

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY



VOLUME 54 • NUMBER 4
DECEMBER 2014

Lutheran Spirituality and the Pastor

**One Via or Another? An Overview of
Luther and the Later Middle Ages**

The Early Life of Milton H.A. Otto

Milton Otto Tribute

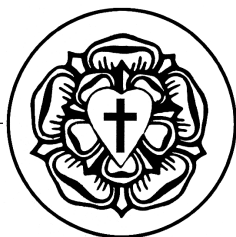
Milton Otto Remembrance

The Festival Exordium: An Oral Tradition

**The 875th Anniversary of the Death of
Otto von Bamberg (1060-1139)**

Book Review and Index

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The journal of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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Foreword

LSQ Vol. 54, No. 4 (December 2014)

THE HEART OF LUTHERAN SPIRITUALITY is found in Luther's famous axiom *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio* (prayer, meditation, and affliction). The one who has been declared righteous through faith in Christ the crucified and who has died and rose in Baptism will, as the psalmist says, "delight ... in the Law of the Lord and in His Law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2). He will read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Word. Through the Word and Sacraments the entire Trinity makes its dwelling in us and we have union and communion with the divine. When our faith-life is so formed, nourished, and strengthened, we will be a living epistle of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:1–3) and a little Christ to those around us. This truth is explicated in the essay "Lutheran Spirituality and the Pastor."

As the church prepares to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation it is necessary that we see Martin Luther not as a brilliantly bright and explosive firework that suddenly appeared in an otherwise dark and dreary sky, but perhaps better as the brightest and most intense light in a sky filled with many other lights. In the essay entitled "One Via or Another? An Overview of Luther and the Later Middle Ages," the Rev. Thomas Rank considers the influence of the late medieval era on Martin Luther. The Rev. Rank is pastor of Scarville and Center Lutheran Churches in Scarville, Iowa.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Milton H. Otto (1914–1982). Milton Otto was born in Cherokee County, Iowa,

and baptized in infancy at Hanover Lutheran Church. He prepared for the pastoral ministry and graduated from Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis, Missouri, in 1940. After vicaring at Princeton, Minnesota, and teaching at Eau Claire, Wisconsin he was called as pastor of English Lutheran Church, Cottonwood, Minnesota, and later he was called to the Saude–Jerico Parish of Lawler, Iowa. He served as president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod from 1954 until 1957 during the difficult years of the severance of fellowship with the LCMS. During his years at the seminary, Professor Otto taught the core classes of the seminary and was the dean. He is remembered for his pastoral care and evangelical heart. The spirit of a *Seelsorger* (one who cares for souls) was evidenced in his teaching and his faith-life. His evangelical imprint is to be found on a whole generation of ELS pastors. Included in this issue of the *Quarterly* are a number of articles commemorating the life of Milton H. Otto.

The rubric for the sermon in Rite One of the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* states, “On festival days the following order may be observed. [The pastor] may introduce the sermon with a prayer for the day. Before reading the text he shall deliver an exhortation (exordium) explaining the festival. The congregation shall sing the festival verse or hymn. The usual order shall then follow.” In his essay “The Festival Exordium, An Oral Tradition,” the Rev. Glenn Obenberger has gathered considerable information concerning the use of the exordium, which is extremely valuable for understanding this Scandinavian Lutheran festival tradition. The Rev. Obenberger is pastor of Parkland Lutheran Church, Tacoma, Washington, and vice-president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Also included in this *Quarterly* are a brief article concerning the 875th anniversary of the death of Otto von Bamberg, the apostle to Pomerania, and a review of the book *Lutheran Bible Companion* edited by Edward A. Engelbrecht. It was reviewed by Prof. Michael Smith.

– GRS

Lutheran Spirituality and the Pastor

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The Devotional Writers and Lutheran Spirituality

THE HEART OF LUTHERAN SPIRITUALITY is found in Luther's famous axiom *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio* (prayer, meditation, and affliction). The one who has been declared righteous through faith in Christ the crucified and who has died and rose in Baptism will, as the psalmist says, "delight ... in the Law of the Lord and in His Law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2). He will read, mark, learn, and take the Word to heart. Luther writes concerning meditation on the biblical truths in the preface of the Large Catechism, "In such reading, conversation, and meditation the Holy Spirit is present and bestows ever new and greater light and devotion, so that it tastes better and better and is digested, as Christ also promises in Matthew 18[:20]."¹ Through the Word and Sacraments the entire Trinity makes its dwelling in us and we have union and communion with the divine and are conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29; Colossians 3:10). When our faith-life is so formed, nourished, and strengthened, we will be a living epistle of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:1–3) and a little Christ to those around us.

¹ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 381.

History of Lutheran Spirituality

Luther was certainly a devotional writer. This is seen in volumes 42 and 43 of the American Edition of *Luther's Works*. He intended his Catechism to be a simple outline of devotion.² However, when we speak of the Lutheran devotional writers we usually think in terms of the writers of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Also following this period there were important Lutheran devotional writers like Walther, Loehe, and Laache to name a few.

The Lutheran devotional writers stood firmly in the fold of Lutheran orthodoxy and the seventeenth-century dogmatists. They confessed the central article of the faith, which is the material principle of the Evangelical Lutheran Church—justification by faith alone without the deeds of the law. A person is justified or declared righteous not by anything he does or accomplishes but alone through the imputed righteousness of Christ that is ours by faith. On the basis of Christ's sacrifice and His perfect keeping of the law in our place (Galatians 3:13; Romans 5:18–19), God does not impute (count or reckon) sin but declares the whole world righteous or innocent. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Corinthians 5:19; see also Romans 4:5; Romans 5:18; Romans 3:23–24). This verdict of "not guilty" the Holy Ghost brings to the individual through the means of grace and is obtained by faith (Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 12:3).

Justification and Devotional Literature

At the same time, these writers were a part of the devotional movement that swept the Lutheran lands in the seventeenth century as a result of the ravages of the Thirty Years' War and a general decline in Christian life and morals.

German literature from this period, especially lyric poetry written between 1600 and 1720, is characterized by a consciousness of human suffering and the fragility of earthly existence. This awareness prompted contrary impulses, no doubt aroused by the hardships resulting from the Thirty Years' War. There were many literary comments about the vanity of all worldly

² LW 54:17; LW 43:187–211; see Robert Kolb, ed., *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture, 1550–1675* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 238ff.

endeavors, often accompanied by an advocacy of ascetic self-restraint and interest in mystical religiosity.³

This movement promoted a practice of piety which focused on an intimate union between the heart of Christ and the heart of each faithful Christian. Thus the devotional writers often used the personal pronoun *ich* (I) in their writings, rather than *wir* (we). They defended the doctrine of the inerrant Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, but in addition they highlighted the truth that Jesus comes to dwell in the Christian, providing consolation in daily struggles and new strength to grow in the Christ-like life. Unlike the later Pietists who overemphasized sanctification and devalued the means of grace, the devotional writers held that the means of grace, the liturgy, personal devotions, and piety went hand-in-hand. These writers are not to be confused with the Pietists whose founder was Spener (1635–1705). Their devotional literature and hymns were used in the practice of Lutheran spirituality and spiritual formation.⁴ While terms like this were not used, the devotional writers made considerable use of piety (*pietas*, *Frömmigkeit*) and godliness (*Gottseligkeit*). This devotional literature (*Erbauungsliteratur*) was to encourage proper meditation on the Word and contemplation of the loving Savior **through reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting the Word, as the ancient collect states**. Both clergy and laypeople alike were to prepare themselves for difficult times through sustained meditation on Scripture. Through this process the Word said or sung was to be brought from the mind to the heart, touching one's whole being with the comforting love of Christ.

Among the early Lutheran devotional writers were Johann Habermann (1516–1590), known for his prayer book;⁵ Philipp Nicolai

³ Eric Lund, ed., *Seventeenth-Century Lutheran Meditations and Hymns* (New York: Paulist Press, 2011), 5.

⁴ This refers to the ways in which our faith-life is formed, nourished, and strengthened.

⁵ Johann Habermann (Avenarius, 1516–1590) was born in Eger, Bohemia (Sudetenland), modern-day Cheb in the Czech Republic. He was a pastor in various places in Saxony and later became a professor at Jena and then at Wittenberg. His interest was Hebrew and Old Testament studies. However, he is best known for his widely used prayer book, *Christliches Gebetbuch*, published at Wittenberg in 1567. Habermann gives themes for daily prayer for each day of the week and for special occasions. His prayers are mainly a paraphrase of the Psalms and other sections of Scripture. His prayer book went through many editions. Thus the phrase “taking one's Habermann” came to mean taking one's prayer book for prayer (“Seinen Habermann zur Hand nehmen, hieß so viel wie beten.” See Friedrich Kantzenbach, *Orthodoxie und Pietismus* [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 1966], 24).

(1556–1608), the author of the king and queen of chorales (*Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* and *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern*); and Johann Arndt (1555–1621), the writer of *True Christianity*, in the west and north of Germany; Martin Moller (1547–1606) at Görlitz an der Oder;⁶ Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), who was also the great Lutheran dogmatician; far to the east Valerius Herberger (1562–1627) at Fraustadt, Posen, modern-day Wschowa, Poland;⁷ Christian Scriver (1629–1693),

⁶ Martin Moller (1547–1606) was born at Leissnitz (Kropstädt) near Wittenberg where he later studied. In 1568 he was called to be the cantor at Lemberg in Schlesien. In 1572, he was ordained in Wittenberg and became the pastor at Kesselsdorf near Lemberg, and in 1575 pastor at Sprottau. He assumed the position of *pastor primarius* at Görlitz (on the Oder River) in 1600. Here he lost his eyesight in 1605 but actively continued to discharge his pastoral duties until his death on March 2, 1606. He was the author of the well-known *Praxis evangelica*, a practical and popular exposition of the pericopal texts for the Sundays of the church year and festival days. His other famous writing was *Preparing for Death* in 1593 (*Handbüchlein zur Vorbereitung auf den Tod oder Heilige Sterbekunst*). “He endeared himself to his generation, and to all generations of men since, especially by his book on ‘the holy art of dying.’ A book of this kind can never outgrow its usefulness in the Christian Church. The sad subject with which it deals is an ever-present reality with mortal men. And Moller is a most excellent companion to the dying Christian” (*Theological Quarterly* XIV, no. 4 [October 1910]: 254–255).

⁷ Valerius Herberger (1562–1627) was born on April 21, 1562, at Fraustadt, Posen, modern-day Wschowa, Poland. He studied at Frankfurt an der Oder and at Leipzig. He returned to his hometown where he became a teacher in 1584, deacon in 1590, and finally pastor in 1599. In 1604 his congregation at Fraustadt was compelled by King Sigismund III to leave its beautiful large church to make room for a small group of Roman Catholics. By Christmastime, Herberger had obtained another place of worship, and appropriately called this house of worship “*Kripplein Christi*” (the little manger of Jesus), and he became known as the “*Prediger am Kripplein Christi*.” Herberger and his parish suffered many trials and tribulations in the Thirty Years’ War and as a result of various epidemics of the time. He died May 18, 1627.

Herberger was one of the most outstanding preachers in his day. Because of his evangelical sermons he was called “*Jesusprediger*.” The Romanists nicknamed him “The little Luther.” His sermons remind one of the lively comforting style of Luther. Herberger published many writings, predominantly sermon books: *Evangelische Herzpostille*, *Epistolische Herzpostille*, *Geistliche Trauerbinden*, and *Himmlisches Jerusalem*. One of his largest writings was *Magnalia Dei*, a running commentary on the Scriptures (recently translated with the title *The Great Works of God*). He also wrote the hymn *Farewell I Gladly Bid Thee* (*Valet will ich dir geben*) which is an acrostic on his given name.

well-loved in Scandinavia;⁸ and Paul Gerhardt (1607–1676), the great Lutheran hymnwriter.⁹

Paul Gerhardt is probably the best known of the seventeenth-century devotional writers among orthodox Lutherans today. Gerhardt suffered continual persecution under Prussian domination for his confessional Lutheran stand.¹⁰ To his orthodox biblical Lutheran doctrine Gerhardt fused the devotional emphasis of Johann Arndt, Johann Gerhard, and the other devotional writers. Seeing his parishioners suffering great losses through terror, disease, and hunger in the wake of the Thirty Years' War, Gerhardt, as Arndt and others before him, saw his decisive task to bring spiritual renewal. This he did through his hymns. When one reads the devotional writings of Gerhard and Arndt and the hymns and sermons of Paul Gerhardt, one finds a warm piety and the power of God unto salvation which touches the heart. The Christian needs a

⁸ Christian Scriver (1629–1693), whose pseudonym was Gotthold, was born at Rendsburg in Schleswig-Holstein. He was pastor at Magdeburg and later court preacher (*Oberhofprediger*) at Quedlinburg. He was once asked by the wife of Charles XI of Sweden to come to Stockholm and be the court preacher. As one of life's more unfortunate husbands and fathers he married four times and was survived by only one of his fourteen children. He desired to live an ordered and regulated Christian life of faith.

It was his attempt to give his Magdeburg parishioners—each of whom, it was said, he knew by name—a regulated life of prayer and pastoral care. Scriver certainly tried to be a model with a precision which bordered on the pedantic: six hours' sleep; four hours for prayer, reading the Bible and other devotional books and reflection thereon; two hours only for meals; two hours for pleasure, under which he included performing church music and charity; nine hours of official duties; and one hour in the morning or at night to reflect on death. The last of which, he said was the most difficult of all to get accustomed to. (Nicholas Hope, *German and Scandinavian Protestantism 1700–1918* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995], 29)

Scriver produced a staggering amount of devotional literature, employing many pictures from nature and materials from the Church Fathers. His most famous works are *Seelen-Schatz and Evangelien-Predigten*. His sermon for Maundy Thursday is an excellent sermon on the Lord's Supper. His literature was well loved in Scandinavia.

⁹ There were other major Lutheran hymnwriters. There was Nicolaus Herman (1480–1561) in Joachimstal; Josua Stegmann (1588–1632); Johann Heermann (1585–1647) in Schlesien; Martin Rinckart (1586–1649) with his "Now Thank We All Our God"; Johann von Rist (1607–1667); Sigismund von Birken (1626–1681); Thomas Kingo (1634–1703), the great Danish hymnwriter; and the Lutheran composer Johann Crüger (1598–1662). During this time the Saxon Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, was producing some of the most magnificent church music of all times. Lutheran liturgical life was seen in all its splendor and glory in Leipzig and Electoral Saxony. Lutheran church architecture reached its apex in the construction of the Frauenkirche of Dresden in 1734.

¹⁰ Gaylin R. Schmeling, "Paul Gerhardt: Pastor and Theologian," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (March 2008).

personal relationship with the Savior through the means of grace. This literature was intended to nourish and strengthen believers through the Gospel, encouraging repentance and spiritual renewal and formation. One of the predominant themes of Lutheran Spirituality is **Union and Communion with God through the life-giving Word and the blessed Sacraments.**

The Arndt and Gerhardt Connection

In many ways Gerhardt and the other devotional writers follow in the footsteps of Johann Arndt (1555–1621). Arndt was the most influential devotional author that Lutheranism produced. He was called as pastor in Badeborn, Anhalt in 1583. In 1590, when Anhalt faced the Second Reformation, he was deposed for insisting on the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the right to use the baptismal exorcism. After this he served as pastor in Quedlinburg, where he influenced Johann Gerhard; in Braunschweig, the city of Chemnitz; and in Eisleben. His final position was superintendent in Celle. His most important work was *True Christianity* (*Sechs Bücher vom wahren Christentum*). It was one of the early German Lutheran devotional books for the common people. Next to the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis it is the most widely circulated devotional book in Christendom. When our forefathers came to this country they brought the Bible, the catechism, the hymnbook, and *True Christianity*.

The connection between Arndt and Gerhardt is evident in Gerhardt's use of the prayers in Arndt's *Paradiesgärtlein* as the basis for a number of his hymns.¹¹ He used devotional motifs common to Arndt and the other devotional writers such as the creation, nuptial, and wounded side motifs. The relationship between the two is especially seen in his use of Bernardian mysticism and the mystical union. Gerhardt's contemplation of the cross in Bernardian mystical form is seen in the hymn "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" (ELH 334).

¹¹ Otto Schulz, *Paul Gerhardts Geistliche Andachten in hundert und zwanzig Liedern* (Berlin: Nicolaischen Buchhandlung, 1842), 125–135. Here five hymns are listed that are based on prayers from Arndt's *Paradiesgärtlein*. See also Elke Axmacher, *Johann Arndt und Paul Gerhardt* (Tübingen: Francke Verlag, 2001), 233–238.

*Baptism, the Foundation of Lutheran Spirituality**Dying and Rising in Baptism*

Baptism is the source of Lutheran spirituality. Through Baptism we are united with Christ. We are in Christ, incorporated into His body, the church, and He abides in us as the vine and the branches (John 15:5). Romans 6 expands upon and enlarges on what it means to be in Christ. Union with Christ is a union with Him in the saving events of His history, His dying and rising again. To be in Christ means to be united with His death and resurrection:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through Baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. (Romans 6:3–13)

Jesus' Baptism culminated in His death and resurrection, through which He fulfilled all righteousness, obtaining righteousness for all by His holy life in our place and by His sacrificial death. Jesus spoke of His suffering and death as His Baptism (Luke 12:48–50; Mark 10:38–39). Christ's Baptism, culminating in His death and resurrection, is the basis for our Baptism so that in it we participate in Christ's death and resurrection, dying to sin and rising to new life.

Baptism then is not only a watery womb (John 3:5; Titus 3:5), but as St. Paul indicates it is also our watery tomb. Here our sinful nature inherited from Adam began to die, which will reach its climax in our physical death when our sinful nature will be no more. In Baptism we were united with Christ and His cross. Our old sinful flesh was nailed to the cross, crucified with Him, and we died to sin. We were crucified through the killing word of the Law. We were buried with Christ in the tomb. Sinners must die; that is what we have earned from our sin (Romans 6:23). Our sinful flesh was killed; it began to die. Therefore, sin no longer has power or domination over us. We died the death we were to die and we were declared righteous because Christ's perfect righteousness was counted as ours by faith. We were justified or pronounced innocent, not on the basis of anything we did, for we were dead, but on the basis of Christ's work. Because we have participated in the death of Christ through Baptism, we are freed from sin and delivered from death and the devil (Romans 6:7). All our sins were washed into the depths of the sea through Jesus' blood (Micah 7:19).

As Jesus arose triumphant that first Easter morning, so we arose to new life in Baptism by the power of Christ's resurrection (Romans 4:5; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21). We participated in His resurrection. The forgiving word of Christ's cross and resurrection in Baptism, that declaration of innocence, made us arise. Faith in Christ's cross was created in our hearts and we were given resurrection power so that we can live resurrection lives, victory lives free from Satan's tyranny. Therefore, our Baptism gives us all the blessings of Christ's dying and rising again, and the absolute certainty of salvation.¹²

Baptism, Our Holy Week Event

Baptism is our Holy Week event. As Jesus made His last journey to Jerusalem with His disciples where He faced His great passion, St. Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). That is exactly what Baptism is for us. We go with Him that we may die with Him. It is our Good Friday and Easter. In our Baptism we are

¹² This simple illustration may help clarify St. Paul's point in Romans 6. You take an apple and put it in a jar. Now place the jar on the table. Where is the apple? It is in the jar and, therefore, on the table. Wherever the jar is there the apple will be. If you bury the jar, you bury the apple. If you unearth the jar, the apple is likewise unearthed. What is true of the jar is true of the apple in it. In the same way, through Baptism we are united with the body of Christ. We are in Christ, so that whatever Christ has experienced is counted as happening to us. We are merged into Christ; therefore, we died with Him and rose again.

united with His death and now His death is our death. Good Friday's cross is our cross and our sinful nature is crucified with Him. His crucifixion is our crucifixion of the flesh. His death and burial is our death to sin. Through Baptism, Good Friday is an event in our lives. We go with Him that we may die with Him.

St. Paul writes to the Galatian Christians, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). In Baptism we are crucified to the sinful world around us and the world to us. We die to this world. This means a radical break with the sphere of Satan's domination. It means breaking with life as it is known, leaving the past behind. It means being beyond the reach of the Law and its demands, escaping the unpaid debts of sin. All debts were blotted out through Christ's death which is ours. Think of the great significance of receiving the sign of the cross in Baptism. We are united with the cross of the Crucified and we are crucified to the world. We are in this world, but not of this world, not a part of it, for we are in Christ.

Baptism is also our Easter, our resurrection. Easter is not only something wonderful that happened to Jesus. United with Him, His resurrection is our resurrection. In Baptism we begin to die to our sinful nature which will reach its completion in our physical death. If we die with Him, then we will also live with Him (2 Timothy 2:11-12; Romans 6:8). Thus in Baptism we arise with Jesus to new life by the power of Christ's resurrection (Romans 6:4-5). New resurrection life is not something we must wait for until the last day. Through the power of Christ's resurrection new life is instilled in us in the baptismal waters, for trust in Christ as our Savior is created in us. This is our resurrection life right now. This baptismal resurrection life, nourished through the means of grace, will culminate in the resurrection of our bodies on the last day.

Baptism is designated the "first resurrection" in Revelation because here we begin to arise from the dead. "Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection" (Revelation 20:6). Over those who share in this baptismal resurrection, the second death, which is eternal death in hell, has no power. They will be priests of God and Christ forever.

To impress upon new Christians the connection between Baptism and Christ's death and resurrection, the Ancient Church often performed Baptisms on Easter Eve. Those baptized were buried with

Christ on the day that Jesus laid in the tomb. Then as He arose on Easter, Easter was the first day of their new life in Christ.

The Daily Use of Baptism

Many people value Baptism for their children and realize that Baptism was important for them when they were a child. Yet, they have a difficult time seeing any value in Baptism for daily life. My Baptism was a long time ago: what is it doing for me right now? Baptism is the entrance into the Christian life. But, once we are Christians, once we are believers, is there any continual use of Baptism in our lives? The answer is a definite yes! Baptism is not merely a one-time occurrence in the past without any real meaning for the here and now. It has real value each and every day of our lives.

Baptism is for life. It is not enough to receive it; we will also live it. Each day we need to continue the dying and rising that began in Baptism. Our sinful flesh died in Baptism, but it does not stay dead. It must be daily put to death anew. Through Christ's resurrection, Baptism is the power source of our new life, our resurrection life right now, so that we can daily crucify the flesh and arise to new life. This means we will daily put off the old man which is the sinful nature with which we were born, and we will put on the new man, the new life in Christ. Baptism makes possible this daily putting off and putting on which St. Paul urges. "Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires ... and ... put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22–24).¹³

We die daily to the sinful flesh by returning to our Baptism in true repentance and faith. Rather than pampering the flesh saying, "Our sins aren't really so bad; we are decent people," we will nail our flesh back on the cross, realizing in sorrow that our sins caused the Lord's great passion. Our sins caused His terrible wounds and nailed Him to the tree. We will not indulge our sinful flesh with our favorite sins such as hatred, covetousness, greed, pride, drunkenness, and gluttony. Rather, we

¹³ The basic paradigm for counseling and for all Christian life is the return to Baptism by putting off sinful habits and by putting on a new spiritual life as St. Paul points out in Ephesians 4:22–25. For example, if an individual's sin is pornography, in confession he will put off the old. He will confess the sin and be rid of all pornographic literature in his possession. Then through absolution he receives the full forgiveness of Christ and the new man is strengthened and arises, putting on the new life. This means that he will avoid those places and those things which will lead him into pornography and he will be strengthened through the Word and Sacraments so that he can continue to resist such cravings.

will crucify the flesh by daily confessing our sins in true sorrow, burying them in Baptism with Christ in the tomb. Then through the Word of absolution given us in Baptism and through the nourishment of the Word and Supper, our new resurrection life will come forth stronger to live a more Christ-like life.

We will daily return to our Baptism by confessing our sins in heartfelt sorrow. In this way we throw those sins back into the baptismal water, drowning our old sinful nature. Then the new life will come forth strengthened, desiring to live a God-pleasing life. This is the proper use of Baptism of which Luther speaks when he writes in the Small Catechism, "Such baptizing with water means that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts; and that a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

All this means that the power of Christ's resurrection is present for our lives right now. Now we don't have to be miserable slaves of Satan doing his every bidding ending in eternal death. Christ's resurrection gives us the strength to face all the conflicts and problems of life with a firm confidence in Him as our Savior. It gives us the power to overcome and obtain the victory. That power comes to us as we daily return to our Baptism where we die with Him and again arise with Him, and then nourish that resurrection life through the life-giving Word and the Holy Supper of His body and blood. This is our daily use of Baptism.¹⁴

Mysticism and Mystical Union

When faith in the Savior is worked in the heart by the Spirit through the means of grace, an individual is totally forgiven on the basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice and he stands justified before God. At the same time new spiritual life is worked, our new man is created, and the entire Trinity makes its dwelling in us (John 14:17, 23-24).¹⁵ This indwelling of the Holy Trinity is referred to as the mystical union (*unio mystica*). The mystical union is the union between God and justified man wherein the Holy Trinity dwells in the believer substantially and operates in the same by His gracious presence. Thus the believer has union and communion with God, partaking in the divine (2 Peter 1:4).

¹⁴ See Gaylin R. Schmeling, *Baptism: My Adoption into God's Family* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999), 95-102.

¹⁵ John 15:5-7, 17:23; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 3:17-19; 1 Corinthians 6:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:16.

This union is effected by God Himself through the means of grace, Word and Sacrament.

The doctrine of the mystical union as employed by the devotional writers is seen by some as a perversion of Lutheran doctrine and the advent of Pietism. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our Lutheran Confessions speak of the gracious indwelling of the Trinity by faith in the elect who have been justified through the imputation of Christ's righteousness.¹⁶ Philipp Nicolai, the great Lutheran hymn writer and preacher, made considerable use of this doctrine in providing comfort for Christians:

Above all this, the fact that God out of great love dwells and rests in His elect and again that they rest tenderly and sweetly in Him and eternally rejoice, this indwelling of God in His elect produces great benefits and much heavenly fruit as Christ says: He who remains in me and I in him the same brings forth much fruit. [*Ueber dies alles, dass Gott aus grosser Liebe in seinen Auserwählten wohnt und ruht, und sie hinwiederum sanft und lieblich in ihm ruhen und sich ewiglich erfreuen, schafft diese Einwohnung Gottes in seinen Heiligen auch grossen Nutzen and viel himmlische Früchte, wie Christus sagt: Wer in mir bleibt, und ich in ihm, der bringt viel Früchte.*]¹⁷

The following is a definition of the mystical union from the nephew of Johann Gerhard, Johann Quenstedt (1617–1688), the dogmatician known as the librarian of Wittenberg:

The mystical union is the real and most intimate conjunction of the substance of the Holy Trinity and the God-man Christ with

¹⁶ To be sure, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who is the eternal and essential righteousness, dwells through faith in the elect, who have become righteous through Christ and are reconciled with God. (For all Christians are temples of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who moves them to act properly.) However, this indwelling of God is not the righteousness of faith, which St. Paul treats (Rom. 1:17; 3:5, 22, 25; 2 Cor. 5:21) and calls *iustitia Dei* (that is, the righteousness of God), for the sake of which we are pronounced righteous before God. Rather this indwelling is a result of the righteousness of faith which proceeds it, and this righteousness (of faith) is nothing else than the forgiveness of sins and the acceptance of poor sinners by grace, only because of Christ's obedience and merit. (FC SD III, 54, Kolb–Wengert, 571–572; see also Luther, WA 20:229, WA 40^{II}:421 [LW 12:377], 40^I:233 [LW 26:132], 40^I:283 [LW 26:167], 40^I:285,286 [LW 26:168].)

¹⁷ Philipp Nicolai, *Freudenspiegel des ewigen Lebens*, ed. Rudolf Eckart (Elberfeld: Verlag des Lutherischen Büchervereins, 1909), 67.

the substance of believers, effected by God Himself through the Gospel, the Sacraments, and faith, by which, through a special approximation of His essence, and by a gracious operation, He is in them, just as also believers are in Him; that, by a mutual and reciprocal immanence they may partake of His vivifying power and all His mercies, become assured of the grace of God and eternal salvation, and preserve unity in the faith and love with the other members of His mystical body.¹⁸

Calov (1612–1686), considered by some the fourth in the series of Lutheranism’s most preeminent theologians following Luther, Chemnitz, and Gerhard (but others would prefer Quenstedt in this position), has this to say about the mystical union:

The form (of the mystical union) is a union (*conjunctio*) with God, not relative but true, not purely extrinsic but intrinsic, not through a bare positioning but through an intimate immanence, not only the operation of grace alone but likewise the approximation of the divine substance to the faithful with a mystical *περιχωρήσει*, nearer nevertheless to a commixture or an essential transformation of man.¹⁹

Therefore we see that the mystical union was not an innovation of Arndt though definitely taught by him,²⁰ but rather it is a scriptural doctrine embraced by all the Lutheran fathers. One of the places that Paul Gerhardt uses the comforting doctrine of the mystical union is in his Christmas hymn, “I Stand Beside Thy Manger Here”:

¹⁸ Quenstedt, *Theologia* III, 622; quoted in Heinrich Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1899), 482.

¹⁹ Calov, *Theologia Positiva*. Cap. VIII. Thes. III. 503, as quoted in Timothy Schmeling, “Life in Christ: The Unio Mystica and its Relation to Theosis” (M.Div. thesis, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, 2003), 7. See also Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, Vol. III, trans. James Langebartels (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 385–393, and Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 86.

²⁰ Johann Arndt, *Sechs Bücher vom wahren Christenthum* (Stuttgart: J.F. Steinkopf), II:6, 216–219.

This only, Lord, I humbly pray,
 O grant it, dearest Savior,
 That Thou wouldst dwell in me this day
 And here abide forever.
 So let me be Thy cradle blest.
 Come! Come, within my heart to rest,
 My precious Joy and Treasure!
 (ELH 129:5)²¹

Proper and Improper Mysticism

The biblical doctrine of the mystical union as taught by the devotional writers is not to be confused with the false mysticism of the enthusiasts and the pagan world. In the mystical union the distinction between the divine and human is not confused. The soul of man is not absorbed into the divine. Rather the Lutheran theologians explicate the mystical union using the analogy of the personal union in Christ. As the human and the divine in Christ are united into one person and yet the natures remain distinct, so in the mystical union the Trinity makes its dwelling in man but God and man remain distinct. There is no essential or substantial union, but there is a union of substances.

As the personal communication of attributes arises out of the personal union of the divine nature and the human nature in Christ so out of the spiritual union of Christ and the church, of God the Lord and a believing soul, arises a spiritual communion not only in the kingdom of glory and in eternal life but also in the kingdom of grace and in this life. Therefore Saint Peter says concerning the true believers that they have become partakers in the divine nature.²²

This gracious union with God is conveyed and preserved through the means of grace. Many of the medieval mystics and Reformed

²¹ See also ELH 115:14; 161:4; 517:7.

²² *Wie aus der persönlichen Vereinigung der göttlichen und menschlichen Natur in Christo entsteht die persönliche Mittheilung der Eigenschaften / also entsteht aus der geistlichen Vereinigung Christi und der Kirchen / Gottes des Herrn und einer gläubigen Seele / eine geistliche Gemeinschaft / nicht allein im Reich der Herrlichkeit und im ewigen Leben / sondern auch im Reich der Gnaden und in diesem Leben / Dannenhero S. Petrus 2. Epistel 1. v. 4. von den wahren Gläubigen spricht / dass sie der Göttlichen Natur sind theilhaftig worden.* (Johann Gerhard, *Postilla Salomonae* in Johann Anselm Steiger, *Johann Gerhard, Doctrina et Pietas*, Abteilung 1, 1 [Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog Verlag, 1997], 97).

enthusiasts believed that outward means were unimportant in the union with the divine. In other words the Spirit conveys and maintains this union without external means. Contrary to this, the devotional writers continually preserve the connection between the mystical union and the means of grace. Finally, in the mysticism of the Lutheran fathers we do not climb to God through contemplation, but God Himself descends to us in the manger and the cross. Christ unites us with Himself in the Word, He clothes us with Himself in Baptism, and He feeds us with Himself in the Holy Supper so that we have union and communion with the divine.²³

Devotional Themes

The mystical union is often expressed by the devotional writers with the **nuptial motif**, which has its roots in Scripture (Song of Solomon; Hosea 2:21–22; Revelation 21:2). As husband and wife become one flesh, so Christ unites Himself to His bride the church and to each believing soul, giving her all His divine gifts and taking upon Himself her burden of sin. The bride by nature was naked but He clothed her with the garments of salvation and covered her with a robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10). With these thoughts in mind, Gerhardt ends his hymn, “The Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth,” “And there, in garments richly wrought as Thine own bride, I shall be brought to stand in joy beside Thee” (ELH 331:10). This motif often includes Luther’s joyful exchange (*der fröhliche Wechsel*).²⁴ Christ, my husband, takes upon Himself my sin, death, and hell and gives me, His bride, in exchange His forgiveness, life, and salvation. Gerhardt makes this same connection: “Lord, my Shepherd, take me to Thee. Thou art mine; I was Thine” (ELH 377:7). Christ, my husband, who gave His life for me will never abandon me. What comfort this is!

In their pastoral care the fathers make considerable use of the picture of the **wounded side of the Lord**. This image is based on John 19:34.²⁵ This picture was used already by Augustine and it was used throughout church history.²⁶ On that first Good Friday after Jesus completed salva-

²³ For a consideration of the benefits of the mystical union, see the section in Gaylin Schmeling, “Gerhard—Theologian and Pastor,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (December 2004): 311–313.

²⁴ LW 31:351–352.

²⁵ See also Zechariah 12:10, 13:1; 1 John 5:6. For a complete presentation of the wounded side motif see Schmeling, “Gerhard—Theologian and Pastor,” 307–309.

²⁶ Augustine, “Tractate on John” CXX:2, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 7*, ed. Phillip Schaff (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 434–435.

tion for all men, His side was opened showing how the treasure of salvation is distributed to all people. It flows to us in the water and blood: the water of Baptism, the blood of the Lord's Supper and in His Word which is spirit and life. Gerhardt uses this picture when he writes, "My greater treasure, Jesus Christ, is this which from Thy wounds most blest flowed forth for my salvation" (*[Mein großer Schatz Herr Jesu Christ, ist dieses, was geflossen ist aus deiner Leibes Wunden]*, ELH 331:7). In another hymn he speaks in Bernardian mystical style of kissing the wounds of the Savior,²⁷ showing how greatly he prizes the treasure flowing from the wounded side of Christ.

At other times, the devotional writers speak of **hiding themselves in the wounded side** of the Savior in all of the struggles and problems of life. Here there is rest and peace in the outrageous fortune of life. As St. Paul, they connect the rock smitten in the wilderness with Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). Jesus is the Rock of Ages from whose side flows the double cure. Johann Gerhard then adds to this picture the cleft in the rock of Song of Solomon 2:14 where one is to fly as a dove for shelter. Here our soul can fly as a dove and hide in the cleft of the rock, that is, take refuge in His wounded side until all the stormy blasts of life are over.²⁸ Gerhard writes, "I hear the voice in the Song, which urges me to hide in the clefts of the rock (Song of Solomon 2:14). You are the strongest rock. The clefts of the rock are your wounds (1 Corinthians 10:4). In them I may hide myself from the accusations of all creation."²⁹

A refuge has been prepared for me in the satisfaction You [Christ] made for my sins. I have a refuge in Your intercession for me at the right hand of the Father. Take flight, O my soul, to the morning light. Like a dove, hide in the clefts of the rock (Song of Songs 2:14), take refuge in the wounds of Christ, your Savior. Hide in this rock until the wrath of the Lord passes by, and you will find rest in this refuge. You will find protection. You will find acquittal. Amen.³⁰

Finally Gerhard draws together the **wounded side of the Lord and the nuptial motif**.

²⁷ Schulz, 9. *Ich umfange, herz und küsse der gekränkten Wunden Zahl und die purpurroten Flüsse Deiner Füß' und Nägelmal.*

²⁸ Johann Gerhard, *Meditations on Divine Mercy*, trans. Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), [1:7] 45.

²⁹ Johann Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations*, trans. Wade R. Johnston (Saginaw: Magdeburg Press, 2008), [Meditation 1] 22.

³⁰ Gerhard, *Meditations on Divine Mercy*, [1:7] 45.

You have a type of how the Lord Christ was to have His side opened up by a spear in Adam, who had his side opened by God, and from the rib which was taken from him was crafted a woman. Thus, as Christ fell into death's sleep on the cross, from His opened side flowed blood and water—the two Holy Sacraments—from which the Church, Christ's Bride, was built up.³¹

As Adam's bride was taken out of his side while he slept (Genesis 2:21), so the second Adam's bride, the bride of Christ, is cleansed and formed through the waters of Baptism, the blood of the Lord's Supper, and His Word which is spirit and life. This corresponds to what issued from the Savior's wounded side during His three days sleep in death (John 19:34). Therefore, Jesus can say of His bride, the church, as Adam said of Eve the mother of our race, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). The church is so intimately united with Christ through the means of grace that she is one flesh with Him (Ephesians 5:32).³²

Following the lead of Johann Arndt, Gerhardt makes a considerable use of the **pictures from nature and creation** in his works. He points to the wonderful blessings of the earth. He directs his readers to the beauty of the seasons and the magnificent splendor of God's creation (*Die güldne Sonne*, ELH 57). At the same time he uses these pictures from nature to point to our spiritual life. As the sun descends and seems to be defeated, Gerhardt tells us we have another sun, Christ the sun of gladness, dispelling all our sadness ("Now Rest Beneath Night's Shadow," ELH 569:2). The beauties of the summer should remind each Christian of the wonderful splendor of the summer of heaven. The fall points to the end of the world and to the fall of our life. Every evening as we remove our clothes and go to sleep, we are to think of our mortality. When we arise and dress, we are directed to the glorious garment in which we will be dressed in heaven's morning. Likewise the rhythm of the day reminds us of our dying and rising in Baptism (ELH 569:4). Everything in mundane life should point us to the spiritual.

³¹ Johann Gerhard, *An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ*, trans. Elmer M. Hohle (Malone, Texas: Repristination Press, 1998), 30.

³² Valerius Herberger also uses the wounded side motif. Valerius Herberger, *The Great Works of God: Parts One and Two*, trans. Matthew Carver (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 175, 179.

The devotional works that make significant use of illustrations from nature and creation are at times referred to as emblem literature. This literature usually centers on a visual image that is meant to convey a spiritual lesson. Christian Scriver is a master of this genre of meditative literature. In his *Gotthold's Occasional Devotions* (*Gottholds Zufällige Andachten*), published between 1663 and 1671, one finds four hundred such devotions based on a particular object or scene. There are meditations on the dew, the sailors, the church tower, the mirror, the gravestone, the snow, the rainbow, etc. Below is a portion of the devotion on the stork.

Gotthold added: I have recently read some wonderful things about these birds [storks], namely, that they love their young so heartily that they are not afraid to die for their sake. It has been observed during the most intense fires that they will repeatedly and earnestly carry water in their throats and bills to rescue their nests on burning houses. In Delft, Holland, they noticed storks, which could not rescue their young, cover them in their nests, spreading their wings over them, and thus dying along with them. This is what you call dying for love and in love.

This also brings to mind our dearest and most worthy friend, Jesus, about whom it has been fairly written when he is portrayed, hanging, on the cross: He died for love and in love. In truth, love caused the death of the Son of God. Death could not kill him, but love drew him down from heaven for us, laid him in a manger, brought him to the cross, and killed him. We are fond of gathering herbs and plants when they are most potent. Likewise, I maintain, our heavenly Father determined that his beloved Son should die at the time when his love had reached its highest degree, and as he died in love, so did he also rise again and ascend to heaven where now, in all eternity, he loves nothing more dearly than the sons of men. He also wishes nothing else for us than that we should live and die in his heart-felt love.³³

The **Divine Physician and the medical motif** is common in Augustine³⁴ and the other early church fathers. Based on passages such as Matthew 9:12 the devotional writers also use the picture of the

³³ Lund, 253–254.

³⁴ The great doctor this is Jesus—*medicus magnus hoc est Iesus* (Augustine, *Sermo* 229.6). They were slaying the doctor; the doctor made a medicine from his own blood

physician of souls. All people are born into this world sick in sin. We could do nothing to change our sin-sick condition. In fact Scripture tells us that we were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Yet Jesus, the Divine Physician, gives life. He restores us to health and He heals our wounds (Jeremiah 30:17). Like a surgeon He wounds through the Law, stopping our diseased and sinful hearts. He then transforms them through the Gospel of forgiveness (Deuteronomy 32:39). This wonderful medicine of the Gospel He prepared for us through His holy life and death for our redemption. This life-giving medicine of the Gospel is brought to us through the means of grace where Jesus comes to us as the Good Samaritan, pouring healing balm on the diseased flesh and binding up our wounds.³⁵ Arndt prays in his postil, “You pious Samaritan, here lies the wounded, pour into our wounds the oil of mercy and the joyous wine of comfort, for your wine alone gladdens the distressed heart.”³⁶ Like his teacher Arndt, Gerhard relished the use of the divine physician picture.

From the magnitude of the price, figure the amount of the danger; from the price of the remedy, figure the danger of the disease. Altogether great were the wounds that could only be healed by the wounds of the living and vivifying flesh of Christ. Great indeed was the disease that could only be cured by the death of the Physician.³⁷ If I did not have a disease, I would not seek the help of medicine. He is the Physician (Matthew 9:12). He is the Savior (Matthew 1:21). He is Righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). “He cannot disown himself” (2 Timothy 2:13). Have mercy on me, O Medicine, O Savior, O Righteousness. Amen.³⁸

The **wanderer or traveler motif** was common among the devotional writers. The great Lutheran dogmatician from Strassburg, Johann

for his slayers—*illi occidebant medicum: medicus de suo sanguine faciebat occisoribus medicamentum* (Sermo 229E.3).

³⁵ For a complete study of the use of the medical picture in early Lutheranism see Johann Anselm Steiger, *Medizinische Theologie: Christus medicus und theologia medicinalis bei Martin Luther und im Luthertum der Barockzeit* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

³⁶ *Du frommer Samariter, hier liegt der Verwundete, gieß in unsere Wunden das Öl der Barmherzigkeit und Freudenwein des Trostes, denn dein Wein erfreut allein das betrübte Herz* (Johann Arndt, *Evangelien-Predigten* [Groß Oesingen: Verlag der Lutherischen Buchhandlung Heinrich Harms, 1998], 51; see also pages 596, 738).

³⁷ Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations*, [Meditation 2] 24.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, [Meditation 8] 45.

Conrad Dannhauer (1603–1666), even entitled his main theological work *Hodosophia christiana* (*The Christian Way of Wisdom*). The theme of Gerhardt's sister's funeral sermon was, "The Last Battle of Spiritual Pilgrims and Wanderers."³⁹ This motif is based on the Old Testament Exodus. As Israel of old we were all liberated from the great satanic pharaoh. We passed through the Red Sea of Baptism, and now we are traveling through this present wilderness where there are struggles and conflicts on every side. Yet the Lord is with us all the way, strengthening us in every burden with the heavenly manna, the means of grace, until we cross the Jordan of death, reaching the heavenly Canaan above. Gerhardt's hymn, "I Am a Guest on Earth,"⁴⁰ employs this imagery. He speaks of himself wandering here on earth striving to reach the heavenly *Vaterland*.

The wanderer motif is also found in Gerhardt's hymn "Commit Whatever Grieves Thee" (TLH 520; ELH 208). This hymn is based on Psalm 37:5: "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (*Befiehl dem Herren deine Wege und hoffe auf ihn; er wirds wohl machen*). In its German form the hymn is an acrostic on Psalm 37:5, formed by the initial words of the stanzas.

1. **Befiehl** du deine Wege
2. **Dem Herren** mußt du trauen
3. **Dein'** ewge Treu und Gnade
4. **Weg'** hast du allerwegen
5. **Und** ob gleich alle Teufel
6. **Hoff'**, O du arme Steele
7. **Auf**, auf, gib deinem Schmerze
8. **Ihn**, ihn laß tun und walten
9. **Er** wird zwar eine Weile
10. **Wirds** aber sich befinden
11. **Wohl** dir, du Kind der Treue
12. **Mach'** End, o Herr, mach' Ende⁴¹

An interesting aspect of devotional literature is the **gathering of Scripture passages**. At times the devotional writers collect many sections of Scripture into a compact form as a special comfort to the Christian. For example, hymnist Paul Gerhardt wrote:

³⁹ Christian Bunners, *Paul Gerhardt: Weg, Werk, Wirkung* (Berlin: Buchverlag Union, 1993), 132. *Letzter Kampf geistlicher Pilgrime und Wandersleute*.

⁴⁰ Schultz, 37. *Ich bin ein Gast auff Erden*.

⁴¹ Schultz, 64.

But in death, we should observe that we should not fear so greatly before death. We should not be dismayed so greatly before the grave. We should not be disheartened in the pains of our life and the loss of all our body's strength. Rather then, we should turn with Christ to God in heaven and say, You are my Father, You are my God, You are my refuge who helps me [Psalm 89:26]. Because You are my God and my Father You will not forsake Your child, O You fatherly heart. You are my light and my salvation, before whom should I fear? You are the strength of my life, before whom should I be afraid [Psalm 27:1]? So I am also certain that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature may separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord [Romans 8:38–39].⁴²

In the same way, theologian Johann Gerhard wrote:

If I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You Lord are with me (Psalm 23:4). The Lord is my light and my salvation whom should I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life whom should I fear (Psalm 27:1)? On God I will hope and I will not fear what flesh can do to me (Psalm 56:4). Who sits under the protection of the Most High and remains under the shadow of the Almighty, he speaks to the Lord, "My confidence and my fortress, my God in whom I hope" (Psalm 91:1). Here also belongs another beautiful passage. Fear not I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine. Then when you go through the water I will be by you, so that the streams should not drown you. And when you go through the fire you should not be burned and the flames should not set you afire. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior (Isaiah 43:2–3). All this St. Paul summarizes when he says "If God is for us, who may be against us" (Romans 8:28):⁴³

⁴² Paul Gerhardt als Prediger: Vier Leichenpredigten desselben aus den Jahren 1655, 1659, 1660 und 1661 (Zwickau: Druck und Verlag von Johannes Herrmann, 1906), 81–82.

⁴³ Johann Gerhard, *Sämtliche Leichenpredigten*, ed. Johann Anselm Steiger, et al. (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog Verlag, 2001), 97. See also Herberger, 375.

Theology of the Cross

The Lutheran devotional writers were definitely influenced by the theology of the cross. Here they follow in the footsteps of Luther who reminds us, "He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering.... God can be found only in suffering and the cross."⁴⁴ For example, Paul Gerhardt does not look for God in the great and spectacular things of this world but in the humble child in the manger and the crucified one. This is seen in his hymn, "O Jesus Christ, Thy Manger Is" (ELH 161), where he beholds his God as the humble child in the manger.

Salvation is not accomplished through great and powerful signs in the eyes of the world. God chose not to accomplish redemption through His bare majesty and power. Rather Gerhardt shows us that salvation was accomplished in the death of God and His seeming defeat as he points out in his hymn, "O Sacred Head Now Wounded" (ELH 334). The channels of God's salvation are not to be found in magnificent signs or in things that the human mind could understand. Rather the means of grace are a seemingly insignificant book, a palm-full of water, and some bread and wine. Gerhardt's battle in Berlin centered in this very point. The Reformed could not accept the fact that the baptismal water could be regenerative and that the host and chalice were Christ's body and blood. God chose to hide His power in these insignificant things. Gerhardt realized that the church was not a great and powerful outward organization such as the Elector hoped to accomplish through uniting the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Brandenburg-Prussia. Rather the church is found in the insignificant gathering around the means of grace.

The theology of the cross also affects the life of the Christian. The Christian should not expect that his life will always be outwardly easy. But his life is always at its best under the cross because his gracious Father is guiding his life. This we see in Gerhardt's life. His life did not appear to be outwardly successful. But in the conflicts and struggles (*Anfechtungen*), God was at his side. God is not closest to us in peace and leisure but in the suffering of the cross. This is Gerhardt's attitude toward the cross.

⁴⁴ LW 31:53.

Though a heavy cross I'm bearing
And my heart Feels the smart,
Shall I be despairing?
God, my Helper, who doth send it,
Well doth know All my woe
And how best to end it.
(ELH 377:2)

Comfort (Trost) of the Lord

The main purpose of the devotional literature of the time was doctrine (*Lehre*) and comfort (*Trost*). The people of the seventeenth century were in need of comfort as a result of the Thirty Years' War, and they needed to be instructed continually in the doctrine on which that comfort was based. Their land lay in ruin. Education and business had nearly ceased. More importantly, the church had suffered great loss in its outward organization. Churches were burnt, pastors driven out of their congregations and the normal rhythm of parish life disrupted. Susan Karant-Nunn, in her book *The Reformation of Feeling*, argues that *Trost* (comfort) was a major characteristic of Lutheran pastoral care and piety. This emphasis she finds lacking in Reformed sources, which place a greater emphasis on discipline and the suppression of emotion.⁴⁵

Our times appear quite different outwardly. We are relatively well-to-do: we have one of the highest standards of living that there has ever been, and one would assume that all should be right with the world. Yet all around us there are people who are on the verge of despair. They can find no meaning or purpose in life. For them, life is "an aimless mote, a downward drift from futile birth."⁴⁶ Rick Warren and Joel Osteen are looked to for comfort, yet what they offer will not help us make it through the day. We often feel burdened with our sins, forsaken and alone. Even in the best of times our fast-paced lives leave us trying to catch our breath, never quite at peace within ourselves. Our world is definitely in need of comfort.

The comfort that the devotional writers have to offer is not sunshine and lollipops. There is no promise of paradise in the here and now. We were never promised a rose garden. But in the midst of trial and

⁴⁵ Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 96, 97, 105, 178, 201, 226, 251–252.

⁴⁶ "O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth" (CW 400:1), written by Martin Franzmann (1907–1976).

tribulation, there is confident hope. Gerhardt and the other devotional writers fill their literature with words of comfort such as *Schirm und Schild, Hilf und Heil*. They emphasize *Trost* in all their writings. We are not left alone and hopeless in the ravages and misfortune of life. We have the greatest helper there is: God the Father in heaven. Therefore Gerhardt can confidently sing,

Commit whatever grieves thee, Into the gracious hands
Of Him who never leaves Thee, Who heav'n and earth commands.
Who points the clouds their courses, Whom winds and waves obey,
He will direct thy footsteps And find for thee a way.
(TLH 520:1; ELH 208)

Not only can our great Helper help in every need, we have the certainty that He will help. He already did the greatest thing for us. He sent His Son to lay down His life on the altar of the cross to pay for our sins and chose us as His own in Baptism where faith was worked in our hearts. If He already did this, the greatest thing, then He will be with us in all the other needs and struggles of our lives, working all for good (Romans 8:28), even turning evil into good in our lives (Genesis 50:20). This is Gerhardt's point when he writes:

I build on this foundation: That Jesus and His blood
Alone are my salvation, The true eternal good.
Without Him all that pleases Is valueless on earth;
The gifts bestowed by Jesus Alone my love are worth.
(ELH 517:3)

Through the doctrine of the mystical union, Gerhardt adds to the assurance that our Savior God will be with us in our needs. The Christian faces many burdens, but because Christ dwells within him, he knows that God is for him; therefore nothing can be against him. "If God Himself be for me, I may a host defy" (ELH 517:1). Johann Gerhard says concerning the comfort of this indwelling:

Because You were given to me, so also shall all things be given to me. My nature is glorified more in You than it was disgraced in Adam through sin. Because You assumed into the unity of Your person [Christ has two natures, divine and human, in one person] that which was only tarnished [accidentally weakened] by Satan, You truly are flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone (Ephesians 5:30). You are my brother. What can You deny to

me, the person to whom You are most intimately joined by the same essence of flesh and by the feeling of fraternal love? You are the bridegroom (Matthew 22:2) who, according to the good pleasure of the heavenly Father, bound the human nature to Yourself as a bride by means of a personal covenant. With a thankful soul, I proclaim and acknowledge that I, too, am invited to the celebration of this marriage.⁴⁷

Finally in Gerhardt's hymns we are taught the holy art of dying (*ars moriendi*). United with His cross by faith in the Savior, we can be unafraid of living and unafraid of dying as he so beautifully points out in the hymn:

Be Thou my consolation, My Shield when I must die;
Remind me of Thy passion When my last hour draws nigh.
Mine eyes shall then behold Thee, Upon Thy cross shall dwell,
My heart by faith enfold Thee, Who dieth thus dies well!
(ELH 335:8)⁴⁸

Our Helper is the one who can do all for He is almighty. He will take care of us for He already gave His life for us on the cross and made His dwelling within us. This One strengthens us in all the difficulties of life through His means of grace, Word and Sacrament. The means of grace are our nourishment for the way, the fortress in battles and the rock of help. Here we receive the strength to do all things through Him (Philippians 4:13), the power to overcome and obtain the victory (1 Corinthians 5:57).

From now on I cannot doubt the indwelling of Christ, because it is sealed for me in the imparting of His body and blood. From now on, I cannot doubt the assistance of the Holy Spirit, because my weakness is strengthened by such a support. I do not fear the plots of Satan because this angelic food strengthens me to do battle. I do not fear the lures of the flesh because this life-giving and spiritual food strengthens me by the power of

⁴⁷ Gerhardt, *Meditations on Divine Mercy*, [2:4] 65–66.

⁴⁸ See also ELH 20:3; 334:9; 341; 372:7; 377:4–5. This medieval genre of literature was common to the devotional writers. For example, Martin Moller wrote a book entitled *Handbüchlein zur Vorbereitung auf den Tod, oder Heilige Sterbekunst*. Recently there has been a renewed interest in bereavement and consolation literature from the period of Lutheran orthodoxy. An example of this is Anna Linton, *Poetry and Parental Bereavement in Early Modern Lutheran Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

the Spirit. I eat and drink this food so Christ may dwell in me and I in Christ. The Good Shepherd will not allow the sheep, fed by His body and blood, to be devoured by the infernal wolf. He will not allow the strength of the Spirit to be overcome by the weakness of my flesh. Praise, honor, and thanksgiving to You, O kindest Savior, forever, Amen.⁴⁹

The Aptitude of a *Seelsorger* and Spiritual Formation

When we consider Luther's axiom *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio* (prayer, meditation, and affliction) we usually think in terms of the aptitude of a *Seelsorger*.⁵⁰ Certainly Luther encourages pastors to follow this three-fold rule. However, the axiom has a wider application.⁵¹ It is the method of spiritual formation for each individual who daily dies and rises in Baptism.

According to Luther and the fathers, this method of spiritual formation is found in Psalm 119. Here he describes spirituality that he had learned reading and praying the Psalms.

Moreover, I want to point out to you a correct way of studying theology, for I have had practice in that. If you keep to it, you will become so learned that you yourself could (if it were necessary) write books just as good as those of the fathers and councils, even as I (in God) dare to presume and boast, without arrogance and lying, that in the matter of writing books I do not stand much behind some of the fathers. Of my life I can by no means make the same boast. This is the way taught by holy King David (and doubtlessly used also by all the patriarchs and prophets) in the one hundred nineteenth Psalm. There you will find three rules, amply presented throughout the whole Psalm. They are *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio*.⁵²

Oratio: Prayer and Spiritual Formation

King David prays in this Psalm, "Teach me Your statutes. Make me understand the way of Your precepts; So shall I meditate on Your wondrous works. . . . I entreated Your favor with my whole heart; be

⁴⁹ Gerhard, *Meditations on Divine Mercy*, [2:13] 87.

⁵⁰ *Oratio, meditatio, tentatio faciunt theologum*.

⁵¹ Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 15–43.

⁵² LW 34:285 [St. L. XIV:434ff.]; Pieper, Vol. I, p. 186.

merciful to me according to Your word” (Psalm 119:26–27, 58). Here David reminds us of our inability to understand spiritual things and to grow spiritually. By nature we are totally ignorant of divine wisdom. Therefore the Christian will pray for the guidance of the Spirit in his study and meditation on the Scripture. Prayer will be a daily part of the Christian’s life. Remember our Lord often spent time in prayer as He prepared for His important work (Mark 1:35). Luther tells us not to be proud and arrogant about our own abilities, but rather to go into our little room, get down on our knees, and pray to God with humility and earnestness that He through His Son would give us His Holy Spirit to enlighten us, lead us, and give us understanding as we study the Word.⁵³

Luther gives a simple form of prayer or devotion in the morning and evening prayers in his Catechism. It includes the Trinitarian invocation with the making of the sign of the holy cross, the confession of the Apostles’ Creed, the praying of the Our Father, and concluding with Luther’s morning and evening prayer.

[In the morning, when you rise you shall make the sign of the holy cross, and you shall say:]

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Then, kneeling or standing, you shall say the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. Then you may say this prayer:]

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray You to protect me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

*[And then you should go with joy to your work, singing a hymn, or the Ten Commandments or whatever your devotion may suggest.]*⁵⁴

Using the Trinitarian invocation emphasizes Baptism as the foundation for spiritual life. The devotional outline includes the Apostles’ Creed, the baptismal creed, as a summary of saving faith in Jesus as

⁵³ Ibid., 285–286. Luther said that a considerable time in prayer is half of study (*Viel gebetet ist zur Hälfte studiert—ora et labora*).

⁵⁴ *An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2001), 26.

the Savior. Devotional prayer centers in the Our Father, Christ's own prayer, which He taught us and through which our prayer is united with His continual intercession. Luther's morning and evening prayer emphasize our daily spiritual warfare and divine protection. One may then continue with a psalm, a hymn, or the Ten Commandments.⁵⁵

Meditatio: Meditation and Spiritual Formation

The psalmist writes, "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation" (Psalm 119:97–99). In the Scripture Christ is present for us with all His blessings, as Luther wrote:

When you open the book containing the gospels and read or hear how Christ comes here or there, or how someone is brought to him, you should therein perceive the sermon or the gospel through which he is coming to you, or you are being brought to him. For the preaching of the gospel is nothing else than Christ coming to us, or we being brought to him.⁵⁶

The Christian will pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as he begins to study and meditate on the Word. The Holy Scripture is the only source for doctrine, faith, and life. That life-giving Word he will diligently read, mark, learn and inwardly digest as the ancient collect directs. The pastor and all his members are to meditate on and contemplate upon the Word. That doesn't mean one quick read and then off to Facebook. No, he will contemplate upon the Word and inwardly digest it. Johann Gerhard in the *Schola Pietatis* says that the Christian will ruminate on the Word or roll it over in his mind as a cow chews on its cud. Think of a cow resting in a pasture quietly chewing away, digesting its food. Thus the Christian will study the Word and then mediate and ruminate or chew on the Word. Gerhard reminds us that Isaac went into the fields in the evening of the day to pray and meditate on the truth of the Lord (Genesis 24:63). David said that when he lay on his bed he thought about the Lord and when he arose he spoke of Him

⁵⁵ John W. Kleinig, *Grace Upon Grace: Spirituality for Today* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 78–80.

⁵⁶ LW 35:121.

(Psalm 63:6 [7], *The Orthodox Study Bible*). All these examples are to remind a Christian that he is to study and meditate upon the Word.⁵⁷

Remember the example of Mary, the mother of our Lord, who kept all those things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19). Mary of Bethany sat at Jesus' feet and contemplated on the life-giving Word (Luke 10:38–42). The Bereans searched the Scriptures to confirm the truth of St. Paul's message (Acts 17:11). When our faith-life is so nourished through meditation on the Word, we will be conformed to the image of the Savior (Romans 8:29; Colossians 3:10) and be followers of Him in Christ-like love (Ephesians 5:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6).

Tentatio: Affliction and Spiritual Formation

David writes, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes. The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of shekels of gold and silver" (Psalm 119:71–72). Here David speaks of the benefit of the Christian cross and suffering.

Tentatio is usually translated by Luther as *Anfechtung*. *Tentatio* is sometimes understood in a narrow sense referring to the suffering of the Christian because of his faith.⁵⁸ It can also be used in a wider sense to refer to all the affliction that a Christian endures in his earthly life.⁵⁹ In affliction our sinful flesh is crucified with Christ, a part of our daily return to Baptism. The afflictions that the Lord allows to come upon the Christian are not a punishment for their sins, rather they are a chastisement from our loving Father to strengthen our faith, draw us closer to Him, and guide us in life. Here we are refined like gold and silver (Malachi 3:2–3; 1 Peter 1:7).

The Christian tends to think that when everything is going well in his life God is smiling on him and all is right with the world. God may indeed be smiling on him, but God may be even closer to him in his suffering. God is at his side all the way in this present vale of tears. Through the means of grace the Lord gives him the strength to do all things through Him, the power to overcome and obtain the victory.

The cross alone is our theology (*Crux sola ist nostra theologia*). *Tentatio* makes beggars out of theologians and theologians out of beggars. Concerning *Anfechtung*, Luther writes, "This is the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to

⁵⁷ Johann Gerhard, *Schola Pietatis* (Nürnberg: Gedruckt zu Jena Georg Sengewald, 1653), 2:291–292.

⁵⁸ Pieper, Vol. III, 69.

⁵⁹ Hoenecke, Vol. III, 403.

experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom."⁶⁰

Proper Lutheran Meditation

Presuppositions of Meditation

1. Christian meditation presupposes the presence of the risen Christ with His people as He promised, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20) and the mystical union with each and every one of us where the entire Trinity dwells in the believer (John 14:23–24).
2. Christian meditation presupposes that such devotion is not merely thinking about our inner-self, focusing on our self or clearing the mind, but is contemplating upon the life-giving Word of God. It is not merely deep relaxation or visualization.
3. Christian meditation presupposes the doctrine of justification by faith alone. We are saved through the imputed righteousness of Christ and not by anything we do.
4. Christian meditation will follow the rhythm and pattern of the Christian church year.

False Views of Meditation

People meditate for a number of different reasons. Some of these reasons have nothing to do with God's Word and even contradict the Scripture. John Kleinig summarizes these improper views of meditation in this way:

First, meditation is supposed to increase a sense of euphoria and well-being. And some techniques of meditation are designed to achieve just this. People are taught to think positively about themselves by concentrating on a series of self-affirmations or by envisaging themselves in some perfect place. Now, it is true that, since meditation involves relaxation, it can produce a sense of well-being. But that is not the purpose of Christian meditation. When we meditate on Christ and his word, we may indeed feel bad about ourselves, since he exposes our guilt and failure as we ponder his word.

Second, other forms of meditation are designed to help people solve their personal problems. It is true that meditation

⁶⁰ LW 34:286–287.

can expand our ability to think laterally, imaginatively, and creatively, so that we can make sense of our experience and find solutions to those problems that bedevil us. But that is not the purpose of Christian meditation, which may, in fact, unsettle us and create new problems for us by sensitizing us to God's will for us, Satan's attacks on us, and the needs of the people around us.

Third, meditation is espoused as a therapeutic exercise for people to tap their latent spiritual potential. So, for example, people who suffer from cancer or some other sickness are trained in techniques of deep relaxation and visualization, so that they can heal themselves. This is often coupled with dietary restrictions and fasting. Now, it is true that some people have been amazingly healed by employing such therapies. Christians, however, do not meditate in order to draw on their spiritual potential and to heal themselves. They do not hold that all spiritual powers are good. Some are evil, because they come from the evil spirit, who can and does perform physical miracles (Mk 13:22; 2 Th 2:9; Rev 19:20). Through meditation Christians may even discover how spiritually weak and powerless they are.

Fourth, some methods of meditation are used more or less blatantly for pagan purposes. It is now quite common for people to practice the more advanced levels of yoga and other Hindu techniques of meditation to reach higher levels of consciousness. This can come in many different guises and is often coupled with teaching about astral planes and angel guides. Those who promote these exercises often claim that Christ taught these ways of achieving divine consciousness. This approach is in fact as old as the gnostic heresy, which almost destroyed the early church and is once again making inroads into the church. But it has little or nothing in common with Christian meditation, which does not culminate in self-illumination and the achievement of divine consciousness, but in the dark night of the soul and the knowledge of Christ crucified.⁶¹

⁶¹ John Kleinig, "Meditation," *Logia* 10, no. 2 (Easter 2001): 48.

Outline of Lutheran Meditation

Meditation includes contemplating on written material, pictures (icons), and the use of the other senses (taste, smell, hearing, and touch).

In our modern world we pride ourselves on how fast we read and do things. Meditation is the antithesis of this. Our meditation on the Word should not be done in a hurried and haphazard manner. This is not skimming a text or speed reading, which is the case with much of our Bible study. Rather there must be suitable preparation. As an athlete warms up for a race so we need to prepare ourselves for proper meditation on the Word and meditative prayer. Physical and mental preparation are both important. The right place, the right time, and the right body posture should be considered.

The following is an outline of how one will meditate and contemplate on the Word.

1. Begin by recalling the grace and mercy of our Triune God. God the Father created us and still preserves us, God the Son redeemed us with His own blood, and God the Holy Spirit brings us the treasure of salvation through the means of grace. Especially recall that we were baptized into Christ, where faith in the Savior was worked in our hearts and we are now part of His body, the church.
2. Pray that God the Father, through the Incarnate Word, would help us in our meditation on the Word; to draw near to Him; and receive help, insight, and inspiration by the Spirit working through the means of grace.
3. Read the devotional material in logical sections to enrich our understanding of the Word of the Lord. Where applicable, use our imagination to picture the scene that is being described.
4. Read shorter sections chosen for meditative study, slowly and aloud, remembering that the arisen Lord is speaking to us through His Word. Read carefully so that each phrase receives its proper color, meaning, and flavor.
5. Meditate and contemplate upon the text applying it to our faith and life. We will ruminate on the Word and inwardly digest it,

making its truths our own. We will mine the text, finding its treasures.⁶²

Pictures of meditation:

[a.] Meditating is like chewing the cud. Think of the cow, in the shade of the tree, peacefully and continually chewing the cud. Likewise we are to repeat, reflect upon and consider the Word we have received.

[b.] Meditating is like taking pollen from a beautiful flower. Think of the honey bee, taking its time inside the flower removing the pollen. Likewise we are to make the effort and to take our time to receive the divine Word so that our lives can be as “honey.”

[c.] Meditating is like being in a small boat that rises and falls as it moves through the ocean waves. We are to rock the Word of God in our hearts, as we lovingly repeat it, reflect upon it and consider it, in order that it may sanctify and guide us.⁶³

6. Engage in prayer or conversation with God, responding to what we have understood and seen in each passage.
7. Repent of the sins this text has brought to mind and be assured of the Lord’s full and free forgiveness.

⁶² See also *The Lord Will Answer: A Daily Prayer Catechism* ([St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004], 1) for the “Six R’s” of prayer— Recite, read, reflect, repent, rejoice, request.

Recite aloud a part of the catechism or a Bible passage to refresh your memory and focus your thoughts.

Read the devotional page to enrich your understanding of the Lord’s teaching.

Reflect on how this teaching applies to your faith and life.

Repent by pouring out your heart to the Lord, asking Him to forgive your failures of faith and life. Confess your thoughts honestly to the Lord.

Rejoice in God’s mercy and forgiveness through His Son, which are the very basis of prayer. We are unworthy of His blessings but He declares us worthy through Christ Jesus!

Request God’s blessings for yourself as well as your family, friends, and neighbors. Pray confidently, in view of the prophet Isaiah’s promise, “The Lord will answer” (Isaiah 58:9).

⁶³ Peter Toon, “Meditating, the Biblical Way,” *Mandate* 28, no. 5 (Sept–Oct 2005): 6.

8. Request the Lord's blessings brought to mind by this text for ourselves, our families, our congregation, and community.
9. Conclude by thanking our Triune God for the blessings that He has given us in these words and for all His blessings for body and life.

To assist one in the practice of Christian piety and sanctification Gerhard reminds the Christian that there are five means of help or support. These five are: 1) Hearing or reading the Word of God (*Verbi divini auditus sive lectio, die Anhörung oder Lesung des Göttlichen Worts*), 2) Receiving the holy Lord's Supper (*Eucharistiae usurpatio, die Niessung des Heiligen Abendmahls*), 3) Holy meditation (*Sancta meditatio, die heilige Betrachtung*), 4) Zealous, diligent prayer, and godly appeal (*Seria oratio, eiveriges fleissiges Gebet und Göttliche Anruffung*), and 5) The subjugation and mastery of the body (*Corporis castigatio, des Leibes Beteubung und Zehmung*).⁶⁴

Meditation on the Psalms

For centuries the Psalter has been the primary prayer book of God's people both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Early Christians made a regular and consistent use of the Psalms. They prayed (said or sung) the Psalms as the New Israel whose Messiah and Lord is Jesus of Nazareth, the exalted King. In the Middle Ages there were orders of monks who prayed the entire Psalter each week in the Daily Office. The Book of Psalms is an excellent place to begin Christian meditation on the Word. It is the biblical textbook for prayer and meditation. The Psalter was considered by Luther to be a summary of the entire Bible.

The Psalter ought to be a precious and beloved book, if for no other reason than this: it promises Christ's death and resurrection so clearly—and pictures his kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom—that it might well be called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. It is really a fine enchiridion or handbook. In fact, I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble himself to compile a short Bible and a book of examples of all Christendom or all saints, so that anyone who

⁶⁴ Gerhard, *Schola Pietatis*, 2:272.

could not read the whole Bible would here have anyway almost an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book.⁶⁵

The first Psalm, which introduces the whole collection, describes the righteous person as meditating upon God's Law by day and by night. Clearly, this meditation upon God's Law (that is, the Torah, the full revelation of God and His salvation) is of the utmost importance for those who desire to know, love and serve the Triune God. The ungodly are like chaff which the wind drives away. But by meditating on God's Word the righteous are watered by God like a tree by the streams of living waters. The Psalms are indeed a proper beginning point for meditation on the Scripture. The Psalms encourage us in this meditation, give directives for such meditation, and use many of the major devotional themes.

The Psalms inform our minds, warm our hearts, and direct our wills toward the knowledge of God. As one reads the Psalter he must conclude that *Anfechtung* has always been the common experience of the believer. This is not something extraordinary that is only happening to him as St. Paul reminds us (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Lord has sent this trial or conflict for His good purpose (Psalm 119:71–72). The believer finds his comfort as he meditates on the Psalms perceiving that God has provided endurance and deliverance for His Israel in every age through the means of grace. He prays the Psalms, assured of the redemption of the Lord. The Psalms which Christ Himself inspired are His prayers. Finally the Psalms connect our private meditation with corporate worship. The Psalms have always been an integral part of the divine liturgy. Here the whole company of the saints is gathered together united in praying the Psalms of Christ.

⁶⁵ LW 35:254. Luther provided a selection of psalms with an indication of their purpose: Psalm 67 for the increase of faith, Psalm 51 for the confession of sins, Psalm 20 for good government, etc. (Kolb, 240). Many of the Lutheran fathers connected psalms with each of the six chief parts of the Catechism. Heinrich Heshusius (1556–1597), son of the better-known Tilemann Heshusius (1527–1588), was a professor at Helmstedt and later superintendent in Hildesheim. In 1593, he published a catechism based on Luther's *Small Catechism* and the Psalms. Among the psalms he employed are the following: Psalms 15, 24, 1, 127, 120, and 81 for the Ten Commandments; Psalms 117, 118, 95, 89, and 110 for the Apostles' Creed; Psalms 25, 103, 67, 45, 141, 107, 85, 142, 31, and 66 for the Lord's Prayer; Psalm 29 for Baptism; Psalms 51 and 32 for Confession and Absolution; Psalms 111, 23, and 36 for the Lord's Supper (Michael J. Halvorson, *Heinrich Heshusius and Confessional Polemic in Early Lutheran Orthodoxy* [Burlington: Ashgate, 2010], 94–118).

Bonhoeffer makes this interesting comment concerning Christ and the Psalms:

According to the witness of the Bible, David, as the anointed king of the chosen people of God, is a prototype of Jesus Christ. What befalls David occurs for the sake of the one who is in him and who is to proceed from him, namely Jesus Christ. David did not remain unaware of this, but “being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ” (Acts 2:30f.). David was a witness to Christ in his kingly office, in his life, and in his words. And the New Testament says even more. In the Psalms of David it is precisely the promised Christ who already speaks (Hebrews 2:12; 10:5) or, as is sometimes said, the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 3:7). The same words that David spoke, therefore, the future Messiah spoke in him. Christ prayed along with the prayers of David or, more accurately, it is none other than Christ who prayed them in Christ’s own forerunner, David.⁶⁶

The Psalms are the Prayer Book of Christ. He inspired them, speaking through the holy writers. He saw His vocation, particularly His active obedience, in the words of the first Psalm: “Blessed is the man... [whose] delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (1:1–2). His entire redemptive ministry was portrayed in the prophetic Psalms. The Psalms were continually on His lips during His earthly ministry. He quotes the Psalter in His public ministry and from it He prayed as He died on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (22:1). He expired with a part of Psalm 31 on His lips: “Into your hands I commend my spirit” (31:5). Then as the resurrected Lord He declared to His disciples that He was the fulfillment not only of the Law and the Prophets but also the Psalms (Luke 24:44).⁶⁷

The church illuminated by the Spirit sees in the Psalms the person and work of Christ as well as His vocation and experience. Because Christ is the head and the church His body, by extension the Psalms are also the prayer book of the church which expresses her vocation and

⁶⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: Prayerbook of the Bible*, ed. Geoffrey B. Kelly (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 158–159.

⁶⁷ See Peter Toon, *Knowing God through the Liturgy* (Largo: The Prayer Book Society Publishing Company, 1992), 62–79.

experience. The Psalter as a whole is the prayer of the church as the body of Christ and further, it is the prayer of both head and body (with all its members), that is of Christ and His brethren. The Epistle to the Hebrews and other portions of the Scripture teach us to think of Christ as our exalted high priest who as our mediator in the presence of God is also our intercessor there. When we pray in His name we are joined in the Spirit with His prayer which He continually offers to the praise of God and for the good of His people. To pray the Psalter in and with Him as His body is to be joined to Him in His priestly, heavenly prayer.

Thus the Psalter is the prayer book of Christ and His body the church which we pray in Him as His body, with Him as His disciple, and through Him on the basis of His redemptive sacrifice.

Conclusion

The center of Lutheran spirituality is found in Luther's famous maxim *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio* (prayer, meditation, and affliction). The one who has been justified by faith alone in the Savior and united with Him in the baptismal waters will read, mark, learn, and take the Word to heart. Both clergy and laypeople alike will prepare themselves for difficult times and all situations in life through a sustained meditation on the Word. Through the Word and Sacraments the entire Trinity makes its dwelling in us (John 14:17, 23–24) and we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). When our faith-life is so formed, nourished, and strengthened, we will be able to face all the conflicts and struggles of life with a firm confidence in the Savior, knowing that He is working all for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28). We will be a living epistle of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:1–3) and a little Christ to those around us. As was the case for Gerhard there is no more blessed event filled with comfort and assurance than to partake of the divine having union and communion with God through the means of grace.

“This is no natural thing,” Tauler says in his sermon on the holy Supper. “Here something comes more close to, and into, a man than by eating and drinking something. Christ founded this method in order that He might unite Himself with us all the more closely and inwardly.” He became Man for our sake so that we might become children of God (John 1:12) through Him, and become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). That wasn't enough for His love—He also wanted to become our food. Nothing is more closely related to the Lord Christ

than His assumed human nature (His flesh and blood) into which He united Himself; and on the other hand, nothing comes more close to us humans than what we eat and drink, for it imbeds itself into our most inward recesses.⁶⁸

Thus this Holy Supper will transform our souls; this most divine sacrament will make us divine men, until finally we shall enter upon the fullness of the blessedness that is to come, filled with all the fullness of God, and wholly like Him (Gregory Nazianzus, *Oratio* 30).⁶⁹

Soul of Christ, sanctify me. Body of Christ, save me. Blood of Christ, satisfy me. Water from the side of Christ, cleanse me. Passion of Christ, comfort me. O good Jesus, hear me. Within your wounds hide me. Never let me be separated from you. From the malicious enemy defend me. In the hour of my death call me and bid me come to you, so that with your saints I may praise you forever and ever. Amen. LSQ

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⁶⁸ Johann Gerhard, *Postilla*, vol. 1, trans. Elmer M. Hohle (Malone: The Center for the Study of Lutheran Orthodoxy, 2003), 300–301.

⁶⁹ Johann Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations*, trans. C.W. Heisler (Malone: Repristination Press, 2000), 20:111.

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One Via or Another?

An Overview of Luther and the Later Middle Ages

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THE TERM “CONFUSED SEA” IS used in oceanography to describe a highly disturbed water surface, without a single well-defined direction of wave travel. Such a description can rightly be applied to the theological “sea” into which Martin Luther was born in 1483. The waters were moved by philosophical discussions between the realists (*via antiqua*) and nominalists (*via moderna*); by the monastic quarrels between Dominicans, Franciscans, and Augustinians (among others)¹; by the increasing influence of humanism within medieval academia and culture; by mysticism and popular piety; by undercurrents created by European political power struggles which include the interference by the church and the encroachments of the Turks (who had finally captured Constantinople only three decades before Luther’s

¹ Here is a brief sample of some of the issues between the various orders “...it was not intellectual issues but the fierce competition between secular and regular clergy that would later array the nominalists—with their strong support among secular scholars—against the Fratres Minores, the order in which they had been conceived and nurtured. The common heritage of Franciscans and nominalists was all too easily forgotten in the division over doctrinal issues and in the public commotion that ensued. Scotists and nominalists were drawn together in a surprisingly effective alliance against Dominican opposition to the Immaculate Conception, a doctrine ardently supported by the Franciscans. The intensity of the strife between parish clergy (*curati*) and the intrusive *fratres* over the right of the latter to say mass, hear confessions, and raise money highlights the significance of the *Decisio* of Luther’s vicar general and father confessor of the Observant Augustinian Johannes of Staupitz, who, though himself a friar, took the side of the parish clergy.” Heiko Oberman, “Luther and the Via Moderna,” *The Two Reformations*, ed. Donald Weinstein (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 28–29.

birth); and by various other changes in social structure. Each of these broad movements is in and of itself worthy of its own field of study. Yet for the Lutheran parish pastor with a typical seminary education it is beyond reasonable expectations for him to be expert in each (any?) area, keeping up with recent scholarship, not to mention the many other worthy directions for study: koine Greek, biblical Hebrew, Christology, ecclesiology, hermeneutics, catechetics, liturgics, homiletics, etc. Therefore it is the goal of this essay to present an overview of this “confused sea” with some attention to more recent studies of the main influences on Martin Luther, those which helped to shape the world of thought in which he studied.

As we prepare synodically and congregationally to celebrate the coming anniversary year of 2017 it is necessary that we see Martin Luther not as a brilliantly bright and explosive firework that suddenly appeared in an otherwise dark and dreary sky, but perhaps better as the brightest and most intense light in a sky filled with many other lights. We may also consider the application of C.S. Lewis’ counsel on the need to read old books in his introduction to St. Athanasius’ *On the Incarnation*: “If you join at eleven o’clock a conversation which began at eight you will often not see the real bearing of what is said. Remarks which seem to you very ordinary will produce laughter or irritation and you will not see why—the reason, of course, being that the earlier stages of the conversation have given them a special point.”² Luther’s criticisms of a variety of individuals who in large part are representative of some school or theological viewpoint in his disputations and polemical works stem from the “conversations” he has had with their ideas and the theological consequences.

Part I. Why Does Luther Read Gabriel Biel’s Commentary on the Mass?

Prior to the celebration of his first mass in May of 1507 as a priest in the Order of the Hermits of Saint Augustine (*Ordo eremitarum sancti Augustini*, OESA [or OSA]), Luther read Gabriel Biel’s exposition of the liturgy of the mass (*Sacri canonis Missae expositio*), written by Biel while he taught at the University of Tübingen.³ Our question is concerned not with the actual study of the liturgy required for a priest,

² Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, trans. a Religious of C.S.M.V. (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 4.

³ Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to the Reformation, 1483–1521* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 71.

which is self-evident, but with why a particular book and author would be chosen. In other words, why Biel?

The faculty of the University of Erfurt (founded in 1392), where Luther studied (1501–1505) and in which city was located the Augustinian monastery he joined, was connected to Biel in various ways. Gabriel Biel (ca.1420/25–1495) was one of the best known of the theologians titled nominalists. He was also considered “the last of the scholastics.”⁴ Biel had attended Erfurt in the 1430s and again in the early 1450s. At that time the university had become known as a center for the *via moderna* (associated with nominalism) as opposed to the *via antiqua* (associated with realism, advocated by Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus). The university included in its studies the works of William of Occam (1285–1347), considered to be the founder of nominalism.⁵

By the time of Luther’s arrival at the University of Erfurt, the Faculty of Theology had become something of a stronghold of the *via moderna*. In a formal disputation of the university in 1497, two professors of the Faculty of Arts who were also to become Luther’s main teachers, Jodocus Trutvetter from Eisenach and Bartholomäus Arnoldi from Usingen, had established a coherent programme of teaching, in which nominalist ideas derived from Ockham and Biel were worked through into all areas of the academic curriculum.⁶

Trutvetter (d. 1519) was one of Biel’s students, a nominalist, but also with humanist sympathies. He would later teach at the University of Wittenberg. Arnoldi was also a nominalist, a humanist, and an Augustinian.

⁴ Heiko Obermann, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought Illustrated by Key Documents* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 137.

⁵ “Luther considered himself to have belonged at one time to the sect...to the scholastic position of the Occamists, nominalists, or modernists, to those who saw in William of Occam the venerated head of their school and who also considered themselves different from both the Thomists and Scotists. The differences lay in epistemology, i.e., in the way they viewed human ability to perceive. According to Occam, only the concrete, individual things could be perceived by the soul, and on this basis reason would form specific or general concepts according to definite rules and categories. Strictly speaking, nothing could be known about the objects of faith.” Brecht, 36.

⁶ Graham Tomlin, *Luther and His World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 33.

Trutvetter described Occam as the most significant newer philosopher. Luther adopted his teacher's view and even defended it during his dispute with Rome. Occamism was surely important for Luther in matters pertaining to epistemological theory, to the Aristotelian worldview, to the relation between philosophy and theology, but also in theological areas such as Christology in its relation to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, and not least in the doctrine of sin and grace.⁷

So Biel's commentary on the Mass is read by Luther because of Biel's influential role with the faculty at Erfurt, which in turn is due to the fact that Biel is the key representative of the *via moderna* in the late 15th and early 16th centuries.

But at this point, it is well for us to back up a bit and look at some of the main terms being used to describe Scholasticism, in particular: realism and nominalism, *via antiqua* and *via moderna*.

The representatives of the *via antiqua*, followers of Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, were realists. They held that universal concepts (*universalia*) are more than just human tools to inventory the extramaterial world, but are the expressions of reality itself, indeed, that final higher reality behind all individuality. Men as individuals can exist only because "mankind" exists as a universal reality.

In contrast the followers of the *via moderna* dared to tread a new, uncertain, and controversial path: sensory perception of reality does not lead to the cognition of universal realities but to abstract thought. Universals are the result of such abstractions and are devoid of independent reality. What is real is the individual, the human person as a unique entity perceived by the senses.

...The nominalists, as the representatives of the *via moderna* came to be called, were soon decried as skeptics who dared to term universal realities mere words (*nomina*).⁸

So how exactly does this medieval debate between the adherents of the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna* affect Luther and the subsequent

⁷ Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 22.

⁸ Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 117.

trajectory of the reformation? Heiko Oberman provides an important link for us. Referring to the two of the primary faculty members at Erfurt that taught Luther, Trutvetter and Arnoldi, he wrote:

Again and again both of them cited one basic notion as the decisive principle and characteristic of the *via moderna*: all philosophical speculation about the world must be tested by means of experience and reality-based reason, regardless of what even the most respected authorities might say to the contrary. Arnoldi emphasized that this was to be no different in the case of theology: all theological speculation is to be tested by the authority of the Scriptures as interpreted by the Church.

Hence experience and Scripture were the only valid norms in the realms of philosophy and theology. . . .

In the realm of theology the full implications were not immediately seen. Only Luther's quest for God's reliable and certain word in the Scriptures put an end to the supremacy of speculative philosophy.⁹

The fact of the influential teaching of the *via moderna* at Erfurt was one part of the impetus for Luther to turn to the Scriptures as the authority for what is to be taught and believed in the Church.¹⁰ We can also detect the influence of humanism's *ad fontes*, which we will examine later.

Several other factors (individuals) serve to fix our attention on the *via moderna* for a bit longer: Augustine and Gregory of Rimini.

With regard to Augustine's influence, at the close, just as in the early and High Middle Ages, the great African father was by far the most significant and influential theologian. Among theologians of all persuasions there are more quotations from Augustine in disputed cases than from any other authority. In addition, where the late Middle Ages are concerned, we may speak in some sense of an Augustine renaissance relating to certain aspects of sin and grace. On topics pertaining to this doctrine, theologians such as Gregory of Rimini (ca. 1300–1358)

⁹ Oberman, *Luther*, 118–119.

¹⁰ "Luther regarded Trutvetter as the one who first taught him that belief is to be accorded only to the biblical books, and all others are to be accepted with critical judgment. That was the way the Erfurters already formulated the 'scriptural principle.'" Brecht, 35.

were adherents of Augustine, though in philosophy Gregory largely followed Occam.¹¹

Yet, as noted by David Steinmetz, the topic of Luther and the influence of Augustine is hardly settled:

The relationship of Luther to St. Augustine is a far more complicated question to resolve than one might anticipate. No one doubts for a moment that Luther was profoundly influenced by Augustine ... or that Luther regarded Augustine as one Father really worth intense study. His own knowledge of Augustine ... grew almost geometrically in the period of 1513–1518, the period in which Luther struggled to interpret the Psalter and the writings of St. Paul. The difficulty with labeling Luther an Augustinian is that every theologian in the West is to some extent an Augustinian, even though their common commitment does not prevent them from differing profoundly with one another.¹²

While there is difficulty in determining the precise influence of Augustine on Luther, there are areas of Augustine's theology that do show Luther's agreement with the substance of his teaching. Free will, salvation, grace, and justification were to become the primary areas in which Luther would find support from Augustine for his own conclusions as he studied Psalms and Romans.¹³

By 1515 his attention focused above all on Augustine's anti-pelagian writings, *Contra Julianum* and *De spiritu et littera*. Along with his exegetical works ... these treatises clarified and reinforced Luther's understanding of sin and grace although

¹¹ Lohse, 12.

¹² David Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 12.

¹³ A fruit of the humanist endeavor was the publication in 1506 of the works of Augustine. "For the first time in centuries, it was possible to read the greatest authority in Western theology in full, in context, and without the help of medieval commentators, whose 'glosses' in the standard selections on offer made sure that any inquisitive reader would interpret the master in the 'correct' way. This again began to have a revolutionary effect, as scholars began to realize that the way in which Augustine had been interpreted by the scholastics was not as accurate as it had seemed." Tomlin, 38. For further historical analysis of Luther and Augustine see Alister McGrath's *Iustitia Dei*, 208–235.

precisely how his influence impacted Luther cannot easily be determined.¹⁴

Gregory of Rimini's influence upon Luther is subject to some debate. It is perhaps most accurate at this time to date Luther's acquaintance with Gregory at around 1519, when he first is mentioned by Luther in his "Resolutions on Propositions debated at Leipzig."¹⁵ Be that as it may, Gregory is noteworthy for his strong stand with Augustine over against any sort of Pelagianism, a stand with which Luther would have great sympathy.

For it is certain that the *moderni* (as they are called) agree with the Scotists and Thomists in this matter (namely on grace and free will) except for one man, Gregory of Rimini, whom they all condemn, who rightly and convincingly condemns them of being worse than Pelagians.¹⁶

Here is an assessment of Gregory:

The uniqueness of Gregory's position lies in the fact that, while on the one hand he opposed every major school of his day, he nevertheless on the other effected a successful synthesis of Occamistic terminism with Augustinian teachings of sin and grace. Gregory was strongly influenced by the nominalism of his contemporary Occam, and began his movement sharply criticizing the realism of the Thomistically orientated Aegidians.¹⁷

¹⁴ Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith* (New York: Oxford, 2009), 36.

¹⁵ As noted by Steinmetz in *Luther in Context*, "Luther among the Anti-Thomists," 57. However, Oberman, of whom Steinmetz was a student, argues for a *via Gregorii* at Erfurt due to the influence of Gregory on two of the main instructors at the University of Erfurt: Trutvetter and Arnoldi. "Jodokus Trutvetter and Bartholomaeus Arnoldi—who also never became a follower of Luther—had particularly highlighted Gregory of Rimini as a loyal interpreter of nominalistic principles. Trutvetter was not scant with his praise: Gregory of Rimini is an important guide both in theology and philosophy. ... In 1508 the *via moderna* was introduced at the arts faculty in *Wittenberg*, and significantly enough, it was to be taught explicitly in line with the *via Gregorii*." Oberman, 122 (emphasis added).

¹⁶ Steinmetz, 57.

¹⁷ The term Aegidian refers to those who followed the reform work within the Augustinian order accomplished by Aegidius Romanus (d. 1316). "The so-called *Schola Aegidiana*, i.e., the official theology of the Augustinian Hermits, is essentially a reaction of Augustine's Platonism against medieval Aristotelianism and an attempt to modify Thomism with the Platonism of Augustine. The *Schola Aegidiana* is therefore merely a

Gregory all but identified his position with that of Augustine. He for example recognized Pelagianism as the “Grundhäresie” in much the same manner as his master once had. This cancer he detected in virtually all the doctrinal systems of his day, and so he warned and corrected and opposed the errorists about him. ...

Gregory is especially distinctive for his clear enunciation of the damning nature and effect of original sin. ... Gregory asserted: “Concupiscence itself is original sin” (*Ipsam concupiscentiam esse originale peccatum*).¹⁸

One can understand why Luther would be drawn to Gregory’s Augustinian-centric anti-Pelagian theology when one sees the extent to which Luther confessed the depravity of the human condition, one which did not allow room for any positive spiritual activity to prepare for or in any way to deserve the grace of God.¹⁹

This then leads us to one of, if not the, major criticism by Luther over against Scholasticism, a criticism which would lead to Luther’s eventual break not only with the Thomists, but with the Occamists, those of the *via moderna*, including Gabriel Biel. The phrase at the heart of the discussion is this: *facere quod in se est* (to do what is in him).

degenerate offshoot from Thomism.” Quoted in Robert Spieler, “Luther and Gregory of Rimini,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1953): 157–158.

¹⁸ Spieler, 157–158.

¹⁹ For more on Luther and Augustine, see the introductory notes to Luther’s “Preface to Augustine, On the Spirit and the Letter,” *LW* 60, 35. Luther: “[S]tudents of theology should become familiar with this book so that they may be able to stand firm and to refute those rabid voices of the Papists, who shout that we are bringing a new kind of doctrine into the church. For this book of St. Augustine is not new; rather it demonstrates conclusively that it is the Papists who are the inventors of new dogmas. ... There is a saying among them—quite satanic, but one which they regard as a theological rule—namely, that Augustine ‘spoke exaggeratedly’ in these matters. For thus they have evaded the force of the doctrine and work of the holy man, lest they be defeated by the authority of St. Augustine and forced to abandon their abominable fabrications” (43). Gabriel Biel, other Augustinians, as well as Eck and Erasmus followed this “theological rule” which allowed them to ignore the strong statements of Augustine on free will, etc. “Thus the saints often spoke exaggeratedly in the course of uprooting the heresies that had sprung up against them” (38). “It was against that ‘common knowledge’ shared by predecessors and contemporaries that Luther composed the first thesis of his *Disputation against Scholastic Theology* [1517]: ‘To say that Augustine exaggerates in speaking against heretics is to say that Augustine tells lies almost everywhere’” (39). It is worth considering whether or not such a “theological rule” is also applied to the polemical writings of Martin Luther in our own day.

This phrase lies at the heart of the eventual break between Luther and the Scholastics, a break which would include finally the Roman Catholic Church. The question concerns, in part, the extent of the abilities of man to be involved with his salvation.

When Luther read Biel's textbook of dogmatic theology, he came across and was persuaded by the idea that God has entered into a covenant, or pact, with humanity. Essentially, if the sinner did what lay within him (the Latin phrase was *quod in se est*), then God would not deny him his grace. Within the framework of this agreement or covenant, sinners were capable of making a small moral effort on their own, without the help of God's grace. This initial effort was required before God would respond. This might involve feeling a genuine sorrow for sin, or generating a sense of love for God. In response to this, God would give a supply ("infusion" was the technical term) of his grace to help fan this spark into a flame. This initial gift of grace was not enough to merit salvation on its own, however. The Christian then had to cooperate with God's grace and, by the exercise of good works done with God's help, perfect his contrition for sin and love for God, so that salvation could truly be merited.²⁰

As Luther read beyond Biel and the Scholastics, as he researched for his lectures on the Psalms (reading Augustine) and Pauline writings (specifically Romans and Galatians), he became convinced that the tradition handed to him through the Scholastics was decidedly wrong. This was not an immediate conclusion he reached over the course of a day or so.²¹ But in the course of his lectures on the Psalms and Romans a change can be noted. The following extended quotation from Luther's *Scholia* on Romans 4:7 illustrates the debate between Luther and the Scholastics, and the significant change in Luther's understanding of human ability as affected by sin:

Either I have never understood, or else the scholastic theologians have not spoken sufficiently clearly about sin and grace, for they have been under the delusion that original sin, like actual sin, is entirely removed, as if these were items that can be

²⁰ Tomlin, 34.

²¹ For further discussion and resources on this point, see Lohse's chapter, "The Reformation Discovery," 85–88.

entirely removed in the twinkling of an eye, as shadows before a light, although the ancient fathers Augustine and Ambrose spoke entirely differently and in the way Scripture does. But those men speak in the manner of Aristotle in his *Ethics*, when he bases sin and righteousness on works, both their performance or omission. But blessed Augustine says very clearly that “sin, or concupiscence, is forgiven in Baptism, not in the sense that it no longer exists, but in the sense that it is not imputed.” And blessed Ambrose says, “I always sin, therefore I always go to Communion.” And on the basis of this in my foolishness I could not understand in which way I should regard myself a sinner like other men and thus prefer myself to no one, even though I was contrite and made confession; for I then felt that all my sins had been taken away and entirely removed, even inwardly. For if because of sins that were past, which they say must always be remembered (and here they speak the truth, but not strongly enough), I still had to consider myself a sinner, then I felt that these past sins had not been forgiven. Yet God has promised that they are forgiven to those who confess them. Thus I was at war with myself, not knowing that it was a true forgiveness indeed, but that this is nevertheless not a taking away of sin except in hope, that is, that the taking away is to be done, and that by the gift of grace, which begins to take sin away, so that it is not imputed as sin. For this reason it is plain insanity to say that man of his own powers can love God above all things and can perform the works of the Law according to the substance of the act, even if not according to the intentions of Him who gave the commandment, because he is not in a state of grace. O fools, O pig-theologians (*Sawtheologen*)! By your line of reasoning grace was not necessary except because of some new demand above and beyond the Law. For if the Law can be fulfilled by our powers, as they say, then grace is not necessary for the fulfilling of the Law, but only for the fulfilling of some new exaction imposed by God above the Law. Who can endure these sacrilegious notions? When the apostle says that “the Law works wrath” (v. 15) and that the Law “was weakened by the flesh” (Rom. 8:3), it certainly cannot be fulfilled without grace. They could have been made aware of their own foolishness and brought to shame and repentance even by their own experience. For willy-nilly they recognize the evil lusts in

themselves. For this reason I say: “Hah! Get busy now, I beg you. Be men! Work with all your might, so that these lusts may no longer be in you. Prove that it is possible by nature to love God, as you say, ‘with all your strength’ (Luke 10:27) and without any grace. If you are without concupiscence, we will believe you. But if you live with and in these lusts, then you are no longer fulfilling the Law.” Does not the Law say, “You shall not covet” (Ex. 20:17), but rather, “You shall love God” (Deut. 6:5)? But when a person desires and loves something else, can he really love God? But this concupiscence is always in us, and therefore the love of God is never in us, unless it is begun by grace, and until the concupiscence which still remains and which keeps us from “loving God with all our heart” (Luke 10:27) is healed and by mercy not imputed to us as sin, and until it is completely removed and the perfect love for God is given to the believers and those who persistently agitate for it to the end.

All of these monstrosities have come from the fact that they did not know what sin is nor forgiveness. For they reduced sin to some very minute activity of the soul, and the same was true of righteousness.²²

Lohse quotes another notable section in Luther’s comments on Romans 5, notable because of the use of the descriptive phrase of sinful man as “curved in upon himself”:

The reason is that our nature has been so deeply curved in upon itself [*tam profunda est in seipsam incurua*] because of the viciousness of original sin that it not only turns the finest gifts of God in upon itself and enjoys them ... it even uses God Himself to achieve these aims, but it also seems to be ignorant of this very fact, that in acting so iniquitously, so perversely, and in such a depraved way, it is even seeking God for its own sake.²³

So why is Luther reading Gabriel Biel? Biel exemplified the theological context for a significant part of Luther’s formative education. Yet the theology of Biel and his many predecessors in both the *via antiqua* and the *via moderna* were ultimately rejected by Luther, especially so as he mined more deeply the biblical texts, and the original languages, of the Old and New Testaments.

²² Luther, *LW* 25, 260.

²³ Lohse, 71.

Part II. Humanism

In 1509 Desiderius Erasmus wrote in his *In Praise of Folly*, “You’d extricate yourself faster from a labyrinth than from the tortuous obscurities of realists, nominalists, Thomists, Albertists, Ockhamists and Scotists.”²⁴ As Luther worked through these same “tortuous obscurities” one can see why many in those days might see Luther and Erasmus as a new dynamic duo, an alliance of two of the greatest minds of their era. But the alliance would never come; it would, in fact, turn into a bitter contest, a contest left for us to observe through Erasmus’ *De libero arbitrio* of 1524 and Luther’s *De seruo arbitrio* of 1525.

Luther’s falling out with the greatest humanist of his day did not signify a rejection of some of the pleasing fruits of humanism, in particular the availability of the Hebrew and Greek texts, texts which allowed exegetes to compare the original with Jerome’s universally used Latin Vulgate. Reuchlin’s *De Rudimentis Hebraicis* (1506) was the Hebrew grammar and lexicon that Luther used studiously as he lectured on the Psalms. Erasmus’ 1516 edition of the Greek New Testament (*Novum Instrumentum omne*) was the text used by Luther in his New Testament studies. Both of these works were the result of the *ad fontes* humanistic endeavor, an endeavor much appreciated by Luther as he strove to understand theology through hearing and reading the Holy Scriptures themselves, unmediated by the glosses of the Scholastics. “Luther recognized that the mastery of ancient languages was a necessary tool in accomplishing a clear textual interpretation of the Bible.”²⁵

The University of Erfurt became notable for its promotion of humanism in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. The more recently established University of Wittenberg was also a center for humanism; especially noteworthy is the fact that Philip Melancthon would serve as professor there, recommended by his uncle, the above-mentioned Reuchlin.

The case of the humanist Reuchlin (1455–1522) is worthy of some attention as we look at the influences on Luther. Reuchlin became involved in a dispute with theologians and monks from Cologne. In part, the dispute came about because Reuchlin objected to the demand of the Cologne authorities in 1510 to burn the books of the Jews, including writings in Hebrew. The demand for the destruction of the Hebrew books came about because of the efforts of a Jewish convert to Christianity named Pfferrkorn. “With the zeal of a convert he wrote

²⁴ Tomlin, 36.

²⁵ Oberman, *Luther*, 214.

A Mirror for Jews, in which he argued that all Hebrew books should be confiscated.”²⁶ Reuchlin, although apparently inclined to irenicism, could not stand by idly while such a travesty occurred, so he attempted to interfere with the destruction of the volumes. Reuchlin’s subsequent condemnation by the pope in 1520 would serve as a prologue to Luther’s own path to excommunication. Luther, sympathetic to Reuchlin, wrote in 1514, “When such protests and opinions [as those of Reuchlin] can no longer be freely expressed, then we must fear that finally inquisitors ... will denounce someone as a heretic on a whim.”²⁷

As a professor of Biblical Theology, Luther had been trained in the *Quadrigena: sensus literalis, allegoricus, tropologicus* or *moralis*, and *sensus anagogicus*.²⁸ There is certainly evidence of the application of this method in Luther’s commentary on the Psalms, 1513–15. However, Gerhard Ebeling, in an in-depth study of these lectures, concludes that Luther’s use of the *Quadrigena* at this stage is already differing markedly from its traditional application:

It seems to me that what urges itself upon us as the unifying common theme of these early lectures on the Psalms, if one approaches them without prejudice, is something that is exceedingly rare for a late-Scholastic theologian, namely the existential struggle for the right understanding and exposition of the text of the Psalms as God’s Word, and more precisely as the testimony to Christ, and thus as the struggle with the hermeneutical problem itself!²⁹

As Ebeling explains further:

The power to see everything together, the ability to get a grasp of the many-branched whole which sprouts from the root, and the capacity to concentrate everything on one point, and then to unfold everything from that point outward, distinguishes Luther’s thought from the very beginning.³⁰

²⁶ Lewis Spitz, *The Renaissance and Reformation Movements*, vol. I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 281. See also Brecht, 162–163 and Lohse, 96–97.

²⁷ Lohse, 97.

²⁸ Lohse, 51. Footnote #1 on this same page: “In the example of ‘Jerusalem’ the fourfold meaning of Scriptures involves literally the city, allegorically the church, tropologically the believers, and anagogically the heavenly Jerusalem.”

²⁹ Gerhard Ebeling, “The Beginnings of Luther’s Hermeneutics,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 7 (1993), Part I, 129–158; Part II, 315–338; Part III, 451–468; 135.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 453.

And finally there is this: “Luther deems it important to relate the Psalms to Christ according to the literal sense.”³¹ This is an approach distinct from other commentators who would have been able to relate the Psalms to Christ also, however in the *sensus allegoricus*, and not *literalis*.

Such insight serves to caution us today from being overly critical of whatever vestiges of the *Quadriga* we may find in Luther’s commentaries or sermons. We should be aware of them, certainly. Yet to see such vestiges as a fundamental weakness in Luther’s various works actually serves to detract from the seismic shift Luther provided for exegetical work, as well as its application in homiletics.³²

Part III. Mysticism – τὸ γὰρ γράμμα ἀποκτέννει, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζωοποιεῖ

Bernard of Clairvaux, Johannes Tauler (influenced by Meister Eckhart³³), Jean Gerson—the writings of these men associated with medieval mysticism were known to Luther. The sermons and other writings of these mystics (among others), as well as the counsel of Johannes Staupitz, the vicar general of the Augustinians, Luther’s superior, provided insight into the passion of Christ and its meaning for the life of the Christian confronted with sin. Luther would use and encourage others to use prayer and meditation in order to experience God, and could do so in ways that might seem parallel to the mystical use of the same. Also, “Luther seems to find mystical language most

³¹ Ibid., 454.

³² For a brief and interesting discussion on the possibility of continued value of the *Quadriga* see the post by Peter Leithart, <http://trinityhouseinstitute.com/rehabilitating-the-quadriga> (accessed 9/9/13).

³³ Spitz calls him the “unrivaled master of ‘cerebral mysticism’” (39). He goes on to describe him: “Eckhart was influenced by Bernard of Clairvaux, the Arabic philosophers Avicenna and Averroës, the Jewish Aristotelian Moses Maimonides, and most of all St. Thomas. His work was largely concerned with traditional church dogma and the trend of his thought was toward a Neoplatonic interpretation of St. Thomas. He believed God to be absolute being (*Esse est deus*). The central religious experience is the mysterious occurrence of the birth of God in the soul. Through this birth the downward flood of the divine reaches its goal and proceeds in that same instant to flow again toward its center in the heart of God. The mystical way begins with negation, a mental purgative, an emptying of the soul of every created thing, of all images. In this state of emptiness one is overwhelmed by a feeling of despair—the dark night of the soul, as Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross was later to call it. At that moment, when one feels that one is farthest from God, there occurs the birth of God in the soul. The divine spark (*scintilla*) in man leaps across the chasm and experiences momentary union with God. The traditional dogmas of sin, grace, the incarnation in Christ fade into the background in this context and pantheistic tendencies are truly in evidence” (40).

congenial and accurate, often resorting to such terms as ‘rapture’ (*raptus*), mystical ‘translation’ (*translatio*), and using the imagery of the heavenly marriage.”³⁴ Once more, though, Luther would find his own way.

The mystics were concerned not with the abstract theology of the scholastics (note, however, that scholastics were by no means necessarily opposed to mysticism), but with the knowledge of experience gained from learning of Christ and the comfort of his Passion.

“Mystical faith” is always closely associated with *fides qua creditur*, one’s living association with God, yet can never be separated from *fides quae creditur*, the articles of faith. ... Western mysticism attaches *fides qua* firmly to *fides quae*. It seeks to avoid the free-floating cosmic mysticism and speculation about the ages that is based on eastern Gnosticism.³⁵

While that strong attachment of mystic experience to the articles of faith may often have been desired by the mystics, the question remains as to how successfully that attachment remained binding. The very methodology of the mystics, the inner movement desired as a text was meditated upon, could too easily lend itself to deviating from the faith and beginning a journey into one’s own experience, senses, less and less connected to the actual word of Scripture. The biblical text, whatever it was, would become little more than an entrance point by which one could attempt a closer relationship with the divine.

Certain fundamental ideas appear in various expressions of medieval mystical experience. One of these is that the mystical experience is achieved only as a result of a long, difficult, and even arduous effort. The word “ascent” is often used, and the motive force is overwhelming love of God. A second idea is that the mystic way requires an astringent ascetic preparation in order to drive out the baser elements, a *vita purgativa*. A third idea is that the course of mystical ascent draws one away from the senses into meditation and contemplation. This contemplation is of varying modalities, some mystics stressing intellectual effort, others a willful gazing with the “inner eye of the soul.”³⁶

³⁴ Gerhard Forde, “When the Old Gods Fail: Martin Luther’s Critique of Mysticism,” *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007).

³⁵ Heiko Oberman, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 77.

³⁶ Spitz, 38.

It was mystical experience detached from the biblical text which Luther would later designate as enthusiasm (finding the god within) and mark it as “of the devil.”³⁷

While the mystics would attempt to retain the connection of “letter” and “spirit,” one can appreciate the difficulty of doing so when human effort is so much the center of the mystical activity.³⁸ Luther’s response to such mysticism is aptly summarized by Forde:

Any mysticism that regards the text as only significant or an experience that has its ground somewhere else than an encounter with the text, whether in the metaphysical realm of ideas or in the perennial philosophy of the soul’s immediate contact with the deity, would be radically questioned—at least in the sense that such natural knowledge or experience delivers one into the hands of the gracious God. At best, all such knowledge always delivers one into the hands of the God of wrath.³⁹

The role of mysticism in the formation of Martin Luther’s theology is an area which deserves more attention. Oswald Bayer notes the significance of Luther’s break with the traditional way of understanding theology.

Ever since theology began to be thought of as a philosophy of science in the thirteenth century, the question has been asked: How do we know what we know? Is our knowledge only theoretical? Or is it also practical? Or is it also affective, involving the senses, the emotions, the memory, the desires, and the imagination? The question has predominantly answered with the twofold scheme of theory and practice (*contemplatio* and *actio*). As for the “affects,” they seem to be placed, as in Bonaventure,

³⁷ See Smalcald Articles, III, VIII.

³⁸ “Without for a moment denying the ‘letter’ of the revelation, the mystic nevertheless tends to dissolve its tie to the once-for-all historical and prophetic referent and turn it into the eternal language of the individual soul and its inner life. Thus what in the Holy Scripture was exoterically intended acquire an esoteric meaning of the initiated mystical soul. The mystic is therefore never divorced from the historical revelation, but the mystic transcends its sense individually even though the ‘letter’ is never altered. The consequence of this internalization is on the one hand that the mystic generally tends to border on and to flirt with heresy and on the other hand that mysticism cannot in the long run maintain itself in separation from its historical religious background” Forde, 59.

³⁹ Forde, 65.

between *contemplatio* and *actio*, between theoretical and practical knowledge.

Luther rightly torpedoed the traditional twofold scheme and corrected it. Adopting the experience and language of the mystic Tauler, he speaks rather of the “receptive life” (*vita passiva*), “so that neither the active practical life (*vita activa*) with its works nor the contemplative theoretical life (*vita contemplativa*) with its speculations should lead us astray.”

... For [Luther], faith is no longer subordinated to theory, but it is a unique and distinctive kind of life, a receptive life (*vita passiva*). Theory and practice are no longer related to each other in a twofold way. Rather, both are related to faith, and it is this *third* element that determines whether they are true or false.⁴⁰

The time of the Later Middle Ages was witness to major and lasting attempts to address the fears, spiritual and otherwise, of a laity confronted with a society in flux.

Mysticism appears when the original and immediate unity of subject and object in the mythical stage of religion has been lost and the abyss, the distance, between God and humans has become apparent. The mystic seeks to overcome the consciousness of this distance on a different and perhaps higher level and to reestablish the original unity of subject and object in the “ground” of the soul. ... Mysticism appears, perhaps we can say, when the old gods of the myth or the prophetic revelation or the sacramental priestly system have failed.⁴¹

As we observe the rise of individual spirituality and, at the same time, the demise of organized religion in our own day, we should not be surprised at attempts to find some way back to the God who is lost. It is part of our task to insure that the distance between God and humans is bridged by that which only God gives and institutes: concrete

⁴⁰ Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, ed. and trans. Jeffrey G. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 107–109. Bayer also states, “The twofold scheme serves as a basic model right up to our own day. An impressive example of this is the motto of Taizé, *contemplation et lutte*, “prayer and engagement” (109).

⁴¹ Forde, 58–59.

text, words and promises in real languages that can be understood and taught, holy sacraments.⁴²

Conclusion

Martin Luther received his theological formation not in a dark and dreary time, theologically speaking, but in a time of intense theological deliberation, when biblical texts read in the original languages brought new light, when the care of souls, while fragmentary, was not non-existent by any means. But the seas were truly confused by a grand confluence of ideas old and new. Luther's course through this confusion did not occur with him skipping merrily over the waves, but rather careening through them, with the bow more often smashing through the waves, not rocking gently. In other words, it was hard work, the work of a man who desired to know God, to know him with confidence based on God's Word.

One last consideration for us: Confessional Lutheranism is not alone in its anticipation of the anniversary year of 2017. There are competing voices that will be much louder than our own, with a message and "lessons-learned" that may very well differ from our own understanding of the significance of Martin Luther and the Reformation. Examples from a recent document serve to outline where we may anticipate some of these differences to lie:

⁴² On this point, a recent diagnosis of the primary problem in the ELCA shows how mysticism has become detached from Scripture in that church body, resulting in a move to Gnosticism. Steve Paulson (ELCA), responding to a presentation by Dr. J. Brug (WELS) on the ELCA's rejection of biblical inerrancy commented, "No doubt [Brug] is right, that the ELCA lost track of the original source of Scripture, which is the inerrancy in the letters that come through an inerrant Holy Spirit. But we must go one step deeper, which is that the ELCA has become enthusiasts, fanatics, who swallow the Holy Spirit, feathers and all. They are not immoralists; instead they are on a quest for a greater holiness than yours—and you ought to get ready, since they are ready to fight on this particular matter.

"The ELCA is a runaway train of piety that they believe is conducted by the Holy Spirit, who is the Perfecter of the Law. To them, law is not universal and unchanging but imbued by the Spirit with the power to evolve, develop, adapt, and so to make new laws—that is, they have discovered what they consider to be the greatest part of divinity, which is the *future, not the past—the Spirit, not the Father.*" Steven D. Paulson, "Scripture, Enthusiasm, and the ELCA," *Logia XXII*, no. 1 (Epiphany 2013): 53–54.

Therefore, in order for God to reveal himself truly he must work, not only in Scripture, but *beyond* it, in the form of merciful, graceful, unconditional love. You have to understand that where this is going is pure Gnosticism, and the Gnostic always prefers androgyny over the particular matter of procreation by the male and female.

198. Scripture is the witness to God's revelation; thus a theologian should carefully follow the way in which God's revelation is expressed in the biblical books (*modus loquendi scripturae*). Otherwise, God's revelation would not be taken fully into account. The manifold voices of Scripture are integrated into a whole by their reference to Jesus Christ: "Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what else will you find in them?" Thus "what inculcates Christ" (*was Christum treibet*) is the standard in addressing the problem of the canonicity and the limits of the canon. It is a standard developed from Scripture itself and in a few cases applied critically to particular books, like the letter of James.⁴³

In this paragraph reference is made to Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, and it is used to address the issue of canonicity and its limits and how this might be useful in discussions between the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church. However, Luther's actual point in this section is in regard to the clarity of Scripture, not canon. The paragraph immediately following the question "Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what else will you find in them?" starts with these sentences:

The subject matter of the Scriptures, therefore, is all quite accessible, even though some texts are still obscure owing to our ignorance of their terms. Truly it is stupid and impious, when we know that the subject matter of Scripture has all been placed in the clearest light, to call it obscure on account of a few obscure words.⁴⁴

The same document continues:

232. Sixteenth-century divisions were rooted in different understandings of the truth of the Christian faith and were particularly contentious since salvation was seen to be at stake. On both sides, persons held theological convictions that they could not abandon. One must not blame someone for following his or her [sic] conscience when it is formed by the Word of God and has reached its judgments after serious deliberation with others.

⁴³ *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt GmbH, 2013), 73.

⁴⁴ Martin Luther, "Bondage of the Will," *Luther's Works*, vol. 33, ed. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972).

233. How theologians presented their theological convictions in the battle for public opinion is quite another matter. In the sixteenth century, Catholics and Lutherans frequently not only misunderstood but also exaggerated and caricatured their opponents in order to make them look ridiculous. They repeatedly violated the eighth commandment, which prohibits bearing false witness against one's neighbor. Even if the opponents were sometimes intellectually fair to one another, their willingness to hear the other and to take his concerns seriously was insufficient. The controversialists wanted to refute and overcome their opponents, often deliberately exacerbating conflicts rather than seeking solutions by looking for what they held in common. Prejudices and misunderstandings played a great role in the characterization of the other side. Oppositions were constructed and handed down to the next generation. Here both sides have every reason to regret and lament the way in which they conducted their debates. Both Lutherans and Catholics bear the guilt that needs to be openly confessed in the remembrance of the events of 500 years ago.⁴⁵

So reads the pious judgment of the 21st-century ecumenical theology, the "agree to disagree" sentiment so dominant in the last century of American Lutheranism, over against the fathers of the faith willing to sacrifice "kindred, goods, and life" for the sake of the Gospel.

I believe we are obligated to know our history, to have the skills and desire to refute where necessary those positions which may be little more than projections of 21st-century prejudices and ecumenical goals on to a time far different from our own, while at the same time stating positively that which has made the Reformation something truly to celebrate. For finally it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ which Luther strove to allow to shine more clearly and more brightly. In that Gospel is the confidence of all who believe, based on the work of Christ alone, and not our own. LSQ

⁴⁵ *From Conflict to Communion*, 83–84.

Appendix I

Notable Philosophers and Theologians

Name	Date	Other (with qualifications)
Plato	427–347 BC	
Aristotle	384–322 BC	
Augustine	AD 354–430	
Anselm of Canterbury	1033–1109	
Bernard of Clairvaux	1090–1153	Cistercian (Rule of Benedict), mystic
Peter Lombard	1100–1160	The Four Books of Sentences (<i>Libri Quattuor Sententiarum</i>)
Bonaventure	1221–1274	Franciscan
Albertus Magnus	d. 1280	Dominican
Thomas Aquinas	1225–1274	<i>via antiqua</i> , realist, Dominican
Meister Eckhart	1260–1327	mystic, Dominican
Duns Scotus	1265–1308	<i>via antiqua</i> , realist, Order of Friars Minor (OFM), Franciscan
William of Occam	1285–1347	<i>via moderna</i> , nominalist, Franciscan
Gregory of Rimini	1300–1358	<i>via moderna</i> , nominalist (<i>via Gregorii</i> at Erfurt)
Johannes Tauler	c. 1300–1361	Dominican, mystic
John Wyclif	1330–1384	nominalist, later realist
Pierre d'Ailly	1351–1420	<i>via moderna</i> , nominalist
Jean Gerson	1363–1429	<i>via moderna</i> , nominalist (pupil of d'Ailly), mystic features
John Hus	1372–1415	
Gabriel Biel	1420/5–1495	<i>via moderna</i> , nominalist, Canons Regular, Rule of Augustine (CRSA)
Johann von Staupitz	ca.1460–1524	<i>via antiqua</i> , realist, mystic features, OESA
Jacobus Trutvetter	1460–1519	<i>via moderna</i> , nominalist, humanist
Bartholomäus Arnoldi	1465–1521	<i>via moderna</i> , nominalist, humanist, OESA

Martin Luther	1483–1546	OESA
Ulrich Zwingli	1484–1531	<i>via antiqua</i>
Andreas Karlstadt	1486–1541	Thomist

Appendix II

Luther's Early Academic Career

(from Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*)

1501–1505	University of Erfurt, 1505 Master of Arts
July 1505	Enters Augustinian monastery
1507	Ordained in Erfurt
1509	Begins reading Augustine in Erfurt (alliance of Augustine and nominalism, Oberman, 161)
1511	Transfer to University of Wittenberg
1512	Doctor of Theology, professor of Biblical theology
1513–1515	<i>Dictata super Psalterium</i>
1515–1516	Lectures on Romans
1517	Disputation on Scholastic Theology (repudiation of Aristotle)

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The Early Life of Milton H.A. Otto

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THE YOUNG BOY ON THE railway platform was most certainly filled with conflicting emotions. Probably he was scared about leaving home and family for the first time. Probably he was excited at the chance to travel and see bigger and greater places. Possibly he was thinking that no matter how it turned out, his life would never be the same.

That boy was Milton Otto, age 13. He was on his way from the small town of Aurelia, Iowa, to Seward, Nebraska, to attend Concordia Academy, the preparatory school of Concordia Teachers College, where he would begin his study to become a parochial school teacher. Although he was the oldest of seven in the family of Henry and Anna Otto, allergy issues made it clear that farming could never be his life's work. He had been confirmed that spring at St. John's Lutheran Church and a month later graduated from St. John's Lutheran School, both of Hanover, Iowa. His teacher was Jacob Schmidt, a much-beloved man who taught at St. John's for 44 years. Teacher Schmidt visited with Henry and Anna Otto over that spring and summer and spoke of the possibilities ahead for their son. He stressed the boy's intelligence and predicted that he would make a good parochial school teacher. With Milton's agreement, they looked outside of their known world of farming and planned a different route for their son's life.

Before going ahead, it is interesting to look back and see where this farm family's roots were anchored. Christoph Otto (once spelled

Otte and pronounced “Otta”) was the first of the family to set foot on American soil. Christoph was born in 1820 in the town of Schwarme, in the area of Niedersachsen, Germany. He met and married Anna Maria (called Mary) Eckelmann there in 1850. Eighteen years later, in April of 1868, Christoph and Mary Otto and their six children boarded the North German Lloyd ship, the SS Hansa, at the nearby seaport of Bremen and sailed for America.

Their reasons for leaving are not recorded, but the area of north-western Germany in which they lived had been ceded to Prussia as part of the Austro-Prussian War in 1866. Perhaps these political changes caused their move, or perhaps it was simply a chance for a large family to find farmland and make a new start.

The Ottos made their way to New Bremen (later called Tinley Park), Illinois, south and west of Chicago. They must have been renting land, because they moved several times over the next 10 years. But sometime between 1880 and 1885, Christoph and Mary and at least five of their now eight children moved again, this time to Diamond Township in the western Iowa county of Cherokee. Christoph and Mary lived there the rest of their lives.

Milton’s mother’s family had also settled in Tinley Park, but they went west before the Ottos did. In 1878 John and Mary (Krueger) Miller bought land in Maple Valley Township, Buena Vista County, Iowa, which was adjacent to the township where the Ottos later settled. The Millers sent two boys, John Jr. and Fred, ahead to break the sod and plow some prairie and plant at least a small crop before the rest of the family, including Milton’s grandfather, August Miller, left Illinois in January of 1880.

According to a story written by John Miller’s son, George (Milton’s great uncle), it was a cold and miserable winter. John Jr. and Fred had built a small house, 16 x 24 feet, with an upstairs loft. From mid-January until another home could be built in the spring, 14 people lived in that small house. They had one cow and lived on milk and cornbread from the corn the older boys had planted the previous year. John would later tell his children that the family had not one cent of money from that spring until thrashing time.

The Ottos and the Millers became neighbors in western Iowa and attended the same church, St. John’s Lutheran in Hanover. Christoph and Mary’s son, Heinrich Johann, eight years old when the family left Germany, grew to adulthood in America and married Katharina Caroline Hinkeldey in Hanover. Heinrich and Katharina

had 16 children, including Heinrich (Henry) Herman, who grew up to marry Anna Marie Miller, daughter of August Miller and Elizabeth (Ahrenholz) Miller, at St. John's Lutheran. Henry and Anna had seven children, the oldest being Milton Henry August, born December 6, 1914, in Diamond Township. He was named after his father and his two grandfathers, Henry Otto and August Miller.

Milton spent his childhood on the Iowa prairies. His playmates were his many cousins and a couple of uncles who were close to his age. Before he was three, he had a younger brother and a younger sister. One can guess that he did as all boys do: dug in the dirt, went fishing, and explored the land around his home. His parents, grandparents, and the many other relatives who lived nearby were hard-working Germans, so helping with the farm work would have been instilled in him at an early age. One thing is certain: he went to church every Sunday. St. John's Lutheran was still holding services in German as well as English up until 1940, and the Otto family attended one or the other each week.

But there was a time when German services were not allowed. Milton was still a toddler when America entered World War I, and anti-German sentiment sprang up throughout the country. In May of 1918, Iowa's Governor Harding made English the only legal language in the state. The use of all foreign languages (not just German) was illegal, and books, newspapers, and even ethnic church services had to be in English. One would suppose St. John's complied and held church services only in English. One might also suppose that there were "informal" gatherings where people could more comfortably hear and speak their native German.¹

St. John's had a parochial school, and Milton attended there for all eight grades. And that is when his life changed. Three months shy of his 14th birthday, Milton set off alone on the train for Seward, Nebraska. Left at home with his parents were brothers Vernon, Marvin, and Arnold; and sisters Erna, Dorothy, and LaVonne. Not much is known about his two years at Concordia Academy in Seward, but during that time, an important change took place in his heart. The young boy began to feel the Lord's calling to become a pastor. He must have spoken with teachers or advisors about this, and found out that he needed to change schools. To be a teacher, a student needed to take an academic course load. But to be a pastor, he must also take Latin, which was not taught in Seward.

¹ Anti-German sentiment in Iowa: <http://www.johnheinl.net/LHserver/JP-german61001.htm>.

In the fall of 1930, with hard times of the Great Depression settling over the country, Henry and Anna Otto found the necessary funds to send their son farther from home, to St. Paul, Minnesota, and Concordia Academy, the preparatory school for Concordia College there. Milton needed to repeat his sophomore year to make up the language study he had missed. Concordia was feeling the effects of the Depression also. By 1931, the enrollment had dropped by more than 50 percent. The LCMS considered closing the college for a few years to wait out the financial crisis. They held on, but closed residence halls, slashed budgets, and could not pay students working around campus. Food donations from congregations helped to keep the school's food service running.²

Milton spent five years at Concordia, St. Paul, graduating from high school in 1933 and from the junior college program in 1935. He helped his folks with tuition by holding down a job whenever possible, and going home to work on the farm each summer. There wasn't always money for train trips in-between, so he spent some holidays alone or perhaps enjoying the kindness of others. "Glad to hear you had enough to eat Thanksgiving day," his father, Henry Otto, wrote in 1934, and added that the family hoped to have him home for Christmas "as we still have plenty to eat."

Not everyone had enough to eat. Times were hard, and the country was already five years into the Great Depression. Once, Milton wrote home to ask if his parents had listened to "The Lutheran Hour" on the radio. "You asked if we listened to 'The Lutheran Hour,'" his dad responded. "No, we didn't, because the radio isn't going, and we don't have any money to get it fixed."

Late in 1934, Milton wrote home to ask for money to have his picture taken, possibly for his graduation the next spring. "How much revenue goes on that?" his father questioned, and explained that they were waiting for a corn bonus check, and they would then send some money, "which is our duty."

Life wasn't all drudgery and hard times. Milton was a member of the track and field team at Concordia, acted in at least one play, and was in the Concordia College Glee Club. And when the class of 1935 graduated in the spring of that year, the graduation program lists Milton Otto, President of the Concordia College Student Association, as giving the graduate address. In the fall of 1935, after graduation and another

² Concordia College, St. Paul difficulties during the Depression: <http://www.csp.edu/about-concordia/vision-mission-history/history/>.

summer in Iowa working on the farm, he took an unfamiliar route south to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri.

Finally starting at the seminary after all the preparatory work must have been exciting, but it also seems to have brought doubts to Milton's mind as to whether he could complete the task. His father may have been tight with dollars but he was generous with support. "Experience has taught me the best and only remedy is prayer, patience and work and in due time everything will turn out for your good." Then Henry Otto added, "Just forget all the stumbleblocks and do the best you can at your work. May God keep you in the course you have started."

He kept on. The students at Concordia Seminary were divided into Juniors, Middlers, and Seniors. The Missouri Synod's scheduling for seminarians was that a student would attend two years of seminary, take the third year as a vicar, also called the supply year, and then return to the seminary for his senior year. In his second, or Middler year, Milton worked as well as attending the seminary full time. He was also in the Students' Chorus, along with Junior W.C. Gullixson and Middler Stuart Dorr. (Both of these men would remain close friends with Milton for the rest of their lives.) It was a hard year.

In August of 1937, Milton received an Application for Supply from John H.C. Fritz, Dean of Concordia Seminary. The call was to teach in the Christian day school and preach at Our Saviour's Evangelical Lutheran Church, rural Princeton, Minnesota, under the Rev. Norman A. Madson. The salary promised was \$50 per month for teaching, with extra pay for preaching. Out of that sum, he was to pay room and board of \$15 per month. He was to board at the parsonage with the pastor's family. Pastor Madson wrote that there were 30 pupils in the one-room school. Then Milton received another letter, this one asking him to go to Worthington, Minnesota, for a short-term supply to a congregation whose pastor was ill and in the hospital, which he declined. He accepted the offer from Princeton.

Suddenly, the young man who had lived in various dorms for nine years was in charge of 30 pupils. It must have seemed a monumental task. He planned class work for all subjects for the eight grades he taught each day, and contended with students who could be mischievous or unruly. He seemed to blame himself if their conduct or their grades were poor and continually tried to find new ways for each child to succeed. He also had to fit in time for sermon writing. Milton's diary shows occasional discouragement. "I sometimes wonder if I ever will make it!" he said once during that winter, and another time stated, "Life

is hard; if one could only get a glimpse of the future.” In retrospect, one can see that he held himself to extremely high standards, and perhaps expected the same of others, especially of the students in his charge.

Times were not all bad. He chopped wood to work out frustrations, helped milk the cows, and kept up a steady stream of letters between family and friends. In spring, he entered into frequent softball games in the evenings with the Madsons and perhaps some neighbors. On Confirmation day that spring, he was quite proud of his students. “Finest Confirmation attended and enjoyed since my own,” he reported.

In June of 1938, the congregation surprised Milton with a farewell party, which included a purse of \$9. “Saying good-by [is] an awful job,” he noted. “I hate to leave.” He had grown close to the family and the community, but now it was time to go home to Aurelia for the summer—though soon after arriving he headed back to Bethany College in Mankato for his first Norwegian Synod Convention. The first day of the convention, the Rev. Martin Galstad asked Milton to come and assist him for the next year at Parkland Evangelical Lutheran Church, in Tacoma, Washington. The second day he noted that Galstad again approached him. “I am almost inclined to accept,” he wrote, and mentioned talking over the situation with several pastors who were at the convention.

According to his diary, asthma and hay fever bothered Milton a lot that summer as he milked cows, cultivated, chopped wood, and brought in the hay. At the bottom of a listing of a full day’s work in fields and barn, he would note, “Lungs filled up” or “can hardly breathe.” Yet he kept on working, knowing his father was paying him \$80 for a summer of work.

Perhaps the uncertainty of the future bothered him even more than the asthma. Money was always a problem and he needed a new suit and a topcoat. “I’m puzzled as to the choice of school or working,” he said. And one more thing: Our Saviour’s at Princeton had given him his first chance to work in the parish ministry and he loved it. “I can’t forget all the wonderful people in Princeton,” he said.

He verbally accepted Pastor Galstad’s offer to assist in Tacoma, but then it seemed the seminary in St. Louis would not allow it. “You know it is our rule that Middlers should not stay out more than one year,” wrote Acting Dean Theodore Hoyer. “If there are conditions that make it necessary for you to work another year, we should be so informed.”

Milton responded that his original intentions were to return to the Seminary, even though “I don’t see how I would be able to do so

financially.” He explained that he had tried to both work and attend school during his Middler year and “nearly ruined my health trying to make ends meet.” Thus, when the possibility of teaching another year was offered, he felt he had to accept it. St. Louis agreed. The official call came in late June of 1938, offering him \$40 a month to teach school and “reasonable additional compensation” to assist the pastor of the congregation in conducting divine worship and preaching.

The summer was beneficial to him in another way. He had numerous chances to preach—at least twice in nearby Alta. Once he mentioned, “Teacher Schmidt there, making preaching difficult.” Some of his work was filling the pulpit for his uncle, the Rev. Arthur Otto, in Galva, Iowa. Uncle Art offered constructive criticism, questioning some statements and urging him to keep his train of thought.

On August 31, 1938, Milton boarded a train for Tacoma. He arrived on Friday, and was in the pulpit at Parkland on Sunday morning. “Hard to preach to a strange crowd,” he wrote, which indicates he knew many of the people to whom he had been preaching over the past summer. The next Wednesday, he began the school year with 19 pupils. “Nice bunch,” he noted. The different climate seemed to affect him that fall. Again, he was downhearted. “Felt rather gloomy. Must be the weather,” he said once. Perhaps it wasn’t the climate, but the fact that he was farther away from home, family and friends than ever before. He found that school went much better when he was well prepared. As the year turned over to 1939, a change seemed to be taking place. “Enjoyed the day immensely,” he said one day in January. And after he corrected tests, he noted it was the “surprise of my life to find out they had improved that much.”

During the Lenten season that year, Milton sometimes preached on Wednesday and Thursday nights, as well as keeping up with the day-school kids. In April he mentioned that he could preach two times every Sunday in May, and he was glad to be in church on Sunday, April 30 as a “hearer” instead of as a preacher. It is difficult to follow his preaching schedule with just the notes from his diary. Sometimes he preached “for Arnie,” sometimes he went to a town, such as Olympia, sometimes he named only the church, such as, “preached at Redeemer at 9:30; Grace at 11:00.” The pay for preaching at these services was usually about \$5. He filled pulpits in three different synods: Norwegian, Wisconsin, and Missouri. Since they were all members of the Synodical Conference, one might think all were the same. But it wasn’t so. A friend told Milton that he preferred “the German style of preaching—point by point—because

it is easy to follow." The friend added that with the Norwegians, it was "not so."

In May, Milton was happy to receive tests back from the county that showed his pupils were above average on the attainment tests both in the county and in the nation. Suddenly, it was June. "Doesn't seem possible that it's over," he said. There was a school program, where he handed out diplomas and the kids gave him a briefcase. The congregation surprised him with a gift of \$23. Just as it was back in Princeton, Milton was torn by having to leave a place he had grown to love. "Don't know what to do," he wrote, "I could get June board for preaching two times." Pastor Galstad urged him to be practical and return home; the two boarded the train on June 6 for the Synod Meeting in Mankato.

He stopped in Minneapolis to visit some friends, and noted they were "full of vitriol" against the Norwegian Synod. The discussion on unionism had been growing. While the Missouri Synod was leaning towards more fellowship with liberal Lutheran church bodies, both the Norwegian and Wisconsin synods were strongly against such fellowship. Pastor Madson had written Milton in the summer of 1938, saying, "No, I was not so well pleased with the resolutions regarding union at the St. Louis convention."³ He added, "I wouldn't like to see the day when I shall have to break with Missouri, but if it means uniting with the Norwegian Merger and the U.L.C., what else is there to be done?" In Tacoma, the discussion had continued; now it seemed to be part of every gathering.

At Bethany, Milton roomed with "TNT," Bjarne and Martin (Torald Teigen, Bjarne Teigen and Martin Galstad). Daily room and board for the convention was \$2. He was obviously glad to be back; "met the rest of the gang," he said. But while at the convention, he got word that his Grandmother Miller was very ill. Pastor Madson asked him to come to Princeton and preach that weekend; he declined and headed back to western Iowa. He came in on the train at 7:45, and found that his Grandma had died at 7:00. He perhaps felt guilty then, about hanging out with "the Norwegians" while his grandmother was dying. But those very Norwegians were the people who guided him onto the path of his future.

It was another summer of working on the farm. He took a few days to attend a Missouri Synod district convention, and got a bit steamed up. "Our men don't know the A.L.C. Declaration, nor what our synod did

³ These resolutions implied that complete doctrinal agreement was not necessary for church fellowship.

in St. Louis, nor what it means. [I am] ashamed of these Missourians!" he stated. He also noted that his mother was now taking an interest in "this union business."

It was time to work. He painted the house and all of the outbuildings. He did his share of milking, haying, shocking, grubbing out stumps, and everything else that farm life entails. And he kept on preaching. He was happy to have his family serve as hosts for the Rev. N.A. and Mrs. Madson, when Pastor Madson was to preach in nearby Storm Lake. A Rev. Vogel preached in German, Madson in English. There were 1,127 people in attendance.

From July 30 through September 3, Milton preached every Sunday. Pastor Madson had written him, "It makes farm work more interesting when one knows that on Sunday he must hold forth in the pulpit." He preached one Sunday in Princeton, where "TNT had Norwegian; I did English." And once, back in Iowa, he did a German service at 9:30 and the English service at 11:00.

Then it was September and time to head back to the seminary in St. Louis for his final year. "Place seems forsaken and dreary," he said. "Don't know many." He noted that about 10 of his classmates were there, meaning he wasn't the only one who had stayed out to work an extra year. Then he said, "The Norwegian fellows are here!" It was becoming clearer as to where his heart was leaning. According to the 1940 commencement issue of *Alma Mater*, Milton was a member of the "Koren Forbundet," a Norwegian Club for students (mostly Norwegians) who were preparing to assume membership in the Norwegian Synod. Fellow members were Walther C. Gullixson, [unknown] Ylvisaker, Luther Vangen, Nils Oesleby, and Raymond Branstad. He also subscribed to the Norwegian publication *Tidende*.

Soon he was immersed in classes, Seminary Chorus, and the Lutheran Hour Choir, which included 26 men chosen from the larger chorus. The Lutheran Hour Choir performed live on the radio twice every Sunday, and he was excited that the choir was making a record. Milton enjoyed being back at school and felt he was doing well. Two years of teaching and preaching had taught him to use time wisely. He gave his first sermon before a homiletics class on October 31. "[They] tore me apart," he said, "but [I'm] not bitter." The next day he added, "[Prof E.J.] Friedrich will have mercy on me, but have to re-write." Perhaps his friend back in Washington was correct; Germans and Norwegians prepared sermons differently, and after two years of

training under Norwegian pastors, it seemed as if his method of writing a sermon showed a marked difference from the German ideal.

The discussion of unionism crept into classroom also, as when he quoted Prof. F.E. Mayer as saying, "We are agreed with ALC." It carried over into the dorm rooms too, as he noted "in Mack's room with Gullixson to discuss problems." The union discussions, the burgeoning war in Europe, and the constant battle for money were key themes in Milton's daily journaling throughout the year. He typed a German sermon for a classmate and earned 50 cents, but then paid Gullixson 75 cents for a vocal lesson. He was discouraged in early November when he said he had to ask his dad for money, for the "first time in three years."

Then, he got a job downtown at the Famous Barr department store every Saturday. The store was so large it had 5,000 employees. He and other seminarians worked as doormen, counting shoppers, keeping order, and rebuking rowdy kids. On one exciting day, he helped arrest two shoplifters. A day's work earned him \$3.50. He bought two shirts and collars one week, and a pair of shoes a week or so later.⁴

Suddenly, it was time for Christmas vacation. Milton got back to Iowa just in time to help with hog slaughtering. Then he preached for the English service at Hanover on Christmas Day. He would be back to his home church to preach on Good Friday the next spring.

January of 1940 meant the last semester of school. One of his first meetings was with Prof. Friedrich to go over his sermon. "Considerable improvement," the professor declared. That was one relief, and the knowledge that "board is paid up" was another, but the question of money continued to dog him. He had loaned money to a friend over the past summer, and now that friend was slow to repay. But his sister Erna, who was working, occasionally sent him \$5. Then in February, there was a letter from his dad. He had sold some cattle and sent Milton \$25.

The union question wouldn't go away, either. In February, Milton noted, "Dr. Ylvisaker here, so Bethany boys and I had supper with him." He said they talked "Missouri Synod conditions, union, and inter-synodical affairs." On the same day he noted that Prof. Polack said in class, "the Norwegian Synod is wrong." It must have been difficult to know when to speak up in the classroom and when to keep silent.

On February 18, Milton preached to about 280 men at the Bureau for Homeless Men in St. Louis. "Deviated from MS [manuscript?] – purposely," he said. It could be that the audience moved him to preach

⁴ Facts on the Famous Barr Department Store:
<http://departmentstoremuseum.blogspot.com>.

differently than he had intended, and he was able to adapt. It was a good skill to learn.

When he went home for Easter in March, he found a wonderful surprise—the farm had been electrified. “Electricity is rather nice,” he commented. Then it was back to school for the final two months; it was a very busy time. The Seminary Chorus left on tour by train to Chicago, Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana. Their audiences were as large as 2,200 people. The concert in Toledo was broadcast over WSPD radio. Back in St. Louis, the Lutheran Hour chorus sang its last live broadcast, then held a banquet in the DeSoto Hotel.

In May, classmates began to hear of calls, although “Fibby” [Dr. Fuerbringer, President of the Seminary] warned them that there was “not much hope for many calls.” Walther Gullixson received the call to Parkland, and Milton felt a little sad that he was not their choice. “I feel almost jilted,” he said, but added, “It must be for the best.” If he could only have seen into the year ahead, he would have known God’s plan for him was far better. On May 16, a call came from the Norwegian Synod Home Mission Board to assist Rev. Guttebo in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, for one year. The pay would be room and board and \$10 a month.

Milton was excited about the call, but concerned about the salary, so he wrote to the Rev. Hansen, chairman of the Norwegian Synod Home Mission Board. “It gave me great pleasure to know that the Norwegian Synod considered me worthy of working for them,” he began. “I hope their confidence in me will not be betrayed.” Then stated his problem:

Please do not get the impression that I am selfishly inclined; but you perhaps realize that at the close of a school year as well as at the end of a long siege of schooling, most of us are not only without funds but also committed to the red side of the ledger. At the above rate I doubt if I could get the things I still need and still balance my budget.

N.A. Madson wrote to reassure him that the mission board had offered \$10 per month thinking they would be supplied with a Middler, but “since it is now a matter of a theological candidate” they had reconsidered and offered \$25 plus room and board. This was still \$10 less than he had received in his first vicar placement as a Middler. Then he received a letter from Pastor John Moldstad encouraging him to accept, saying the Norwegian Synod wanted him. But on May 25, the Dean of the Seminary offered him another position, teaching school (half German, half English) in Denver, Iowa, for \$50 a month. He had made

up his mind. "Said no, and told him about Wisconsin and J.M.," he reported.

The school year was drawing to a close. Milton ordered a gown for \$34.10, cleaned and packed. Henry and Anna Otto drove from Iowa to St. Louis on June 4. He showed them the Concordia campus and found them a cabin for their stay. Dr. Ylvisaker spoke for the baccalaureate service that evening. The next day was graduation day. He had one comment: "Through with school life." But there was no rest. A Lutheran Hour Concert was given at St. Stephen's in the evening, and the next day the Lutheran Hour Choir boarded the train for a tour to the West Coast. It was a long tour, but among all the cities where they would sing were two places near to his heart: Seward, Nebraska, and Tacoma, Washington. In Tacoma, Milton left the tour and preached for Sunday services. Then he stayed to visit friends for a week, finally heading home on July 7.

While he was on tour, Milton received a letter from N.A. Madson, affirming that the matter of salary was straightened out. At that, Milton accepted the call to Eau Claire, and sent a telegram to his folks in Aurelia announcing the same. Henry Otto responded, "Received your telegram and was very happy to receive the message; I think I'll have it framed." The next letters to Milton from the home farm began, "Dear Rev. Milton."

The years from 1928 to 1940 had been a long haul for everyone, as each member of the Otto family had to do without extras to keep Milton in school. The 12 years of support from his parents was partly monetary, but in the later years it became more fatherly advice and encouragement. Henry and Anna must have found great joy in knowing their long-time efforts were now being rewarded. Their son had finally accomplished what he had set out to do. It was a wonderful ending, but it was also a wonderful beginning of a new phase in life. Perhaps Henry was speaking of more than just a choir tour when he ended his letter, "May the Lord's guiding hand protect you on the rest of your journey that you reach home safely."

July flew quickly by and on August 8, 1940, Milton left on the train for Eau Claire. There must have been some layovers before he boarded the "400" (so called because it ran from the Twin Cities to Chicago in 400 minutes) and arrived in Eau Claire on Friday afternoon, August 9. There was a reception for him at Concordia Lutheran Church that evening. On Sunday morning he preached in both of Rev. Guttebo's churches, Concordia and Pinehurst Lutheran.

Family lore has two stories of how that first meeting between Milton and his future bride came about. Milton told his children that he looked up into the balcony and saw a woman in a white dress “who looked like an angel singing in the choir.” That angel was Marjorie Helen Lund, who with her parents and younger sister, Elaine, was a member of the Concordia parish. Meanwhile, Marjorie told this story: the conversation on the way home from that service was pretty one-sided; she couldn’t stop talking about the new young pastor. Finally, her uncle who was riding with them in the car, said, “It sounds like we could have a pastor in the family.”

His words were prophetic. After his graduation, Milton stopped keeping a diary and kept only the briefest of notes in Concordia journals. He would indicate with a just a word or two what happened on that day. On Tuesday of that next week, he met with Pastor Galstad in preparation for opening the new Christian Day School in Eau Claire. And on Thursday he met with the “Northside Group.” Below that is penciled in “M.H.L.?” The next week on Thursday, Ladies Aid was held in the church basement. The same initials are penciled in below: “M.H.L.,” and there is no question mark this time.

The month was a busy one. On September 3, the Christian Day School opened in Eau Claire, and from this day on, he taught school every weekday and preached every Sunday, alternating between Concordia and Pinehurst congregations. There were also Sunday school classes, radio broadcast devotions and numerous meetings. And there was choir every Friday, which would have given Milton a chance to see his new friend, Marjorie.

The date of his ordination was set for October 6, 1940, and Milton’s folks wrote that they would be coming to Eau Claire, and that his uncle and aunt, Fred and Mary Radke, would be riding along. The Rev. N.A. Madson preached the ordination sermon, using the text from Isaiah 40:1–5.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the

Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

Milton's parents said they enjoyed meeting Rev. Guttebo and his wife and mentioned how nice everyone was to them. "The services at your installation were so impressive," Henry said, and added that Uncle Fred "sure liked the way they do ordinations up there." Was there a difference between the German and Norwegian traditions in ordination?

The fall grew busier. There was a Young People's Convention in Mankato, a choir trip to sing at a sanitarium, and a patriotic duty also. Milton, who had been watching the war in Europe closely for two years, now did his civic duty and registered for the draft.

October turned to November and on Armistice Day the entire Midwest received a big surprise, an early blizzard that roared into history as one of the greatest winter storms ever. Milton never mentioned it in his journal, but he read about the storm and how it affected his hometown in a letter from his folks.

The night of the 10th the storm came; we were lucky with our cattle; had 44 head on the eighty until that Sunday afternoon ... [when] we got the cattle home. We had only three loads of corn left to pick and planned on getting that out on Monday forenoon and turn in the cattle, but the weatherman had planned different ... Never saw the like at this time of year. Many farmers had either loss of stock, or car or tractor block cracked. Most everyone lost chickens. We lost around 20. [It was] estimated some 2,800 birds killed ... some of the dead turkeys were sold to the public at 50 cents apiece. No frozen turkey for me.

Then came a surprise. Barely three months into the school year and only seven weeks after his ordination, on November 25, Milton received a call to be the pastor at English Lutheran Church of Cottonwood, Minnesota. He was in a quandary, and looked for advice from home as well as from his colleagues. He had just begun a new Christian Day School—what would happen to the school if he left after just a few months?

Concordia's assistant pastor and lone teacher of the new christian day school in Eau Claire sent out several letters to those men he trusted within the Norwegian Synod. The Rev. Christian Anderson, who was

covering a four-point parish including Cottonwood, sent a letter telling something of the congregation, and added, "It goes without saying that the missionwork here [at Cottonwood] has been very much neglected, since Cottonwood is about 20 miles from the parsonage." Anderson also stated that the majority of English Lutheran's members were of German heritage, perhaps hoping Milton would feel at ease there and the members would also feel comfortable with a pastor who was of the same background.

Milton's two bishops from his vicar years responded quickly to his letters. Martin Galstad confessed that the Mission Board had taken advantage of him by placing him where they could get a schoolteacher and assistant pastor for a low wage. "But it is a crime to make a man with debts work that way with little or no income, when it's not *necessary*" [emphasis his]. He also said he knew the teaching position kept Milton from the pastoral field, and gave his consent to the move. "I only regret that it will be a real defeat for the church if the Eau Claire school goes by the board."

N.A. Madson expressed similar feelings. "While I do not like to think of your leaving Eau Claire so soon after having begun your ministry there, the urgency of this call is such that I had to give my consent." He added that he would not have given approval "had I not been assured that the work in your Christian Day School would be taken care of by a competent teacher."

On December 11, the Concordia and Pinehurst congregations passed a resolution that he be given "a peaceful dismissal," provided that he stay until a teacher had been found for the school. Pastor Guttebo wrote a letter to Miss Norma Gronna to see if she would be able to take the position. This was soon assured, and on December 18, 1940, Milton wrote this acceptance to Mr. Oscar Runholt in Cottonwood: "After much deliberation, and consultation with men more experienced in the ministry, I have decided to accept the call as pastor to the English Lutheran Church of Cottonwood. God grant that it is a decision pleasing in His sight."

Back in Iowa, Henry Otto also sent his approval. "The congregation should be encouraged to continue with the school, but why not give some young man a chance to follow your foot steps and you try to help those that have called you in a larger field," he advised. And there was a more personal side to Henry's advice: "You would be so much closer to home ... why, we could get up early and be at your morning services."

There remained only the details to be worked out. Milton would preach his farewell sermon in Eau Claire on January 12, 1941, and his installation in Cottonwood would take place on January 26. His mentor, N.A. Madson, sent a letter of advice and encouragement saying in part, "Our prayers ascend to the throne of grace on your behalf; may the Lord of the Church be with you in all your labors in that section of the vineyard." He closed with these words, "Continue faithfully the course which you have begun with so much promise, and for which we learned to think so highly of you in Our Saviour's congregation in Princeton, and blessings unnumbered must of necessity follow."

So, in mid-January, Milton moved to Cottonwood. There was only one drawback; he had left his heart back in Eau Claire. He did confide in his parents, and took some good-natured joshing from his father about being bitten by the love-bug. "I take it from your letter your mind is floating some other place, but don't worry, it's only the symptoms of being in love." More seriously, Henry added, "Whatever your choice may be, we wish you nothing but happiness."

There followed a courtship by mail for a year and a half. On August 9, 1942, two years to the day from when they met, Milton and Marjorie were married at Concordia, the little Lutheran Church in downtown Eau Claire right next to the railroad tracks, where the hooting of the train whistle and clacking of the wheels often interrupted a Sunday sermon. The Rev. Guttebo performed the ceremony for the bridal couple.

Milton's future seemed assured. He was doing exactly the work he wanted to do, in the service to which God had first called him so many years ago as a schoolboy in Nebraska. He was married to the woman God had chosen for him, and he began with eagerness the job he had been called to do in Cottonwood. But dark days were ahead. In little more than 10 years, Milton would be president of the small Norwegian Synod he had adopted as his own. The serenity of the Synodical Conference was unraveling and the discord that first showed itself during his seminary days would rise to a full-scale battle during his tenure as the leader of the small Norwegian group he had grown to love.

No matter what problems, difficulties and stresses occurred over the years, Milton Otto continued to regard his work as a servant of Christ, a servant of his congregation, and a servant of his students. Everything he did or said during his years in the ministry was, as W.G. Polack proclaimed in the hymn below, "A work of love for Thee." Polack,

a Concordia Seminary faculty member, wrote the hymn entitled “A Graduation Prayer” especially for the class of 1940:

Lord Jesus Christ, grant me to know,
That while I sojourn here below,
Naught save Thy Cross where Thou didst show
Thy love for fallen man.

May Thy dear Cross my glory be,
Where Thou, O Lord, didst die for me;
Through it Thou drawest me to Thee
That I might be Thine own.

Lord, keep me in the narrow way
By Thy Good Spirit day by day;
Make all that I may do and say
A work of love for Thee. LSQ

Endnote

Milton Otto has had at least 10 male relatives who became pastors, and six female relatives who married pastors. All 17 (including Milton) are descended from Christoph Otto. The relatives include one uncle, three first cousins, three first cousins once removed and two second cousins who became pastors. Seven (eight with Milton) had the Otto surname. Also, one first cousin, three second cousins and two second cousins once removed married pastors. Most were in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. The most recent pastor in the family is the Rev. Karl Hermanson, Milton’s grandson, who is currently pastor at Faith Lutheran Church (ELS) in Oregon, Wisconsin.

Unless otherwise noted, all information for this article is taken from diaries Milton kept from 1938–1940, from his personal correspondence and from the genealogical studies of Paul Otto, Milton’s son. Any errors are mine alone. – Betsy (Otto) Hermanson.



Rev. Milton Otto (1914–1982)

Milton Otto Tribute

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*The following is written in tribute to
the Rev. Milton Otto (1914–1982) upon the centennial of his birth.*

Milton H. Otto was born December 6, 1914 in Cherokee County, Iowa. He graduated from Concordia Seminary (St. Louis, Missouri) in 1940. He served a year of vicarage at Princeton, Minnesota and was assistant pastor and taught parochial school at Concordia Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, Wisconsin where he married Marjorie Lund on August 9, 1942, two years to the day from when they first met. He also served as the pastor of English Lutheran Church (Cottonwood, Minnesota) and Saude and Jerico Lutheran Churches (Lawler, Iowa).

Pastor Otto was the president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod from 1954–57. He then served as the dean of Bethany Lutheran Seminary and an instructor of Bethany Lutheran College. Until 1981, he served as the Dean of the seminary. He entered the church triumphant on August 21, 1982.

PROFESSOR OTTO SAID ...

The potential pulpiteer sat at the feet of the professor who was forty years his elder.

This was not the first time they had met, for the pastor had thrice poured water upon his infant head.

For three years of instruction his pastoral heart shown forth.
His words of wisdom still echo in the pulpiteer's heart:

At night, **keep a note pad nearby your bed.**

To write the sermon thoughts that come to your head.

He said, with thumb-worn Bible in hand, **for the first ten years, write-out sermons in full**; knowing full-well that a habit would form.
Then **Number your sermons and correct them after they're preached** because, after all, even **C.F.W. Walther did that.**

When you enter the pulpit **you make a promise** to preach upon the words which you have read.

If you don't preach upon the entire text, shorten it to the words upon which you shall preach.

Remember, the law and the gospel must always be told.
But at a funeral **the law is in the casket** and the gospel must be bold.

On Christmas and Easter, **the gospel of Jesus must sound forth alone.**
And always be careful to **never confuse a title with a theme!**

The slender man said, **Never travel without a sermon at hand;**
Because **you'll never know when you'll be asked to preach.**

Church records are important and should be recorded on the day,
Because you might be killed in an accident on your homeward way.

Know your members and shepherd them well
Because **you can't excommunicate someone after he's dead!**

The call to your first church may be of shorter duration,
Unless your mistakes are so small you can live with them.

When courting your wife, and want to know how she will be,
Go **meet her mother** and see the house you will have.

When meeting a bride and groom, encourage a wedding hymn by asking:

You want the congregation to participate in the service, don't you?

There should be forgiveness just because you are married,
But there is no such promise because marriage is no sacrament.

Take time each day for family devotions, but if this fails,
Then **leave the book in the bathroom** where it's sure to be read.

He himself would think all these words are too flippant,
But his words still resound in the pulpiteer's head.

The future wife of the parsonage was handed a clipping:

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

He said, **your main task, as the pastor's wife,
Will be to care for the man that he may pursue his great work.**

When the pulpiteer wed his youthful bride, the professor spoke at the altar:

When you make it a point to use God's Word and Sacrament for yourselves you shall be going with Jesus. When you go with Jesus you shall have spiritual life and sustenance. When you go with Jesus you shall receive the needed grace to fulfill your respective roles as husband and wife. When you go with Jesus you will have the necessary strength and patience to meet the problems and disappointments that will come your way.... Yes, when you go with Jesus you will be richly blessed with respect to your personal faith and life, for doesn't He say, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."?

The professor now rejoices with the saints above.
But the young pulpiteer, now aged with many years,
often thinks back when he says,
Professor Otto said LSQ

Milton Otto Remembrance

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PROFESSOR MILTON OTTO WAS TWO years younger than my father. I first met him at Bethany Lutheran College in the fall of 1964 when I was a freshman student in his religion class. I was heading for the seminary and anticipated attending many classes under his instruction. My first impression, which never changed, was that he was a man who commanded respect and rightfully deserved it. As a young student who had been trained to respect all elders, I was also intimidated by this very professional instructor.

Upon entering the seminary, I continued to be somewhat intimidated by what appeared to be a “stern German” dean. But it did not take long before the warm heart of a faithful Christian man of God changed that impression. He was so dedicated and caring, displaying great love for his students. What a blessing Professor Otto was both in and out of the classroom. His love for his students was only surpassed by his love for his Savior. Professor (Dean) Otto was clearly a Christian gentleman who was gifted by God to train future pastors in the school of the prophets.

He quickly became a “father-figure” for me and I dare say that if it had not been for his tutelage and encouragement, I may not have remained a student in the seminary. Through his capable teaching and caring concern, all with God’s blessing, of course, he turned a young and inexperienced student into a graduate ready to perform the duties of a pastor. He taught me dogmatics, church history, practical theology, and

homiletics, always displaying the character and competence of a well-qualified professor.

Please allow me to share several personal experiences with Professor Otto that remain in my memory. It was the closing weeks of my third year of classroom instruction and my class was anxiously awaiting vicarage assignments. We all had our opinions and guesses where we would be assigned. When the assignments were announced, I was to be going to the *last* place I had wanted to go. As it turned out, it was actually the “best” place I could have gone, and this reminded me never to second-guess the Lord. Well, my disappointment was obvious in my facial expression, which Professor Otto could easily read. So after class he called me into his office and counseled me with the gifts God had given him. He was observant, caring, and most loving.

During my early years of ministry, my congregation in Midland, Michigan, hosted a Seminary Institute and Professor Otto presented a seminar. He came early to the institute and preached for me on Sunday morning. My wife and I hosted him in the parsonage. He preached an excellent sermon (in my opinion), but after the service back in the parsonage I saw him going back over his sermon notes. He was recalling what he had preached and made a quick comment revealing he was never fully satisfied with his own preaching and was constantly striving to improve. After 41 years of preaching I could only wish I were half the preacher he was! Which reminds me of the very first sermon I ever wrote in class. When Professor Otto returned the manuscript I handed in, it was filled with notes in red ink suggesting improvements. It was both educational and humbling, which was received by both the mind and the heart. Later I was asked to preach at a friend’s wedding so I turned in my sermon for his approval. This time there were no suggestions, only the comment written on the bottom of the last page, “Not bad at all!” (That’s a good compliment from a German!) This still brings a smile to my face and warmth to my heart. I also remember that he allowed me to preach my first sermon in my home church in Albert Lea, Minnesota, *before* I even preached it in class.

Professor Otto’s wife Marjorie (Marge, or back then, Mrs. Otto) assisted her husband in helping the seminary students. She hosted the seminary students for an evening meal in their home and opened her heart to us as well. We felt we were more than just a student or name to her. We were part of her Christian family and her friendship followed at future synod conventions after graduation. She was truly a “help-mate” to her husband and a blessing to the seminary.

In the eighteen years that I had the privilege of knowing this “Professor” I can’t think of one time that could be described as a disappointment. Every experience was positive, for which God deserves the glory and the praise. Looking back upon 41 years of pastoral ministry, with fondness and appreciation of many blessings from God, I count my relationship with Milton Otto as one of the greatest. Looking forward to eternity, it will be the ultimate pleasure to join this now sainted professor, along with all the other saints, in praising the Savior, who ultimately deserves all the credit and glory. In the list of God’s instruments used to nurture my faith, Professor Otto remains among those on the top. It is my prayer that I will follow in his footsteps and when I reach the end of my life, I will join him fully trusting in the Savior whom he confessed throughout his life and in the final hours before his death when his last words were, “I am ready to die.”

As a clergy member of our synod where the calendar of time has brought me well past the status of an inexperienced pastor, I am honored by the request to share these memories of a dedicated professor. It also behooves me to state my appreciation publicly for how God has continued to bless Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary with capable, humble, and qualified professors. Knowing each of them personally and considering all of them personal friends, no longer being “intimidated” as I once was with Dean Otto, I give thanks and praise to God for faithful dedicated servants using their God-given talents to train pastors to carry on the Gospel ministry for the salvation of souls. Telling others about Jesus, how he lived, died, and rose again to save all sinners, is truly the mission of every Christian. LSQ

The Festival Exordium: An Oral Tradition

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AS WORK BEGAN ON THIS topic it became quickly apparent there are little to no resources available to use as reference tools for a research paper. In expressing this frustration to Prof. Mark DeGarmeaux of Bethany Lutheran College, he made the comment that what seminarians at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary received in their instruction concerning the use of festival exordiums was handed down by oral tradition.¹ The undersigned does not recall to what extent such oral tradition was passed on by his homiletics professors: Milton Otto, Mark Harstad, and Wilhelm Petersen; or from his bishop during the year of vicarage: the Rev. Alf Merseth; or the retired pastor in residence in his first parish: the Rev. Milton Tweit. In communicating with some past and current homiletic instructors at BLTS, all indicated that the tradition of using an exordium in festival sermons was taught, but none had anything in writing to submit.² So this paper will not technically be a scholarly treatment of the topic but rather a small, primarily subjective contribution to the oral tradition handed down to us in this

¹ E-mail communication from members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod clergy roster will be used as documentation and used with permission.

² The Rev. Norman Madson, who taught homiletics at BLTS in the late 20th century stated, "I did check my Homiletic Class notes, and found nothing written down about the Exordium. It must have been information given 'off the cuff.'" (Norman Madson, e-mail message to author, March 19, 2014.)

21st century with suggestions from personal practice and with guidance and commentary offered by some contemporaries as noted.³

In the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (ELH) Rite One under the heading “#15. Sermon” we read these rubrics:

The pastor may introduce the sermon with a prayer. After the prayer he may greet the congregation with an apostolic greeting (Rom. 1:7), announce and read the sermon text and conclude with the brief prayer of John 17:17. Following the sermon he may close with the Gloria Patri. He shall then pray the prayer of the church.

On festival days the following order may be observed. He may introduce the sermon with a prayer for the day. Before reading the text he shall deliver an exhortation (exordium) explaining the festival. The congregation shall sing the festival verse or hymn. The usual order shall then follow.⁴

“Exhortation” is a speech or discourse intended to advise, incite, or encourage. Its etymology is Latin (*exhortari* = *ex* completely + *hortari* to encourage). “Exordium” is a beginning or introductory part, especially of a speech or treatise. Its etymology is also Latin (*exordiri* = *ex* completely + *ordiri* to begin). While we use the term exordium for festival sermons, it is a combination of both exordium and exhortation.⁵ The ELH rubric identifies the exordium as an explanation of the festival itself; although it is an introductory portion of the sermon, it does not function as an

³ Putting oral tradition down in writing almost feels like a Moses experience, without the inspiration thing going on however.

⁴ Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (St. Louis: Morning Star Music Publishers, Inc., 1996), 48.

⁵ “If you take a look at the older homiletic textbooks in the European and American tradition, which were shaped by the classical tradition, like Vinet, the term ‘Exordium’ is simply the name used to designate the ‘Introduction.’ Quintilian and the entire Western rhetorical tradition spoke about the art of oratory and some homileticians influenced by the oratorical tradition referred to homiletics or preaching as ‘sacred oratory.’ Just as the ‘Exordium’ was a synonym for ‘Introduction’ so the term ‘Peroration’ was often used as the term of choice for ‘Conclusion’ both in rhetoric and in the homiletical tradition that drew its terminology from rhetoric. I’m not sure where the practice in our own circle of homiletics came from. Walther uses it as well, so was it a German invention? The medieval homiletic rhetorical literature that I own do not use an Exordium as we do, as a kind of Prefatory introduction. The homiletic texts I have, some of which are nineteenth century, use it synonymously as an expression for ‘Introduction.’ Conceivably, the idea of an ‘Exordium’ for special occasions makes sense if it situates the text within the special occasion.” (Prof. Steve Reagles, e-mail message to author, January 29, 2014.)

introduction to the theme of the festival text. Its purpose, as we shall see, is for a special feature of the festal nature of the day.⁶

Reu uses the term exordium in his manual on homiletics as simply the introduction to a sermon as done in most every-Sunday sermons today.⁷ It also appears that Giertz' character, Fridfeldt, in *The Hammer of God*, uses the term exordium in this same way. Fridfeldt did not have time to prepare his sermon for Transfiguration Sunday. He read from the late curate Schartau's book of sermons.⁸ Again in this case the exordium is preparatory for the theme of the sermon and no singing of a hymn verse is indicated, rather we are informed after the reading of the exordium, "Now came the first main division of the sermon proper."⁹

Historical Development

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod's practice of using an exordium with the sermon on the three great festivals in the church year seems to be a vestige of a Lutheran practice used since the 16th century. Initially it appears that it was used throughout the church year. In a communication with Prof. Dennis Marzolf of Bethany Lutheran College this point was made:

The practice of the exordium on the festivals is probably a remnant of what was likely a regular part of the pulpit service in some Lutheran regions. Friedrich Lochner gives a hint about this in his *Divine Service of the Lutheran Church*, 1895 (183-185). He suggests that the first pulpit action was an exhortation to prayer (sort of an epiclesis for the sermon) to the Holy Spirit for a fruitful and beneficial use of the Word, followed by the Lord's Prayer (either in silence or aloud), and then a pulpit

⁶ "The contemporary and classical model of 'requiring' an 'Exordium,' or introduction, body, conclusion model that is still with us was established by Plato in the Phaedrus, where he insisted that every oration ought to have a beginning, middle and end. But then the homilies in Scripture don't follow that model. And Luther sometimes ended his sermons with no conclusion ['That's enough for today.']. Our current model, taught at seminary—and that some pastors continue to use on into parish life—depends heavily upon the Classical model of Lenski and is still echoed in basic speech classes, where we are in the 'Introduction' to grab attention, establish the context, announce theme and parts, but it's quite different than an 'Exordium.'" (Prof. Steve Reagles, e-mail message to author, January 31, 2014.)

⁷ M. Reu, *Homiletics: A Manual of the Theory and Practice of Preaching*, trans. Albert Steinhäuser, D. D. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1924), 487.

⁸ Bo Giertz, *The Hammer of God*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), 200-202.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 203.

verse appropriate to the season; Christmas: To Us is Born a Blessed Child (131:2; used on every Sunday from Christmas to Candlemas), Easter: Christ is Arisen (344:1 is closest in ELH; we didn't include the old Christ is Arisen which is in TLH) and Pentecost: Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord (2). On other Sundays outside of these seasons "We Now Implore" was used as the pulpit verse. The pulpit verse was usually just ONE verse of the hymn. Then the Gospel lesson was read and the sermon commenced. He cites the Schwarzburg Agenda of 1675. My guess is that the Invocation of the Spirit, Lord's Prayer, and Pulpit verse as a common occurrence fell by the wayside with the passage of time, and that where it was retained as a traditional practice it was reserved for the three festivals. This action was not a part of the sermon introduction, but had a separate function.¹⁰

From the Ritual of 1685 ordered by King Christian V of Denmark and Norway, which was basically a reissuance of the Ordinance of 1537, under "#16 The Sermon" we read:

Then the pastor goes to the pulpit and preaches the usual sermon based on the Day's Gospel. ... The pastor, or whoever preaches, shall first of all, commend the people to prayer and call for God's help in this holy ceremony; and then as usual read the Lord's Prayer...

During certain seasons "they sing after the Lord's Prayer and before the Gospel is read from the pulpit" special hymn verses as specified for the seasons: "between Christmas and Candlemas," "between Easter and Christ's Ascension,"

¹⁰ In *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church* (Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Vol. 4, The Age of the Reformation* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002]) an overview of preaching from the time of Lutheran Orthodoxy highlights Heinrich Müller, 1631-75, 394, ff.: "The Christmas prothema concludes, 'This love therefore moves us to love God in return, to rejoice in the Lord and sing hymns of praise to him. At this point the congregation is asked to sing the Christmas carol "Ein kindelein so löblich." Again, at p. 399, an Easter sermon, he writes, "Having delivered this classic prothema, our preacher announces the hymn 'Christ ist erstanden,' one of the classics of the German Protestant hymnal. We might point out that the tradition in the late Middle Ages was to conclude the prothema by having the congregation repeat the Pater Noster or the Ave Maria. This was especially the case when the sermon was held on Sunday afternoon or at some time other than the celebration of Mass on Sunday morning." (Prof. Dennis Marzolf, e-mail message to author, March 16, 2014.)

“between Christ’s Ascension and Pentecost,” and “on the Feast of Pentecost.” At the three great Holy Days they sing each verse three times and also on Ascension Day, but after that only one time and then the pastor always gives the congregation a very short speech about each of these Holy Day’s joy and salvation.” “While this is sung the pastor drops upon his knee in the pulpit and prays God for help and support in this undertaking; then he stands up again ... and proceeds to the reading and exposition of the text.¹¹

According to Mark DeGarmeux these are the hymn stanzas that were referenced in 1685:

During Christmas and Candlemas, after the Lord’s Prayer and before the Gospel is read from the pulpit, this verse is sung: TO US IS BORN A LITTLE CHILD. During Easter and Ascension: CHRIST IS ARISEN. During Ascension and Pentecost: CHRIST TO HEAVEN SHALL ASCEND. On the festival of Pentecost: WE NOW IMPLORE GOD THE HOLY GHOST.¹²

New festal verses were composed in the late 18th century, which eventually became those used traditionally among us today. In *The Handbook to The Lutheran Hymnal* we read this note regarding the Christmas verse “Rejoice, Rejoice, This Happy Morn” (#79):

In Scandinavian Lutheran circles, we are informed, it is customary in the service on Christmas Day, after the pastor has delivered the introduction to his sermon, for the congregation to rise and sing this hymn of one stanza. After which it is seated, and the pastor proceeds with the preaching of the sermon.

This hymn is from the pen of Birgitte Boye and was published in *Guldberg’s Hymn Book*, 1778. The translation is by Carl Döving, made in 1911 and published in *The Lutheran Hymnary*, 1913.¹³

¹¹ Craig Ferkenstad, “About God’s Service in the Church,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XXII, no. 2 (1982): 17-18. (Some of the currently retired ELS pastors who grew up in parsonages in the ELS consistently observed that their fathers did not drop upon their knee and pray nor was the festal hymn stanza sung three times. At least by the early 20th century that 1685 practice was not followed any longer.)

¹² Prof. Mark DeGarmeux, e-mail message to author, January 28, 2014.

¹³ W. G. Polack, *The Handbook to The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1942), 65. “Boye, Birgitte Katarine (Johansen) (1742–1824), the

“He Is Risen” (#189):

To be sung before the reading of the Gospel from the pulpit, from Easter until Ascension Sunday. “Han er opstanden! Store Bud!” was first published in *Guldberg’s Hymn Book* of 1778. — The translation into English was rendered by G. T. Rygh, 1909. [Dahle, *Library of Christians Hymns*]¹⁴

“Holy Spirit God of Love” (#230):

This hymn of one stanza by Birgitte Boye was first published in *Guldberg’s Hymn Book*, 1778. It is to be sung “on Pentecost Day before the reading of the Gospel from the pulpit.” The direction has in mind the ancient custom, that, according to Luther’s own suggestion, the text for the day would be the Gospel. After the pastor has delivered the introduction of the sermon and read the text the congregation rises and sings this stanza. The translation is by George T. Rygh, 1908, slightly altered.¹⁵

oldest of seven children, was born on March 7, 1742, in Gentoft, Denmark, to Jens Johansen, who was in the royal service, and Dorotea nee Henriksdatter. At an early age Birgitte was betrothed to Herman Hertz, a hunter and gamekeeper in the service of the king and later forester of the district of Vordingborg. They married in 1763 and within five years had four children. In the mid-1770s the office of forester was abolished, and the Hertz family fell into pressing financial circumstances. Birgitte appealed to Danish Secretary Ove Guldberg for help. He brought the matter to the attention of Prince Fredrik, who ordered both her sons educated at his expense. Her husband died following a year-long illness, and she was then supported for three years by a pension from the prince. In 1778 she married an employee in the customhouse of Copenhagen, Hans Boye, whom she also survived. She died on October 17, 1824. Birgitte was a talented woman who studied French, German, and English and became the most highly praised hymnwriter of the Danish Rationalistic period. In 1772 the Society for the Advancement of the Liberal Arts sent out a call soliciting contributions from every person “who had a desire and talent for writing sacred poetry.” Birgitte Hertz responded with 20 texts, of which 18 were subsequently selected and included in *Psalmebog, eller en Samling af gamle og ny Salmer, til Guds Aere og Hans Menigheds Opbyggelse* (“a hymn-book, or a collection of old and new hymns, for the honor of God, and the edification of his church”), produced at Copenhagen in 1778 by Bishop Ludvig Harboe and Ove Guldberg. She continued to compose and translate hymns so that, in all, she contributed 148 hymns (124 original texts and 24 translations) to an unauthorized hymnal put out by Guldberg himself. Her own *David’s Psalmer i en fri Oversættelse*, a three-volume collection containing the first 89 psalms, was published between 1781 and 1785. She also wrote nationalistic poetry and dramatic works, many of which were apparently performed for special royal events.” (C. T. Aufdemberge, *Christian Worship: Handbook* [Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997], 657.)

¹⁴ Polack, *The Handbook to The Lutheran Hymnal*, 144.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

The Revs. N. A. Madson, C. Anderson¹⁶ and A. Harstad represented the Norwegian Synod on the Synodical Conference committee, which worked on *The Lutheran Hymnal* throughout most of the 1930s and published it in 1941. The Rev. Dr. S. C. Ylvisaker also served on a subcommittee for this project. Very likely their influence resulted in the inclusion of all three festival verses reflecting our ELS traditions.

However, while this practice was noticeably retained among the Norwegians in mid-20th century American Lutheranism, the practice also had German roots as well. Marzolf makes these observations:

I think that *The Lutheran Hymnal* retained the continental pulpit verses as well as the Scandinavian verses. It wouldn't really be correct to refer to this as a Scandinavian practice, but I think it would be correct to suggest that the practice was more clearly retained among the Norwegians than it was among the Germans in our country, although the LCMS founders who used their own regional version of the Deutsche Messe (like our Bugenhagen order) would have continued to use the Exordium practice on festivals until that regional (Saxon) usage was replaced by the Common Service in the early 20th century.¹⁷

It would appear that C.F.W. Walther used the exordium stanzas for his festival sermons, but not the brief exordium practiced among the Norwegians. It also served more as an introduction leading into the text as noted above from the story in *The Hammer of God*. For example, in his Christmas Day sermon translated by Henry Eggold, we read at the close of his lengthy six-paragraph introduction:

Let us go to Bethlehem; there you will look into the open heaven, so that all doubt is removed. But, my beloved, before we go to this most holy and most blessed place on earth, let us first lift up our hearts to God in silent prayer after we have sung a hymn.

Text: Luke 2:1-14

Permit me then on the basis of this story of all stories to bring you to the joyful Christmas message:

Rejoice! The Savior Is Born;

¹⁶ "On the three great festivals and Ascension day, after a brief introduction, a fitting stanza should be sung by the congregation standing before the text is read." (Christian Anderson, "Our Liturgy," *Clergy Bulletin* 17, no. 2 (1957): 14.

¹⁷ Prof. Dennis Marzolf, e-mail message to author, January 20, 2014.

Heaven Is Open for You¹⁸

In other festival sermons from Walther made available in English, the singing of a hymn is not mentioned after the introduction before the reading of the text, but a silent prayer is urged upon the hearers based on the exordium in the Christmas and Easter sermons (not found in the Pentecost sermon). There is one exception for Easter based on the text 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, Walther says immediately before reading the text: "...but first let us turn in silent prayer to the hero from David's stem who so bitterly fought for our freedom after we have sung, etc."¹⁹

The reason for its falling into disuse among the German Lutherans in America is somewhat of a mystery. Marzolf speculates:

My guess is that the transition from the local rites (Saxon, Bugenhagen metrical/chorale ordinary) to the prose text (Common Service form, Loehe's Agenda, Kirchenbuch out East) led to the demise of the Exordium verse. The interesting/ironic thing about that, if it's true, is that the imposition of the more "ancient" rite actually displaced a liturgical practice that was older than the models used in the composition of the Common Service.²⁰

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's *Christian Worship* also includes these festal verses:

- #49 "Rejoice, Rejoice This Happy Morn" (ELH #142 + TLHy #183 + TLH #79, LW #520 v.1, LBW #43, LSB #391, *ELW*);
- #162 "He Is Arisen! Glorious Word!" (ELH #348 + TLHy #329 + TLH #189, LW #520 v. 2, LBW #138, LSB #488, *ELW*) & #144 "Christ Is Arisen" - the older Easter single verse not found in ELH [cf. #344 "Christ the Lord Is Risen Again", 3 stanzas] + TLHy [cf. #334 "Christ the Lord Is Risen Again", 7 stanzas] but included in TLH #187, LW #124, LBW #136, LSB #459, *ELW* #372);

¹⁸ C.F.W. Walther, *Selected Writings of C. F. W. Walther: Selected Sermons*, trans. Henry Eggold, ed. Aug. R. Suelflow (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 23-24. (Similarly he handles the Easter text as well, cf. 77-79.)

¹⁹ C.F.W. Walther, *Standard Epistles: C. F. W. Walther*, trans. Donald Heck (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1986), 205. (cf. also 31 and C.F.W. Walther, *Old Standard Gospels: translated from Walther's Evangeliumpostille*, trans. Donald Heck [Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1984], 26, 154, 199.)

²⁰ Prof. Dennis Marzolf, e-mail message to author, March 16, 2014.

- #180 “Holy Spirit, God of Love” different translation although both attributed to George A. T. Rygh + TLH #230, LW, LBW, LSB, ELW (ELH #399 “O Light of God’s Most Wondrous Love” + TLHy #383).

It is reported by the Revs. Mark Jeske and James Tiefel that the Revs. Walther Gullixson and Erling Teigen offered input to the committee that produced *Christian Worship* and may well have influenced the inclusion of these three festival stanzas. However the practice of using them with an exordium does not appear to be a common practice among WELS congregations. It was noted that some WELS pastors use the Christmas and Easter stanzas for the closing hymn on their respective festivals.

The older Lutheran practice of using an exordium for any sermon on any given Sunday or festival might be relegated by many American Lutheran pastors today to the initial greeting for the service and an explanation of the theme for the Sunday. However it is not the formally crafted address as done with exordiums, even though the opening hymn may be chosen to coordinate with the theme.

(In the initial presentation the Appendix II: Christmas 2006 was used for a demonstration followed by the singing of “Rejoice, Rejoice This Happy Morn” [ELH #142].)

Practice and Mechanics

The exordium as used in the late 20th century and early 21st century in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is not as noted above an additional introduction to the theme highlighted in the festival text. It is more akin to a keynote address for that particular festal day. It is to capture the mood of the day.²¹ We think of keynote speeches in regard to secular conventions or conferences as providing a rousing proclamation encapsulating the overarching theme for all the event participants. In a sense this is what an exordium is to accomplish by focusing on the flavor of the particular feast day in the church year, instead of the particular focus

²¹ “I personally find the Exordium as often used, to be ineffective, simply because in many cases it feels like a second introduction to the sermon. I keep asking myself, why is the preacher ‘setting up’ the audience to hear the sermon a second time. That was the classical purpose of the Exordium, to prepare the hearer for the central oration. But there was only one introduction, i.e., ‘Exordium.’ At least the way some preachers use the exordium the entire Classical rhetorical theory of introducing the speech to **singular effect** is countermanded by a second ‘set-up’ ‘Introduction.’... Rhetorically speaking, it seems to me that an Exordium could be effective only if it has a purpose that does not duplicate the function of the sermon’s introduction.” (Prof. Steve Reagles, e-mail message to author, January 29, 2014.)

of the festival text for the sermon of the day. (See some examples of this tradition from some recently translated festival sermons from the Rev. U.V. Koren in Appendix I.)

It has been the practice of this writer to keep the script of the exordium to a maximum of one page of the manuscript (double-spaced); thus having no more than one extra page in the manuscript of a normal Sunday sermon. It is also the practice not to begin with a prayer as is done on normal Sundays nor even begin with the apostolic greeting. Rather, by breaking with the familiar, it should grab the attention of the hearers indicating that something different and special is going on this day. The exordium is begun with a statement or question, which will seize the attention of the hearers.

The information about the festivals can be considered a tired old subject, so the speaker desires to secure the attention in perhaps a novel way. The exordium's content should be uncomplicated, fresh, and vital to the celebration at hand; a welcome change from the usual and commonplace. A nice balance between the novel and the familiar should be maintained however, so that what is stated is interesting but also has a base of acceptability lest it become distractive during the delivery of the sermon proper.

It is also the goal that by the end of the exordium the hearers, yes, even the dairy farmer who has been awake for hours already (and may often be fast asleep by the end of the normal introduction) be motivated to rise and sing yet again on this festive day. The Rev. Norman A. Madson, Sr. demonstrates this goal in a Christmas exordium:

Is it any wonder, then, that our pious fore bearers have so been gladdened by the Christmas Gospel that they have been wont to greet their pastor in the pulpit on this day with a song of praise? Shall we remain cold and indifferent to its wondrous message? No, we will do as did they, arise and join our hearts and voice in the singing of our festival stanza: "Rejoice, rejoice this happy morn."²²

Therefore in its composition and delivery the preacher will want to build up to a crescendo of excitement so that the verse which is sung upon

²² Norman A. Madson, Jr., ed., *Morning Bells at Our Savior's* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 2008), 48 (cf. also pp. 143 and 195).

the completion of the exordium will reflect a festive response among all participants.²³

Following the singing of the festal verse appropriate for the day, while the congregation is still standing, the text is read. Then a suitable prayer collecting the thoughts of the text in preparation to its proclamation is given, calling upon the Spirit for His blessing of all who shall hear. With the congregation seated the hearers are addressed as the fellow redeemed in the name of Jesus (e.g., the Christ Child born of Mary, the crucified and risen Lord, the ascended Lord who sends out the Spirit to His Church).

Since the exordium is not directly related to the text or to the theme for the sermon, it is a subject which the preacher can have come to his mind throughout the church year. From other sermon preparations, his devotional readings, his theological study, his Catechism instruction, etc., he will take note of thoughts that will potentially grab the attention of festal hearers. Current events may give some direction to its composition (see Appendix II: Easter 2008, Pentecost 2003 and 2011). Another's composition may serve well as a stand-alone exordium (see Appendix II: Christmas 2005 and 2013). More often than not it has been the experience of this writer to find Christmas exordium material in preparation for a midweek Advent series, Easter exordium material in preparation for a midweek Lenten series and the use of the passion account during the pre-Easter season, and Pentecost material in preparation for the last few Sundays after Easter. Another way to prime the pump, so to speak, is that one could consult the content of the festival stanza itself and highlight something stated within its lyrics. A good example of this technique is demonstrated by the Rev. Norman A. Madson, Jr.:

Once again we have come into our house of worship to celebrate the birthday of our Savior. And if there is one word in the English language that ought to describe the frame of mind in which we have gathered here today, it is the word REJOICING! Even those hearts among us which may be weighed down with some special sorrow or problem, must on this occasion be lifted up as we give heed to the angel's announcement: "Unto you is

²³ "As I recall, [my Dad's] words began in a normal tone, perhaps asking a thought-provoking question. ... His pace and tone would continue to rise through the 2 to 3 minute exordium until in joyous fashion he would invite the congregation to rise and sing." (Rev. Nile Merseeth, e-mail message to author, March 25, 2014).

born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

It has been a custom of long standing among God’s people to greet His wonderful works with hymns of rejoicing. When God for example, blessed the aged Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth with a child in their old age, Zacharias was inspired to sing a beautiful song of praise to God for the gift of their miracle son, John the Baptist. When the virgin Mary was informed that she was going to be the mother of God’s Son, she broke forth in a beautiful song of praise, called Mary’s Magnificat.

It is a wonderful work of God that the Christmas gospel presents to us again this morning. And to show our gracious God our gratitude for the sending of His Son into this world to be our Savior, we shall arise and join our hearts and voices in signing that glorious Christmas stanza: “Rejoice, rejoice, this happy morn....”²⁴

During Lententide 2014 while this paper is being composed, an Easter exordium is being pondered focusing on the subject of grave robbers. It was a menace on the minds of the chief priests and elders as they asked for Jesus’ tomb to be secured. It was part of the lie they instructed the Roman guard to use if asked about what happened. Upon seeing the empty tomb Mary Magdalene suspected such a crime and reported it as such to the disciples and of which she accused even our Lord thinking He was the gardener. In truth Jesus Himself was the grave robber! Our Lord robbed the grave of His holy body. In that miraculous act, we find the promise that on that Last Day our graves will be robbed by Him as well. Quoting from Handel’s Messiah based on 1 Corinthians 15: “Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” However since an Easter festival sermon will not be composed by this writer until 2015, it will be filed away for now. The exordium is a stand-alone piece of oratory; it can be composed separately and retained for future use.

Using an exordium does not have to be restricted to the three festival days. Any special day for the church at large or a local congregation may be most appropriate for the use of an exordium. We are approaching

²⁴ An exordium included in a 2010 Christmas letter by the Rev. Norman A. Madson, Jr.

the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017. Employing this special feature for such a festival service would serve God's people well by highlighting what by God's grace they are celebrating. Certainly this could be done on the day that a congregation is marking one of its significant anniversaries. One could even imagine its use at the funerals of significant figures within the church like a J. S. Bach (although he was not so much appreciated for his contributions until about a century after his death) or C. F. W. Walther or U. V. Koren.²⁵ In all of the above circumstances the festal verse that could be sung would be "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage." Other significant events might cause the church to assemble for worship recognizing God's gracious working among us – the end of a great war, the recovery after a severe pestilence, or upon the cessation of government sanctioned or sponsored immoral practices like abortion or genocide.

When composing an exordium one is not required to adhere to a strict Law/Gospel presentation, since it is part of a larger proclamation, which will be given such careful inclusions and distinctions. However the Gospel should definitely predominate in an exordium since the good news of our salvation is the very nature of any festival celebration in the Church. With that said it can be observed that normally an exordium will have both Law and Gospel in it and could serve as a stand-alone seasonal devotion or newsletter article. (It may also end up serving as one of the three sermons the dairy farmer will hear in its entirety all year!)

Even though the exordium is not the proper introduction to the theme and body of the sermon, it may serve well to refer to its subject matter again toward the end of the sermon in or before the conclusion. Obviously it will be a related thought for the festival day. But if

²⁵ "Many years ago I had read Garry Wills' *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America*. In it he discusses the speech delivered by Edward Everett and includes the full text of that 2-hour oration in his book. It appears to me that the short opening paragraph is a classic exordium. You can find the full text of the speech by Googling 'Edward Everett's Gettysburg Speech'. [sic] The opening paragraph goes: 'Standing beneath this serene sky, overlooking these broad fields now reposing from the labors of the waning year, the mighty Alleghenies dimly towering before us, the graves of our brethren beneath our feet, it is with hesitation that I raise my poor voice to break the eloquent silence of God and Nature. But the duty to which you have called me must be performed; —grant me, I pray you, your indulgence and your sympathy.' I think that constitutes an exordium. It sets a tone or atmosphere for a solemn occasion, in this case the dedication of a cemetery, without actually getting into the subject matter that follows." (Prof. Mark Harstad, e-mail message to author, January 31, 2014.)

a reference to it can serve as the conclusion to the sermon, that is an indicator that the exordium is being misused.

Introducing the use of an exordium in a parish that is unfamiliar with this practice would not be a major innovation, if a pastor would desire to do so. It would likely not be viewed as something obtrusively innovative. However it is always a wise practice patiently to wait for initiating a new practice after trust and respect have been established by the newly-installed pastor and he has had the opportunity to learn about any peculiar sensibilities among the flock.²⁶

Another feature the pastor may consider to complement his exordium is to compose a special clause to be inserted into the post communion blessing which would reinforce the emphasis of the exordium. So for example it may go something like this:

- *Our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, who has now bestowed upon you His holy body and blood, **the very body and blood born of Mary for you**, whereby He has made full satisfaction for all your sins*

- *Our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, **whose empty grave has robbed our graves of their victory and** who has now bestowed upon you His holy body and blood, whereby He has made full satisfaction for all your sins*

- *Our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, who has now bestowed upon you His holy body and blood, whereby He has made full satisfaction for all your sins, **has sent to us His Spirit in full measure freely giving us all the blessings of Christ's perfect sacrifice***

(In the initial presentation the Appendix II: Easter 2005 was used for a demonstration followed by the singing of "He Is Arisen! Glorious Word!" [ELH #348].)

²⁶ "In my ministry I observed the practice of using the exordium after I'd entered the pulpit. With the possible exception of Grace Lutheran Church, Vero Beach, FL, I used the exordium in each stateside parish I served. It was a constant. I believe that in time I may very well have introduced it at Vero Beach and in the foreign mission field churches I started and/or served." (Rev. James Olsen, e-mail message to author, March 23, 2014)

Contemporary Usage

A survey was administered at five ELS congregations where exordiums are traditionally used. Of the 161 communicant respondents who regularly attend festival services (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost), 112 (70%) recognized that the pastor does something different with the delivery of the festival sermon from the regular Sunday sermon.²⁷ Of the 112, there were 99 (88%) who checked that the differences they recognized on those festival days added to the festive nature of the day. (See Appendix III for the full results of the survey. 13% were also honest in observing that the recognized difference made the sermon longer!)

There may be a few other conclusions we might draw from the answers of these ELS respondents. A large majority of the laity who have experienced the exordium on festival days appreciate this special feature. There may not be a full understanding of the structure and function of the exordium, but the expressed appreciation should encourage pastors to continue to employ this traditional practice and move pastors who have not used an exordium in the past to consider instituting it in the future. There also seems to be a proper understanding that this should be reserved for church festivals and not secular holidays like Memorial Day and Independence Day, with perhaps the exception of Thanksgiving. Again of those who recognized a difference on the three major festivals, 34% did not check any other day and would appear to prefer that this unique practice be reserved for only those days. However, as noted above there may be other occasions when an exordium would be appropriate. Might we even consider having a special service in 2026 on or near the Fourth of July introducing the sermon with a special exordium followed by the singing of "God Bless Our Native Land" (ELH #602)?

A survey was also administered among pastors who are currently serving ELS congregations, asking the following questions:

Q1: I graduated from the following seminary:

Q2: Year of seminary graduation

Q3: I was taught in seminary about the use of an exordium for festival sermons.

²⁷ From the breakdown of the various confirmation-age groupings we can observe that the one made up of mostly baby boomers noticed the difference to a larger degree (1-10/67%; 11-30/69%; **31-50/78%**; 51 +/65%). This might suggest that those who have traditionally been interested in variety not only noticed it but also appreciated it more than others.

Q4: I consistently use an exordium prior to the sermon for: Christmas, Easter, Pentecost.

Q5: I have always used an exordium for festival sermons.

Q6: I know what an exordium is.

Q7: If no for #6, I would be willing to learn what it is and how to use it.

Of the eighty who responded to the survey, sixty-five were graduates from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato; six from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon; six from Concordia Seminary, Fort Wayne; two from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis and one from “other.”

As expected, the majority of those who graduated from Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary did recall being instructed concerning the use of the exordium on festival days (1970 and before/100%; 1971-80/73%; 1981-90/69%; 1991-2000/78%; 2001 and after/52%). We might conclude that most recently the rate of those who acknowledge being instructed about exordiums at BLTS is decreasing. However it is reported by the current seminary administration that this is still a part of the institution’s homiletics instruction.

Of all the ELS pastors who responded, 40% have always used exordiums. From the various time periods we find these percentages of consistent use: 1970 and before/50%; 1971-80/36%; 1981-90/46%; 1991-2000/43%; 2001 and after/44%. Of those who consistently use the exordium, the following number of pastors used it accordingly: 40 used the exordium on Christmas, 45 used it on Easter (“the queen of seasons”), and 30 have used it on Pentecost.

All the responding pastors who were trained in the WELS, LC-MS, or another Lutheran seminary reported that they were not taught about the exordium, except for one from Mequon who was trained in the 1970s. Of the eighteen ELS pastors who acknowledged not knowing what an exordium is, only one was not now willing to learn about it. There were another six who answered that they *did* know what an exordium was but answered #7 despite the instruction that it was only for those who did *not* know. Those six indicated that they also desired to learn. So it is assumed that those six were communicating that they were eager to learn more.

(In the initial presentation the Appendix II: Pentecost 2008 was used for a demonstration followed by the singing of “O Light of God’s Most Wondrous Love” [ELH #399].)

The use of exordiums for our festival sermons would appear to be a salutary practice in the church, one worthy of preserving and perhaps promotion in our midst. It is obviously not a command of God nor a tradition which when broken indicates a spiritual decline. However, while not commanded there may appear to be an ancient precedent found in the epistle written to the church at Philippi by the Apostle Paul and the epistle written to the Hebrews. The introductory words in these epistles are more than simple introductions to the overall theme (Philippians 1:3-11 and Hebrews 1:1-2:4). While these epistles come to us today in written form and are not usually read in their entireties, we should understand that they were intended to be read aloud and completely for the initial receiving congregations to hear.

When the Rev. Ted Gullixson, the son of the late Rev. Walther Gullixson and nephew of the late Rev. George A. R. Gullixson, was asked about his recollections about the custom of using exordiums in festival services in the ELS, he made this comment: "Before my uncle G. A. R. Gullixson died, he asked me to promise that I would uphold the Norwegian liturgical practices, especially the Exordium. For 37 years I used the Exordium and Festival hymn at the three major festivals."²⁸ And again: "One Exordium I remember my father using (which he likely got from someone else) was 'How do you punctuate Easter?' (e.g., comma, question mark, asterisk, exclamation point). I have used that one a couple of times."²⁹

The ELS may not be alone in the world still retaining this festal custom. The Rev. Tor Jakob Welde of the Lutheran Confessional Church (Norway) writes:

In our church body (established 1978) we do not use such exordiums. I tried to find out (on the internet) about what is in use in the bigger (state) "Church of Norway", if that might be of interest to you. And I see their "manual" for the brand new liturgy/service book suggests verses to be sung on the three major festivals, "Høytidsvers" (Høytid = Hochzeit) "in the introductory section of the sermon". It is something, which is optional, apparently. I think earlier (up until 1977?) it was more "obligatory", I remember seeing something about this in an older Norwegian hymnal.³⁰

²⁸ Rev. Theodore Gullixson, e-mail message to author, March 25, 2014.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Rev. Tor Jakob Welde, e-mail message to author, April 7, 2014.

A question might be raised about the preferred use of the exordium as a special feature on festival days especially on Christmas and Easter. These are often extraordinarily busy times of the church year for the preacher and having to do the extra work of composing an additional component to the sermon might seem overwhelming. In addition, on those two festivals there is often already many extra features making the service memorable and significant, such as additional singing by the congregation, choirs and soloists, the use of other musical instruments, and special decorations adorning the chancel area. Most pastors probably regret observing the apparent disregard for the third high festival shown by their congregations. It is often treated as a stepchild in the family of high festivals. Choirs are often disbanded for the year after Easter. There are no Pentecost trees or wreaths, lilies, or white cloth-draped crosses. Even the pastors who consistently have used the exordium have not observed it on Pentecost as frequently as they do for the other two festivals (Christmas 87%, Easter 98%, Pentecost 65%). Therefore to elevate this festival of the Holy Spirit one might especially be encouraged to use the exordium and hymn stanza to mark Pentecost as a special day in the life of the Church. By doing it along with the other two high feast days, it will at least subliminally elevate Pentecost in the minds and hearts of God's people.

There are other reasons to retain or initiate the use of the exordium on all three high feast days.³¹ Exordiums enhance the worship experience for most of those who experience them as shown in the congregational survey (Appendix III). This unique practice adorns the service of the Word with a special preparatory proclamation of the Gospel. In a strange kind of way we might consider that the exordium with the accompanying stanza sung by the congregation is like the glory of the Lord shining round about the shepherds, the earthquake that took place on Easter morning, and the sound of the mighty blowing wind in the enclosed room. God still would have been active without those reported occurrences taking place; nevertheless in their reporting they

³¹ The writer remembers a response to his first exordium. It was on Christmas Day 1982 while serving his vicarage in the Northwood/Lake Mills, IA parish. After returning home in Northwood, two Watchtower witnesses came to the front door trying to spread their lies about Jesus' person and work to the many Christian residents in Northwood. Inviting them into the foyer, they heard the stand-alone exordium, which clearly proclaimed the glorious news of the incarnation of our Lord. They uncomfortably apologized as they made a hasty exit. They certainly felt the sting of the law when their lies were exposed, but they also most certainly heard the Gospel in the evangelical exordium.

were significant. The huge difference of course is that with Elijah God was not found in the wind, earthquake or fire, but in the low whisper. So our Gospel-rich exordiums can serve as the effectual low whisper, which prepares the hearers for the main Gospel proclamation itself in the body of the festal sermon.

We might observe that since the break-up of the Synodical Conference in the mid-20th century, the ELS has become a melting pot among American Lutheran church bodies (congregations, members, and pastors alike). However, it becomes self-destructive for the ELS if the melting pot concept is replaced by a mosaic of multiculturalism. WELS and the LC-MS appear to have a well-established culture, which easily assimilates new members, building a loyal base that supports its peculiar brandings. However the ELS could easily lose its unique and beloved culture and heritage when different elements are introduced into it with no conscious effort of melting together to achieve a harmonious whole. The ELS is in danger of “each doing what’s right in his own eyes” by the importation of a wide variety of customs and rituals, hymnbooks, catechisms, etc.

To retain this custom of using festival exordiums, which has been passed down generationally in the ELS, would help to maintain a unified identity among us and in American Lutheranism at large. We have other unique practices which distinguish the ELS: the use of the Bugenhagen order of service, chanting, individual absolution, with a regular sermon the preacher often begins with a prayer and concludes with the “Gloria Patri,” promotion of liberal arts in higher education, lutefisk dinners, and requiring many of our males in local leadership roles to leave home on Father’s Day (the jellied fish menu and the anti-family time of an annual gathering could be dropped without losing much, however). While it may be too bold and energetic to nurture an evangelistic fervor in regard to the exordium, a case could be made for the ELS to export its wholesome and salutary practice to other Lutheran church bodies in the CELC and beyond.

President George Orvick often made the point that while the sister church bodies of the ELS and the WELS are agreed in doctrine, there is a distinctive flavor in both of these synods. As often described, the flavor of the ELS has been characterized as being evangelical and Christ-centered; the “one thing needful” aroma emanating from the Bethany experience wafts out to our congregations in various ways. The festival exordium is a Gospel-centered feature, which should be retained and promoted among us, with the result that our distinct flavor is preserved

and a good fraternal collegiality be strengthened among us to the glory of God and to the welfare of His people. LSQ

APPENDIX I

U. V. Koren's Exordiums
from a recently translated collection of sermons
by Prof. Mark DeGarmeaux

Christmas

The Holy Scriptures and the example of the prophets and the apostles show that the believers' life on earth is not just joy and happiness, but that there are often difficult and dark hours, days, and times for them, when sighing and sorrow are a daily experience. Every Christian will have experienced that, if he lives long enough. The distress can dim the light, which the Word gave him, but it cannot rob him of it. There are particular times in the church year when it seems even the appointed portions of God's Word have to put to shame every sorrow, and bring God's joys right into our hearts, yes, make the joy so much greater by contrast.

For when the heart is most opprest,
The harp of joy is tuned the best.³²

And this festival of ours is such a time. Nothing else is fitting for us than to be joyful. Otherwise it would have to mean that we did not understand or did not believe the message.

So then, in spite of sin and Satan and sorrow, let us meet our Savior with joy, and with thanksgiving in our heart sing and confess His birth, as we sing our Christmas hymn:³³ "Rejoice, rejoice this happy morn."

Easter Sunday

Again the song of praise sounds over the whole earth. The more clearly the Gospel is recognized, the greater the joy with which the Easter festival

³² H. A. Brorson: *In this our happy Christmastide, Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* 150.

³³ Translator's note: "It has been a custom in the Norwegian church to stand and sing a festival verse before the reading of the sermon text on Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost."

is celebrated! For the meaning of our deliverance and salvation is proclaimed today. Who then rightly keeps the Easter festival? Let St. Paul answer: "*If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*" [Rom. 10:9-10]. So we too, by God's gracious help, will do this—in faith we will turn to the Lord, show that He lives and hears us, and thus we will confess His victorious resurrection and sing our Easter hymn: "He is Arisen!"

*Pentecost*³⁴

God grant you true Pentecost joy through the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name! Amen.

In this lesson we have heard again today about the wonderful event in Jerusalem ten days after the Savior's Ascension. There we find Jewish men and women who had been His followers. For the past 50 to 60 days they had experienced all these astonishing things that occurred after Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem. They had been as happy as children and zealous for Jesus while they traveled around with Him. They had been miserable and sad when He had died. Yes, who can describe their misery when He was gone, the One for whom they had left everything, and from whom they had hoped for everything, first and foremost peace for their souls.

But He had come back and they had seen Him—but then He was hidden from them again, and they didn't see Him; for they are to be saved not by sight, but through faith in their heart. Did they believe then? Yes, and yet, no. He had rebuked them for their unbelief, and they had to own up to what they themselves saw and heard. But then He was gone again. Their hearts were wavering.

Finally, they had seen Him ascend into heaven. Before that happened, He had told them that they should remain in Jerusalem and there "*wait for the Promise of the Father,*" and that they would "*be baptized with the Holy Spirit,*" and that they should "*be clothed with power from on high*" [Luke 24:49]. What was that all about? What did He mean by that? No one knew. So the ten days since the Lord's Ascension had passed amid these expectations. The Jewish festival of Pentecost had come, and they were sitting together as they usually did. What their thoughts were centered on is not difficult to imagine.

Then all at once they heard a sound from heaven like a mighty rushing wind. The miraculous surge entered them and filled the whole house, and immediately they saw something that had never been seen before: flames of fire, tongues as of fire that glowed above each of them. And as the fire visibly rested on them, a heavenly fire was also burning in their hearts, and with a previously unknown ability they spoke in languages that had been foreign to them before, and they testified of "the wonderful works of God" in all the languages of the world "as the Spirit gave them utterance."

³⁴ Translator's note: "Another translation can be found in *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging.*"

This is how God the Holy Spirit came from heaven. He no longer comes visibly and audibly—but He still comes with fire and tongues: with fire in the hearts that are kindled by the miraculous testimony that the almighty, holy, righteous, merciful God loves us; and with fire on the tongues that will and must confess and praise Him whose love has made our hearts so indescribably rich and happy.

So now it is Pentecost around the world. Around the nations, among all peoples and races and in so many languages God is praised for the gifts of the Spirit. It may be that, by God's permission, in many places the enemy of souls has succeeded in confusing hearts, so that in many ways and to a great extent they have not kept the testimony of the Spirit. Yet God has kept for Himself a seed among the peoples who continue through the Word and who by the Holy Spirit have learned and still want to learn to believe that God loves them. They learn this by having the Spirit explain to them Him in whom God's love is revealed, Jesus our blessed Savior. This grace has come also to us. The mighty Spirit of truth has proclaimed our ascended Savior also to us. So let us be glad and sing our Pentecost hymn and invite the heavenly Guest to come to us again and abide with us, in our hearts, in our homes, in our church.

Let us sing: "O Holy Spirit, Enter In."

Appendix II

*Some Festival Exordiums Preached by Pastor Glenn Obenberger
at Parkland Evangelical Lutheran Church, Tacoma, Washington*

Christmas:

2002

Christ was handed over by God into the hands of sinners. Now normally we think of this expression in terms of Jesus' betrayal, arrest, trial, condemnation and execution. This is how the Holy Scriptures uses this statement. But God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son. Right away at the birth of Jesus, God handed over His Son into the hands of sinners. We look at the hands of such sinners as Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and wise men, Simeon and Anna as being hands which received Him with faith and love; however that was the small minority in our world filled with the majority who remain hostile towards God.

For many God had come too uncomfortably near to them. Herod, the chief priests and elders, and all Jerusalem were disturbed by the news of the wise men that a new King of the Jews had been born. Herod sought to get His hands on this newborn king and kill Him. But while God thwarted His efforts, there would come a time 33 years later that the evil design of sinful man would have its way. But what they meant for evil, God meant for good.

God comes near to us, by sending His Son to be our brother. To live the perfect life we are required to live but fail to produce, and to die the death we as sinners are required to die, so that we might live. There in the Bethlehem stable it was time for the Virgin to be delivered of the baby and so He was, delivered into the hands of sinners. Many even today find that Christ the Lord is too uncomfortably near and seek to be rid of Him, even from His own celebration of His birth at Christmastide. But by God's grace there still are those whose hands, having been washed clean by His blood in holy baptism, desire to receive Him with joy and gladness. O dear Christians, God has handed over His Son to us sinners, let us raise our voices in joy that we know and believe the goodness God has worked by delivering Him over for our offenses and raising Him for our justification. Let us rise and sing Hymn #142.

2003

In 1st Samuel chapter four we read that when the Israelite soldiers learned that the ark of the covenant was brought into their camp as they were facing the army of the Philistines "all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook." What this meant was that God's presence was among them ready to defend them against their enemies. This was true, but not in the way they thought; the greater enemy was to be found in their own leaders and God used the Philistines to bring them to repentance.

On the last day when Jesus returns we read from the first letter to the Thessalonians: the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. Our Lord's presence then will also be ushered in by a tremendous shout, a shout that will shake the very foundations of the earth as all the dead will rise!

The shepherds heard the shout of the angelic choir as they gave glory to God in the highest. In faith they were moved to search for the gift of God to them, namely His Son. We are present here as Christmas worshippers because God has moved our hearts to believe and find Christ where He has promised to be for us today. God is present among us through the work of the Spirit bringing Christ and all his blessings to us. We then this morning, worshippers of the new-born King, should also open our merry mouths to sing of our joy that He still is present for us today graciously giving us all good things. Let us arise and sing Hymn #142.

2005

Good Christians all, this Christmas time,
Consider well and bear in mind
What our good God for us has done,
In sending his beloved Son.
As did blest Mary, we should pray
To God with love this Christmas Day;
In Bethlehem upon that morn
There was a blessed Messiah born.

The night before that happy tide
The noble Virgin and her guide
Were long time seeking up and down
To find a lodging in the town.
But mark how all things came to pass:
From ev'ry door repell'd, alas!
As long foretold, their refuge all
Was but an humble oxen stall.

Near Bethlehem did shepherds keep
Their flocks of lambs and feeding sheep;
To whom God's angels did appear
Which put the shepherds in great fear
"Prepare and go", the angels said,
"To Bethlehem, be not afraid,
For there you'll find, this happy morn
A princely babe, sweet Jesus born."

With thankful heart and joyful mind
The shepherds went the babe to find,
And as God's angel had foretold,
They did our Savior Christ behold.
Within a manger he was laid,
And by his side the virgin maid,
Attending on the Lord of life,
Who came on earth to end all strife.

Good Christians all, this Christmas time,
Consider well and bear in mind
What our good God for us has done,
In sending his beloved Son.

2006

Where was the embarrassment among the angels? They were there barring reentry into the Garden of Eden; they were there with Lot in Sodom when the men of the Sodom wanted to have their way with them; they were there when Zechariah, one of the priests of the Lord, doubted the word from God that his aged wife would conceive and give birth to a son. Where was their embarrassment to speak of the lowly circumstances surrounding the birth of the Lord of Glory?

They certainly knew that the Son of God entered this world of sin and shame in such a lowly fashion, hardly fit for even a peasant child, not to mention the King of kings. But there was no shame. Rather as the angel announced: this was “good news of great joy”! Although these holy angels always behold the face of the heavenly Father in heaven, they were not ashamed to behold the condition of the Son, nor too ashamed to speak of it. These holy angels serve us who believe and they knew the meaning of this act of God for us and they could not hold back from singing God’s praises.

Shall we hold back this morning because of the humble setting of the birth of our Savior? Do you know why this birth happened in this humble way and why it is truly good news of great joy? If you do, please rise and sing with joy and mirth in your heart: #142.

2007

The Apostle Paul in part speaks of the animal kingdom in Romans 8 when he says, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” Now there is an incident in the Holy Scriptures where the groaning of an animal is put into human speech. That was the incident of Balaam, a prophet used by the king of Moab to speak a curse upon God’s people, but the Angel of the Lord, the pre-incarnate Christ, stood in the way to prohibit it. Balaam could not see Christ at first, but his donkey could. After beating the donkey to make it go forward three times, the donkey spoke up and objected to this beating she was receiving at her master’s hand.

Animals were created to serve mankind and when the whole human race fell into sin, the animals now must serve us under the weight and curse of sin. But one wonders about the animals gathered at the Bethlehem stable the night of Jesus’ birth. Perhaps there was a donkey Mary rode upon from Nazareth. Perhaps there were cattle housed in that stable who had recently fed from the manger. Perhaps some of the sheep and lambs accompanied the shepherds as they came to worship the Christ Child.

Animals have senses we as humans do not and perhaps they sensed that someone special was among them that night – their Creator wrapped in swaddling clothes. If so, perhaps the braying, the lowing, and the bleating normally done as their groan under the weight of sin ceased for a brief time. Now whether they did or not, Paul also tells us this: “We ourselves, who have the

first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." Therefore as we recount today what God was doing in that stable for us, we have reason to cease our daily groaning and raise our voices in praise to God who has sent His Son to redeem us as His dear children. Please rise and sing #142.

2011

With every act of disobedience we commit we join Eve in her quest to become like God. Remember what Satan told her: "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God..." "So when the woman saw that the tree ... was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked."

Our first parents having been made in God's image wanted to become more like God, but this desire brought only disaster driving the human race from its Creator. Yet God loved us so much announcing that He Himself would become flesh - like us. The Seed of the woman would come and crush Satan's head, defeating sin, death and hell.

This was God's plan from eternity. He in the second person would take on human flesh. He would be born naked and have our shame covered by swaddling clothes. He would take that perfect body and soul to the cross, where He would once again be stripped, suffer, and die in our everlasting guilt and shame. Oh my fellow sinners, we in our sin still shamefully long to become God, but God has overcome our foolish desire, by becoming us, setting us free from all our shamefulness forever. Lift up your voices once again in great joy for God's incarnation by singing Hymn #142. Please rise.

2013

"Those who have traveled all night in their car may have noticed, toward dawn, a star of unusual brilliance appearing in the sky as a herald of the new day. This star is used in the last book of the Bible as a symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ and the new era ushered in by Him. Certainly there was a heavenly brightness to be seen in Him. St. John says in his Gospel that Jesus is the Light. Luther says that the coming of His Spirit into the soul of a man is like a light being turned on so this man sees things he had never seen before. Most of all, the love of God shines in his heart "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus." (2 Corinthians 4:6).

"The coming of our Lord meant that a new day dawned for the world. Men presently began to number the years from His birth. His religion changed human institutions. There is no area of life that has not been affected by the words He spoke, the life He lived, the death He died. In our part of the world we owe our ideas of liberty, justice, charity, the dignity and rights of man, and the place of women in society to His influence. No one could have suspected, when His star first appeared in the eastern sky; how bright would be the day

that would follow and how all-pervasive its light.” (Guide Me, Savior; CPH 12/3)

Rejoice, this light has appeared for you, a new day has dawned upon you!
Rise to sing of this our blessed morning light, hymn #142.

Easter:

2001

An often overlooked occurrence at the time of Jesus’ death on Friday is what is reported to us by Matthew: “The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.” These were believers in Christ who having died had been raised to life when Jesus breathed His last. We would love to know what it was like for them. When Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter, the widow’s son of Nain, and Lazarus, Jesus was right there and others as well to explain all that had transpired. But what did these newly raised think and do, finding themselves still wrapped in grave clothes, having their graves broken open with no one around?

What is especially significant for us this morning is that we are told they went into the holy city after Jesus’ resurrection and they appeared to many people, who had known that they had died. Jesus would soon be showing Himself alive to many of these same people, so what is the significance of these resurrected believers? Jesus, being the eternal God, we would expect that He lives, but the glorious significance is that because He lives we too shall live. These resurrected believers were living, breathing testimonies of this and what is more they rose, not when Jesus rose, but when Jesus died. Why then? Jesus is the sinners’ substitute, when He died, He took the death of us all. These believers rose to show that their death and ours was swallowed up in Christ—it no longer has a claim on any of us.

Our joy this morning is precisely the same. We do not have dead loved ones coming to us this morning from our cemetery, but the same Lord whose death and resurrection raised those Jerusalem believers, is our Lord. Our joy and comfort in the truth that Jesus lives, is not so much that HE lives, remember had He never come into our world, He would have lived forever; but our joy is this BECAUSE HE LIVES WE TOO SHALL LIVE. Please rise and sing Hymn #348.

2003

We read how on Friday afternoon the women watched where Jesus was buried and saw how the stone was rolled into place. There no doubt was another observer of Jesus’ burial—Satan. How delighted he must have been to see the power of death come to God’s Son. He knew of Jesus’ prediction that He would rise again, he knew that Jesus had raised others, but it still remained to be seen

if He could break the grip of death Himself. No doubt Satan was made to smile when the chief priests and the Pharisee asked Pilate to make the tomb secure calling Jesus “that deceiver.” Satan, the father of lies, enjoyed to hear Truth incarnate called “that deceiver.”

Perhaps Satan even visited the tomb between Friday and Sunday. Perhaps he frustratingly observed that Jesus’ body was not decomposing like all other human bodies do in the grave. Jesus’ tomb was secure, however, and the death wrappings were still in place. But then Christ was made alive and He went directly to Satan’s eternal home—he descended to hell. There Jesus showed that He was very much alive and fulfilled all that was said concerning His work of salvation. Jesus then rose, left the tomb, and an angel came to roll back the stone to show that He was gone. As always Satan was powerless to stop the work of God.

But Satan was not done. The guards would be bribed to lie. The disciples lived in fear and would not believe even with the reports that the tomb was empty. Sin, death, and hell were all defeated by the Savior sent by God for all people; but Satan still roamed the earth and does even today, looking for those he can devour. How about you? Has Satan paid you off with enough worldly pleasures and treasures that the report of Jesus’ resurrection is of little interest to you? Are you caught up in all the fears that this world can throw at you, that you take no comfort in Jesus’ victory over Satan by conquering death for you? No, you are here this morning because you believe this most glorious truth that the One whom God has sent to take your place as the condemned sinner, not only took your punishment all the way to the point of death, but that He overcame all of this for you—He lives and you with all your fellow Christians throughout the world today rejoice. Let us sing out our Easter faith by turning to hymn #348. Please rise.

2004

If the message of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead were strange to you, you would not be here this morning. Now you may be a bit fuzzy about all that the great events of Jesus’ rising from the dead means for you personally, but you know about it and long to hear it again.

However, even though our culture leaves very few ignorant of Jesus’ name, many of your neighbors would find it new and strange that Jesus rose from the dead and that it benefits them personally. Most of your neighbors would classify Jesus as just a great person on par with such persons of the past like Aristotle, Socrates, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Thank your Lord that these Easter truths are not new or strange to you. Prepare yourself once again to renew your faith in these blessed eternal truths. Let us rise and sing of our joy and faith. Turn to hymn #348: He is arisen! Glorious word!

2005

This was the second morning Barabbas got to wake up a free man after that strange incident of suddenly being taken off of death row and released from prison on Friday morning. Maybe the earthquake early Sunday morning centered outside the city in that garden awakened him and beads of perspiration quickly formed on his forehead thinking the Roman soldiers were at his door seeking to arrest him again. But instead, as far as we know, this murderous insurrectionist, yes, even terrorist, was still free. Deep down he probably knew he did not deserve to be set free, but very likely he thought his cause was right and his actions which landed him in prison in the first place were justified.

We would love to know what Barabbas did with his new-found freedom. An innocent man was executed and he, the guilty, was set free. Did this change his life? Did he use his freedom for good, or did he abuse it in service of evil again? What would you have done? Or better yet, what do you do with the freedom this same holy One has bought you with His innocent suffering and death?

“Christ died for the ungodly. ... Christ died for us.” Unlike Pilate who unwillingly declared Barabbas innocent and reluctantly set him free, God joyfully declares us sinners innocent while condemning His perfect Son in our place. You are blessed, my fellow redeemed. Barabbas likely woke up Easter morning free but frightfully still bound to his sin. You, on the other hand, rose this morning knowing why and how you have been set free. Let us sing of this magnificent freedom made certain for us by Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Turn to hymn #348. Please rise.

2006

Remember the sad words the first Adam heard from God as a consequence of his sin: “Dust you are, to dust you will return.”—words spoken to and about you, if you had the imposition of ashes put on your forehead on Ash Wednesday. Elton John’s famous song from the soundtrack of “The Lion King” tries to make this sad cycle sound so very beautiful and attractive in “The Circle of Life.”

This cycle of death really, has no human solution. Poetic lyrics set to a melifluous tune, does not change the fact that for thousands of years, the earth has been methodically reclaiming her dust. But the message we sing about today is that **THE CYCLE IS BROKEN: JESUS DID NOT RETURN TO DUST!** Jesus took our sin, suffered our hell, took our death, but the ravages of our sin stopped there with Him. The line was drawn in the sand, or shall we say the dust?

We can picture Satan pacing in that tomb where Christ’s body lay, taking note that the ravages of death were not setting in—no rigor mortis, no stench. It was not moving, it was not breathing, but Jesus’ body was not cooperating with death’s decay. Death took hold of Jesus, but now Jesus took hold of death.

And as soon as that earth shook on the third day, that lifeless body was once again alive. Death was swallowed up in victory by the sinless Son of God. We sing a much different tune today, not the Circle of Life, or in truth the Cycle of Death, but we sing the glorious words of resurrection and life. Please rise to sing hymn #348.

2007

It is reported by many combat veterans that no matter how big, or bad, or mean a soldier or marine is, no matter if he's married or has a girlfriend, when that man is dying, when he's lying shot in the dirt, scared, screaming for someone in the last seconds of his life, it's his mother for whom he's going to call. This was not the case for the great Warrior who faced down all our enemies on that cross. Instead, handing over a son's responsibility for his mother to His trusted friend, He before taking His dying breath called out with a loud voice to His Father. It was not in desperation either.

Jesus' final words were, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." There was confidence in His last words, a confidence that His work was completed and acceptable to the Father in heaven. He came to suffer and die in our place and He fulfilled all that was necessary to present an acceptable sacrifice for all our sins. He even cried out our cry of eternal damnation to its full extent for each one of us sinners. Jesus was not wishing that His sacrifice would be acceptable to the Father, He knew beyond any doubt that it was.

By the resurrection three days later, the Father responded to the Son's "It is finished!" with "Amen." Let's add our voices in that exchange of victorious words by singing Hymn #348. Please rise.

2008

Jesus died, which means that His soul was separated from His body. His soul was in the loving protection of the heavenly Father's hands, safely abiding in the heavenly paradise along with the soul of the believing malefactor. But, who was protecting His body? Satan, the prince of darkness, the enemy of God's creation, desires all human bodies and souls to be with him in his eternal hell.

You would think Jesus' disciples would have been standing watch outside His tomb keeping a vigil, especially in anticipation of the third day, when Jesus promised to rise again. But rather, we are told that they were all hiding from fear of Jesus' enemies. So who did God arrange to keep watch, to guard that sacred tomb of His Son? The chief priests and elders asked for the protection and Pontius Pilate provided it. So Jesus' very enemies kept the vigil!

Who knows how you and I would have fared under those same circumstances. We live today virtually unmolested by Jesus' enemies. Yet we battle with our own sinful flesh and its natural desire to remain indifferent to the Easter joy. Can it be that our hearts are lifted up more by such things as the prospect of receiving a rebate check in May from the government, than the good news

that Jesus lives? God forbid! Please join me in demonstrating otherwise, by rising and singing Hymn #348.

2009

This is the greatest day God has made since the seventh day of creation week! We just got done confessing this when we read Psalm 118: “This is the day which the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.” The disciples had sung these very words with the Lord Jesus three days earlier. At the close of the Passover meal it was customary to sing Psalms 115–118 and we are told that as Jesus and His disciples were about to leave the upper room to make their way to the Mt. of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, they sang together.

Perhaps those words were echoing in their heads as all the awful events of Friday played out. So by what the disciples would witness—the arrest, trials, beatings, crucifixion, death, and burial—it would rather appear *this was the worst day, which the devil had made, for they were grief stricken and in despair, as though death had overcome.*

We have an advantage, which the believers on that first Easter did not have. As we are told after Peter and John visited the empty tomb that day, “They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.” They would not be led to understand this until after Pentecost. But because we are the Church post-Pentecost we understand why this truly is the greatest of all days. With faithful understanding, let us rise and sing hymn #348.

2010

Once again we hear the angelic invitation not to fear. There is a good reason why the Easter visitors at the tomb should not be afraid: Jesus took care of the one fear He taught them to have and this is now resolved by the empty tomb. Hell is what Jesus said we should fear. “Do not fear the ones who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

We see in our Lord’s life that He did not fear the crowds attempting to throw Him off the cliff in Nazareth or to stone Him in Jerusalem. He did not cower before Pilate who arrogantly announced to Him, “I have the power either to free you or to crucify you.” He was not afraid of the Sanhedrin. He was confident and tranquil, even when he was being arrested. But when He faced drinking from the cup of judgment of His Father, we are told He sweat drops of blood. That was endured on the cross; the grave for Jesus was a restful place for His holy body to sleep for three days.

Death, eternal death, is our enemy, the wages of sin. Today we rejoice because death, yes, even eternal death, is a defeated enemy! The resurrected Jesus defeats death, brings life, and makes all things new! This is our joy today; this is the reason we too need not fear. He who believes in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus will live, even though he dies. With fearless confidence in the Risen One, let us rise to sing Hymn #348.

2011

Jesus was judged to be treasonous and was executed by Pilate, although in truth Pilate declared Him to be innocent and tried washing his hands of the whole affair. It was Rome's custom to leave bodies on the cross as carrion and then the remains were gathered up many days later and traitors were given a dishonorable burial in a criminal's graveyard.

Now in Judea, Rome made the concession that the bodies of the crucified, once dead, could be removed. So while Jesus' body would not be left on the cross overnight, it would have been the custom to discard it in a criminal's cemetery in great dishonor. But Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for Jesus' body. As Isaiah prophesied, Jesus was to be buried in an honorable grave among the wealthy.

Pilate no doubt gave Joseph permission to spite those who "forced" him to crucify that righteous man. But the fear on Easter morning among Jesus' followers was that His enemies undid this honorable burial and discarded His body somewhere never to be found again. But such was not the case—burial was no longer needed. He, who bore our sin, rose from the grave, all charges against Him were answered, punishment paid in full, just as He declared from the cross. In the greatest honor of all, no grave was now needed—He lives to give us life! His living body is found by us even today hidden for example with that bread, buried, if you will, most honorably within His believers, but living, giving us life—life to the fullest. Let us rise to sing Hymn #348!

2013

If you were an unbeliever and heard that the God of the universe was going to come Himself to our earth to address a problem for our race, what would you ask it to be? The ending of all wars between nations? The stopping of all crimes against humanity? The cure for cancer or heart disease? How about the ending of all natural disasters? What is the threat that has plagued the human race the most, which you would want solved by your Creator God?

My guess it would be none of them specifically, but all of them in general. These are all only symptoms. There is a common root problem to all of them. You know it. That is why you, my fellow believers, are here this morning to worship in joyous celebration. The root problem is sin, but that in itself is not the biggest threat which we all fear the most. It is the resulting death, which comes to our race on account of sin.

The eternal God came to our world to solve all these problems and more. The Son of God who became flesh, said concerning His purpose for the human race: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."—and this by laying down His life for us in dying on the cross and by taking it up again in rising again from the grave. If ever there was a basis for worship, it is here; God has rescued us from death—forevermore! Please rise to sing Hymn #348.

Pentecost

2003

(May 1, 2003 President Bush displayed the "Mission Accomplished" banner.)

But the War has ended! What more needs to be done? Victory has been declared; there is no question who the Victor is. Yet peace seems elusive for many. Yes there was a promise that after the victory there would come a period of change, painful and even deadly at times. We are living in that time, my fellow redeemed. Change has happened and continues to this day, the promise has been kept.

The end of the War was marked in April, on Good Friday. Victory was declared most spectacularly on Easter Sunday. Christ is the victor over sin, death and the devil. The promise of the Spirit's outpouring upon the Church of Jesus Christ has occurred. We are living proof of this life-changing work of the Spirit in our lives. We are led daily to repent over our sins, to put to death our sinful natures and to rise with Christ in newness of life. All that was promised to happen for our eternal benefit has been accomplished.

How many languages has the message of our deliverance come through to get to us today in English? Aramaic, Greek, Latin, German, Norwegian, Korean to list just a few. We now hear most clearly as the Spirit has worked from nation to nation, generation to generation the transforming message of God's love, that all our sins are forgiven by the atoning sacrifice of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Savior. Let us join in singing with the great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language our joy in His gracious working among us, hymn #399. Rise!

2004

If it were not for this day we observe today—Pentecost—the other two festivals of the Church year, Christmas and Easter, would only be historical events probably not even footnoted in history textbooks today. We celebrate the work of the Holy Ghost today and its crucial part in the plan of our salvation. The angel announced to the shepherds, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." But if it were not for Pentecost, the words "to you" could be dropped, because they would mean nothing. Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene outside the tomb and said, "Go ... to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" But without the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, "your Father" and "your God" could also be dropped.

The Father willed our salvation from eternity. The Son came and won salvation for us on the cross. Now the Holy Spirit is at work distributing this salvation to us individually. Perhaps we feel a little guilty about our lack of attention to this great high festival. However, normally when the Spirit comes to us sinners it is not with dramatic results as was found on that first

Pentecost—the sound of violent wind, the tongues of fire, and the speaking of unstudied foreign languages. The Spirit rather comes in an undetectable way as Jesus told us in John 3: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” We find ourselves believing in Christ and cannot trace the exact time and place of the Spirit working such faith in our hearts, but since we believe, we know He has been at work in us. We now know and trust that Christ Jesus was born to be OUR Savior and that He rose to life defeating OUR sin and death making US right with the Father in heaven. Let us rise and sing of this gracious working among us. Please turn to Hymn #399.

2005

Remember the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis? God punished the entire world even to the very last day because of the stubborn arrogance of the people who would not obey His Word to subdue the earth and fill it. Rather they stayed put and constructed a tower to their own glory. God confused their language so that they would be forced to separate and scatter throughout the world. This has led to wars and rumors of wars and other tragedies right up to this day.

Although while we are troubled and vexed by this consequence of this ancient disobedience, God is not. On this festival day we remember how the language barrier posed no difficulty for the Spirit and His Church. Jesus knew of this miraculous work of the Spirit. He did not hesitate to command us to go into all the world and preach the Gospel.

God’s people went to peoples of many languages who were illiterate, and learned their languages and developed their alphabets so that the Gospel might truly be heard and taught. In the Revelation John received from our Lord, he got a glimpse of heaven filled with all believers and this is how he described it: “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. They ... cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’” We have begun to sing this song here on earth in our language. My fellow redeemed, let us rise and sing hymn #399.

2006

This day was anticipated at the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry when John the Baptist denied the thinking of the crowd that he was the Christ: “I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” Jesus would often speak of this day of the Spirit’s outpouring upon His Church and shortly before He ascended into heaven, He instructed His disciples with these words: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

What happened on this day which we celebrate today has been and still is an essential part of God's order of salvation. Yes, the securing of our salvation by the blood of the Son of God was an essential part, but unless the Spirit was sent in full measure we could not receive the forgiveness, life, and salvation which Jesus won for us. God's desire that all men be saved would have come to a grinding halt, if the Spirit had not been poured out on the Church. The Spirit's worldwide work still spreads like fire today, so that your baptism and mine is the Spirit-filled baptism, which Jesus promised.

As those who have been set on fire with the Spirit of God, let us sing of this great work among us by turning to Hymn #399. Please rise.

2008

Recently I spoke with a Lutheran pastor who had been visiting the country of Turkey. Although it is about 90% Muslim, it has a secular government. But there is a Turkish policy on religion against "proselytizing." It is illegal to share one's faith with another unless specifically asked. In effect this is enforced only against Christians. The pastor asked their tour guide why it would be so wrong simply to talk about one's faith. *"Everyone knows what happens then,"* she said. *"Whenever they have the chance, Christians talk about their faith, and then there are converts. People shouldn't change the religion they were brought up with, and wherever Christians talk about Jesus, people are converted."* *"But nobody is forcing them to change,"* the pastor said. *"You can say that,"* she replied, *"But everyone knows what happens when Christians talk about what they believe."*

Do you know what happens when you speak the good news of salvation in Jesus? The Holy Spirit is at work upon the hearts of those who hear! When Christians speak, the result is not just that sinners listen, but the Holy Spirit is at work mightily working on the hearts of sinners. It is this blessed work of the Holy Spirit begun on this day that we celebrate today. Oh that we might be compelled always to speak. Please rise and join in singing Hymn #399.

2009

When the world observes its special days of celebration, they are usually memorial celebrations. Perhaps we could say that our July 4th celebration in the United States not only recognizes the freedoms declared in 1776, but that we enjoy them even to this day and plan to in the future as well. But anyone with a sense of history knows that any nation or empire sooner or later falls.

However the festivals observed in the Christian Church not only focus on past events and not only recounts how these events have impacted the Church ever since in the "here and now," but we celebrate the ongoing eternal benefits of what we celebrate. On Christmas the Church rejoices that God has become man and our joy is that God is our brother in the flesh even today and forever. On Easter the Church rejoices that our crucified Savior who died in our place, defeated death for us by His resurrection and He now lives and will live forever granting us life in the flesh forever as well.

So today on Pentecost the Church rejoices that the Holy Spirit continues to be poured out upon the Church of believers. In our festival hymns we are confidently asking that the same Pentecostal Spirit would be poured out on us today, bestowing upon us the eternal blessings of Christ. Let us rise and sing Hymn #399.

2010

The closeted Christians were entering their seventh week—almost two months—hiding from the hateful murderers of Christ. Jesus was no longer dead, having arisen and having appeared to His disciples on many occasions; yet they remained closeted, fearful of what man could do to them. But on this day, the closeted Christians became confessing Christians. What changed? The hatred for Christ by the general public? No! A decision these closeted Christians made with great sincerity and passion? No! A new-found enthusiasm produced by a seven-week intensive and effective evangelism program? No! A nontraditional, more inspiring form of worship? No!

The change was what Jesus had promised would happen on this day. These closeted Christians moved from their locked room to the open courtyard of the Temple grounds where those who had cried out over fifty days ago, “*Crucify Him!*” were all gathered. Now with bold confession the once closeted Christians convicted many hearts. Especially Peter who in this very location had boldly lied, “*I know not the man!*” now declared this was the Man whom God had promised to send, whom they however had crucified. But graciously he invited them to believe and be baptized in this very one they crucified.

Whether you recognize it or not, you, my fellow redeemed, are numbered among these bold confessors today, because the same outpouring of the Spirit has been given to you. Rise and sing out your confession. We are not closeted here, this is a public gathering! Let’s sing hymn #399 as the confessing Christians our Lord has made us to be.

2011

(also graduation from Parkland Lutheran School)

The disciples were failing their tests which Jesus, their teacher, had been giving to them throughout the three years of schooling. For example: when mothers were bringing little babies to Jesus, they tried to make them leave; when they were surrounded by crowds that exceeded 5,000 and again 4,000, they were unable to turn to Jesus in faith trusting He could feed them; after Jesus rose from the dead, He “rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe”; even on the day of Jesus’ ascension they wanted to know if Jesus was now going to take His kingly throne on earth.

Failing one test after another, we take note that Jesus was still patient with them and told them that things would improve after the Holy Spirit came to them. We see the change with Peter, who about 50 days earlier denied knowing Jesus to save his own life. On this holy day of Pentecost when the Spirit was

poured out upon Jesus' Church in full measure, Peter would speak to many of those who had called for Jesus' crucifixion. He would speak harsh law to condemn and then would speak the sweet Gospel of God's love and forgiveness in the very one they had crucified. The gift of the Holy Spirit made all the difference for these disciples and it still does for us believers today. Let us acknowledge this same working among us by singing our verse #9 in the worship folder. Please rise.

2012

As Jesus went to Jerusalem for the last time with His disciples, He told them this: "Everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him....' [They] did not understand any of this."

Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, was handed over to the Gentiles by His fellow Jewish religious leaders. Gentiles were non-Jews despised by most Jews. The Gentiles took *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews* and did their worst to Him. But the worst they did to Him was the best that could have happened for all people. Through this Gentile cruelty, God had His Son suffer and die to save us all.

We get to celebrate the great high festival of Pentecost when the Spirit enlightened His Church to the meaning of what Christ has done for us all. Through the miracles of this day, God handed over the Christ to the Gentiles as He converted the Jews gathered in Jerusalem "from every nation under heaven" and sent them back with the good news of our salvation in their own native tongues.

What happened then is still happening today. You and I are among the Gentiles to whom God has handed over His Son. Let us rejoice over this great gift by singing Hymn #399. Please rise.

APPENDIX III

Festival Sermon Survey

(administered at five ELS congregations where exordiums are traditionally used)

Approximate Number of Years as a Confirmed Lutheran:

30 1-10; _35_ 11-30; _45_ 31-50; _51_ 51-+ = 161 respondents

1. I have noticed that on Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost that our pastor begins his sermon differently than he does for his regular sermons.
112 Yes (*continue with 2-5*) _49_ No (*stop*)
2. The difference is in the ... (*check all that apply*)
45 prayer; _69_ greeting; _56_ introduction; _43_ body;
24 conclusion;
other: __4 had something musical; 3 wrote exordium__
3. The differences ... (*check all that apply*)
14 make the sermon longer than normal _99_ add to the festive nature of the day _1__ have little to no effect
__0_ are tedious
4. The differences are so effective it should be considered to be used on other occasions:
31 Epiphany; _23_ Ascension; _8_ Memorial Day; _4_ Fourth of July;
10 St. Michaels; _26_ Reformation;
24 Thanksgiving; other: __38 chose none, 1 wrote "all the time"__
5. Other observations or suggestions concerning festival sermons and services:

The 875th Anniversary of the Death of Otto von Bamberg (1060–1139)

*Gaylin R. Schmeling
President, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
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“**T**HEREFORE, SINCE WE ARE SURROUNDED by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1). “Of the worship of saints they teach that the memory of saints may be set before us, that we may follow their faith and good works, according to our calling, as the Emperor may follow the example of David in his country” (AC XXI). Otto von Bamberg belongs to the great cloud of witnesses and heroes of faith that the Augustana encourages us to emulate.

On June 30, the church celebrates the life and work of Otto von Bamberg, who was born around 1060 in Swabia and who died on June 30, 1139. He was the Bishop of Bamberg, a great evangelist, and the apostle to Pomerania.

During his tenure as bishop of Bamberg beginning in 1102, he rose to great prominence as a churchman and missionary. At the time of the Investiture Controversy¹ between Emperor Henry IV and the papacy he remained loyal to the emperor. As a consequence, he was suspended by a papal party at the Synod of Fritzlar in 1118. At the Congress of

¹ This controversy concerned the nomination of bishops and abbots and the conferring of the symbols of office. Who had the right to nominate and invest bishops or abbots with authority? Was it the emperor or the pope?

Würzburg in 1121, Otto successfully helped negotiate the peace treaty, the Concordat of Worms,² which was signed in 1122 at Worms.

As bishop, Otto led a model life of Christian piety, doing much to improve his ecclesiastical and temporal realms. He restored and completed Bamberg Cathedral after it had been damaged by fire in 1081, improved the cathedral school, established numerous monasteries, and built a number of churches throughout his territory and later in Pomerania. He greatly expanded the town of Bamberg and rebuilt the Monastery of St. Michael, which had been destroyed by an earthquake around 1117.

Christianity came late to Pomerania because the native people resisted all the advances of the faith. In the year 1124, Bishop Otto von Bamberg traveled through Pomerania³ to proclaim the Gospel of the Savior to the inhabitants.⁴ However, the heathen faith in the pagan gods—Swantewit, Triglaw, Radogast, and other idols—was not easily blotted out and many of Otto's converts had to pay for their faithfulness to Christianity with their life. In 1128, Duke Wartislav I of Pomerania requested that Otto make a second missionary journey to Pomerania. As a young man Wartislav had been captured by Saxon Germans during one of their wars and spent some years in captivity in Saxony. While there he became a Christian and later was able to return to Pomerania and become the duke. He was very helpful to Otto in his mission work.

With his two missionary journeys, the church was planted on the Baltic shores. Otto, together with his priests, baptized more than 20,000 people. Through him the Pomeranian church was established and organized. In 1140, Wollin was designated as the seat of the bishop, and in 1176, the seat of the bishop moved to Cammin. Thus Christianity was brought to the southern shores of the Baltic.⁵ Otto was indeed the Apostle of Pomerania.

Shortly after Cammin was established as the bishopric of Pomerania work began on the present cathedral in Cammin. In 1224, Cammin

² In the Concordat of Worms pope and emperor agreed (1) that all elections of bishops and abbots should be conducted according to the laws of the church, but under imperial supervision; (2) that the right of spiritual investiture by ring and staff belonged to the pope, and (3) that the emperor should exercise the right of investiture by the touch of a scepter as an emblem of secular rights and authority.

³ Pomerania means the land by the sea, the Baltic Sea.

⁴ Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 17.

⁵ Milton L. Rudnick, *Speaking the Gospel Through the Ages* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988), 60–61, and Heinz Butzlaff, *Pommern, Land am Meer* (Würzburg: Flechsig-Buchvertrieb, 2000), 22–23.

joined the Hanseatic League and become one of its trading cities. In 1534, after the Reformation, Pomerania became Lutheran, and the cathedral became a Lutheran church. When Pomerania was given to Poland in 1946 the cathedral became Roman Catholic.

Otto von Bamberg is a fine example of a Christian missionary for each of us to emulate. His work brought the saving Gospel of full forgiveness in Christ the Savior to the southern coast of the Baltic. The people in his flock were fed with the life-giving Word and the Holy Sacraments. In the Reformation men like Johannes Bugenhagen restored the Gospel brought to Pomerania by Otto to its truth and purity in a time when it had been obscured. In the 19th century emigrants from Pomerania brought the Lutheran Church to North America, South America, and Australia. Thus the Gospel proclaimed by Otto von Bamberg produced abundant fruit in many parts of the world.

May we each follow his example of missionary zeal. Each of us will want to be certain that the Gospel truth is established and preserved in our own midst so that our children and their descendants remain firm in the saving faith. The only hope for our children and their descendants in this life and the next is found in the Savior Jesus Christ who washed all sins away. In addition, we will desire to spread the message of salvation to all those around us so that more and more may come to know peace and joy in our gracious Savior. As the Apostle to the Pomeranians knew full well, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). LSQ

Book Review and Index

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Book Review: Lutheran Bible Companion

Edward A. Engelbrecht, ed.
Lutheran Bible Companion: A Practical Tool for Churchworkers and Laypeople. 2 volumes. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014. 1128 and 1016 pages. \$69.98 hardcover.

When preparing materials for a seminary class a few years ago, I bemoaned to a colleague the lack of a modern Lutheran introduction or overview (handbook) of the entire Bible. The recently-released *Lutheran Bible Companion (LBC)* fills that void well.

The *LBC* is produced in two volumes, the first providing an introduction to the Bible and an overview of each book of the Old Testament; the second providing an overview of each book of the Apocrypha and the New Testament, closing with some brief sections regarding “Archaeology

and the Bible” and the like. Each of the chapters which treat an individual book include sections which cover the composition, outline, and doctrinal content of the book, and quotes from Luther and Gerhard about the book. For some of the books there is included a section titled, “Questions People Ask About [the book].” Articles which address various topics appear in some of the chapters, such as “Speaking in Tongues” in the chapter on 1 Corinthians. Each of the chapters ends with a “Further Study” section, which provide additional resources divided into those geared for laypeople and Bible classes, those geared for church workers, and those of a more academic nature.

A comprehensive review of such a large reference work is not feasible in this venue, so I will focus on selected portions. The initial section of volume one provides a helpful overview of “How to Read and Study the Holy Bible.” In this section,

Rev. Engelbrecht focuses on how the Lord works through the Word (with appropriate Lutheran emphases on law-gospel and the absolute truth of Scripture), how Scripture interprets Scripture (including the Bible's Christocentricity and the importance of paying attention to the context of a passage), and how the Holy Spirit works in the Word through faith (focusing on the use of the means of grace in the gathering of the faithful). A subsequent brief section treats the distinction between the law and the gospel, providing appropriate quotes from Scripture and from writers throughout the history of the church.

Another helpful resource in the front matter of volume one is a lengthy chronology of the general time periods covered by the Bible, from creation to the early second century AD. The chronology comprises a chart of five columns, one of which is the time period covered and the other four different geographical areas of the world. This chronology is helpful in seeing what was taking place in different parts of the world when Bible events occurred.

Since the bulk of the *LBC* is the treatment of the individual books of the Bible (and the Apocrypha), I will offer a few comments about the chapter regarding Matthew as an example. An inset column at the beginning of the chapter provides the highlights and summary of the chapter's contents, including basic isagogical information such as the author, date, and purpose. An item to note: the date for the writing of Matthew is given as ca. AD 50. I appreciate that the editors chose to give early dates

for the composition of the synoptic gospels (Mark – AD 50-60; Luke – AD 55-60), contrary to much of mainstream scholarship. At the beginning of the section describing the purpose/recipients of Matthew, the author states, “The Gospel according to Matthew was apparently written for religious instruction, perhaps for Jewish Christians” (188). There is much agreement regarding Matthew being written with a Jewish audience in mind, but it would have been good to have more explanation of the “religious instruction” portion of the purpose. (Was this instruction along the lines of catechesis, for example?) The section entitled “Doctrinal Content” provides very brief summaries of passages, discourses, or chapters, focusing on the primary theological messages therein. After summarizing the doctrine of the gospel, specific law and specific gospel themes are given. For example, one of the law themes revolves around the kingdom of God, a prevalent feature in Matthew: “With God’s rule comes His Word of the Law, authority, and judgment” (204). On the gospel side, “The King comes to ransom His people from bondage to sin and institutes a new Passover for forgiveness and nurture of faith: the Lord’s Supper” (205). Following the same divisions in the “Doctrinal Content,” a section of “Application” presents the practical theology of Matthew. At the end of the chapter, “Questions People Ask About Matthew” are presented and answered. This useful section reminded me of William Arndt’s *Bible Difficulties and Seeming Contradictions* with updated material.

Included in the *LBC* are a plethora of pictures, charts, maps and other graphics that not only provide information but add to the general aesthetics of these volumes. The *LBC* will prove to be a wonderful resource for laypeople, teachers, pastors, professors, and the like.

– Michael K. Smith

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