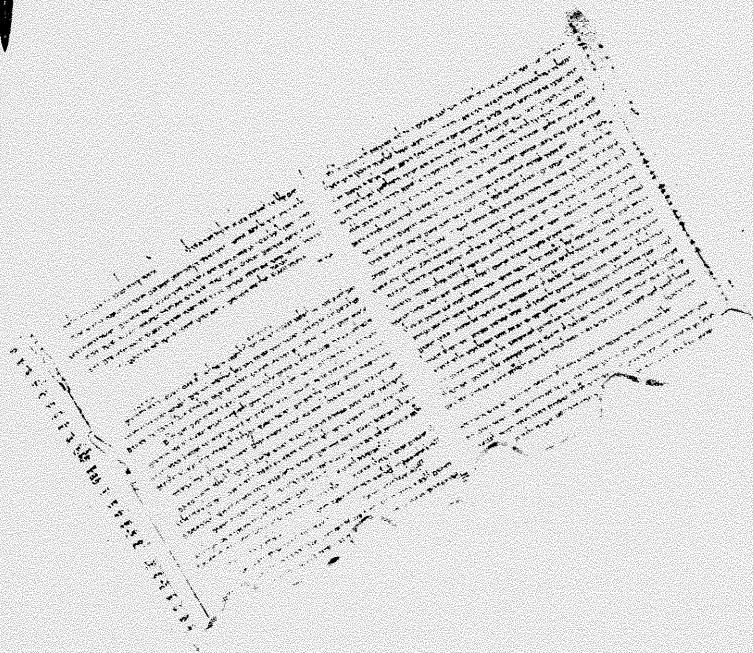




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THE FORMULA OF CONCORD - BLUEPRINT FOR RENEWAL*

by

N. S. Tjernagel, PH. D.

All sincere Christians who observe the present agony and trouble in the Lutheran Church in America must grieve in penitent dismay over the scandal of public notoriety that has shamed all of us who bear the Lutheran name. The news media have made us targets of ridicule and contempt. Legal suits are threatened while the partisans of opposing views use scornful and vindictive language more suited to the political arena than the calm dignity of the Christian Church. Some pastors become involved in the conflict while others simply shrug it off as a passing unpleasantness. Laymen, often uninformed about the issues in the debate, do not know where to turn for truth and live in simple frustration over questions they cannot answer.

We must do everything in our power to restore a God-pleasing peace within an embattled Lutheran Church. The Church Militant is, of course, engaged in a constant struggle against Satan's effort to pervert the truth. But what we must realize now is that the present strife is something more than the ordinary and continuous defense of the truth in which the church has always been involved. We stand now in one of the crisis periods in the history of the church. We stand where Christians stood at Nicea in the fourth century. We are now standing

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in the posture of the true Lutherans who sought to preserve the truth in the generation after Luther's death in the sixteenth century.

The problem at Nicea was no less a question than that of a proper definition of the nature of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. Christians in the second half of the sixteenth century were fighting to retain the biblical truths of Holy Scripture as they had come to understand them from the teaching of Martin Luther and the confessions of the Lutheran Church. The stakes were equally high in both cases -- nothing less than the continued existence of apostolic theology. We are in the same position now. The historical critical method, Gospel reductionism, and other exegetical aberrations have challenged the integrity of the Holy Scriptures, the sacred bearer of the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. We cannot accept the proposition that a credible and saving Gospel is given us in the text of a Bible that is compacted of legends and fables. To use the phraseology of the publication Affirm, we must align ourselves with the "Bible believers" and against the "Bible doubters." It is as simple as that.

The post-apostolic fathers who contended for the truth at Nicea concluded their task by hammering out a statement, the Nicene Creed, that put the debated issue of the eternity of Christ in clear biblical terms. They left a document so completely lucid and clear and unequivocal that, since that time, the mainline Christian denominations have had no doubt about the truth that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is truly Him of Whom John speaks when he says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The Lutheran theologians of the second half of the sixteenth century rendered similar service.

After thirty years of debate they put their biblical views into a perfected and refined statement of faith that we know as the Formula of Concord of 1577. That statement restored peace to the church and became the catalyst for drawing other authentic and biblical reformation documents into the unity and the unifying principle of the Book of Concord of 1580.

In our present impasse in the Lutheran Church we shall do well to consider how sound theologians in the sixteenth century faced their problems and then consider how we must face ours. Their ceaseless concern was the formulation of clear statements that would speak effectively to the issues before them. We know now how wise was their course because we have seen the Formula of Concord stand up to theological scrutiny for four hundred years. In all that time it has been a bulwark against schism and error while it has fostered the unity that has been the heritage of the Lutheran Church.

Our conflicts parallel, to a remarkable degree, the disagreements between the Lutheran parties from 1546 to 1577. It may not be necessary for us to make a formal addition to the Lutheran Confessions. It is, however, the contention of this writer that we must respond to the heresies of our time in carefully formulated and meticulously edited statements in which God's Word shall refute the errors of our time just as the Formula of Concord refuted the heresies of the sixteenth century. We urgently need a statement now that will deal comprehensively and effectively with the historical-critical methodology, the Gospel reductionism, and every other error that divides Lutherans in this agonizing period of our history. The Formula of Concord must become our blueprint for the solution of the problems and the remedy for the malaise that imperils confessional Lutheranism in the twentieth century.

We are accustomed to thinking of Martin Luther as a robust, confident, and fearless reformer. We know the overwhelming success of his triumph over Roman Catholicism in all of its works and ways. What most of us are not fully aware of was his almost constant sense of dismay over the doctrinal weaknesses and aberrations of the Protestant movement as a whole and his Wittenberg disciples themselves. The well-known Luther film of the recent past told only half the story, Luther's conflict with Rome. It did not describe his differences with the other reformers of the sixteenth century.

From the beginning Luther was to find that even his best friends were lacking in true perception of the most fundamental aspects of Lutheran theology. Among these close friends was John Staupitz who died in 1524. This man, referred to as "my dearest father," had been both academic supervisor and father confessor to Luther. Staupitz was the man who offered the consolation of the Gospel to the young Martin, saying, "You must look to the wounds of Christ, and nowhere else, to find the solution of your anxieties." Luther was later to say that "If it had not been for Staupitz, I should have sunk in hell." But for all of Staupitz' doctoral degree and his academic status, he really never was more than a simple and pious evangelical who could not understand the depths of Luther's concern over sin any more than he could grasp the theological synthesis that was developing from Luther's study of the Word. At last Staupitz threw up his hands in despair and retreated to the simple solitude of the Benedictine monastery of St. Peter of Salzburg. Luther grieved deeply over his friend's defection and said: "It will be a miracle if you do not fall into the danger of denying Christ."

Another of Luther's close friends was Andrew Carlstadt, who had been appointed to the Wittenberg faculty seven years before Martin's arrival.

Carlstadt had been professor of theology and dean of the faculty when Luther stood for his doctorate. The two men had been bound together by a common interest in St. Augustine. They were agreed about the danger of permitting the intrusion of scholastic logic into biblical theology. Carlstadt's seniority on the Wittenberg faculty made him the defender of Lutheran theology at the Leipzig debate in 1519 where, as is well known, he received what Luther called "rough handling" from Eck. His continued preaching of Luther's theology of the cross and his emphasis on the Holy Scriptures, "the majesty of Holy Writ," as he called it, won him the accolade of the inclusion of his name on the papal bull "Exsurge Domini" issued on June 15, 1520, for the formal excommunication of Martin Luther.

Yet, how little Carlstadt understood the spiritual substance of Luther's theology is apparent from his conduct when Luther was exiled to the Wartburg in 1520. Luther has started the Reformation, Carlstadt thought, now let's get on with it. So he proceeded to marry a sixteen-year-old girl (he was 45), celebrated the Lord's Supper in both kinds against the positive prohibition of Frederick the Wise, called the presence of pictures and images in the churches a sinful idolatry, and initiated the bedlam of violence and destruction in Wittenberg that precipitated Luther's premature return from exile at the Wartburg. The Saxon court promptly suspended Carlstadt's privilege of preaching in the parish church and confiscated some of his offending writings.

Leaving Wittenberg for parish activity in another location, Carlstadt continued to be a source of embarrassment to Luther and the University of Wittenberg. Luther winced in pain over the "monstrosities" that continued to flow from Carlstadt's pen. For a time he supported Thomas

Muenzer and the revolutionaries of the Peasants' Revolt. Then he turned to the Swiss and rejected Luther's doctrine of the real presence. Through it all Luther patiently hoped that his former friend would come to his senses. Luther wrote in 1527: "We have thus far been holding Carlstadt in our bosom with sufficient kindness with the reasonable hope that he might return to the true way; but day by day this poor man becomes more hardened."

Another of the heretics in the Wittenberg closet was John Agricola (1494-1566) of Eisleben. As a young man he had been one of Martin Luther's especially beloved students, and was later one of the very few intimates to whom Luther wrote from his Wartburg sequestration. A letter from Luther in 1528 reveals that Agricola had been teaching that faith can exist without good works. Luther's reprimand quieted Agricola temporarily, but when he was elevated to the dignity of a professorship at Wittenberg he began to repeat his antinomian assertions. Luther's efforts to change Agricola's mind proved futile, and when the electoral court moved against him he fled to another political and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Luther could only refer to his former friend as a chameleon, though the Reformer continued in his sincere hope that the Word would triumph and that in the end Agricola would be brought to the light of truth.

For all the harm these lesser men wrought in the cause of true Lutheranism, none was more damaging than Luther's most beloved friend, Philip Melancthon. Theirs had been a creative partnership that had reached its highest level of productivity in the period of the Diet of Augsburg of 1530. A brilliant humanistic scholar in the best tradition of the Renaissance, his special friend had been Greek, so important to the New Testament studies that led to the Bible translations of the Reformation. Melancthon matured

into outstanding competence in the field of education where his curriculum development for the schools of Germany won him the merited designation, Preceptor of Germany. His linguistic skills and his other scholarly gifts were to support the reformatory activities of Luther in an indispensable degree and to enhance the reputation of Wittenberg University where his class enrollments far exceeded even those of Luther himself.

Melanchthon wrote the Augsburg Confession in the irenic tone that was so conspicuously an example of Renaissance intellectualism in its peace-making role. Luther, unable to attend the Diet of Augsburg because he was under an imperial ban, was far from enthusiastic about the Augsburg Confession, though he did indeed accept it. He remarked that he could not tread so lightly. Luther's qualms about the Augsburg Confession might better have been directed against the author, Philip Melanchthon, who, no sooner than the document was read and approved, began a meddling process of revision of it. Before long Calvinists and Roman Catholics were ridiculing Lutherans with the charge that there were as many versions of the confession as there were theologians, and the Lutherans were thoroughly confused about their own doctrine. The Elector of Saxony sternly rebuked Melanchthon for making changes in a document that had become what he called "the church's book." Prof. Bente reflects in the historical introduction to the Triglotta:

"In making all these changes, Melanchthon did not introduce any direct heresy into the Variata. He did, however, in the interest of his irenic and unionistic policy and dogmatic vacillations, render ambiguous the clear sense of the Augustana. By his changes he opened the door and cleared the way, as it were, for his deviations in the direction of Synergism, Calvinism (Lord's Supper) and Romanism (good works are necessary for

salvation). Nor was Melanchthon a man who did not know where he was going when he made alterations. Whenever he weakened and trimmed the doctrines he had once confessed, he did so to satisfy definite interests of his own, interests self-evidently not subservient to, but conflicting with the clear expression and bold confession of the old Lutheran truth." (Historical Introduction, 26).

In spite of all this, the friendship between Luther and Melanchthon was not severed. But the reformer did see trouble in the future. In his last year he said:

"Up to this time you have heard the real, true, word; now beware of your own thoughts and wisdom. The devil will kindle the light of reason and lead you away from the faith, as he did the Anabaptists and Sacramentarians . . . I see clearly that, if God does not give us faithful preachers and ministers, the devil will tear our church to pieces by the fanatics, and will not cease until he has finished. Such is plainly his object. If he cannot accomplish it through the pope and emperor, he will do it through those who are now in doctrinal agreement with us. Therefore pray earnestly that God may preserve the Word to you, for things will come to a dreadful pass." (H. I., 93).

It would not be long before the church would be torn to pieces, before the dreadful things Luther had prophesied would indeed come to pass. Will it be thought harshness on our part if, at this great distance in time, we shall reach the judgment that Luther's friendship for the heretics in his own bosom was a fault for which the Lutheran Church

was soon to pay dearly? While Luther lived, his commanding personal stature kept the errors of his friends from becoming a public scandal. Had the Reformer repudiated these men and their errors in a decisive way, their influence might have been destroyed in Luther's lifetime. As it was, some of them were to survive him and, worst of all, the mantle of Luther's leadership was to fall on the unworthy shoulders of the devious and dissembling Melanchthon.

The same phenomenon has been observable in our time. Good men, yes, good and pious Christians have occupied the primary roles of leadership in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. But, alas, they have been too polite, too much imbued by a friendly and tolerant spirit, and they have left college, seminary, and staff positions in the hands of devious theologians of Melanchthon's character. At a time when Christian discipline could have been exercised effectually it was not done. I personally saw the venerable former president of the Missouri Synod in the process of giving the game away through the fervent plea that tipped the scales toward membership in the L.C.U.S.A. at the Detroit Convention in 1965. The present administration has now courageously moved to turn Missouri back to her former moorings. We wait with bated breath to see if the effort has been made too late.

Martin Luther, the stout hearted Reformer, was laid to rest in the castle church at Wittenberg on February 22, 1546. Within eight months the leading Lutheran prince, Duke John Frederick of Electoral Saxony, had faced the Emperor Charles V and been forced to surrender his rule and abandon Wittenberg and the university to men who were prepared to betray the theology of Martin Luther. Fourteen months after Luther's death, Emperor Charles V had defeated the Schmalkaldic forces and placed its most dynamic leaders,

John Frederick of Electoral Saxony and Philip of Hesse in chains and under the sentence of death. The emperor appeared to be in complete control of Germany, and Wittenberg was no longer the fortress of Lutheran orthodoxy.

With the death of Luther a leadership so wonderfully framed in love, a paternal patience, a greatness of spirit, a theological mentor of apostolic proportions was gone. Now the humanism of the Renaissance could go its way in Biblical interpretation; the theology once more would come under the blight of philosophical rationalization. And, alas, another danger was at hand, danger from the right, the manace of theologians who would try to outdo Luther in orthodoxy and, in exaggeration of Lutheran principles, would lead theology to the extremities of irrationality and futility.

The emperor's victory over the Lutherans in 1547 persuaded him that he had within his grasp the realization of his fondest dream, and restoration of religious unity in Germany. The political power of the Lutherans was shattered and Martin Luther was dead. When Charles, no friend of the pope, came to Wittenberg after his victory he paid his respects at the grave of the great reformer. Scorning the suggestion that he disinter Luther's bones and burn them Charles said: "I fight the living, not the dead."

The emperor's instrument for the restoration of religious unity was a document, not supported by the pope, called the Augsburg Interim. It was to bring Protestants and Catholics under a temporary truce until the Council of Trent would establish a final religious settlement. One of the authors of this curious document was John Agricola, who styled himself the reformer of all Germany and said, in the manner of the gospel reductionists of our time, that through the Augsburg Interim he had "flung the windows wide open for

the Gospel; that he had reformed the pope, and made the emperor a Lutheran; that a golden time had now arrived, for the Gospel could now be preached in all Europe." (H.I., 95).

The Augsburg Interim made minor concessions to the Lutherans; priests might marry and Communion be celebrated in both kinds, but the doctrine of justification was clearly rejected. For all his hopes, however, Charles was to find that it was one thing to win a war against Lutherans in disarray. It was quite another matter to ram the Augsburg Interim down the throats of German Lutherans. The decree soon became a dead letter, incapable of enforcement.

Melanchthon did not like it, but he refused to speak out against it. He was willing to assume the responsibility for turning out a compromise document, the Leipzig Interim, which was published on December 22, 1548. This miserable statement made an effort to salvage the doctrine of justification in exchange for acceptance of Roman Catholic ceremony and ritual. A reading of the Leipzig Interim reveals that the man who had been closest to Luther had sold out to the enemy in a shabby act of theological treachery. True Lutherans now knew who the real enemy was and girded for a battle to the finish.

Antonius Corvinus, martyr, who died in prison for refusing to accept the Interim pleaded with Melanchthon to "return to his pristine candor, his pristine sincerity, and his pristine constancy to think, write, and do what is becoming to Philip the Christian teacher, not the court philosopher." (H.I., 101). Many others spoke out similarly. Even John Calvin reproached Melanchthon's conduct, saying: "The hesitation of a general or leaders is more disgraceful than the flight of an entire regiment of common soldiers . . . By yielding but a little you alone have caused more lamentations

than a hundred men by open apostasy . . . I would die with you a hundred times rather than see you survive the doctrine surrendered to you." (H.I. 101).

In the end the Interims and the concessions of Agricola and Melanchthon were rendered fruitless by a turn of political events that brought about the abdication of Charles V and the adoption of the Imperial Peace of Augsburg of 1555. This agreement granted religious liberty to both Lutherans and Catholics within their own principalities. The way was now open for the return of Lutherans to the halcyon days of Luther's leadership in Wittenberg. No political controls remained to influence doctrine or preaching or to drive loyal Lutherans into exile or prison. But the Peace of Augsburg came too late. Too much damage had already been done. The Lutheran theologians who had sold their souls for political advantage were now left to the pitiful task of saving face by defending the tattered remains of their shabby heterodoxies. Germany's period of theological madness had twenty-two more years to run.

Three parties may be distinguished in the theological anarchy of the generation following Luther's death. The first was named after Melanchthon and called the Philippists. They included the synergists, the interimists, and the crypto-Calvinists. They were in control of the universities at Wittenberg and Leipzig.

The second party was known as the Gnesio-Lutherans (genuine Lutherans). They were strongest in Ducal Saxony and held the universities of Jena and Magdeburg. Among this group of men were Amsdorf and Flacius.

The third group or center party was little involved in the early controversies. Andreas, Chemnitz, and others in this group came to the fore as pacificators between the two extremes and

eventually provided the leadership that brought the Formula of Concord to fruition.

Almost every thread in the tangled skein of debate that ensued may, in one way or another, be traced back to Melanchthon who, from the beginning had been a rationalizing humanist, more interested in moral philosophy than theology. His philosophical ben had opened a whole Pandora's box of unscriptural doctrines, indifferentism, unionism, synergism, antinomianism, crypto-Calvinism and others.

At the opposite pole from Melanchthon was Illyricus Flacius (1520-1575) the leader of the Gnesio-Lutherans who were often guilty of compounding the disagreements of the time by taking untenably extreme positions to the right of orthodoxy. F. Bente has called Flacius "one of the most learned and capable theologians of his day, and the most faithful, devoted, staunch, zealous, and able exponent and defender of Lutheranism." (H.I. 144). His personal misfortune, and the misfortune of true Lutheranism, was the fact that in his zeal to put down synergistic doctrine he permitted himself to be caught in a trap which led him to take an irrevocable and extreme position that was neither Lutheran nor Scriptural. Martin Chemnitz (1522-86) reproached Flacius by saying: "It is enough if we are able to retain what Luther has won; let us abandon all desire to go beyond and improve upon him." (H.I. 149). All Germany became a battle ground of bitterness, invective, and confusion. No court, congregation, or Christian was unaffected by it. There seemed no way the church could return to a godly peace.

We have belabored the problems of the Lutheran Church after Luther's death because we find so many parallels between the Lutheran conflict in the second half of the 16th century and the struggle of our own half of the 20th century. In both

instances the scandal of a divided church brought public ridicule of the body of Christ, the holy church. In both instances the scandalous conduct of churchmen brought shame on pious Christians. Then, as now, the church itself was in peril and it seemed that only the smallest remnant could possibly remain true to orthodox Lutheranism.

Problems of biblical interpretation in the 16th century stemmed from the philosophic rationalism that characterized the age and the spirit of the Renaissance. Today theologians are being impaled on a rationalistic scientism that is the paramount character of the thought of our age. Scientific principles, appropriate to the material world, have been applied to the social sciences, economics, sociology, literature, history, and psychology. And now our theologians are applying these principles to the study of Holy Scripture. The results have been a disaster. But then, we should thank God it hasn't happened before. The scientific world view of modern thought was ushered in by the publications of Charles Darwin over a century ago. It has only recently caught up with our own theologians. For what is the Historical-Critical hermeneutic, Gospel reductionism, the JEDP theory, and current views on biblical inspiration if it is not an arrant scientism at work distorting God's truth.

In the 16th century as well as in our own, theologians have been caught up in their own conceit and God's Word has been perverted and emasculated. But God preserved the truth in the 16th century. He is no whit less almighty now and we shall be less than confident of His power if we do not now recall the seemingly insurmountable hazards to the truth that were overcome by Christians in the 16th century. How did they do it? What can we do now to preserve the truth for those who so earnestly wish to retain it? It seems to me that the believers of the 16th century have left us a blueprint

for renewal and that we shall do well to follow the course that was effective for them and apply it with all diligence to our confrontation with the erring theology of our time.

We might begin with a suggestion that was made early in the 16th century conflict. Flacius, the most dogged and persistent of the Lutherans attempting to preserve the theology of Luther, suggested as early as 1553 that ten or twenty theologians who had not been participants in the public controversy arising from the Interims be appointed to lay the groundwork for agreement between the contending parties. By 1553 the battle lines were fairly well drawn and the conflict had settled down to hostility between the Philipists at Wittenberg and the Gnesio-Lutherans at Jena.

Flacius' suggestion was prudent indeed because Melanchthon had let it be known that he would have no part in consultations involving Flacius. The Wittenbergers were circulating a caricature in which Flacius was represented as a braying ass, other braying asses placing a soiled crown on his head. (Remember the phrase, "garbage in, garbage out.") Melanchthon maintained, in a fashion familiar to us all, that Flacius had consistently slandered him by misinterpreting his words. The rigid and unbending response of Flacius was that Melanchthon must retract his errors. It was obvious that they could not talk to each other and that their differences were irreconcilable. A contemporary remarked that "As long as Flacius and Melanchthon are alive, unity will not be restored." As it turned out Melanchthon died in 1560 and Flacius in 1574.

While he lived, Melanchthon continued his intransigent determination to block measures toward unification in whatever form they were made. He opposed a General Council proposed for the year 1559 in which all who accepted the Augsburg Confession,

the Apology, and the Schmalkald Articles would be seated on equal terms. The council was not convened. In January 1561 a futile effort was made to bring the contending parties together at Naumburg. The effort failed because of inability to agree on a text of the Augsburg Confession. The Gnesio-Lutherans refused to recognize Melanchthon's corrupted version of 1540.

The battle of the theologians continued. It was a layman, August, the Elector of Saxony, who turned the tide of conflict when he came to realize the essential fraudulence of the theological faculty at Wittenberg. (Have we seen history repeating itself recently?) Ever since the Schmalkaldic War the Philipists had dominated and controlled the University of Wittenberg. In 1574 Elector August read their essay, Exegesis Perspicua. In reading the section dealing with the Lord's Supper, the Elector came to realize that his theologians were Calvinists, not Lutherans at all. By unmasking their dishonesty and deceit he destroyed the house of cards the Philipists had erected. Exposed with reference to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, the rest of their theology was immediately suspect, and the entire movement which had fattened on support of the Leipzig Interim came to an ignoble end.

It was the "shot in the arm" that was needed by good men, quietly laboring outside the perimeter of the smoke of battle raised by the hostilities of the Philipists and the Gnesio-Lutherans. Ten years earlier an obscure theologian, Jacob Andreae (1528-90) had written five articles dealing with theological questions then at issue. His work had very little effect because they antedated the collapse of Philipism in Saxony. He tried again in 1573. This time he wrote and disseminated six sermons addressed to pastors and laymen rather than to the theologians. Martin Chemnitz (1522-86), the towering figure of Lutheran renewal, read them and was delighted, considering them an effective basis

for the rebuilding of a shattered Lutheran theology.

It will not serve our purpose in this study to detail the process through which these sermons of Andreae were revised, recast, refined, and revised again through several editions before they appeared in their final form as the Formula of Concord of 1577. From the beginning of these revisions we see the sure hand of Chemnitz, second only to Luther in his sure touch in biblical interpretation and his confident approach to the inerrant Scriptures. But it was not Chemnitz working in cloistered solitude. Many theologians, working in private and in session with others, worked carefully and effectively to cover the issues that had racked the church since the death of Martin Luther. The gold of Luther's theology, corrupted by vain and obdurate men, was put through the refiner's fire in a manner that has no parallel since that time.

That a new work, a new theological statement, should have been necessary at that time is remarkable. The church then had the voluminous writings of Martin Luther, they had all the confessional writings except the Formula of Concord. How could the theologians err with all that massive body of material before them? But they did. A new statement was needed and by the grace of God it was forthcoming. It is the point and purpose of this paper to state that in my opinion true Lutherans stand now in the challenge that faced Andreae and Chemnitz. We are in a position where we must respond clearly and effectively to the false teachings that harass us now. True, we still have the Bible, Luther's writings, and the confessions. Our religious adversaries say they accept them all. We must produce clear statements that expose them in precise and biblical terms, just as the fraud of the Philipists and others were exposed in the 16th century.

There can be no thought of reuniting all Lutherans in any ecumenical sense. The Formula of Concord did not unite all Lutherans in the 16th century. When Jacob Andreae produced the six sermons that became the groundwork for the Formula of Concord, he had already given up any hope of reconciling the Flacians and the Philipists, the extreme parties in the conflict. His heart was simply set on the hope of preserving the truth in Germany. We in America in this 20th century must set our hearts to the same task, that of preserving the truths of God's Word.

I am not suggesting that we should produce a new Lutheran symbolical book or confession. But we must confess our faith and make a clear testimony to what we believe. When Martin Luther wrote the first visitation articles for the church in Germany, he said that his words were not intended as a commandment, as though a new papal decree were being promulgated. He said that his words were to be taken as a witness to his faith. The authors of the Formula of Concord similarly said: "We believe, teach, and confess." They did not prescribe a faith. They simply testified to what they believed. We must do nothing less.

In the 16th century tricks of false interpretation had been used to harmonize the Augsburg Confession with the heterodoxies of the Interimists. In his incomparable study (The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, Philadelphia, 1911, p. 693) Theodore E. Schmauk says: "Instead of restraining the formation of parties and the partisan spirit within the Church, the Augsburg Confession became the subject of the most excruciating controversies that agitated the church. It failed to prevent the polemical extravagances of the Gnesio-Lutherans, the compromises of the Philipists, and the approaches to Reformed doctrine by the Crypto-Calvinists."

So it is today. The "Bible doubters" in the contemporary Lutheran church plead with the utmost solemnity that they hold to the Lutheran Confessions in their entirety. But they do not. Therefore we now face the critical necessity of a renewed defense of the truth that will expose their deceitful professions. We are called on to defend the truth against those who subvert it. We have the same task as the 16th century defenders of the truth. Indeed, except for Luther's Catechisms, all of the Lutheran Confessions have been written to defend the truth against error. They were not designed to be comprehensive summaries of doctrine. They were written to defend the Scriptures against errors that faced the church at the moment of their writing. The writers were God's servants defending His truths against the specific assaults that Satan was making at the moment. The evil one has new arrows in his shaft in the 20th century and we must now respond to them in particular and specific terms.

It will not do for us to say that we have the Confessions and that they are sufficient to our present needs. In the 16th century many people said that very thing and opposed the adoption of the Formula of Concord for that very reason. For many it was, as Schmauk says: "A rock of offense to all those who believe that a covering over of doctrinal differences which were already existing, and a regarding them with indifference was the right way for the restoration of the peace of the Church" (p. 660). We must now pin our opponents down by specific statements that make clear the fact that they are subverting both the Bible and the Confessions in their faulty reading of Holy Scripture. We must recognize and reveal the age-old problems of biblical interpretation seen in "the difference between faith divinely born; and truth humanly grasped" (Schmauk, p. 642).

In their preface the compilers of the Formula of Concord declared their intentions clearly and firmly. "Godly men, lovers of peace, judged that the increasing dissension could best be met by an accurate explanation of the controverted articles from the Word of God which would reject and condemn the false dogmas; and clearly present the divine truth. This would not only silence adversaries, but would show the more simple and godly how to act in these dissensions, and to avoid future corruptions of doctrine."

This, my brethren in Christ, is the task that lies before this generation of sincere Lutherans who love the truth and wish to remain under the instruction of God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions. We will not, I repeat, will not, fulfill our mission by any simplistic quoting of Walther and Pieper and resting on the work of previous generations. We have specific errors to deal with, problems for which Walther and Pieper offer no solutions because the questions were not raised in their time. Pious scholars must now be found who shall be willing to roll up their sleeves for the kind of painstaking labor that distinguished Andreae and Chemnitz in their generation, and Walther and Pieper in theirs.

We have seen that the scholarly studies that led to the publication of the Formula of Concord in 1577 had begun with the publication of Andreae's famous six sermons in 1573. It may well be that a beginning has been made in our time toward a similar end by the publication of "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles" by the intrepid and courageous Dr. J.A.O. Preus. Surely it is only a beginning. If this document is to serve a far-reaching purpose in our time it will need to be as carefully scrutinized, studied, edited, revised, and then gone over again to make sure that it is a scriptural definition of the issues that takes as full an

account of our generation's theological problems as the Formula of Concord covered the issues that had raised havoc in the 16th century. Good and honest scholars must be found for this task. They must be given time, opportunity, and the means to bring this undertaking to a God-pleasing conclusion. It took the Lutheran scholars of the 16th century a little over four years. They were assisted by many hundreds of pastors working both individually and collectively in conference groups. Would to God that this generation might equal their efforts both in their dedication to the truth and in the effective outcomes of their scholarly undertakings.

Lutheran scholars must also begin at once the updating of Franz Pieper's Christian Dogmatics. All of us know the monumental influence that this work has had on orthodox Lutheranism in America. It has been the textbook in doctrine for thousands of seminary students. It has been the ready reference book for pastors preparing sermons, Bible studies, and conference papers. It has been the eloquent testimony of true Lutherans to their fidelity to the truths of God's Word and the constancy of their faith as heirs of the Lutheran Reformation.

Pieper's work will always remain a useful reference book, but a new work is needed at this time to speak to the problems of doctrine that face us at this moment. Satan's pernicious attacks on the veracity of Holy Scripture is constantly taking new turns and appearing in new dimensions of sophisticated perversion of truth. We simply have to meet these attacks in the contemporary context in which they are made. Gospel reductionism, for example, appears so reasonable, so attractive, clothed, as it is, in eloquent appeals to the centrality of faith in the Gospel. The uninitiated are so readily deceived by this sophistry. A new and comprehensive work on Christian doctrine needs to take clear and specific

account of this denigration of the truth, as well as every other heterodoxy that has become a part of the devil's weaponry since the deaths of Walther and Pieper and the other theologians who contributed so much toward the preservation of Lutheranism, in its pristine form, in America.

When men of ready wit and devout scholarship have responded to the needs of the hour with specific statements responsive to current heterodoxies, and have produced a comprehensive study of Christian doctrine for our own generation and that to come, we shall be able to rest in the security of God's truth. Until these things are done, until we have proceeded along the lines suggested in the blueprint for renewal given us by the men who produced the Formula of Concord we shall flounder in purposeless debate and unceasing tension.

One of the factors in the breakdown of Christian unity after Luther's death was the dissolution of the Schmalkaldic League which had contributed so much to Lutheranism in the Reformer's lifetime. We believe that Lutheran unity and true orthodoxy has suffered equally in our time by the dissolution of the Synodical Conference. The time has come for those of us who have lived during that golden age of American Lutheranism, the years of the life of the Synodical Conference, to turn our hands, minds, and hearts to the renewal of unity and the restoration of the biblical truths that have been the hallmark of the Holy Christian Church on earth.

While Lutherans worked at Augsburg to give a full testimony to their faith at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, Martin Luther was pacing the floor restively at the Castle Coburg. He was under the imperial ban and was not permitted to attend the diet. One of the messages which he sent to his friends and followers at the diet

might well be addressed to us in the crisis of truth in which we stand at this hour.

May the Lord Jesus who has sent you all to Augsburg as His confessors and servants, and for whom you offer your necks, be with you all. May He, through His Spirit, grant you the testimony of the certainty of faith to know and not to doubt that you are his confessors. Thus faith will quicken and comfort you, because you are ambassadors of a great king. These are trustworthy words. Amen.

June 30, 1530 Yours, Martin Luther
(L.W. 49, 342)

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The right of private judgment and the right of Church discipline are coordinate and harmonious rights, essential to the prevention, each of the abuse of the other. To uphold either intelligently, is to uphold both. In maintaining therefore, as Protestants, the right and duty of men, in the exercise of private judgment, to form their own convictions, unfettered by civil penalties in the State, or by inquisitorial powers in the Church, we maintain, also, the right and duty of the Church to shield itself from corruption in doctrine by setting forth the truth in her Confession, by faithfully controverting heresy, by personal warning to those that err, and finally, with the contumacious, by rejecting them from her communion, till, through grace, they are led to see and renounce the falsehood, for which they claimed the name of truth.

The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology,
Krauth, p. 175

THE CONTEMPORARY EMPHASIS ON THE OCCULT AND DEMON
POSSESSION*

by

Herbert C. Swanson

In our ceremonies, we called on demons to do almost everything a person's Satanic-oriented mind could dream up. We had control of a Satanic power, although often demons themselves do their own destructive deeds without our help in directing them.

Demons can inflict disease, can possess men, can possess animals, can oppose spiritual growth, can disseminate false doctrine, can torment people, and can be tormented by people. Demons can talk or can cry with a loud voice, using the tongues and lips of humans. They can tell lies and make people believe lies. They can even preach. They can stand, walk, and seek rest when embodied in a human being. They can tell fortunes, make people strip off their clothes, cause suicides, render a person insane, or cause a body to be bowed in affliction. They can cause jealousy, pride, or lust. They can drive a person into despair.

**Some preliminary findings and conclusions.
Delivered at Central Conference, ELS, Mankato,
Minnesota, April 23, 1974.*

As I started the ritual for raising a demon, the thought went through my mind that most people outside of witchcraft and Satan worship do not even believe in demons. So many people refuse to believe until they see or feel something for themselves. By the time our ceremony was over, any skeptic who could have viewed it would have been made a whole-hearted believer. I was proud of myself for pulling it off without a hitch.¹

So reads the testimony of Mike Warnke, former high priest of Satan, and author of The Satan Seller, who now heads "Alpha Omega Outreach," a mission to the tens of thousands of people in occult bondage. Through the grace of God, Warnke was delivered from Satanic possession and now seeks to free those who are enslaved by a powerful adversary whose might is denied by many in our technological age.

Until six or seven years ago, the only contact that most Americans had with the occult was limited to Chinese fortune cookies and an occasional glance at one's daily horoscope. Black magic and voodoo were shrugged off as silly superstition and demon possession was said to be a form of mental illness. But then everything changed and people disenchanted with standard brand churches which seemed to give no alternative to the secular world, started to look elsewhere for spiritual fulfillment. The United States witnessed a supernatural explosion and the Age of Aquarius was born.

¹Mike Warnke, The Satan Seller (Plainfield, N.J.: Logos Inter., 1972), p. 68.

The gurus came from India with their "transcendental meditation." Bishop Pike received widespread publicity for his alleged communication with his dead son through spiritist Arthur Ford. Jean Dixon was practically elevated to a deity and sold more than three million copies of her book on prophesy. The astrology business, assisted by 10,000 professional astrologers, became a 200 million dollar a year business. Anton La Vey, high priest of the First Church of Satan had his face on the cover of Life magazine and Satanism was on its way to becoming a "respectable" religion. A number of high schools and colleges such as the University of Alabama, N.Y.U., and the University of South Carolina have offered courses in witchcraft, magic, and sorcery, and each time the courses have been overenrolled. Two million ouija boards were sold last year and a large number of children have already been present at a seance before reaching high school age. There are 5000 practicing witches in New York and probably twice that many in Los Angeles.

How is the Bible-believing Christian to evaluate the occult phenomena that he encounters in the newspapers, on television, and in his own experience? Dare one who confesses Jesus Christ as Lord ignore the reality of Satan in 20th century America. Most evangelical scholars who have made in-depth studies of the occult answer with a resounding, No! Satan cannot be treated lightly for he is a dedicated enemy, relentless in his determination to destroy every Christian life. In 2 Timothy 2:3,4 we are admonished to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ, which confirms that this life is a war. It is true that the victory's won! Jesus, our Savior, has conquered death at Calvary. We are forgiven and eternal life is ours in His name. Nevertheless, Satan has not conceded the victory and the fact that we are told to be sober and vigilant and that we

are not fighting against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, etc., should be sufficient warning to urge us to watch, resist, and stand fast. Let us not be deceived. Satan desires to snatch away our crown. In his book, Dealing With The Devil, C. S. Lovett writes, "I want you to feel about Satan as the gazelle feels about a lion; or a rabbit, the coyote. There is no room for positive thoughts about the devil. He is a killer, deadly, vicious, and fast."²

Recognizing that Satan is a vicious killer who in the graphic words of Luther would delight in plunging a knife into a small child's heart, how do we deal with him and his demonic hosts? Dr. Kurt Koch, a Lutheran minister in Germany who has made a life-long study of the occult suggests,

First we must proclaim the victory that Jesus has won over the powers of darkness. People oppressed and subjected by occultism will never find true deliverance through medicine, psychology, or psychiatry; it is only to be found in Jesus Christ. It is for us to show them the way to the Great Deliverer. Secondly, people must be warned of the dangers of spiritism, magic, and occultism. There are terrible consequences involved if we trespass into these areas, and God Himself has forbidden us to touch these things.³

²C. S. Lovett, Dealing With The Devil, (Baldwin Park, Cal.: Personal Christianity, 1967), p. 90.

³Kurt Koch, Between Christ and Satan, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971), p. 9.

Prior to discussing the wide-spread activity of evil spirits in the world today and the occult phenomena through which they operate, it is imperative that we understand the nature of demons and the manner in which the Master dealt with them. Although students of demonology differ regarding the origin of demons, Scripture indicates that they are fallen angels. They are personal beings, possessing intelligence, a will, great strength and they are able to pursue courses of action, plan strategy, and achieve victories. As spirit beings,⁴ they obviously live above the operation of what we know as natural law. While their victims are bound by the laws of space, time and environment, demons are free of such restrictions. They are not normally subject to human visibility or other sensory perception for God does not permit Satan and the demons to throw His ordered universe into confusion by violating natural laws. However, let a man foolishly dabble in the occult and he will experience the horrors of hell firsthand. Roberta Blankenship, a young girl in her 20's got into witchcraft at an early age. Now a Christian, she writes of her terrifying encounters with demons, even after her conversion.

I awoke screaming, my heart pounding. A heavy breathing sounded through the darkness of my room. Someone was lying next to me on the bed, breathing heavily! "It's Mom," I thought. I thrust out my arm to grab her, but it landed flat on the other half of the bed. Yet the impression of weight was there and the breathing continued. Suddenly I heard a flapping by my feet. I raised my leg in an effort to knock

⁴Mt. 8:16; Eph. 6:12.

at the thing and again sensed an un-earthly presence surrounding me. Then the laughter began.

Jesus save me, I cried. I believe in the blood of Christ. In the name of my Savior Jesus Christ, I command this spirit to leave me. Immediately the evil presence vanished. I turned on the lamp near my bed and sat up. Praise God for the blood of Jesus Christ. My little lamp burned until daylight.⁵

This writer acknowledges that it is relatively easy to simply write off the above story, claiming that the poor girl's imagination ran away with her. The problem lies in the fact that hundreds of thousands of similar cases have been investigated by reputable evangelical scholars and accepted as true. John Warwick Montgomery, writing in *Principalities and Powers*, states,

The problem in determining whether demon possession occurs and witchcraft works is absurdly simple. The documentation is overwhelming. Even if 99% of all witchcraft cases are thrown out (and that would be very difficult to do) the remainder would easily establish the reality of the phenomenon.⁶

⁵*Roberta Blankenship, Escape from Witchcraft, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), p. 90.*

⁶*John Warwick Montgomery, Principalities and Powers, (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973), p. 146.*

Author and minister, Victor Ernest takes an even harder line when he declares "The man who denies the phenomena of spiritism today is not entitled to be called a skeptic, he is simply ignorant."⁷ The Scriptures Themselves do not leave us without witness with regard to supernatural manifestations of the Prince of Darkness. It should be noted that Satan was seen by the prophet Zechariah in a vision as he stood by the right hand of Joshua.⁸ Then too, we know that Jesus encountered Satan in the wilderness and it is very possible he assumed some visible or bodily form for this wicked purpose.

Our Lord Jesus was not unaware of Satan's influence in the lives of men for whom He came to die and consequently He spent roughly one-fourth of His ministry delivering the demonized. Author Derek Prince who spearheads a deliverance ministry out of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, believes that the way Jesus dealt with demons was one of the most striking features of His whole ministry.⁹ Our Lord performed miracles of healing, control over the forces of nature, raising the dead, etc., but these had occurred previously in the ministry of Old Testament believers such as Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha. Demons are mentioned in the Old Testament (Lev. 17:7; Deut. 32:17; Psalm 106:36,37) but the authority with which Jesus cast out demons was completely new. His powerful spiritual ministry

⁷Victor H. Ernest, *I Talked With Spirits*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1970), p. 11.

⁸Zechariah 3: 1.

⁹Derek Prince, *Deliverance and Demonology*, (Ft. Lauderdale: Derek Prince Tape Ministry) P. O. Box 306, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. 33302.

precipitated a violent outburst of demon activity.¹⁰

A careful examination of the passages dealing with demoniacs delivered by Jesus will reveal that demon possession is distinct from mere illness. In many instances Jesus is said to have healed the illness and cast out the demons. There may be a great similarity in some of the symptoms but one should distinguish between them carefully. Dr. William Orr writes, "Some demon-possessed people are not in any way diseased. Some are both demon-possessed and diseased. Yet others are diseased and in no manner afflicted with demons."¹¹ The Biblical accounts seem to be clear so one should not make any mistakes.

Perhaps the most spectacular instance of demon deliverance is that of the demoniac of the Gadarenes. (Luke 8:26-29) Here we are able to observe Jesus' method of dealing with unclean spirits. Upon crossing the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and His disciples were met by a formidable creature, naked, living among the tombs and possessing superhuman strength. An amazing aspect of this case was the vast number of demons who possessed him.¹² The demons bore witness to the fact that Jesus was the Son of God but also to the fact that they had nothing in common with Him. Jesus commanded them to identify themselves, a practice that is generally followed

¹⁰Mt. 4:24, Mt. 8:16, Mk. 9:17, 25, 26, Lk. 13:10-17, etc.

¹¹William W. Orr, Are Demons For Real (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1970), p. 16.

¹²A "legion" in Roman military history consisted of three to six thousand foot soldiers and three to seven hundred cavalry!

in the deliverance ministry today, and then sent the demons into a herd of 2000 swine. It appears that many demons may already be confined to the abyss, being too depraved and harmful to be allowed to roam the earth.¹³ The demons possessing the man from Gadara were apparently not in this class and sought to have their freedom prolonged before their ultimate confinement in hell.

Numerous references could be cited showing how Jesus dealt with demon-possessed persons, but the fact of possession in apostolic times is not generally questioned by evangelical theologians. However, the suggestion that these same demons might be very much alive and active in the world today is not readily accepted in all conservative circles. Some will grudgingly admit that demon possession may occur in primitive societies (One is hesitant to discount the testimony of numerous Christian missionaries or label them as false witnesses.), but the idea that there may be cases of demon possession in one's own community or in one's own church, is too much to swallow. Yet it would be foolish, in the light of the evidence that is available today, to ignore the reality of demon possession simply because it has not been a common experience in one's own ministry. With the increase of witchcraft and Satan worship in America, and with the morbid preoccupation with the occult as is seen by the nation-wide excitement generated by the showing of The Exorcist, the parish pastor is going to come face to face with a genuine case of demonic influence or possession, sooner or later. If he recognizes the symptoms and knows how to deal with them, he will be able to deliver the demonized through the power of Jesus' Name.

¹³Lk. 8:31; Rev. 9:11.

How does one become interested in Satanism and the occult? John C. Hagee writes,

The major reason is the utter failure of the contemporary church to communicate the living and victorious Christ to people everywhere. The church has become a massive machine geared to budgets and buildings while insensitive to the human heart struggling for survival.¹⁴

Nicholas Pileggi in his Age of Occult claims that some of the things that turned this generation toward the occult were mind-control studies, sensitivity groups, U.F.O.'s, Eastern metaphysical concepts, yoga exercises, Zen mysteries, macrobiotic diets and L.S.D.¹⁵

One vehicle that serves as a channel for demonic oppression or possession is spiritism, defined as "spiritual activity, grounded in the persuasion that people can by means of certain persons, certain mediums, make contact with the deceased and so acquire revelations from beyond."¹⁶ Spiritism which is estimated to have 70 million adherents in the world today, may be broken down into the following categories:

¹⁴John C. Hagee, Invasion of Demons, (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1973), p. 72.

¹⁵Nicholas Pileggi, Age of Occult, McCall's, March, 1970 quoted in Hagee, p. 72.

¹⁶Rudolph Tischner quoted in Merrill Unger, Demons in the World Today (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971), p. 37.

1. Physical phenomena - (levitations, apports, and telekinesis)
2. Psychic phenomena - (spiritistic visions, automatic writing, speaking in a trance, materializations, table-lifting, tumbler-moving, excursions of the psyche)
3. Metaphysical phenomena - (apparitions, ghosts)
4. Magic phenomena - (magic persecution, magic defense)
5. Cultic phenomena - (spiritistic cults, spiritism among Christians)¹⁷

In the case of levitations, apports, and telekinesis, God allows the physical and natural laws of the universe to be suspended temporarily and in a restricted sense, by higher laws of the spirit world. These phenomena are diabolical miracles. (Exodus 7:22, 8:7; 2 Thess. 2:8-10) While the sense of power that one feels in being able to suspend natural laws is awesome, one cannot engage in occult practices forbidden by God, without suffering terrible consequences. Dr. Koch states that in his own experience, there were numerous cases of suicide, fatal accidents, strokes, and insanity among occult practitioners. The scientist may consider these effects to have a different cause other than spiritism but the discerning Christian will note the frequency in which psychic disturbances appear in connection with the practice of occultism.

Perhaps the most remarkable phenomena of spiritism are materializations. These are supernatural appearances and disappearances of material images in connection with the activities of a

¹⁷Ibid., p. 38.

spiritistic medium. Merrill Unger, who is a competent scholar with doctorates from John Hopkins University and Dallas Theological Seminary, states,

We have historical evidence of materializations. Missionaries claim that pagan priests in Japan dematerialize themselves on one mountain and rematerialize themselves on another mountain. This is to be regarded as a miracle of Satan.¹⁸

The case of Phillip transported by the Spirit of God from Gaza to Azotus, 25 miles away (Acts 8: 39,40), may have been an example of this phenomenon or simply a miracle of transportation of his unaltered physical body. In any case, the New Testament recognizes both the miracles of God and those of Satan. In Tibet where demon-controlled religion has resisted Christian missions, priests of the Taschi Lama possess tremendous occult gifts and are reported to make tables fly through the air for a space of 100 feet.¹⁹ Above all, the so-called red-hooded monks are extremely adept in telekinesis, materializations, levitations, and black magic. Where Satan's power remains virtually unchecked, miracles of evil supernaturalism abound.

Classified under the heading of metaphysical phenomena are ghosts and apparitions. As with all occult phenomena, some of the facts relating to them are genuine while others are artificial and false. Eidetic images and hallucinations belong to the artificial side and genuine cases of ghosts are considered to be those which have been objectively

¹⁸*Merrill Unger, Demons in the World Today* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1971) p. 45.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 45.

confirmed over several generations. Real apparitions and ghost phenomena can be observed by any normal person and they can be photographed. The apparitions are not deceased human beings but counterfeits caused by demonic powers. Dr. Kurt Koch notes two important facts that seem applicable when dealing with ghosts. He notes that these appearances always have their roots in the occult activity of those who have previously lived in the house; and secondly, the ghost will immediately begin to retreat when people living in the home commit themselves to Christ and put themselves under His protection.²⁰

Through the implementation of levitation, apports, telekinesis, and materializations, one can see how a person endowed with strong mediumistic powers can do a great deal of harm. The most diabolical form of spiritism is black magic, through which demonic powers are used to inflict harm on individuals for purposes of persecution or revenge. While it is impossible to describe the tremendous scope of magic in a general paper on the occult, one should know that this satanic discipline covers the healing and inflicting of diseases, persecution and defense magic, and death magic.

Spiritism alone is unfortunately not the only tool that Satan employs to enslave human beings. Fortune-telling, astrology, card-laying, psychometry, divining rod and pendulum are but a few of the practices that can set a person on the road to mental disorientation, physical disability, and an everlasting hell. Fortune-telling is the offspring of idolatry, for seeking intimate knowledge of the future impugns God's holy character. The teller of fortunes either interprets certain signs and omens under indirect demonic control (artificial

²⁰Kurt Koch, *Between Christ and Satan*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishing, 1971), p. 117.

divination) or he foresees the future under the influence of direct demonic powers. (inspirational divination) Astrology likewise invites the activity of demon spirits because it originated in star-worship and seeks secret knowledge in opposition to God's will and God's Word. Many who consider astrology as mere superstition and fraud have nevertheless come under its occult power by dabbling in it, either as a pastime or to expose its fraudulent character.²¹

Jean Dixon is perhaps the best known fortune-teller today. She is reported to be a very religious person who advocates and lives a moral life. She has prophetic visions, uses a crystal ball given to her by a gypsy woman, and she writes horoscopes. But while she has a high degree of accuracy, she has never been 100% correct, a characteristic which distinguishes her from the true prophets of the Bible. (See Deut. 18:21,22) Mrs. Dixon predicted peace in Vietnam in 1965, claimed that Nixon would defeat Kennedy in 1960, and stated that Walter Reuther would run for the presidency in 1964.

While many occult practitioners are unaware of the immense danger of trafficking in the black arts, the Satan worshipper is very much aware of the meaning of his actions. He deliberately makes a covenant with Satan, sealed in his own blood, which Satan will assuredly honor on the day of reckoning. Anton La Vey is undoubtedly the best known of the Satanists, and with his black cape, diabolical countenance and his large assortment of occult paraphernalia, he certainly looks the part. But La Vey is basically a pleasure-seeker, delighting in mundane, fleshly and carnal things. Other followers of Satan recognize the reality of

²¹Merrill Unger, *Demons in the World Today* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1971), p. 59.

Satan's mighty power and through a variety of rites and incantations call upon demons to do their bidding. Mike Warnke writes,

Some groups have favorite demons on whom they call again and again to afflict their enemies. They call, "Master So-and-So" or "Master Such-and-Such," and then ask for the favor they have in mind. The demons have to do what they are commanded, but like rebellious children, they resent their obligation to serve you. You have to know the proper way to safely unleash a demon.²²

But whether a person is cognizant of the dangers of the occult or not, exposure to the multitude of Satanic practices makes one a candidate for demon possession. This is the ultimate experience for one who places himself in league with the devil. Rationalistic criticism has persistently denied the reality of demon possession as presented so vividly in the Biblical accounts of Jesus' ministry but a careful reading of the Gospels and the Book of Acts will show that Jesus accepted their reality and taught His disciples how to deal with them. A demon-possessed person is one who has been invaded by evil spirits. They may control his body, mind, or both. Sometimes they produce only physical illness, but at other times their wretched victims are grossly immoral, speak blasphemously, and exhibit supernatural strength. They obviously have been mastered, mind and body, by a superior force. Richard DeHaan states,

²² Mike Warnke, The Satan Seller, (Plainfield: Logos International, 1972), p. 68.

A possessed person may have symptoms much like those that are apparent in the mentally ill. He may be deeply melancholic or depressed, appear to be withdrawn from reality or may manifest emotions that range from ecstatic joy to violent screaming or wild ferocity.²³

By temporarily blotting out a person's consciousness, demons can speak and act through him as their complete slave and tool. The inhabiting demon comes and goes much like the proprietor of a house who may or may not be "at home." In these attacks, the victim passes from his normal state, in which he acts like other people, to the abnormal state of possession. The abnormal or demonized stages can last for a few minutes or several days. Sometimes the attacks are mild, sometimes they are violent. If they are frequent and violent, the health of the subject suffers.

Merrill Unger notes that the chief characteristic of demon possession is the automatic projection of a new personality in the victim. The inhabiting demon uses the victim's body as a vehicle for his own thoughts, words, and acts. The demon even speaks out of the victim's mouth and declares emphatically that he is a demon. Frequently he gives his name. The new personality reveals itself in a different voice and sometimes uses a different language or a completely different dialect. At times a different educational and cultural level is employed by

²³Richard W. DeHaan, *Satan, Satanism and Witchcraft*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), p. 35.

the demon.²⁴ Pronouns are used to emphasize the new personality. The first person consistently designates the inhabiting demon. Bystanders are addressed in the second person while the victim is referred to in the third person and looked upon during the attack as unconscious and for all practical purposes as non-existent during this interval. This is one of the factors through which demon possession and insanity can be distinguished. As insane person will often imagine himself to be someone else, such as Julius Caesar or Abraham Lincoln, but his assumed personality is clearly seen as a transparent unreality. By contrast the new personality in the demonized person clearly and constantly recognizes the distinct existence and individuality of its possessed victim, speaking of that victim in the third person, an element entirely lacking in cases of insanity.

It should be noted at this time that there is a difference between demon possession and demon influence (oppression). Unger states,

In demon influence, evil spirits exert power over a person short of actual possession. This may vary from mild harassment to extreme subjection when body and mind become dominated and held in slavery by spirit agents. Christians as well as non-Christians can be so influenced. They may be oppressed, vexed, depressed, hindered, and bound by demons.²⁵

²⁴ *Merrill Unger, Demons in the World Today* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1971), p. 104.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

While severe demon influence resembles demon possession, it is never the same. In demon possession one or more evil spirits dwell in a person's body as their "house" and take complete possession of it at times. In this condition the personality and consciousness of the victim are completely blocked out and the personality of the demon takes full control. Today there are countless books written on the subject of demon influence and possession by Christian authors not prone to sensationalism. The large majority of writers are hesitant to say that a Christian can be demon possessed but most are ready to admit that a believer can experience severe demon influence if he has practiced occult arts or if he persistently yields to demonic temptation and sin.

What do the Scriptures say? Can a baptized Christian be filled with an unholy spirit? It appears that Ananias and Sapphira were and it cost both of them their lives. (Acts 4:32-5:6) Peter said to Ananias, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost..." From the context there is no question that Ananias and his wife were Christians. In fact, it was precisely because they were Christians that their dishonesty was described by Peter as a conspiracy to lie to the Holy Spirit.

In 2 Corinthians 11:3,4 we read of some of the Corinthians "receiving another spirit." These Christians who had received the Holy Spirit were now receiving a different, unholy spirit. Similarly, the Galatians are said by Paul to have been bewitched, turning back to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves they again wanted to be. (Gal. 3:1,2; 4:3,8,9.)

It is the contention of this writer then, that while a Christian cannot be totally controlled by Satan (demon possession), he can be tormented

or afflicted by evil spirits in some area of his life. Believers who persist in flagrant sin may be driven by demons into emotional instability, insanity, or even suicide. Severe demon influence can produce enslavement and subjection even if it does stop short of actual possession. Believers need to heed the warning recorded in 1 Peter 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

One cannot do extensive reading in the field of "deliverance and demonology" without raising the provocative question, "How can we know if we have a demon?" (in the sense of being influenced or oppressed, not possessed) The very suggestion may bring smiles to the lips of some, but then Satan is always delighted when men fail to recognize his potential for destroying them. Others may be genuinely offended. Montgomery recognized this and stated that the close-minded religionist would be offended by his book's recognition of legitimate and positive occult domains.²⁶ But for the individual who acknowledges the subtlety of Hell's angel of light and suspects that he may be an unknowing victim of demonic powers, there are a few simple tests. Rev. Don Basham, an acknowledged leader in the deliverance ministry writes,

The modern term "hang-up" may be descriptive of demonic activity. Are we stuck at a point in our spiritual development? Is the problem subject to prayer and obedience? If not, we should at least consider demons as a cause. If we ever feel compelled to

²⁶ John Warwick Montgomery, *Principalities and Powers* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973), p.20.

destructive acts, it may be that an evil spirit is at work. An especially strong reaction to the idea of deliverance should raise the question, where does this reaction come from? Could it come from the demons themselves?²⁷

What if there are no evidences of demonic powers in one's life? Can he sit back and relax? Basham says, No! Rather, one must protect himself against an invasion of demons by refusing to indulge inappropriate carnal appetites and by staying strictly away from the psychic, medium, astrological, fortune-telling, ESP, Spiritualist world. If one has already come into contact with this world, he ought to renounce it as sin and seek deliverance. Finally, it is important that one claims his rights as a Christian to be protected from Hell's wicked angels. Jesus defeated Satan by going to the cross and shedding His blood. ("And they overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the lamb, and the word of their testimony." Rev. 12:11.)

Finding no evidences of demonic subjection in one's own life, how does the parish pastor who acknowledges the validity of the deliverance ministry, minister to a soul in bondage? Basham, one of the most articulate and knowledgeable men in this neglected field, states that the enslaved person must first desire deliverance. He notes that some people who claim they want deliverance actually want to retain their habit patterns but on a less destructive scale. Why? Because various captivities are not always unpleasant and help one to escape unpleasant reality. True freedom entails responsibility and responsibility is

²⁷ Don Basham, *Deliver Us From Evil*, (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1971) p. 122.

not always welcome. (The Israelites wanted to go back to Egypt) Secondly, the person should be willing to admit he may have a demon. This is an ugly thought and people do not like to admit the possibility. Yet admittance appears to be essential according to the evangelicals ministering deliverance full time. Thirdly, the individual ministering deliverance must take authority in the name of Jesus. When one comes up against demonic forces in His name, one is fulfilling His mission on earth. Jesus had said, "In my name shall they cast out devils Mark 16:17.

The final three steps in casting out demons are also important. It is helpful to get the demon to name itself. There are two considerations here. First, from the standpoint of the person who needs deliverance, naming the spirit proves to be an exercise in honesty. Men are likely to give polite names to their weaknesses. One says, "I have a roving eye" but the spirit calls it lust. Another says, "I eat a little too much," but the spirit calls it gluttony. Then too, naming the spirit brings it to light, and since all evil thrives in deception and darkness and hates the truth and the light, naming the spirit exposes it, weakens its hold and sets the stage for deliverance. The fifth step in deliverance is the afflicted person's renunciation of the demon. One must disavow all association with Satan and past occult practices. They must be confessed as sin. Satan wants man's allegiance and will resist this confession. Finally, the afflicted person must be willing to forgive. In his worldwide deliverance ministry, Basham found that lack of forgiveness was perhaps the largest single contributor to demonic bondage. Jesus said, "... if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Mt. 6:15.

Through the mercy of God and the employment of the preceding Scriptural injunctions and practices given to men by Jesus Himself, many blood-bought souls in bondage to Satan have been set free. For this we must give glory to God and to His Son Jesus Christ, who is our Deliverer, our Lord, and our Savior. Because of the victory He wrought on the cross, we have power over all the power of the enemy. The Bible says, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." (1 John 3:8) "I am the light of the world," Jesus says. "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12) Satan and witches, hell, demons and ignorance, bondage, dread, fear, even horoscopes and Ouija boards are creatures of the night. Thank God that we have Jesus, the true light, who delivers us from evil, forgives our sins and grants us eternal life in His name. May this same Lord keep us strong in our Christian faith until we are with Him in glory forever and ever.

Those who imagine that the right of private judgment is the right of men, within the Lutheran Church, and bearing her hallowed name, to teach what they please in the face of her testimony, know not the nature of the right they claim, nor of the Church, whose very life involves her refusal to have fellowship with them in their error. It is not the right of private judgment which makes or marks a man Lutheran. A man may have the right to judge and be a simpleton, as he may have the right to get rich, yet remain a beggar. It is the judgment he reaches in exercising that right which determines what he is.

The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology,
Krauth, p. 172

SOME STATEMENTS ON LAW-GOSPEL PRINCIPLE
AS IT PERTAINS TO HERMENEUTICS*

by

Prof. J. B. Madson

The Word of God, at first only a spoken word, has come under attack since Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. From the time, also, that God "caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our leaning," the attacks have not abated, nor do we have reason to think that they will cease until the Lord destroys all opposition at His second coming.

In the meantime, we are also to be alert to the realization that the "devil is not always at one door." He may attack the Word at the point of its inspiration, of its clarity, of its sufficiency, or of its interpretation, or he may be at several doors at one time. One of the great battles at the moment in Lutheranism in America - and certainly elsewhere also - concerns interpretation of the Word. This struggle is not isolated from the prior and continuing battles concerning inspiration, authority, inerrancy, and the like. In other words, all these aspects of the Word and its use are closely inter-related, and to err in one is to be in danger of undermining the correct teaching in relation to the others.

One of the strong attacks against the authority of the entire Holy Scriptures is based on an

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alleged special reverence for the Gospel. For the humble Christian this is a disarming approach, for he prizes the Gospel above all else; if only that is left unsullied, is there any cause for concern? Highly as we respect the Gospel, we do not serve the purpose of that Gospel, nor do we honor it, when we employ it to denigrate any part of God's Word. It is therefore our intention to set forth some statements from various sources for discussion of this hermeneutical principle which has brought a spate of errors into the arena of the church.

1. The Holy Scriptures have as their ultimate purpose the salvation of men. (John 20, 21., II Tim. 3, 15) To accomplish this purpose, the Sacred Scriptures convict men of their sin (Law) and lead them to know and place their trust in Christ as the only Savior from sin (Gospel).

2. Since Jesus is our only Savior, it is important that we have the epistemological source of this Christ, namely the Gospel, but it is of equal importance, if not of prior importance, that we have the epistemological source of the Gospel, the Holy Scriptures. (The Apostle writes not only that "the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation," but also that "the Holy Scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation.")

3. To stand in judgment over the Holy Scriptures by relegating some of that revelation to the realm of the unnecessary or the possibly erroneous is to call into question the Gospel itself, for the transmission of which to our age and time, as well as for the understanding of which, we are dependent on the Holy Scriptures. (Cf. again II Tim. 3, 15)

4. To drive any kind of wedge between the Bible and Christ is a device unwarranted by the Scriptures themselves, since the Bible focuses on

Christ (Die ganze Schrift treibt Christum) and Christ submits totally to the Bible. (John 10, 35)

5. The expression of the Christocentric approach to the interpretation of Scripture without the recognition of the prior formal principle of Scripture itself is deceptive as to its truly Lutheran quality; though it seems to delight in terms that are dear to Lutherans, e.g., Law and Gospel, Christocentric, Solum Evangelium, it does not come to grips with the epistemological question: How can one come to know about Christ so that he can read the Bible with understanding?

6. When it is contended that C. F. W. Walther, especially in his THE PROPER DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL, is a Gospel reductionist because of his emphasis on the importance of the proper distinction, it may easily be forgotten that he assumes the a priori of Sola Scriptura. For example, under Thesis I he says: "Whatever of either doctrine is contained in the Scripture is the Word of the living God himself." (p. 6)

7. It is a distortion of the relationship between the Gospel and the Bible to maintain "that the Gospel, rather than the Scripture, is the norm for appraising and judging all doctrines and teachers (as, for example, when a decision on the permissibility of ordaining women into the pastoral office is made on the basis of the 'Gospel' rather than on the teaching of Scripture as such)." (A STATEMENT OF SCRIPTURAL AND CONFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES)

8. In reference to Articles IV and XII of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession: "Justification is important because of its basis in Scripture,... But this doctrine is not a general key to the Scriptures, it provides the basic rule which clarifies the Scriptural view concerning the relation between faith and good works.... (The rule concerning

Law and Gospel) was never applied as an obtrusive hermeneutic principle, and least of all set over the Scriptures as an authority." (Fagerberg, A NEW LOOK AT THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS, pp. 36, 38)

9. "If the Law-Gospel distinction and the doctrine of justification by grace were hermeneutical principles of general applicability, or even the dominant hermeneutical principles, it is difficult to understand why the confessions bring nonsoteriological questions to the Scriptures for an answer, or answer them from the Scriptures without the explicit help of such soteriological hermeneutical principles." (Bohlmann, PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS)

10. The Law-Gospel principle as it is being employed brings much confusion in its wake. Instead of being recognized as a principle for practical theology (Cf. Walther), it is made the sole principle of exegesis. It is, however, rather "a principle that comes out of God's Word and then serves to enlighten everything which God has said and done as recorded in the Bible." (David Scaer in "Law-Gospel Debate")

11. "The Law and the Gospel deal with how God's creative and redemptive acts are related to God's people in preaching. A bare act of God is not Law or Gospel of itself. God's preaching or explaining his acts is Law and Gospel. The Gospel is the report of the act . . . the news that God has acted both legally and redemptively is the Gospel. The redemptive occurrences in and of themselves are not Gospel. They become Gospel - if we date to speak like this - when God informs the world through the Apostolic Word that God has acted pro me." (Ibid.)

12. "The Gospel never becomes the norm to decide what may or may not be believed; the Gospel is God's message of approval on all His previous activities. The Gospel is not a principle of reduction, but a principle of inclusion." (Ibid.)

13. If the Scriptures do not determine for me what the Gospel is and what events in the history of the world relate to it - and how they relate - must I not at some point subjectively determine the nature of the Gospel and the distinction between it and the law?

No profession can rob any man or woman of the right to love, to have some green Eden of home on which the world cannot intrude, which is their very own, apart from every claim and duty. If the minister's wife did no other thing than to make her husband happy and at rest in a perfect home, then through its effect on him she would have done more for the parish than 10,000 times all other services which she could possibly do. To be his perfect love is her greatest and most sacred duty. -- Hewitt, A.W., The Shepherdess, p. 2

GOSPEL REDUCTIONISM

by

J. B. Madson

The Word of God, at first a spoken word, has come under attack since Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. From the time, also, that God "caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning," the attacks have not abated, nor do we have reason to think that they will cease until the Lord destroys all opposition at His second coming.

In the meantime, we are also to be alert to the realization that the "devil is not always at one door." He may attack the Word at the point of its inspiration, of its clarity, of its sufficiency, or of its interpretation, or he may be at several doors at one time. One of the great battles at the moment in Lutheranism in America -- and certainly elsewhere also -- concerns interpretation of the Word. This struggle is not isolated from the prior and continuing battles concerning inspiration, authority, inerrancy, and the like. In other words, all these aspects of the Word and its use are closely interrelated, and to err in one is to be in danger of undermining the correct teaching in respect to the others. In fact, the present controversy swirls around the very attributes of Holy Scripture.

**Delivered at the ELS General Pastoral Conference, January, 1974.*

One of the strong attacks against the authority of the entire Holy Scriptures in our day is generated by an alleged special reverence for the Gospel. For the humble Christian this is a disarming approach, for he prizes the Gospel above all else; if only that is left unsullied, is there any cause for concern? Highly as we respect the Gospel, we do not serve the purpose of the Gospel, nor do we honor it, when we employ it to denigrate any part of God's Word.

That there is controversy and debate here is readily acknowledged by both factions in the dispute. One of the proponents of "Gospel Reductionism," Dr. Robert C. Schultz of the Department of Theology, Valparaiso U., states at the beginning of a review of the controversy:

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is currently engaged in conversations about its understanding of Scripture. No controversy has been of such decisive and divisive significance since the Altenburg debate on the nature of the church. Those who stand outside the organization and therefore at some distance from the controversy cannot view the situation with bemused detachment.¹

The controversy has been variously designated. The term Law/Gospel Reductionism has been attributed to Dr. J. W. Montgomery and some essays of his on this subject in 1966.² It has also been

¹Robert C. Schultz, Reflections on the Current Controversy in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod: An Attempt to Express Pastoral Concern, in The Cresset, October 1977, p. 7.

²Cf. J. W. Montgomery, Crisis in Lutheran Theology, Vol. 1, pp. 81-123.

referred to as the Law-Gospel Debate or the controversy on Gospel Reductionism. Montgomery in his essays describes Gospel reductionism as a hermeneutical procedure that calls for interpreting Biblical texts with the Gospel, or the distinction between Law and Gospel, as the basic exegetical norm. Dr. Edward Schroeder, formerly chairman of the department of theology at Valparaiso University and now professor of systematic and historical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, summarizes the charges against Gospel reductionism by saying that these changes confuse the material and formal principles of Lutheran theology.³ Then, after restating the definitions of these two principles, he adds that opponents of reductionism argue that the Confessions and our tradition hold to a careful distinction between these two principles.

While the disturbance has only recently surfaced in a rolling boil, Dr. David Scaer of Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, contends that it has been simmering in LC-MS circles since the late 1940's and early 1950's.⁴ Dr. Edward Schroeder contends, in the aforementioned article, that it was at the Bad Boll Conferences, which concluded in 1954, that this influence spread into Missouri, especially by way of Dr. F. E. Mayer. But he tries to bring Walther and Pieper to the defense of his position, as well as Luther, Melancthon, and other confessors of the Reformation. He writes:

³E. H. Schroeder, Law-Gospel Reductionism in the History of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, CTM, Vol. XLIII, 1971, p. 232.

⁴David P. Scaer, The Law-Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod, The Springfielder, 1973, p. 156.

The distinction between Law and Gospel is the operating yardstick whereby the confessors practiced their Gospel reductionism. . . The confessors of 1530 look very much like Gospel reductionists.⁵

Just what is the nature of the controversy concerning Gospel reductionism? The battle being waged in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod will certainly serve to reveal its nature, even though there may be elements of the struggle difficult to assess. In 1971 the President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod presented a report to his church on the basis of another report from the Seminary Board of Control, which in turn was based on the report of a special fact-finding committee. Part Four of the report contains a table of divergent positions held by various members of the faculty, with the synodical position listed in the first column and other positions listed in the second column. Under Article III. The Holy Scriptures, D. Bible and Gospel, the following two positions are stated:

Synodical Position

The Scriptures are the only source and norm of doctrine in the church (formal principle), while the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the chief doctrine of the Bible and the heart of the Christian faith (material principle). The Gospel is a basic presupposition for the interpretation of Holy Scripture

Other Positions

The Gospel is not only the center of the Christian faith but the criterion of acceptable Biblical interpretation. Thus no interpretation of a Biblical text need be rejected unless it harms the Gospel. Considerable latitude needs to be given in

⁵E. H. Schroeder, *op. cit.*, pp. 236f.

(that is, one approaches the Scriptures expecting to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ and to relate all that he reads there to Him), but it does not determine the meaning of the Biblical text. Whatever the text says is the meaning of the text and is to be accepted as such because it is the Word of God. The grammar, context, and literary form of a text determine if it is to be understood literally or otherwise.

the interpretation of the Bible in a non-literal, non-historical way, so long as this does not affect the Gospel. For example, the fall of Adam and Eve or the world flood need not be accepted as factual so long as the doctrinal lesson of sin and grace is preserved in the interpretation.

6

The first position above declares the Holy Scriptures to be the source of all doctrines that are to be taught in the church. "These teachings, if used according to the principles laid down in the Bible itself will convict the sinner of his sin (the Law) and will lead him to a knowledge of Jesus Christ as his personal Savior from sin (the Gospel). The 'Valparaiso Theology' holds that Gospel, as the preached good news about Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins, is the basis of theological work. It also holds that the Scriptures when used by themselves can lead to conflicting opinions and thus the Gospel as the pre-supposition of faith must be used in approaching the Scriptures."⁷

⁶Report of the Synodical President to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1971, p. 28.

⁷David Scaer, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

The conflict between these two positions is further set forth in A STATEMENT OF SCRIPTURAL AND CONFSSIONAL PRINCIPLES, a statement also emanating from the office of the President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in 1972. While, as we have stated before, this controversy impinges on several doctrines or several aspects of the doctrine of Holy Scripture, it is particularly pertinent to quote from two sections of Part IV of this document. Under IV, B. The Purpose of Scripture, it is confessed:

We believe that all Scripture bears witness to Jesus Christ and that its primary purpose is to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. We therefore affirm that the Scriptures are rightly used only when they are read from the perspective of justification by faith and the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. Since the saving work of Jesus Christ was accomplished through His personal entrance into our history and His genuinely historical life, death, and resurrection, we acknowledge that the recognition of the soteriological purpose of Scripture in no sense permits us to call into question or deny the historicity of factuality of matters recorded in the Bible.⁸

The following section of the document, C. The Gospel and Holy Scripture (Material and Formal Principles) focuses more sharply on the problem when it states:

⁸A *Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*, 1971, p. 20.

We believe, teach, and confess that the Gospel of the gracious justification of the sinner through faith in Jesus Christ is not only the chief doctrine of Holy Scripture and a basic presupposition for the interpretation of Scripture, but the heart and center of our Christian faith and theology (material principle). We also believe, teach, and confess that only "the Word of God shall establish articles of faith" (SA, II, 11, 15), and that "the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged" (FC, Ep. Rule and Norm, 1) (formal principle). The Gospel which is the center of our theology is the Gospel to which the Scriptures bear witness, while the Scriptures from which we derive our theology direct us steadfastly to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁹

To sharpen that focus still further, the Statement here, as throughout the document, states its rejection of false positions by a series of antitheses:

We reject the following distortions of the relationship between the Gospel and the Bible (the material and formal principles): 1) That acceptance of the Bible as such, rather than the Gospel, is the heart and center of Christian faith and theology, and the way to eternal salvation. 2) That the Gospel, rather

⁹Ibid., p. 23.

than Scripture, is the norm for appraising and judging all doctrines and teachers (as for example, when a decision on the permissibility of ordaining women into the pastoral office is made on the basis of the "Gospel" rather than on the teaching of Scripture as such). 3) That the historicity or facticity of certain Biblical accounts (such as the Flood or the Fall) may be questioned, provided this does not distort the Gospel. 4) That Christians need not accept matters taught in the Scriptures that are not a part of the "Gospel."¹⁰

Of the above cited antitheses it is especially number two that will be found to strike at the heart of the Gospel reductionist theory. Though the position of the proponents of Gospel reductionism might be documented from a variety of sources, we shall refer especially to a document prepared in late 1972 by the moderate (liberal) faculty majority at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, a document prepared, at the urging of district presidents, to set forth the confession of the embattled majority. This document is entitled Faithful to our Calling - Faithful to our Lord. The opening Preamble, as early as the second paragraph, makes clear what the faculty majority thinks the issue to be:

At the heart of the discussions in our Synod is the question of whether the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is the sole source of our personal faith and the center of our public teaching. Is the Gospel alone sufficient as the ground of faith and the governing principle for Lutheran theology? Or is

¹⁰Ibid., p. 23.

something else required as a necessary condition? It is our conviction that any effort, however subtle, to supplement the Gospel so that it is no longer the sole ground of our faith or the governing principle for our theology is to be rejected as un-Lutheran, contrary to our confession, and injurious to the mission of the church.¹¹

This document consists of a rather brief Affirmations of Faith (a Trinitarian Confession) and a lengthier section of Discussions of Issues divided into eight parts. In accord with their attitude over against the Verbal Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, the framers of this document also make clear in the preamble that not all of the professors subscribe to the precise wording of the document. They intend the document to illustrate "how the Gospel governs our handling of theological topics."¹² Illustrative of their method is Discussion IV, Par. 2, wherein they state:

We, as Lutherans, start with the Gospel of Jesus as the center of the Scriptures, the heart of our theology and the core of our lives. That conviction governs our interpretation of the Scriptures, the way we perform our task as theologians, and how we live. Because the Gospel is the center of the Scriptures, all of their parts must be understood in relationship to that center. The relative significance of each teaching of the Scriptures must be discerned by relating it to that center. Any tendency to make the

¹¹A Christian Handbook on Vital Issues, Chr. News, 1963-73, p. 821.

¹²Ibid., p. 821.

doctrine of the inspiration or the inerrancy of the Scriptures a prior truth which guarantees the truth of the Gospel or gives support to our faith is sectarian. The Gospel gives the Scriptures their normative character, not vice versa. We are saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone, not through faith in Christ and something else, even if that something else be the Bible itself.¹³

So there you have it in pretty plain words. If there is any improvement to be noted in the circumstances of the present controversy, it is that both sides quite readily admit that a difference exists. The difference basically concerns the roles of Scripture and Gospel in the exegetical process. Though terminology may differ, so that some refer to the controversy as the Law-Gospel debate, or some denominate the new departure as Gospel reductionism or Law/Gospel reductionism, even the proponents of the latter methodology do not completely denounce those terms:

If the expression "Gospel reductionism" did not already carry such a pejorative flavor, it would serve as a good label to describe what regularly happened in the early years of Reformation confessional history. Already in the confessions preceding the Augsburg Confession - at Schwabach and at Torgau - the confessors evaluate the abuses in teaching and practice of the late medieval church by tracking down their

¹³Ibid., pp. 823-824.

actual or potential impingement on the Gospel. The reformers actually put into practice a means of evaluating issues by leading them back (reducere) to the Gospel. If there was no way that the Gospel was either abated or abetted by a particular practice or Biblical interpretation, then the confessors were content to ignore it or, at most, to give it skimpy treatment.¹⁴

The adherents of the position espoused in Faithful to our Calling - Faithful to our Lord claim that its methodology is in accord with the Confessions and true Lutheranism and that the "scholastic" position of those who posit both material and formal principles is sub-Lutheran or even un-Lutheran. The Faculty Statement claims that its position is not only correct, but the true Reformational and Lutheran one (though some of their own number would shudder at the use of those two terms to distinctly set apart their hermeneutical approach), and that a review of history is needed for those who think otherwise.

One of the many essays in defense of the Faculty Statement is one written by Dr. Paul Bretscher, formerly of Valparaiso University, entitled "The Log in Your Own Eye." Using the metaphor of Matthew 6, Dr. Bretscher identifies the sound eye as the pure doctrine of the Gospel, exhibited in the Confession made by the reformers at Augsburg, "as they found it in the Holy Scriptures."¹⁵ He makes quite clear that those

¹⁴E. H. Schroeder, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

¹⁵Paul Bretscher, "The Log in Your Own Eye," *CTM*, April 1972, p. 665.

who hold to the dual principles (formal and material) are quite incapable of performing benign surgery on the specks in the eyes of Gospel reductionists, for the latter really represent the Reformation position:

This is a simple test for that speck, which anyone can take. What comes to mind first with the phrase "The Word of God"? a) The holy, inspired, inerrant Bible? Or b) The words God speaks from heaven out of that Bible to comfort our hearts? Is believing the Bible the same thing as believing the Gospel? Is Bible reading and study itself a means of grace? Is it the glory of the Reformation that Luther restored the Bible to the church, or the Gospel? What has happened to us, when the formal principle has displaced the material in the center of our thinking?¹⁶

That the Confessions approach Scripture Christologically will hardly be denied by either side in this controversy. The fact that the Confessions do not have a specific article on Scripture has been used as an argument against the place of the formal principle in Lutheran Confessional theology. Edmund Schlink, a German theologian concludes that it was a "theological decision" to omit an article on Scripture, because the authority of the Scripture is grounded on the Gospel and not on a doctrine of inspiration,

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 25.

and emphasis on the latter might have obscured the former.¹⁷

We agree with Ralph Bohlmann when he states that there is no evidence in the Confessions or elsewhere to support the idea that the omission of an article or articles on Holy Scripture in favor of a Christological approach to Scripture was a conscious "theological decision."¹⁸ Arthur Carl Piepkorn, in a brief essay entitled "The Position of the Church and Her Symbols," in speaking of the "verbal" aspect of inspiration in early orthodoxy, writes:

If there was one point of universal agreement among all of these (he has just mentioned Calvin, the Council of Trent and pre-Reformation scholasticism) aside from the nude assertions of the Ecumenical Creeds, it was the authority, the inspiration, and the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures. It is not surprising, therefore, that we do not have an explicit article on the Sacred Scriptures in the Lutheran Symbols.¹⁹

One certainly has to read the Confessions with filtered lenses to miss the authoritative role ascribed to Holy Scripture in the faith and life of the church. The well-known excerpt from

¹⁷ Cf. Ralph Bohlmann, Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions, p. 25.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁹ Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol., XXV, No. 10, October, 1954, p. 740.

the Epitome of the Formula of Concord reads:

We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with (all) teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament alone, as it is written Ps. 119, 105: Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. And St. Paul: Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed, Gal. 1, 8.²⁰

A shorter paragraph in the Thorough Declaration reiterates:

First (then, we receive and embrace with our whole heart) the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged.²¹

What should be clear from these citations is that Scripture is considered as both the source and norm of doctrine. Again from the Epitome we read:

The Holy Scriptures alone remain the only judge, rule and standard (Richter, Regel and Richtschnur), according to which, as the only test-stone (Probierstein), all dogmas shall

²⁰*Triglotta, Formula of Concord, Epitome, p. 777.*

²¹*Ibid., p. 851.*

and must be discerned and judged, as to whether they are good or evil, right or wrong.²²

On the basis of such declarations in the Formula of Concord, Ralph Bohlmann concludes: "Thus the statement of the Formula of Concord that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule and norm in the church is not a mere principle. It is practiced throughout the confessions both in theses and antitheses, and with reference to both doctrine and life."²³

But these same confessions are not bashful about saying that Law and Gospel are the basic message of Holy Scripture and that justification by grace for Christ's sake is the center of all Scripture. This is so because of the divine purpose of the Scriptures: "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name," (John 20, 31) and the divine power of the same, for they "are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (II Tim. 3, 15) The Confessions are also quite insistent that these Holy Scriptures are to be divided into the two chief doctrines, the law and the promise (a favorite term with Melancthon which he takes from Paul's epistles and Hebrews). The Formula of Concord is oft quoted regarding the importance of the distinction between the Law and the Gospel:

As the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is a special brilliant light, which serves to the end that God's Word may be rightly divided, and the

²²*Ibid.*, p. 779, par. 7.

²³Ralph Bohlmann, *op. cit.*, p. 46f.

Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles may be properly explained and understood, we must guard it with especial care, in order that these two doctrines may not be mingled with one another, or a law be made out of the Gospel, whereby the merit of Christ is obscured and troubled consciences are robbed of their comfort, which they otherwise have in the holy Gospel when it is preached genuinely and its purity, and by which they can support themselves in their most grievous trials against the terrors of the Law.²⁴

So where, precisely, do the two contending factions in this controversy differ from one another? Both can make statements upholding the importance of the doctrine of Scripture and of the chief article of that Scripture, the doctrine of justification of salvation by grace alone through faith; yes, also the importance of the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel. It must also be admitted that not all of the protagonists of one position or the other necessarily agree in all their contentions, certainly not in their use of certain terminology. Reductionists generally contend that the elevation of the formal principle breeds "biblicists," and with sinful human nature being what it is, who will not admit the possibility that someone may distort that principle to aver that faith in the Bible is an end in itself. (Cf. the great controversy concerning the place of good works in the Christian life.) Surely, on the other hand, proponents of Gospel reductionism have often wandered far afield and

²⁴*Triglotta, Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, V, 1, p. 951.*

embarrassed even some of their own kind by denying truths vital to the Gospel which they allegedly esteem so highly. And are not these latter in graver danger because in belittling or discarding the real doctrine of Scripture they destroy, or at least endanger the basis of our knowledge of the Gospel?

In the second of his 1973 Reformation Lectures at Bethany College, Dr. R. Preus refers to the Hauptartikel Principle employed by Melanchthon in the Apology and by Luther in the Smalcald Articles. Having then asked the pertinent question whether Luther is here imposing something alien or extra-biblical on Scripture, he answers:

Not at all. And this can be said for two reasons. First, never in our Confessions does this overriding Christological principle violate the intended meaning of a biblical passage or pericope. Never do Luther or Melanchthon or the writers of the Formula of Concord use such a principle to interpret a text grammatically or historically. Never is their procedure a substitute or shortcut for the grammatical exegesis. Second, the Hauptartikel is itself subject to all the rigorous canons of grammatical exegesis. This is clear from the fact that the article of Christ or justification is ordinarily included in a series of articles all purporting to be drawn from Scripture and to be a summary of Christian doctrine. Luther's statement (SA II, II, 15), "The Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel," applies to the Hauptartikel as well as any other article of faith. Furthermore, the longest discussion in the Confessions (Apology IV)

centers in a defense of the Hauptartikel, justification by faith. And here Melancthon clearly draws his conclusions from the Scriptures. It is true that he expresses his Hauptartikel Principle before he proves it from the Scriptures . . . But he does indeed exegete these passages dealing with justification, and he does so to establish the doctrine itself and its centrality (Apology IV, 107, 293-4). He specifically says, "What we have shown thus far, on the basis of the Scriptures and arguments derived from the Scriptures, was to make clear that by faith alone we receive the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake..
....."25

Just a little earlier, in Lecture I, Dr. Preus showed from Luther's dealings with Zwingli that Luther was no reductionist, but that Zwingli certainly was. Zwingli could not believe in the real presence because he did not think it physically possible, but then he also held that it was not necessary to believe in the real presence because the Gospel of justification did not demand it. In an oral gloss upon his own essay text Dr. Preus remarked that Luther could have showed a Gospel-reduction need for the real presence ("given... shed...for remission"), but he didn't.

As the Confessions and the Lutheran Confessors clearly maintain and practice it, there is an intimate connection between the sola scriptura and solus Christus principles. The formal principle has meaning only in the unfolding of Scripture's Christological content for its saving purpose.

²⁵R. Preus, *Bethany College Reformation Lectures, 1973, No. II, paragraphs 6 and 7.*

The material principle has its validity and authority only from the Holy Scriptures that have been given by God and are employed by Him in bringing man to faith in Jesus Christ. "What confessional Lutheranism affirms is an indissoluble unity of Gospel and Bible, not one versus the other."²⁶ To attempt to drive a wedge between Christ and the Bible is the work of the devil. Neither the Scriptures nor the Gospel propose this as a live option. The Bible centers in Christ and Christ himself submits totally to it. Gospel reductionists would likely cringe at hearing the children sing: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." The problem, as David Scaer points out -- and others, we may add -- is basically one of epistemology: How do I know about Jesus Christ? The Scriptures are the cognitive principle in theology because they have been given us by God to tell us of Christ. Luther's dictum, *Die ganze Schrift treibt Christum*, is not a wedge for Gospel reductionism.

²⁶Horace Hummel, "Gospel & Bible," *Occasional Papers published by Affirm*, Spring 1973, p. 28.