

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY



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Walther: The American Luther

The Centennial of Walther's Death With Special
Reference to Our Synod's Indebtedness to Him

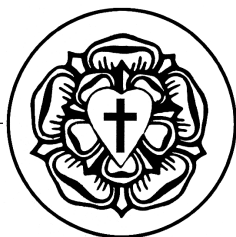
Reformations Before the Reformation

Lutheran Apologetics: From Our Classrooms and
into the World

Sermon on Genesis 22:1–18 and the Aqedah

Note, Book Reviews, and Index

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Foreword

LSQ Vol. 51, No. 4 (December 2011)

THIS YEAR MARKS THE 200TH anniversary of the birth of Dr. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (1811–1887). Walther was born on October 25, 1811 in Langenchursdorf, Saxony. He was the greatest theologian of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and one of the most important leaders of confessional Lutheranism in America. Walther might justly be called the *Lutherus redivivus* (Luther living again) for America and far beyond its boundaries. It is Luther who taught Walther to understand the Holy Scriptures and especially the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He was in many ways the Luther of America. The article, “Walther: The American Luther,” gives a brief summary of Walther’s life and work. The essay entitled “The Centennial of Walther’s Death With Special Reference to Our Synod’s Indebtedness to Him” was originally printed in the *Quarterly* in 1987 to remember the centennial of Walther’s death. This essay summarizes the close connection between Walther and the Norwegian Synod. It was written by J. Herbert Larson, a pastor emeritus living in New Braunfels, Texas.

As Lutherans, and as western Christians, we are accustomed to speaking of the theological and ecclesiological events that surrounded the famous Wittenberg monk-professor, Martin Luther, as *The Reformation*. At the same time, it is recognized that there were “reformations before the Reformation.” It is acknowledged that the sixteenth-century Lutheran Reformation arose as a culmination of

a reformatory *process*—or at least of a reformatory aspiration—that reached back several decades, and perhaps even centuries, into the late medieval period. This is the point of the essay “Reformations Before the Reformation,” written by the Rev. David Jay Webber, who is pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Scottsdale, Arizona.

There is a considerable amount of discussion among Christians today concerning apologetics. The term “apologetics” refers to the defense of the Christian faith. Defending the Christian faith may include an explanation of the basic beliefs of Christianity. It may also include giving grounds or reasons for accepting the Christian Gospel message as true or a refutation of criticisms of the faith, as well as exposing inadequacies in alternative religions and worldviews. In his essay, “Lutheran Apologetics: From Our Classrooms and into the World,” Professor Lyle Lange shows the importance of apologetics in Christian teaching today. Christian students need to be prepared to face an ever-increasingly hostile world. This essay was presented at the Lutheran College Conference, August 9, 2010. The Rev. Lange is professor of doctrine and Old Testament at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota.

The binding (Aqedah) of Isaac in Genesis 22:1–18 is a picture or type of the sacrifice of Christ. Abraham bound his son on the altar and in his mind had already slaughtered his son out of love for God. Likewise, God the Father did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all on the cross out of love for you and me, slaughtering Him in our place (Romans 8:32). That great sacrifice canceled the debt of our wrong and covered our wretched sinfulness, blotting it out with His precious blood. The sermon on Genesis 22:1–18 and the Aqedah is a summary of this typology.

Also included in this issue are two book reviews and a report concerning the 2011 convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference. The book *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal*, edited by Robert C. Baker and Roland Cap Ehlke, was reviewed by the Rev. Joel Willitz, who is pastor of St. John’s Lutheran Church in Frankenmuth, Michigan. The book *Telling the Next Generation: The Evangelical Lutheran Synod’s Vision for Christian Education, 1918–2011 and Beyond*, edited by Ryan C. McPherson, Paul G. Madson, and Peter M. Anthony, was reviewed by the Rev. Thomas Rank, who is pastor of Scarville Synod and Center Lutheran Churches in Scarville, Iowa.

– GRS

Walther: The American Luther

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A YOUNG STUDENT FROM THE University of Leipzig had been waiting patiently for a letter. He was at the point of despair. He didn't know if he were really a believer or not. The only Christian group on campus said that he wasn't repentant enough for his sin, that he didn't show enough of the expected signs of sorrow over sin. He had written to Pastor Martin Stephan for counsel. Holding the letter from Stephan in his hands, he prayed that it would give him the proper guidance.¹ Pastor Stephan's letter presented to him the Gospel in all its beauty. Our forgiveness does not depend on fulfilling so many outward signs of repentance but alone on the cross of Jesus where forgiveness full and free has been obtained for all men.

This event was one of the most significant incidents in the life of Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther. He was born on October 25, 1811 in Langenchursdorf, Saxony, the province where Luther lived and worked. Coming from a long line of Lutheran clergymen, he studied for the public ministry at the University of Leipzig and became a Lutheran pastor. Young Walther wanted to become a musician but his father persuaded him to study theology. Because rationalism had a strong hold on the German church at this time, even while studying theology in the university the way of salvation had not become clear to him.

¹ August R. Suelflow, *Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C.F.W. Walther* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 25.

After the letter from Pastor Stephan, God prepared Walther for his task in another way. Carl had to leave the university for six months to recover from an illness. While at home he found an edition of *Luther's Works* in his father's library. These volumes of Luther he read avidly. This rediscovery of Luther brought him to believe and confess the truths of orthodox Lutheranism. It is Luther who taught Walther to understand the Holy Scriptures and especially the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He remained a student of Luther throughout his life, so much so that this is a proper epitaph for his life: "*Gottes Wort und Luthers Lehr' vergehet nun und nimmermehr!* – God's Word and Luther's teaching pure now and forever shall endure."

Because of the persecution from rationalistic church leaders and because of the pressure to unite with the Reformed Church, confessional Lutherans like Walther felt a need to find a new homeland where the Gospel could indeed be preached in its truth and purity. In 1839, 700 Saxons including Walther reached New Orleans and from there travelled to Missouri, where they settled. At the same time, likeminded Pomeranians and Prussians travelled to Australia and others settled near Milwaukee, Wisconsin, founding the oldest German Lutheran church in the state.

After considerable confusion in the leadership of the Saxons, Walther became their spiritual leader. Walther was the first president of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), founded in 1847. Through his two publications, *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre* (Doctrine and Defense), his influence was felt far beyond the boundaries of the LCMS. His writing encouraged the fledgling Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) in its biblical stand with the result that fellowship was declared between Wisconsin and Missouri in 1869. Already in the 1850s, the fathers of the Norwegian Synod, H.A. Preus, J.A. Otteson, and U.V. Koren, found themselves in doctrinal agreement with Walther and the LCMS. The Norwegian theological students were sent to St. Louis until a Norwegian seminary was founded in Madison, Wisconsin in 1876. Walther's great dream was to unite all the orthodox synods in America into one organization. This was accomplished in 1872 when the Missouri, Norwegian, Wisconsin, Ohio, Minnesota and Illinois Synods formed the Synodical Conference of North America.

Through the inspired Word, the Lord forged a close association between the Norwegian Synod and Walther and the LCMS. The Norwegian Synod found support and friendly encouragement in Walther and the Missouri fathers. In August 1857, J. A. Ottesen and

Nils Brandt wrote a report on their trip to find a proper seminary for Norwegian students, in which they characterized the Missourians as having

a heartfelt trust in God, a sincere love for the symbols and the doctrines of the fathers, and a belief that in them His holy Word is rightly explained and interpreted, and therefore a sacrificial, burning zeal to apply these old-Lutheran principles of doctrine and order. May the Lord graciously revive this spirit throughout the entire Lutheran church, so that those who call themselves Lutherans may no longer wrangle over questions settled by the Lutheran Confessions. May they rather show their true Lutheranism by truly believing that God's Word is taught rightly and without error in the Lutheran Confessions. Otherwise, the Lutheran name is but duplicity and hypocrisy.²

Koren said that the Norwegian Synod learned no new doctrines from Missouri, but that it learned to appreciate, more than ever before, the confessional Lutheran heritage it brought from Norway. The synod found in Missouri the same theology that it had learned in Norway. The founders of the Norwegian Synod and the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod have long acknowledged a deep indebtedness to Walther for his friendship and support. In 1947, Pastor A.M. Harstad, then president of our synod, encouraged the synod to continue paying that indebtedness by remaining faithful to the doctrine of Scripture. His words then express what should be our sacred determination still today: "Let our Synod, by God's grace, continue to be filled with the spirit of true confessionalism."³

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Election Controversy raged in the Synodical Conference. In this conflict, Walther fought valiantly for the truth of Scripture. "The German term *Gnadenwahl* means 'election of grace' and indicates that we are elected alone by God's grace."⁴ Walther's opponents in this controversy (F.A. Schmidt and the Ohio Synod) believed that there was something in man that contributed to his salvation and thus he is elected in view of his faith (*intuitu fidei*). Walther realized that this was an attack on the very heart

² Carl S. Meyer, *Pioneers Find Friends* (Decorah: Luther College Press, 1963), 69.

³ J. H. Larson, "The Centennial of Walther's Death With Special Reference to Our Synod's Indebtedness to Him," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (December 2011): 301.

⁴ Suelflow, 167.

of the Gospel. With the Synodical Conference, he maintained, “We believe, teach, and confess, that the cause which moved God to elect, is alone His grace and the merit of Jesus Christ, and not anything good foreseen by God in the elect, not even faith foreseen in them by God.”⁵ Our election is totally by God’s grace. One’s faith is not the cause of one’s election. Rather because of one’s eternal election the treasures of Christ’s cross are brought to him through the means of grace, and faith in the Savior is worked in his heart through those same means of grace. Therefore salvation from beginning to end is entirely the work of God.

Walther served the church in many capacities. He was the first president of the LCMS and served in this position from 1847–1859 and again from 1864–1878. At the same time, he was called as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Louis and as professor and president of Concordia Seminary. As seminary professor, in addition to his other duties, he issued an amplified edition of J.W. Baier’s *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, which was used for the seminary dogmatics courses.⁶

Walther was a voluminous writer. He produced many books and essays and wrote in numerous periodicals. He is best known for his book on church and ministry, which settled the controversies among the Saxon immigrants, and his book *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, which is used in the homiletics courses at our seminary. Here he pointed again and again to the wonderful complexity and yet brilliant simplicity of the message of God’s Word—God’s Law, demanding perfect obedience, and His Gospel, proclaiming all that Jesus has done for salvation. Dr. Walther said in effect that the Law must be so preached that the most self-righteous person in the congregation feels the fires of hell and the Gospel must be so preached that the most broken sinner feels the joys of heaven. From his devotional writings and numerous sermon books, it is evident that Walther was a model *Seelsorger*, preacher, and pastor. Concerning Walther it was said, “He is as orthodox as John Gerhard, but as fervent as a Pietist; as correct in form as a university or court preacher, and yet as popular as Luther himself.”⁷

⁵ Carl S. Meyer, ed., *Moving Frontiers* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 273.

⁶ See Henry W. Reimann, “C.F.W. Walther’s 1879 Edition of Baier’s *Compendium*” in *The Symposium on Seventeenth Century Lutheranism*, Vol. I (St. Louis, MO: Continuation Committee of the Symposium on Seventeenth Century Lutheranism, 1962), 106.

⁷ Henry Eyster Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, 5th ed. American Church History Series (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1907), 403.

Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther was called to his eternal rest on May 11, 1887, and was buried in Concordia Cemetery, St. Louis, Missouri, where his mausoleum is found today. On this the 200th anniversary of his birth, his influence on confessional Lutheranism can hardly be overestimated. He was the greatest theologian of the LCMS and one of the most important leaders of confessional Lutheranism in America. Walther might justly be called the *Lutherus redivivus* (Luther living again) for America and far beyond its boundaries. The confessional scriptural stand of our synod and the WELS was strengthened through his important work. He was indeed the “American Luther.” ^(LSQ)



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der königlichen Privat-Bibliothek, etc. etc.
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The Centennial of Walther's Death

With Special Reference to Our Synod's
Indebtedness to Him

*J. Herbert Larson
Pastor Emeritus
New Braunfels, Texas*

LSQ Vol. 51, No. 4 (December 2011)

THE DEATH OF DR. CARL Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther was not unexpected. It came on Saturday, May 7, 1887, near half past six in the evening, in his home in St. Louis. Burial did not take place until Tuesday, May 17, thus allowing the Missouri Synod to hold its convention in Fort Wayne, Indiana, from May 8 to 14, and as many as possible of Walther's brethren to travel to St. Louis for his funeral.

On Friday, May 13, at four o'clock in the afternoon, Walther's body was brought to the Concordia Seminary building. Pastor George Stoeckhardt of the Holy Cross congregation in St. Louis spoke briefly to Walther's family and close neighbors, and offered prayer. Eight students of the seminary served as pallbearers. Two were students from the Norwegian Synod: a graduate of the 1887 class, Eivind O. Vik and another whose last name was Mikkelsen. They were but two of a large number to receive their training at Concordia under an agreement between the synod and the Missourians which began in 1857.

The first public service in memory of Walther was held on the following day, a week following his death. Several congregations in St. Louis held memorial services on Sunday the 15th. A service was held at the seminary at three in the afternoon. Then Walther's body was borne to Trinity Church, where it lay in state until Tuesday the 17th.

An estimated 4000 persons filled the church with more standing outside. Among those present were four pastors of the Norwegian

Synod: its president, Pastor Herman Amberg Preus, Pastor Ole Juul of Our Savior's and Pastor Amund Mikkelson of First Lutheran in Chicago, and President Peter Laurentius Larsen of the synod's Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. Burial was in the Concordia Cemetery, to which a memorial wreath was brought "from the Norwegian brethren." President Larsen spoke briefly on behalf of the Norwegian Synod:

Among the large crowd which has gathered for this burial, are also a small number of pastors from the Norwegian Synod, among whom is its president. We want to express in the name of our brethren the sincere thanks which we feel toward God and His servant, the precious, now sainted Dr. Walther, for all the good which has flowed to us also through him. We cannot then do otherwise than to use this opportunity to also bring to the large number of Missouri Synod representatives here, whose leading man he was, our thanks for such great and sacrificial love which has been shown us from their Synod's side for now close to thirty years. Since 1858, without let up, we have had students in its theological seminaries. About half of our pastors have studied at those seminaries, and most of them have benefitted from Walther's instruction. What blessing they, and through them their congregations and our people have had from this – who can measure it? But we others also, older pastors in our Synod, who have benefitted from instruction here, not exactly as enrolled students, have we not also sat at Walther's feet? Certainly we have, and far be it from us to be ashamed if we regard it much more as an honor and even more as a great blessing which has come to us in that way. Our people have also received blessing from Walther and the Missouri Synod in that way, since not a few articles from here have been translated into our language and distributed among our countrymen. We mention especially Walther's *Church Postil* and the excellent little book, *The Proper Form of an Evangelical Lutheran Local Congregation Independent of the State*.

The faithfulness in the preservation of the divine truth, as well as in striving after true holiness, to which Walther and the Synod whose leading man he was, so strongly have led and encouraged us, O might this faithfulness – be it today our wish

and our prayer – long outlive the dear departed as well in our as in his own Synod! Grant it for Jesus' sake! Amen.¹

There is a proper Christian spirit in which one speaks of those who have taught us the Word of God, whom we are to remember, and whose faith we are to follow, according to Hebrews 13:7. In his 1928 address to our synod, President Christian Anderson spoke of remembering men from the past, and said in part:

It is in order that we thereby can be encouraged to hold fast to the glorious heritage which the fathers have left behind them, and to witness just as they did.²

This is the God-pleasing spirit in which we view Walther and our synod's indebtedness to him.

Walther was a Saxon, a German, born at Langenschursdorf on October 25, 1811, a descendant of a family of ministers, a son of Gottlob Heinrich Walther, pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church at Langenschursdorf. He was ordained on January 15, 1837 and became pastor of the Lutheran congregation at Braeunsdorf. On November 18, 1838 he was on the ship Johann Georg, one of five ships bringing emigrants to the United States. After their arrival in New Orleans, the Saxons sailed up the Mississippi River to St. Louis. During the spring of 1839 the majority of them moved southward to Perry County, Missouri.

After his older brother, Otto Herman Walther, died, C.F.W. Walther was called to succeed him as pastor of the St. Louis congregation, taking up his work there on Jubilate Sunday (the 3rd Sunday after Easter) of 1841. During the next forty-six years Walther was pastor, president, and professor at Concordia Seminary, president of the Missouri Synod, editor and writer for *Der Lutheraner* and *Lehre und Wehre*, essayist at numerous conferences, and one of the founders and the first president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America.

He earned the respect of many throughout Lutheranism in America and in Europe, and the opposition of others. Some who opposed him were nevertheless compelled to pay him tribute. One such was an Inspector Bauer in Germany who said of Walther and his Missouri Synod:

¹ *Evangelisk Luthersk Kirketidende*, 3 June 1877, 344 ("Evangelical Lutheran Church Times"), the Norwegian Synod's weekly, published from 1874 to 1917 (hereafter abbreviated KT). All translations from Norwegian are by the author.

² *1928 ELS Beretning*, 17.

With respect to faithfulness to the Confessions, the Missouri Synod represents the conscience of the Lutheran Church. We accord it this recognition without reservation.³

Superintendent Dr. Broemel in Germany wrote a book called *Homiletic Character Portraits*, featuring biographical information about, and an appraisal of, great preachers in the church's history. Walther was the only living preacher to be included. Broemel said of him:

Pure doctrine also requires pure and firmly believing hearts which are prepared to give up all outward things, because inwardly they have surrendered them. It requires theologians, who with unshaken steadfastness of faith, not confused by a skeptical theological strife, have made the whole Word of God the light of their life. Walther is such a theologian. What he preaches is nothing other than the old, familiar Lutheran orthodoxy. Nowhere has he added anything to it, nowhere taken anything from it. He stands exactly where the old Lutheran preachers and dogmaticians stand. For him, Luther and the old theologians have spoken the best words for our, as well as for all, times. Walther knows his Luther, but also as a son co-equal with his father. Walther is a learned theologian, but for the most part he lives only in the doctrine which lies behind him. He is as well versed in the church-fathers, especially Luther and the Reformers, as in the Bible.... But because he is a living Christian who is completely serious about the whole of God's Word, therefore this orthodox man makes a perfectly timely, which is to say, entirely subjective impression. He is a deep and earnest preacher, who lives entirely in Jesus, his theology is thoroughly practical. He is as orthodox as John Gerhard, but also as sincere as a pietist, as correct in form as a university—or court—preacher, and yet as popular as Luther himself. If the Lutheran Church wants to bring its doctrine into the people, then it must be as faithful and sure in doctrine and use it in as engaging and relevant a form as Walther. Walther is a model preacher in the Lutheran Church. How entirely different it would be with the Lutheran Church in Germany if it contained many such preachers! Walther is filled with love of Christ and love for the brethren. But that which makes Walther so impressive is, of course, not the form but the content of his sermons.

³ Quoted in KT, 10 December 1875, 784.

As a good Lutheran he preaches the whole of the Word of God. He has no pet ideas. He preaches the whole content of Scripture with the greatest conviction of faithfulness.... He does not yield one tittle of Scripture. Dead, sluggish orthodoxy is an abomination to him. As a genuine son of the Reformers, Walther is a faithful friend of his new fatherland. Truth, freedom, and manly courage are Walther's basic elements.⁴

President Preus included these excerpts from Dr. Broemel's book in one of his own writings, as part of his response to theological adversaries of the Norwegian Synod. It is but one contemporary expression of Walther's stature. He and the Missouri Synod and the Norwegian Synod enjoyed one another's fellowship in the Gospel.

The Fellowship Begins and the Norwegian Synod Praises God

How did the two synods meet? The facts which answer the question were well-recorded at the time and have been repeated many times since.

In his essay titled "Ask for the Old Paths," delivered at our synod's convention, Pastor Christian Anderson takes us back to the 19th century:

When the University of Christiania was established in 1811, they were so fortunate as to get two conservative Lutherans, Svend Borchmann Hersleb and Stener Johannes Sternersen, to head the theological faculty. From then on a new generation of theologians was trained to care for the spiritual needs of the people. And when the first pastors who came to work among our people in this country were trained, another pair of staunch Lutherans headed the theological faculty, Gisle Johnson and Carl Paul Caspari.

The first theologically trained pastors who came to work among the Norwegian immigrants were men whose training had led them to seek "the Old Paths" of the Apostolic Church and of the Reformation, and they were thoroughly consecrated to the cause of building a true Lutheran Zion among their emigrated countrymen; most of them had, humanly speaking, left a brilliant future in the homeland in order to cast their lot with the pioneers who were struggling to build homes in the wilderness of the Northwest. The Norwegian lay people who had never been so completely imbued with the spirit of

⁴ Quoted in KT, 10 December 1875, 785f.

Rationalism as the theologians had been were equally desirous of founding a true Lutheran Church in the new land.⁵

Very soon after its organization our Synod entered into very close relations with the most conservative of these groups, the Missouri Synod, which for so long a time enjoyed the leadership of that richly gifted and devoted man of God, Dr. C.F.W. Walther. The fact that this choice was so easily made is an evidence of the character of our Synod.⁶

A large emigration to America from Germany and Norway began in the early 19th century and continued through the following decades. When Pastor Justin A. Petersen read an essay at our Synod's 1938 convention titled, "Address in Commemoration of the Saxon Immigration," which had occurred 100 years previously, he said of the reasons for the emigration,

First, we consider the motives that constrained the Saxons to leave their fatherland. Spiritual conditions in the homeland had become well-nigh intolerable. False teachers and false doctrines were being forced upon them both from pulpit and in school room. God's pure Word, freedom of worship, a good conscience, their soul's salvation and that of their children as well, were at stake. Something drastic had to be done, and that something very soon, 'ere irreparable damage be done. The only solution that offered itself was to emigrate. And this they did, this bold band of Saxons, men, women and children, pastors, candidates, teachers, lawyers, doctors, artisans, farmers, day-laborers, but Lutheran Christians all, — not to Australia, as originally planned, but, under God's Providence, to these our United States of America.

With the Norwegian emigrants it was quite different. They sought these shores, not because of religious persecution at home, not to better their spiritual status — on the contrary, it appeared that they might have much to lose in this respect. No, what prompted them primarily was the desire to carve out a future for themselves and for their children in this new land of unparalleled opportunities. It was rather the material magnet that drew our fathers. This is not an uncharitable disparagement of them, but it goes to show the difference in motives; and this

⁵ 1952 *ELS Synod Report*, 21.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

difference again accounts for a number of things not difficult to understand in the light of subsequent development. With the Saxons, we repeat, it was spiritual values and concerns above all. With the Norwegian emigrants it was rather material interests and ambitions, though the spiritual values were by no means lost sight of in their new surroundings, for the Norwegian emigrants, as a class, were not materialistic; on the contrary, they were deeply religious.⁷

Large numbers of people who were to become the great-grandparents and the grandparents of some of us, and spiritual ancestors of us all, came to pioneer settlements in the wilderness at Fox River in northern Illinois and Muskego and Koshkonong prairie in southern Wisconsin. Pastor Johannes Wilhelm Christian Dietrichson, the first ordained Lutheran pastor, arrived from Norway in 1844, but stayed in this country only briefly before returning to the homeland. Pastor Nils O. Brandt arrived in 1851; Pastors H.A. Preus and J.A. Ottesen in 1852. Preliminary steps were soon taken which resulted in the organization of the Norwegian Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America at a constituting convention held at Luther Valley, in Rock County, in southern Wisconsin, on October 5, 1853.

The synod looked for a supply of pastors to come from Norway, but also immediately began to concern itself with having pastors trained in this country. An early hope was that a theological department might be established at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, but this did not materialize.

The early governance of the synod between conventions was in the hands of the *Kirkeraad*, the Church Council, which met at intervals. The obtaining of pastors was high on the Council's agenda. It was suggested that the synod send a small delegation to visit the seminaries of Lutherans in St. Louis, Missouri; Columbus, Ohio; and Buffalo, New York; all of which were German-Lutheran. Estimated cost of the trip was once given as \$400. The Church Council wanted the synod to retain the option of establishing its own seminary should it be determined that it would be inadvisable to enter a working agreement with any of the three seminaries mentioned. We see the caution with which the synod approached the important matter of training its future pastors.

Pastors Ottesen and Brandt made the trip in the spring of 1857 and submitted their report, written by Ottesen, and dated August 1857, to

⁷ 1938 ELS Synod Report, 48-49.

the September 30, 1857 meeting of the Council. Their report fills almost 14 pages of *Kirkelig Maanedstidende*, the synod's Norwegian language monthly publication. Almost 10 pages are given to their report of their visit to St. Louis, 2 pages to Columbus, and 2 pages to Buffalo. After discussion, Pastor Preus recommended to the Council that it recommend to the synod that it ask permission to use the seminary in St. Louis for the training of pastors, and that the Norwegian Synod seek to arrange with Concordia for the placing of a Norwegian Synod professor on its faculty, with provisions made by the synod for his support.

At the 1857 convention in the little Iowa congregation in Winneshiek County, Iowa, Pastor Koren moved that the synod accept the Council's recommendation. Pastor Ottesen was delegated to represent the synod at the Missouri Synod's convention later in the same month in Fort Wayne. Pastor Koren accompanied him.

Laur. Larsen was the first Norwegian Synod professor at St. Louis, serving from 1859 to 1861. The first three Norwegian Synod students travelled to St. Louis at the end of August 1858. They were a Torgeson, from the Waupaca, Wisconsin congregation, Jacob Larsen from the Pine Lake congregation in Waukesha County, Wisconsin, and Lasse Fosse from the Norway Grove congregation in Dane County, Wisconsin. None of the three names, however, appear in the 1903 *Festskrift*, which gives biographical information of all the men who had served the synod from 1853 to 1903, so apparently none of the three completed study at St. Louis, or, at least, entered the synod's ministry. The first graduate from the Norwegian Synod was Ove Jakob Hjort, class of 1862.

This brief recital of facts has not done justice to the excitement in which the events were enveloped. Take a step or two backward, to catch some of the excitement. In touching upon it we begin to identify in specific ways what the debt is which our synod has so long felt toward Missouri and Walther, and we begin to hear the Norwegians' praise of God and Walther.

There was an especially rainy Sunday while Ottesen and Brandt were in St. Louis, so rainy that they and their host, Missouri Synod President Friedrich C.D. Wyneken, were prevented from going the three miles to church. The delegates spent the day with Wyneken. The more Wyneken said, the more was Ottesen impressed, as he said later, that "This is exactly what my father has so often said. This is Lutheran doctrine! Pure, unadulterated, unfalsified Lutheran doctrine, not modified by anything old or new. This is faithful to the Confessions and it is

biblical Christianity.”⁸ Ottesen never forgot that day, nor did he change his mind over the next half-century. He had found his own father's theology, the theology of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions which had been impressed upon him at home and in his university training, in the theology of Missouri. But however much of the delegates rejoiced over the Lutheran doctrine at St. Louis, they also spoke and wrote extensively about the Christian life which they saw firsthand.

On their way to Columbus, Ottesen and Brandt stopped at the Missouri seminary in Fort Wayne, and received the same impressions as they did in St. Louis. They were cordially received in Columbus and Buffalo, but they did not see and hear the same things there, and their report reflects that.

After the 1857 convention, as we heard, Ottesen and Koren attended Missouri's convention in Fort Wayne and went from there to a Free Conference in Pittsburgh, where they again heard and observed Walther and other Missourians. In brief parting words to the Fort Wayne convention, Pastor Koren said,

We confess with you the faith that the true church of Christ on earth properly is invisible according to its essence, but we do, however, believe that we do not deceive ourselves, when from the words and speeches which we have heard among you, we have concluded in the glad assurance of faith, that Christ's true church is here.⁹

Home again at Koshkonong, Ottesen wrote a report of the two meetings for *Maanedstidende*, and then followed it with a lengthy article, "A Glance at the Missouri Synod." Among so much else he wrote:

Professor Walther from St. Louis must be mentioned especially.... (His) speeches on the doctrines of his faith were the most interesting, the most informative, and delivered in as clear and simple a manner as one could want to hear. The liveliness and zeal for the truth, the impressive power and self-illuminating clarity with which he always developed his equally thorough knowledge, as well as his superior ability always, as we say,

⁸ *Liysbilleder fra den lutherske kirke I Amerika*, the Norwegian Synod's Publishing House, Decorah, IA, no date, 274. Cp. *Jacob Aal Ottesen*, A Biography (translated from Laur. Larsen's original by the Rev. George A.R. Gullixson, published by Webpsco, Inc., Wenatchee, WA, 1987, 24-25).

⁹ *Kirkelig Maanedstidende*, May 1858, 69 ("Churchly Monthly News"), the Norwegian Synod's monthly, published from 1855 to 1874. Abbreviated MT.

to hit the nail on the head, was so persuasive and convincing that it was impossible to listen to him without thanking and praising the Lord of the Church, who has brought to light so excellently equipped a warrior and watchman for His truth in these times of error and confusion.¹⁰

Pastor Koren had been a guest in the home of Professor Craemer at Fort Wayne during the convention. When Koren was again at home at Washington Prairie, near Decorah in northeastern Iowa, he wrote to him:

We learned nothing new from you. But that which we already had learned by precept in Norway – the two great Lutheran fundamental principles of the Reformation, these we saw exemplified openly and victoriously here for the first time in the life of an entire church body. We saw them exemplified in all seriousness and in childlike joyousness, without a trace of pious pretense, but with a power which under the conditions obtaining in a free-church came into evidence in a way which would not have been possible in a state-church without a complete revolution of the situation which exists there. We saw what we have learned by precept to confess, the well-known glory of our Lutheran symbols, such as we had never seen it before.¹¹

Somewhere around the time when the Norwegian-Missouri deal had been struck, Missouri responded in a letter to the Norwegian Synod's pastoral conference. The letter is an expression of what Missouri had always intended, and of course of what the Norwegian Synod was looking for. Koren quotes from the letter:

We are convinced that from the beginning we have wanted nothing else than to hold fast to the saving Word of the pure Gospel in the way in which it was again brought to light through the faithful service of Dr. Luther, for our own salvation, confess it before the world, defend it against alterations, and falsifications, and by the grace of God, as much as possible,

¹⁰ MT, May 1858, 65.

¹¹ *Samlede Skrifter* (the "Collected Writings") of U.V. Koren, Vol. III, 476f., Lutheran Publishing House, Decorah, IA, 1912, Abbreviated SS.

spread it among our countrymen and arrange for our churchly practice according to it and it alone.¹²

Very soon afterward Ottesen provided *Maanedstidende* with a Norwegian translation of a sermon by Walther, to introduce him to the synod at large. Since then the periodicals of the old synod and of the reorganized synod have continued virtually without let-up to carry translations of Walther's writings and sermons, articles sketching his service to the church, and expressing our synod's thanks to God for the gift with which He has blessed us in the person and work of C.F.W. Walther. Essays read at conventions have added their comments. Presidents of the synod have included testimony in their annual addresses at the opening of the conventions. Not to do so, many have reminded, would be to be ungrateful to those who have served Him faithfully; for instance:

Herman Amberg Preus was President of the Norwegian Synod from 1862 until his death in 1894, thirty-two years, or, half the lifetime of the old synod which was organized in 1853 and passed out of existence in 1917 to join with the United Lutheran Church and Hauge's Synod in forming the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. This Preus was the grandfather of Pastor H.A. Preus of our ELS, who died in 1985 at the age of 98, and the great-grandfather of J.A.O. Preus and Robert Preus of the present Missouri Synod and of David Preus of the former American Lutheran Church, which now enters the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

President Preus said in his address to the 1869 convention in the Spring Grove church in Houston County, Minnesota:

Now the Lord has placed an older brother at our side in the dear Missouri Synod. We shall not forget the great guidance and strengthening it as been to us with its deep insight into the Word of God and faithful steadfastness to them, but will thank God and it for it in spite of attack, mockery and derision, of which they as well as we partake just because of our association. We can just as little measure the favorable influence this association has had on our church body's expansion, as we can measure the influence of teachers who have graduated from our schools, but it meets us in the sermons and in the life of the congregations, just as it has found its expression in the Synod

¹² SS, Vol. II, 338.

as well in the discussion of various questions of doctrine, and in the newly adopted Synodical Constitution.¹³

The 1881 convention met again at Spring Grove, with the specter of the Election Controversy looming large before the synod. Walther was under attack from Professor Friedrich August Schmidt for alleged Calvinistic error regarding election. President Preus used the occasion to remind the Norwegian brethren:

For the unfortunate outcome of this struggle, as well as for the confessional position which our Synod has taken in the course of the years, its love and zeal for the pure doctrine of the Word of God which we inherited from the fathers of the Reformation, we have especially to thank, as every man among us knows, next to the grace of God, the Missouri Synod and the man whom God has let be its leader for over a generation. And surely, the more people from various sides and for varying reasons are now seeking to awaken ill-will against these builders and defenders of the Lutheran Church and the faith in these western regions, the more proper it is for us to remember with gratitude all their devoted love toward our Synod and above all the richer acknowledgement of truth and the encouragement to richer use of it for a sound congregational life and true Christian life, of which God has allowed us to be partakers through them.

I especially want to call attention to some basic truths for whose preservation and carrying out, both in theory and practice, Dr. Walther, together with the whole Missouri Synod, has lifted the banner and fought with unshaken faithfulness, namely: The freedom of a Christian man and a Christian congregation, the universality of divine grace and the total depravity of the natural man and his inability to cooperate in any way whatsoever in his conversion.

Of what importance their testimony has been for our holding fast to these basic truths and our continuance in them in our Synod's fight over the Gospel, Absolution and Justification, among other things, and through it also for our abiding with the truth of the Word of God in these doctrinal points, I need not explain further here. If we hold fast in the future to these basic truths, then surely we shall not go astray in

¹³ 1869 *Beretning*, 9.

the fight which may be imminent, but we will continue in the truth and emerge from the controversy victorious.¹⁴

U.V. Koren spoke often on the subject. One of the synod's goals in entering into the arrangement with Missouri was the establishing of its own institution of higher learning. Koren gave the dedicatory address at Luther College on October 14, 1865. His entire address is pertinent. With representatives of the Missouri Synod present, Koren said that three considerations prompted the Norwegian Synod to ask Missouri's assistance. The first was to secure workers in the immediate future. The second was to acquire insight and experience into how the synod should organize a seminary of its own (it did not open until 1876 in Madison, Wisconsin). The third was to grow as Christians and as Christian churchmen through an association with a synod which had proven itself in theological controversies and was on a genuinely Lutheran foundation. "Have we gotten what we wanted?" Koren asks, and then goes on to answer that God should be praised, and if

We would be silent, if we would not honestly and willingly testify before all the world of what God has done for us through these brethren in the faith, then we might expect that He would withdraw His hand from us because of such ingratitude.¹⁵

Thus, students from Norwegian Synod congregations studied for the ministry at St. Louis or Fort Wayne. One of them was Bjug Aanondson Harstad. His teachers at St. Louis in 1871 were Walther, Craemer, E.A. Brauer and Th. Jul. Brohm, and a learned young man named Edward Preuss who left the Lutheran Church that fall to join the Roman Catholic Church. Harstad travelled to St. Louis in 1926, after a long ministry, during which he also served as president of the Minnesota District of the old Norwegian Synod and as a member of the Synod's Church Council, and then was also the first president of the Norwegian Synod when it reorganized in 1918. That trip rekindled memories which Pastor Harstad shared with the readers of our synod's *Tidende*. His words give us a brief insight into his memories as a member of Walther's classes.

The first impression which we took from the older men was that they genuinely interested themselves in their calling and

¹⁴ 1881 *Beretning*, 8f.

¹⁵ SS, Vol. II, 336ff.

work for the glory of God and the edifying of the church. They gave us to understand immediately that we must not forget why we were here, namely not to have a good time, but in order to become prepared, through the study of the Word of God and prayer with all our strength and to be trained to attend to the most important and the most earnest calling which the Lord entrusts to any man on earth. Praying diligently was over half the battle. We should study the 119th Psalm diligently and notice how in each of the 176 verses David prays for and praises the enlightenment of the Word of God. We must know that there was no time for idleness or play. No love affairs could be tolerated. Theology should be our dear bride. Besides, we must seek to obtain a scholarly spirit. (“You must get a scholarly spirit,” Walther said once.) It was pointed out to us that those who had obtained some proficiency in the ancient languages must remember their duty and their responsibility to learn to know the excellent writings of the pious fathers and the characteristic so-called knowledge of newer theologians too.

The method of recitation or instruction proceeded for the most part about as it does with confirmands. Walther assigned the lessons to us and expected that we give an orderly account for them each day. This was especially good for us, who thoughtlessly liked to sneak off if we could. I remember one time when nearly the whole class was acting unusually foolish. Then we all got so earnest and so penetrating a reprimand from Walther for neglect of duty, that it cut to the marrow and bone. We could not soon forget about it. Is not such needed now?¹⁶

What was the Norwegian Synod looking for in 1857 and what did it find in Missouri? The very theology which Walther and the Missouri Synod had, expressed in these excerpts from Walther’s writings:

When our synod came into being, it committed itself before friend and foe only to all the symbols of the old Evangelical Lutheran Church, openly and without reservation, and adopted as its motto, “God’s Word and Luther’s doctrine pure shall to eternity endure,” and thus joyfully began its work – but it also undertook really to act in accordance with those symbols and its motto, in teaching and defense, in structure and practice. But

¹⁶ *Evangelisk Lutersk Tidende*, 9 June 1926 (“Evangelical Lutheran Times”), published by the reorganized Norwegian Synod from 1917 to 1953; 264.

immediately loud and intensive objections arose from the most diverse quarters and in the most diverse ways.¹⁷

In his opening address at the Missouri Synod's 1866 convention, Walther discussed his synod's history and the blessings God had given it, then said:

But I ask you, what was the *way* by which the Lord caused us to share in this blessing and deigned us worthy of it? It was none other than this: Here we established nothing new or original but inquired about the former paths and walked on the good old way; we sat as pupils at the feet of Luther and other orthodox and devout teachers already triumphing in heaven, and we followed in their footsteps; we took the church of the Reformation as our model and its pure Confessions as our banner, our guiding star, and our protecting wall. If you will, we have made the attempt to determine whether the doctrine of the 16th century could be used for the salvation of souls also in our 19th century, whether the tree of our old Lutheran Church, which for centuries produced such glorious fruits for the welfare of millions, might still demonstrate its pristine vitality and fruitfulness – and behold! Our hope was not put to shame. Even though the time of our synod's existence is not as great a visitation of grace as was the time of the Lutheran reformation of the church, the old doctrine has now again demonstrated its old and eternally new power; thousands of souls have been led thereby to faith and through faith to salvation, and a church has come into being that is united in faith and confession and aglow with love and good works.¹⁸

What is our Synod's Indebtedness to Walther?

We have heard several 19th century witnesses. Preus was articulate in defining it. Koren said that the Norwegian Synod learned no new doctrines from Missouri, but that it learned to appreciate more than ever before the heritage it brought from Norway. Ottesen said that the synod found in Missouri the same theology it had learned in Norway. When the synod reorganized in 1918 it continued to use Missouri's seminaries

¹⁷ *Editorials from Lehre und Wehre*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 116.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 119f.

and to reaffirm its blessings through association with Missouri. These later voices also help to define the indebtedness; e.g.;

Pastor Bjug Harstad's lengthy, excellent historical work, titled "Pioneer Days" is appended to the 1928 Synod Report. He wrote:

Especially by the example and guidance of the German Lutheran Missouri Synod, they learned from the Word of God to understand that every local Christian church, large or small, is the highest authority in all its own matters not ordered by Scripture.¹⁹

... the fraternal association with the Missourians did, even in the sluggish Norwegian mind, kindle a fire of intense love and study of biblical truths, the Lutheran confessions and apostolical principles for church organizations, independent of human authority.²⁰

In his 1938 address, Pastor Justin A. Petersen said,

Our main debt to the Missouri Synod is of a doctrinal nature. We would be showing little understanding and lean appreciation indeed of our debt to the Missouri Synod, if we failed to place our doctrinal debt at the very head of the list.

However, without intending for a moment to minimize or discount our doctrinal debt to the Missouri Synod, we would not be fair to the memory of our own sainted fathers, if we failed to call attention to the fact that they, too, possessed the pure doctrine....

It can be truly and gratefully said that from the Missouri Synod fathers, and especially Walther, our Norwegian Synod fathers learned to evaluate and appreciate their priceless possession of God's Word and Luther's doctrine pure all the more. Through their fraternal associations with the Missouri Synod, they were confirmed and heartened in their Lutheran heritage.

We could well classify our doctrinal debt to our Missouri brethren under the well-known watchwords – "The Word Alone," "Grace Alone" and "Faith Alone."²¹

¹⁹ 1928 ELS Beretning, 8.

²⁰ Ibid., 28.

²¹ 1938 ELS Synod Report, 50f.

Then Pastor Petersen went on to discuss these three familiar watchwords, concentrating on Grace Alone, "since these three are so inter-related and so conditioned upon one another."

Pastor Petersen's essay was read on Synod Sunday afternoon, which in former years climaxed, rather than began, the conventions. Synod President Norman A. Madson was at the Missouri Synod's convention in St. Louis the following week as our synod's official representative to bring its greetings to the Missouri brethren. He said,

The debt we owe our dear brethren of the Missouri Synod, while it is both physical and spiritual, is nevertheless chiefly of a *doctrinal* nature. Had not our sainted fathers come into contact with the Missourians when they did (in the fifties), God only knows what would have become of our Norwegian Synod....

...there is to mind no greater contribution made to the cause of sound Lutheranism by your beloved Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther than his clear-cut enunciation of the principles governing a truly free church.²²

The feelings between the two synods were mutual. There was a face-to-face sharing of those feelings at the Norwegian Synod's 1864 convention in the Perry church in western Dane County, Wisconsin. Professors Walther, Craemer, and Wilhelm Sihler attended the entire convention. After President Preus had given his address and report to the synod at the convention's beginning, Professor Craemer spoke his synod's brief greetings. At the close of the convention Walther was given the floor, and said,

Esteemed brethren, beloved brothers of the ministry and in the faith! We cannot part from you without declaring with what heartfelt joy we have been filled, and without thanking you for the rich blessing which has here been conferred upon us.

We have here had the joy of seeing a genuine Lutheran Synod, and this was also what we expected to find. But after we have seen you with our own eyes, we must confess that God has done more among you than we expected. Your Synod is not satisfied with the Lutheran name and with merely enlarging itself outwardly; but as a genuine Lutheran church body you place pure doctrine above everything and make it your task to

²² Norman A. Madson, *Preaching to Preachers* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1952), 187-188.

bring it forth from the Word's rich mine. With joy we have been witnesses to the earnestness with which you all, teachers as well as hearers, bow beneath the Word of God and do not ask about what the world and the spirit of the time demand, but only say, "Speak, O Lord! Thy servant heareth." Thus have we also seen that your burning zeal for doctrine also bears fruit in a burning love, and that you wish to offer your whole life to God.

I am reminded by that of how the Scandinavian church was the champion of the Reformation in the north 300 years ago and of how somewhat later, when the German church was in need, it reached out a helping hand under the great Gustav Adolph's direction and aided so much toward winning the religious peace which secured outward peace for the Lutheran Church in Germany for the future. May God thus grant then that you may be the Lutheran Church's champion in America's north until the Last Day!

And may the same faithful God who has now tied the heartfelt bond which unites our Synods, strengthen it also further and equip us thus with His gifts, so that we might be able to assist you with our small service! The joyous tidings we can bring our Synod from you will in this without doubt awaken many hearts to pray that He who began the good work in you, will also perform it until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. We commend ourselves to your brotherly love and intercession.

President Preus replied,

Dear teachers and brothers in Christ! On the Synod's behalf I thank you for your presence here, for all your good counsel and for the strengthening and the instruction you have given us. We thank God if by our small testimony of our love to Christ, we have also been able to help somewhat toward strengthening you in your love. But we must be shamed over your humility, that you speak so much about thanking us, while we, however, have been your disciples, and you have worked to the strengthening and instruction mainly of teachers in our church body and through them also for the congregations. Bring then our greetings to your Synod, and let the bond of faith and love always encircle us, so that we together may strive for the good thing until we are gathered in Christ's kingdom.

Then Preus turned to the Synod and said,

Dear fellow representatives and colleagues! During these meetings we have heard a young man preach to us, who has recently completed his studies in St. Louis and is now ready to accept a call as a pastor among us. Here is again a proof of how much we owe the dear Missouri Synod and its teachers who are present here also for the great help it has rendered us in getting pastors trained. Let us now all show our gratitude for this by rising.

When the assembly complied with the request, Professor Craemer replied, "We thank you for the undeserved thanks."²³

There Was Opposition

Whenever individuals or church bodies believe, teach, and confess the full truth of Scripture and bring their practice into conformity with it, they can also expect opposition. "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord" (Matthew 10:24). "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

Koren is one who traces the opposition to the Norwegian Synod in this country, even before it was organized, to the activity of Hans Nielsen Hauge and Elling Eielsen. Hauge took a strong anti-state-church position in Norway. When the Norwegian Synod sought in America to be a continuation of the state church of Norway, except as a free-church, some of the Norwegian immigrants saw the synod as the transference of the devil incarnate to this country and opposed it vehemently.

We heard President Preus' 1881 defense of Walther. In 1874 Professors Sven Oftedal and August Weenaas of the faculty of the Norwegian-Danish Lutheran Conference's seminary in Minneapolis felt themselves compelled to issue an "Open Declaration" charging the Norwegian Synod with a number of serious offences against the law of Christian love and departures from orthodox Christianity. Weenaas followed "An Open Declaration" with a book in which he further developed such charges against the Norwegian Synod, that it was founded upon Grundtvigian principles, that it was badly infected with what he labeled "Missourians," meaning that the influence of Missouri upon the Norwegian Synod was detrimental to it, and most extensively, that the Norwegian Synod was terminally ill with what he labeled "Wisconsinism." Since Preus was the synod's president, and

²³ MT, August 1864, 226-228.

in many minds its chief spokesman, and since he lived in Wisconsin, Weenaas could think of nothing more derisive than to coin the word “Wisconsinism” to convey his contempt for the synod’s doctrine and practices. Preus responded in a lengthy article which appeared over the course of several issues of the *Kirketidende*, holding Weenaas’ accusations up to the light of historic truth and the light of Scripture. Feelings ran so high among Norwegian-American Lutherans in the mid-1880s Election Controversy that some of them formed a short-lived Anti-Missourian Brotherhood in protest to what they perceived to be the Norwegian Synod’s pro-Missouri stance.

It is easy to multiply expressions of opposition to confessional Lutherans, whether past or present. It is not a passing phenomenon.

President Christian Anderson said in his 1927 address,

We have had to put up with accusations of separatism, Pharisaism and many other things, accusations... of exclusivism and of a lack of the proper Christian love.²⁴

Dr. Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker was the essayist in 1938. The subject was unionism.

Few of our members realize the dangers with which our dear Synod is beset, nor do they often take time to count the foe which is bent on the downfall of our faith. Therefore the complaint must be heard continually: Leave us alone from the preaching against false doctrine and false churches, as if we were so much better than they. The very name, Norwegian Synod, has these seventy-five years served to identify us with a preaching and testimony which is at the same time an invitation and a warning.²⁵

We are ridiculed, defamed, and persecuted, because we have disagreed with the commonly accepted slogans of church unity and union, whereby every church is obliged to recognize every other church denomination, even heathen religions, as brethren with whom we can and should build the kingdom of God.²⁶

Bjug Harstad quoted in his 1921 presidential address something which Professor Sven Oftedal wrote in the March 30, 1875 edition of the Norwegian language newspaper “*Skandinaven*”:

²⁴ 1927 *ELS Beretning*, 13,16.

²⁵ 1938 *ELS Synod Report*, 67.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

I knew that the Norwegian pastors in America, infested with the worms of Romanism, bleached out by the state-church and frozen stiff by orthodoxy, driven by a ministry of poverty and sick with thoughts of home, had been swallowed up by Missouri, and held on to lay the yoke of slavery and papal darkness upon a people whom the Lord had selected to be champions of Christianity and freedom.²⁷

“Swallowed by Missouri” was a common characterization of our synod made by its and Missouri’s opponents. They meant that the Norwegian Synod had no identity of its own, no theology of its own, that it was nothing but a parrot of Missouri, that the Norwegian Synod could not think and speak for itself, etc. The synod’s men responded.

Koren discusses a point which bears on the ever-present thought in some minds that it is exercising spiritual tyranny to demand unity in all doctrines of faith:

Through a period of twenty years the writer has attentively followed the controversies of the Missouri Synod and has read the church’s periodicals which they have published, but he has not yet discovered that they have demanded any other agreement than that which God’s Word demands, unity in all articles of faith which are clearly affirmed in Scripture. To demand such agreement is no spiritual tyranny for those who are of the truth, who from the heart acknowledge Scripture as the only sure and perfect rule of our faith and life; but it is indeed spiritual tyranny for all those who want to set “their own spirit” above Scripture and make it an open field for their exercises in spiritual gymnastics.²⁸

No one can rightfully accuse us, however, of being parroters of him (Walther) or of others.²⁹

Ottesen had to respond also. In 1863 the *Norsk Kirketidende* of Christiania had written about the synod’s relationship with Missouri, calling it an annex of the Missouri Synod, and accusing Ottesen especially of idolizing Walther. Ottesen responded,

²⁷ 1921 *ELS Beretning*, 24.

²⁸ SS, Vol. III, 382f. Cp. *Faith of Our Fathers* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1953), 53.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 437; Cp. *Faith of Our Fathers*, 98.

Neither I nor any of us idolize Walther or toil under his authority. We never cite Walther's mere name, or whatever Walther says about a matter, but we cite Walther's reason and proofs from God's Word, which surely then speaks for itself, and were equally good if a child had said something just as good.³⁰

Pastor Justin Petersen's words in 1938 maintain the proper perspective:

We must not, therefore, canonize the Missouri Synod, and "make flesh our arm." That would be making an idol out of her – a spirit far alien to the true Missourian. Not the hosts of the Lord, but the Lord of hosts will we worship.³¹

Repaying the Debt

Lest we be wicked borrowers who do not pay back, some time should be taken to consider our payment of the debt owed to Walther and his synod. The debt can never be paid in full; we should never think that it has been. It is something for each of us to continue to make payments on.

Pastor Petersen addressed the matter in the second part of his two-part address in 1938, saying in part,

1. First and foremost, by appreciating more clearly and more deeply what a priceless possession we have in purity of doctrine and unity of faith, partly become ours through association with our Missouri brethren; by guarding this treasure most jealously, ready, if need be, rather to shed our life's blood than to yield, compromise or obscure the truth of God's Word; by zealously spreading this truth in all our missionary activities; not forgetting, above all, to *use* this pure doctrine for our individual, congregational and synodical edification and growth "in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." This will naturally lead to and include
2. The bearing of fruits meet for the purity of the doctrine of grace. God expects, and rightly, more of us than He does of others less favored. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of

³⁰ MT, 1 February 1863, 43.

³¹ 1938 *ELS Synod Report*, 57.

him shall be much required." Who should be more humble, more zealous, more fruitful than just we? In the strength of this same grace, we should constantly strive to become ever worthier sons and daughters of the true Reformation church. But is not the danger actual and ever-present to make an idol even out of purity of doctrine and the outward forms of worship, priding ourselves in the possession of the same while we fail to bear the fruits thereof in our hearts and lives? Our own Luther even in his day saw their danger and bitterly deplored the oft meager fruits of faith.³²

One of the two essays at our 1925 convention was a symposium under the theme, "True Christian Progress." Fourteen of our pastors presented topics dealing with the wide range of Christians' individual, congregational, and synodical lives. Pastor H.A. Preus was at the time a member of the synod's Publications Committee. His remarks were on the distribution and use of Christian literature:

Patronize home trade: Lutheran literature instead of straying into the strange fields of Reformed church literature, which, sad to say, many younger pastors are prone to do, with baneful results to the Lutheran Church. They are, as a recent writer put it, "reading themselves out of the Lutheran Church." Yes, breathing this atmosphere accounts for much thought and many tendencies foreign to the Lutheran Church creeping into it.³³

It is easy to expand upon these 1925 comments. Walther studied Luther and more than once wrote something like this:

If you have such a great longing to learn Lutheran doctrine, to cling to it, and faithfully to teach it, I would urge you to read Luther's writings. It cannot be otherwise but that in *Luther* the *Lutheran* doctrine is the purest, the brightest, the most complete and original (according to the Scripture). It is plain stupid to continue to argue about Lutheran doctrine, and to follow one's own presumptions, and not to turn to Luther himself. And that is my summary and general advice to you in your present critical circumstances. Buy the whole collected works of Luther, if you

³² Ibid., 55f.

³³ 1925 *ELS Beretning*, 96.

don't have them yet, and read them day and night. If you do you will soon become divinely certain and happy in your faith and then in your standpoint within and toward the church.³⁴

Recall Walther's advice to Bjug Harstad's class at the seminary to dig deeply into Scripture and "the excellent writings of the pious fathers." Read the periodicals and annual Synod Reports of the old Norwegian Synod or of the reorganized synod. Read its other publications. Read Walther. All this, in partial payment of the debt.

Our synod can make partial payment by continuing to offer to pastors and congregations and individuals of the Missouri Synod or of other Lutheran bodies who are searching for a new church home during a time of much tumult within Lutheranism the fellowship of our congregations and synod. As Missouri has strengthened us time and again when we needed strengthening, we can be a source of strength to others.

The debt can be paid by our familiarizing ourselves with the history so briefly recited in these few pages, and making that history a part of ourselves. President George Albert Gullixson did some of that in his address to the 1924 convention, and said he did it:

In order that we thereby better can understand our own position in our struggle for the preservation of the old Lutheran doctrine and in order to uphold the principle that God alone shall have the glory for everything in our proclamation.... The chief goal of our Synod is to preserve God's Word as our only rule and guide for faith, doctrine and life and to proclaim this Word to others.³⁵

President Christian A. Moldstad said in his 1937 Report,

Our young people must be given the history of our Synod so that they will understand and appreciate God's purpose with us. The temptations to worldliness, indifference to doctrine, and church unionism are greater than ever.³⁶

Pastor Paul Ylvisaker did some musing in his 1967 essay, "The Abiding Worth of our Reformation Heritage," about what it would

³⁴ *Selected Letters*, trans. Roy A. Suelflow (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 112.

³⁵ *1924 ELS Beretning*, 15.

³⁶ *1937 ELS Synod Report*, 13.

have been like to have been with those Norwegian fathers and mothers, back then, in 19th-century America. Then he wrote,

We seem so far away from it all, and we begin to wonder whether we are not the poorer for it.... There is a legacy of loyalty among our people still, and God is raising up new confessors of the Gospel – again by the teaching and preaching of the Gospel. But here is a good place to admit to a real doubt whether much of the rank and file of our membership is keenly aware of our heritage. And we should set about stirring up our zeal and the appreciation for the heritage of those truths without which, we say again, we be disinherited indeed.³⁷

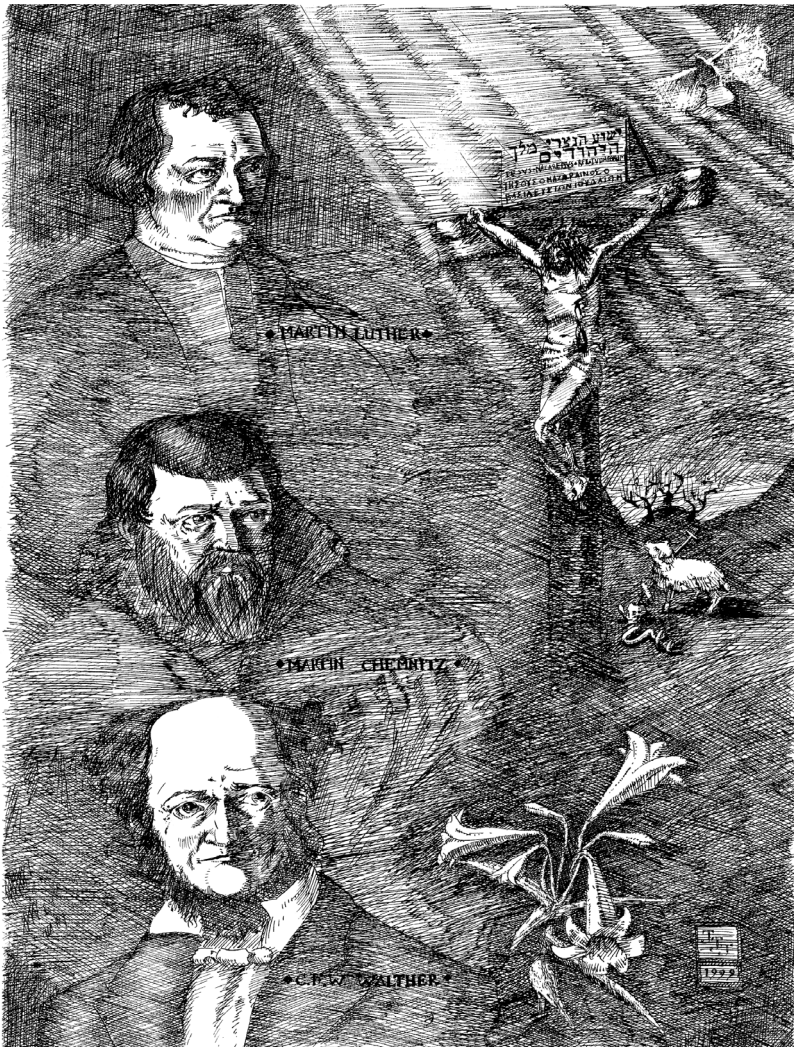
The divine truth of Holy Scripture is timeless. Through it the Lord forged a close association between the Norwegian Synod and Dr. Walther and the Missouri Synod. Walther entered the Church Triumphant one-hundred years ago this past May 7. We in our corner of the Lutheran Church have long acknowledged a deep indebtedness to him. We have heard many expressions of it. Forty years ago the historical setting was the negotiations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod with the former American Lutheran Church; today it is everything which interests and concerns us with the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Pastor A.M. Harstad was President of our Synod in 1947. In continuing payment of our indebtedness, his words then should express our sacred determination yet: "Let our Synod, by God's grace, continue to be filled with the spirit of true confessionalism."³⁸

To the glory of our God, may it be so, as we commemorate the centennial of Walther's death, with special reference to our synod's indebtedness to him. LSQ

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³⁷ 1967 ELS Synod Report, 31.

³⁸ 1947 ELS Synod Report, 9.



A replica of the painting in Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary by Jason Jaspersen.

The painting depicts Martin Luther (top), through whom God restored the Gospel in the Reformation; Martin Chemnitz (middle), the leading light in Lutheranism after Luther—so much so that there was the saying, “If the second Martin (Chemnitz) had not come, the first Martin (Luther) would scarcely have stood” (Si Martinus non fuisset, Martinus vix stetisset); and C.F.W. Walther (bottom), the principle founder of confessional Lutheranism in this country. Their confession centers in the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God on the cross and His glorious resurrection, by which the whole world was declared righteous in Christ.

Reformations Before the Reformation

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AS LUTHERANS, AND AS WESTERN Christians, we are accustomed to speaking of the tumultuous theological and ecclesiological events that surrounded the famous Wittenberg Monk-Professor as *the Reformation*. At the same time, we do recognize the existence of “reformations before the Reformation.” It is acknowledged that the sixteenth-century Lutheran Reformation did not emerge from nowhere, but that it arose as a culmination of a reformatory *process*—or at least of a reformatory aspiration—that reached back several decades, and perhaps even centuries, into the late medieval period.¹ Hermann Sasse summarizes this historical truth when he observes that the word “reformation”

had a long history before it was first applied to the movement which had its origin in the posting of Luther’s Theses. For more than two centuries before, a reformation of the church in the sense of both a moral-religious and a legal-organizational renovation...was being demanded. Theologians and humanistic scholars, clergymen and laymen, prelates and heretics, reform councils and popes, statesmen and monks had formulated

¹ This is the main theme of James Kiecker’s book *Martin Luther and the Long Reformation: From Response to Reform in the Church* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992).

theories for such a reformation and had tried to put them into practice.²

All of these late-medieval reformers and would-be reformers had reached the conviction that the western church—at least in its institutional life—had in some way, or in many ways, become deformed, and was not what it was supposed to be. As Sasse goes on to explain,

This was the problem which all of them had in common: What can be done in order that the church might once again become what it ought to be according to God's will? All of them also had in common the conviction that there are ultimate authoritative norms according to which the church must again get its bearings after it had strayed from the right path; that there are commands which it must again obey; and that this obedience, this heeding of the ultimate authority, and the doing of what this authority requires, represents the reformation, or renovation, of the church. Councils and popes, the theological exponents of conciliarism and curialism, the Hussites, the monastic reformers, the humanists, Erasmus and Zwingli, Calvin and Bucer, Carlstadt and Münzer, together with the reform popes, the Anabaptists of Münster, and the Council of Trent—all of them agreed in this. There was dispute only over the authority which needed to be obeyed in order that the church might be restored....³

These reform agendas were essentially oriented to the law, and to a desire for one or another set of structural and behavioral changes in the life of the church. Luther's movement did build on the movements that had come before him. But the Lutheran Reformation also broke with most of them, in the key issue of the nature and character of the reform that was needed. Luther's unique contribution to "reformation" thinking was not simply that he declared the Word of God in Holy Scripture to be the ultimate authority by which a reformation should be governed and implemented. Where he departed from his predecessors was in his deeper and more profound recognition of the fact that it was a *theological* reformation that was needed. Quite literally, the word "theology" means "God-talk" or "God-words." And it was a change, or

² Hermann Sasse, *Here We Stand: Nature and Character of the Lutheran Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1938), 53.

³ Sasse, 53–54.

a reformation, in the way preachers and teachers would talk about God that Luther believed was most necessary for the church.

Reformations Throughout Church History

An acknowledgment of those late-medieval reformatory processes that led up, over time, to the remarkable work of Luther and his colleagues, does not, however, exhaust our understanding of “reformations before the Reformation.” The Reformation of the sixteenth century was not an essentially unique occurrence in the history of the church. In point of fact, the entire history of the church on earth is characterized by a series of reformations like this—some of which had a profound and continuing impact on the development of the theological life of the church. For almost 2,000 years, the Christian church has retained its evangelical catholicity by means of a continual process of reformation, in keeping with the apostolic directive to “test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22; ESV).

Admittedly this is a uniquely Lutheran interpretation of church history—although it is an interpretation that we believe is true to the facts. This “reformational” interpretation of church history does differ from the interpretive paradigm of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy on the one hand, and of Zwinglian/Calvinist Protestantism and Evangelicalism on the other.

The basic assumption of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy is that the history of the church, and of the church’s confession and implementation of its faith, is, in essence, linear. The church progresses in its development and in its embracing of revealed truth in an ever-forward movement. To be sure, according to this “traditionalist” conceptualization, controversies do often serve as catalysts for more careful reflection on certain points that perhaps had not been discussed very thoroughly in the past. And so, as the church moves forward from a time of controversy, its articulation of its faith will often be clearer and fuller than it was before. But the basic assumption is that there would never be a need for a *backtracking*, or for a repudiation of a theological pathway that had been followed by the church’s mainstream, up until a certain controversy would prompt a reconsideration and reworking of what had previously been assumed to be a normative form of Christian teaching.

In this “traditionalist” conceptualization, at a very basic level, the church’s theology is not understood to be static. The theological life of

the church does move forward into the future. But the theology of the church's past will never need to be corrected in any kind of substantial way, because in the past, just as in the present, the church on earth has been supernaturally guided by the Holy Spirit, and has been supernaturally preserved from error by the Holy Spirit. Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox have a relatively optimistic attitude toward the church as an institution, and as an institutional phenomenon of history. In earlier centuries, the institutional church may not yet have taught the whole truth of God in all of its fullness. But what it did teach, it taught accurately. *Ecclesiam non posse errare*. The church cannot err.

The basic assumption of Zwinglian/Calvinist Protestantism and Evangelicalism, in comparison, is one of deep skepticism concerning the faithfulness and constancy of the church in its earthly, institutional existence. Therefore every inherited dogmatic conviction is always up for reevaluation and reconsideration, in every generation. The dogmatic legacy of the past is functionally little more than the provisional dogmatic *opinion* of the past, which—with little compunction—can be altered or rejected when it now seems not to pass the muster of the contemporary church's reading of Scripture. The way things were in the days of the apostles is seen as the baseline, and as the standard.

The more extreme elements of this school of thought would reject every creedal and hymnic development that ever took place in post-apostolic times. Campbellites and “restorationists” of all stripes would seek diligently to reclaim and reprimarize the supposed purity of the New Testament church—which, they imagine, was a church without creeds, without ceremony and liturgy, and without humanly-composed hymns beyond the inspired Book of Psalms. There is a naive belief that the many centuries of historical development and reflection that have occurred over the past two millennia can be ignored—indeed, that such developments and reflections *must*, as a matter of conscience, be ignored and rejected.

In contrast to both of these viewpoints, the Lutheran way stands between them with its own uniquely balanced approach toward ecclesiastical and theological history. In a way that is in some respects similar to the thinking of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, the Lutheran Church does expect to see an essential continuity in the church from the time of the apostles to the present, in view of the fact that there is only one holy catholic and apostolic church. But in a way that is in some respects similar to the thinking of Zwinglian/Calvinist Protestantism and Evangelicalism, the Lutheran Church does

not assume that every development in the *institutional* history of the church is necessarily a God-pleasing development—un-reformable and un-correctable.

Confessional Lutheranism, in its own way, does affirm that “the church cannot err.”⁴ But in saying this it means something different from what Catholicism and Orthodoxy mean when they say this. Lutherans affirm this principle in regard to “the true church,” and not in regard to any or every manifestation of the empirical church in this world. The saving faith of the church—anchored as it is in Christ and his promises—is always pure. But the outward confession and exposition of this faith is not always pure. The point of the church’s ongoing reformation is, therefore, always to seek, with God’s help and guidance, to bring the church’s *confession* of its faith into ever greater conformity with its *actual* faith.

One of the best summaries of this distinctly Lutheran way of looking at Scripture and tradition, and at the ongoing interplay of continuity and correction in the history of the church, is offered by the Swedish scholar Holsten Fagerberg in his book *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*. We beg everyone’s indulgence to quote liberally from this work, because it is so clear and well-stated in its explanation of the unique “reformational” view of doctrine and history to which the Lutheran Confessions bear witness. Fagerberg writes:

When Melanchthon supported the Evangelical position with arguments derived from the early church fathers, this was in harmony with his considered opinion concerning the Reformation as a continuation of the doctrinal formation of the early church. A study of those parts of the confessional writings for which Melanchthon was responsible reveals that the formal statements in the introduction and conclusion of the Augsburg Confession... reflect a well-thought-out and distinctive point of view. The frequently repeated quotations from the church fathers speak very clearly as the expression of the theological method upon which the Confessions are patterned. Reference is made first of all to the Bible, which must clearly support a doctrinal opinion, and secondly to the writings of the fathers. ... One finds the same attitude in Luther, generally speaking....⁵

⁴ Cf. Apology of the Augsburg Confession VII/VIII:27, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 178.

⁵ Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions (1529–1537)* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 48–49.

Fagerberg accurately summarizes here the conservative Lutheran instinct for continuity and unity with the church of the past. But this instinct or impulse is balanced by the Lutheran belief in Scripture's supreme and infallible normative authority, and—if need be—its supreme and infallible corrective authority. And so Fagerberg continues:

Although the Confessions frequently point up areas of agreement with the early church fathers, they also include a variety of criticisms. Their attitude is that the church fathers cannot be accepted *en bloc*. They were not infallible; as men they could make mistakes; their opinions often revealed a serious lack of harmony. ... With regard to the sacrament of penance and the preaching office [the reformers] discovered an obvious development, which they looked upon as a deviation. ... Some of the fathers are appreciated more than others. In general, the testimony of those who lived closest to the time of Christ is accepted in preference to those who lived later. The risk of error increased with the passing of time. The scholastic theologians were criticized with particular sharpness for their blending of theology and Aristotelian philosophy. ... With regard to the doctrines of original sin, penance, and the Lord's Supper, the Lutheran Confessions seek support from the early fathers, inasmuch as their position was different from that taken by the scholastics.⁶

The Lutheran Reformers saw the pattern of ongoing ecclesial reformation in the church's earthly history as a normal process, which had had a positive impact on the continuing clarification and development of the church's theological life. What was going on in their lifetime was nothing new. This is what had always gone on in the past, especially when times of degeneration and crisis similar to the epoch of the sixteenth-century Reformation had required it.

Examples of doctrinal deterioration in the institutional church abound throughout the centuries of Christian history. But what also abounds is evidence of God's providential intervention in the affairs of the church, to bring needed reformation and restoration of his saving truth through the ministry of reformers who worked in his name, under their calling as teachers in the church. Fagerberg accordingly explains:

⁶ *Ibid.*, 52–54.

Melanchthon wanted to preserve the historical continuity between the Lutheran Reformation and the older forms of Christianity, and he also wanted to eliminate irregularities within the church. These were the basic guidelines which he derived from his study of church history. According to Melanchthon, the Lutheran Reformation was not an interruption of church history but a continuation. As he saw it, church history proceeds according to a definite pattern and is characterized by both apostasy and reformation. The divine truth concerning man's salvation is one and the same from the beginning of the world to the present. This truth has been stifled, and threatened with destruction, time after time, only to be brought back into the light through a reforming movement. The church has always existed, sometimes strong, sometimes enfeebled. During periods of decay the true church lives on as a minority church. In the earliest years of Christian history this pattern involved the revelation of the divine truth through Jesus and the apostles, whom Melanchthon considered to be reformers. Decay set in after the apostolic age, which reached its culmination in Origen and called forth a reformation via Augustine. After the Augustinian purge the same course of events recurred anew: decay throughout the entire medieval period, which elicited the Lutheran Reformation. But during the entire process, characterized by renewal-decay-renewal, the truth was always preserved by a minority. The truth can be stifled, but it can never be completely destroyed. Melanchthon could see a dogmatic doctrinal continuity running throughout the centuries of church history and the periods of decay, and it was to this that the Reformation wanted to attach itself. The Reformation was not designed to introduce novelties but to revive the ancient truths which had been forgotten or obscured as a result of the church's decay.⁷

Fagerberg notes, too, that this basic way of interpreting the Christian past is not merely the private opinion of Melanchthon, or of Luther, or of any other individual. Rather,

This view of history is to be found in the Lutheran Symbols, and it throws light on both positive and negative expressions concerning the church's doctrinal development. Augustine

⁷ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

is accorded the highest rating. He was the only church father lectured upon regularly in Wittenberg. It also explains the generally negative attitude the Symbols take toward the post-Augustinian epoch, in which Pope Gregory the Great was thought to have brought about a trend leading in the wrong direction. It also makes clear why certain medieval theologians could be consulted on particular questions: the light was never completely put out, and the truth never totally obscured.⁸

But again, for the Lutherans of the sixteenth century—and also for us as we would seek to be faithful servants of a “reformational” church in our time—this providential process of clarification and correction is a process that is always governed by the supreme authority of Holy Scripture. The faith of the fathers, and also our own faith, must always be tested on the basis of the Scriptures. It is not the great Reformers of the past *in themselves*, who by the force of their personalities, or by their own intellectual cleverness, brought about the reformations with which they are identified, and for which they are honored. It is, rather, the great Reformers with *Bibles* in their hands, and with *pure biblical doctrine* on their lips and flowing from their pens, who are the instruments of God in these important times. And so, as Fagerberg explains further,

The truth was given and established once and for all time. Those fathers whose work was acceptable had not formulated any new doctrines; they had restored the original ones and freed them from irrelevant additions. The Confessions sought to return to those fathers who had preserved the pure doctrines, without falsification. But to attempt such a critical sifting of the church fathers’ statements demanded the use of a higher norm, and the Lutherans found it in Scripture. ... The church has God’s revealed Word, which is also a living Word. What the church proclaims cannot be altered; its content must remain the same from age to age. ... the only function or duty of the clergy is to cause the voice of Christ to be heard. Put another way, the church must give voice to Christ’s Word.⁹

But this commitment to scriptural authority and to scriptural truth does not mean that the church is limited to the *terminology* of Scripture in its assertion of this authority, and in its explication of this truth. At

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 58.

various times in Christian history, when heretics have hijacked the terminology of the Bible, and have distorted the meaning of the biblical words so as to make them say something they do not say, the reaction of the responsible teachers of the church has been to devise *new* terminology—not for the sake of introducing new *doctrine*, but for the sake of preserving the *old* doctrine by means of the new, more precise terms. In the history of the church's ongoing struggle with heresy, we do not, therefore, see a development of *doctrine*, but we *do* see a development of *terminology*. Fagerberg observes that

Melanchthon—and Luther too—was profoundly convinced of the church's doctrinal continuity. The Confessions located the source and norm of the divine message in the Bible; as a result, the Bible occupies such a central position in Reformation theology. The apostolic Word is found preserved in Scripture, and all statements must be verified by Scripture. The fact that Scripture was accorded such significance did not mean, however, that its words had to be repeated in a literal way. ... What is said in the Bible is also to be found in certain of the early church fathers and has been codified in the ancient creeds of the church. It is certainly true that they sometimes use other words and different modes of expression, but they nevertheless preserve the meaning of Scripture. ... That which can be accepted as genuine ecclesiastical tradition must be capable of verification by Scripture. ... It is this principle which gave rise to the saying, "The Word of God shall establish articles of faith" (SA II II 15), and which explains the critical rejection of certain points in the older doctrinal development. ... But this appeal to Scripture in no way includes a demand to reiterate Scriptural formulations in a literal way. The Confessions...use terms that cannot be found in the Bible but are in harmony with its meaning. The same is true of the formulations employed in the ancient creeds of the church.¹⁰

This is something that Luther himself explicitly acknowledged, when commenting on the chief "shibboleth" of the Arian controversy—*homoousios*—and on the important role that this admittedly extra-biblical term played in the service of catholic orthodoxy. He wrote that

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 59–61.

It is certainly true that one should teach nothing outside of Scripture pertaining to divine matters...which means only that one should teach nothing that is at variance with Scripture. But that one should not use more or other words than those contained in Scripture—this cannot be adhered to, especially in a controversy and when heretics want to falsify things with trickery and distort the words of Scripture. It thus became necessary to condense the meaning of Scripture, comprised of so many passages, into a short and comprehensive word, and to ask whether they regarded Christ as *homoousius*, which was the meaning of all the words of Scripture that they had distorted with false interpretations.... It is just as if the Pelagians were to try to embarrass us with the term “original sin” or “Adam’s plague” because these words do not occur in Scripture, though Scripture clearly teaches the meaning of these words....¹¹

The Scriptures are, as it were, both the fountainhead and the filter of the Christian church’s theological tradition. The prophets and apostles stand at the head of this sacred stream, which began to flow out into the world about 2,000 years ago. The teachers and pastors of each generation of the church’s history, who have come after them, are their successors, who have carried forward their doctrine—passing it on, eventually, to us. The creeds and confessions of the church are important mechanisms of this forward flow of the genuine prophetic and apostolic tradition through the centuries. The orthodox symbolical books were produced under divine providence by faithful teachers and pastors at crucial times in history, and they have served, since their production, as decisive and ever-reliable testimonies to God’s unchanging Word.¹² Once they are brought into existence, by being drawn out of the Scriptures, the symbols are thereafter able to guide later generations of the church in the accurate appropriation of the particular dimension of scriptural truth to which they bear witness.

But as the stream of apostolic truth flows forward in this way through the generations, the Scriptures function also as a *judge* and

¹¹ Martin Luther, “On the Councils and the Church,” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 41 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 83–84.

¹² The Scriptures cannot err, and therefore they do not err. The Symbolical Books *can* err, but they *do not* err. “We do not claim that our Confessors were infallible. We do not say they could not fail. We only claim that they did not fail” (Charles Porterfield Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* [Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1871], 186).

norm in each generation, so that clarifications and corrections of current teaching can be made whenever they are needed. Either through carelessness to one degree or another, or through wickedness to one degree or another, the prophetic and apostolic message has, at various times in history, been muddied and polluted by error. The Scriptures are therefore continuously to be brought to bear on the church's total proclamation, so that the truth that was successfully carried forward from the past will indeed be accurately confirmed as such in the light of Scripture, and be allowed to be brought forward into the future as well; while any error that has been improperly mixed into this truth will be identified as error, and filtered out.

Fagerberg's summary of the theological method of the Lutheran Confessors describes this too:

The conviction concerning the identity of the church's proclamation also gives tradition a certain importance for the exposition of the Bible. Scripture therefore does not have a merely critical function to fulfill over against tradition; the latter also has a degree of importance as a guide for the church in its own exposition of Scripture. To support the argument that the Confessions did not introduce any novelties, it was important to be able to refer to patristic utterances. There is, in other words, a line which runs from the Scriptures to the later tradition; but also in the reverse: Beginning with tradition, one can also find the road which leads back to Scripture. During the sixteenth-century theological confrontations, the ancient creeds served as guides to the Scriptures. Luther and Melancthon approved of Biblical interpretations which affirmed the dogma of the Trinity, while those which did not were rejected as mistaken. ...Luther...traced all heresy back to the denial of the Second Article of the Creed, which sets Christ forth as true man and true God. Melancthon also upheld the idea that the ancient creeds can be used as guides back to Scripture. But the connecting line is not unbroken, not even in the first five centuries of the church's existence. Rather, the truth is to be found in isolated points, elucidated by individual theologians, with Scripture serving at all times as the supreme norm. The authenticity of what the church says today depends on its factual

agreement with what the church has said in all ages, through those who have understood the true meaning of Scripture.¹³

The apostolic truth of the Gospel is always preserved, somehow, somewhere. The Lord's promise that his church will endure until the end of the world means that the witness of his saving message in the earth will likewise endure. During certain periods of church history this witness of saving truth may be transmitted through inadequate or weak forms of teaching, which preserve the essential points, but which also distort as they preserve. Such inadequate or weak forms of teaching may even assume a certain normative status for a time, until they are eventually judged to be deficient, and in need of supplementation or correction.

Sometimes, during low points of Christian history, this witness of saving truth will be preserved in the community of God's people through mostly *implicit* means—by way of credal formulations and sacramental *verba*, for example—and will be forced to coexist institutionally alongside *dangerously* incomplete or even erroneous forms of teaching. But the truth will never be completely silenced. And there will always be at least some voices that retain the pure teaching explicitly, even if they are in the minority in the institutional church. This is why Martin Chemnitz says that “we disagree with those who invent opinions which have no testimony from any period in the church, as Servetus, Campanus, the Anabaptists, and others have done in our time. We also hold that no dogma that is new in the churches and in conflict with all of antiquity should be accepted.”¹⁴

The typical pattern—which has been repeated many times in Christian history, but with varying degrees of institutional disruptiveness—is that after a while, when weak teaching eventually degenerates into outright heretical teaching, a controversy finally ensues, and the church at large then begins to consider the relevant questions more carefully than it had before. A direct and overt attack on the truth of the Gospel jars the church into a higher level of care in its reading of Scripture, which then leads the church to a deeper understanding, and a more precise confession, of the revealed truth of God regarding the controverted point. The overt heresy is refuted and rejected, and the proponents of the heresy are repudiated as false teachers. And the misleading theological tendencies of the past that had laid the

¹³ Fagerberg, 61–62.

¹⁴ Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 258.

groundwork for the heresy are corrected. But at such times of reformation, the otherwise orthodox Fathers of the past who had taught or tolerated these tendencies in their day are nevertheless evaluated in a respectful and generous manner—in view of the fact that they lived before the time when controversy had more fully exposed the theological shortcomings of those tendencies; and in view of the fact that their teaching, such as it was, had been formulated with good intentions in opposition to other *more* dangerous doctrines. Such gentleness in evaluating the writings of earlier Fathers is proper, in part because—in the words of Johann Gerhard—“It is wicked to interpret a poor choice of words as error, when you know that the right meaning was intended.”¹⁵

In this spirit, the Lutheran Reformers of the sixteenth century acknowledge in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession that the church of all times

retains the pure gospel, and, as Paul says [1 Cor. 3:12], “the foundation,” that is, the true knowledge of Christ and faith. Even though there are among these people many weak ones who build upon this foundation structures of stubble that will perish (that is to say, certain useless opinions), nevertheless, because they do not overthrow the foundation, these things are to be both forgiven them and also corrected. The writings of the holy Fathers bear witness that at times even they built stubble upon the foundation but that this did not overturn their faith.¹⁶

And the Fathers of the past who had actually preserved a more pure form of teaching on the controverted point are acknowledged and honored as the genuine guardians, *under* God, of the unchangeable *truth* of God—that is, as the ones to whom everyone *should* have been listening all along. And so, for example, in reference to the biblical doctrine of justification by grace through faith, as it had been taught by the famous fourth- and fifth-century bishops of Milan and Hippo, the Lutheran Reformers assert—in the Apology—that “what we have said agrees with the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, with the holy Fathers Ambrose, Augustine, and many others, and with the whole

¹⁵ Johann Gerhard, *Locus on Good Works*, sec. 38; quoted in C. F. W. Walther, “Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” *Essays for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), Vol. II, 59.

¹⁶ Apology VII/VIII:20–21, Kolb/Wengert, 177.

church of Christ, which certainly confesses that Christ is the propitiator and the justifier.”¹⁷

Martin Chemnitz affirms the insights of St. Augustine on these kinds of educational and reformatory processes in the church, when he notes that in a time of controversy,

The Scriptures are examined more carefully, and those theologians who had preserved the correct teaching are now noticed with greater appreciation than perhaps had been the case before the controversy. Augustine is correct and truthful when he says in *De Civitate Dei*, 16.2, “Many points pertaining to the catholic faith have been stirred up by the cunning troublemaking of heretics, so that we have had to defend these points against them, consider more carefully, define more clearly, and preach more powerfully. The question has been raised by the adversary, and the opportunity is present for better learning.” This point is certainly most true in church controversies.¹⁸

The Reformers know that Christ has promised to preserve his church until the end of time, and in the history of the church they observe that, “in order to keep the Gospel among men, he visibly pits the witness of the saints against the rule of the devil; in our weakness he displays his strength. The dangers, labors, and sermons of the apostle Paul, Athanasius, Augustine, and other teachers of the church are holy works, true sacrifices acceptable to God, battles by which Christ restrained the devil and drove him away from the believers.”¹⁹ Since the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, as here cited, highlights the ministry specifically of Sts. Athanasius and Augustine, let us illustrate the Lutheran way of looking at specific examples of “reformational” events in history by a further examination of these men, and of the way in which they each responded to the chief heresy that was attacking the faith of the church in their respective generations: Arianism in the case of Athanasius, and Pelagianism in the case of Augustine.

¹⁷ Apology IV:389, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 166.

¹⁸ Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), Vol. II, 473.

¹⁹ Apology IV:189–90, Tappert, 133.

Saint Athanasius the Reformer

The Gospels and Epistles clearly teach the divinity of Christ. The full divinity of the Holy Spirit is likewise affirmed in the Scriptures. At the same time, all of Scripture is united in teaching the existence of only one true God. But as we all know, the Scriptures do not speak of these things with the kind of systematic and logical exactness that can be found in, say, the Ecumenical Creeds. And that is because the Creeds emerged historically from times of intense controversy between the faithful pastors of the church, who diligently struggled to defend and preserve the true doctrine; and manipulative heretics, who deceptively twisted some of the less precise terminology of the Scriptures, and taught a theology of God that contradicted what the Scriptures actually intend to say—even while using the biblical terms which they had redefined.

Before the era of Athanasius—that is, before the fourth century—the false teachings of Gnosticism, Adoptionism, and Modalism had already prompted the church to begin the process of coming up with ways of formulating its trinitarian faith, and of explaining and defending that faith, that moved beyond the *terminology* of Scripture. The pre-Athanasian Fathers who confronted these heresies wanted to do nothing other than to explain and defend the biblical truth. Gnosticism, with its teaching about two ultimate deities, denied monotheism. St. Irenaeus of Lyons and Tertullian of Carthage led the way in responding to this. Adoptionism—taught in its most sophisticated form by Paul of Samosata—preserved monotheism, but denied the essential divinity of Christ. A host of theologians and Fathers repudiated that falsehood. And Modalism—sometimes called Sabellianism, after Sabellius, one of its chief exponents—preserved monotheism, and also preserved the deity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. But it denied the distinction of divine Persons, proposing that the one divine Person reveals himself in various “modes” at different times in history—sometimes as “Father,” sometimes as “Son,” and sometimes as “Spirit.” Tertullian and others rejected and warned against this teaching too.

In the midst of these overt heresies, with their challenges and threats, those who sought to defend the truth of God in pre-Athanasian times settled, for the most part, into a basic form of teaching regarding the Godhead and the divinity of Christ that is known as “Logos Christology.” Among those who were most closely associated with this form of teaching, as its expounders, were the second century Apologists (especially Justin Martyr), Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and most

notably Origen—who fleshed out his particular version of “Logos Christology” with much speculation and philosophical elaboration.

Notably, however, the second-century writings of the great anti-Gnostic Father Irenaeus did *not* go very far in the direction of “Logos Christology,” but explained the mysteries of God and of Christ in a way that adhered quite closely to biblical terms and concepts. St. Ignatius of Antioch, who came before Irenaeus, and St. Methodius of Olympus, who came after him, were also a part of this more conservative “Asian” school of thought.

“Logos Christology” attempted to be faithful to the totality of the biblical witness especially in response to Modalism, its primary foil and nemesis. “Logos Christology” affirmed the eternity of the Logos, who was eventually incarnated in the person of Jesus. But Logos Christology denied that the Logos was, from eternity, his own divine Person, distinct from the Person of the Father. Rather, it was maintained that it was in the creative act of the divine *speaking*—whereby the heavens and the earth were brought into existence—that the Logos first *emerged* or *emanated* from God. Before creation, the Logos existed *within* God, as the inner mind or *reason* of God. The doctrine of the immutability of God is lost with this scheme. And a subordinationist positioning of the Son *under* the Father, with a diminished degree of deity, is strongly implied.

In commenting on the views of Justin Martyr, and the other Apologists of Justin’s era, Bengt Hägglund points out that, according to their teaching,

even though the Logos has always been a part of the divine essence as the indwelling reason, it did not proceed from the Deity until the time of the creation of the world. Christ, therefore, would have been generated in time, or at the beginning of time. This philosophical Logos doctrine would also seem to suggest that Christ occupies a subordinate position relative to the Father.²⁰

To give credit where credit is due, this is not Arianism, since, as Hägglund also notes, “the Apologists posited the preexistence of the Logos in no uncertain terms, even though its appearance as ‘the Son’ was thought to have taken place initially at the time of the creation.”²¹

²⁰ Bengt Hägglund, *History of Theology*, tr. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 28.

²¹ *Ibid.*

But the weaknesses of the Apologists' "Logos Christology" are obvious. And this is true also in the slightly later writings of Tertullian, who reproduced the same basic ideas. In his summary of Tertullian's way of explaining these things, Hägglund goes on to explain that

The doctrine of the Trinity occupies an important position in Tertullian's theology. ... Tertullian adopted the Logos concepts of the Apologists and developed them further. ... Christ, he said, is the divine Word, which proceeded from out of God's reason at the time of creation. When God said, "Let there be light," the Word was born. Christ is one with God, and yet He is distinct from the Father. He has come forth from the essence of God as the rays emerge from the sun, as plants from their roots, or as a river from its source. Therefore the Son is subordinate to the Father. ... Tertullian... strongly emphasized that the Son and the Holy Spirit are one with the Father but at the same time somewhat different from the Father. "The Father is not the Son; He is greater than the Son; for the one who gives birth is different from the one who is born; the one who sends out is different from the one who is sent" (*Adversus Praxean*, 9).²²

It is easy to see how the Arians, in the fourth century, could and would exploit certain gaps and shortcomings in this teaching. In the minds of some, it was only a short step from believing that the Logos *emanated from* God at the beginning of creation, to believing that the Logos *was made by* God at the beginning of creation. While Arianism in its full-blown form was certainly a new departure, it did have some things in common with the preceding "Logos Christology," which had in part prepared the way for Arianism. Therefore, when Arianism needed to be confronted and destroyed, the weaknesses of the "Logos Christology" that stood behind it—especially its rejection of the eternality of the divine Son *as divine Son*—also needed to be corrected.

The Christology and trinitarian theology of St. Athanasius the Great was not only *anti-heretical*, in how he rejected the explicit error of Arius's *new* way of explaining things, but was also *reformatioal*, in how he corrected the weaknesses of the church's *relatively old* way of explaining things. According to Hägglund, Athanasius taught that

²² Ibid., 54–55.

the Logos is not a part of creation; it rather shares in the same divinity as the Father Himself. Athanasius also overcame the earlier subordinationist point of view. The Logos is not another God, and does not stand lower than the Father, as a spiritual being which emanated from the Father. The Father and the Son comprise one Deity. ... “The Son is not another God. ... For if He is also something other, even to the point that He was generated, He is nevertheless the same as God; He and the Father are one through the unique nature which they share in common, and through the identity of the one divinity.” (*Orationes contra Arianos*, III, 4) ... Athanasius taught that the Holy Spirit, too, is “of the same substance.” He is a part of the same divine essence and is not a created spirit.²³

Many bishops were initially suspicious of what Athanasius was teaching. To some, it sounded like a revival of Modalism. Some of the Modalists had in fact taught that the “Father” and the “Son” are of “one substance,” which was their way of saying that there was really just one divine Person or hypostasis who existed behind these two modes of manifestation. And so, when Athanasius used the same terminology to describe the essential unity of the Father and the Son, it took a while for many of the more conservative bishops to embrace this. For a while many of them thought that it would be better—and less Modalist-sounding—to say that the Father and the Son are of “like substance.” Their hesitancy to embrace the *homoousios* doctrine fully and enthusiastically was not in most cases based on any real sympathy for Arius and his teaching. Calling these foot-dragging bishops “semi-Arians,” which is commonly done by historians, is therefore somewhat of a misnomer.

The teaching of Athanasius also resonated with the biblically-conservative “Asian” school of thought, which still existed here and there among some of the bishops. The trinitarian teaching of the chief figures of this Asian school—Ignatius, Irenaeus, and Methodius—had perhaps not been formulated in a very elaborate or sophisticated way. But it had also never degenerated into the speculative philosophical constructs that governed the “Logos Christology.” And so, in the light of the extreme degeneration of Arianism, and in the light of Athanasius’s biblically-based opposition to Arianism, the larger church developed a greater appreciation, once again, for the representative teachers of this

²³ Ibid., 83.

Asian tradition, as faithful guardians of important truths regarding the doctrine of God.²⁴

Athanasius was a great orthodox teacher in his time. In hindsight, all of Christendom would affirm that now. But a primary reason why he was controversial in his own time, and why his orthodoxy was not immediately recognized by all, is because he was clearly and accurately seen by his contemporaries to be *more* than a great orthodox teacher. He was a theological *reformer*, who sought to revise certain aspects of the church's previous public teaching. This helps to explain why it took so long for the Nicene orthodoxy that he espoused and promoted finally to become normative in the mainstream church.

And the reforms of Athanasius were indeed governed and inspired by his high view of the unique and supreme authority of Holy Scripture. He said on one occasion that "The holy and inspired Scriptures are fully sufficient for the proclamation of the truth."²⁵ And for this reason, according to Athanasius, "Catholic Christians will neither speak nor endure to hear any thing in religion that is a stranger to Scripture; it being an evil heart of immodesty to speak those things which are not written."²⁶ Athanasius put these principles into practice in the way in which he formulated and advocated his trinitarian theology:

Unlike the older Alexandrian theologians (Clement, Origen), Athanasius did not insert the Christian faith into a closed, philosophical system. On the contrary, he rejected the resources of philosophy in the development of Christian doctrine; the Bible was his sole source.²⁷

Athanasius was not a "Biblicist," however. He was obviously willing to employ certain *terms*—such as *homoousios*—that were not *in themselves*

²⁴ Archibald Robertson writes, "Arianism was a novelty. ... With Origen and the Apologists before him it made much of the cosmic mediation of the Word in contrast to the redemptive work of Jesus; with the Apologists...it enthroned in the highest place the God of the Philosophers; but against both alike it drew a sharp broad line between the Creator and the Universe, and drew it between the Father and the Son. Least of all is Arianism in sympathy with the theology of Asia,—that of Ignatius, Irenaeus, Methodius, founded upon the Joannine tradition" ("Prolegoma," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria* [ed. Robertson]: *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Volume IV [reprint: Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980], xxix).

²⁵ Saint Athanasius, "Against the Heathen," I:3; quoted in Carl A. Volz, *Faith and Practice in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 147.

²⁶ *Exhort. ad Monachas*.

²⁷ Hägglund, 79.

used in Scripture. But the *content* of his theology was based squarely on Scripture, and was drawn directly from Scripture. A term like *homousios* was used, not because it went *beyond* the biblical teaching—in “developing” or “expanding on” the biblical teaching—but because it did nothing more than *embody* and *summarize* the biblical teaching.

Saint Augustine the Reformer

Even while the Arian controversy concerning the Christian view of *God* was still being fought out in some regions, another controversy arose in the church concerning the Christian view of *man*. Pelagius, a British monk whose life bridged the fourth and fifth centuries, was concerned that too much emphasis on the grace of God would have the effect of discouraging Christians from doing good works, and would breed an attitude of laxity and indifference regarding the holiness that is supposed to characterize the lives of Christians. He feared that the teaching that Christians are saved by grace alone, and not by their own works, would make the Christian faith seem to be a matter of divine determinism.

Pelagius knew that the orthodox fathers of the church had always *rejected* the various forms of determinism or fatalism that were present in the teaching and worldview of the pagans and certain heretics. The Gnostics especially had taught that only *certain* people have a spark or remnant of divinity within them, and that these people alone will eventually be elevated to a higher spiritual plane; while all others, who lack this spark, are not the object of any divine soteriological interest. Pelagius knew that the earlier fathers had generally emphasized instead, as the Christian alternative to determinism or fatalism, the *freedom of the human will*, by which Christians—without compulsion or coercion—earnestly and freely believe in Christ, and joyfully and willingly live out their faith in accordance with God’s revelation. This teaching was promulgated, in part, in the interest of emphasizing that the true God—as compared to the false gods of the pagans and the Gnostics—invites *all people* to be saved, and sincerely desires the salvation of all people.

Pelagius was especially drawn to the way in which St. John Chrysostom, the Bishop of Constantinople, had explained and applied these matters in his sermons. And so, in his desire to put forth a form of teaching in his own time that would encourage Christians toward a more fruitful life of good works, Pelagius picked up where the

Golden-Mouth had left off, and expanded on the ideas of “free will” that he found in John’s writings.

Chrysostom, and many others like him, had not done a very good job in expounding on the mystery of divine “election” or “predestination,” which various texts of Scripture do mention. These fathers for the most part “explained it away” in light of their overarching commitment to a “free will” mode of looking at, and interpreting, virtually everything regarding faith and the reception of salvation. Although some of the fathers had a better grasp of these things than others, the general consensus of the earlier fathers was that fallen man, even with his inherited tendency to sin, does retain an ethical “free will.” That was a misleading and imbalanced position, especially since these fathers, as a rule, did not emphasize what would have been a necessary distinction between the human will *before* conversion, and the human will *after* conversion. These fathers likewise did not emphasize, as they should have, an equally necessary distinction between the natural will *in regard to the things of earth*, and the natural will *in regard to the things of God*. Such nuances in understanding when, how, and in what way the human will is or is not free, were not generally to be found in their writings. Rather, the will of fallen man was simply “free,” and not bound to an arbitrary, predetermined fate. That was what they felt they needed to say over against Gnosticism and similar forms of determinism, and so that is what they did say.

But Pelagius went much further than this. He said, in effect, that man is not really “fallen” at all. In principle, he maintained that the human race, by nature, retains its capacity to do everything that God commands, and to live a life without sin. As far as our innate moral character is concerned, we are born into the same moral condition in which Adam was created. Temptations to sin come as the result of negative *external* influences, and not from an *inner* corruption. There is no inherited sinfulness, passed on to us from our parents. There is only the bad *example* set for us by parents, insofar as our parents misuse their “free will” by making wrong ethical choices that are contrary to God’s law.

Pelagius could not completely ignore the existence of “grace” in the Christian scheme of salvation, since that word is plastered all over the Bible. But according to Pelagius, the reality of God’s saving “grace” is to be seen chiefly in the fact that God graciously gives us his law, so that we will know how to remain—or how to become once again—pure and good, as God wants us to be. God is “gracious” because in his law he tells

us everything we need to know, when he requires us to live righteously, and when he promises to reward such righteousness. God is not capricious, and does not leave us guessing in fear and uncertainty, regarding the way of salvation by works that are pleasing to him. In his grace, he *tells* us what is pleasing to him.

Initially, Pelagius was reacting to some things that had been written in favor of a more genuine “grace alone” theology by the North African Bishop of Hippo, St. Augustine. And when Pelagius went public in criticizing St. Augustine, and in putting forth his own new emphasis on human freedom and innate sinlessness, this elicited a strong and firm response from Augustine. G. W. H. Lampe summarizes this history in this way:

It was not until Augustine’s time that the relation of divine grace, to which every Christian ascribed the salvation of man, to the freedom of the human will, became a subject of controversy. It had...not been thought out in any systematic way by the early Christian writers. Predestination tended to be treated as a dangerous concept, and the Pauline passages which suggested it were something of an embarrassment which patristic commentators, such as Origen and Chrysostom in particular, sought to explain in terms which would not impugn the freedom of the human will to take the initiative in repentance and faith. This freedom was of central importance in the Christian apologetic against pagan fatalism and the influence of astrology, and in the orthodox repudiation of Gnostic determinism....²⁸

Augustine’s arguments against Pelagius were rooted chiefly in Scripture and in what Scripture teaches regarding human sin and divine grace. In the process of digging into the sacred texts, he did reach the conclusion that many of the fathers of earlier times, who were preoccupied with the threat of fatalism, did not read Scripture as carefully as they should have in regard to what it teaches on these topics. These well-intentioned fathers were so concerned to make sure that they did not teach divine *determinism*, that they ended up not teaching divine *monergism* either. They over-corrected in such a way as to give encouragement—unwittingly—to someone like Pelagius, who came along later, and built his theology, not on their strengths, but on their weaknesses.

²⁸ G. W. H. Lampe, “Christian Theology in the Patristic Period,” *A History of Christian Doctrine*, ed. Hubert Cunliffe-Jones (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 155.

Augustine did not completely reject these fathers as false teachers. He treated their writings with respect, as far as his biblically-formed convictions would permit. In a sense, he built his theology on their strengths, while forgiving, and gently correcting, their weaknesses. But he also tested and evaluated their writings in the light of the supreme norming authority of Scripture, and accepted only what passed that test. Augustine said on one occasion:

What more can I teach you, than what we read in the Apostle? For Holy Scripture sets a rule to our teaching, that we dare not “be wise more than it behooves to be wise,” but be wise, as he says, “unto soberness, according as unto each God has allotted the measure of faith.”²⁹

And he wrote these words to St. Jerome:

To those writers alone who are called canonical I have learned to offer this reverence and honor: I hold most firmly that none of them has made an error in writing. Thus if I encounter something in them which seems contrary to the truth, I simply think that the manuscript is incorrect, or I wonder whether the translator has discovered what the word means, or whether I have understood it at all. But I read other writers in this way: however much they abound in sanctity or teaching, I do not consider what they say true because they have judged it so, but rather because they have been able to convince me from those canonical authors, or from probable arguments, that it agrees with the truth.³⁰

Augustine’s arguments for original sin and total human depravity in spiritual matters, and for salvation by the working of God’s grace alone, were fundamentally exegetical arguments. But he also knew that it was necessary to demonstrate that he was not inventing new doctrines, or new, unprecedented interpretations of the Bible, but was instead clarifying, and reiterating, the genuine catholic faith. One of his apologetic techniques in this respect was to appeal to the universally-approved

²⁹ Saint Augustine of Hippo, “On the Good of Widowhood,” 2; in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983 reprint), First Series, Vol. III, 442. The quotation is from Romans 12:3.

³⁰ Saint Augustine of Hippo, Letter to Jerome; quoted in *Biblia cum glossa ordinaria et expositione Lyre litterali et morali* (Basel: Petri & Froben, 1498), Vol. 1, “On the canonical and non-canonical books of the Bible,” tr. Michael Woodward.

practice of infant Baptism, which the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (quoting Acts 2:38) declares to be “for the remission of sins.” He noted, therefore, that the church has always implicitly recognized the sinfulness of people from birth, even if this belief was not explicitly unfolded and expounded in a systematic and thorough fashion.

Augustine also mined the writings of the earlier fathers for examples of sound and valid insights on the teaching of sin and grace, which were brought to bear against Pelagius’s heretical teaching. Augustine’s treatise *Against Julian*—an ally of Pelagius—which is chock-full of citations from respected Christian teachers of the past, is the best example of this. In this treatise, Augustine sought to demonstrate that St. Ambrose (his own catechizer and baptizer) had consistently taught the biblical position on these questions. For example, among other citations from the great Milanese bishop, Augustine quoted him as saying, “Adam was, and in him we all were. Adam perished and in him all perished.”³¹

And Augustine was also able to demonstrate that other influential figures of the past, who *sometimes* did not express themselves very well on these matters, had taught soundly enough and clearly enough at *other* times to indicate that, if they had had occasion to think these things through more carefully, they would have been more consistent, and not have articulated the admittedly weaker expressions that the Pelagians were now highjacking into their false system.³² Examples of such sound

³¹ Saint Ambrose of Milan, “Commentary on Luke,” 7.234 (on Luke 15:24); quoted in Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Against Julian: The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 35 (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1957), 11.

³² Martin Chemnitz points out that there were similar personal inconsistencies in the teaching of the ancient and medieval Fathers on the article of justification: “...the ancient writers spoke with the greatest security (as Augustine says)—and most unfortunately—concerning this article when they were engaging in general rhetoric in sermons and homilies, or when they were carrying on a debate with heretical adversaries. But when they were forced to deal with those passages in which we find the *sedes doctrinae* of the matter, then the actual evidence of the divine revelation convinced them to explain this doctrine more correctly and properly, as we can see in the commentaries of Origen, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Augustine, and others. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that sometimes even monks who had preached at great length on merits and the righteousness of works learned the correct understanding of the article of justification, not in their idle contemplations, their sharp disputations, or their rhetorical declamations, but in serious trials, when the conscience was pressed down by a true sense of sin and the wrath of God, as if it had been dragged before His tribunal. For there, as the conscience worriedly looks around and wonders how it can escape the judgment of damnation and stand in the sight of God, it learns to understand Paul’s statement in Rom. 3:28. Thus Anselm and Bonaventura speak entirely differently regarding the article of justification in their disputations than they do in their meditations. There are some lovely statements in the meditations of Augustine and Anselm and in the Soliloquy of Bonaventura.

statements that he cited are St. Irenaeus's reference to "the ancient wound of the Serpent,"³³ and a comment of St. Cyprian of Carthage regarding "the contagion of the ancient death."³⁴

A questionable statement by Chrysostom that the Pelagian bishop Julian had quoted—that infants "not having sins" are baptized³⁵—was interpreted by Augustine as charitably as possible, to mean that such infants had not yet consciously committed personal "sins of their own." Augustine did not pretend that this was not, in itself, a weak expression. But Augustine also reminded Julian that the theology of Chrysostom must be evaluated in the context of the contemporary theology of his brother bishops, who on this point did not even give the *appearance* of allowing for a Pelagian notion of sin. He posed this question to Julian:

Do you, then, dare to set these words of the holy Bishop John in opposition to so many statements of his great colleagues, and separate him from their most harmonious society, and constitute him their adversary? Far be it, far be it from us to believe or say such an evil thing of so great a man. Far be it from us, I say, to think that John of Constantinople, on the question of the baptism of infants and their liberation by Christ from the paternal handwriting, should oppose so many great fellow bishops, especially the Roman Innocent, the Carthaginian Cyprian, the Cappadocian Basil, the Nazianzene Gregory, the Gaul Hilary, the Milanese Ambrose. There are other matters on which at times even the most learned and excellent defenders of the Catholic rule do not agree, without breaking the bond of the faith, and one speaks better and more truly about one thing and another about another. But this matter about which we are now speaking pertains to the very foundations of the faith. He who would overthrow in the Christian faith what is written: "Since by a man came death, by a man also comes resurrection

Bernard [of Clairvaux] also speaks far more fittingly than the others about the article of justification, because he is not carrying on some idle debate but is presenting his conscience before the judgment of God as if it were to state its case, and from this come the most beautiful thoughts in Bernard's writings" (*Loci Theologici*, Vol. II, 473).

³³ Quoted in Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Against Julian*, 7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁵ Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilia ad neophytos*; quoted in Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Against Julian*, p. 27. Julian had actually quoted this statement of Chrysostom by means of a garbled Latin translation, which had made his teaching seem much worse than it was. Augustine corrected that, and then put the best construction on what Chrysostom had actually said. See *Against Julian*, 25–27.

of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made to live" [Rom. 5:19], strives to take away all that we believe in Christ. Christ is fully the Saviour of infants as well. They shall certainly perish unless redeemed by Him, for without His flesh and blood they cannot have life. This John, too, thought and believed and learned and taught. But you twist his words according to your doctrine.³⁶

On the topics of original sin and divine monergism in human salvation, Augustine, like Athanasius, was not only an orthodox teacher for his time, responding to the heresies of his time. He was also a reformer, who recognized, from the vantage point of the controversy into which he had been drawn, that many of the earlier Fathers' statements on these matters could have been worded in a better way than they were. In responding to Pelagius, therefore, he did not limit himself to a repetition of what had been said before, and he also did not simply build on what had been said before. Some of the things that earlier teachers had said, on the doctrine of human sin and divine grace, he no longer said. And what he did say, in general, was better, clearer, and stronger than what had been said before.

And as is usually the case with theological reformers, his teaching was not accepted right away by the rest of the church. The Eastern Church, in fact, has never really accepted it.³⁷ Many polemical partisans of Eastern Orthodoxy even to this day deliberately slight the famous

³⁶ Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Against Julian*, 25–26.

³⁷ The modern Eastern Orthodox Church does not enjoy unanimity in its midst in its teaching on sin and grace. There are some segments of Eastern Orthodoxy that actually teach a view of sin that is, for all practical purposes, indistinguishable from the Pelagian view! The following originally appeared in an official publication of the Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, is posted on the web site of this Orthodox jurisdiction, was reprinted in an official publication of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the United States of America, and is also posted on the web site of *that* Orthodox jurisdiction: "My daughter just had a child. Holding him, I thought, 'It is so difficult to believe that an infant's heart is sinful.' Many teach this, but not Orthodoxy. We do not believe that we are totally depraved, as many Protestants do. Nor do we believe we are born with the guilt of sin, as the Romans teach. Instead, we are born in innocence and our heart is pure. To be sure, we all sin. Yet some, as did our Lady the Birthgiver-of-God, continue in purity of heart the rest of their lives, as blameless. Mary was as human as we are, yet morally pure throughout her life. We are all born in the same condition and we have the choice to keep our hearts pure and directed towards God, or to sin and rebel against the purity of a loving heart. Our lives become a continual struggle to conform our hearts to purity and holiness. Recognize this, and we are on our way to becoming Orthodox" (Rick Burns, "What is Primary to Orthodox Spirituality?" *The Word* [November 2006]; posted online at www.antiochian.org/node/17685;

North African bishop with the appellation “Blessed Augustine,” which is deliberately said as a substitute for “*Saint* Augustine.” And even in the West, where his teaching in its essential points was considered to be normative for a time, the Augustinian doctrine of sin and grace—or more precisely, the *biblical* doctrine of sin and grace which Augustine confessed—was largely supplanted in the Middle Ages by a “semi-Pelagian” view, so that it was in need of being recovered and renewed in the sixteenth-century Lutheran Reformation (which it was).³⁸

Conclusion

The topic of this essay has been “Reformations before the Reformation.” Were there reformations before the Reformation? From one perspective, there was almost nothing *but* reformations before the Reformation! And there have been many reformations *since* the Reformation. The entire history of the church, in its institutional life, has been characterized by a spirit of “reformation” in every generation. Sometimes these reformations have been small and almost unnoticeable. Sometimes they have been profound. But every generation is expected by the Lord of the Church to test itself in the light of Holy Scripture, to add what is lacking, to remove what is wrong, to strengthen what is weak, and to clarify what is obscure. “If you abide in my word,” Jesus says, “you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32; ESV). Hermann Sasse writes that “reformation,” broadly considered in this way,

is a *continuous process*. It is a continuous process not only in the sense that this renewal from the Word of God *ought* to take place again and again, but also in the sense that *it is actually happening* all the time. Every real sermon contributes to such a renewal. This kind of reformation takes place every Sunday—every day, in fact. For the church literally lives by the Word of

reprinted in *Ukrainian Orthodox Word*, Vol. LIX, Issue 3 [March 2009]: 16; posted online at uocofusa.org/files/publications/UOW/2009/UOW-2009-03.pdf.

³⁸ The Lutheran Reformers did not, of course, endorse everything Augustine ever said on every topic. Augustine’s teaching on salvation by divine grace alone, because of fallen man’s complete inability to save himself, or to contribute toward his salvation, was seen as his most important and most enduring contribution to Confessional theology. He was not often quoted on the topic of the Lord’s Supper, however, since here his teaching had notable weaknesses. In contrast, John Chrysostom was often cited by the Reformers as a sound teacher on the topic of the Lord’s Supper, but he was seldom considered to be an authority on the doctrine of sin and grace.

God. It would not exist any longer, if it did not experience a renovation by the Word of God again and again.³⁹

This does not mean, of course, that God is “reinventing” the church over and over again every day. There is only one church of Jesus Christ. This is a deeply necessary Lutheran conviction. For this reason, as Sasse also states,

Lutheran theology...lays great emphasis on the fact that the evangelical church is none other than the medieval Catholic Church purged of certain heresies and abuses. The Lutheran theologian acknowledges that he belongs to the same visible church to which Thomas Aquinas and Bernard of Clairvaux, Augustine and Tertullian, Athanasius and Ireneaus once belonged. The orthodox *evangelical* church is the legitimate continuation of the medieval Catholic Church.... For the orthodox evangelical church is really identical with the orthodox catholic church of all times.⁴⁰

The one, eternal church of Christ experiences its *continuity* in this world by means of its continuous *reformation*. The world, the flesh, and the devil are always threatening the church because they are always attacking the Gospel, and are always attempting to dilute, mute, and obscure the Gospel. But God, providentially, is also always raising up faithful and gifted pastors and teachers for his church, whom he calls and energizes to bring the Gospel back into focus, to correct the missteps of the past, and to proclaim the saving message of Christ with renewed vigor and clarity. *Ecclesia semper reformanda est.* LSQ

³⁹ Sasse, 56; emphases in original.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

Lutheran Apologetics: From Our Classrooms and into the World

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“**I**DON'T DO APOLOGETICS. I just step aside and let God's Word defend itself.” “Apologetics undermines Scripture's authority and the Holy Spirit's work of conversion.” These are two responses Lutherans have offered for not engaging in apologetics. While these sentiments may flow from good intentions, they reveal a misunderstanding of what constitutes biblical (and confessional Lutheran) apologetics. Biblical apologetics (1 Peter 3:15) is always being ready to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope that you have. A challenge to, or a questioning of, the Christian faith calls for apologetics.¹ C. F. W. Walther, the great theologian of the Missouri Synod, wrote of the need to confess the truth and oppose error. He wrote,

These fake Christians do not know how hard it is for the bold champions to go public and become targets for the hatred, enmity, slander, scorn, and persecution of people. However, they [the bold champions] cannot help but confess the truth and at the same time oppose error. Their conscience forces them to do this because such behavior is required of them by the Word of God.²

¹ Hereafter, understand all references to apologetics in connection with what Peter described in 1 Peter 3:15 and in connection with the doctrine of Scripture as it is confessed and taught by confessional Lutherans.

² C.F.W. Walther, *Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2010), 293.

Walther did not use the word apologetics in his statement. However, he encouraged us to do what Peter stated in his first epistle, namely, be ready to give a defense of the hope we have. Christians are apologists for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christians have delivered defenses of the gospel throughout the New Testament era, and there certainly is a need for apologetics today. This morning, then, we will address the topic of Lutheran apologetics. We will consider what Lutheran apologetics is and what it covers, why we need Lutheran apologetics, why it deserves a place in our schools' curricula, and also how it ties in with our Lord's commission to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19,20). We will cover biblical apologetics in the following areas:

- What constitutes Lutheran apologetics
- Lutheran theology guides Lutheran apologetics
- The history of apologetics
- Fideism, evidentialism, and presuppositionalism
- Apologetics and the authority of Scripture
- Apologetics and philosophy
- Apologetics and science
- Apologetics, myth, and allegory
- Apologetics and culture
- Apologetics, the law, and human rights
- Apologetics and ethics
- Apologetics, cults, and world religions
- Apologetics in our classrooms
- Apologetics and our world-wide mission³

What is Lutheran (biblical) apologetics?

The primary Scripture passage which speaks of apologetics is 1 Peter 3:15. In order to keep the passage in its context, I will quote the entire section. Peter wrote:

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and

³ It should be noted that most of the areas listed here are the areas of study covered by Dr. John Warwick Montgomery in his Academy of Apologetics, Evangelism, and Human Rights at Strasbourg, France. The content in these areas is my own.

pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:8–17; NIV⁴)

This section of Peter’s epistle addressed the issue of how to respond to those who have wronged or slandered us because of our faith in Jesus. Let me paraphrase Peter’s response: Peter stated, Do not respond to persecution or slander by repaying evil with evil or insult with insult. Rather, respond in a way that is a blessing to those who have spoken evil of you (Psalm 34:12–16). When people speak evil of you, don’t let that frighten you. Rather, “... in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.” Give Jesus the place he deserves in your heart. Keep yourselves from sin. Don’t give the world any chance to slander either you or Christ. Always be ready to give a defense of the hope you have. Do this with gentleness and respect. In this way, your enemy may be ashamed of his slander. If you suffer for doing what God wants you to do, you are truly blessed.

What is the *hope* we have? Peter defined this earlier in his letter. He wrote:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:3–7)

⁴ All subsequent Scripture references are from the NIV.

It should be noted that this hope is not a subjective feeling of the heart. We are not asked to share how we feel about God. Rather, the hope of which Peter wrote is the assurance of salvation based on the objective facts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. The Christian faith is founded on these facts. We address these facts every time we confess the ecumenical creeds.

Peter encouraged Christians always to be ready to give a *defense* (*apologia*) of the hope we have. Concerning this *apologia*, R.C.H. Lenski wrote:

Let whoever will constitute himself a judge, the Christian is never to evade or to put him off, he is to be ready to present his case, his defense, to render account as to what his hope embraces, and as to why he holds it in his heart. We may say that he is to be ready always to testify, to correct ignorance about Christ, to spread the gospel light, to win others for Christ, to justify his own hope, and as Peter adds here (v. 16), to silence evil speakers with his good conduct which certainly speaks for itself and puts slander to shame.⁵

There are many examples of this *apologia* in the New Testament. Paul presented a *defense* (*apologia*) of his mission to the Gentiles before the mob at the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1). Paul spoke of being in jail because of his *defense* of the gospel (Philippians 1:16). In Ephesus, Alexander tried to make a *defense* (here the verb *apologeomai* is used) of the gospel, but was shouted down by the mob of idol makers (Acts 19:33). Paul said that those who deny God's existence are without a *defense* (*anapologetos*) (Romans 1:20).

Although the word *apologia* is not used in John's Gospel in connection with Jesus' discourses, he certainly gave a defense of his claims as Messiah. The same thing could be said of the discourse with Pilate concerning Jesus' office of king (John 18). When Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin, they gave a defense of the hope they had (Acts 4). When Luther stood before the Diet of Worms and declared, "Here I stand," he did exactly what Peter stated he should do. He gave a defense of the gospel. The same could be said of Luther's defense of *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fidei*. This was apologetics.

It is evident, then, that apologetics is Christocentric in nature. It flows from sanctifying Christ in our hearts. It gives a defense of the

⁵ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude* (Columbus: Wartburg, 1945), 150.

hope that we have in Christ. This hope is objective, not subjective in nature. The Christian faith is based on the historical events of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Apologetics is a natural outgrowth of our faith in Christ. Christians do apologetics. Apologetics has often been called "pre-evangelism." I would rather put it this way: Apologetics may involve "pre-evangelism" (removing obstacles which prevent us from sharing the gospel). However, Lutheran (biblical) apologetics *is* evangelism.

Lutheran theology guides Lutheran apologetics.

We know that when we give people a defense of the gospel, we will not always have the time or opportunity to set forth the whole counsel of God. We will often have to deal with the basics of the Christian faith or specific issues. Yet, in connection with our study of Lutheran apologetics, it is good for us to review the Lutheran worldview which we have from Scripture. This will remind us where we come from, and where we intend to go, with our apologetics. It will help us to evaluate what we find in the study of apologetics, to utilize what is good, and to recognize what does not harmonize with God's Word.

This review will not be exhaustive. Rather, it will highlight a few salient points we need to stress as we give a defense of the hope we have.

- Lutheran theology is Christocentric. We begin with Christ, who he is and what he has done for our salvation. We stress his active and his passive obedience together with his resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 2:2). Christ is the center of all biblical teaching. We do not begin with the sovereignty of God. We do not regard Scripture as a manual for holy living. We proclaim Christ and his saving work as the focal point of all scriptural revelation. Lutheran apologetics, then, will not be concerned about merely defending the existence of a god. It will be concerned about identifying who God is and what God's Son did for our salvation.
- Lutheran theology stresses the three *solas*:
 - a. *Sola Scriptura*: The sole source and norm for the Christian faith is the canon of Scripture. We draw all doctrine from it, and we judge all teachers of doctrine by it. We reject oral tradition, the authority of the church, enlightened reason, and special revelation as sources for Christian doctrine.
 - b. *Sola Gratia*: We are saved by God's grace alone. Unbelievers cannot save themselves by their works, for their works are an abomination in the sight of a holy God. Even believers' works

cannot save them, because sin still contaminates all their works. No one can save himself. We could never do enough good to enter heaven by merit. Christ had to do it all. He carried out God's will for all people perfectly, and he suffered the penalty for the sins of the whole world. We must give God all credit for our salvation.

c. *Sola Fide*: Faith is the instrument through which we receive the benefit of all Jesus did to save us. Faith is not a work we do to complete what Jesus did for us. It is not a decision we make to accept Christ as the Lord of our life and our Savior.

- Lutheran theology stresses the importance of properly using the law and the gospel. The improper use of the law will lead people either to Phariseeism or despair. Turning the gospel into a set of laws will rob sinners of their salvation.
- Lutheran theology is rooted in the means of grace. The gospel, baptism and the Lord's Supper are the "giving instruments" through which the Holy Spirit distributes to individuals the salvation Christ won for all. The sacraments are not mere ceremonies which remind us of what Christ did. They are the means through which God actually gives us the benefit of what Christ did for all.
- Lutheran theology asserts that justification is the doctrine by which the church either stands or falls. It teaches that justification is:
 - a. Forensic: a change in our status before God, not a change in our nature.
 - b. Objective: done, whether anyone believes it or not.
 - c. Universal: done for all. No one was left out. Jesus died for all people's sins.
 - d. Subjective: through faith we receive the benefit of what Christ did for all. Through unbelief, we lose the benefit of what Christ did for all.
- Lutheran theology teaches that faith is trust or confidence in Christ as our Savior from sin. The foundation for faith is not our faith. The foundation for faith is Christ, his holy life, his substitutionary atonement, and his resurrection from the dead.
- Lutheran theology teaches that conversion is the work of God alone. All people by nature are spiritually blind (unable to see their need for a Savior), spiritually dead (unable to do anything to save themselves), and enemies of God (actively hostile to his will). God alone can give faith through the gospel and baptism. Luther reflected this

teaching of Scripture when he wrote, "I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him."

- Lutheran theology teaches that sanctification (in the narrow sense) is the work by which the Holy Spirit produces in believers the ability to lead a Christian life. Sanctification flows from justification by faith. Sanctification is guided by the law but empowered by the gospel. Only the gospel can produce sanctified living. Any attempt to use the law to produce sanctification is legalism or moralizing.
- Lutheran theology recognizes the Christian has a dual nature: saint and sinner. It is not possible for the Christian to achieve perfection in sanctified living in this world because of the Christian's sinful nature.
- Lutheran theology teaches that all good works are acceptable to God through faith in Christ. The Christian's vocation in life provides an avenue to do good works which are precious in the sight of God.
- Lutheran theology recognizes that the last days of the world span the time between the first and the second coming of Christ. Jesus could come again at any time. His Second Coming will end this world's existence. God will create a new heaven and a new earth in which we will be forever with the Lord. We reject the teaching that Christ will come to reign on earth for a thousand years (millennialism).
- Lutheran theology accepts the account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, that God made the world and everything in it in six normal days. It also accepts the entire book of Genesis as historical fact. We reject atheistic evolution and theistic evolution (which involves progressive creation, the gap theory, the day-age theory, and the framework hypothesis) as contrary to Scripture.

What is the history of apologetics?

We do not have enough time today to make a thorough study of the history of apologetics. Such a study would be valuable, for we learn much from those who went before us. We will, however, consider a brief survey of the history of apologetics. This will help us know who has gone before us, what issues they had to face, and how they gave a defense of the hope they had.

The apostolic era furnishes us with many examples of those who gave an *apologia* (defense) of the gospel. On Pentecost, Peter responded to the charge that those speaking in tongues were drunk (Acts 2). He

pointed out that the charge of drunkenness had no basis. Rather, the historical events of Pentecost fulfilled what the prophet Joel had foretold. Peter then proclaimed to the people the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Christ, the objective basis for our hope of eternal life.

The Sanhedrin summoned Peter and John before them to defend their miracle of healing the lame man. The Sanhedrin demanded, "By what power or what name did you do this?" (Acts 4:7). Peter gave his defense. "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ... Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:10, 12).

The Sanhedrin produced false witnesses to testify against Stephen. These liars testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us" (Acts 6:13,14). Stephen used apologetics as he gave a survey of Old Testament history as his defense. He concluded his call to repentance with the words, "They [the prophets] even predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him" (Acts 7:52). This defense also served as the last will and testament of his life in this world.

We have already mentioned the many times Paul defended the message of the crucified and risen Savior. He gave a defense before the philosophers in Athens who disputed with him (Acts 17), as well as before the mob at the temple in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1), again before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem after his arrest (Acts 23), and also before Felix, Festus, King Agrippa, and Bernice in Caesarea (Acts 24–26). In each instance, Paul defended the message of the gospel which God had given him to proclaim.

It is evident apologetics lived and flourished in the apostolic era. Chronologically, after all of these previously mentioned examples had taken place, Peter exhorted Christians to do what the apostles and early Christians had already done: give a defense of the hope they had in Christ. We now turn to the history of the post-apostolic era for more examples of those who gave a defense of the Christian gospel.

In the second and third centuries, Christians felt the need to refute slanderous statements made by the pagans about their beliefs and practices. The following is a brief list of the scurrilous charges made against the early Christians.

- People charged Christians with incestuous relationships. Christians called each other “brother” and “sister” and engaged in weekly “love feasts.”
- Some slanderously reported that Christians practiced cannibalism (eating “body” and “blood”). Some even charged that Christians concealed a newborn baby in a loaf of bread and then ordered a new convert to cut the loaf so he and the group could eat the flesh of the child.
- The Roman senator and historian Cornelius Tacitus charged Christians with worshipping a donkey. He also said this about the Jews. His idea was that when Israel left Egypt and traveled in the wilderness, they followed thirsty donkeys to water. Tacitus believed that this was why the Jews had worshiped the image of a donkey’s head. He believed the Christians to be closely associated with the Jews. Tertullian defended the Jews and the Christians against this charge. He said that when the temple was destroyed, there was not one image in the temple which represented any animal at all.⁶
- Some accused Christians of sedition because they would not worship the emperor as god.
- Intellectuals among the pagans claimed Christians were stupid people whose doctrines were foolish and self-contradictory. (There is nothing new under the sun.)⁷

Over against these slanderous charges, Aristedes, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch, Origen, and Tertullian arose to give a defense of their faith. True, some of these men went too far in their appeals to philosophy to justify their faith. However, there were many who endeavored to do what Peter had encouraged them to do: give a defense of the objective truths of the gospel. In the fifth century, Augustine (354–430) was one of the foremost apologists.

A survey of apologists must certainly mention Martin Luther. He stood before the emperor, before the hierarchy of the church, before princes, in defiance of the pope’s decrees, and in opposition to Islam’s teaching. Yet, he never wavered in giving a defense of the teachings of Scripture. Concerning Luther as apologist, Craig Parton observed:

Thus at the end of the day we can say that Luther, rather than casting doubt on the apologetical task, provides us with the

⁶ For further information on this charge, consult Steve Ham, *In God We Trust* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2010), 107–109.

⁷ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: Vol. 1, The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1984), 49–52.

surest foundation for making that effort Christocentric, cross-driven, and objectively centered. Luther would not let human reason think it could save itself by speculations or by rational deductions or philosophizing. But God gave us a reason that remains capable of determining if events in history really occurred. Believer and unbeliever can determine facts. Of course this is not yet saving faith. Those same facts carry with them the proper interpretation. Data always precede interpretations. The best interpretations are those that bubble up from the text (or event) itself that is being investigated. Thus the Christian may lead the mind of the seeker to the conclusion that the witness of Scripture is reliable, in preparation for leading him or her to Christ.⁸

When we look at what Luther did, we thank God for his defense of the Christian faith. Certainly, God gets the credit for all he did. However, if we remove the historical Luther from our celebration of the Reformation, we turn the Reformation into an existential happening (What does this mean to you? How do you feel about this?) and we lose the benefit of seeing how God moved and enabled Luther to give a defense of the Christian faith. We learn from the examples of others. It is good to have “heroes” of the faith. It is even biblical (consider Hebrews 11). All of those mentioned in Hebrews 11 had their faults and sins. Yet, God did great things through them. Scripture encourages us to emulate the good that God enabled them to do (Hebrews 13:7). Luther also deserves to be in that category.

Though many more examples of apologists could be listed, the following is a list of people often associated with apologetics in their time. Not all of these were Lutherans, and not all of their apologetics would fit in with what Peter had encouraged. However, we mention their names simply because you will run into them in a study of the history of apologetics. They are: John of Damascus (c. 674–c. 750), Theodore Abu Qurrah (c. 740–c. 820), Anselm (1033–1109), Peter Abelard (1079–1142), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Raymond Lull (c. 1235–1316), Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), Martin Chemnitz (1522–1586), David Chytraeus (1531–1600), John Gerhard (1582–1637), Abraham Calov (1612–1688), Johann Quenstedt (1617–1685), Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), David Hollaz (1647–1713), G.K. Chesterton (1874–1936), Cornelius Van Til

⁸ Craig Parton, *The Defense Never Rests* (St. Louis, Concordia: 2003), 65–66.

(1895–1987), C.S. Lewis (1898–1963), Francis Schaeffer (1912–1984), Paul L. Maier (1929–), Norman Geisler (1932–)⁹, and Greg Bahnsen (1948–1995).

Other apologists of today are those who come from Answers in Genesis, such as Ken Ham, Mike Riddle, Andrew Snelling, Gloria Purdom, Jason Lisle, Terry Mortenson, and David Menton (Menton is a Lutheran who comes from the Church of the Lutheran Confession). Lutheran apologists active and published in our time are Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, Craig Parton,¹⁰ Alvin Schmidt, Adam Francisco, Angus Menuge, Gene Edward Veith, Mark Paustian, Allen Quist, and Ryan McPherson. If I have omitted anyone, I apologize. I thank God for all of you who give a defense of the hope that you have.

There are other apologists today who could be mentioned. A list of some could be obtained from the recently published book *Tough-Minded Christianity*, the volume honoring the legacy of Dr. John Warwick Montgomery. Some apologists today have undercut their defense of the gospel by accepting theistic evolution. The incompatibility of evolution of any kind with the gospel will be addressed in another section.

Having looked at a brief overview of the history of apologetics, we now move on to another area. We will spend some time in this area, for it deals with the crux of whether Lutherans should do apologetics and how they will do it if they should.

Fideist, Evidentialist, Presuppositionalist: Which are you?

Apologetics involves being “prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). What is the *content* of this answer? Is it a mere recitation of the words of Scripture? Can it involve the use of historical information? Does it allow for demonstrating that the skeptic’s viewpoint is not in accord with the facts or that it is unreasonable? Is it legitimate to point out that the truth claims of Scripture are supported by fact and are therefore not unreasonable? Does the use of anything but the passages of

⁹ Alvin Schmidt, “Christianity Needs More Lutheran Apologetes” (2008), in *Tough-Minded Christianity*, ed. William Dembski and Thomas Schirrmacher (Nashville: Academic, 2008), 497–498. Dr. John Warwick Montgomery prepared an excellent history of Apologetics. It is entitled: *Defending the Gospel Through the Centuries: A History of Christian Apologetics*. It and the other works of Dr. Montgomery are available through the Canadian Institute For Law, Theology and Public Relations.

¹⁰ I thank especially Craig Parton, who first interested me in apologetics, and Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, whose knowledge of apologetics is encyclopedic and whose training has been invaluable in the study of apologetics.

Scripture mean we are attempting to convert a person through the use of reason? We will examine these issues as we assess the three different approaches to apologetics. We will begin by examining the first two positions, fideism and evidentialism, as they are most closely related to Lutheranism.

Fideists adopt the view that it is wrong to use any arguments based on reason in apologetics. Craig Parton described the fideist view this way:

... the fideist ... argues that it is unspiritual to even attempt to reason with the unbeliever and to show him the truth of the Christian faith. Only the preaching of the Gospel should be engaged in, and any attempt to argue with the pagan is to substitute human reason for the work of the Holy Spirit.¹¹

We will examine this view shortly.

The evidentialist's view is that reason, though corrupted by the fall into sin, was not destroyed, that humans' abilities to draw logical conclusions still remain. Therefore, reason is useful in apologetics. Alvin Schmidt gives us a simple overview of the evidentialist approach.

Proponents of this method hold it is important that apologetes present the biblical evidence—Christ's miracles and especially His bodily resurrection—as historically reliable facts from which the Holy Spirit can bring skeptics to faith in Christ's atoning work. Since Christ's miraculous works and His resurrection are recorded as facts in the New Testament documents, shown by scholars to be historically reliable, the skeptic can conclude that those miraculous phenomena were indeed the work of God, in fact, that Christ is God Himself. This conclusion is especially true of Christ's resurrection, for no man could raise himself from the dead, even if he had performed some lesser miracles.¹²

Concerning this matter, Craig Parton also comments:

Man did not lose his inferential capacities at the fall, though they were thoroughly tainted by sin. He did lose any ability to reason himself into heaven or to merit God's favor by his use of

¹¹ Parton, *The Defense Never Rests*, 57.

¹² Schmidt, "Christianity Needs More Lutheran Apologetes," in *Tough-Minded Christianity*, 499.

that reason. ... When the unbeliever tries to distort those facts [of the gospel], refuses to face those facts, or imposes gratuitous interpretations unsupported by those facts, the Christian apologist can guide the discussion back to the historical record. Not all interpretations are equal, and we hardly abrogate the work of the Holy Spirit when we point this out to the unbeliever.¹³

How do we evaluate these two approaches? Scripture tells us, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). Paul wrote, “Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:6, 7). Does this mean, however, that saving faith is a blind leap into the dark? Is it like Indiana Jones standing at the edge of a precipice, jumping off into the void in the hope he will land on the bridge that leads to the Holy Grail? This may describe the faith of the evolutionist, but the Christian faith is founded on fact (Consider the two books by the evidentialist Dr. John Warwick Montgomery: *Evidence for Faith* and *Faith Founded on Fact*). The Bible gives us the historical record of Christ’s entry into this world, of his atoning life and death, and of his physical resurrection from the dead. Faith is founded on these facts. If none of these events happened, we are of all people most miserable. We sing in one of our hymns:

This is the threefold truth on which our faith depends;
And with this joyful cry worship begins and ends;
Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!
(CW 406:1)

When Paul addressed those skeptics in Corinth who doubted the resurrection of the dead, he pointed them to the eyewitnesses who had seen the risen Christ.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James,

¹³ Parton, *The Defense Never Rests*, 57–58.

then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (1 Corinthians 15:3–8)

For Paul, the resurrection of Christ was a well-attested fact supported by eyewitnesses who could verify it.

Luke wrote, “After his suffering, he [Jesus] showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). The Greek word for “convincing proofs” refers to evidence that is irrefutable. Jesus made clear the apostles could be absolutely sure he had risen from the dead. They would be asked to lay down their lives for Christ. Christ gave them the certainty he had risen, a certainty which we also have through their eyewitness accounts and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As we continue to look at the evidentialist’s view, please note that the facts of Scripture are the basis for the gospel proclamation. Though reason might conclude from the evidence that these are true, only the Holy Spirit can give the person faith in Christ and his promises of salvation. The Jewish rulers had the evidence Jesus rose from the dead. They just didn’t believe it.

Alvin Schmidt makes an interesting observation concerning the fideist approach. He wrote:

Fideism often manifests itself in different forms. The following is an example that I as a professor experienced in the classroom at a Lutheran college in the late 1960’s. I perceived that my students—all of them Lutherans and some products of Lutheran parochial schools—did not understand the relationship between faith and the resurrection of Christ. So I wrote the following statement on the blackboard: “The resurrection of Jesus Christ is true because my faith tells me so.” Then I asked the students (about 25 of them) whether this statement was true or false. All but one said “true.” The response of most students was clearly one of fideism; thus it required my telling them that it is not one’s faith that makes Christ’s resurrection true, but rather it is the historical fact of His resurrection that makes one’s faith true and valid. . . . If I say, “I will some day rise from the dead,” that is a matter of faith. But whether Christ rose from the dead is not a matter of faith. That is an event that happened in history.¹⁴

¹⁴ Schmidt, “Christianity Needs More Lutheran Apologetes,” in *Tough-Minded Christianity*, 501–502.

Schmidt points out that fideism makes a person vulnerable to the attacks of modern critics on the reliability of the four Gospels. In 1892, Martin Kahler (1835–1912) introduced his distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte*. He held that events in *Historie* were verifiable. However, events in *Geschichte* (supra history) were not verifiable, but were only accessible by faith.¹⁵ Critics place the resurrection of Christ into the realm of *Geschichte*, thus denying the reality of it. They tell us that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was real in the minds of the early disciples, but was not a real historical event. We all know what Paul said of that:

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. (1 Corinthians 15:14–19)

This whole matter of making a distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte* is something which confronts us today. We need to face this perversion of the gospel and deal with it, defending the historicity of the life of Christ as presented in the four Gospels.

Schmidt also deals with the question of the role of the Holy Spirit in apologetics. He wrote:

Christian apologetics is sometimes criticized by some who say that it ignores the role of the Holy Spirit, as it seeks to persuade unbelievers on the basis of evidence to become Christians. This criticism reflects a wrong understanding of Christian apologetics, for when apologetes point non-Christians to the biblical facts that happened in history, the Holy Spirit is invariably operative. Also, when the biblical facts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection are defended, God's Word comes into play. And when God's Word is present, the Holy Spirit is also present seeking to create faith in the hearers by moving them to

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 505.

accept the benefits (eternal life and salvation) of Christ's death and resurrection.¹⁶

The Holy Spirit did work through the miracles God enabled the apostles to do. When Peter raised Tabitha from the dead, we read, "This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord" (Acts 9:42). The miracles certified the truthfulness of Peter's message, and the Holy Spirit created faith in Jesus in these people's hearts. Jesus also gave Thomas the empirical evidence he needed to be convinced Jesus had risen from the dead (John 20:27). This evidence elicited a wonderful confession from Thomas. He said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

We need to look at three statements which have had profound influences on how confessional Lutherans have viewed apologetics. Two are from Francis Pieper, the great dogmatician of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. He wrote:

The arguments supplied by the science of apologetics—and there is a great wealth of them—cannot change the human heart, cannot produce an inner acceptance of the Gospel.¹⁷

The best apology of the Christian religion is its proclamation.¹⁸

The other is from Dr. Siegbert Becker, formerly from the Missouri Synod, later from the Wisconsin Synod. He wrote:

The best defense of Scripture is Scripture itself. When men ask for proof of the truth of Christian doctrines, we are simply to quote the Bible passages which teach these doctrines. If men do not accept the doctrines of the Christian faith on the authority of the Bible, we are not even to desire their assent on other grounds. The Christian faith is not to be defended by rational argumentation.

[Becker continues] But again, this does not mean that we are not to employ reason in the struggle with the enemies of the faith. Every argument of reason can be overthrown with an argument from reason. We may use reason to show the unbeliever the untenableness of his position and the unwarranted

¹⁶ Ibid., 507.

¹⁷ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 1:65.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1:109.

nature of his conclusions. In this area we often hear Luther call his adversaries unreasonable.¹⁹

With regard to Pieper's statements, I would not agree that apologetics is a science. It is giving people a defense of the hope you have. Secondly, I would agree that the Holy Spirit works conversion only through the gospel and baptism. However, the gospel is founded on the historical facts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. As Alvin Schmidt observed, the Holy Spirit is active as he works through the historical facts of the gospel message. To relate the historicity of the Bible is part of the apologetic task. With regard to Dr. Becker's statement, I think that people have often read his first paragraph and forgotten the second. Reason can be employed to show the erroneous thinking of a person who rejects the gospel message. It is part of the apologetic task of removing obstacles so people will listen to a presentation of the gospel.

It is because of fideism that we find little formal study of apologetics in Lutheranism. Alvin Schmidt makes some interesting observations concerning this. He wrote:

In spite of the massive inroads liberal theologians have made as a result of the Enlightenment by placing the miraculous works of Jesus outside the parameters of history into the realm of faith, Lutheran theologians, both in Europe and America, basically failed to respond as apologetes to this heretical maneuver. With the exception of a few American Lutherans like Theodore Graebner, Alfred Rehwinkel, John Klotz, and Paul Zimmermann in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), who argued mostly against the theory of evolution, there were no Lutheran apologetes who argued against the theology that said Christ's resurrection occurred in *Geschichte* or in suprahistory. Only two Lutheran evidential apologetes of note have argued against this radical theology, and then only since the 1960s. These two Lutherans are Wolfhart Pannenberg and John Warwick Montgomery. ... Strange as it may seem, before the days of Pannenberg [and] Montgomery, one finds Francis Pieper (1852–1931), a highly influential conservative theologian in the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, not favoring Christian apologetics. ... Given Francis Pieper's long-standing influence, which continues to the present time in the

¹⁹ Siegbert Becker, *The Foolishness of God* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1982), 238–239.

seminaries of the LCMS, where students still are required to read his three volumes in dogmatics, it is not surprising that fideism has not been countered apologetically in the circles of the LCMS. It is also interesting to note that to this day neither of the synod's two seminaries (Fort Wayne and St. Louis) has a required course in apologetics in their curricula.²⁰

Many in our own circles have reacted negatively toward apologetics. Some say apologetics involves attempting to "reason" people into the faith. They state that all we need to do is proclaim the gospel. They assert that rational arguments have no place in our proclamation. Let us examine this view.

To begin with, I believe that God converts people through the gospel and baptism. We do not, by our own thinking or choosing, come to faith in Christ. Yet, reason is involved in communicating the gospel. Take, for example, preaching a sermon. I don't think any preacher would make the statement that his sermons are totally devoid of reason. Reason is involved in translating the text. We don't read Scripture to people in the original Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic. Pastors don't simply read their texts, say "Amen," and then sit down. My father had a vicar whom he asked to prepare a devotion for a Sunday School teachers' conference. The vicar opened his Bible, read a section of Scripture, closed the book, said "These are my sentiments exactly," and then left. Needless to say, my father had a discussion with him about expounding and applying the text.

Expounding and applying the text involves the use of reason. Developing a theme, parts, and outline for the sermon involves reason. Pastors are concerned that they present their sermons in a logical way which enables their hearers to understand. They use illustrations and object lessons to make things clearer for their parishioners. Some pastors even tell jokes in their sermons. No one, as of yet, has suggested we discontinue preaching sermons because reason is used in them. Reason used in a sermon does not convert the hearer. It does communicate the gospel message to the hearer.

Some have used infant baptism as a reason for not doing apologetics. Is this valid? In our baptismal rite we state, "In obedience to the command of our Lord and trusting in his promises you have brought this child to be baptized" (*Christian Worship*: 13). Because Christ told

²⁰ Schmidt, "Christianity Needs More Lutheran Apologetes," in *Tough-Minded Christianity*, 505-507.

us to bring our children to him and because he promised that baptism grants rebirth and renewal through the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), we bring our children to be baptized. God works renewal of infants through baptism. With adults, however, we instruct them and then baptize them. Instruction involves the use of reason in the process, but God converts through the message of the gospel communicated by reason.

What does reason do as we give a defense of the hope we have?

- Reason communicates the message. Without communication there is no apologetics (or preaching or teaching of any kind).
- Reason clarifies our message. If a Bible passage is too difficult for someone to understand, we put it into simpler words.
- Reason can confirm what the Bible says. It doesn't prove the Bible, but it corroborates what the Bible says. Archaeology has confirmed the existence of many cities and places Luke tells us Paul visited. Observations from the created world (such as design) confirm there is a Creator. This is also biblical. The writer to the Hebrews stated, "Every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything" (Hebrews 3:4).
- Reason recognizes and corrects errors. When people make assertions that have no evidential basis, or, which contradict the evidence, we use reason to remove the obstacles so we can present what God's Word says. For example, if two statements contradict each other, both cannot be true.
- Reason can be used to consolidate the evidence for the truth of the Bible. Reason may tie all the evidence together. Biblical evidence remains primary. Other evidence may simply confirm or corroborate what the Bible states.

Does apologetics make use of reason? Certainly! Does this mean we cannot use apologetics because we are trying to "reason" people into the Christian faith? Certainly not! The Lord wants us to give a defense of the hope we have. Reason is involved in the process. However, the message conveyed by reason, the gospel, alone can convert. Studying how to do apologetics is as valid a study as homiletics and catechetics. We don't send ministers of the gospel out into the field and tell them to write or say whatever comes to their minds. We train them before we send them out. Why should we do any less when it comes to equipping our students for defending the hope they have?

We will now turn our attention to Presuppositionalism. The presuppositionalist says that the fall into sin has created such a wall between the believer and the unbeliever that no amount of rational argument can

address unbelief or the reasons for it in order to break it down. Nancy Pearcey described it this way:

Because nonbelievers are created in the image of God, the force of their own human nature compels them to live in ways that are inconsistent with their professed worldviews. In evangelism, our goal is to highlight that cognitive dissonance—to identify the points at which the nonbeliever’s worldview is contradicted by reality. Then we can show that only Christianity is fully consistent with the things we all know by experience to be true.²¹

Presuppositionalism comes from the camp of the Reformed. Craig Parton evaluated it in the following way:

... those Christians inclined to appreciate the apologetical task are given supposed theological reasons *not* to defend the faith with evidence to the unbeliever. Calvinist presuppositionalists (which, sadly enough, also influence some Lutherans) have emasculated serious apologetical activity among pagans. By arguing that their system is more “self-consistent” than that of the pagan, and by spending their apologetical time refuting non-Christian belief systems, the presuppositionalists forget two critical points: First, consistency does not mean that you have divine revelation.... Second, the refutation of non-Christian belief systems, while necessary, does not *ipso facto* establish the truth of Christianity. In addition, the refutation of every non-Christian alternative would consume a lifetime.²²

The Lutheran apologist defends the authority of the Bible.

Confessional Lutherans accept the authority of the Bible. There are a number of reasons for this. Jesus accepted the authority of the Old Testament. He referred to the canon of the Old Testament (Luke 24:44) as the Word of God. This settles the matter for us. In addition, the Jews of Jesus’ time accepted the same canon of the Old Testament as the authoritative Word of God. As for the New Testament, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to enable the sacred writers to make an accurate record of what he said and did. The apostles, then, wrote, approved, and

²¹ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway 2004), 319.

²² Parton, *The Defense Never Rests*, 61.

gathered the books of the New Testament which are the authoritative Word of God. Further, we accept the authority of the Bible as God's Word because the Holy Spirit has worked that conviction in us through the words of Scripture. We did not come to the conviction on our own that the Bible is God's Word.

At Luther's time, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Calvinists all accepted the Bible as God's Word. All believed the Bible carried the authority of God himself. This changed in the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment scholars rejected the authority of the Bible. Critics said the Bible was a product of human evolution and development. The critics denied the Bible alone could establish what we should believe and how we should live. Biblical criticism began with the rejection of the Mosaic authorship of Genesis and ended with the denial of the Christ of the four Gospels.

Critics developed elaborate scenarios as to how the parts of the Bible eventually came together. They based their hypotheses on human speculation, not on empirical evidence. They disregarded the internal evidence in the Bible itself. The speculation concerning the four Gospels became so wild that, in 1906, Albert Schweitzer, himself a critic of the Bible, lamented the mess made by the biblical critics up to his time (*The Quest for the Historical Jesus*). We can demonstrate that the scenarios developed by the critics fly in the face of the facts. Their claims are unreasonable.

To begin with, critics say that it is impossible to believe the Bible is the Word of God because the manuscripts contain so many variant readings. This charge does not take into account the reliable nature of textual criticism. Because we have so many biblical manuscripts, textual critics have arrived at a very reliable received text. There is also a great deal of commonality between the various manuscripts of the Bible. For example, though separated by 1000 years, there is a 95% agreement between the Leningrad Text of Isaiah and the Qumran Isaiah text found with the Dead Sea Scrolls. Instead of an unreliable textual transmission, we have a transmission that has produced a very reliable text.

Also, critics place the writing of the books of the Bible long after the time when the evidence indicates they were written. Take, for example, the four Gospels. Redaction criticism places the final product of the Gospels around A.D. 160. Yet, we have references to the Gospels by the church fathers at much earlier dates than that. Craig Parton quotes Sir Fredrick Kenyon, former director and principal librarian of the British

Museum, concerning the reliability and integrity of the four Gospels and the entire New Testament. Kenyon wrote:

In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscript so short as in that of the New Testament. The books of the New Testament were written in the latter part of the first century; the earliest extant manuscripts (trifling scraps excepted) are of the fourth century—say, from 250 to 300 years later. This may sound a considerable interval, but it is nothing to that which parts most of the great classical authors from their earliest manuscripts. We believe that we have in all essentials an accurate text of the seven extant plays of Sophocles; yet the earliest substantial manuscript upon which it is based was written more than 1,400 years after the poet's death. Aeschylus, Aristophanes, and Thucydides are in the same state; while with Euripides the interval is increased to 1,600 years. For Plato it may be put at 1,300 years, for Demosthenes as low as 1,200.²³

If the critics of the Bible applied their canons of criticism to the classics, it would destroy the study of the classics. Parton also points out that the four Gospels meet the commonly accepted canons of historical scholarship used to determine if any work that predates the printing press has reached us in substantially the same shape in which it was authored. The criteria are: The documents ... give no evidence of tampering, are well-attested as coming from a strong tradition of manuscript evidence, arise almost on top of the events they record, and have no peer among all the works of antiquity based on the sheer number of excellent and early manuscript copies.²⁴

The evidence is clear. The critics (Dan Brown included) have made claims which do not square with the facts. They are in error. This gives us the opportunity to explain from Scripture why we believe the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God, of which Jesus Christ is the focal point.

²³ Parton, *The Defense Never Rests*, 76–77. For a chart giving an overview of the best works of antiquity, see also Parton, *Religion on Trial* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock: 2008), 47–48.

²⁴ Parton, *The Defense Never Rests*, 77.

The Lutheran apologist recognizes that philosophy cannot be the source of Christian teaching, but it can be used in the service of Christian doctrine.

Reason is a good gift which God has given to us. Reason helps us to examine our environment to determine what is good and what is harmful. The fall into sin caused the corruption of reason, but it did not eradicate reason. Because sin has corrupted reason, it cannot be the source of teaching concerning God and his salvation of sinners. Paul wrote, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). Through the means of grace God comes to us and offers us the benefit of all Christ did for all people. Through these means he also converts, giving us a faith in Christ in our hearts. Through faith in Jesus, God sanctifies our reason for service in his church in obedience to his Word.

There are those who maintain that Luther did not believe reason belonged in the realm of the church. Concerning Luther and reason, Craig Parton wrote:

As for Luther, he certainly railed against reason as the devil’s whore. But what “reason” was Luther referencing? Surely not man’s inferential capacities, for Luther clearly understood that the fall had not obliterated man’s ability to discover truth in all fields of learning. No, what Luther railed against was any use of reason to achieve salvation or to allow the unbeliever, by his own striving, to climb up to heaven. ... Some of the most important of Luther’s interpreters, however, give the impression that the reformer’s stress on the two kingdoms meant that reason and proof only operate in the secular realm of this world but are of no heavenly value. In point of fact, Luther’s position is that reason operates in both kingdoms, but in the church reason is to be subservient to the Word of God. In the Christian faith, reason must operate ministerially, not magisterially.²⁵

We use our reason in the ministerial sense. Paul wrote, “We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). In this way we also make philosophy subservient to the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, some may say Tertullian stated, “What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? What does the Academy have to do with

²⁵ Ibid., 50–51, 64.

the Church?" (*Prescription against Heretics* I.7.)²⁶ Others may say that Paul wrote, "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5a). Again, Paul wrote, "When I came to you brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God" (1 Corinthians 2:1).

However, Paul was not averse to quoting the philosophers to touch a contact point with the pagans. In Athens, Paul quoted the classical Stoic poets Cleanthes, Aratus, and Epimenides. These poets reflected a longing for God. Paul went from where they were to where they needed to go: to the risen Christ (Acts 17).

Philosophy gives us a tool for displaying the revelation of God. Dogmaticians regularly make use of the syllogism to demonstrate the deity of Jesus. For example: "God alone is almighty. Jesus is almighty. Therefore, Jesus is God." A study of philosophy enables us to understand the worldviews people hold. This gives us valuable insights as to how we may reach people with the gospel. A study of logic enables us to recognize faulty and erroneous arguments. It enables us to arrange and communicate the message of the gospel in a way that people can understand. Used in service to Christ and subservient to God's Word, philosophy can be a very useful tool.

Before leaving the area of philosophy, permit a few words on the philosophical arguments for the existence of God. The ontological, cosmological, historical, teleological, and moral arguments for God's existence have been used in apologetics to deal with agnostics, atheists, and skeptics. These arguments can serve a useful purpose. However, they will be of no benefit to the unbeliever if they do not lead to Christ. *World* magazine reported some years ago that Anthony Flew, the atheistic analytical philosopher and author of the parable of the invisible gardener,²⁷ had become a theist. The apologist, Gary Habermas, had convinced him of the existence of a god. We can thank God for this movement from atheism to theism. However, if Flew does not come to faith in Jesus Christ, he will still perish. My point is that, if we use these arguments, we dare not set as our goal merely presenting philosophical evidence that God exists. We need to take people further, to Jesus Christ,

²⁶ Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, Vol I, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1984), 53.

²⁷ Parton, *The Defense Never Rests*, 62.

who said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Do you want to see God? There he is in the flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ, who proved his deity by his resurrection from the dead, and who saved the world from sin by his holy life and substitutionary death.

The “transcendent” argument for God’s existence has been used with some success against atheists. Presuppositionalists Greg Bahnsen (1948–1995), Jason Lisle, and Francis Schaeffer have used this approach (Pearcey describes it in her book on pages 313–314) to show the atheist the inconsistency of his beliefs. It argues that the atheist with his belief in evolution will eventually have to admit that he is not living in harmony with his views. While evolution says there is no absolute morality and all actions spring from a chemical reaction in the brain, he will not actually want to live that way with his family. The statement, “I love you dearly” sounds a lot better than to say, “My attitude toward you is merely a chemical reaction in my brain. I have no permanent basis on which to build a relationship with you.” Here again, we may use this argument to clear the way to present Christianity as the absolute religion because it offers the only way to salvation and it is based on the unchanging Word of God.

The Lutheran Apologist will defend the gospel against the attacks of what is falsely called knowledge (1 Timothy 6:20).

Many have written about apologetics in the area of science. Nancy Pearcey wrote much about science in her book, which we will discuss for the next two days. She portrayed the extent to which evolution has taken over not only science, but also our culture. If we needed someone to reinforce that opinion, Ben Stein has done that. In his movie, “Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed,” Stein has chronicled the extent to which Darwin’s theories have influenced the institutions in our society. Both Pearcey and Stein indicated that those who have embraced Darwinism have also said it ultimately led them to deny the existence of God. Will Provine, the atheist scientist who spoke in Ben Stein’s movie, made it clear that Darwinism left him “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12).

Pearcey has chronicled how Darwinism affected evangelicalism. It has really affected most areas of the visible church today. Ever since the days of Charles Lyell and Charles Darwin, many in the visible church have attempted to bend their teaching on Genesis 1–11 to fit with evolutionary views. Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield taught theistic evolution. The *Schofield Reference Bible* (1909) accepted the gap theory.

Roman Catholicism listed evolution in the Syllabus of Errors at the end of the 19th century. By the middle of the 20th century, Rome had accepted theistic evolution and the historical-critical interpretation of the four gospels. Gleason Archer, the Old Testament scholar, and Wayne Grudem, the Reformed dogmatician, have also espoused theistic evolution.

Ken Ham, in his book *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It*, relates the results of a study of 1,000 twenty-somethings, raised in the church but no longer attending.²⁸ The study found that evangelicals are losing their children in elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools rather than in colleges. The cause is the “Sunday school syndrome.” Evangelicals have embraced theistic evolution. This is what they teach their children in Sunday schools. The children get the message. “If creation, Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood, and the Tower of Babel are all myths, why should we believe any of the rest of the Bible?”

Jesus said, “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” (Matthew 24:37). If we were to change this to say, “As it was in the days when Santa Claus came for Christmas, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man,” the message would be clear. Santa Claus isn’t real; neither is Christ and his Second Coming. Paul wrote, “Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men” (Romans 5:18). Again, if Adam and his sin aren’t real, neither are Christ and his salvation of the world real. Jesus accepted the accounts of creation, Adam and Eve, and Noah and the flood as historical facts.

What about those who accept theistic evolution as an explanation for the origin of the world and its inhabitants? Can they be saved? We hold that a person who errs in ignorance or in weakness in a non-fundamental doctrine can still be saved, as long as the person believes in Jesus as his Savior. However, evolution is not inclined to allow God or Christ to remain in the picture. It is basically an atheistic view concerning the origin of things. It also views people as no more than matter in motion. It leaves you without hope, without a Savior, and without God.

This simply demonstrates that if you tamper with any section of Scripture, you tamper with Christ. The devil’s plan to destroy the Christian faith started with an assault on the book which serves as the

²⁸ Ken Ham & Britt Beemer with Todd Hillard, *Already Gone* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2009).

foundation for the rest of Scripture, namely, the book of Genesis. Christ is the foundation for faith, and the book of Genesis clearly presents Christ as this foundation for the rest of the Bible. If the foundation is destroyed, whatever is built on it will also collapse.

We need to speak out and defend the biblical teaching on creation. To begin with, we can point out that in the areas of cosmological evolution (formation of the universe), of geological evolution (formation of the earth), and of biological evolution (molecules to man, or from “goo” to you), evolutionists operate with many assumptions and unproven hypotheses. As Pearcey ably pointed out, evolution is a secular religion involving blind faith. When confronted with the facts, the evolutionist may respond, “No I can’t observe this happening now. However, given millions and billions of years, it must have happened.” This is blind faith, not empirical evidence.

There is evidence from the created world that testifies to the Creator and reflects the teaching of the Bible. The incredible complexity of information in the cell as well as the incredible body we have are evidences of the Creator who designed them. David wrote,

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Psalm 139:13–16)

The incredible size, complexity, and orderliness of the universe are testimony to the Creator who made it. David wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1). Again he wrote, “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him” (Psalm 8:3–4a). The complexity of the earth and its geology testifies to God the Creator. The Lord said to Job, “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone...?” (Job 38:4–6).

Finally, we must return to the Genesis record and defend it as historical fact, for that is how it is presented in its context and in the rest

of Scripture. We need to answer the assertions of evolution. If we do not offer any answers, people will think we have none.

Above all, we need to remember, as we pointed out earlier, the important foundation that Genesis lays for the rest of the Bible. The Holy Spirit has furnished us with a historical framework for the message of the gospel. This is why Paul in Acts 17 started at the beginning with the Athenians—with the God of creation, ultimately leading to Jesus Christ and his resurrection. I appreciate Answers in Genesis' emphasis on the chronological approach to apologetics, beginning with Genesis. This is the approach also of New Tribes Mission, an organization which does evangelism among the most primitive peoples on earth. They start out with creation in their mission approach. This method has made me rethink the two questions we asked in the "Talk About the Savior" evangelism method.²⁹ We started with God without putting him into the historical framework he has given us in Genesis.

Ken Ham has defended the importance of Genesis in evangelism and apologetics. He told of a translator, Nathan, he had in Japan who brought him to understand this importance. He writes:

The first thing Nathan explained to me was that whenever I used the word "God" he could not just translate this as "God." Because of the prevalence of the Shinto religion in this country, and thus their belief in many gods, the people would just add this god I was talking about to all their other gods. So whenever I used the word "God," Nathan would define who this God is—the God who created and upholds all things. He is the God who is separate from His Creation... . Without the foundational basis of the account of the Fall in Genesis, and the fact that we all are traced back to one man, Adam, whom God created, how would they understand the gospel? You can tell people they're sinners, but unless they understand what sin is, they will not comprehend the message. Nathan explained to me that if I was to communicate the message of the gospel to the average Japanese, I would first need to lay the foundation of the gospel from Genesis, before they would really have much understanding.³⁰

²⁹ "If you were to die tonight, are you sure you would go to heaven?" "If God were to say to you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven,' what would you respond?"

³⁰ Ken Ham, *Why Won't They Listen* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2002), 19–20.

Another reason for beginning with the historical Genesis account is that unbelievers are troubled by the suffering and misery they see in the world. Whereas a believer may look at the world and say it is a beautiful creation of God, the unbeliever will have a different outlook. He will say:

“Around the world I see children dying, people starving, senseless killing, terrorism, horrible accidents. I don’t see a beautiful world. I see physical and emotional pain everywhere I look. It’s a chaotic world. It’s a world where only the fit survive—the weak get stomped on. I don’t see a God of order and love. If He does exist, He must be a vicious and hateful God.” [Ham continues:] The problem is that you and your friend are looking at the...world through different eyes. If you put on truly biblical glasses, and look at the world through the Bible, then we know that God created a perfect world, but man rebelled. Sin entered the world, and thus death and the Curse came as a consequence of the judgment of a Holy God. And look what *our* sin has done to this world: children abused, families splitting apart, mental diseases, rapes, cancer killing our loved ones, etc. It is a horrible world. But a Christian understands there’s a God of love because even though man rebelled, God sent His Son to die so we can be restored to our Creator.³¹

The historical record of Genesis gives us the framework from which we can communicate God’s message of sin and grace. May God enable us to use the historical framework of Genesis to lead people to Jesus Christ and the salvation from sin we have through him. May he move us to do this now, while we have the opportunity to give a defense of the hope we have.

Permit a few comments on the Intelligent Design movement, in order to promote discussion. We usually say we do not favor the inclusion of “intelligent design” in public school science courses because this involves mixing the mission of the church and the state. However, watching the movie by Ben Stein (“Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed”) caused me to rethink the matter. The intelligent design movement is not exclusively a Christian movement. Its goal is to follow the evidence in the world of science where it leads. If what we observe in the world gives evidence of intelligent design rather than natural selection, why should we prohibit scientists from following the evidence where it leads?

³¹ Ibid.,93–95.

Further, the intelligent design people are concerned about freedom of speech. If they observe intelligent design in the world, should they not be allowed to publish their research without fear of losing their jobs? The reason establishment scientists react so strongly to intelligent design is that it does not follow the dogma that the world is a closed system and that we cannot use any outside influence to explain how everything got here. In the face of mounting evidence against their ideas of chance formations, some evolutionists have offered the idea that perhaps some intelligent life from another planet seeded life on this planet.

I could favor trying to get local school boards to permit intelligent design into the classroom on the basis of civic righteousness. The teaching of evolution is destructive to morality, ethics, and respect for the importance of human life. At least the reference to a supreme designer might work with the natural knowledge of God to slow the rate of corruption in our society. Obviously, intelligent design does not communicate the message of our Savior God who made the world and saved the world from sin. This message we will proclaim in our sermons, apologetics, and teachings.

The Lutheran apologist will recognize the opportunity to reach people with the gospel through the literary medium of myth and allegory.

There are Christian writers who have tried to reach people with the gospel through the writing of myth and allegory. G.K. Chesterton, Charles Williams, J.R.R. Tolkien, Dorothy Sayers, and C.S. Lewis are among them. Gene Veith, who is among the leaders today in defending magic and fantasy as a tool to lead people to the cross of Christ, offers some observations concerning this genre of literature.

Just as C.S. Lewis's nonfiction works are effective in reaching modernists by showing reasons to believe in Christian doctrine, his fictional works are effective in reaching postmodernists by telling the Christian *story*. Lewis addresses his readers' intellect with Christian truth in his nonfiction, and he addresses his readers' imagination with Christian truth in his fiction.

The Chronicles of Narnia, his science-fiction trilogy, *The Great Divorce*, and *The Screwtape Letters* relate objective Christian doctrine to tangible, concrete life. They also appeal to another quality of postmodernists, their desire for mystery. Postmodernists not only do not have to have logical reasons

to believe in something, they tend to prefer beliefs that do not have a logical reason. This is why they prefer “spirituality” to “religion,” embracing the mystical rather than the rational. This tendency can get postmodernists into trouble, leading them into flying saucer cults and New Age occultism. Those who have no concept of truth in their religion can be manipulated into believing just about anything, as long as it appeals to their desires and gives personal meaning to their lives.

One way Christianity can answer is to recover its own rich “spirituality,” and the “mysteries” of salvation—the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection, and the life of the redeemed—which no one can fully grasp by human reason. Nor could we have ever just dreamed up or constructed for ourselves such mind-blowing truths. Rather, they come from outside ourselves, by revelation of the Holy Spirit in God’s Word, which puts them into a completely different category from both modernism with its reason and postmodernism with its anti-reason.

... I used to give copies of *Mere Christianity* to my non-Christian friends. At one time, the book left a strong impression (and sometimes still does for some people, the modernists and those who still use their minds). But lately, I have been frustrated by the way they say how glad they are that Lewis has the beliefs that he does, but that they have their own truths. His logical handling of Christianity does not get through to them. For people like that, I have them read Lewis’s fiction, including *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.³²

The review of Veith’s book by Angus Menuge also points us to the value of literary apologetics. He wrote:

Veith does a great service by giving a nuanced and measured reply to skeptics of Lewis’s *Chronicles*, including Christians who think magic and fantasy are necessarily threats to the faith, and unbelievers, like Philip Pullman who seek to evangelize for atheism. Veith argues convincingly for the enduring value of Lewis’s approach in a pluralistic, postmodern age, showing how his narratives lead the reader to the cross of Christ and away from unhealthy introversion and the occult.³³

³² Gene Veith, *The Soul of the Lion, the Witch, & the Wardrobe* (Colorado: Cook Communications Ministries, 2005), 201–203.

³³ *Ibid.*, back cover.

The Lutheran apologist seeks to proclaim and defend the gospel in a culture which is hostile to Christ.

We will not spend a great deal of time on cultural apologetics. This is not to say it is not important. We have read Nancy Pearcey's book and will spend two days discussing it. So there isn't a great need to discuss the issues involved in cultural apologetics in this paper. However, permit some observations.

First of all, cultural apologetics covers a great variety of areas. It could be called apologetics and art, music, drama, media, education, etc. In considering all these different aspects of culture, it is important to know what is good and in harmony with God's will and what is at variance with God's will. Nothing comes to us in a vacuum. All things in culture are produced from specific worldviews which people have. I can listen to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and say it is a beautiful piece of music. However, when I hear the *Ode to Joy* from the choral section, I have difficulty considering the music apart from its worldview.³⁴ When I look at a picture Pablo Picasso painted of a woman, I have difficulty disassociating his art from his outlook on women. When we teach art, drama, education, etc., it is important to discuss with our students the worldviews from which our culture operates and whether they are in harmony with God's will.³⁵

Then, to do cultural apologetics, Christians need to live their faith out in the culture. Pearcey's observations are in place: "...many believers have absorbed the fact/value, public/private dichotomy, restricting their faith to the religious sphere while adopting whatever views are current in their professional or social circles."³⁶

On the one hand, John tells us, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 15,16). On the other hand, Jesus tells us, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world.

³⁴ The *Ode to Joy* was based on Schiller's poem, which emphasized the Enlightenment setting of humanism, rationalism, romanticism, and Deism.

³⁵ As examples of cultural apologetics, consider Gene Veith's book on art, *State of the Arts: From Bezalel to Mapplethorpe*, and the work done by Allen Quist in connection with *EdWatch*.

³⁶ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 33.

A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:13–16).

These two statements do not contradict each other. On the one hand, the Lord directs us to remain uncontaminated by whatever our culture offers which is at variance with his Word. On the other hand, we are to be out and about in our society, giving a defense of the hope we have. In this way, we will act as a preserving influence against the corruption of society and as a beacon of light to the world around us.

Justo Gonzales, in his history text, offers some interesting observations as to why the early church grew so rapidly. He wrote:

The enormous numerical growth of the church in its first centuries leads us to the question of what methods it used to achieve such growth. The answer may surprise some modern Christians, for the ancient church knew nothing of “evangelistic services” or “revivals.” On the contrary, in the early church, worship centered on communion, and only baptized Christians were admitted to its celebration. Therefore, evangelism did not take place in church services, but rather, as Celsus said, in kitchens, shops, and markets. A few famous teachers, such as Justin and Origen, held debates in their schools, and thus won some converts among the intelligentsia. But the fact remains that most converts were made by anonymous Christians whose witness led others to their faith. . . . Another surprising fact about the early expansion of Christianity is that, after the New Testament, very little is said of any missionaries going from place to place, like Paul and Barnabas had done. It is clear that the enormous spread of the Gospel in those first few centuries was not due to full-time missionaries, but rather to the many Christians who traveled for other reasons—slaves, merchants, exiles condemned to work in the mines, and the like.³⁷

Are there some lessons for us here? We could say:

- Know your culture. Know the culture of those to whom you will speak. Know what is good and what is bad. Give a reason for the hope you have.

³⁷ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: Vol. 1, The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, 98–99.

- Equip God's people so they can go out into the world and give a reason for the hope they have (Lutheran Apologetics: From our Classrooms and into the World). Recognize the potential every Christian has as a witness for Christ.
- Recognize the importance of letting your light shine wherever you are, not just in church.
- Don't underestimate the power of the gospel. Apologetics doesn't depend on us. We give a reason for the hope we have, and the Holy Spirit does the work.

The Lutheran apologist will seek to be an influence for good in the political realm by giving a reason for the hope he/she has.

We know the horrible things that happened when the church became enmeshed in the affairs of the state. The Crusades, the Inquisition, the persecution of Puritans, and the Salem Witch Trials all stand out as glaring examples. However, does this mean that Christians should shun government office, stay out of politics, and never bring their Christian faith to bear on the societal issues of the day? No, it doesn't. Christians will recognize that the church's mission is to proclaim the gospel of Christ, not to improve society through legislation. However, that doesn't mean Christians should withdraw from the public square. As Nancy Pearcey indicated, this also is a realm where the Christian can give a reason for the hope he/she has.

We know that, in the Old Testament Law, God provided for the defense of those who often could not defend themselves: the widows, the orphans, the deaf and the blind. The psalmist Asaph also wrote, "How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? ... Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (Psalm 82:2-4). There were provisions in the Mosaic Law that provided rights for women in a culture dominated by men. There were laws that protected women from being dumped precipitously by their husbands (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). If a man married a captive woman, he could not sell her into slavery if she displeased him. There was a test for an unfaithful wife (Numbers 6:11ff). If the woman was innocent, she had protection from the suspicions of a jealous husband.

There still is room for the Christian to defend the weak, the orphans, the poor and the oppressed today. As we do this, we have opportunity to give a defense of the hope we have. First of all, we are all part of the

same family, the human family. Paul stated to the Athenians, "From one man he made every nation of men" (Acts 17:28). It is evolution that teaches there are superior and inferior people on earth. Paul declared all believers equal in status before God. He wrote of believers, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). John wrote, "I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne, and in front of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9). Jesus said, "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11). In heaven there will be room for all believers at the banquet of the Lamb. No one will be excluded because of racial, societal, or gender issues. This is the hope that we have. There is no reason why we should exclude others from our company or oppress them because of these differences.

As we defend the cause of those who cannot defend themselves, we cannot but think of the unborn babies who are killed every day, offered at the altar of self-interest. In the face of millions of abortions, we need to speak out on behalf of unborn babies and give a biblical defense of the sanctity of human life. We also are reminded of the many people who face end-of-life issues who need counsel from the Word of God. We have a wonderful opportunity to give a defense of the hope believers have.

John Warwick Montgomery has written a number of works on the issue of the law and human rights.³⁸ We quote him as we conclude this section:

When Christians abrogate their responsibilities in national life, they present engraved invitations to non-Christians to step in and impress their values on the nation. According to John 8, only Christians are "free indeed," because only they have been emancipated by Christ from debilitating slavery to sin; Christians, therefore, are just the people needed to articulate and put into practice the foundational American ideal of freedom.

What, in sum, is the root problem in American life that the revelationally committed Christian must bend all his efforts to

³⁸ *Law and Gospel* (1978), *The Law Above the Law* (1975), *Law and Morality: Friends or Foes?* (1994), *Human Rights and Human Dignity* (1986, 1995), *Slaughter of the Innocents* (1981), and *Christians in the Public Square* (1996).

solve? What produces melancholy in our bicentennial American as he faces the third century of his national existence? He fears that “things are out of control”—meaning out of his control—and thereby betrays the self-made-man syndrome that has corrupted so much of his history.

It may therefore be a blessing in disguise that things no longer appear to bend to our control. Perhaps the way is now open to a new era of dependence on the God of Scripture. If so, the proclamation of that wondrous option will depend squarely on the courageous entrance of Christian believers into all spheres of national life.³⁹

The Lutheran apologist will give a defense of the hope he/she has in dealing with issues of ethics.

Ethics deals with what is right or wrong. Christian ethics is the practical application of the teachings of the Bible. Generally, ethical systems in the world have fallen into one of two categories. The following is a summary of the two categories and the ethics practiced by representative philosophies.

Deontological Systems. They are duty orientated. They require that we judge what is right or wrong according to a duty. Examples are:

- Emotivism establishes right or wrong on the basis of emotional reasoning.
- Voluntarism seeks to establish duty through the moral laws or rules formulated outside of a person.
- Autonomism stresses that a person makes laws for himself by his own reason.
- Positivism accepts the rules of the functional authorities in our lives. This may be government, an institution, or popular opinion. If the majority of people want abortion, then it must be right.

Teleological Systems focus on the goal or outcome of an action. If the outcome is good, then the end justifies the means. Examples are:

- Natural law ethics denies the total depravity of man. It states that God has given us laws, and we must obey them. However, it believes that we can interpret these laws according to the

³⁹ John Warwick Montgomery, “If You Can’t Beat ‘Em, Separate From Em,” in *Christians in the Public Square: Law, Gospel & Public Policy*, essays by C.E.B Cranfield, David Kilgour, M.P, John Warwick Montgomery (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: Canadian Institute for Law, Theology, and Public Policy, Inc., 1996), 47.

intelligence and freedom which remain a part of our human nature even in our fallen state.

- Proportionalism denies there are any general absolute principles which determine the good or evil of an action apart from the circumstances in which they take place.
- Consequentialism or utilitarianism teaches that what brings the greatest good for the greatest amount of people must be right.
- Situation ethics (Joseph Fletcher) states that each act in its own circumstances and with its own consequences may demand a different moral response imposed by the highest law of love.

Evolutionists and atheists deny there are any moral absolutes. The scientist, Will Provine, stated in the Ben Stein movie that evolution destroys any basis for ethics. We would respond to him and the systems above that God has given us absolutes in his Word, and that these commands are binding on all people of all times. Many Reformed ethicists join us in saying the Bible contains absolutes for all people of all ages. However, they forget the gospel which alone can move the Christian to respond in joy to God's will. As we live our faith and practice ethics, we must steer a clear course between the Scylla of evolutionary thinking and the Charybdis of legalism. As Lutheran apologists, we will defend both the absolutes of God's Word and the place of the gospel in enabling God's people to respond in joyful and willing service to God's will.

The Lutheran apologist will defend the gospel against cults and world religions as well as seek to proclaim the good news of salvation to free people from slavery to the devil.

We sing in one of our favorite mission hymns, "What though the fragrant breezes blow soft o'er distant isles" (CW 571:2). When I grew up, the word "distant" seemed to describe the religions of the world. They were all "over there" somewhere. That is not true today. They are here, flourishing among us. The church my son serves in Louisville, Kentucky, is less than a mile from a Hindu temple. Muslims have erected mosques in many of our cities. Buddhists present cultural exhibits on college campuses. When I served a congregation in California in the 1970s, traveling to Broadway Street in San Diego brought you into contact with the Hari Krishna group. Anyone who attempted to pass through the San Diego airport, the San Diego zoo, or the Wild Animal Park

would encounter the Hari Krishna trying to raise money by selling flowers “for the children.” New Age religions blend these world religions and serve them up in attractive “self-help” ways. These religions also intend to make converts. Islam is growing rapidly throughout Europe as well as in America. Anyone who lived through the 70s knows the impact the Hindu religion had on America through the Beatles and George Harrison’s song, “My Sweet Lord.” Book stores are full of Buddhist literature.

In addition, there has been a proliferation of cults in America. Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses aggressively seek converts in our neighborhoods. Names like “Heaven’s Gate,” Jim Jones, David Koresh, Mo Berg, and Sun Myung Moon (Unification Church) remind us how dangerous and how aggressive these groups can be. (A member of the Unification Church approached me in our mall in New Ulm about two years ago.) Many of you will remember the “deprogrammers” parents hired to get their children out of cults.

If we circulate in society, we will come into contact with world religions and cults. (With the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses, we don’t have to circulate. We just have to be home when they call.) How should we react to these people? When the Jehovah’s Witnesses or Mormons call at our house, I don’t slam the door in their face. I talk with them about Jesus and what he did to save us. When they come to my door, we generally speak for about an hour. Usually, their compatriots, who drive up and down the street, finally come and take them away. I talked with the lady from the Unification church about Jesus for over half an hour until her partner came and led her away. These are opportunities to give a defense of the hope that I have.

There are many books that have been written of late which help us in reaching out to people of world religions and cults. It is well worth our time to study these books, so we learn what these people believe, what their worldviews are, and how we can reach out to them. This will equip us to prepare ourselves to defend and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Lutheran apologetics belongs in our classrooms.

The title of this paper assigned to me was “Lutheran Apologetics: From Our Classrooms and Into the World.” Perhaps the question that needs to be asked is, “What are we currently doing in our courses to prepare our students to give a defense of the hope they have?” After going through the section on fideism, one might conclude that a formal

study of apologetics in our midst is a rare occurrence. We noted Alvin Schmidt, a member of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, indicated there is no formal apologetic instruction in his synod. What about in our own synods? The *Quarterly* did present a favorable review of Craig Parton's book, *The Defense Never Rests*. Mark Paustian and Allen Quist have published books on apologetics. Bethany and Wisconsin Lutheran College have a course on apologetics. President Zarlring made a presentation on apologetics to the Aulic at MLC a year or so ago. There have been two Summer Session classes on apologetics offered at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Beyond that, I don't know of any formal courses in apologetics that any of us have.

I would assume that we consider apologetics in conjunction with other courses. In religion courses, we equip our students to give a reason for the hope they have. We give them a doctrinal base from which to operate as apologists. In science, we deal with evolution and its aberrant beliefs. In literature, we point out Christ-figures and discuss ways in which they can serve as a bridge for leading people to Christ. In philosophy we look at the worldviews of the world's philosophers and our own Christian worldview. In education courses, we strive for Christ-centered education as we examine the methodological presuppositions used to teach others. In physical education courses, we teach why Lutheran coaches have a different worldview from non-Christian coaches. In other courses we do cultural apologetics. However, the question remains, "Is this adequate?"

I believe there is a need for more apologetics. Our students are looking for answers to the questions they have and the questions others have posed to them. These questions may come from parents, siblings, relatives, friends, dates, fiancés, spouses, or people with whom they work. Our students sincerely desire to be able to give people a reason for the hope they have. Are we meeting their needs, or, are we sending them out into a hostile world poorly equipped to deal with the barrage of questions they will face?

Rather than attempting to dump a collective guilt trip on us about whether or not we are teaching apologetics (guilt is a lousy motivator), rather than attempting to lead a crusade or a revival for more apologetics in our classrooms, I will offer a series of questions in the interest of encouraging the teaching of apologetics.

- Does God want us to sanctify Christ in our hearts and always be ready to give a defense of the hope that we have?
- Is apologetics a fruit of our Christian faith?

- Should apologetics be in our curricula? If so, where should it be taught?
- What concept of apologetics do we have? Is a faulty view of apologetics keeping us from teaching and encouraging people to give a defense of the hope they have?
- Do we teach apologetics in our classes? If we are, where are we teaching it? If not, why aren't we teaching it or where do we expect it will be taught?
- Are we doing the best job we can of teaching apologetics in our schools? Are there things we could do better? Are our hearts really into it?
- Why aren't we offering apologetics to all our students in a formal course? Are other things more important? Is apologetics one of those things which would be nice but we just don't have time or room for a formal course? Is our current roster of courses the best we can do? Are we intimidated from trying to get a formal course in apologetics by the fear of including something else in the curriculum? (What will be removed so this new course can take its place?)

In pondering these questions, let us also remember Jesus Christ, “the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:2, 3). There is joy in the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. He always was ready to give an answer to people for the mission he had. He carried out all of God's will for us. He suffered the punishment for our sins of commission and omission. Through faith in Jesus, through our baptism, God has given us Christ's righteousness and forgiveness for all of our sins. We are the redeemed and forgiven sons and daughters of God.

Therefore, we do find joy in doing apologetics. Even in the face of persecution and scorn, there is still joy. “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (Acts 5:41). There is joy in going out into the world and giving a defense of the hope we have. There is joy in equipping our students so they always are able to give a reason for the hope they have. Our joy will become their joy, and their joy is our joy. We will do our best to equip our students in apologetics as a way of saying “thank you” to Jesus who gave his all for us.

The Lutheran apologist's mission is global: From our classrooms into the world.

Let us revisit the statement made by Justo Gonzalez as he examined reasons why the early church grew so rapidly (page 27). He stated, "It is clear that the enormous spread of the Gospel in those first few centuries was not due to full-time missionaries, but rather to the many Christians who traveled for other reasons—slaves, merchants, exiles condemned to work the mines, and the like." Certainly, we encourage our students to do apologetics wherever they are. The world includes our immediate localities. However, our students and members are traveling the globe as never before. The airlines have made global travel easy. In half a day or so we can get to practically any area of the world. The internet and cell phones have opened up for us avenues of global communication. Our people are out there in all areas of the world.

What a fantastic opportunity we have to spread the gospel if our students give people an answer for the hope they have. We often think in terms of sending a missionary to an area of the world to establish a church there. Why, however, do we restrict our thinking to missionaries alone? All Christians are able to give answers for the hope they have. We need to lift our students' vision to see a global picture. In view of the unprecedented opportunities the Lord has set before us, we need to equip these students to do the best they can to defend and proclaim the Christian faith.

What about the fear that the world is a nasty place in which to witness for Christ? The early Christians faced a world as nasty as ours. Yet, in spite of the opposition, they went out and gave a reason for the hope they had. We can persuade ourselves that it is too dangerous to go out into the world and share our faith. However, we may also look at the opposition we face as an opportunity to give people a defense of the hope we have.

The story is told in Marine Corps history of Lt. General Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller. During the Korean War, twenty-two enemy divisions surrounded his First Marine Division at the frozen Chosin Reservoir in Korea. Army headquarters fully expected to lose his entire division. Puller's assessment of the situation was this: "All right, they are on our left, they're on our right, they're in front of us, they're behind us...they can't get away this time."⁴⁰ And, they didn't. Puller destroyed seven divisions of enemy troops and led his division to safety.

⁴⁰ <http://www.military-quotes.com/chesty-puller.htm>

We may look at all the opposition to Christianity in the world, wring our hands, and say there is nothing we can do. Or, we can look at all the opponents of Christianity out there in the world and say, “They can’t get away from us this time.” We have an army of troops, our students, to send out into the world to defend and proclaim the message of the crucified and risen Christ. In thankfulness to God we will equip them as best we can to give a defense of the hope they have. LSQ

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The Sacrifice of Isaac



*by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld for Die Bibel in Bildern,
published in Leipzig between 1852 and 1860.*

Sermon on Genesis 22:1–18 and the Aqedah

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Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, You who did not spare Your own Son but offered Him up for us all, we ask You to be merciful to us in the time of testing and temptation. We ask not that You stop testing us because we know that tests are for our good. Rather with the temptation give us the power to bear it by the Spirit through the means of grace so that we may be thus strengthened. We ask this in the name of the Lamb of God. Amen.

Text: *Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you." So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together.*

Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided." Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." (Genesis 22:1–18; NKJV)

THE WORD MORIAH FILLS US with wonder and has an air of mystery about it. It has been used in song and as a Christian name. The name was originally used for the mountain in the Jerusalem area where Solomon built the temple. Thus Moriah became the center of Old Testament worship. Yet Moriah was a significant spot long before the building of the temple. Here occurred the greatest conflict of Abraham's life. Let us then consider, **The Journey to Moriah.**

I. It is a Type of Jesus' Journey to the Cross. Abraham, the great father of faith, was now in his golden years. The son whom he had so patiently awaited all his life had finally come and was now between 12 and 15 years of age. With this promised heir and all his wealth, his every desire was fulfilled. It looked like the old patriarch could end his years in peace and quiet.

The tranquility of this picture however was soon disrupted. The Lord tested Abraham and said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (22:2). The command which came, most likely at night, must have crushed the old man's heart because Isaac was the most important thing in his life.

Yet he did not murmur or complain about such a terrible request but silently obeyed.

Probably not sleeping a wink during the night, maybe the longest night of his life, he arose early the next morning and told no one the shocking command not even his wife Sarah. Having saddled his own donkey, he awoke his two personal servants who were to split the wood for the sacrifice and get everything ready for the trip. Finally he did that which he dreaded most of all. He went in and awoke his only son Isaac who was overjoyed at the prospect of taking a trip with his father. This didn't make it any easier for his father.

Having said good-bye to Sarah and the others in the camp, they began the journey. Isaac joyfully walked at his father's side because now he was having the chance to do something alone with his father. But for Abraham each step toward Moriah became more painful.

On the third day they beheld Moriah. Abraham told his two servants to remain below the mountain while he and the boy went to sacrifice. He placed the wood for the sacrifice upon Isaac and he carried the fire and the knife. Thus they proceeded up the mountain. Yet Abraham had hope, for he said to the servants, "The lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you" (22:5; see also Hebrews 11:17–20).

On the way up the mountain, Isaac said, "My father, we have everything for the sacrifice except where is the lamb?" (22:7). Those words must have went through Abraham's heart like a knife and yet he confidently said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering" (22:8).

Once on the mountaintop, they built an altar to the Lord of uncut stone. Then the wood was arranged in order upon the altar. All this must have puzzled Isaac somewhat because they did not have a lamb. Finally, Abraham with tears in his eyes turned to his son and began to tie his hands. Immediately Isaac understood that he was the victim because he had heard of the sacrifice of the firstborn among the heathen Canaanites. Yet he did not cry out or fight, as well he could have, because he certainly could have easily overpowered the tired old man. He simply stood there and obeyed his father.

Abraham then placed his son upon the wood of the altar. Probably kissing his son good-bye, he raised the knife to slaughter his son, which he had already done in his heart. Suddenly the voice of God came, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son,

from Me" (22:12). Just think of the joy in Abraham's heart as he untied his son and grasped him in his arms. The Lord did indeed provide for behind the altar a ram was caught by its horns in a bush. This was to be the lamb for the sacrifice.

This section of the Old Testament history is a type of the Messiah's work.¹ All of us by nature were lost in sin. We broke every commandment in the book and were going headlong to destruction. Even now our old sinful flesh desires to do those things that we as Christians don't want to do, but we do them anyway. Our situation is wretched indeed (Romans 7:24).

Yet in this text we have a picture of salvation. As Isaac, Jesus was the only begotten Son of God whom He loved with all His heart. For the Almighty to give His Son was no easy matter. Still He loved us lost miserable sinners so much that He sent His Son to the slaughter in our place. There is no greater love than this.

As Isaac obeyed his father so Christ obeyed His Father. He willingly obeyed the Father's plan of salvation even though the great suffering filled His human body with horror as we see from the dark and dreadful conflict of Gethsemane. He even carried His own cross to Calvary just as Isaac carried the wood of the sacrifice upon his back to Moriah.

Abraham bound his son on the altar and in his mind had already slaughtered his son out of love for God. Likewise, God the Father did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all on the cross out of love for you and me, slaughtering Him in our place (Romans 8:32). That great sacrifice canceled the debt of our wrong and covered our wretched sinfulness, blotting it out with His precious blood.²

There is another picture of salvation involved in this scene on Moriah. After God stopped Abraham from slaying his son, a ram was found caught by its horns in a bush behind them. This was the sacrifice God provided to take Isaac's place. It was offered in Isaac's place. That ram however is a symbol of the much greater sacrifice that God would provide in the stead of all men. We all deserve to die the death of deaths. Yet the Lamb of God has saved us from that death. He is the perfect offering which God provided to take away our sin. He went up to the cross and allowed Himself to be slaughtered as the one final blood offering for sin. There can be no forgiveness without the shedding of blood but the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin (Hebrews 9:22; 1 John 1:7).

¹ See Appendix I.

² See Appendix II.

This Jesus Christ would be a natural descendant of Isaac and Abraham. Because this Messiah would come forth from their loins, their seed would be a blessing to all as the Lord God promised, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (22:18).

II. Also this journey to Moriah is a type of our earthly pilgrimage.

Abraham is indeed one of the greatest children of God that ever lived. He is the father of the faithful. By faith he left the most important civilization of the time to go out into Canaan, a new frontier. By faith he was sure that God would send a promised child even when he and his wife were far past childbearing age. By faith he was confident that Canaan would be given to his seed even if he never owned an acre of it. So great was Abraham's trust in the Lord.

Yet the Lord saw fit to test that faith and strengthen it. As our text opens there is a peaceful lull in the patriarch's life. In his great wealth, he was perfectly content to just sit back and watch Isaac grow. In this situation there was a tendency to forget about the Lord and fall completely in love with his wealth and even more so with his only son, the one for whom he had waited these many years. Therefore the Lord tested his faith, knocking him to his knees to see what was most important in Abraham's life.

The test was very difficult. God demanded his long-awaited son whom he greatly loved. Remember there was little chance that Abraham could have another son because of his old age. This would show that he loved God above all things.

An added conflict was this: for Abraham the promises of salvation and eternal life were all bound up in his son. God promised Abraham that from Isaac's seed the Messiah Savior would be born who would free us from sin and give us everlasting life (Genesis 12:1-3). So great was the test.

Similarly the Lord must test our love and strengthen our faith in this life. It can so easily happen to us also, that in times of peace and contentment we put many things before the Lord and thus endanger the very salvation of our souls. Such things may include family and friends, boyfriend or girlfriend. Then we should never underestimate the new idols of the 21st century, the gods of success and leisure. Just think how important they are in our society. What wouldn't you give to do well in school or be the town athlete? What would you give to be top man at work? What would you give to be the richest farmer in the area? Would you even be willing to trade your immortal soul? Then there is the god

of leisure. On TV recently I heard a woman say she would give up meat before her weekly bowling. More is spent on pleasure than on defense in our land. How many don't forsake their family and make themselves a stranger at God's house in order to worship the god of leisure?

Therefore God tests us to strengthen our faith and save us from spiritual death. He may allow us to lose those very things we love so much to see if we really love Him. Financial problems, family conflicts, sickness and even death may come to knock us to our senses and to draw us closer to Him. In each thing that comes upon us we have the assurance that God is purifying and refining our faith (1 Peter 1:6-7), always caring for us, holding us secure.

Then as Abraham faced temptation with a firm confidence believing that God would even raise his son again to fulfill his promises (Hebrews 11:19), so we should stand firm trusting in His promises. These promises are found in His Word where He assures us that He is controlling all things in the universe for our good, even turning evil into good (Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20). When burdens come we may be confident that He will give us the strength to bear them for St. Paul says, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). The strength that we need in every trial and the power to overcome, He gives us in the means of grace, Word and Sacrament.

When we do fail in our tests, as happens to each of us, we have the certainty that the Father did not spare the Greater Isaac, but delivered Him up for us all (Romans 8:32). Therefore all our sins, even our sins of failure, are forgiven.

The journey to Moriah is a vivid picture of the Savior's journey to the cross where He shed His blood as a sacrifice for all. By a firm trust in that sacrifice may we find true comfort for our life's pilgrimage. Then as we climb our mounts of testing may we be assured of His promises and as we reach the top may it be our Moriah, the place where the Lord has seen our woe and provided.

Here the King hath spread His table
Whereon eyes of faith are able
Christ our Passover to trace:
Shadows of the law are going,
Light and life and truth inflowing,
Night to day is giving place.

Lo, this blessed food descending
Heav'nly love is hither sending,
Hungry lips on earth to feed:
So the paschal lamb was given,
So the manna came from heaven,
Isaac was His type indeed.

O good Shepherd, Bread life-giving,
Us, Thy grace and life receiving,
Feed and shelter evermore;
Thou on earth our footsteps guiding,
We in heav'n with Thee abiding,
With all saints will Thee adore.
(ELH 321:4-6)

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Appendix I

Isaac's life pictures Christ in a number of ways:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Abraham—father | 1. God—Heavenly Father |
| 2. Isaac—only begotten son | 2. Christ—only begotten Son |
| 3. Son of his father's love | 3. Son of His Father's love |
| 4. Abraham spared not his own son | 4. God, the Father, spared not His own Son, but gave Him for us all |
| 5. Isaac carried the wood of his sacrifice | 5. Christ carried the wood of His sacrifice (the cross) |
| 6. Isaac—obedient unto death | 6. Christ—obedient unto death |
| 7. Substitute provided for Isaac | 7. Christ Himself our Substitute |
| 8. Isaac offered as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah, God's appointed place (Gen. 22:1–9) | 8. Christ offered as a sacrifice at Jerusalem, or Moriah, God's appointed place (2 Chron. 3:1) |

Appendix II

עֶקֶב – *Aqedah* – The Binding of Isaac

The *Aqedah* is one of the major themes of Jewish deliverance. *Aqedah* is a Hebrew word meaning “binding,” and it serves as the common description for the testing of Abraham by God as recorded in Genesis 22:1–19. The noun derives from the Hebrew “and he bound” of Genesis 22:9. In later Jewish literature this event was so linked with the Passover that *Jubilees* 17:15–18:19 has the Passover become a commemoration of the *Aqedah*.³

Melito of Sardis (died A.D. 180) speaks of Jesus bound as Isaac, making Isaac a type of Christ in the Old Testament (*Peri Pascha* 69), thus continuing this deliverance theme. The interpretation of the *Aqedah* as a type of Christ can be found through the history of the church; see *Luther's Works* 52:126; Johann Gerhard, *An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ*, pp. 99, 102–103, 167, 222, 235; and Johann Arndt, *Passions-Predigten*, p. 75. In his *Passions-Predigten*, Arndt writes,

³ Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *Lamb's High Feast* (Boston: Brill, 1998), 17.

In Genesis 22 as our great forefather Abraham was to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah according to the command of God, he took the wood of the sacrifice, laying it on the back of Isaac, and had him carry it up the mountain. The boy said to his father, “My father, here is the wood and the fire for the sacrifice, but where is the sheep?” Abraham said, “The Lord will provide Himself a sheep for the sacrifice.” On the top of the mount his father bound him, laid him on the wood, and took the knife in order to slay him.

Likewise, Christ Jesus, our Heavenly Isaac, the obedient Son of God the Father, was led out and had to carry the cross to His sacrifice and death. Thus this type was fulfilled. The burden of His cross He Himself bore until He became entirely weak and tired and could not continue forth. Therefore they seized Simon of Cyrene, and forced him to bear the cross after the Lord. But Christ Himself had to be sacrificed on the wood (cross) that He carried. He was the sheep that God chose for the sacrifice, namely, the little ram that Abraham saw caught in the thornhedge. This was Jesus with His crown of thorns. Thus it is as it is written in the 43rd chapter of Isaiah, “Me you have made work by your sins, and you have wearied me with your iniquities. I, even I, will blot out your transgressions for My sake and remember your sins no more.”⁴

In addition there is a connection between the *Aqedah* and Romans 8:32:

The text of Gen. 22:12, 16 LXX underlies Rom. 8:32a, if it is not actually quoted. What Paul says of God (τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ οὐκ ἐφέλωτο, “He did not spare his own Son”) finds a clear correspondence in God’s address to Abraham in Genesis: (οὐκ ἐφέλω τοῦ υἱοῦ σου τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ, “You did not spare your beloved Son” [N.B. The LXX text follows with a phrase δι’ ἐμέ, “for me,” which is missing in the MT]).⁵

In synthesis, what can we say of the *Aqedah* motif in Romans 8:32? The motif is directly present in v. 32a with two complementary components: primarily through the act of offering by the father (but with different motives or goals between type and antitype: obedience to God for Abraham, and love of “us” for God), and secondarily through the special character of “son” as found in Isaac on the one hand or Jesus on the other. But indirectly the motif of the *Aqedah* is present as well in 32b with the theme of expiation, which is, however,

⁴ Johann Arndt, *Passions-Predigten* (Verlag der Lutherischen Buchhandlung Heinrich Harms), 75.

⁵ Romano Penna, *Paul the Apostle Jew and Greek Alike*, Vol. I, tr. Thomas P. Wahl (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 163.

derived not from the story of Abraham and Isaac but from the Isaian passage about the Suffering Servant....⁶

⁶ Ibid., 167–168.

Note and Book Reviews

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CELC Meets in the Unity of the Spirit

Delegates representing the 21 members of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) and guests brought many stories about mission work from around the world. They came from Europe, Asia, South America, Africa, Indonesia and India, and all of them were committed to proclaiming the pure Gospel about Jesus Christ crucified in order to build up Christ's Church.

The seventh triennial convention of the CELC was held on June 4 through 6, 2011, on the campuses of Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota (Saturday and Monday) and Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota (Sunday). The CELC members and guests gathered around the conference theme, "Unity of Spirit—Bond of Peace." Throughout the conference, the

representatives and guests heard five essays and reports from the various member and guest church bodies.

One missionary from a Muslim country reported that in ten years the mission had grown from 400 to 1,800 souls. Because evangelism is a crime in that country, the Christians there won their neighbors for the Gospel by helping them when disaster struck. Rev. Takeshi Nidaira of Japan thanked everyone for their prayers and help during the earthquake disaster. Rev. Peter Chen of Taiwan noted that after 40 years of preaching the gospel, four churches with 150 souls exist on that island. English as a Second Language (ESL) classes have helped the church in Mexico have over 1,000 members in three areas. The Confessional Lutheran Church, Sweden, reported that six congregations and four preaching stations exist.

CELC Emeriti

The conference also took note of the twelve CELC emeriti from the first CELC convention who were present. The following persons or relatives were honored as being present at the 1993 convention: Dr. Ellen Gawrisch, daughter of the first chairman, the Rev. Wilbert Gawrisch; the Rev. Richard and Charlene Lauersdorf; Clarice Madson, wife of the sainted Rev. Juul Madson; the Rev. George and Ruth Orvick; the Rev. Armin and Virginia Panning; the Rev. Wilhelm and Naomi Petersen; the Rev. Armin and Kay Schuetze; Eugene and Eleanore Schultz, and the Rev. Gerhard Wilde. Rev. Schuetze related that though it took twenty years after the breakup of the Synodical Conference to organize the CELC, he was happy to attend the first meeting in 1993. Rev. Orvick spoke of the joy in the fellowship that the members of the CELC have together. Rev. Wilde noted the gratitude they felt for the American brothers who kept in touch while they were still behind the Iron Curtain in East Germany.

The Opening Session

The opening service of the CELC was held at the Chapel of the Christ on the Martin Luther College (MLC) campus. Prof. Thomas Nass of MLC served as the liturgist, and the preacher was Prof. Michael K. Smith of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota. Speaking on Ephesians 4:1-3, Prof. Smith's theme was "Somebody Makes Nobodies Into One Body."

While God sees us all as nobodies because of sin, through the water of baptism God makes us His children by creating faith in Jesus. God has brought us together into one body that confesses the truths of God's Word. God is giving us a privilege to express this unity through the CELC and a challenge to remember and pray for those who are in fellowship at this meeting. Following the service Pres. Mark Zarling of MLC welcomed the CELC members to the campus.

In his address to the conference, the Rev. Steven Petersen, president of the CELC, noted that the world may regard this meeting as insignificant, but God has preserved among us a Unity of Spirit and a Bond of Peace based on our common faith. It is a faith that we trace back through the Confessions and the three solas, to the Scripture. Our common faith teaches that sinners have hope through the active and passive obedience of Jesus and have forgiveness through faith in the justification Jesus won on the cross. Rev. Petersen noted the proposal to add two more members and an associate member to the CELC and the invitation to include guests from non-member church bodies. He spoke about the publication of the doctrinal series, "The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century" and the work of the Theological Education—Transfer and Augmentation Commission (THETA) to help member seminaries train pastors. He thanked CELC emeriti for their work in the CELC and for the work of the Rev. Wayne Mueller and Prof. William Kessel, whose terms

on the Planning Commission were finished.

The Sunday Service

On Sunday, June 5, the convention moved to the campus of Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota, for the special service at Trinity Lutheran Chapel. Scripture lessons and prayers were read in their native language by the Rev. Takeshi Nidaira (Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church—Japan), the Rev. Martin Wilde (Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, Germany), the Rev. Artur Villares (Lutheran Church of Portugal), the Rev. Davison Mutentami (Lutheran Church of Central Africa, Zambia), and the Rev. Segundo Gutierrez (Peruvian Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Church). Chaplain Donald Moldstad served as liturgist and the Rev. Charles Degner, WELS Minnesota District President, preached the sermon on the theme “God So Loved the World,” based on John 3:13–18.

Rev. Degner stated that the lesson of the bronze serpent is “just look, don’t do anything.” Jesus taught Nicodemus the same lesson: “Just look, don’t do.” Jesus was lifted up to carry the sins of the world. On the cross we see God’s love for the world. Everyone is invited to believe on Jesus to have eternal life. No matter what differences exist between peoples, all are justified freely before God through the death of Jesus. Never lose faith in the power of the Gospel, for through the Gospel God will build His Church.

The Business of the CELC

Three business sessions were held during the conference. The representatives adopted changes to the guidelines regarding associate membership so that those applying for such membership should have an organized congregation with lay leadership and members supporting the work of the church. The CELC encourages smaller church bodies to become associate members.

The CELC received two groups into full membership: All Saints Lutheran Church—Nigeria and the Lutheran Confessional Church—Norway. The East Seoul Canaan Church was received into associate membership.

The election of officers occurred during the Monday morning session resulting in the following elections: President—Daniel Koelpin, Vice-President—Michael Smith, Secretary—Thomas Nass, Planning Committee members—Michael Duncan and Steven Petersen.

Prof. Lyle Lange reported on the progress of the Theological Commission, which is producing a series of documents entitled “The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century.” The commission presented the document “Eagerly Await the Savior: The Doctrine of the Last Things (Eschatology),” which was adopted as a confession of the CELC. This is the fifth document of the series.

The delegates adopted another proposal to produce a newsletter for the CELC members to be digitally published twice a year. The newsletter

would inform CELC members about the events happening in the member church bodies.

Special Presentations

The conference heard three special presentations relating to mission work. The first was from Multi-Media Evangelism. Rev. Hartman spoke about a distance learning program for discipleship training and 33 books in a Bible teaching series. He announced that 85,000 copies of the *Road to Emmaus* DVD have been purchased. They are producing a Spanish version of the *People's Bible*.

Mr. Bill Meier spoke about the work that WELS Kingdom Workers has done in 12 countries—building projects, mission assistance, canvassing, and teaching Vacation Bible School and ESL classes.

Dr. Thomas Kuster of Bethany Lutheran College spoke about the Christ in Media Institute as a resource for creatively packaging the Gospel message so that people will notice it. He mentioned a 2012 conference at Bethany that will address the challenges of creating such materials for media.

CELC Five Essays on “Church”

Essay #1: “The Invisible and the Visible Church”

The essay, “The Invisible and the Visible Church,” was delivered by Prof. Lyle Lange of MLC. The teaching of justification by faith alone is the central doctrine of the Christian Church and the teaching that gathers an assembly of believers in Christ, that is, the holy Christian

Church, which is located wherever the pure Gospel is proclaimed and the Sacraments are rightly administered.

Since faith is a matter of the heart, the holy Christian Church is invisible to men, but not to God. There is only one church since there is only one faith. Through this faith, Jesus gives the Church the imputed righteousness that He won on the cross. The Church is universal; it exists in the world wherever the Gospel is proclaimed. Jesus promises that it would never perish, for it is the only Church by which one can come to the Father through Jesus.

Though Christ’s Church is invisible, it can be identified on earth by the presence of the Gospel and Sacraments. Only the believers in a visible church are members of Christ’s one, holy, invisible Church; the others are hypocrites. God wants believers to gather around the Means of Grace to hear the pure Gospel and receive the Sacraments. Where errors of doctrine or practice exist, it is always harmful; yet God may have believers in such churches. We are to thank God for giving us His pure Gospel, for this is not man’s doing.

Essay #2: “The Mission of the Church”

The essay, “The Mission of the Church,” was delivered by the Rev. Davison Mutentami of Zambia, Africa. After Jesus rose from the dead, He gave the disciples His Great Commission to “go” as Christ’s messengers in order to “make disciples” by “baptizing and teaching” so that they hold firmly to everything Jesus has taught (Matthew 28:18–20).

The Word of God both creates faith and keeps believers in the faith.

The Gospel is the power of the Church's mission. The Church is to preach repentance and forgiveness because Jesus gave it the authority to tell all people that God has reconciled the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19–20) and invites them to be reconciled to God. The Church uses the Office of the Keys, which Jesus gave to it (Matthew 16:19), namely the power to forgive the sins of the repentant and to declare not forgiven those who will not repent. The message of forgiveness is God's instrument to use the loosing key to declare God's forgiveness. The Church must not abuse the Keys, but use them only as Christ instructed—disciplinary actions toward those who will not repent and the announcement of forgiveness to those who confess their sins. Through the Means of Grace, the Holy Spirit conveys to people the gift of forgiveness of sins won by Christ on the cross.

The visible church also has the duty to administer Christ's Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, both of which assure believers of God's forgiveness. In Baptism, God washes away sins, even for the infant, because it connects the sinner with Jesus.

Jesus also asks the Church to use both hands when preaching the Gospel. One hand has the spiritual food for the soul, while the other has physical food and help for the body. By helping people in need, the church establishes a point of contact to bring the Gospel. "Evangelism" is an action word.

In addition, the office of the public ministry is where pastors act on the basis of a call they received from fellow Christians. The pastor acts under God and in the name of the congregation. The mission of the church requires a public ministry; it is important that local congregations call public ministers. Their work is to nurture the flock, protect it against false teaching, and build it up through evangelism work.

Essay #3: "The Governance of the Church"

The essay, "The Governance of the Church," was presented by the Rev. John Vogt, the Rector of St. Sophia Lutheran Seminary, Ukraine. Since the ascended Lord rules His Church by His Word, the form of government in Christ's Church is a monarchy. However, Jesus also has delegated leadership in the visible church to men (Hebrews 13:17). During the time of St. Paul, the church had offices such as pastors and deacons to carry out various tasks. The apostles exerted bishop-like oversight of the mission churches.

During the Apostolic Age, developments led to a three-tier governance: bishop, pastor, and deacon. Eventually these positions developed into two powerful bishops claiming authority over the whole visible church—Rome and Constantinople. Governance by church leaders was the only form until the Reformation. After Luther's death, state churches became the norm. When Lutherans came to America, they usually set up a self-governing congregational structure

with voter assemblies, church councils, and boards and committees.

Whatever type of governance that serves the proclamation of the Gospel and is agreed upon by the visible church can be used to the glory of God.

While a call to serve in the ministry may be issued in a number of different ways, it may be best that the people who are to be served also extend the call. Generally, a divine call has no time limit.

Because of the political, social and cultural differences that exist in the world, carrying out the ministry of Word and Sacrament may differ, but this does not destroy the unity of faith.

Essay #4: "Fellowship at Jesus' Feet: Challenges and Opportunities for Confessional Lutherans in the 21st Century"

The essay, "Fellowship at Jesus' Feet: Challenges and Opportunities for Confessional Lutherans in the 21st Century," was delivered by the Rev. Andreas Drechsler, Germany.

The doctrine of church fellowship has shaped the landscape of Lutheranism in America and the world, and it led to the formation of the CELC.

The dual purpose of studying about church fellowship is to keep the Gospel pure and to give glory to God by sharing the Gospel. God directs His Church to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Throughout the Bible this theme is vital—fellowship with believers and separation from errorists.

Proclaiming the pure Word and rightly administering the Sacraments are the clear marks of Christ's invisible Church in the world. We recognize fellow Christians by their fruits—faithfulness to God's Word and the Gospel, genuine Christian love for others and an objective confession of faith.

Unity in God's truth means confessing all that God has revealed in His Word, even though there can be differences in terminology and different levels of understanding of a doctrine. All public expressions of Christian fellowship call for the same measure of unity in all biblical doctrines. Fellowship grows out of a love for God and for our neighbor to give a clear testimony to the truth. Christians should not be afraid to put His Word into practice.

Since prayer is an act of worship to God, joint prayer requires agreement in all doctrines. Any practice that communicates agreement with the teachings of error is false fellowship. While Scripture says that believers do exist in erring churches, Christians cannot identify them nor practice fellowship with them. Love for God, for His truth and for the people around us motivate the way Christians practice fellowship in the unity of faith.

Essay #5: "The Distinctive Blessings in Which the Lutheran Church Rejoices and Lives"

The essay, "The Distinctive Blessings in Which the Lutheran Church Rejoices and Lives," was written by the Rev. Esequiel Sanchez

and was read by the Rev. Larry Schlomer.

Since all people were born dead in trespasses and sins, God gave us what we needed—salvation by Jesus and justification by faith in Jesus. This is the teaching on which the visible church stands or falls. Confessional Lutherans continue to proclaim the benefits of God’s justification: peace, reconciliation, the promise of heaven and forgiveness of sins. These blessings come to us as we enjoy and experience a solid system of interpreting the Bible, the God-breathed Word.

One blessing that Christians have is fellowship (Psalm 133:1), which is worked by the Holy Spirit through the use of God’s Word and Sacraments. The challenge is to preserve this divinely-worked unity (2 Timothy 1:13).

—Theodore G. Gullixson

LSQ

Book Review:

Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal

Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal. Robert C. Baker, general editor and Roland Cap Ehlke, editor. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2011. \$24.99.

Greek Stoic philosophers. Roman legislators. The Early Church Fathers. Thomas Aquinas. The concept of a common morality shared by all people—often called “natural law”—has a rich and storied past in Western philosophy

and Christian theology. However, for hundreds of years many Lutherans have either considered natural law an errant teaching of the medieval Church or they have simply ignored it—that is, until now.

Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal presents essays from sixteen contemporary Lutheran scholars, teachers, and pastors, each offering a fresh reappraisal of natural law within historic Lutheran teaching and practice. Thought-provoking questions and indices to the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions will help readers consider how this teaching may be applied to life today.¹

The subject of natural law is fascinating since we all have it within and it connects us the world over with all people. Natural law not only holds out the possibility of better understanding our brothers and sisters around the globe—their morality, laws, and governmental systems—but also aids in identifying with their hearts and building the bridge to the revealed law and on to the gospel. The essays in this volume are very scholarly and well-documented presentations of natural law with a focus on Lutheran thought. The reader soon senses the great challenge of the study of natural law, of arriving at objective, concrete information strictly from subjective examinations of natural law. The only sure measuring stick of natural law

¹ Back cover of *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal*

is the revealed law of holy Scripture, but at the point we turn to Scripture we abandon the strict study of natural law. In the end, natural law must be defined by revealed law to bring about God's greater saving purpose of preparing hearts to receive the only answer to the law's condemnation, the gospel.

Following is the list of the essays, along with a sample quote to offer a taste of each.

"A Lutheran Affirmation of the Natural Law" – Rev. Dr. Carl E. Braaten (ELCA)

This belief in natural law is the bedrock of the Constitution of the United States and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948. (5)

"What Is the Natural Law? Medieval Foundations and Luther's Appropriation" – Rev. Gifford A. Grobrien (LCMS)

Furthermore, as a scriptural doctrine, the natural law was defined as the law of God written on the hearts of all people (Romans 2:14-15), as the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31), and, less frequently, as the law of love (Romans 13:8-10; Luke 10:27). Because of the disruptive effects of sin, the natural law is illuminated by revelation in the Ten Commandments. (23)

"Luther's Pragmatic Appropriation of the Natural Law Tradition" – Dr. Thomas D. Pearson (ELCA)

Natural law does scant work throughout Luther's biblical and theological endeavors, but it does substantial, albeit often conflicted, work when his focus is on the domain of civil righteousness. (41-42)

"Natural Law in the Lutheran Confessions" – Rev. Prof. Roland Ziegler (LCMS)

However, sinful human reason impedes a true understanding of the law, because the sinful human being believes that the law can be fulfilled and that through it righteousness before God can be obtained. (76)

"Natural Law and the Orders of Creation" – Rev. Dr. Armin Wenz (SELK)

Parallel to the "means of grace," through which God the Spirit bestows on us our salvation in Christ, one could talk about "means of earthly bliss" through which God continues to create and preserve the very world into which His church and His Christians are sent to serve Him, their Creator and Savior. (85)

"Friedrich Julius Stahl: A Lutheran's Rejection of Natural Law" – Mr. Jacob Corzine (LCMS)

Each person must sufficiently limit his own freedom so

that he does not impose it on another. This is the foundational principle of rationalistic natural law. (104)

“After Barth: Three Lutheran Appraisals of Natural Law” – Rev. Prof. John T. Pless (LCMS)

Yet Wingren himself is unable to articulate what constitutes natural law. (133)

“Natural Law, Human Sexuality, and Forde’s ‘Acid Test’” – Rev. Robert C. Baker (LCMS)

Forde suggests that the focus should not be on the meaning of the words in Scripture, per se, but on how we are delivered from the experience of what those words might suggest. Here Forde appeals to hearers being “exegeted” by the Scripture. (148)

“Natural Law and the ELCA” – Prof. Marianne Howard Yoder (NALC) and Rev. Dr. J. Larry Yoder, STS (NALC)

The outcome in Minneapolis finally boiled down to emotion and its legitimizing foundation, the self. Each time there was lengthy debate those on the side of the tradition had the better arguments, but the revisionists have always had the advantage of emotional appeal, which evokes sympathetic response. (167)

“Natural Law in an African Context” – Rev. Dr. Carl E. Rockrohr (LCMS)

This essay presents one setting of African traditional beliefs to provide opportunity to identify natural law in African beliefs. Such an endeavor is not merely academic; it is an undertaking that appreciates another person as a fellow creature of God to whom is given natural law, just as the Scriptures have said. (180)

“The Natural Law of the Family” – Dr. Ryan C. MacPherson (ELS)

Rational analysis readily reveals that sexual intercourse between a man and a woman generally leads to babies; that babies need caregivers; that a woman carrying her child within her womb is the best person suited for nourishing the child at her breasts after birth; and that the man whose union with her conceived that child has a responsibility toward her during the vulnerable times of pregnancy, childbirth, and infant nourishment—if not also longer. (212)

“Natural Science, Natural Rights, and Natural Law: Abortion in Historical Perspective” – Rev. Dr. Korey D. Maas (LCMS)

That even relatively recent world history has evidenced such inhuman evils as chattel slavery and the Holocaust only

demonstrates once again that even substantial populations, even over extended periods, are in fact capable of willfully suppressing knowledge of moral truths that cannot otherwise be unknown. (232)

“Natural Law: A Basis for Christian-Muslim Discourse?” – Dr. Adam S. Francisco (LCMS)

But one must be realistic. Islam is an ideology, and ideologies ultimately do not allow for rational neutrality. Any shared ethical principles derived from reflection upon nature will, in the end, be interpreted by a Muslim in light of Islamic law. (245)

“According to Nature, *Adiaphora*, and Ordination” – Rev. Dr. Albert B. Collver III (LCMS)

The violation of the created order with the ordination of women corresponds with another violation—the ordination of practicing homosexuals. (262)

“A Way Forward? Continuing Conversations on Natural Law” – Mr. Matthew E. Cochran (LCMS)

If it is indeed a worthy goal to help those caught up in the current moral conundrum, then we cannot afford to neglect natural law. (281)

Natural Law claims to be a new beginning, after a long hiatus, of Lutheran study of natural law. If

natural law is an objective, concrete, absolute reality, “the righteousness of God” (law) to be distinguished from “the righteousness from God” (gospel), the law of love from a God who “is love,” then theoretically it should not matter who does the study. Lutheran or other, everyone by nature has this concrete law. But God’s law has been obscured by sin. To what extent it has been clouded, darkened, obliterated, rejected, and turned against itself as its very opposite, and what residue remains, is a question of unending debate, and varies from one individual, family, or society to another depending upon their exposure to religion (true or false) and depraved behavior, laws, and norms.

This book honestly acknowledges its own dilemma and delicate vulnerability. To study natural law in the light of revealed law will result in a presentation of Scripture alone. To separate the study from Scripture is to make the perilous jump to the subjective and depraved to search for something of truth, relying upon reason and to some extent emotion, and arriving finally upon relativism. Natural law and revealed law must finally touch.

In the political realm, while it is often not appropriate or beneficial to appeal to Scripture, appeals to natural law are essential. In evangelism the natural law serves as common ground to identify with a fellow human being and demonstrate the need for salvation, but the subject must then progress to the revealed law and the gospel. That is the great challenge!

This book exhaustively examines the expressions of natural law from

theologians, philosophers, etc. of the distant past, attempting to analyze who and what school of thought influenced them. My life is not long enough to sort out and identify with all of the people and thought processes evaluated. There is a section of study questions in the back of the book. It, along with the book itself, is of benefit for the intellectual reader. I would not recommend this book to the average layperson. Even a study of it at an ELS winkel would be challenging.

The essay, "Natural Law in an African Context," is an intriguing comparison of natural law similarities between the Christian and the heathen, which is essential for identifying with unbelievers. Though beyond the purpose of the article or book, I hope that pagan who shares a bit of my heart (law) has been or will be brought to share that which occupies the greater part of my heart (gospel).

The essay, "Natural Law and the ELCA," clearly articulates natural law. Whether or not it was intended, it demonstrates powerfully that one will use natural law in the church to determine doctrine to one's own peril. In Christ's Church all that is appropriate is, "Thus saith the Lord!"

The essay "The Natural Law of the Family" by Ryan C. MacPherson was particularly engaging as he described in heartfelt (natural law) terms the building block of earthly society.

I must admit that while wading through this extensive work, I wondered if it would be easier to simply gather sixteen four-year-olds from diverse cultures, interview them

on what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad, and document the results. Is a scholarly investigation and evaluation of natural law a contradiction in terms? Natural law exists very well apart from intellectual study. The baby crying to be fed, the beaten-up child in the principal's office, the widow mourning at the grave of her husband, and the citizens of a recession-afflicted nation all appeal to natural law.

I do recommend this book for study by our pastors and intellectual lay people. I have gained from it a clearer understanding of natural law. One challenge is to understand the limitations of natural law, where it is helpless and what it cannot do. Another challenge is the beginning of a study of the appropriate place natural law can serve. This book meets both these challenges. Obviously more work in this vast field of God's holy will, revealed to mankind but obscured by the fall into sin, should be done. As this study has already traversed millennia, it will continue until the end of time as only a beginning, since the proper function of natural law is always only a beginning. By God's grace and the work of his Spirit, natural law opens the door to the revealed law and then the saving gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

– Joel M. Willitz

Book Review: *Telling the Next Generation*

Telling the Next Generation: The Evangelical Lutheran Synod's Vision for Christian Education, 1918-2011 and Beyond. Ryan C. MacPherson, Paul G. Madson, Peter M. Anthony, editors. Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 2011. \$23.95.

For over nine decades pastors, teachers, professors, parents, and other faithful lay people have written about, promoted, supported financially, and otherwise dedicated themselves to the work of instructing the next generation in the saving truth of the Gospel, the Word of God. The collection of essays in *Telling the Next Generation* brings to us this history in written form, bringing to our attention the fact that this divinely ordained work is one which is needed now just as it has been in bygone years. It is the history of a Lutheran church body, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, seeing the need for such instruction, desiring to be faithful to that work, and striving to achieve it despite the opposition of devil, world, and flesh.

For those who have grown up in the ELS many of the names of the essayists in this collection will be familiar: Christian Moldstad, Norman A. Madson, Sr., Theodore A. Aaberg, Alfred Fremder, Milton Tweit, Sigurd C. Ylvisaker, Milton Otto, and Bjarne Teigen. For those unfamiliar with the ELS, here you have an introduction to the synod centered on instruction in the Christian faith. These are pastors and theologians,

professors and presidents, who shaped the ELS through the early and middle years of its existence. In many ways reading the essays of these men gives insight into the goals and desires of those who left the Norwegian Lutheran merger of 1917 and set out to continue in the old paths of scriptural truth without compromising that truth with human opinion.

One of the strengths of this volume is the fact that it is more than a collection of theological essays. Included are a number of other writings more popular in style: sermons, articles from *The Sentinel*, documents from Bethany Lutheran College, graduation addresses, etc. Through these various sources one learns that the commitment to the education of the next generation was not mere theory, but was to be implemented in the various spheres in which education takes place: home, elementary and secondary schools, college, and seminary.

The challenges faced during those decades of the 20th century will sound familiar to those charged with the instruction of the young in these early years of the 21st century. In 1974 Pastor Roger Dale wrote, "Our culture is in a state of radical change as a result of technology, affluence, mobility, and the declining influence of Christianity" (47). In the midst of the trying days of WWII (1943) Professor Carl S. Meyer wrote, "But there is another warfare, grimmer in its aspects and more momentous in its outcomes... that is the warfare against the wicked one and the wicked world. It is one of the glories of this warfare that young men and young women,

strong, abiding in the Word of God, overcome the wicked foe" (106). Dr. Alfred Fremder in 1952 described why Lutheran elementary schools are so necessary: "My children—and yours—will have to face a relentless, horrible, real foe, not a dummy scarecrow. It will not be a mock battle. Cream puffs and custard pies will not suffice. Deadly weapons are needed to conquer a deadly foe" (125).

It was understood that the Word of God is that which provides the protection needed against the enemies of the soul, for by that Word is provided the power of God for salvation, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That reliance upon the Gospel, the work of the Son of God, His holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death, shines through the variety of writings, shines through the decades, with the confession that finally any fruits of instruction in the Christian faith are by God's strength alone, and none of ours.

This book deserves to be read along with the other historical surveys of the ELS: *Grace for Grace, Faith of Our Fathers, A City Set on a Hill, and Built on the Rock*. Read it not only as a history, but as a source of encouragement and exhortation, of examples of the commitment to the faithful instruction of the next generation still needed in our own day. Despite the advances of technology, the enemies of the soul have not changed over the past century. It remains incumbent upon faithful parents, pastors, teachers, professors, and the church at large to see to it that the young hear the Word of God, are taught it with diligence, with the desire for

excellence in all the various academic disciplines, that heart and mind and soul are edified. In this way the children are trained up in the way they should go.

If it is faith we need, may God grant us faith in great measure. If we need to learn obedience, then may God grant obedience to His sacred bidding. If it is the opening of our eyes to the plight of our youth and the need of our church, then may God mercifully open our eyes and let us see our mission also here. And may the same gracious God grant us as parents and as a church the Christian conviction and courage to do as He so clearly commands, and the faith to receive at His bounteous hand the blessing He so lovingly has promised. (S. C. Ylvisaker, 173)

— Thomas L. Rank

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