himself and does not act contrary to His natural justice, the expression of which is set forth in the Law." As a result, Gerhard "condemns gravely" a statement in which Ulrich Zwingli says that God is outside the law and that he both can and does do all sins that he forbids to us.[26] So Gerhard is rejecting a view which would see the moral law as an arbitrary code imposed by a divine

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[22] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 151 (*De natura Dei*, § 152). See also 151–152 (§ 153).

[23] Vorstius (1569–1622), a Reformed theologian, was ordained by Theodore Beza but was soon suspected of Socinianism. His views were condemned by the Reformed at the Synod of Dort in 1619: "Vorstius, Conrad," *BBKL*.

[24] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 202 (*De natura Dei*, § 209).

[25] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 210, 213 (*De natura Dei*, §§ 221, 225). Their errors on divine justice and perfection are nearly identical to what was said about goodness and mercy: absolute reprobation and God as the cause of sin are again problematic: Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 218, 255 (*De natura Dei*, §§ 232, 294).

[26] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 220–221 (*De natura Dei*, § 236).

despot. Gerhard insists on seeing the moral law as a reflection of God's justice itself. This is a teaching which we will see anticipated and repeated in other writers, such as Philipp Nicolai.

I have said that all of these issues stem from the Reformed view of the divine decrees. Of course, the divine decrees are a function of God's will. It makes perfect sense, therefore, that in the chapter on God's will, Gerhard would have much to say against the Reformed doctrine of God. Gerhard opposes the Calvinist way of distinguishing "the will of the sign" from "the will of good pleasure."[27] The basic problem is that they say that these two ways of considering God's one will can be contrary to one another. For example, God says in his word that he seriously desires to save all human beings. This is what is called "the will of the sign." But in his secret counsel he decrees absolutely, without consideration of human sin and unbelief, the reprobation of the majority of mankind. This is "the will of good pleasure." According to Gerhard, this Calvinist explanation not only twists old, helpful scholastic distinctions and terminology, but it actually results in two contradictory wills in God. This conflicts with divine simplicity and immutability and makes God a liar.

Gerhard feels quite strongly about the Calvinist error regarding the hidden and revealed will of God:

> The Calvinists use this distinction also in the worst way, for they oppose the hidden and revealed wills to each other and assert wickedly that in the work of salvation God inwardly wills the contrary of what He outwardly revealed in His Word that He wills. . . . In those things that concern the work of salvation, we deny with all our might that one should establish a hidden will not only diverse from the one revealed in the Word but even opposed to it. In fact, we declare that this is wicked and blasphemous.[28]

As appears from Gerhard, the will of God is really a central issue among the Calvinist errors on the doctrine of God. Gerhard takes the Calvinists to task on the distinction between God's absolute and conditional will, the antecedent and consequent will, the effectual and ineffectual will, and the effecting and permitting will. He does not reject the distinctions and the terminology for all of these, but he objects to the way in which the Calvinists abuse them.[29] In general, Gerhard writes,

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[27] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 240 (*De natura Dei*, § 268).
[28] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 240–241 (*De natura Dei*, § 269).
[29] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 241–243 (*De natura Dei*, §§ 270–272, 275).

> *The Calvinists* . . . set the freedom to act, or God's free will, against the rest of the divine attributes. That is, because of His freedom to act, they attribute to God the sort of things that conflict with His goodness, righteousness, and wisdom. They say, for example, that "God drives people to sin," that "God has made an absolute decree of reprobation," etc. But if we say that this conflicts with the righteousness and holiness of God, they flee for refuge to the idea that "God is an utterly free agent and is subject to no laws." Yet God acts freely in such a way that He still does not act contrary to His own natural righteousness and goodness.[30]

So as we have seen, the Reformed doctrine of God's will and the divine decrees is a major issue in the doctrine of God. In polemicizing against his Reformed opponents, Gerhard spends perhaps most of his time on this issue within his 1625 commonplace *On the Nature of God*.

Second, several errors in the doctrine of God surface in the Calvinist approach to Christology. This was a major problem that surfaced over and over in Gerhard's commonplace *On the Nature of God*. Specifically, the Calvinists deny a real communication of divine properties to Christ's human nature. Thus, in the chapter on the divine attributes in general, this question arises: "*We teach that the [divine] attributes were communicated to Christ according to His human nature. Is it then right to infer that we are separating the essential properties from the [divine] essence and from each other?* Polanus . . . makes us out to be guilty of this crime."[31] The Polanus that Gerhard mentions here is Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf (1561–1610), a Reformed professor of the Old Testament in Basel, who was prolific in systematic theology.[32] Gerhard responds with various arguments, but finally appeals to the union of the two natures in Christ:

> If we prefer, however, to indulge our own reasoning rather than to stay in the footsteps of Scripture, let Polanus explain to us how the hypostasis of the Word itself is communicated to the flesh yet the hypostatic property [i.e., being eternally begotten] is not communicated to it. The first he cannot deny, unless he should go on to deny the union itself. The latter he cannot affirm, unless he would like to assert that Christ's human nature has been eternally begotten from the Father. Therefore as the infinite wisdom and power of God could find a manner and means by which the hypostasis of the Word was

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[30] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 246 (*De natura Dei*, § 278) (italics original). See also 251 (§ 287).

[31] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 119 (*De natura Dei*, § 111) (italics original).

[32] Erich Wenneker, "Polanus von Polansdorf, Amandus," *BBKL*.

> communicated to the flesh through the union (but not communicated immediately, that is, by a hypostatic property), so also He could find a means whereby eternity, infinity, etc., were not communicated immediately while omnipotence, omniscience, and the other attributes pertaining to the fulfillment of Christ's office were communicated [immediately].[33]

This is a very technical argument. Yet from it we see that the battle is on the field of Christology, though this extends by necessity at some points into the doctrine of God.

Against the Calvinists, especially Polanus, Gerhard defends the communication of divine properties to the human nature of Christ in his chapters on divine wisdom, glory, omnipotence, and omnipresence.[34] Regarding omnipresence, a Calvinist slur used in referring to a Lutheran was "ubiquitarian," from the Latin word *ubique*, "everywhere," because of the Lutheran teaching that "Christ, according to both natures, is present in heaven and earth and governs all things."[35] In response to Calvinist claims that would undermine the Lutheran position, Gerhard lists fourteen arguments for the omnipresence of Christ according to both natures.[36] Actually, the amount of space that Gerhard devotes to refuting the Reformed christological errors is relatively short in the commonplace *On the Nature of God*. The bulk of his arguments on Christology are reserved for the next commonplace, *On Christ*.[37]

The third main center of Calvinist errors, according to Gerhard's commonplace *On the Nature of God*, is the misuse of reason. At the beginning of the volume, Gerhard opposes Zwingli on the issue of natural theology, that is, how much our reason can know about God apart from revelation. Ulrich Zwingli, Rudolf Gualther (1519–1586), and others said that "from the book of nature one can have the sort of knowledge of God that is sufficient for salvation, something we energetically deny."[38] While this view was perhaps not the dominant Reformed view, Gerhard includes evidence that Zwingli's successor, Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), shared

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[33] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 120 (*De natura Dei*, § 111).

[34] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 198, 236, 258–259 (*De natura Dei*, §§ 202, 263, 304).

[35] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 176–177 (*De natura Dei*, § 182).

[36] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 176–178 (*De natura Dei*, § 182). See also 136, 181 (§§ 131, 187). A related issue is divine omnipresence, regardless of the issue of the omnipresence of Christ's humanity. Here, Gerhard notes several errors on the part of the Reformed; Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 173–174 (*De natura Dei*, § 179).

[37] Gerhard, *On the Person and Office of Christ*, §§ 66, 92, 110, 119, 121, 123, 141, 152, 158, 178, 195, 205, 243, 246, 288, 314–315, 327.

[38] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 62 (*De natura Dei*, § 64).

Zwingli's error, as did many other German Reformed theologians.[39] Against them, Gerhard is able to quote Calvin, using his common tactic of quoting his adversaries against themselves.[40]

The other place where the Calvinist misuse of reason plays a role is in the chapter on divine omnipotence. Here, Gerhard sets forth a "Luther" quote that Luther probably did not say: "It is a chief basis of Calvinist doctrine that most of his defenders think that God cannot do what He promises in His Word." The Calvinist doctrines of the Lord's Supper and the presence of Christ in the church make it clear that they indeed do this, says Gerhard. In addition, the Calvinists say "that God cannot do those things that involve a contradiction in the judgment of our reason." And "they deny that God is able to accomplish what is beyond nature and reason." Gerhard explains the problem with this: "In so doing, they make the measure into something measured, for the power of God is the measure that measures and is the efficient cause of nature, human reason, and all created things."[41] Later, again quoting his adversaries against themselves, Gerhard quotes Calvin and Polanus against this limitation of God's omnipotence. Polanus said, "God can do many things that man's reason cannot comprehend. The incarnation of the Word and the other mysteries of faith are examples of this." Gerhard then asks,

> Why, then, do they declare (wickedly) from the leadership and comprehension of reason so daringly that God cannot cause one body to be in many places? Yet from these words, it readily appears what great impudence it is for the Photinians, who walk in the footsteps of the Calvinists, to say: "It implies a contradiction and is simply impossible for God to be one in essence and three in persons, for God to beget a Son from eternity of His own essence, for the divine and human natures in Christ to be personally united," etc.[42]

Gerhard's point is that the Calvinists and Photinians, that is, the unitarian Socinians, use human reason to determine what God cannot do, and thereby they undermine divine omnipotence.[43]

All in all, Gerhard spends the most time in this commonplace opposing not the views of the Calvinists, but the views of the Photinians

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[39] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 83–84 (*De natura Dei*, § 81).

[40] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 89 (*De natura Dei*, § 86).

[41] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 189–190 (*De natura Dei*, § 194).

[42] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 195 (*De natura Dei*, § 199). The same issue also occurs in the chapter on divine wisdom, 235 (§ 261).

[43] Gerhard deals with a few other Calvinist errors regarding the misuse of reason: *On the Nature of God*, 195–196, 239 (*De natura Dei*, § 200, 267).

and the semi-Photinian Conrad Vorstius, whose views were by no means typical among the Reformed. After them, however, Gerhard seems to spend more time polemicizing against the Reformed than against the Roman Catholics. This tendency to polemicize against the Reformed is even stronger in the Commonplace *On the Person and Office of Christ,* yet it does not hold true in every commonplace. In the commonplace *On the Church*, for example, Gerhard spends nearly all of his time debating the views of the Jesuit Robert Bellarmine.

Aside from the errors of individual Reformed writers, which are not necessarily representative of Reformed Christians as a whole, Gerhard sees three main areas of disagreement between Lutherans and the Reformed: (1) divine decrees, which have to do with God's will, predestination, atonement, and the cause of sin; (2) Christology, especially the communication of divine properties to the human nature of Christ, which has implications for the doctrine of the Lord's Supper; and (3) the use of reason in theology, which plays itself out especially in the chapter on divine omnipotence. In the midst of all this disagreement, however, Gerhard does not state that the Reformed have a different god, or that they are not Christians. The Calvinist errors on God stem, for the most part, from errors in other articles of faith and make their way to the doctrine of God if they are being consistent. As Gerhard criticizes the Reformed doctrine of God, he never implies that they are trying to teach a completely different God. Also, his argument is never so general as, "They teach divine simplicity, but we do not," or, "They teach divine immutability, but we do not." Instead, his argument is that they claim to teach simplicity, immutability, etc., just as we do, but their doctrine of decrees and their view of Christology conflict with this. It is also significant that in his next commonplace, *On the Trinity*, Gerhard finds no problems with the Calvinist teaching, except for isolated places where Calvin and a few other Reformed theologians do not see the Trinity in certain passages of the Old Testament.[44] Yet in the commonplace *On the Nature of God*, the errors of the Calvinists seem very serious indeed.

Some questions arise from this. Does every error concerning God's works immediately imply an error in the doctrine of God? Also, because God's will is nothing other than his utterly simple essence as it works toward creation, is each and every error with regard to God's will and work immediately a case of idolatry? Gerhard does not answer those sorts of questions. But a generation earlier, Philipp Nicolai did.

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[44] Gerhard, *On the Person and Office of Christ* (*De persona et officio Christi*, §§ 65, 145, 154, 155).

II. Philipp Nicolai: On the Calvinists' God and Their Religion

We have heard from the arch-theologian Johann Gerhard. Now let us hear from the writer of the king and queen of Lutheran chorales,[45] Philipp Nicolai. Nicolai is significant to our examination of the Lutheran opposition to the Reformed doctrine of God, due not to his hymn-writing, nor to his emphasis on missions, nor to his meditations on eternal life, nor to his doctrine of the ministry,[46] but due to his treatise from 1597, *On the Calvinists' God and Their Religion*.[47] In this heavily polemical book, which is but a sample of his polemic against the Reformed, Nicolai essentially denies that the Reformed are Christian. This work was produced in a polemical context, where accusations were flying on both sides. Nicolai was responding to a book entitled *Pseudochristus*, "False Christ," by Eberhard Blyttershagen, who apparently was accusing the Lutherans of christological heresy, stating that our Christ is a different Christ than the one revealed in the Scriptures.[48] Nicolai's intention was to return the favor, trying to demonstrate that the Calvinists have a heretical doctrine of God and thus worship a different god.[49] The first part of Nicolai's book is on the Calvinists' god. The second is on their religion. As we proceed, we will see that the heart of Nicolai's objections is his firm faith that God is love.[50]

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[45] "Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern" (O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright) and "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme" (Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying), included in *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 395, 516; see also Fred L. Precht, *Lutheran Worship: Hymnal Companion* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 82–84, 194–196.

[46] Philipp Nicolai, *Commentariorum De Regno Christi, Vaticiniis Propheticis Et Apostolicis Accommodatorum Libri Duo*, 2 vols. (Francofurti Ad Moenum: Spies, 1607); Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "Philipp Nicolai (1556–1608): Theologian, Mystic, Hymn Writer, Polemicist, and Missiologist: A Bibliographical Survey," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 39 (1968): 432–461, esp. 453–454; Philipp Nicolai, *FrewdenSpiegel deß ewigen Lebens, Das ist: Gründtliche Beschreibung deß herrlichen Wesens im ewigen Leben* (Franckfurt am Mayn: Spieß, 1599; repr., Elberfeld: Verlag des Lutherischen Büchervereins, 1909); Jörg Baur, "Das kirchliche Amt im Protestantismus: Skizzen und Reflexionen," in *Das Amt im ökumenischen Kontext*, ed. Jörg Baur (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1980), 122–126.

[47] Philipp Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calviniſten Gott und ihrer Religion, in etliche Frage unnd Antwort . . . verfaſſet und zuſammen getragen. Sampt angehengter Kurtzer Form, wie ein chriſtlicher eynfältiger Haußvatter ſein Kindt und Haußgeſind, für demſelbigen unſeligen Calvinismo trewlich warnen, und davon abhalten ſoll* (Franckfurt am Mayn: Johann Spieß, 1597). Translations from this work are my own.

[48] Eberhard Blyttershagen, *Pseudo-Christus: Grundt und eigentliche beſchreibung, auch gegeneinander haltung deß einigen und waren Chriſti . . . Und dargegen des falſchen errichten Chriſti* (Hanau: Antonius, 1596).

[49] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calviniſten Gott und ihrer Religion,* fol. Aiij r.

[50] See Anne M. Steinmeier, "Nicolai, Philipp," q.v. in *BBKL*.

The first problem with the Calvinist view of God, according to Nicolai, is their doctrine of absolute reprobation. In catechetical question-and-answer format, he sets forth the question: "What kind of a god do the Calvinists have?" He answers:

> They invoke a god who, without any grace or mercy, ordains and reprobates many hundreds of thousands of human beings—even the majority of all of Adam's children—to eternal death, the abyss of hell, and eternal hellfire without any fault or merit of theirs, and even though they had not given him any reason for this false, horrible, and cruel reprobation, nor had they ever provoked him to do this with their sinful works.[51]

Nicolai objects to a Reformed doctrine of a reprobation that is not in view of sin and unbelief, which makes God the primary cause of damnation.

Nicolai is talking about predestination. There was a change among Lutherans on the doctrine of predestination shortly after the Formula of Concord. FC XI teaches that God's election from eternity is the cause of faith and is not based on foreseen faith. Nevertheless, within two decades after the Formula of Concord, most Lutherans were teaching that God's election from eternity is based on foreseen faith, or at least on a foreseen non-rejection of grace, and his reprobation from eternity is based on foreseen sin and disbelief.[52] Philipp Nicolai seems to echo these sentiments.

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[51] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 2.

[52] Gottfried Adam, *Der Streit um die Prädestination im ausgehenden 16. Jahrhundert: Eine Untersuchung zu den Entwürfen von Samuel Huber und Aegidius Hunnius* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970); Robert D. Preus, "The Influence of the Formula of Concord on the Later Lutheran Orthodoxy," in Lewis W. Spitz and Wenzel Lohff, eds., *Discord, Dialogue, and Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977); Robert D. Preus, "Article XI. Predestination and Election," in Wilbert Rosin and Robert D. Preus, eds., *A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978); Robert D. Preus, "The Doctrine of Election as Taught by the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians," *Quartalschrift* 55 (1958): 229–261; Reinhold Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, 3rd ed., vol. 4/2 (Erlangen: A. Deicherische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1920), 548; C.F.W. Walther, "Dogmengeschichtliches über die Lehre vom Verhältniß des Glaubens zur Gnadenwahl," *Lehre und Wehre* 26 (1880): 42–57, 65–73, 97–110, 129–137, 161–170. For an example of how FC XI was understood in the seventeenth century, see Johannes Huelsemann, "Praelectiones academicae in librum concordiae," in *Vindiciae s. scripturae per loca classica Systematis Theologici: Praelectiones academicae in librum concordiae: Patrologia succincta, vice Appendicis Loci de Ecclesiâ Representativâ: Annotationes ad Breviarium Theologicum, Accessere denuo Animadversiones in Bellarminum de Verbo DEI et Dissertatio de Necessitate Conjunctionis Evangelicorum cum Romano Papatu* (Leipzig: Michael Russworm, 1679), 691–743.

In each part of this catechetically fashioned attack on Reformed doctrine, Nicolai proposes a simple, if loaded, question, answers it, and then proceeds to cite his Reformed opponents at length, lest he seem to be setting up a straw-man to knock down with such force. Often, Nicolai will follow up by citing passages of Scripture which say the exact opposite of the Reformed citations he had produced.

Nicolai opposes not only the Reformed doctrines of Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Christ, and Predestination, but also their doctrine of God, tracing their error regarding God's work to an error regarding his nature:

> What kind of an essence does this god have? Answer: As is the work, so is its essence. Therefore, if he cruelly and unmercifully determines, assigns, dedicates, and ordains the poor, miserable children of Adam to hellfire and eternal torment without their fault and without any cause being given, out of mere whim, then you must believe that this cruel and terrible condemnation is one and the same with the nature and essence of this lord god.[53]

According to Nicolai, therefore, the Calvinist error about absolute reprobation has to do with God's will, which is one with the divine essence. That is a necessary result of the doctrine of divine simplicity, which both the Lutherans and the Reformed confessed.[54] It is also a way of thinking that allows one to take any error from anywhere in theology and immediately make it an error in the doctrine of God.

After quoting Reformed authors who stress that an error regarding God's will is indeed an error regarding God's essence, Nicolai declares:

> Now, from this we see, and it becomes sufficiently obvious, that no devil in hell can be so damned, base, depraved, and evil as the Calvinists' lord god depicts himself: he not only burns with calamitous hate and unmerited reprobation of the human race, but also, according to his nature and according to his essence, is the hostile condemnation itself.[55]

When this doctrine of absolute reprobation is combined with the Reformed emphasis on the glory of God and his sovereignty, an interesting question and answer result:

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[53] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 8.

[54] AC I confesses that God is *impartibilis, ohn Stuck*. *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 11th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 50 [henceforth *BSLK*]; Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 114 (*De natura Dei*, § 104); Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:271–298.

[55] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 9.

> To what end does the Calvinists' god bring about this reprobation and destruction of the poor people? Answer: Just as the cattle and animals were ordained by God to be slaughtered for the food and nourishment of people, so also the Calvinists' god has ordained many thousands of human beings to eternal death, without any cause being given except that he has his glory and pleasure in such bloodthirst.[56]

Just as Johann Gerhard would do twenty-eight years later in his *Theological Commonplaces*,[57] here Nicolai notes that one of the fundamental differences between his Reformed opponents and the Lutherans has to do with God's relation to the moral law. Nicolai rejects the view that God's law is not descriptive of him, and therefore that God can be pure and holy, even though by nature he is the cause of sin and damnation. He rejects the opinion that "no law is given to God the highest master; therefore he does not sin even though he does and works the same thing in man that to man is sin, but to him it is not sin."[58] A generation later, Gerhard identified the same error regarding the relation of the law to God's character. For the Calvinists that Gerhard and Nicolai opposed, God's will is sovereign above the law. For the Lutherans, God's will *is* the law.[59] As a result of seeing God as sovereign above and contrary to the moral law, the Calvinists had no trouble making God the cause of sin, according to Nicolai. The Calvinists' "lord god" was a cause of David's adultery, he causes murder and the murderer's execution, and he causes the sin and vice of all evil people; he decreed and caused Judas's betrayal of Christ, and he causes the godless to despise the gospel.[60]

Nicolai asks, "What do you think, now, about the Calvinists' lord god?"

> Answer: From these testimonies of the adversaries it is sufficiently obvious that their god must be a profane, lecherous, unchaste, devious, evil, deceptive, and bloodthirsty Moloch. No murderer, no thief, no villain, no traitor could begin his condemned vice, murder, theft, whoring, incest, treason, or any similar, horrible vice—much less carry it out and fall into eternal hellfire—if he were not moved and driven to it by the Calvinistic lord god with the secret cord of his inner will.[61]

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[56] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 20.
[57] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, 220–221 (*De Natura Dei*, § 236).
[58] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 10–11.
[59] See FC SD VI, 15; V, 17 (*BSLK* 966, 957).
[60] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 10–18, 24–26.
[61] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 26.

Nicolai continues: "Do you really think, then, that the Calvinists honor and invoke the devil himself, instead of the true, living God? Answer: I confess it from the bottom of my heart, and I say it as a certain truth." As proof, he also mentions that Zwingli taught that the virtuous pagans would be saved and would dwell in heaven.[62] Of course, as we saw from Gerhard, this was not the position of John Calvin. So Nicolai may not always have sought out representative Reformed writers as his dialogue partners.

In the second part of the book, Nicolai proceeds to show on the basis of the five chief parts of the catechism how the Calvinist religion is the abomination of desolation.[63] Nicolai says again that the Calvinist errors deal not just with God's works, but also with his nature. The Bible teaches that God is love, and that we are to be formed into the image of God, which is love. God never acts against love. But the Calvinists say that the law of love, the Decalog, does not apply to God. Therefore he can reprobate people arbitrarily and without respect to their foreseen sin.[64] The Calvinists make a double will of God. With one he commands the moral law, with the other he reprobates and causes sin.[65] "The devil and his Calvinists" deny that God's mercy extends to the whole world and that he desires the salvation of all human beings from his heart, and that God's will was for Christ to die for all human beings. Instead, God the Father never so loved the reprobate sinners that he gave his only-begotten Son.[66]

Other errors mentioned by Nicolai include the Calvinists' view of God's omnipotence, the issue of Christ's omnipresence according to his humanity, limited atonement, the communication of divine properties to the humanity of Christ, the inamissibility of faith and the Holy Spirit, Baptism as a mere sign, and their opinion about the spiritual eating of

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[62] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 27, 30.

[63] Nicolai does not count confession as one of the chief parts of the catechism, though he does consider the *Apology of the Book of Concord* to be a Lutheran confessional statement on the same level as the Book of Concord itself. Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 32–33, 106–107; Timotheus Kirchner, Nicolaus Selneccer, and Martin Chemnitz, *Apologia, Oder Verantwortung deß Christlichen Concordien Buchs: In welcher die ware Christliche Lehre . . . vertheydiget: Die Verkerung aber vnd Calumnien, so von vnruehigen Leuten wider gedachtes Christlich Buch im Druck ausgesprenget, widerlegt werden; Desgleichen ein warhafftige Historia der Augspurgischen Confession . . . Gestellet durch etliche hierzu verordnete Theologen, Jm Jar nach der Geburt vnsers Herrn . . . Jesu Christi, 1583* (Dreßden: Stöckel, 1584).

[64] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 33–34.

[65] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 37–38.

[66] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 47.

Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper.[67] In a concluding "warning to children and servants," Nicolai says that the Calvinists have made the devil their lord god, and he claims that they say that people should not worship the man Jesus.[68] Nicolai's rejection of the Calvinists is total and final.

When we step back and consider the points of conflict, rather than the implications of those points of conflict, a few basic themes emerge from Nicolai's polemic. Strongest of all is the focus on God's will, love, benevolence, and predestination. Nicolai cannot stand the Calvinist doctrine of an unconditional, absolute reprobation, which is not in view of foreseen sin and unbelief. The will of God is the center of his critique of the Reformed doctrine of God. Another strong theme is the doctrine of Christ, with the attendant issue of the real presence in the Lord's Supper. But Nicolai does not mention any particular problems with the Reformed doctrine of God with regard to attributes such as eternity, simplicity, immensity, and immutability. His point is not that the Calvinists have a false doctrine of God's essence and attributes *per se*, but that their false doctrine of God's will and work vitiates their doctrine of God and sets a false god in place of the true God of the Bible. Only on omnipotence does he identify an error in an attribute other than God's will, and this stems from the Calvinists' approach to Christology. Everything else stems from their view of God's will and moral character.

Nicolai's book is the harshest of polemic, and the jury is still out as to whether he has criticized mainstream Calvinism or only the extreme statements of individuals. For our purposes, it does not matter. What is important is that Nicolai anticipates the same central concerns that Gerhard would raise a generation later. Divine decrees and Christology are the main problems. Yet for Nicolai, an error concerning God's works immediately implies an error in the doctrine of God. "As is the work, so is also its essence," he said, taking that principle from his Reformed adversaries.[69] Is each and every error with regard to God's will and work immediately a case of idolatry? Philipp Nicolai seems to say yes. His, however, was not the only voice. Pastors and laymen within Lutheran Germany continued to have questions about how they should deal with their Reformed neighbors. For answers, they turned to theological faculties and famous theologians.

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[67] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 41–42, 50–51, 53, 58, 61–62, 67–72, 76, 80–81, 87, 91–96.

[68] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 110–111.

[69] Nicolai, *Kurtzer Bericht von der Calvinisten Gott und ihrer Religion,* 8.

III. Georg Dedekenn: Treasury of Counsels and Decisions

C.F.W. Walther, the nineteenth-century father of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and a scholar of Lutheran orthodoxy, once wrote these words about a collection of pastoral advice that was published in the age of orthodoxy:

> Scarcely any question of conscience could arise on one of the aforementioned topics, which does not find its answer by famous theological colleges or individual well-known theologians, occasionally out of their rarest works and manuscript documents which never appeared in print, which university and consistorial archives contained.[70]

Walther was writing about an enormous collection of casuistry that was compiled by Georg Dedekenn. Casuistry consists of cases of conscience, or the hard questions that arise in life, where one does not know what to do. In seventeenth-century Lutheran Germany, if one had a question of conscience, one could write to a theological faculty and, for a fee, receive a response steeped in Scripture and common sense. Georg Dedekenn was the associate pastor of Philipp Nicolai in Hamburg, and his publication, the *Treasury of Counsels and Decisions,* published first in 1623 and then expanded in 1671, is an important source for understanding pastoral practice, ethics, and the hard doctrinal questions that arose in the lives of seventeenth-century Lutherans.[71]

The Reformed doctrine of God was one of those hard questions. Lutheran pastors and laypeople asked for official opinions from Lutheran faculties and individual theologians as to how they should think about and deal with differences on the doctrine of God. The counsels and decisions in Dedekenn's *Treasury* stress the danger of Calvinist teaching, due especially to their limitation of God's saving will and their approach to Christology. The counsels we will examine, however, which emphasize the seriousness

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[70] C.F.W. Walther, "Lutherisch-theologische Pfarrers-Bibliothek," *Lehre und Wehre* 4 (1858): 347.

[71] Georg Dedekenn, ed., *Thesaurus consiliorum et decisionum*, 3 vols. (Hamburg: P. Langen, 1623); Georg Dedekenn, ed., *Thesauri Consiliorum Et Decisionum Appendix, Quædam huic Operi inserenda continens* (Hamburg: Michael Hering, 1623); Georg Dedekenn and Johann Ernst Gerhard, eds., *Thesauri Consiliorum Et Decisionum Volumen Primum [– Tertium]* (Jena: Zacharias Hertel, 1671); Christian Grübel, ed., *Thesauri Consiliorum Et Decisionum Appendix Nova, Continens quædam inserenda Operi Dedekenno-Gerhardino* (Jena: Zacharias Hertel, 1671). See Benjamin T.G. Mayes, "Counsel and Conscience: Post-Reformation Lutheran Casuistry According to The Dedekenn-Gerhard Thesaurus Consiliorum et Decisionum and its cases on Marriage and Divorce" (Ph.D. diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2009).

of Reformed errors, also do not contain very much criticism with regard to their doctrine of God.

"Is Calvinism, according to doctrine and person, a damnable sect?" That is a question proposed to the theological faculty of Wittenberg. The faculty gave an answer dated July 30, 1619, which was reprinted in Dedekenn's *Treasury*. The Wittenberg faculty explains that Calvinists are part of the visible church of Christ, for they are baptized in the name of Jesus and confess him, although they do not teach and believe correctly about him in all points. There are four characteristics of a "destructive sect" *(verderblicher Sect)*: First, the error must go against the foundation of the Christian faith. Second, it must be defended intentionally. Third, the church is divided and offended by it. Fourth, a destructive sect does not allow itself to be taught, but wants to maintain its correctness, and thus it remains stubbornly in its opinion. With regard to the first point, the Wittenberg faculty states that the Calvinists do, indeed, err in the foundation, which is Christ. They divide his two natures by denying any real communion of natures and properties, and in particular by denying the omnipresence of the life-giving Son of Man, that is, Christ according to his humanity. This is, in fact, the same error that Nestorius made. They also deny that God's Son shed his blood, saying that bloodshed belongs only to the man Jesus, who is united with the Son of God. Regarding Christ's office, the Calvinists deny that Christ is the mediator and high priest for all human beings, and that he died for all, calls all to His kingdom, and desires salvation for all. Regarding justification, they exclude Christ's active obedience from his merit and ascribe his merit only to his suffering and death. They also ascribe suffering only to the human nature in Christ. The Wittenberg faculty notes that the Calvinists have other errors against the foundation of the Christian faith, but for the sake of brevity they do not list them here. The Calvinists are a destructive sect, they say, about whom St. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, "There must be divisions among you." The Wittenbergers conclude:

> From this report about Calvinism, one can conclude how those people are to be considered who confess that doctrine, which they understand well and defend steadfastly until their death. Because the doctrine removes the foundation of faith and therefore is destructive, it must follow that all who knowingly and steadfastly cling to this destructive sect are not on the right path. Because they still want to defend it, they make themselves damnable (whether they are teachers or other people), for whoever is not with Christ is against him. And whoever contradicts the truth to the point of death cannot comfort himself with the hope of salvation. Therefore Dr. Luther considered

> the Zwinglians and all Sacramentarians as heretics and members cut off from the church of God, simply because of the one error of denying that Christ's body and blood are received in the venerable Sacrament with one's physical mouth (. . . Jena German, vol. 8, fol. 381b). And St. Paul writes, without distinction of preachers and laity, about those who offend and mislead others with their false doctrine: "Whoever makes you err will bear his judgment, no matter who he is" [Gal. 5:10]. And again, "I wish that those who destroy you would be eradicated" [Gal. 5:12]. Gal. 5:4, 10; Ps. 12.[72]

From the Wittenberg faculty we see that in 1619, before the syncretistic controversies of the seventeenth century burned their hottest,[73] the most important Lutheran theological faculty considered Calvinism to be a damnable heresy. Yet on the other hand, when they set forth the Calvinist errors, they centered on the incarnation and the limited scope of God's saving will. The doctrine of God's essence and attributes, as well as the doctrine of the Trinity, were not mentioned as problematic. This was perhaps because the faculty wanted to keep its response short and non-technical, but one cannot avoid surmising that the differences between the Reformed and the Lutherans were not centered on the doctrine of God, since the faculty acknowledges that they are part of the visible Church of Christ. "Are they heretics?" Yes, but not because of their doctrine of God *per se*.[74]

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[72] Georg Dedekenn and Johann Ernst Gerhard, eds., *Thesauri Consiliorum Et Decisionum Volumen Primum, Ecclesiastica Continens: . . . Der Erste Theil: In welchem die Geistliche und Kirchen-Sachen begriffen . . . In richtigerer Ordnung/ mit gantzen Sectionibus, vielen Quæstionibus, Remissoriis und Responsis vermehret/ und mit vollkommenern Indicibus verbessert* (Jena: Zacharias Hertel, 1671), 273–274. The translation is my own.

[73] See "Consensus Repetitus Fidei Vere Lutheranae," in Abraham Calov, Johann Meisner, Johann Andreas Quenstedt, and Johann Deutschmann, eds., *Consilia Theologica Witebergensia* (Franckfurt am Mäyn; Nürnberg: Endter, 1664), 928–995; Heinz Staemmler, *Die Auseinandersetzung der kursächsischen Theologen mit dem Helmstedter Synkretismus: eine Studie zum "Consensus repetitus fidei vere Lutheranae" (1655) und den Diskussionen um ihn*, Texte und Studien zum Protestantismus des 16. bis 18. Jahrhunderts (Waltrop: Spenner, 2005); Benjamin T.G. Mayes, "Syncretism in the Theology of Georg Calixt, Abraham Calov, and Johannes Musäus," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68 (2004): 291–317.

[74] On September 23, 1619 (just a few months later), the Wittenberg faculty again gave an opinion on whether Calvinists can be saved. Here, again, they stress that "the Calvinist sect is damnable, since it goes against the foundation of faith." But they make a distinction: "Not everyone who holds this misleading doctrine is to be damned for that reason." Those who do the misleading, whether preachers or laity, who intentionally and stubbornly contradict the true doctrine, have no hope of salvation. Others are not well informed about true doctrines (such as the oral eating of the body of

In a long opinion dated March 18, 1619, the theological faculty of Tübingen deals with the same question. As the Calvinist errors, they list God as the cause of sin, predestination, limited atonement, the call of the gospel, the misuse of the distinction of "will of the sign" and "will of good pleasure" (i.e., when the gospel is preached, God does not really mean it for the majority of mankind), Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Their conclusion is that Calvinists cannot find consolation from their doctrine.[75] Here, once again, there is no mention of problems with the Calvinist doctrine of the divine essence, attributes, and the Trinity *per se*. But of course, they also do not mention the christological errors which underlie the error on the Lord's Supper. Here the focus is on comfort, and the cluster of doctrinal errors is centered on the divine decrees and the limitation of God's will to save.

The doctrine of God and the Trinity becomes concrete in Holy Baptism, where the confession of the Trinity is a constitutive element of the sacrament. In the answers given to many questions, Dedekenn's *Treasury* makes clear that Calvinists cannot be admitted as sponsors at a Lutheran baptism, though one judgment from Tübingen says that if they are not public detractors of our faith, they can be *witnesses* of the baptism.[76]

But what should be thought about Calvinistic baptism? If the Reformed have so many errors that impinge on the doctrine of God, can they even give a legitimate baptism? Michael Muling (fl. 1602–1623)[77] says

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Christ, or ubiquity), and yet they blaspheme the true doctrine which they do not understand. "To these people, too, we cannot give much hope of their salvation, although it may be more tolerable for them than for the misleaders. For the blaspheming of holy truth always damns, whether it occurs knowingly or unknowingly." Others among the misled, however, remain in their simplicity and believe their false teachers, but do not blaspheme the truth. The Wittenberg faculty explains, "Although such people, if God wanted to deal with them according to his justice, would also have little hope of their salvation—for a blind man leads the blind and they both fall into a pit—nevertheless it is right to have patience with them, as with people weak in faith, and with Christian love to hope for the best, and to pray for them, that God may be gracious to them, for they know not what they do." Also, Christ rules among his enemies and preserves his seed among such poor, misled people. Thus, the Lutherans do not condemn entire churches. Dedekenn and J.E. Gerhard, *Thesauri Consiliorum Et Decisionum Volumen Primum*, 281–282, referring to the preface to the Formula of Concord.

[75] Dedekenn and Gerhard, *Thesauri Consiliorum Et Decisionum Volumen Primum*, 283–289.

[76] Dedekenn and Gerhard, *Thesauri Consiliorum Et Decisionum Volumen Primum*, 474–476, 483–487.

[77] Zedler gives only a list of his works, but no other information. Johann Heinrich Zedler, "Muling (Michael)," *Grosses vollständiges Universallexicon aller Wissenschaften und*

that the baptisms given by heretics who err and speak falsely about the Trinity are to be condemned. Muling gives as examples "the Arians, Servetians, Antitrinitarians, Tritheists, and the like." If these people are converted to the true faith, they must be given Christian Baptism for the first time, not a "rebaptism." But other "sectarians" err in some articles of Christian doctrine, yet they hold an orthodox position on the three distinct Persons and the one, indivisible divine essence. These groups, whom Muling leaves unnamed, have true Baptism if it is administered according to Christ's word.[78] Johann Gerhard makes the same distinction, and puts Arians, Manichaeans, and Photinians in the first class. In the second class he puts the Roman Catholics ("Papists"). He also gives an example of a true baptism that took place in Reformed Heidelberg.[79] Paul Tarnov (1562–1633) makes the same distinction and adds Macedonians and Valentinians to Gerhard's first class, while making clear that the Calvinist errors do not affect the substantial parts of Baptism, but only their purpose and effect. Tarnov says clearly that this latter class, including the Reformed, can baptize legitimately.[80]

From this brief foray into the casuistry literature of Lutheran orthodoxy, we have seen that according to the Lutherans, the Reformed errors center on the divine decrees, with related issues such as predestination, limited atonement, and Christology. The Reformed doctrine of God is not so corrupt that they could not administer true Christian Baptism, even though many of their other errors are set forth as destructive and damnable.

IV. Conclusions

For Gerhard, Nicolai, and the counsels presented by Dedekenn, the Reformed errors stem from and center on the will of God and Christology, not from the essential attributes of God, such as eternity, immutability, and simplicity. Because of God's simplicity, however, the will of God cannot be

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Künste (Halle and Leipzig: Johann Heinrich Zedler, 1732), http://www.zedler-lexicon.de, accessed on November 22, 2008. From the title page of a printed funeral sermon, we gather that Zedler was a parish rector and superintendent in Belzig, Brandenburg, around the year 1606. Michael Muling, *Eine Christliche Leichpredigt . . . Bey dem Begräbnus des Erbahren Wolweisen Herrn Johann Otto/ weiland Bürgermeisters zu Beltzigk/ welcher den 15. Julii dieses instehenden 1606. Jahrs . . . verschieden . . . Gehalten durch M. Michael Mulingius, Pfarrern und Superintendenten doselbst* (Wittenberg: Müller, 1606).

[78] Dedekenn and Gerhard, *Thesauri Consiliorum Et Decisionum Volumen Primum*, 399–400.

[79] Dedekenn and Gerhard, *Thesauri Consiliorum Et Decisionum Volumen Primum*, 397–399, quoting Gerhard, *Loci theologici,* locus *De baptismo*, § 22ff.

[80] Dedekenn and Gerhard, *Thesauri Consiliorum Et Decisionum Volumen Primum*, 400.

separated from his essence. Nicolai connects the will of God with the doctrine of God's nature and concludes that the Reformed have a false God, the devil. The other authors we have examined emphasize the severity of Reformed errors, but do not go so far as to exclude them from the visible church. Except for this issue, we have noticed remarkable consistency in the Lutheran objections to the Reformed doctrine of God. They center on the will of God (decrees, predestination, limited atonement) and on Christology (denial of the real communication of properties, and also the denial of the presence of Christ's body and blood on earth in the Lord's Supper). Gerhard, writing at the most length among our samples, also adds the misuse of human reason as a central problem with the Reformed doctrine of God.

As Lutherans in our day struggle to know who they are and what the truth of God's revelation is, a look at the history of polemics from Gerhard, Nicolai, and Dedekenn can yield much fruit. First, from history one can sometimes learn what worked and what did not. Of course, this can be difficult. Scholars continue to debate the legacy of Lutheran orthodoxy, particularly as to whether it should be blamed for what followed (e.g., pietism, rationalism), or whether it should be studied and valued for its own achievements. Second, from the study of the doctrine of God in the age of Lutheran orthodoxy, we can come into contact with rich insights into Scripture, and with a wisdom that transcends the ages. Finally, the history of polemics can serve as a mirror, showing whether we take these issues as seriously as both the Lutherans and Reformed of that time did. If we do not, we can ask ourselves whether our lack of concern is better or worse than their zeal.

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Luther's Threefold Use of the Law

Edward A. Engelbrecht

Although students of Luther agree that the doctrine of the use of the law is a cornerstone in his thought laid early in the Reformation, several scholars since the mid-twentieth century have claimed that Luther taught only two uses of the law,[1] even though Luther explicitly described a "threefold usefulness of the law" (*dreyerley brauch des gesetzes*) in 1522 and a "third office . . . of the law" (*3. officium . . . legis*) in 1528.[2] Scholars of the only-two-uses consensus have not examined these two passages side-by-side, nor have they viewed Luther's teaching in light of the medieval exegetical tradition. Consequently, it will be argued below that the only-two-uses consensus is not properly grounded in history. This article will examine Luther's writings on the threefold use and third office of the law, viewing the passages in the context of the ancient and medieval exegetical tradition, and interacting with the detailed studies of Gerhard Ebeling and Martin Schloemann.[3] It will demonstrate that Luther indeed taught a threefold use of the law, an insight that would become standard in Lutheran theology.[4]

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[1] Wilhelm Maurer provided an impressive list, which William Lazareth included in "Antinomians: Then and Now," *Lutheran Forum* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 19. The list includes Paul Althaus, Heinrich Bornkamm, Gerhard Ebeling, Werner Elert, Ragnar Bring, Anders Nygren, Lennart Pinomaa, Regin Prenter, Gustaf Wingren, Karl Heintz zur Mühlen, Oswald Bayer, Bengt Hägglund, Lauri Haikola, Gerhard Heintze, Wilifried Joest, and Martin Schloemann. To this list can be added the American scholars Timothy Wengert, Lowell Green, Gerhard Forde, and perhaps others.

[2] Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Scriften*], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 10.I:456–457; 26:17. There is also a passage from Luther's second Antinomian Disputation (1538) that mentions a third use of the law, but Werner Elert concluded that this example was a later addition to the text and reflected not Luther's teaching but Melanchthon's. Werner Elert, "Eine theologische Fälschung zur Lehre vom tertius usus legis," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 1 no. 2 (1948): 168–170.

[3] Gerhard Ebeling, "On the Doctrine of the *Triplex Usus Legis* in the Theology of the Reformation," *Word and Faith* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1963), 62–73. Martin Schloemann, *Natürliches und gepredigtes Gesetz bei Luther: eine Studie zur Frage nach der Einheit der Gesetzesauffassung Luthers mit besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Auseinandersetzung mit den Antinomern* (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1961).

[4] For more on this topic, see my forthcoming book, Edward A. Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law: Luther's Use of the Law for the Christian Life* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011).

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I. Origins of the *usus legis* Terminology

Scholars have struggled to explain how the sixteenth-century reformers developed the technical term "use of the law" (*usus legis*).[5] The terminology can be traced back to Augustine (354–430), who was a major contributor to the doctrine of the use of the law.[6] In a letter to Asellicus and a sermon on Romans 8:12–17, Augustine employed the expression *utilitas legis*, the "benefit" or "usefulness of the law," an expression that he began to use consistently.[7] Medieval writers used the term in interpretations of Romans 2:15, Galatians 3:19, and 1 Timothy 1:8–9. Peter Lombard[8] and Thomas Aquinas[9] enumerated four uses of the law, while Petrus Aureoli[10] and Nicholas of Lyra[11] settled on three. On Galatians 3:19, Nicholas wrote, "Here [Paul] responds to the question by showing the *threefold usefulness of the law*."[12] The same expression appears in the early Luther.

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[5] See, e.g., Ebeling, "Doctrine of the *Triplex Usus Legis*," 73; Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions, 1529–1537*, trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 82.

[6] Victor Ernest Hasler, *Gesetz und Evangelium in der alten Kirche bis Origenes* (Zurich/Frankfort am Main: Gotthelf-Verlag, 1953), documents examples of the early Christians' enduring interest in biblical teachings on the law.

[7] *Patralogia cursus completus: Series latina*, 217 vols., ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1844–1864), 33:892; 38:851 [henceforth PL]. For English translations, see Letter 196:2, 5–6, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Letters (156–210)* (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2004), 312–313; Sermon 156:3, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Sermons (148–183)* (New Rochelle, New York: New City Press, 1992), 98–99. One may see in Augustine's expression the basis of the "theological *terminus technicus*" that Ebeling sought. The development of this expression likely stemmed from 1 Tim 1:8–9.

[8] PL 192:127. "Quid igitur lex? id est cur a Deo data est lex? Quae est ejus utilitas?" The text includes bracketed and parenthetic references to Augustine and Ambrose, from whom Peter drew his insights.

[9] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, tans. F.R. Larcher, Aquinas Scripture Series 1 (Albany, NY: Magi Books, Inc., 1966).

[10] See Gal 3 in *Compendium Biblie totius* (Argentinae: 1514). This text and others were brought to the attention of modern scholars by Heinrich Denifle, *Die abendländischen Schriftausleger bis Luther über Justitia Dei (Rom. 1,17) und Justificatio* (Mainz: Kirchheim & Co., 1905), 202.

[11] Nicholas de Lyre, *Postilla super totam Bibliam* (de Venetiis: impensis Octaviani Scoti, 1488). Nicholas's method is thought to have significantly influenced Luther, who exhibits clear dependence upon Nicholas of Lyra's *Postilla* in, e.g., his 1515 Lectures on Romans, available in Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 25 [henceforth *LW*].

[12] "Hic respondet ad q[uaesti]onem ostendens *triplicem legis utilitatem*" (emphasis added).

In 1509, 1510/11, and 1516, Luther had opportunity to encounter this terminology in his studies of Augustine, Peter Lombard, medieval glosses on Paul's letter to the Galatians,[13] and perhaps other theological writings. Timothy Wengert suggests that Luther's earliest expression for the use of the law came in 1521.[14] In view of the ancient and medieval teaching, however, we may see the matter differently.

In his scholia on Romans (c. late 1515), Luther revealed his indebtedness to Paul and to the medieval theology of the use of the law.[15] In commenting on Romans 3:20, a classic passage for defining the theological use of the law, Luther wrote of the "work of the law" (*opus legis*; Rom 2:15) and described the law as "useful" (*quod non inutilis sit*; also *utilis*),[16] relating Paul's "work of the law" (Vulgate, *opus legis*) to the medieval theological term "usefulness of the law" (*utilitas legis*). The 1515/16 lectures on Romans demonstrate Luther's theological maturation and how the doctrine of the law relates to the doctrine of the gospel.[17]

Luther's scholion on Romans 14:1 includes references to 1 Timothy 1,[18] a passage which, according to Luther, presents as Paul's opponents Jewish teachers who insist on the necessity of fulfilling legal requirements for salvation. Luther links Romans 14 to other Pauline passages on the abrogation of Jewish laws, including the Law of Moses. Luther also condemns a medieval antinomian movement, the "Picards," who emphasized the abrogation of rules and practices. This is important for understanding that Luther was from early on opposed to antinomianism and did not intend to introduce it when describing the abrogation of the Law of Moses. Luther still used the medieval expression *nova lex* (new law) to describe the New Testament, though his understanding of the distinction between law and gospel was already at work.[19]

In the glosses to his 1516/17 Lectures on Galatians, Luther provided the following heading for the third chapter: "The Galatians are rebuked

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[13] Kurt Aland, ed., *Hilfsbuch zum Lutherstudium*, 4th ed. (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1996) lists collections of Luther's marginal notes on these texts during those years.

[14] Timothy Wengert, *Law and Gospel: Philip Melanchthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over* Poenitentia (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 191.

[15] Luther's scholia on Romans are available in WA 56 and *LW* 25.

[16] *LW* 25:240; WA 56:253–254.

[17] Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 51.

[18] *LW* 25:485–488. This point provides helpful context for understanding Luther's 1528 Lectures on 1 Timothy at the end of this article.

[19] *LW* 25:488–490.

and the apostle, showing the imperfection of the Law of Moses, says that righteousness is by faith; with a consideration of the usefulness of the law."[20] Here one sees again Luther's law and gospel distinction as well as the use of the law within that distinction. Another early reference to the usefulness of the law appeared in the 1519 Lectures on Galatians, where Luther provided a detailed explanation of how the law increases transgression. Luther asked, "Who would ever have expected such an answer, one that is certainly opposed to all who are wont to speak intelligently about the usefulness of the Law?"[21] He followed with a long argument associating Galatians 3:19 with Romans 5:20, engaging with the interpretation of Jerome, whose commentary on Galatians focused on the civil use of the law when answering Paul's question of Galatians 3:19.[22]

In 1521 Luther wrote about the *officium legis* (office of the law),[23] an expression that he would consistently use interchangeably with "use of the law" in later writings.[24] Luther's terms *utilitas legis* and *officium legis* show the influence of medieval commentators and canon law on his theological development. Although the term *utilitas legis* was foundational to Luther's doctrine of the law, scholars of the only-two-uses consensus have failed to recognize it.

In the *Weihnachtspostille* (Christmas Postil) of 1522, Luther provided his most extensive early explication of the use of the law.[25] The elector commissioned these sermons to guide evangelical preachers. The Weimar Edition of Luther's works lists twenty-six German printings (1522–1544)

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[20] "Increpantur Galat<h>ae ac ostendens apostolus imperfectionem legis Mosaicae dicit iusticiam esse ex fide: annectendo legis utilitatem." WA 57.II:20. Elsewhere in this chapter, Luther provided a second reference to the use of the law: regarding Paul's question in Gal 3:19, he wrote, "Obicit sibi ipsi aliorum motivum: videtur enim lex superflua, immo inutilis, si non iustificat." (He poses to himself the others' argument. For the law appears unnecessary, or rather useless, if it does not justify.) WA 57.II:26.

[21] *LW* 27:269; WA 2:522 has *de utilitate legum*.

[22] Cf. Peter Lombard's emphasis on Rom 5:20 in PL 192:127.

[23] *LW* 44:302.

[24] Melanchthon used the expression earlier in his 1521 *Loci Communes* (CR 29:154). The same expression appeared in the first pages of Gratian's *Decretum*, which Luther and Melanchthon would have read early in their careers. It appears that Luther or Melanchthon adapted this term from canon law for describing the uses and effects of the Law of Moses. Luther purchased a copy of *corpus iuris canonici* in 1505 when he began study of canon law. Ironically, he burned volumes of canon law after Roman officials began burning his books; E.G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 20.

[25] Unfortunately, this passage is rarely considered by current advocates of the only-two-uses consensus.

and two printings of Martin Bucer's Latin translation (1525 and 1526).[26] These sermons were among Luther's most widely distributed—and therefore influential—writings. They were in constant use throughout Lutheran regions, spreading his views on the use of the law.

Historians of doctrine have focused on a portion of Luther's 1522 sermon that described a twofold use of the law,[27] but have largely neglected or not understood a particularly significant passage with explicit reference to a "threefold use of the law." In Luther's sermon for New Year's Day on Galatians 3:23–29,[28] we see three attitudes toward the law, that is, three ways in which man conducts himself with reference to it. Some utterly disregard it, boldly opposing it by a dissolute life. To them it is practically no law. Others, because of the law, refrain from such a course and are preserved in an honorable life. But while outwardly they live within the law's prohibitions, inwardly they are enemies of their tutor. The motive behind their conduct is the fear of death and hell. They keep the law only externally, or rather, it keeps them. Inwardly they neither keep it nor are kept by it. Still others observe it both externally and with the heart. Those who keep the law in this manner are the true tables of Moses, written upon outwardly and inwardly by the finger of God himself.

The Lenker edition, cited here, obscures Luther's reference to the use of the law. Luther begins this passage with the expression *dreyerley brauch des gesetzes*, which is the German equivalent to Nicholas of Lyra's *triplicem legis utilitatem*.[29] Luther provides a much more extensive explanation of the

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[26] WA 10.I:viii–ix.

[27] See, e.g., Ebeling, "Doctrine of the *Triplex Usus Legis*," 64.

[28] Martin Luther, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, trans. John Nicholas Lenker and Eugene F.A. Klug (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 6:272–274; WA 10.I:457–458 [henceforth Lenker]. Legal historian John Witte Jr. writes, "Luther also touched lightly on a third use of the law. This use, grounded in St. Paul's discussion of the law as 'our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ' (Galatians 3:24), became known in the Protestant world as the 'educational,' 'didactical,' or 'pedagogical' use of the law. Law, in this sense, serves to teach the faithful, those who have already been justified by faith, the good works that please God. Luther recognized this concept without explicitly expounding a doctrine of the third use of the law. He recognized that sermons, commentaries, and catechism lessons of the many Old Testament passages on law are directed, in no small part, to teaching the faithful the meaning of God's law." John Witte Jr., *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 103–104.

[29] "Aus Lyra hat nämlich der Autor die dreifache utilitas legis genommen. . . . Lyra selbst war aber hierin abhängig von Pet. Aureoli." (From Lyra, of course, the author [Luther] has taken the threefold *utilitas legis*. . . . Lyra himself, however, was dependent in this on Petrus Aureoli.) Denifle, *Die abendländische Schriftausleger*, 202. Denifle

threefold use as it relates to Galatians 3 and broader Pauline theology. Before considering more of this passage, however, a closer examination of the history of its interpretation will be presented.

II. Ebeling's Assessment

Although Gerhard Ebeling was well aware of Luther's reference to a *dreyerley brauch des gesetzes* as a potential source for the Reformation doctrine of a third use of the law, he dismissed the possibility of a connection between Luther's teaching here and the dogmatic tradition of a third use:

> The threefold use of the law which Luther speaks of here, bears solely on the question of fulfilling the law. . . . Luther expressly describes this third method in a way that excludes the *tertius usus legis* as Melanchthon understands it. . . . This distinction of a threefold use of the law is only inserted by Luther in the form of a parenthesis in a context where the real topic is as plainly as may be the *duplex usus legis*, in the sense that there are said to be "two things for which the law is necessary and good, and which God expects of it." . . . Our conclusion therefore is, that the formula "threefold use of the law" is indeed found in Luther for the first time, yet it only expresses a passing thought and is then dropped again, while at the same time the doctrine of a twofold use of the law is already established in essence and still awaits only its final conceptual formulation.[30]

Note well that Ebeling assesses this passage based on what was to come about twelve years after it was written—Melanchthon's understanding expressed in the 1535 *Loci Communes*—rather than on the broader history of Western Christian thought. Ebeling seems to have been unaware of the ancient and medieval tradition on the use of the law.[31] He also seems to have dismissed prematurely the relevance of this passage because it does not speak in the same manner as Melanchthon or later dogmatic theologians. Ebeling's focus on finding the mature dogmatic expression of the Reformation prevents him from taking into account the manner in which Luther taught the doctrine of the law.[32]

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published his research in the era during which Luther scholars such as Kawerau supported the idea that Luther taught a threefold use of the law. The next generation of scholars, such as Elert and Ebeling, somehow missed this historical insight as they worked to establish the two-uses consensus.

[30] Ebeling, "Doctrine of the *Triplex Usus Legis*," 64–65.

[31] Ebeling, "Doctrine of the *Triplex Usus Legis*," 73.

[32] Ebeling also characterizes Luther's threefold teaching as "the form of a parenthesis," which allows him to dismiss its importance. Yet it is noteworthy that other

Ebeling's assessment does, however, provide helpful caveats. Earlier in the text, for example, Luther does indicate that he will write about two responses to the law.[33] Ebeling is correct in noting that within this passage Luther distinguishes what "God expects of [the law]" and what man does with the law. The following table summarizes Luther's teaching in this passage:

Divine and Human Uses of the Law (1522)

Divine use one:	Preservation of discipline
Divine use two:	Humbling through the granting of self-knowledge
Human (mis)use one:	Bold opposition by a dissolute life
Human (mis)use two:	Outward keeping of the law, or being kept by the law
Human use three:	Outward and inward keeping of the law

Modern scholarship, influenced by the dogmatic tradition, has tended to describe only the divine use of the law, that is, the manner in which the Holy Spirit uses the law in a person's life. In this passage, however, Luther clearly has in mind the manner in which man uses and misuses the law, which was a topic for earlier theologians, as found in the *Glossa Ordinaria*[34] and even Paul in 1 Timothy 1:8–9. In fact, Luther wrote about the divine and human uses of the law alongside one another throughout his career.

Because Luther does not explicitly enumerate a third divine use in this passage, Ebeling rejects it as an example of the teaching of a third use. Not all scholars, however, have agreed fully with Ebeling's assessment. The

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historians have characterized 1521–1522 as especially important for Luther's development of the doctrine of the law and the distinction between law and gospel. See, e.g., Berhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 52. Lohse explains that the conflict with Karlstadt in the winter of 1521–1522 caused Luther to reflect deeply on the uses of the law and the dialectical relationship between law and gospel. Lohse sees Luther writing especially about the civil use of the law at this time.

[33] "Alszo sehen wyr disze tzwey stuck auch ynn allen menschen." (Thus we see these two parts also in all men.) WA 10.1:452. The Lenker translation added the heading "The Office of the Law." *Complete Sermons* 6:270.

[34] "Lege autem legitime utendi multiplex est modus, ut secundum aliud justus, et secundum aliud injustus recte dicatur legitime uti lege." (Now, there are many ways of lawfully using the law, so that the righteous are correctly said to be lawfully using the law in one way, and the unrighteous in another way.) PL 114:625.

1986 *Bekenntnisschriften* follows a reference to this passage with the word "triplex," meaning that the editors take the passage from the *Weihnachtspostille* as teaching a threefold use of the law.[35] Also, there was in the early twentieth century a scholarly consensus on this question, whose adherents included Gustav Kawerau, Reinhold Seeberg, Friedrich Loofs, Karl Aner, and Heinrich Denifle.[36]

Readers should note the fact that Luther does provide three positive statements of the law's use, with the third being the use of the law by the believer. There is also a divine action under this third category: "This class are [sic] the tables of Moses, written upon outwardly and inwardly by the finger of God himself."[37] Luther remarkably describes the believer's outward life and inward heart as the "tables of Moses," making the righteous man an embodiment of the divine law. He follows with extensive comment on man's use and abuse of the law, which also requires careful assessment, since Luther continues to comment on the use of the law throughout this passage.

III. The Pattern of Luther's Teaching

Luther's dialectical and rhetorical approach in the *Weihnachtspostille* is to present a contrast between those who misuse God's law and those who use it properly. He first describes three classes of those who use or misuse the law.[38] He then repeats the teaching by illustrating it with an extended analogy based on Israel's responses to the Law of Moses.[39] We shall consider these passages in order, beginning with the description of the three classes of mankind:

> The first class are righteous neither without nor within; the second are only outwardly pious and not in heart; but the third are thoroughly righteous. Upon this point Paul says (1 Tim 1,8), "But we know that the Law is good, if a man use it lawfully." But in what way is it lawfully used? I answer, "Law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless" (verse 9). And what are we to understand by that? Simply that he who would preach the Law aright must be governed by these three classes. He must not by any means preach the Law to the third class as an instrument of righteousness; this were perversion.

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[35] *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 10th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 962n2; the reference is to WA 10.I:457,2–458,18.

[36] See Werner Elert, "The Question of the Law's 'Third Function,'" in *Law and Gospel*, trans. Edward H. Schroeder (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

[37] Lenker 6:273.

[38] WA 10.I:456,19–457,13.

[39] WA 10.I:457,14–458,14.

> But to the first class such preaching is in order. For them is the Law instituted. Its object is that they may forsake their dissolute life and yield themselves to the preserving power of their tutor. However, it is not enough for them to be guarded and kept by the Law; they must learn also to keep it. So, in addition to the Law and beyond it, the Gospel must be preached, through which is given the grace of Christ to keep the former. There is a considerable difference between observing the Law and being preserved by it; between keeping and being kept. The first class neither keep it nor are kept; the second are kept; and the third keep it.[40]

Luther then extends and applies the threefold usefulness of the law, emphasizing the use of the three classes as a guide to preachers. Knowing the audience(s) should help preachers to proclaim the law appropriately. Luther then follows with his biblical analogy. The Lenker edition again hides Luther's theological term "use of the law" by not including the term "use" in its translation. Luther literally introduces the analogy as "three attitudes toward the use of the Law" (*drey weyse am brauch des gesetzs*).[41] Luther's analogy includes a time when the law is given, that is, twice under Moses, and a time when the Law of Moses is not given, that is, the time of Joshua, when the law is fulfilled by faith.[42]

As noted above, Ebeling emphasizes that Luther's entire discussion of the threefold use of the law occurs in the context of his teaching about two offices or uses of the law. Ebeling, however, does not seem to have considered the larger dialectical and rhetorical pattern of Luther's teaching, which is summarized as follows: (1) first use, (2) second use, (3) first misuse, (4) second misuse, (5) third use, and (6) an analogy illustrating the earlier points. Because Luther describes the use of the law in terms of a contrast, he naturally divides his teaching on the third use of the law from the first two uses. As one explores later passages from Luther, one should watch for this contrast and pattern of teaching.[43]

Ebeling makes an additional point on Luther's sermon on Galatians 3:23–29: "The exposition of Gal. 3.23–29 in the *Weihnachtspostille* of 1522 . . . does in fact contain the expression 'three-fold use of the law,' which Bucer

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[40] Lenker 6:273; WA 10.I:456–457.

[41] Lenker 6:273–274; WA 10.I:457–458.

[42] Luther's concept of the "time of the law" is important for understanding how he wrote about the use of the Law of Moses, especially as he interpreted Gal 3.

[43] Cf. also the progression in the *Glossa Ordinaria* for 1 Tim 1:8–9, where two purposes of the law are plainly presented, followed by a digression on the human need for and use of the law.

in his Latin translation of 1525 renders literally as *triplex usus legis*."[44] Ebeling is correct in his claim that this is the earliest appearance of *usus legis* yet noted, the term Luther would later use in his 1531 Lectures on Galatians and that Melanchthon would use in the 1535 *Loci Communes*.[45] Since Luther delivered his Galatians lectures and Melanchthon wrote the *Loci* in Latin, it is tempting to conclude that both consulted Bucer's Latin translation of Luther's sermon on Galatians and so settled on the term *usus legis* rather than the ancient and medieval *utilitas legis*. Yet the possibility remains that it was a medieval theologian that coined the term *usus legis*.

IV. The January 15, 1528 Lecture on 1 Timothy

Luther reflected again on the use or office of the law on January 15, 1528. His comments are complex and even contradictory at points, which is likely why scholars have overlooked them. One scholar who did examine this passage was Martin Schloemann, who considered the development of Luther's doctrine of the law by studying Luther's interpretation of 1 Timothy 1:8–9. Schloemann expressed surprise that other scholars had not studied Luther's comments on the law in the lectures on 1 Timothy, since he saw in them a repudiation of the third use of the law.[46] Schloemann seems, however, to have misunderstood Luther's comments in the lectures because he was not familiar with the ancient and medieval teaching about the uses of the law, and also because he did not include in his research Luther's observations from the 1522 *Weihnachtspostille*—Luther's most extensive early commentary on the topic, which cited and interacted with 1 Timothy 1.

In the Lectures on 1 Timothy, Luther wrestles with the opinions of his opponents and the question of how to describe the role of the law in the life of a believer.[47] His main point was made in commenting on 1 Timothy 1:8.

> To sum up all of this: Use the Law as you wish. Read it. Only keep this use away from it, that you credit it with the remission of sins and

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[44] Ebeling, "Doctrine of the *Triplex Usus Legis*," 62–63.

[45] Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1469–1536) used the term *usus legis* in later commentaries, but I have not determined when the expression first appeared in his writings, since a limited number of editions are available to me. Erasmus's *In epistolam Pauli ad Galatas Paraphrasis* (Argentina, 1520), 49, assumes awareness of the medieval expression *utilitas legis*; see also the 1522 *Paraphrases in Novum Testamentum*, in *Opera Omnia* (Lugduni: Petri Vander, 1706), 954.

[46] Schloemann, *Natürliches und gepredigtes Gesetz bei Luther*, 26n73.

[47] See *LW* 28:231n17. In the broader context, Luther referred to his 1524 treatise *Against the Heavenly Prophets*. The concerns of that treatise reemerged in the 1 Tim lectures.

> righteousness. Beware of making me righteous by the Law. Rather use it to restrain. You must not give the Law the power and virtue to justify.[48]

Here Luther voices his chief concern. He supports the use of the law for both believers and unbelievers, but is concerned that no one ascribe to the law the power to justify. "The Law is abused when I assign to the Law more than it can accomplish. Good works are necessary and the Law must be kept but the Law does not justify."[49]

Luther next comments on 1 Timothy 1:9, which stirs further reflection on the same subject:

> The Law frightens and causes trembling—these are the spiritual effects of the Law. It really has a double function: in an external way to repress violence and spiritually to reveal sins. It restrains the wicked to prevent their living according to their own flesh, and it shows the Pharisees their sins to keep them from pride. Satan, every wicked theologian, and even nature cannot bear to have their works condemned. Those who have the firstfruits of the Spirit have the battle to fight against confidence in our own works.[50]

Luther's pattern of thought is as follows: (1) the first use restrains sinners, (2) the second use reveals sin, (3) the law is misused by Satan, wicked theologians, and natural reason, and (4) righteous men battle against confidence in works. This, stated in brief, is a pattern of argument similar to the one used in his 1522 sermon. Luther pairs up a description of the first and second uses of the law, followed with a description of the misuse of the law.

Luther closes that day's lecture by commenting on the Christian life:

> The Law is laid down *for the lawless*. This gives the Law both its civil and spiritual functions: that wicked man is restrained and is led to a knowledge of himself. Those are the two functions. By its civil function it restrains crass sinners who rush in before they reveal all things as free. This must be the Law with its own punishment. Many people are greedy, and yet they live with a beautiful and holy appearance. Paul in Rom. 1 assails the Gentiles for their crass and manifest sins. In chapter 2 he assails the very decent-appearing Jews who beneath their hypocrisy kept encouraging the worst sins so that

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[48] *LW* 28:231–232.

[49] *LW* 28:232.

[50] *LW* 28:233. The statement "Good works are necessary" would later get Melanchthon in trouble with both the Antinomians and the Gnesio-Lutherans.

> these holy sinners are put to shame. Rom. 2. There we have the true use, and you should not assign more to the Law than to restrain and humble the proud saints that they may be led to understanding. When this occurs, there is no further function of the Law.[51]

In this lecture Luther presents a new biblical analogy based on Paul's argument in Romans, which condemned first the Gentiles and then the Jews with the first and second uses of the law. At this point he even concludes that there are no other uses. He then attacks an unidentified opponent for misusing the law, typical of his pattern of argument presenting use then misuse for contrast:

> Why, then, do you preach that one is justified thereby? The just man ought not have the Law except as a restraint and to reveal sin. But it does not take away sin. But in the case of manifest sinners, it restrains; in the case of secret sinners, it reveals. In the case of the just man, it cannot restrain, because there is nothing to restrain; it cannot reveal, because he has done nothing concealed. It is the good use of the Law to restrain and to reveal sin; but it is misuse thereof to say that it takes away sin.[52]

He does not state who these false preachers are, but the scholia on Romans indicates that they were likely the Jewish teachers described in 1 Timothy 1.[53]

A potential cause of confusion, however, is Luther's assignment of the twofold use of the law to "proud saints," believers addressed in Romans, and the "just man rather than the unjust." He then seems to contradict this point by stating that the just man has nothing to restrain or conceal, remembering the wording of 1 Timothy 1:9. Luther fails to include a clear statement of how *simul justus et peccator* factors into the use of the law. The day's lecture closed in a most confusing way, illustrating that Luther had not finally and clearly settled on one way to talk about the role of the law in the life of a believer, though he knew what he did not want to say—that the law justifies sinners.

V. The January 20, 1528 Lecture on 1 Timothy

When Luther begins the next lecture, he expresses himself with greater clarity and confidence. This transition from one lecture to the next is

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[51] *LW* 28:234.

[52] *LW* 28:234.

[53] Luther was not rebuking his colleagues Agricola and Melanchthon, with whom he had recently discussed the use of the law. They had disputed about the role of the law in repentance; neither of them had argued that one is made righteous through the law.

significant for understanding the flow of the passage, yet Schloemann seems to have overlooked it in his analysis. Luther states:

> We have treated these two points: the Law is good, and it was not laid down for the just. I have also mentioned that we understood those two points as characteristic for recognizing Christians. The wicked do not understand that the Law is not for the just man. Against this, Rom. 13:10 proclaims that love is the critical point of the Law, and beyond that it says (Rom. 7:16): "The Law is good." The two functions of the Law are to reveal sinners and restrain them.[54]

As in the previous lecture, Luther here defines the first two offices or functions of the law as ways in which the law acts upon those who hear it. The work of the Holy Spirit is to use the law to restrain sinners and reveal sin, driving a person to despair of his own righteousness. Luther also notes that the wicked do not understand the use of the law, which leads them to misuse it; this is in keeping with Luther's typical pattern of argument.

Luther then defines a third office of the law. He makes this point at the beginning of this lecture, after he has collected his thoughts and can speak more clearly. Rather than describing the prophetic use of the law or "the law of the gospel" as a late-medieval theologian would do, Luther describes a use of the law passively and negatively:

> The third function, however, to remove sin and to justify, is limited to this: The Lamb of God, and not the Law, takes away sin. It is Christ who removes sin and justifies. Consequently, we must distinguish between the function of the Law and that of Christ. It is the Law's function to show good and evil, because it shows what one must do and reveals sin, which one must not commit. The Law therefore is good because it shows not only evil but also the good which one must do. But beyond that it does not go. It does not kill Og and King Sihon. It merely reveals good and bad; Joshua [does the rest].[55]

The law does not justify or remove sin. Christ fulfills this office for the hearer's sake. Luther does not speak first of the Spirit using the law, nor does he speak of the law's effect on the one hearing it. Yet he emphasizes that the law still reveals good and evil for the believer. This basic use of the law does not go away. In this explanation, Luther safeguards the office of Christ to justify and the office of the law to reveal right and wrong. Though fulfilled by the office of Christ, the law still stands.

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[54] *LW* 28:235.

[55] *LW* 28:235.

In this description of the third function of the law, Luther returns to the analogy used in his 1522 sermon. There Luther used a three-part biblical analogy, including (1) the golden calf incident, (2) the veil incident, and (3) the conquest under Joshua. Here, Luther skips the first two parts of the analogy to focus directly on the third: "[The law] does not kill Og and King Sihon. It merely reveals good and bad; Joshua [does the rest]." In this analogy, Luther links his earlier thoughts about a threefold use/misuse by mankind with the three offices of the law described in the 1 Timothy lectures. In other words, this is another connection and point of consistency in Luther's thinking about a threefold use of the law. This again calls into question Ebeling's conclusion that the 1522 sermon did not have to do with Luther's teaching of a threefold use of the law. In both passages, Luther writes about the human use/misuse and the divine use of the law. In studying these passages, in which Luther explicitly mentions a threefold use of the law and three offices of the law, a broader picture of Luther's thinking about the law emerges, which is illustrated in the following table:

Luther's Uses or Offices of the Law

Divine Use 1: Restrain (WA 10.I.:454–455; 26:16; *LW* 28:234–235)	Misuse 1: Bold opposition (WA 10.I:456,10–11; 26:16; Lenker 6:272; *LW* 28:234)	Righteous man's use 1: Live together in peace (WA 10.I:454,17; Lenker 6:271); forsake the dissolute life (WA 10.I:457,6; Lenker 6:273)
Divine Use 2: Bring about knowledge of sin (WA 10.I:454–455; Lenker 6:270–271; WA 26:16; *LW* 28:234)	Misuse 2: Mere outward obedience (WA 10.I:456,15; Lenker 6:273); self-justification and hypocrisy (WA 26:16; *LW* 28:234)	Righteous man's use 2: Self-knowledge leading to repentance (WA 10.I:455,5–6; Lenker 6:271–272; WA 26:16; *LW* 28:234)
Divine Use 3: Write tables of Moses both inwardly and outwardly (WA 10.I:456,18; Lenker 6:273); reveal good and evil (WA 26:17; *LW* 28:235)	Misuse 3: Return to the law for justification (not specifically enumerated by Luther)	Righteous man's use 3: Observe and keep the law both inwardly and outwardly (WA 10.I:256,17; 257,13; Lenker 6:273)

VI. Conclusion

Augustine provided the term *utilitas Legis* (usefulness of the law). The medieval theologians drew on the classical, biblical, and patristic traditions to arrive at enumerations of the usefulness of the Law of Moses. This effort appears to have begun at the University of Paris in the thirteenth century, some two hundred years before Luther and Melanchthon. The medieval glosses supplied everything necessary for the Reformation-era doctrine of the law: (1) biblical basis, (2) distinction of uses, (3) introduction of technical terms, and (4) enumeration of uses. This is evidence that a mature doctrine of the use of the law predated the Reformation.[56] In view of this, the Reformers did not create a new doctrinal category. They interacted with deep, carefully considered teachings of earlier theologians.

The medieval theologians also consistently presented a prophetic use of the law, noting that the Law of Moses proclaimed the coming of Christ. For them there was no contradiction in speaking of "the law of the gospel" or of describing the New Testament as a "new law." These ways of speaking, however, contributed to confusion about the doctrines of repentance and justification, which sparked the Reformation.

Luther taught about the usefulness of the law in substantial agreement with earlier commentators. His terminology and order of uses stemmed directly from his predecessors. Unlike medieval commentators, however, Luther's comments in the *Weihnachtspostille* of 1522 changed the third use of the law from a prophetic use, announcing the coming of Christ, to a righteous man's use of the law. He emphasized that justification changes the believer's attitude toward and use of the law so that the believer no longer keeps the law from compulsion. The law, kept by Christ, can now be kept by those who are righteous through Christ, an insight noted in the

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[56] It seems that the medieval exegetical tradition preserved and defined the doctrine of the usefulness of the Law. The doctrine did not receive the same emphasis in the dogmatic tradition. If these observations prove true, they could explain why modern scholars did not recognize that Luther drew his views from earlier theologians since modern scholars have tended to focus on the dogmatic writings for creating histories of doctrine. Gabriel Biel (d. 1495) wrote about the law in his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. See *Collectorium circa quattuor libros Sententiarum*, Wilfridus Werbeck and Udo Hofmann, eds. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1979), Book III, Dists. 37 and 40. His comments do not clearly anticipate the Reformation doctrine of the use of the law. Johann von Staupitz, Luther's mentor in the Augustinian Order, does not appear to have written on the doctrine of the use of the law. A summary of von Staupitz's teaching is provided by Franz Posset, *The Front-Runner of the Catholic Reformation: The Life and Works of Johann von Staupitz* (Hants, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 303–304.

Glossa Ordinaria on 1 Timothy 1:8–9. This thought and the terminology attending it reappeared in the 1528 lectures on 1 Timothy, in which Luther urged his hearers to use the law as they wished and briefly described a third office of the law that always reveals what is good and what is evil.[57] The righteous man, who has been given the Spirit and has the law written on his heart, gladly takes up the law and uses it. This recalls the advice for morning prayer in the Small Catechism, in which the believer goes joyfully to work singing a hymn on the Ten Commandments.[58]

Although Luther removed the prophetic use from the list of uses taught by Petrus, Nicholas, and others, he did not abandon the prophetic use. For the sake of clarity, Luther relabeled the prophetic use as promise and ultimately as gospel. We may see in these changes the significance of the doctrine of the use of the law to the refinement of the law–gospel distinction.[59] Whereas scholastic theologians had consistently written about "the law of the gospel" or the New Testament as "the new law," Luther saw the need to label the doctrines of law and gospel in order to distinguish clearly the doctrines of justification and sanctification. His theology and terminology for the threefold use of the law and a third office of the law influenced Melanchthon[60] and the writers of the Formula of Concord, with the result that a third use of the law became standard teaching in Reformation theology.

In view of the history, it seems inappropriate to state that Luther taught only two uses of the law or that Melanchthon added a third. A broad consideration of Luther's language concerning the uses and offices of the law urges a different consensus. The third use of the law is a category espoused not only by later Lutherans, but by Luther himself.

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[57] WA 26; *LW* 28.

[58] Scholars have recognized that a third use of the law appears in Luther's teaching, but have had difficulty describing it and relating it to the doctrine in the Formula of Concord. See, e.g., Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 273.

[59] The distinction, of course, has independent existence from the enumeration of uses of the law, and deep roots in Pauline and Western theology. See the timeline in C.F.W. Walther, *Law and Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible*, trans. Christian C. Tiews, ed. Charles P. Schaum, John R. Hellwege Jr., and Thomas E. Manteufel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), liv–lxiii.

[60] Melanchthon did not write about a third use of the law until 1534, twelve years after Luther introduced the thought and the attendant terminology. As was the case with the medieval theologians and Luther, Melanchthon's observation appeared first in his exegetical work, the scholia on Colossians, rather than in a dogmatic treatise. See Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 177.

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Gerhard Forde's Doctrine of the Law: A Confessional Lutheran Critique

Jack Kilcrease

The theology of Gerhard Forde (1927–2005) has enjoyed a great deal of influence among traditionalist North American Lutherans over the last thirty years. Though some in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have come to appreciate his work as a theologian, Forde's more liberal attitude toward women's ordination, biblical criticism, and the modern scientific worldview have earned him more support among the moderately conservative members of first the American Lutheran Church and later the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Because of the wide influence of Forde as a theologian within traditionalist quarters of both the ELCA and the LCMS, and because of the relatively small amount of secondary criticism that Forde's theology has undergone,[1] it is an important theological task to evaluate critically the adequacy of some of his theological proposals. This essay seeks to begin that process of secondary criticism by examining Forde's doctrine of the law.

Forde's theology changed very little from the early 1980s until his death in August 2005. Much of what he produced in this period appears

[1] The following reviews and articles represent the bulk of the secondary criticism of Forde's theology. Mark C. Mattes, "Gerhard Forde on Revisioning Theology in Light of the Gospel," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (1999): 373–393; David Liefeld, "Killing to Make Alive: Cruciform Proclamation in the Writings of Gerhard O. Forde," Logia 9, no. 4 (2000): 45–51. Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997) has been reviewed by Mickey L. Mattox, *Journal of Evangelical Theological Studies* 42 (1999): 536–537; Scott H. Hendrix, *Theology Today* 56 (April 1999): 146–147; Craig L. Nessan, *Currents in Theology and Mission* 26 (1999): 64; Del Jacobson, *Word and World* 18 (1999): 328–329. Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation!* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) has been reviewed by Andrew M. Weyermann, *Lutheran Quarterly* 6 (1993): 93–95; Paul Scott Wilson, *Homiletics* 16, no. 2 (1991): 11–12; David J. Monge, *Word and World* 11 (1991): 426; Charles B. Bugg, *Religious Education* 88 (1991): 291; Jay C. Rochelle, *Currents in Theology and Mission* 17 (1990): 463–464. Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) has been reviewed by J. Raitt, *Interpretation* 38 (1984): 98. Gerhard O. Forde, *The Law–Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969) has been reviewed by Theodore G. Tappert, *Lutheran Quarterly* 21 (1969): 472–473; P Joseph Cahill, *Theological Studies* 30 (1969): 517–520; David L. Mueller, *Religious Education* 66 (1969): 451–452.

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merely to sharpen the contours of the basic theological agenda outlined in his doctoral dissertation, *The Law–Gospel Debate* (1969). This will, therefore, be our chief source for Forde's theology of the law. We will also consider some of Forde's later works, including *The Work of Christ* (1984), a contribution he made to the Braaten and Jenson *Christian Dogmatics*, as well as Forde's *Theology is for Proclamation!* (1990) and a number of smaller essays published in *A More Radical Gospel* (2004) and *The Preached God* (2007).

This article will consider Forde's work from a confessional Lutheran perspective, judging his theology following the norms implicit in the teaching of the early Confessions and explicit in the Formula of Concord. The first basis for evaluation will therefore be the Scriptures, which all of the Lutheran confessional authors viewed as the supreme authority in deciding theological controversies. The Formula of Concord begins, "We receive and embrace with our whole heart the Prophetic and Apostolic Scripture of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel which is the only standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged."[2] The authors of the Formula identify the secondary authority through which they understand the Scriptures in making theological decisions as "the three Ecumenical creeds, namely, the Apostles', the Nicene, and Athanasian,"[3] as well as the previous Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church[4] and Luther's Catechisms.[5] Finally, the confessors invoke the writings of Luther himself: "To his [Luther's] doctrinal and polemical writings we wish to appeal."[6] In the case of Luther, the authors recognize a figure who has been particularly chosen by God and who, by God's providential care, has been raised up to teach the pure gospel to the church in the last days. Although Luther must be thought of as a private theologian, and not everything that he has written is authoritative (a point strongly emphasized by Luther himself), his writings nevertheless rank as an important secondary authority below the ecumenical creeds and the other confessions of the church. He is also important in our evaluation of Forde's doctrine of the law because he becomes the key for determining whether Forde is correct in his claim that

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[2] FC SD, Norm and Rule, 1, in *Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. F. Bente and W.H.T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 851 [henceforth Triglot].

[3] FC SD, Norm and Rule, 2; Triglot 851.

[4] FC SD, Norm and Rule, 3; Triglot 851.

[5] FC SD, Norm and Rule, 6; Triglot 853.

[6] FC SD, Norm and Rule, 6; Triglot 853.

later Lutheranism, particularly the Lutheran orthodoxy of the seventeenth century, abandoned Luther's original insights regarding the law.

I. Forde's General Concept of the Law

In *The Law-Gospel Debate*, Forde begins by critiquing seventeenth-century Lutheran orthodoxy. Much of Forde's treatment here is based not directly on the primary sources but on the work of Lauri Haikola, a Finnish Luther scholar who denied that Luther taught the eternity of the law.[7] Forde cannot accept the orthodox Lutheran definition of the law as "the eternal will of God" (*lex aeterna*), which makes the law into an abstract reality existing in God's eternal being.[8] Instead, Forde insists that the law be defined as a concrete reality within human experience, "law" being "a general term for the manner in which the will of God impinges on Man,"[9] which can take place through a "bolt of lightening, the rustling of a dry leaf on a dark night, the Decalogue, the 'natural law' of the philosopher, or even (or perhaps most particularly) the preaching of the cross itself."[10] In effect, the law is less a set of commandments than a generalized existential dread experienced by human beings in the old, evil age. Scott Murray, in his superb work on the law in twentieth-century American Lutheran thought, agrees with this characterization of Forde's position: "The Law is merely and entirely a threat to being. . . . The person only feels the unease caused by the threat of the Law."[11]

Part of Forde's interpretation comes from his re-reading of Luther's disputations against the Antinomians, in which Luther describes the law as it relates to the angels and the beatified as an "empty law" (*lex vacua*), or in other words, as a law that cannot accuse or demand and, therefore, has ceased to be law.[12] If one has come into compliance with the law through the death and resurrection of faith, then one is no longer under the law. The term "law," therefore, according to Forde, only technically refers to the experience of dread proceeding from non-compliance with God's will.

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[7] According to Haikola, Melanchthon reincorporated the doctrine of *lex aeterna* into Lutheran thought; see Lauri Haikola, *Studien zu Luther und zum Luthertum* (Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1958); "A Comparison of Melanchthon's and Luther's Doctrine of Justification," *Dialogue* 2, no. 1 (1963): 32–39.

[8] Gerhard O. Forde, *The Law–Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969), 3–11.

[9] Forde, *The Law–Gospel Debate*, 192.

[10] Forde, *The Law–Gospel Debate*, 177.

[11] Scott Murray, *Law, Life and the Living God: Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 128.

[12] Forde, *The Law–Gospel Debate*, 180–187.

Forde assumes that the law can only function as a positive demand on the human person when he is out of compliance with it. For the law to ask a righteous person to do something would be rather like asking an oak tree to produce acorns. If we are sanctified by faith, then all is fulfilled and the law is therefore ended. To this effect, Forde cites Luther: "Where sin ceases, there law ceases, and to the degree that sin ceases, to that degree law ceases, so that in the future life the law ought to completely cease, because then it will be fulfilled."[13] According to Forde, Luther understands the law as merely an interim measure between the fall and the eschaton.[14]

From a confessional Lutheran perspective, Forde's definition of the law as merely the pervasive accusing activity of God is inadequate. The first problem is that the Formula of Concord defines the law as "the eternal and immutable righteousness of God."[15] For the confessional authors, then, the law also designates God's eternal will for human beings apart from its temporal effect, which after the fall will necessarily be accusing. The definition offered by the Formula of Concord accurately represents the biblical understanding of God as the eternal and immutable author of the law.[16]

We should, of course, not underplay the fact that in this present evil age, the law continuously accuses us through media of nature and Scripture. On this point, the Formula of Concord favorably quotes Luther: "Anything that preaches concerning our sins and God's wrath, let it be done how or when it will, that is all a preaching of the law."[17] Furthermore, in this age there is no non-accusing law: "*lex semper accusat nos!*" (The law always accuses us!)[18] Nevertheless, if we accept Forde's premise that the law is that which accuses and threatens in this evil age, then why cannot the law additionally exist as the eternal will of God? In other words, if God is operative in the masks of his creatures (*larva Dei*), threatening and accusing sinners as Luther states,[19] then would not this activity be an expression of the eternal will of God, against which sinful

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[13] Forde, *The Law–Gospel Debate*, 182, quoting from WA 39.I:431,5–7 (Forde's translation).

[14] Forde, *The Law–Gospel Debate*, 178–199.

[15] FC SD III; Triglot 935.

[16] Exod 3:14, 20:1–21:1, 24:14; Num 23:19; Deut 32:4; 1 Sam 15:29; Ps 33:11, 46:1–5, 102:25–27; Isa 46:10, 54:10; Lam 3:21–23; Mal 3:6; Heb 6:17, 13:8; Jas 1:16–18; Titus 1:2.

[17] FC SD V; Triglot 955.

[18] Ap III; Triglot 168.

[19] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 26:95 [henceforth *LW*].

human beings are in revolt? If God is eternally life itself,[20] he must necessarily will the life of his creatures eternally. This becomes condemning after the fall, when creatures have murderous impulses and engage in murder (hence the need of the Fifth Commandment!). Nevertheless, although the content of God's will does not change, one's own existential relationship to that will does change. If God's will were not eternal, there would be no eternally valid content for the human race to violate.[21]

Holding these two aspects of the law together, therefore, is the only logical solution in light of Scripture and the confessional tradition. In fact, Theodosius Harnack more than a hundred years ago attempted to hold both aspects of the law together in Luther's thought by suggesting that Luther made a distinction between the "office" and "essence" (*Amt und Wesen*) of the law. Though in the present age of sin and death it is the office of the law to accuse and condemn sinners through the medium of God's created masks, the law is nevertheless also a positive good, which expresses the eternal will of God for human beings.[22] This distinction

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[20] Gen. 1–2; John. 1.

[21] David Scaer agrees that we can distinguish between the law's original intent and how it acts upon us in a state of sin: "Sin transformed the law. For example the command not to murder reflects that God is life. This and the other negative assertions of the Commandments do not have an eternal origin in God, but are the positive commands of God reflecting his eternal nature, now transformed and translated into terms which man in the state of sin can understand." David Scaer, "Law and Gospel in Lutheran Theology," *Logia* 3, no. 1 (Epiphany, 1994): 30. David Yeago suggests that this way of construing the law as purely a negative threat is more a function of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Luther research than of Luther himself. See David Yeago, "Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology," *Pro Ecclesia* 1 (1993): 37–49. Yeago writes: "If it is true that the law oppresses because of its formal character as ordered demand, then the converse would also seem to hold: anything with the formal character of ordered demand oppresses" (41). Yeago's language of "ordered demand" is nevertheless also problematic in that it calls to mind the Thomistic concept of law as "ordering principle." See Mark Mattes' critique in "The Thomistic Turn in Evangelical Catholic Ethics," *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (2002): 65–100.

[22] See Theodosius Harnack, *Luthers Theologie besonderer Beziehung auf seine Versöhnung und Erlösunglehre*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1969), 368–401. Robert Schultz has argued that Harnack's view might be based on some faulty understandings of certain statements of Luther and in one case an inaccurate translation. See Robert C. Schultz, *Gesetz und Evangelium in der Lutherischen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1958), 142. Schultz is well known for his work as a partisan in the great LCMS civil war of the 1970s. For critique of Schultz (among others), see David 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. Based on the evidence that we will see

appears to work well on certain texts of Luther's. In the Antinomian Disputations, for example, Luther states that "the Decalogue is eternal"[23] and distinguishes its reality as the eternal will of God from the "office of the law," which is "whatever shows sin, wrath, and death."[24] Such remarks appear in part to vindicate Harnack's distinction. In the Genesis lectures, the Reformer discusses the existence of the law before the fall and insists that the claim that the law did not exist before the fall is "full of

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below, there is at the very least a strong suggestion that Luther did make such a distinction. In any case, even if he did not literally use the distinct terms "essence" and "office" as terminology, conceptually the distinction appears to be present. He did not, for example, use christological terminology such as "genus majestaticum," but conceptually he affirmed what Chemnitz and Lutheran orthodoxy meant by these terms.

[23] Martin Luther, "The First Disputation Against the Antinomians, Argument 34," in *Only the Decalogue is Eternal: Martin Luther's Complete Antinomian Theses and Disputations*, ed. and trans. Holger Sontag (Minneapolis: Lutheran Press, 2008), 75. James Nestingen claims that this statement of Luther's refers to the eternal restoration of creational relationships: "The law signifies the restoration of the defining relationships of life: the first commandment, with the second and third, in relation to God; the remaining commandments in relation to the neighbor and the earth. These are the relationships of redemption, of the hope of faith. Consequently, Luther insists, they are eternal: they never end." James A. Nestingen, "The End of the End: The Role of Apocalyptic in the Lutheran Reform," *Word and World* 15 (1995): 200–201. This is not a plausible interpretation of this statement for three main reasons. First, Nestingen (following Forde and Wingren, as we shall see later) wrongly conflates "law" with "vocation." Our creational vocations do not automatically dictate how we carry them out. This is evident from the fact that commandments are given in relationship to previously existing creational relationships and do not command them. For example, we are told, "do not commit adultery," not, "get married." In other words, God already assumes that people marry as part of the created order that he established in the beginning. Luther assumes this as well in the Catechism in that he does not instruct people to stand in certain creational relationships, but already assumes they exist and must be regulated by the commandments. Second, the relationships we have with God and creation do end at the last judgment, when Christ will rule and there will be no need of civil government. We will "see God"; consequently, we will not need the preaching of the word or the office of the ministry. We will neither "give in marriage nor be given in marriage"; therefore marriage and the family will also cease. Luther fully expected this (as we shall see below), and it is therefore impossible to base this interpretation on these words. Lastly, it is evident from the context that Luther is clearly referring to the law as God's will for his creatures. He is not talking about creational relationship, which may or may not reflect God's will for them. What actually appears to be going on is that Nestingen here is attempting to uphold Forde and Hakola's rejection of *lex aeterna*.

[24] Luther, "Second Set of Antinomian Theses, Thesis 18," in *Only the Decalogue is Eternal: Martin Luther's Complete Antinomian Theses and Disputations*, ed. and trans. Holger Sontag (Minneapolis: Lutheran Press, 2008), 80.

wickedness and blasphemy."[25] If the law did exist before the fall, then Luther must have believed that the law had an existence apart from its condemning effect and the ensuing sense of human existential dread. This would also suggest that Luther defined the law identically with the Formula of Concord, where, as we noted, both aspects of the law are held together.

If God's will threatens humanity, then it must do so because humans have been disobedient to it. If it has been disobeyed, then it must have existed prior to its violation and therefore must have an existence apart from sin. As we noted, Forde assumes this and must admit at least on some level that the law is eternal insofar as it is God's will. The law is only abrogated because the creature comes into compliance with it and as a result neutralizes its threat. At this point, Forde has merely reworded the definition of the law in his identification of it with the human experience of threat. He has not eliminated the law as something which objectively exists prior to human sin. He has simply suggested that creatures possess different experiences relative to it. In the process, Forde effectively makes human experience of the law into the definitive theological criterion for describing the reality of the law. He thereby endangers the objectivity of the content of the law as revealed in nature and Scripture. On an epistemological level, one suspects that the Kantian denial of the ability to know the thing in itself (the *Ding an sich*) underlies this refusal.[26] By only

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[25] *LW* 1:108. Peter Meinhold claimed that the Genesis lectures were compromised by Melanchthonian influences, particularly on the issue of the law. See Peter Meinhold, *Die Genesisvorlesung Luthers und ihre Herausgeber* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1936), 44–52. Surveying Meinhold's work, this has to do partially with a perception among scholars of that generation that there was a profound theological difference between Luther and Melanchthon. Certain scholars attempt to continue to maintain this view of Luther and Melanchthon and of the Genesis lectures; see Nestingen, "The End of the End," 195–205; "Luther in Front of the Text: The Genesis Commentary," *Word and World* 14 (1994): 186–194. Mickey Mattox has shown that Meinhold's position is inaccurate in that it relies on an "abstract set" of alleged differences between Luther and Lutheran orthodoxy and not on clear textual evidence. It would therefore appear that the text we possess, with minor additions, is representative of the theology of the mature Luther. See Mickey Mattox, "*Defender of the Holy Matriarchs": Luther's Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the* Enarrationes in Genesin*, 1535–45* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 265–266.

[26] I have argued at length elsewhere that this is probably the best explanation of Forde's position. See my doctoral dissertation, "The Self-Donation of God: Gerhard Forde and the Question of Atonement in the Lutheran Tradition" (Diss., Marquette University, 2009). As I show, Forde's doctrine of law and atonement are heavily dependent on the nineteenth-century neo-Lutheran theologian Johannes von Hofmann. See the following works: Matthew L. Becker, *The Self-Giving God and Salvation History: The Trinitarian Theology of Johannes von Hofmann* (New York: T & T Clark International,

identifying the law with the sinner's experience of wrath, Forde reduces the law to a human experience and tends toward a theological anti-realism.[27] This does not mean that Forde is an outright theological anti-

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2004); C.K. von Hofmann, *Interpreting the Bible*, trans. Christian Preus (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959); J.C.K. von Hofmann, *Encyclopädie der Theologie. Nach Vorlesungen und Manuscripten herausgegeben von H.J. Bestmann* (Nördlingen: C.H. Beck, 1879); J.C.K. von Hofmann, *Theologische Ethik* (Nördlingen: C.H. Beck, 1878). Von Hofmann taught (based on Kant and Schleiermacher) that all Christian doctrine must represent human religious experience. In this he did not ignore the historical nature of Christian truth, but rather claimed that our certainty that the events of the history of salvation occurred was based on the fact that our present religious experience could have no other explanation than that history as it is present in Scripture was basically true (I say "basically" because von Hofmann denied the inerrancy of the Bible). Any doctrinal position which demanded our assent simply based on its reality as a revealed truth in the Bible could not be accepted as anything other than an abstraction beyond human experience. Therefore, von Hofmann completely rejected the idea of the necessity of atonement based on the Scriptures' teaching regarding the infinite nature of divine wrath and need for a payment for sin. In the same way, Forde considers any description of the law which does not correspond to the human experience of "threat" or "accusation" to be pure abstraction, i.e., effectively a *Ding an sich* which, standing outside of the phenomenal, cannot be known. Robert Preus has noted the tendency of modern concepts of revelation to existentialize and interiorize God's self-disclosure. See Robert Preus, "The Doctrine of Revelation in Contemporary Theology," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theology Society* 9, no. 3 (1966): 111–123. We should, of course, be careful to mention that Forde does not entirely accept von Hofmann's scheme because of Forde's negative assessment of the concept of *Heilsgeschichte*: "Hofmann operated with a theory about a divine love-will which realized itself in a historical process," a theory that is not an authentic realization of biblical or confessional theology, but rather is "borrowed from German Idealism." Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate*, 73–74. Such a theory is in the end no better in Forde's view than orthodoxy. Both marginalize the law from the actual experience of sinners. In orthodoxy, law is placed in an abstract eternal divine will, whereas with von Hofmann law is placed safely in a bygone historical dispensation. Furthermore, both made Jesus' death into a clean and easy part of a divine plan of which the Savior was all too aware (73–76). Forde considers this to be a form of Docetism. It is difficult to agree with the second criticism. First, Jesus in the Gospels is perfectly aware of the divine plan of salvation realized through him. If this can be characterized as Docetism, then the divinely inspired Gospels are themselves Docetic, an unacceptable conclusion for orthodox Christianity. Second, according to the Gospels, it is precisely that Jesus knows his death will realize the plan of salvation that makes him distraught over its prospect (see Luke 12:49–53). Nevertheless, Forde's criticism of von Hofmann on the second point is warranted. In this, Forde more than von Hofmann is able to maintain the *simul* of Christian existence in that he allows the experience of divine law to persist throughout the life of the Christian, rather than be relegated to a bygone historical dispensation.

[27] For criticism of this tendency in modern theology, see Kurt Marquart, "The 'Realist Principle' of Theology," *Logia* 5, no. 3 (Holy Trinity, 1996): 15–17. Also see Dennis Bielfeldt, "Luther's Late Trinitarian Disputations: Semantic Realism," in Dennis

realist. The definitions he presents merely make this a possible tendency of his thought.

Neither does Forde allow his position to be corrected through Harnack's essence/office distinction. Forde claims that if we accept Harnack's distinction, we place ourselves above the concrete situation of the law,[28] because to consider the law according to its essence (i.e., as the eternal will of God), apart from its accusing effect on human beings, is to "view it in the abstract. . . . This allows man to place himself above the law and to look at it from God's point of view."[29]

This conclusion seems less than satisfactory. Why would a sinner's recognition of the law as God's eternal will, originally intended for his good but corrupted by sin, necessarily involve the sinner placing himself above the law in a realm of abstractions? To say that the law is God's eternal will and that apart from sin it does not accuse need not contradict its present accusing effect. It is no more an abstraction to say that the law at one time functioned differently (before the fall) than it is to say that the world once existed in a state other than we presently find it. Though such a world is beyond our present experience, it is certainly not unthinkable or a pure abstraction. For example, if within my present experience I am poisoned by cyanide, I can nevertheless recognize that the chemical has a reality apart from its harmful effects on me.[30] I can also recognize that it originally possessed a good use (i.e., as a cleaning agent). In the same way, Paul recognized the original intent of the law as something good without placing himself above it. In the midst of an intense confession of sin, Paul states, "I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death" (Rom 7:10). Indeed, what Forde's objection at this point actually demonstrates is his tendency to reduce theological statements to the realm of human existential experience. Thus, any statement which does not directly relate to an existential experience, including the positing of the eternity of the law, must be jettisoned as a "pure abstraction."

Bielfeldt, Mickey L. Mattox, and Paul R. Hinlicky, *The Substance of the Faith: Luther's Doctrinal Theology for Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 59–130.

[28] Forde, *The Law–Gospel Debate*, 184–185.

[29] Forde, *The Law–Gospel Debate*, 185.

[30] David Scaer expresses a similar understanding: "Though law appears to man in the state of sin as demanding and punishing, law as it exists in God is neither demanding nor punishing, but it is positive affirmation expressing God's relationship to creation." Scaer, "Law and Gospel in Lutheran Theology," 30.

The claim that the law existed before the fall leads to further claims regarding the law's definition and its place in the Christian life. If the law existed before the fall, then it possesses a positive use in regulating creation from the beginning and cannot be reduced to existential dread or threat. Luther emphasized this point in the passages of the Genesis lectures that deal with the orders of creation.[31] Nevertheless, this does not mean that Luther believed that human beings were bound to something akin to the covenant of works in Reformed thought.[32] Humanity did not need to "earn its keep," so to speak.[33] Rather, Luther argues that the law functioned as a needed "channel"[34] whereby humanity might use its own natural goodness to glorify God and regulate the created order.[35] This law would therefore also express God's will in accordance with his eternal purpose for creation. Such a purpose comes to express itself in the threat of civil coercion after the fall, but it nevertheless remains true that the law represents God's original intention and relationship to the created order. Forde does not address the law's original role before the fall, an omission that presents something of a loose end. Implicit in Forde's position is the idea that prelapsarian human beings, who were in compliance with the law, could never possess the law as a positive demand. If they did, then they would be out of compliance with it, since the law in Forde's thinking can only command in a situation of sin.

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[31] *LW* 1:80, 95, 104, 115–116. See Theo M.M.A.C. Bell, "Man is a Microcosmos: Adam and Eve in Luther's *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545)," *CTQ* 69 (2005): 159–184. On the law in the Genesis lectures, see David Yeago, "Martin Luther on Grace, Law, and Moral Life: Prolegomena to an Ecumenical Discussion of *Veritatis Splendor*," *Thomist* 62 (1998): 163–191.

[32] For the Reformed "covenant of works," see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 516–518.

[33] David Scaer agrees with Luther's assessment: "The law as a positive affirmation was understood by man only during his brief stay in paradise. He knew God as his Creator, accepted his responsibility for creation and procreated. He was prohibited from stepping out of this positive relationship with God. But this prohibition is not arbitrarily superimposed on man to test him, but was simply the explanation or description of what would happen to man if he stepped outside of the relationship with God in which he was created." Scaer, "Law and Gospel in Lutheran Theology," 30.

[34] This description is offered by David P. Scaer, "Formula of Concord Article VI: The Third Use of the Law," *CTQ* 42 (1978): 152.

[35] This is Luther's understanding of the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. "The church was established first because God wants to show by this sign, as it were, that man was created for another purpose than the rest of the living beings. Because the church is established by the Word of God, it is certain that man was created for an immortal and spiritual life, to which he would have been carried off or translated without death after living in Eden and on the rest of the earth without inconvenience as long as he wished." *LW* 1:104.

How, then, is Luther's statement about law ceasing together with sin consistent with his explicit belief that the law existed as a positive commandment before the fall?[36] Luther is clear that human beings before the fall had the eschatological destiny of being translated into heavenly existence, as does fallen humanity.[37] In such a final state of consummation, there is no need for the command to "be fruitful and multiply," since "people will neither marry nor be given in marriage" (Matt 22:30). Similarly, in the final state there will be no need for preaching the word of God, since all will see God "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12). Such an interpretation is not inconsistent with the way in which the New Testament authors interpret creation and eschatology. The author of Hebrews understands the Sabbath rest as being a type of the eternal rest toward which creation has always been moving (Heb 3–4). In the same vein, Peter Brunner notes that the structure of the week in the primal state, in which work leads to a day of rest and worship, is an image of the history of creation. The movement of history must eventually end in God's eternal rest and the integration of temporal worship into that of the celestial hosts.[38] If this is correct, then it would appear that Luther views the law ending not merely together with sin, but rather with the end of temporal creational relationships.

Regarding the prelapsarian existence of the law, if human beings existed before the fall, then they presumably existed in a state in which the law did not threaten or accuse. This claim leads to two major problems. First, how would human beings have guided their moral conduct within the prelapsarian order? Genesis 1 and 2 appear to suggest that human beings had a definite set of commands which they were asked to obey. Forde partially resolves this problem by denying the literal historical truth of the creation and fall narratives in Genesis.[39] This nevertheless leaves the more serious problem: if the stories of Genesis 1–3 are not to be taken literally and the world has always been governed by the law of entropy and nature "red in tooth and claw," then human beings would presumably always have been under the threat of the law. According to Paul, however, "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law" (1 Cor 15:56). Creation would in effect then be redeemed by Christ in his death and

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[36] Forde, *The Law–Gospel Debate*, 182, quoting from WA 39.I:431,5–7.

[37] "Later on he would have returned to his working and guarding until a predetermined time had been fulfilled, when he would have been translated to heaven with the utmost pleasure." *LW* 1:106.

[38] Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, trans. M.H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 38–41.

[39] Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation!*, 50–51.

resurrection not from the effects of the fall, but from its original and actual state of existence. Forde insists in *Theology is for Proclamation!* that we take the fall seriously as a historical event (albeit somewhere in the recesses of human history, certainly not the literal event recorded in Gen 3), but then declines to reconcile this with the presence of death and violence (i.e., the threat of the law) within the biological order prior to human beings evolving reflective consciousness.[40] Forde suggests that we accept the modern, scientific worldview as something objective and neutral, and think about sin and death as existential problems recognized by the preaching of the cross.[41] To try to investigate the origins of sin and death would be purely speculative. Nevertheless, this solves very little and calls into question the entire orthodox Christian system. Furthermore, the acceptance of the presence of death and, therefore, the curse of the law as present from the beginning of creation places Forde perilously close the Gnostic heresy of the conflation of creation with the fall.[42]

To summarize, Forde's interpretation of the law is problematic from the confessional Lutheran perspective on several levels. First, it seriously undermines theological realism by primarily characterizing the law as an existential experience of dread and not as God's objective immutable will, a tendency which greatly impairs one's ability to preach the second use of the law. Second, this tendency to define the law as an amorphous threat undermines the positive use of the law in the Christian's life. Though Forde's assessment of the law as a moral guide is not entirely negative, his existentializing tendency leaves some significant gaps. Third, Forde's interpretation implies a conflation of creation and the fall, thereby implicitly (though probably not intentionally) resurrecting a Gnostic heresy. Fourth, Forde's teaching undermines the teaching of Scripture and its interpretation by the Lutheran Confessions.

II. Forde on the Second Use of the Law

The second use of the law is foundational for a confessional Lutheran understanding of the interplay between law and gospel.[43] Forde's treatment of the second use of the law logically follows from his general

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[40] Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation!*, 51.

[41] Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation!*, 51.

[42] See Urban Linwood, *A Short History of Christian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 77–79.

[43] FC SD VI; Triglot 963: "The Law of God is useful. . . . Through it men are brought to a knowledge of their sin."

definition of the law and his concept of atonement.[44] He begins with the recognition that human beings exist under the law and the hidden God. Having God constantly impinge upon their reality, human beings cannot trust God because they recognize him as a mortal threat. In order to overcome this situation, God has sent Jesus into the world to forgive, thereby changing God's relation to the world from one of hiddenness and law to one of love and forgiveness. This forgiveness is not brought about by the fulfillment of the law or the propitiation of God's wrath. God as he is actualized in Jesus simply makes a unilateral decision to forgive without any fulfillment of the law. This action on God's part is completely disruptive of the previous human situation under the law. It is an eschatological event. If God had redeemed by fulfilling the law in Jesus, the new age of grace would not have properly disrupted the old age of law,[45] but would simply have been a continuation of it. Human beings prefer to be under the law because they believe that they can control God with their good works. Their response to being forgiven is to kill Jesus in order to maintain their sense of control. In doing this, they reveal their own sin of unbelief and thereby die in their recognition of sin. Jesus was resurrected by God and his practice of unilaterally forgiving was thereby vindicated. This practice of forgiveness continues in the life of the church. By being confronted with Jesus' act of forgiveness in word and sacrament, we recognize our sin and are killed. We are also resurrected by the same promise, and faith is created. Since faith fulfills the law and sanctifies us, God now looks at the person of faith as righteous and is "satisfied."[46]

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[44] For more on Forde's understanding of the second use of the law, see Gerhard O. Forde, *Where God Meets Man: Luther's Down-To-Earth Approach to the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1972), 32–44, as well as Gerhard O. Forde, "Caught in the Act: Reflections on the Work of Christ," in *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism*, ed. Gerhard O. Forde, Mark C. Mattes, and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 85–97.

[45] This is one of the most troubling aspects of Forde's thought. Is there no continuity between the God of the law and the God of the gospel, or between the old and the new creations? David Scaer has helpfully demonstrated that God's new act of creation through the gospel necessarily incorporates his old act of creation, which finds expression in the sacraments. See David P. Scaer, "Sacraments as an Affirmation of Creation," *CTQ* 54 (1993): 241–264. The law for Scaer is incorporated into the gospel by God's act of fulfilling the law in Jesus. For Forde, this happens not in Jesus, but only subsequently in the believer.

[46] Forde's position should not be construed as a form of antinomianism. On the contrary, the law will harass the sinner until it is fulfilled in the existential experience of being convicted of sin and resurrected into a faith that will satisfy God by fulfilling the law. Again, Forde does not dispense with the necessity of the fulfillment of the law. He merely transfers it to human beings away from Christ. In other words, Christ's death is

As a result of his view of atonement, Forde significantly reshapes the practice of preaching law and gospel. A direct reassertion of the law by Christ would not disrupt the previous existential situation under the law,[47] but would rather prolong it. Nevertheless, if preaching is discontinuous with the law, we necessarily fall into a kind of antinomianism, something that Forde wishes to avoid. In fact, it cannot be emphasized enough that Forde rejects antinomianism, which he frequently refers to as "fake theology."[48] In his essay of the same title, "Fake Theology: Reflections on Antinomianism Past and Present," Forde insists that antinomianism does

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a divine gesture which is intended to put human beings into compliance with the law. This creates three problems. First, it moves the focus away from Christ to the human act of faith, which is the real thing that saves from the law. Second, it is not biblical or confessional. Scripture teaches nothing of the kind. Forde is aware of this, but in his piece "The Work of Christ" in the Jenson–Braaten Dogmatics, he goes about criticizing what he sees as the biblical authors' false interpretation of the work of Christ; see Gerhard O. Forde, "The Work of Christ," in *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2, ed. Robert W. Jenson and Carl E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 11–18. Third, it makes the gospel into a law. "If" we have faith, "then" the law will be satisfied and we will be free from wrath. This criticism is not overcome by saying that we are forgiven before we have faith. This means that passive righteousness is given to us, but not active. Active righteousness is apparently up to us—through the grace of God, of course. Forde's stance is perhaps due largely to the strong influence of existentialism and von Hofmann on his thought. For evidence of this, see James A. Nestingen, "Examining Sources," in *By Faith Alone: Essays on Justification in Honor of Gerhard O. Forde*, ed. Joseph A. Burgess and Marc Kolden (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 11–12. Just as Forde interiorizes the law, he also interiorizes atonement. An objective law would be an abstraction, as would be an objective atonement. This is because it would be something beyond our experience—a *Ding an sich* (von Hofmann, following Kant and Schleiermacher). In the same way, the law still must actually be fulfilled, but if it were fulfilled by Christ it would not be an "actual event" for us, i.e., something within our experience. So, in order for it to be an "actual event," it must be interiorized by making faith the locus of its fulfillment.

[47] This is one of the more puzzling aspects of Forde's account of Jesus' ministry. Jesus clearly asserts on numerous occasions that he has come to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matt 3:15) and not "to destroy the Law and the Prophets . . . but to fulfill [them]" (Matt 5:17). As the Formula of Concord also notes, Jesus in his earthly ministry was active in preaching God's specific commandments and not merely in giving absolution. Furthermore, with the exception of the scene on the cross in the Gospel of Luke, in which Jesus forgives those who are executing him, his practice of absolution is not directed toward his opponents. Forde's suggestion that Jesus absolved everyone, including his opponents, does not fit the information we have from the Gospels.

[48] "Antinomianism is fake theology." Gerhard O. Forde, "Fake Theology: Reflections on Antinomianism Past and Present," in *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, ed. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 215.

not take into account the full eschatological nature of the gospel: "The root cause of antinomianism is failure to apprehend the gospel in its full eschatological sense. . . . *Christ*, not theology, is the end of the law to *faith*, experienced as new life from death, the breaking in of the eschaton."[49] In other words, antinomianism's greatest flaw is that it assumes that by verbally eliminating the law it can simply get rid of it. The law, as we have seen, is the persistent experience of existential dread of those out of compliance with it. If the law remains unfulfilled within us, this experience of dread cannot be done away with by merely having someone tell us that everything is all right. Forde insists that the law's power only ends in its disruptive execution of judgment upon the sinner in death, followed by the sinner's being brought into compliance with it by the resurrection of faith. The problem for Forde nevertheless remains: how is the law to be proclaimed to the sinner in a manner that does not make the proclamation of the church a mere continuation of the old age of the law?

In order to solve this difficulty, Forde posits that the law should be proclaimed indirectly through the preaching of absolution. In his essay "Radical Lutheranism" (1987), Forde describes what he considers to be Paul's understanding of the law: "The law does not end sin, does not make new beings [that is, believing ones]; it only makes matters worse. Where the old continuity is maintained, sin does not end. . . . No matter how much religious pressure is applied, sin only grows."[50] There must be courage to unleash the gospel:

> There is too much timidity, too much of a tendency to buffer the message to bring it under control. . . . Faith comes from hearing. Will the old persist? Will we understand ourselves to be continuously existing subjects called upon to exercise our evanescent modicum of free choice to carve out some sort of eternal destiny for ourselves?[51]

Forde makes a similar observation concerning the dual work of death and resurrection (law and gospel) through the word of absolution in his essay "Absolution: Systematic Consideration." In absolution,

> the sinner is not just changed. Rather, the sinner must die to be made new. The paradigm is death and resurrection, not just changing the qualities of a continuously existing subject. Unconditional absolution

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[49] Forde, "Fake Theology," 215 (emphasis original).

[50] Gerhard O. Forde, "Radical Lutheranism," in Gerhard O. Forde, Mark C. Mattes, and Steven D. Paulson, *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 9.

[51] Forde, "Radical Lutheranism," 15.

> is indeed dangerous for the sinner. It means the death of the sinner one way or another. Either the sinner will try to appropriate it on his or her own conditions as a sop to the self, and go to that death which is eternal, or the unconditional absolution will itself put to death the old and raise up the new in faith to new life.[52]

Forde's view of law and gospel parallels his view of atonement. Just as the divine gesture of the cross both executes the divine judgment of guilt and offers forgiveness, the preacher's word of absolution functions as both law and promise in that it both kills and resurrects. Since the word of absolution presupposes that one is a sinner, it accuses as law while also forgiving as gospel. Direct proclamation of divine commandments, on the other hand, would simply be a continuation of the old age.

It is therefore somewhat ironic that Forde's attempt at staving off antinomianism brings him uncomfortably close to the pastoral practice of the early Lutheran heretic Johann Agricola. To simplify a complex theological debate, Agricola came to the conclusion in the mid-1520s that since only faith can bring about works of love, and because true, heartfelt contrition is a work of love, only persons who have faith already can truly repent. Therefore, since faith comes from the gospel, only the preaching of the gospel can bring about true repentance.[53] For this reason, only the gospel and not the law should be preached.

In the mid-1520s, Philip Melanchthon attacked this position by stating that it was necessary for the law to be preached to reveal sin.[54] By the 1530s, Luther himself also began to attack Agricola. He completely rejected Agricola's elimination of the preaching of the law and repentance. In *Against the Antinomians* (1539), one of his many disputations against Agricola and his followers, Luther sides with Melanchthon and assigns the law and the gospel their proper offices. Luther first agrees that the word of the cross can function as either law or gospel depending on one's own existential relationship to it. It is, however, impossible to preach the gospel without the law in the form of divine commandment:

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[52] Gerhard O. Forde, "Absolution: Systematic Considerations," in *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, ed. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 162.

[53] For a discussion of Agricola's early position, see Timothy J. Wengert, *Law and Gospel: Philip Melanchthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over* Poenitentia (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 84–89; F. Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 161–169; Murray, *Law, Life and the Living God*, 16–19.

[54] Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 158–159.

> To be sure, I did teach that sinners shall be stirred to repentance through the preaching or the contemplation of the passion of Christ, so that they might see the enormity of God's wrath over sin, and learn that there is no other remedy for this than the death of God's Son. . . . When Isaiah 53 [:8] declares that God has "stricken him for the transgressions of my people," tell me, my dear fellow, does this proclamation of Christ's suffering and of his being stricken for our sin imply that the law is cast away? What does this expression, "for the transgression of my people," mean? Does it not mean "because my people have sinned against my law and did not keep my law?" . . . The devil's purpose in this fanaticism is not to remove the law but to remove Christ, the fulfiller of the law.[55]

What then should our preaching praxis be? Luther asserts that it must take the form of a full elucidation of the biblical message of law and gospel:

> Preach that sinners must be roused to repentance not only by the sweet grace and suffering of Christ, by the message that he died for us, but also by the terrors of the law. For they are wrong in maintaining that one must follow only one method of preaching repentance, namely, to point to Christ's sufferings on our behalf, claiming as they do that Christendom might otherwise become confused and be at a loss to know which is the true and only way. No, one must preach in all sorts of ways—God's threats, his promises, his punishment, his help, and anything else—in order that we may be brought to repentance, that is, to a knowledge of sin and the law through the use of all the examples in the Scriptures. This is in accord with all the prophets and apostles and St. Paul, who writes in Romans 2 [:4]: "Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"[56]

If this sort of preaching does not take place, and the gospel alone is preached without the law (Agricola's teaching), then no one can truly know the gospel itself: "How can one know what sin is without the law and conscience? And how will we learn what Christ is, what he did for us, if we do not know what the law is that he fulfilled for us and what sin is, for which he made satisfaction?"[57] The Formula of Concord echoes Luther by condemning the heresy of Agricola and recommending the preaching of the law by way of a clear delineation of God's commandments: "The Spirit of Christ must not only comfort, but also through the office of the

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[55] *LW* 47:110.
[56] *LW* 47:111–112.
[57] *LW* 47:113.

Law reprove the world of sin."[58] According to the Formula, the preaching of God's commandments to bring forth repentance has a firmly biblical basis in the practice of the prophets, Jesus, and Paul.

In fairness to Forde, his position is somewhat different from that of Agricola. In Forde's conception, God truly acts through the word of absolution as law in such a way that it "kills" the sinner, rather than only bringing about faith and, therefore, a loving desire to repent. This idea in and of itself is unobjectionable. According to both Luther and the Formula of Concord, anything that accuses is law and, therefore, the word of the gospel can function in this way also in that it causes the recognition of sin. In fact, Paul appears to suggest that this is precisely how he himself came to the recognition of his own inability to earn his salvation.[59] What is objectionable is that Forde appears to exclude completely the preaching of God's commandments, insisting that we must rely entirely on absolution to do the work of the law. It is thus Forde's belief that the preaching of the gospel should take over a function of the law that places him in close proximity to Agricola in actual practice.

Forde himself also appears to see this resemblance, at one point even going so far as to speak favorably of Agricola at the expense of Melanchthon. According to Forde, Melanchthon and his followers, past and present, "attempt to shore up a sagging enterprise [Luther's concept of the gospel] by various applications of law." Therefore:

> When they discovered in the Saxon visitations the sorry state of affairs and feared that the gospel of justification by faith was just leading to laxity, they faced the question of what to do. . . . A great debate ensued, the "antinomian" controversies, which stretched over several decades and took various shapes. . . . Melanchthon, and those who followed him, thought that rigorous proclamation of the law first was

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[58] FC SD V; Triglot 955.

[59] "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin?" (Gal 2:17). In other words, Paul recognized his own sin when he was converted to faith in Christ. If the Messiah had to die for the sins of Israel, then the law was not a plausible way of salvation and humanity must have no ability to fulfill it. The next verse, "If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I was a law breaker," makes sense in light of this interpretation. If Paul had attempted to fulfill the law after he had come to recognize through Christ that he was a total sinner, then this attempt would simply have proved that the law did not work as a way of salvation, since Paul was already out of compliance with it. Since he equates sin with unbelief elsewhere (Rom 14:23), an attempt to fulfill the law would in fact make sin worse because it would simply draw the person away from belief in Christ to self-reliance on works. See also Phil 3:7–9.

> the remedy. If folks are abusing the gospel and Christian freedom they must be brought to true and heartfelt contrition and repentance by preaching the law in all its rigor. If they were apprised of the seriousness and consequences of sin, they could be brought to repentance and proper living. . . . There were those (starting with Johann Agricola) who smelled a rat in this method. They held that you cannot really scare people into faith. Repentance that comes from fear of consequences is merely legalistic repentance based on the self's own desire to preserve itself. True evangelical repentance, Agricola held, comes from preaching the gospel. And because he insisted that the law should be banished from the church and the pulpit he earned the title Antinomian. . . . [Agricola taught that] from the pulpit we preach the gospel alone, and the gospel brings true and heartfelt evangelical repentance.[60]

There are several difficulties with this passage. First, considering the fact that he does not entirely approve of Agricola's teaching, Forde seems to be overstating his position.[61] Forde believes that since the law is that which accuses and threatens, it can be present in the preaching of absolution. Second, Forde fails to mention that Luther approved of Melanchthon's position regarding the preaching of repentance to the extent that he wrote the introduction to Melanchthon's articles of visitation, the recommendations of which Forde criticizes above.[62] Third, and most problematic of all, Forde continues his practice of moving the law into the realm of a vague abstraction. If one lacks a specific enumeration of sins by way of the preaching of God's commandments, how is one to recognize in a concrete fashion one's status as a sinner? Forde's answer is that the sinner knows himself to be a sinner by way of implication through both the practice of absolution and the reaction of sinful humanity to Jesus finalized in its condemning him to the cross. This answer, however, is incomplete. Forde's account of the second use of the

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[60] Gerhard O. Forde, "Lutheran Faith and American Freedom," in *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, ed. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 202–203.

[61] Elsewhere, Forde describes Agricola as an "overt Antinomian," something he is definitely against. Forde, "Fake Theology," 216–217. The difficulty with antinomianism, as Forde sees it, is that it tries to realize the end of the law by merely "shouting the law down." Merely verbal rejection of the law cannot end its tyranny. It cannot neutralize the law because the law persists in harassing sinners because of their lack of compliance with it. This happens whether they wish this to be the case or not. Rather it is necessary to become free from the threat of the law by faith's eschatological actualization of the law's fulfillment.

[62] For Luther's introduction, see *LW* 40:265.

law appears to have a dual antecedent: his definition of the law and his rejection of the biblical and confessional doctrine of penal substitution.

First, Forde's rejection of the doctrine of *lex aeterna* in favor of the law as generalized existential anxiety makes it impossible for the law to be enumerated in a specific and concrete form. Consequently, the law can only come to a climax in the cross and the preaching of absolution as something equally vague, the impact of which can be felt in the reaction of sinful humanity to Jesus' preaching of absolution. Second, because of Forde's rejection of penal substitution, there is at best a tenuous connection between what Jesus does and the law as God's objective will set forth in divinely given commandments. As noted earlier, Luther believed that the law is preachable relative to the cross because the cross represents a fulfillment of the law. If this is not in fact the case, then it is not difficult to see why Forde refuses to allow for God's commandments to be preached relative to the cross. For Forde, the cross and the law have only a weak connection. Human beings bring about the cross because they are out of accord with the law. The law's judgment is existentially executed on humanity in the cross in that they recognize their sin. Nevertheless, Christ does not really contain within himself an objective fulfillment of the law. This makes the connection between the law and the cross merely indirect, thereby also necessitating an indirect relationship between the preaching of God's law and absolution.

Second, of the whole human race, only a very small number was actually present at the crucifixion. To say to a sinner that, hypothetically, he would also have killed Jesus may very well be true, but it does not solve the problem of how this sinful attitude is manifest in the sinner's own life. Even if the sinner would perhaps have joined the mob, how does this relate to the sinner's life here and now? Such a hypothetical scenario makes one's sin into an abstraction, something that Forde is trying to avoid and which he unintentionally achieves with his formulation. Similarly, by exercising a kind of purely civil righteousness, the sinner might very well not have wished Jesus dead. There are abundant examples of this in the Gospels: Pilate, Pilate's wife, the disciples, Nicodemus, and perhaps some other members of the Sanhedrin. Can these people be absolved from the judgment of the cross? Certainly not! But Forde's method leaves this at the very least a loose end. This problem would be solved by positing a *lex aeterna*, enumerated in specific divine commandments which Jesus fulfilled, as we find in the teaching of Scripture, Luther, and the Lutheran Confessions. By simply looking at God's commandments relative to the cross, the sinner could easily see what he had caused by not obeying them.

Through a specific enumeration of the commandments of the law and Christ's fulfillment of them, our role as sinners in Jesus' death becomes clear. We can with Luther see in the flesh of Jesus "Peter the denier; Paul the persecutor, blasphemer, and assaulter; David the adulterer; the sinner who ate the apple in Paradise; the thief on the cross. In short . . . the person of all men, the one who committed the sins of all men."[63]

Forde's understanding of the second use of the law is therefore highly problematic. First, it presupposes a rejection of the biblical and confessional doctrine of substitutionary atonement. Second, it stands at odds with the practice of Jesus, the prophets, and the apostles, who make specific enumerations of the content of the law in order to accuse sinners. Third, it makes the law into a vague and abstract reality that does not expose human beings to the specific ways in which they have violated the law of God. Fourth, it stands at odds with the Lutheran Confessions' understanding of the law and how it is to be preached.

III. Forde on the First and Third Use of the Law

Having reviewed Forde's understanding of the general nature of the law and its second use, we now turn to Forde's understanding of the first and third uses. We will consider them together because, although Forde theoretically rejects the third use of the law, he does so only by subsuming it under the first use. This has not been an uncommon practice in twentieth-century Lutheran theology.[64] We shall then argue that this move creates some ambiguities regarding the role of the law in the life of the Christian.

Before we proceed with our discussion of Forde, it will be helpful to understand what the Formula of Concord means by the first and third uses

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[63] *LW* 26:280.

[64] See, e.g., Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law*, trans. Ross Mckenzie (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961); *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961). Wingren speaks of the first use of the law as the arena of Christian vocation within the orders of creation. This is where the confusion lies. The first use of the law as the Formula of Concord defines it does not touch Christians but only restrains "wild, disobedient men" (FC SD, VI; Triglot 963). Wingren claims that because Christian are still sinners existing in creation, the first use of the law still restrains them and informs them of what works they should do externally. According to David Yeago, this interpretation of the first use of the law goes back to Adolf Harless, *Christliche Ethik* (Stuttgart: Verlag von Samuel Gottlieb Liesching, 1860). See David Yeago, "The Church as Polity? The Lutheran Context of Robert W. Jenson's Ecclesiology," in *Trinity, Time, and Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson*, ed. Colin Gunton (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2000), 201–237.

of the law. The Formula of Concord, following Luther, teaches that the law is God's eternal and objective will, which is revealed to his creatures through both nature and the Scriptures. Because of the fall, this revelation becomes restraining and condemning. Nevertheless, it is no less a revelation of God's will. According to the sixth article of the Formula of Concord, the law possesses a first use: "external discipline and decency are maintained by it against wild, disobedient men."[65] The Formula here specifically defines the first use as applying to non-Christians, or at least to false ones, through coercive authorities (parents, teachers, police, military, etc.). It is not meant to instruct or discipline Christians, but non-believers who are "wild and disobedient."

The sixth article of the Formula also defines the third use of the law. This logically follows from the contention of both Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions that the law is God's eternal will for human beings. Although human beings are no longer defined and determined in their relationship with God (*coram deo*) by the condemnation of the law, the law nevertheless still represents God's will for human life: "For the law is a mirror in which the will of God, and what pleases Him, are exactly portrayed, and which should [therefore] be constantly held up to the believers and be diligently urged upon them without ceasing."[66] Such a formulation provokes the question: if faith sanctifies and renews Christians, will they not automatically perform the works of the law? Yes, to the extent that they are sanctified, they will perform the works of the law, but "believers are not renewed in this life perfectly or completely."[67] The justified sinner, therefore, is in need of the law to subdue his or her old nature. The Formula of Concord compares the old nature to "an intractable, refractory ass [that] is still a part of them [believers], which must be coerced to the obedience of Christ, not only by the teaching, admonition, force and threatening of the Law, but also oftentimes by the club of punishments and troubles, until the body of sin is entirely put off."[68] This use of the law is no more harmless than any other use of the law. It cannot rightly be characterized as a pleasant or non-threatening form of the law.

The second point made by the Formula is that justified sinners renewed by sanctification need the law as instruction so that they do not

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[65] FC SD VI; Triglot 963.
[66] FC SD VI; Triglot 963.
[67] FC SD VI; Triglot 965.
[68] FC SD VI; Triglot 969.

engage in "self-chosen worship, without God's Word and command."[69] In other words, although the regenerate person desires to do good works, he does not automatically know which works are God-pleasing. This strikes a similar note to that of the Augustana with characterization of late medieval Roman Catholicism as encouraging "childish" and "needless"[70] works such as pilgrimages, praying the rosary, etc. God desires specific works, and engaging in works of devotion not commanded by God is useless. Because of this, the law cannot simply be understood as existing relative to sin. Rather, it is also a necessary part of living in creation this side of the eschaton. For human beings to rule in creation as God intends, they must have specific regulations to direct their business as the caretakers of the created order. The only thing that could abrogate this would be the passing away of the old creation at the eschaton. This fits very well with Luther's remarks in both the Genesis lectures and the Antinomian Disputations.

Therefore, when the Formula of Concord posits a third use of the law, it is not supplementing a weak connection between justification and sanctification by trying to inculcate obedience to the law. [71] Neither does it attempt to claim that the law has suddenly become friendly and non-threatening.[72] The confessors of the Formula thoroughly agree with the young Melanchthon's "*lex semper accusat*." In reality, the Formula has attempted to take seriously the *simul* of Christian existence. On the one hand, the Christian lives in the old creation regulated by the law and the orders of creation and, therefore, needs practical instruction in God's will. On the other hand, Christians have already received Christ's alien righteousness and been sanctified by faith. They have been proleptically translated into heaven with its *lex vacua*. To describe this situation in Paul's terms, the Christian is sanctified and can say "in my inner being . . . I delight in God's law" (Rom 7:22). At the same time, the Christian does

[69] FC SD VI; Triglot 969.

[70] AC XX; Triglot 53.

[71] This is a charge Forde himself makes: "Nervousness about the effectiveness of the gospel in the confessional generation of Protestantism resulted in the positing of an added function of the law: a 'third use' by the 'reborn Christian.' The gospel does make a difference, supposedly, but only such as to add to the function of the law." Forde, "Fake Theology," 220.

[72] Forde also makes this charge. "[By the third use] the function [of the law] is really a watering down and blunting of the impact of the law. Instead of ordering and attacking, law is supposed to become a rather gentle innocuous 'guide.'" Forde, "Fake Theology," 220.

what he hates (Rom 7:23). For this reason, Christians must "discipline the flesh" (1 Cor 1:27).

Forde's understanding of the first and third uses of the law is rather different from that of the Formula. According to Forde, the third use cannot be accepted because the law can never be a "friendly guide for the reborn Christian . . . used by us like a friendly pet. . . . The idea of a third use assumes that the law story simply continues after grace."[73] The "law story" is rather ended by and subordinate to the "Jesus story."[74] Forde, however, is not critiquing the doctrine of the third use of the law as found in the Formula of Concord, which teaches that the law remains a threat and an accuser of the Christian throughout his entire life. Neither does the Formula describe the third use as a "pet" (to use Forde's term) that Christians can harmlessly use. It is rather compared to a club! On this level, Forde's critiques of the third use are irrelevant, at least when directed at the definition found in the Formula of Concord. In all fairness to Forde, however, certain interpretations of the third use of the law made since the Reformation have described it as non-threatening and even pleasant.[75] If Forde means to take aim at those formulations, then, in light of the confessional understanding of the law, he is certainly correct to do so.

From Forde's perspective, then, how is the Christian to know how to live in the world if there is no teaching of the third use of the law? Scott Murray has questioned whether or not Forde can really account for the *simul* of Christian existence.[76] Murray makes this judgment in light of his strict identification of the first use of the law (based on the definition of the Formula of Concord) with law as it is used to restrain non-Christians.[77] Forde on the other hand sees Christians as still being subject to the first use of the law insofar as they remain sinners.[78] He defines the first use as being

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[73] Gerhard O. Forde, "Luther's Ethics," in *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism*, ed. Gerhard O. Forde, Mark C. Mattes, and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 153.

[74] Forde, "Luther's Ethics," 154. This remark seem not to take into account the fact that Jesus fulfilled the law. The "law story" must necessarily be the "skeleton" of the gospel story. Otherwise we would be talking about a different God in both stories. The gospel story does, however, become dominant.

[75] See Scott Murray's description of *The Abiding Word* and its treatment of the third use of the law. Murray, *Law, Life and the Living God*, 64–67.

[76] Murray, *Law, Life and the Living God*, 174.

[77] Murray, *Law, Life and the Living God*, 13.

[78] Forde, "Luther's Ethics," 149. There is some wisdom in this. After all, sincere Christians (including the author of this article) still get speeding tickets—and have even

the "political use," but then states that perhaps it would be better to call it "the ethical use,"[79] thereby subsuming the third use under the first use. Mark Mattes observes that ultimately "Forde rejects a third use because he does not see this formulation as offering anything that is not already in the first use."[80] Echoing Gustaf Wingren, Forde states that faith sees the created order as its arena of ethical activity.[81] The Christian is to be ethically guided by the rewards and punishments that the created realm offers in return for external adherence to the law: "So it [the first use of the law] works, most often, by threat, coercion, power, social persuasion and/or often just shame."[82] These are phenomena that Christians are subject to as much as non-believers and, as a result, they become the basis of Christian ethical action in the world this side of the eschaton.[83] In other words, Forde does not reject the idea that the law can serve as a guide for human beings in the world; rather, because of the *simul* of Christian existence in the old and new ages, Forde is more comfortable placing this under the first use of the law.[84]

Forde uses of the idea of eschatological disruptiveness as the chief paradigm for understanding law and gospel. For Forde, to the extent that the Christian remains in the flesh, he is subject to the first and second uses of the law, but as far as the new regenerate life goes, the law cannot inform the Christian of his non-existent duty. The new person has fulfilled the law by faith and, therefore, has no need of it. Because faith inspired by the event of the cross and the empty tomb fulfills the law, the law has become a *lex vacua* and reaches its eschatological fulfillment proleptically. If that is the case, then the law, having been fulfilled, cannot stand over against the Christian any longer. If one does not have faith and thereby fulfill the law,

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been known to run red lights! It is nevertheless hard to imagine a sincere Christian robbing a bank or dealing narcotics.

[79] Forde, "Luther's Ethics," 152.

[80] Mark C. Mattes, "Re-Examining the Third Use of the Law," *CTQ* 69 (2005): 279–280.

[81] The "arena of ethical activity [is for the Christian] disclosed as creation." Forde, "Luther's Ethics," 149.

[82] Forde, "Luther's Ethics," 152.

[83] Forde, "Luther's Ethics," 153.

[84] "The civil use of law ushers us into a strange and exciting new world, the world of the neighbor. Talk of the end of the law is unfortunately often taken to imply that the door is suddenly open to a certain relaxation and permissiveness. To think so, however, would be a fatal mistake. What the end of the law opens the door to is the world of the neighbor, the world in which the self is turned outward toward the other." Forde, "Law and Sexual Behavior," *Lutheran Quarterly* 9 (1995): 7.

the law will simply persist forever until it is fulfilled.[85] This goes hand in hand with Forde's claim that the law lacks reality apart from sin. Nevertheless, to the extent that the new person needs the law as a specific "channel" (to use Scaer's term) to express his regeneration, he is already provided such a channel by the ethical structures present in his specific historical situation.

This conflation of vocation and law is another reason why Forde so strongly affirms Haikola's rejection of the concept of *lex aeterna*.[86] Law as positive directive is new every day and is merely what human beings discern regarding how best to fulfill their vocation in the kingdom of the world at any given moment. For this reason, the law cannot be eternal, since it is temporal and highly mutable.[87] Forde approvingly summarizes Haikola's interpretation of Luther: "God has not revealed his absolute will to man even in paradise [according to Luther]. The will of God is not made known in once-for-all fashion, least of all can man capture this will in the form of an eternal principle. . . . Man must learn to know God's will anew in each situation."[88] Forde even appears to suggest elsewhere that the divine will as law can be learned from the rewards and punishments that society gives the human person: "It [the law] can also work by persuasion, conditional promise, by a kind of seduction or bribery. You eat your spinach, you get your pudding. . . . [If] you do your work well, you get your bonus! So it [the law] works, politically, ethically."[89]

This, however, creates ambiguity regarding the specific content of the law. Here the Augustana's prohibition of "childish" works is instructive. God wishes human beings to perform certain concrete acts of worship and obedience and excludes others. It is irrelevant how sincere the motivation underlying them may be. Part of the difficulty here is that Forde has little

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[85] "A faith that knows of the true end of law in the double sense of goal and cessation will at the same time 'establish the law,' that is, allow the law to stand just as it is. In the light of the end one can gain some understanding of how God puts the law to its proper uses. Indeed, knowing the end, faith supports the law until the end is given. If the end is given and assured, there is no need to try to 'make the law of no effect.' That happens only when faith is lost. Without faith, that is, there is no hope. There is no end in sight. Law just goes on forever." Forde, "Law and Sexual Behavior," 4.

[86] Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 176–177. Forde praises Haikola for rejecting *lex aeterna* because it undermines the dynamic nature of law. Adam and Eve clearly had to obey a different law than Israel. Law is, therefore, historically mutable and only right reason's adaptation to its given historical situation.

[87] This is not necessarily a cogent argument. If the law is eternal, it can still manifest itself differently in different historical situations without in principle changing.

[88] Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 177.

[89] Forde, "Luther's Ethics," 152.

appreciation for the law as a concrete and specific set of commandments revealed by God in Scripture. He is rather more inclined toward the notion that God's will can be read from creation by human practical reason. For this reason the law as taught by Scripture cannot be final.

Although we must agree, following Psalm 19 and Romans 1–2, that human beings can to a certain extent read the Decalogue in the structure of creation in our fallen state, we are still in need of the law's clarification through a specific act of special revelation. Human beings this side of the eschaton must have God's commandments clarified and taught to them so that the sinful nature does not tempt them into self-chosen works, which are a particular problem in the church of our day, with the move toward both church political activism and the acceptance of homosexual practice.[90] In both cases, the church's full proclamation of the law and its work as a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 2–3) has been sidelined for other concerns.

In Forde's case, the danger of self-chosen works for the church is less of a concern, since he emphasizes the church's role as a ministry of forgiveness. Nevertheless, with regard to the kingdom of the left, Forde's ethics do not provide a clear criterion to determine what social norms reflect God's will for creation and which do not. It is of course correct to ask whether or not a particular commandment applies to our situation, as Luther notes.[91] Nevertheless, human beings have a tendency to fit the law to their own desires, and not everything that our society wishes us to do is God-pleasing. Even if we emphasize with Forde the positive role of vocation in shaping ethics, we cannot accept every vocation assigned to us by our culture as salutary. Neither does vocation automatically contain within itself an outline of how that vocation might be fulfilled in a God-pleasing manner.

Overall, the main problem here appears to be ambiguity regarding the content and criterion of the law relative to the Christian life. Forde often agrees that the content of the law cannot be changed: "Under the guise of the concern for ethics, morality, and justice, law is watered down and blunted to accommodate our fancies."[92] Nevertheless, on some issues he

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[90] Forde is to be praised for having resisted the temptation of many in the ELCA to accept homosexual practice. See Forde, "Law and Sexual Behavior." Also see a positive assessment of his thought relative to other ELCA theologians in John T. Pless, "Using and Misusing Luther on Homosexuality," *Lutheran Forum* (Winter 2004): 24–30.

[91] "It is not enough simply to look and see whether this is God's word, whether God has said it; rather we must look and see to whom it has been spoken, whether it fits us." *LW* 35:170.

[92] Forde, "Fake Theology," 220–221.

seems to think that certain aspects of the law can be abrogated, while others not. This is nowhere more clear than when Forde insists that homosexual behavior cannot be accepted or promoted by the church because we cannot change the goals (procreation) and structures of the order of marriage, while nevertheless claiming that it is legitimate to change them with regard to divorce and the ordination of women:

> Some in the church like to argue also that since the church has changed its mind on matters like divorce or ordination of women it seems consequent that it could change its stance on sexual behavior as well. But in questions of the civil use of law it is not legitimate to argue that one example of change justifies another. Each case has to be argued individually.[93]

Since as Paul notes (1 Tim 2:11–15), and as Luther affirms,[94] Adam was the first minister and Eve the first church, why would female ordination be any less a violation of God's original order than homosexual practice? One might also ask this regarding divorce, which Jesus clearly prohibits in most cases due to the structure of the original creation (Matt 19:1–11; Mark 10:2–12; Luke 16:18).

Love of neighbor must, as Forde argues,[95] be the ultimate criterion determining how the law is applied (Matt 22:36–37). Nevertheless, we must have the divine word of guidance to tell us and discern for us how God intends for us to love our neighbor. Even in the prelapsarian state, Adam needed a word from God to know how to establish true worship and proper governance of Eden. This was true even though he was still uncorrupted by sin and therefore desired to love his neighbor in the purest possible way. Overall, Forde's definition of law as the experience of dread, threat, and demand tends to undermine the enumeration of specific commandments that Christians should obey. Much of this appears to be tied to Forde's opposition to law defined as the eternal content of the divine will, and his insistence that the law can only coexist with sin. Forde believes, of course, that Christians should work within the created order in order to promote the love of neighbor, but the specifics of that love are left less than satisfactorily defined.

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[93] Forde, "Law and Sexual Behavior," 6.

[94] "Adam alone heard it [the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil], he later informed Eve of it. If they had not fallen into sin, Adam would have transmitted this single command later to their descendants." *LW* 1:105.

[95] "Thus the purpose of the civil use of law is to take care of God's creation and God's creatures. To be sure, law is not therefore to be imposed as an absolute which must be obeyed for its own sake." Forde, "Law and Sexual Behavior," 6.

IV. Conclusion

In light of our investigation, we have discovered that Gerhard Forde's interpretation of the Lutheran doctrine of the law is in many respects deficient. Its chief weakness is that it makes the actual content of the law overly vague. In critiquing Forde in this way, we do not wish to diminish his contributions to Lutheran theology in other areas. His works on both the theology of the cross[96] and Luther's dialectic of the hidden and revealed God[97] are tremendously insightful. Nevertheless, in regard to the law, his theology proves to be deficient in a manner that was not uncommon for Lutheran theology in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. Of course, no theology or theologian is without his excesses, and for this reason we can at least appreciate that it was Forde's intention to magnify the power of the gospel that led him in this direction. What we find unfortunate is that this came at the expense of the law. We can in the end learn from Forde's mistakes and ever return anew in each generation to the firm foundation of the Scriptures as they are properly interpreted by the Lutheran Confessions.

[96] Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997).

[97] Gerhard O. Forde, *Captivation of the Will: Erasmus vs. Luther on Freedom and Bondage* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005).

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Theological Observer

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday is the story of a marriage. It is the account of an unlikely union. Humanity and the soil are the improbable partners. The tale of these Ash Wednesday nuptials stretches back to Genesis 2–8. The earth is the silent but crucial character in these opening chapters. The key to each of these stories, and therefore the key to Ash Wednesday, is the dirt.

It is dirt out of which God creates Adam, who emerges from it, is lifted up by the creative hand of the Lord, and is enlivened by the divine breath. The Lord makes humanity the masters of that earth of which they are a part. Standing upon the ground, they tread upon it as kings and lords. They tower over the earth while still attached to it. They relate to the dirt as a husband, as the one who plants seed, as the one who gives work and care and waits for the soil to give birth, to respond with the fruits that keep humanity alive. It is a curious balance, this dance of fertility which the Lord establishes. On the one hand, Adam and Eve are exalted, distinct, reaching toward the heavens, bearing the image of the Lord who made them. Yet they are still made of dirt and attached to it. They must stoop to it for sustenance, even in that pristine paradise. They must push seeds into the dirt and tend and water and love the ground so that it may become pregnant and fruitful and bear food for them. The two, made of the same stuff, must be one, united in the bountiful union of seed and fruit and harvest.

Sin warps this strange and wonderful mixture of betrothal and mastery. Adam and Eve sin, but it is the earth that is cursed. "Cursed is the ground because of you" (Gen 3:17). Adam and the earth are one flesh and the dirt, the flesh of Adam, receives the divine word of judgment. Thorns and thistles replace the garden. The earth is transformed from humanity's wife to humanity's enemy. Sin demolishes the beautiful joining of opposites. Adam, man of mud, who stood high above the earth yet was tied to it in a relationship of planting and giving birth, now knows that the earth will devour him. Not only seed will be thrust into the earth—human beings themselves will be planted. The sentence is pronounced: humanity will return to the dust. The earth will greedily consume him who came from her. The dirt becomes master. The balance is lost. The vertical blessing bestowed by God upon Adam is transformed into a horizontal return. The marriagebed of the soil, the womb of the earth where Adam thrust his seed, becomes the deathbed, the tomb.

The story of the two brothers that follows the story of the fall also pushes the ground to the forefront. The unspoken subject of the narrative is the marriage of humanity and the earth, still intact but twisted, an angry, sullen romance. Cain is a farmer, one who embraces the soil for his livelihood. God

snubs his offspring, his harvest. Cain, toiling in the sin-cursed ground, gives to the Lord what his seed has produced, and the Lord turns his face away. So Cain returns to that ground and plants a horrifying, different kind of seed. He spills upon the earth the blood of his brother. It is from the ground, recipient of Cain's violence, that the blood cries out. Though Cain has struck Abel, the ground is also a victim. The ground is now filled, not with seed, not even with the drops of toiling sweat which fallen humanity must shed to get food, but with the warm stuff of life, discharged in murderous hate. God punishes Cain by divorcing him from that very ground from which he was made, of which he was still a part, from which he had labored to gain nourishment. Cain, married to the earth as one who planted seed and tended crops and received its fertile response, must now wander on the earth and never be joined to it as husband and giver.

The story of humanity's conjugal connection to the dirt continues in the account of the flood. People become so evil that God repents of ever making them. And while his anger is focused on those he made in his own image, that anger once more is unleashed upon the ground from which they came and to which they are still joined. God strikes man by striking the earth with the waters of death. To destroy mankind God must wipe clean the earth itself. Mankind and the soil are one flesh. It is the earth which must accept the judgment of God for man's sin. The two partners go down together, drowning in the waters of the Lord's wrath.

This narrative of the union of man and the earth is played out liturgically on Ash Wednesday. It is a quick, repetitive moment of ritual: ashes, the motion of a cross, and a few words. Yet by it we are placed directly into the foundational narrative of humanity. This imposition of ashes is not pedagogical. On the first day of Lent, we are not "told" about creation or taught the doctrinal import of the fall or the story of Cain. In fact, the appointed readings for the day ignore the opening chapters of the Jewish Bible. What Ash Wednesday does is place us in the story. We become actors in the narrative. The story happens to us in a visceral, tactile way.

At that moment, all our modern pretensions are cast off. We lose our pretend advancement and our clean, digital disconnection from things dirty and primeval. We are thrust once more to the soil. We do not sit in the pew learning ancient Palestinian stories. We are physically marked with ashes. Words are spoken over our bodies. We are addressed personally and individually. We become Adam and Eve and Cain and the recipients of the flood and what is true about us, about our bodies, our relationship to our maker, is tossed out into the open.

In those few seconds we live out the primordial series of events that defines us even now. We remember our creation from the dirt, that our bodies

are real and tangible, and we remember with it that the Lord breathed his Spirit into us and that we are formed by his hand. Even more we remember the awful mortality that comes at the end. We will return to the dust. We die. We sin. We are Adam and Eve. We are married to the earth. We cannot escape the ground upon which we walk. That earth gives birth to us, we plant our seed in her, are fed by her. And she will greedily consume our flesh someday soon. No matter how far we have supposedly progressed, we are dirt.

With the mark on our foreheads, we stand in the place of Cain. The ground cries out on account of the evil we have done. The blood of our brothers and sisters cries out for vengeance. We all murder Abel, we all have spilled his blood on the ground through neglect, hatred, envy. We rage and fulminate in our hearts. And by it, we are divorced from creation. We live out the sentence of Cain. Not rooted in one spot, we wander aimlessly, unable to connect to one another, unable to find God in that which he has made. We are forever on pilgrimage and we never arrive.

The last piece of Old Testament story that Ash Wednesday thrusts us into as participants is the most drastic: the flood. There is, of course, no water in the Ash Wednesday ceremony, just muddy splotches on wrinkled foreheads. But the flood is there in all its destructive and saving fury. It appears in the shape of that protective Cainite mark placed upon us: a cross. It is here where we stand on the earth and feel the awful deluge of God's anger over our disobedience, that the imagination of our hearts is only evil all the time. On Ash Wednesday we stand on the earth that God thrashed and pummeled with water: it is the same earth in which the cross of Jesus Christ was planted. The ground from which Adam was formed, the ground which was cursed by sin, the ground which drank the blood of Cain's brother, the ground which soaked up the furious deluge, is now the ground that bears the weight of the Son of God, is splashed with his divine blood and waits to receive his lifeless body.

On Ash Wednesday we are marked with that cross, and it is a cross of Baptism. That we are marked with the cross of Christ in our baptism and that we are so marked on the day of ashes and death and sin and shame is no accident. For that cruciform sign of death and the words of burial that accompany it are only washed away by the waters of Baptism, which is in turn nothing else than the cross of Christ. We are baptized into his death. With the baptismal floodwaters, we go down into that earth with Christ. The waters bury us in the ground with him. It is there finally that death loses its grip on us. Christ is the seed planted in the earth that the greedy grave cannot digest. Christ is planted as seed and the earth must do what God intended it to do before the fall, before the curse, before Abel's blood stained it. It must give birth to life. It must feed God's children. It must give birth to the tree of life, with healing fruit for humanity.

In this Ash Wednesday moment, balance is again restored between humanity and the earth from which we spring. Creation and fall and burial and murder and wrath are wrapped in that sign of our baptism. The burial and resurrection of Christ become the restoration of the connection between the earth and humanity. It marks the soil's return into the scheme of God's giving to humanity. The earth once more serves humanity as mother, as giver of life, as it disgorges Christ. As Mary did at his birth, the earth gives birth to Christ and hands him over to us. Ash Wednesday marks the reconciliation of creation and humanity. In the death and resurrection of Christ, in our baptism, once more we are bound together in fruitfulness to the earth, receiving her harvest for our life.

Paul Gregory Alms
Pastor, Redeemer Lutheran Church
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A Pro-Life Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

Through your Son Jesus Christ, you created the heavens and the earth, marvelously making us in your own image. You breathed into man's nostrils the Spirit of life, and the man became a living being. From Adam's side you fashioned Eve, and from the blessed union of man and wife you would fill the earth with us, their sons and daughters.

But then, in our desire to become gods, we ate the fruit of disobedience that leads to death. Justly barred from the tree of life, we fell into jealousy, anger, lust, and murder.

Yet you have had mercy on us children of Cain. When your Son took our flesh and made his home in Mary's womb, you sanctified human life once more. By the birth of your Son, you made possible our baptismal rebirth. By the death of your Son, you redeemed the world from sin and death. And by the resurrection and ascension of your Son, you made for us a path back home to paradise and to the tree of life eternal.

This day, O Lord, we pray for the churches of this city, and for all who serve as their shepherds.

We come in repentance, knowing, like Peter, that we are unworthy to stand in your presence. For the times that we, like the priests and the Levites, have walked past the suffering, and turned a deaf ear to the cries of the hurting, forgive us.

Give to us this day the Spirit of Christ, that we may speak boldly on behalf of the unborn, and that we may speak tenderly to those in need of forgiveness

and hope. Set before our eyes the vision of Jesus, who took the little children into his arms. Set before our eyes Christ crucified, whose innocent blood is the payment for our guilt.

Through our preaching, humble the proud and lift up the broken-hearted. Bring the wicked to repentance, and enlighten souls darkened by ignorance. Open the ears of those who are deaf to the cries of the unborn. Give sight to eyes that are blind to the horror that is abortion. Give cleansing to hearts stained by what has become our national sin.

Indeed, end our sad divisions. Call us to remember that Christ has come for all nations, and for every race and tribe. United in repentance for our sin, unite us now in the redemption won by Christ for all God's children.

If we confess Christ before the people, Christ will confess us before his Father. And if the people hear the words of a prophet, they too will receive a prophet's reward.

Therefore, bless the churches of Indiana. Strengthen them that they may support faithful pastors and uphold the arms of true prophets. Bless our churches that they may become beacons of hope and havens of mercy for mothers and children. And to all of us, grant us the forgiveness and life which is already ours . . . in Christ Jesus, our Lord of Life, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Peter J. Scaer

This prayer was delivered prior to the annual Allen County Right to Life March in Fort Wayne, Indiana, on January 29, 2011. The Editors

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Book Reviews

***Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament.* Edited by G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007. xxviii + 1239 pages. Hardcover, $59.99.**

This is a great resource for every pastor and all other serious students of the New Testament. Beale and Carson have gathered a team of eminent scholars, who contribute to this commentary on the quotations, allusions, and echoes of the Old Testament in each of the New Testament books. While providing answers to the overall question of how the New Testament writers understood and used the Scriptures, the focus here is on the quotations and allusions themselves. In which context do they appear and from which context are they taken? How is the Old Testament text used in the New Testament passage? What is the theological significance of its usage? Does the author cite the Hebrew or the Greek Old Testament? In addition to this, there is often also a discussion of how the text is used in contemporary Jewish sources. For pastors who usually preach on the Gospel reading, this volume will be of great help in their efforts to include Old Testament material in their sermons and so enrich the interpretation of the text, preaching "the whole counsel of God." Especially helpful in this regard is that each of the four Gospels is given a thorough discussion; together these discussions make up almost half of the volume. Of course, sometimes the reader may wonder why this or that allusion does not get more attention. I am, for example, surprised by the sparse comment on Jesus' allusion to Isaiah 35:5–6 in Matthew 11:5. Nevertheless, this is an invaluable tool for the preparation of sermons and Bible studies.

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***Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy—A Righteous Gentile vs. the Third Reich*. By Eric Metaxas. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010. 591 pages. Hardcover, $29.99. Paperback, $19.99.**

Biographies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer abound, ranging from the massive and authoritative work of over a thousand pages, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Fortress, 2000), by Bonhoeffer's friend Eberhard Bethge, to dozens of shorter, popular accounts. Those interested in a helpful guide to the literature might consult Jonathan D. Sorum, "Review Essay: Another Look at Bonhoeffer," *Lutheran Quarterly* 18 (2004): 469–482, since the body of work on Bonhoeffer is immense. Drawing largely on secondary sources, especially Bethge and *I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, edited by Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann and Ronald Smith (Harper and Row, 1966), Eric Metaxas has woven together a narrative focusing more on Bonhoeffer's personal life and his struggle against National Socialism

than on his theological contributions. While this biography contains nothing that cannot be found in other accounts, Metaxas provides a readable, albeit selective, telling of Bonhoeffer's life. Readers intimidated by the size and detail of Bethge's magisterial work will find *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy – A Righteous Gentile vs. the Third Reich* much less daunting.

Eberhard Jüngel once remarked that one must remove "the halo of theological unassailability" that "has surrounded the works of Bonhoeffer, much to their own detriment. One should destroy that halo for Bonhoeffer's sake" (cited by Frederik De Lange, *Waiting for the Word: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Speaking About God,* 13). Metaxas never really gets beyond the halo. In fact, the Bonhoeffer who appears in his book often speaks with the theological accents of American Evangelical spirituality. While one can resonate with Metaxas's attempt to retrieve Bonhoeffer from the "Death of God Theologians" and various revisionists who sought to use unfinished fragments from Bonhoeffer's letters to construct a secularized Christianity, he cannot be so easily refashioned in the mold of Evangelicalism either. The accuracy of the book also suffers from the common mistake of confusing Hermann Sasse with the pro-Nazi bishop Martin Sasse of Thuringia (see 307 and index, 588).

John T. Pless

***Christian Ethics in a Technological Age*. By Brian Brock. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010. 408 pages. Paperback, $34.00.**

Asserting that the gospel is critical but not destructive of technological developments, Brian Brock seeks to demonstrate how Christian doctrine both frames and engages ethical questions pressed on us by these developments: "The annunciation of the gospel does not destroy the modern technological world altogether, but is a divine invitation to a form of life at once critical, enlivening, and connective" (6). Using the biblical narrative of Paul's encounter with Demetrius, the silversmith in Ephesus (Acts 19:24–26), Brock probes whether or not the presence of Christ is invasive to those who construct the icons of our technologically constituted culture. The first part of the book works through the philosophical claims of Martin Heidegger, George Grant, and Michel Foucault, pressing issues of economics, sociality, and political community within the matrix of a metaphysics of technology. The second half of the book is an effort in constructive theology, as Brock endeavors to work out a concrete ethic grounded in Christ and addressed to issues of political power, work, ecology, marriage, and fertility.

The Swiss theologian Karl Barth is the theological north star guiding the general orientation of Brock's project, although Brock does not hesitate to offer criticisms of Barth along the way. Brock also draws on Oswald Bayer, Bernd Wannenwetsch, Christoph Schwöbel, Michael Banner, and Hans Ulrich to

argue for an ethic entrenched within the contours of creation. Those who have read and reacted to *Together with All Creatures*, recently released by the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations, might find Brock's criticism of approaches to environmental ethics provocative. For instance, he appreciates some aspects of Wendell Berry's work, especially his accent on the gift-nature of creation. Brock believes, however, that Berry's approach is marked by several serious theological flaws, including a romantic notion of the holiness of creation and a disparagement of biblical eschatology (304).

Several other aspects of Brock's work merit careful reflection. He critiques the notion of freedom inherent in modern conceptions of technology. Technology promises autonomy, or freedom of choice. This is a durable claim reinforced in myriad ways culturally and politically within the technological ethos. Accordingly, Brock worries that "abortion and contraception are understood not as acts of gratitude for human fertility and its biological roots, but as bringing freedom by offering escape from the tyranny of biology" (363). Brock diagnoses both Manichean and Pelagian cancers gnawing away at the Christian vision of ethics. The Manichean impulse is identified in the attempt "to expunge the work of the evil creator god by erasing his handiwork from the genome" (370). Brock argues that contemporary Pelagians seek perfection through "responsible procreation," that is, genetic engineering.

Christian Ethics in a Technological Age is not an easy read, but it is a book that will help pastors and laity alike think more clearly about the way technology shapes our vision of human life and the alternative vision given in the confession of the triune God. Brock accurately notes that "the gods of any age do not go quietly" (374). In this well-researched and at times challenging book, Brock provides Christians with a theologically informed tool for discerning the spirits which haunt our culture, as well as some significant assistance in formulating a coherent response.

John T. Pless

***Epaphras: Paul's Educator at Colossae*. By Michael Trainor. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008. 123 + xi pages. Paperback, $12.95.**

Michael Trainor's *Epaphras*, part of the series *Paul's Social Network: Brothers and Sisters in Faith*, combines close attention to New Testament texts and modern network analysis to produce a 123-page book on a person whose name appears only three times in Scripture (Phlm 23; Col 1:7; 4:12–13). Trainor's book is comprised of seven chapters: One: Introducing Epaphras; Two: Epaphras' Social Network; Three: The Domestic Network in the Letter to Philemon; Four: Epaphras' Distinctiveness in Philemon; Five: Epaphras in the Letter to the Colossians; Six: Epaphras' Colleagues at Colossae; Seven: Summarizing Epaphras of Colossae. At the end of the book appear Notes (97–

108), Bibliography (109–115), Index of Persons and Subjects (116–120), and Index of Biblical Sources (121–123).

Complexities associated with authorship have great bearing upon one's understanding of Epaphras. Since Trainor believes that Paul wrote Philemon but not Colossians, he places great emphasis upon Philemon 23–24, where Epaphras's name appears first in a list of persons who append their greetings at the end of the letter: "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers" (Phlm 23–24 RSV). Epaphras's prominence in this list and the specific language Paul uses of him ("sends greetings") suggest his importance within Paul's social network. His significance in Philemon becomes, according to Trainor, the catalyst the writer of the letter to the Colossians allegedly drew upon and elaborated in Colossians 1:7 and 4:12–13. The latter passages establish Epaphras as the "instructor and interpreter of Paul's Gospel of God" (10) and prove that he was "foremost in Paul's retinue" (41) and Paul's "legitimate spokesman and interpreter" (69), and through Epaphras Paul continues to "speak from the grave" (70). Trainor's insights depend in large measure upon the presumed pseudonymity of Colossians, a position which I do not share. Textual support for the Pauline authorship of Colossians is actually quite strong (Col 1:1, 23–25, 29; 2:1, 4–5; 4:3–4, 7–8, 11, 13, 18), so I cannot abide the argument that Epaphras, or anyone else, was the real author of Colossians. If Paul was not the author of Colossians, would the many Christians there and elsewhere have carried on as though Paul really were the author—knowing full well that he was not? This is the stuff of popular conspiracy theories (e.g., *The Da Vinci Code*; *Angels and Demons*), not fact. So Pauline authorship still has much to commend it—even though, to be sure, problems remain with traditional explanations (cf. Trainor, 2–5). Another irritant is Trainor's use of the terminology "Jesus movement groups," "Jesus households," and "Jesus followers" for what more traditional interpreters would term "churches," "congregations," and "Christians." This nomenclature suggests that the book is intended more for social scientists, New Testament scholars, and graduate students than for pastors, church professionals, and Christians.

Nevertheless, I completely agree that the series' social-historical approach opens up "new ways of envisioning [Paul's] world" (45). Just one funerary monument can cast a bright light upon the type of world it was that Epaphras originally inhabited (16–19), and Trainor's understanding of ancient slavery (8, 44–46, 65, 68, 99, 103) is more nuanced than one ordinarily finds in scholarship of this type. This is a book—and an approach—that should be utilized by Lutheran pastors and laity, given our heightened emphases on cross-cultural ministry and missions.

John G. Nordling

***Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek*. By Constantine R. Campbell. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008. 159 pages. Paperback, $16.99.**

Although I read every word of this book carefully and tried with great concentration to understand Campbell's arguments completely, I had trouble coming to terms with this book—both on account of my own limitations and (as I suspect) from Campbell's tendency to presume a lot from his reader. Perhaps the best way to appreciate the contribution of this book is to consider the following two statements, which essentially describe the same events from two quite different perspectives: I walked down the street. A man talked to me (external); I was walking down the street when a man began talking to me (internal). Campbell uses this example (20) to point out that a Greek verb's tense does not provide the whole story of what happens in a sentence. Indeed, close attention to the Greek text quickly reveals that New Testament authors used present tenses to refer to the past, past tenses (aorists and imperfects) to refer to the present, perfect tenses that have a present orientation, etc. (21). Verbal aspect is key to understanding such conundrums.

Another illustration Campbell keeps coming back to involves an imaginary investigative reporter sent to cover a street parade. The reporter who observes from a helicopter and can therefore give a general account of the parade has "perfective aspect," or an external viewpoint, while the reporter who observes from the street and sees the parade from within has "imperfective aspect," or an internal viewpoint (20).

There is much more to aspect, however, than this apparently simple illustration lets on. After two introductory chapters, What is Verbal Aspect? and The History of Verbal Aspect, Campbell unpacks his theory of the two viewpoints in the remaining chapters: Three: Perfective Aspect; Four: Imperfective Aspect; Five: The Problem of the Perfect; Six: Verbal Lexeme Basics; Seven: Present and Imperfect Tense-Forms; Eight: Aorist and Future Tense-Forms; Nine: Perfect and Pluperfect Tense-Forms; Ten: More Participles. Each chapter adheres to the following order of presentation: introduction, Greek texts (plus English translations), explication, and conclusion. In chapters 7–10, Campbell provides exercises on various nuances of verbal aspect: semantics, lexeme, and context, with the goal being to determine a given verb's Aktionsart, "a category of pragmatics that describes actional characteristics, such as iterative, punctiliar, ingressive, etc." (Verbal Glossary, 134). Thankfully, answers to these exercises are provided at the end (138–154). Try as I might, I just could not catch on to Campbell's system of ferreting out the subtle shades of meaning afforded by aspect. Sometimes his analyses seemed too abstract for me to grasp; other times he would explicate only one future, aorist, perfect, or what-have-you, but not comment on other verbs *of the same tense* which happened to fall in a given passage (this happens in pages 97, 99, 100, 108, 110, 113). Why does Campbell account for *some* of the verbs' aspects

in a given passage, but not *all* of them? This frustrating problem kept me from mastering the deeper knowledge of aspect Campbell attempts to convey in this book.

The book's cover says that Campbell wrote this book because he believes the concept of verbal aspect "can be made accessible to all students of New Testament Greek" (back cover). I rather suspect, however, that Campbell is a specialist writing for other specialists. Again, however, Campbell provides a Scripture Index at the end (155–156), making it possible to check one's own (perhaps limited) understandings of aspect against Campbell's more professional assessments. I agree with Campbell that an appreciation of aspect can cast a bright light on what might otherwise seem quite nondescript verbs (see the examples provided in 11–16); my experience has taught me, however, that one may read a book with due diligence yet still come up short. If nothing else, the book taught me that mastering Greek at deeper levels inspires humility, not arrogance.

John G. Nordling

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