

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY



VOLUME 56 • NUMBERS 2–3
JUNE–SEPTEMBER 2016

Presidential Quotes From the Past

**Ministering to Spiritual Stockholm Syndrome:
Luther's Works Vol. 26: Galatians 3 & 4**

**Luther's "On the Councils and the
Church": An Historical Study with
Application for Parish Ministry**

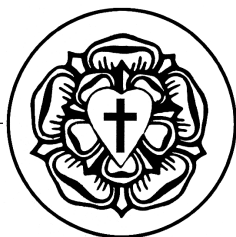
The Absent God of Mormonism

Positive Points for Our Pastors and Parishes

**The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the
*Clergy Bulletin/Lutheran Synod Quarterly***

Sermons, Poetry, and Book Reviews

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The journal of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF..... Gaylin R. Schmeling
BOOK REVIEW EDITOR..... Michael K. Smith
LAYOUT EDITOR..... Daniel J. Hartwig
PRINTER..... Books of the Way of the Lord

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Foreword

LSQ Vol. 56, Nos. 2–3 (June–September 2016)

IN THIS ISSUE OF THE *QUARTERLY* WE ARE continuing a series of quotations entitled “Presidential Quotes From the Past.” The series will include a number of relevant, Christ-centered quotes from the former presidents of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod as we look forward to the 100th anniversary of the synod in 1918.

The next two articles are offered in this *Quarterly* as part of the observance of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation in 2017. They are a study of the important works of Luther.

Those suffering from the Stockholm Syndrome may have positive feelings toward their abusers or actually love their captors. In the essay “Ministering to Spiritual Stockholm Syndrome,” the author applies this psychological phenomenon to the situation St. Paul faced in the Galatian congregation. They were rescued from the tyranny of the law by the blood of Christ, and yet they were drawn to serve it again as a means of salvation. The author of this essay is the Rev. Kyle Madson, who is pastor of Divine Mercy Lutheran Church in Hudson Oaks, Texas.

Luther’s “On the Councils and the Church” represents his mature view of the medieval church and the church councils, especially the ecumenical councils. He showed that the decrees of the councils do not confirm the authority of the pope, nor are the councils themselves without error, contrary to the Eastern Church. Rather the basis for church teaching is always the inerrant Word of God, the Scripture. The

Rev. Daniel Hartwig has explicated these points in his essay, "Luther's 'On the Councils and the Church.'" He is the pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Okauchee, Wisconsin.

The Rev. Gregory Sahlstrom was a missionary among Mormons in the Salt Lake City area. He has done considerable research on Mormonism. He has written a manual for evangelizing to Mormon missionaries and is writing a book on Mormonism. In his essay, "The Absent God of Mormonism," he points out the false teaching of the Mormons concerning the Deity. "Not only does the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints define God as someone who was once absent before becoming God and as a God who is not with us in this world or the next; the absent God of Mormonism isn't God in any real sense at all and so is absent in the sense of simply not existing."

As Christians and as members of the ELS, we face the daily struggle against the flesh which desires to sink us into pessimism. Yet, as Christians we can have joy and confidence. In his essay, "Positive Points for Our Pastors and Parishes," the Rev. Herbert Huhnerkoch points out that our joy is found in the Gospel of Christ's salvation, the treasure of which comes to us in the means of grace. Here we are assured of peace and comfort in this life and hope for the life to come. Pastor Huhnerkoch serves as a pastor at Peace Lutheran Church in Kissimmee, Florida and is the chairman of the Board of Regents of Bethany Lutheran College, Inc.

This *Quarterly* includes the essay "The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the *Clergy Bulletin/Lutheran Synod Quarterly*." It gives a short overview of the history of the *Quarterly*. Reading through the summaries of the various articles, one can visualize the history of our church and the joys and conflicts that it faced. The purpose of this essay is to inform our readers concerning the origin and background of this periodical. We thank the Lord that He has continued to use the *Quarterly* as a vehicle to proclaim the truths of His life-giving Word.

Also included in this *Quarterly* are several sermons and book reviews. In addition, the Rev. Matthew Crick has provided poetry for Holy Week. He is the pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Medford, Oregon.

– GRS

Presidential Quotes From the Past

LSQ Vol. 56, Nos. 2–3 (June–September 2016)

HOW COULD THE ROMAN SOLDIERS, AS THEY mocked and scourged him, make impotent—powerless—the mighty hands that hurl the thunder and lightning? They could not. It was love's tender cord that tied his hands. How could they impale the almighty Son of God to the accursed tree? Again, they could not; it was love of sinners that held him there. Jesus was face to face with an unalterable either/or. Either he must pay the ransom in full or see man, God's foremost creature, the king of creation, eternally writhe in hell. He died the death of a malefactor. He made the Supreme Sacrifice. Love won.

And is not this also the supreme tragedy? No, for he broke the shackles of death, burst open the grave and on the third day arose victorious over sin, death and the devil, and all as our substitute. "He was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." Rom. 4, 25. "Jesus Christ hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." 2 Tim. 1, 10. Now the blessed gospel truth, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" cannot be denied or ignored by heaven or hell; it is authenticated and sealed by the empty grave.

If our Savior's humiliation and his death on the cross is not the supreme tragedy, what then is? Is it that an aged couple lose their means of support through bank failure and must, after a long life of hard work, accept alms? Is it that a wedding party meets instant death at a railroad

crossing, or a mother and father must see their children waste away for want of food, or a babe is snatched from its mother's arms and deliberately murdered? Yes, these are all tragedies and we fairly shudder as we enumerate them, yet the supreme tragedy is none of these.

That a redeemed sinner, an heir of God and co-heir with Christ, the object of his infinite love and the beneficiary of his last will and testament is "cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth" where "their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched"—the eternal damnation of a redeemed soul, that is the supreme tragedy. Let this fact never lie dormant in the hearts of the watchmen on the walls of Zion nor be overlooked by any of the laborers in the Lord's vineyard.

To proclaim the supreme sacrifice and to avert the supreme tragedy, that is the work of the church on earth. [LSQ](#)

Excerpt from H.M. Tjernagel, "President's Message," *Synod Report* 1932: 15.

Ministering to Spiritual Stockholm Syndrome: Luther's Works Vol. 26: Galatians 3 & 4

Kyle J. Madson
Pastor, Divine Mercy Lutheran Church
Hudson Oaks, Texas

LSQ Vol. 56, Nos. 2–3 (June–September 2016)

DEAR BEWITCHED FOOLS,
Love and Stockholm Syndrome: The Mystery of Loving an Abuser. This counseling article, among its other endeavors, examines “how bonds form between victims and their abuser.”¹ Some here have had the painful experience of watching a loved one mysteriously “love an abuser.” At its worst, this mystery even includes one who has been rescued from the abuse by a genuine, self-sacrificing love, fleeing from the rescue back into the preferred arms of their abuser.

3:1–2 — O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you so that you do not obey the truth? Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified among you. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?²

The sort of pain, mystery, and bewilderment of one who cares for a such a bewitched person bleeds through in Paul's impassioned Christian plea to the Galatians as well. The Galatians are a people before whose eyes Jesus Christ was placarded front and center. By this Gospel they have been rescued from the tyranny of the Law. And yet, Paul writes

¹ D.J.M. Dr. Joseph M. Carver, PhD, “Love and Stockholm Syndrome: The Mystery of Loving an Abuser,” Counseling Resource. (n.d.). <http://counselingresource.com/lib/therapy/self-help/stockholm/> (accessed 2015).

² All the scriptural quotations are Luther's translation of the Galatians text as found in Vol. 26.

to them as to a loved one running back into the arms of an abuser. In the midst of just seven English words, he manages to call them both “foolish” and “bewitched.” Luther, commenting on the weight of such sharp language, ascribes a spiritual Stockholm Syndrome to the human heart: “The foolishness of the human heart is so great that in its conflict of conscience, when the Law performs its function and carries out its true use, the heart not only does not take hold of the doctrine of grace, which gives a sure promise and offer of the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ, but it actually looks for more laws to help it out.”³

In keeping with the brevity of his epistle address to the Galatians, the gravity of souls in peril leaves Paul with no time for small talk. He proceeds with a catechetical question-and-answer mode that persists for several verses. In spite of the plethora of questions Paul poses to his “bewitched” brethren, he manages to summarize all of them by asking “only this”: *Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law or by hearing with faith?*

Luther finds value in unpacking some of the language Paul uses here as it is foundational to His appeal to these vexed Christians. First, Luther asserts that to “receive the Spirit” is simply what exists after the Gospel comes and before fruits of the Gospel are performed.⁴ This must be understood as the passivity of faith or resting faith.⁵ Conspicuous by its absence is any persuasion on Paul’s part that the Galatians do indeed possess this Spirit. Rather, Paul effectively says, “you DID receive the Spirit.” According to Dr. Andrew Das, “Paul does not seek to convince the Galatians that they really have received the Spirit; the argument works the other way around. He argues from the indisputable empirical fact that they have received the Spirit in order to convince them that no further validating action is required to ensure their status as God’s

³ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, Chapters 1–4, vol. 26, *Luther’s Works*, ed. J.J. Pelikan, H.C. Oswald, and H.T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 315.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁵ K. Preus, *The Fire and the Staff: Lutheran Theology in Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 188–189. Preus notes that there is one faith but two distinct functions always at work: One that receives the atoning work of Christ unto salvation (passive) and the other that responds in love toward neighbor (active).

Passive Faith	Active Faith
Informed by the Gospel	Informed by the Law
Directed toward God	Directed toward my neighbor
Makes me identical to others	Makes me different from others
I have heaven in view	I have this world in view
Motivated by the Gospel	Motivated by the Gospel

children.”⁶ Paul grants the presence of the Spirit to get to the essential catechetical question: *Is the Spirit (who is most certainly with you, Galatians) present due to the works of the Law OR hearing with faith?*

Secondly then, what does Paul encompass in “the works of the Law”? An isagogical survey of Galatians might lead one very specifically to the ceremonial law. This is indeed the “New Perspective” interpretation of “works of the law,” seeing it as “shorthand for circumcision, food laws, and the ethnic aspects of the Mosaic Law that distinguish the Jewish people.”⁷ Luther urges the problem the Galatians have is far more widespread than merely an undue emphasis on ceremony.

Here again I admonish you that Paul is speaking not only about the Ceremonial Law but about the entire Law. For he is arguing from a sufficient division. If he were speaking only about the Ceremonial Law, there would not be a sufficient division... there are only two ways to justification: either the Word of the Gospel or the Law. Therefore the Law is being taken universally here, as something completely diverse and distinct from the Gospel. But it is not only the Ceremonial Law that is distinct from the Gospel; the Decalog, too, is distinct from it. Therefore Paul is dealing here with the Law as a whole.⁸

Paul uses specific examples of ceremonial law in the verses that follow. But here, at the foundation of this life-or-death catechesis, *the works of the Law* as a whole are to be put in their place, silenced by that which gives and offers forgiveness, life, and salvation—by “hearing with faith.”

Finally, Luther tidies up this preeminent question with an understanding of what St. Paul means by “hearing with faith.” Luther’s minor rephrasing of the question really closes the matter: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit through the Law or through the preaching of **the Gospel?**”⁹ When Luther boils down the syndrome at hand to its simplest reduction, the question is nothing more or less than this: *Are you, Galatians, counted as God’s faithful by works of your own OR by the work of the Gospel upon you?*

⁶ A. Andrew Das, *Galatians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 288.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁸ LW 26, 203.

⁹ *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

3:3 — Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now being ended with the flesh?

In first addressing the Galatians, Paul identifies the abductors simply by their activity: distortion artists peddling a phony gospel (1:6–7). He goes on to paint them as slave traders who have disguised their identity so that they might roam undetected among the free in order to bring them—even if unknowingly—into bondage (2:4). Paul's continuing question here in verse 3 is a bit of a tip-of-the-cap to the sinister subtlety of these opponents of the Gospel. He attributes them with the savvy of ones willing to concede a Gospel ("Spirit") beginning to Christian faith so long as that doesn't remain the continuing state of a Christian's hope and life. A faith that begins by the Gospel is tolerable with the slave traders, so long as the finish of that faith is tied up in "the flesh."¹⁰

In Screwtape-fashion, the deception among the Galatians doesn't pose itself as an *either* Gospel *or* works-of-the-law relationship with God. Rather, this phony gospel is happy to play the both/and game; the Gospel for the conversion of the sinner and the works of the Law for the already-converted to *remain* Christians. The effect of the both/and "gospel" is a soul made glad by its placement into God's family only to be saddled with the demand of now finding and maintaining a faith that graduates *beyond Jesus*.

The key question here is a very basic one: "*Can the cross and blood of Christ save a Christian (failing as he or she is in living the Christian life) or no?*" I hope that most of us would say that the shed blood of Christ is sufficient to save a sinner—All by itself, just Christ's blood, "nude faith" in it, "sola fide," "faith without works," "a righteousness from God apart from law," a cross by which "God justifies wicked people," etc. So far, so good, right? But *is the blood of Christ enough to save a still-sinful-Christian?*

¹⁰ Ibid. "Here Paul is opposing the Spirit and the flesh. By 'flesh' he does not mean sexual lust, animal passions, or the sensual appetite, because in this passage he is not discussing sexual lust or other desires of the flesh. No, he is discussing the forgiveness of sins, the justification of the conscience, the attainment of righteousness in the sight of God, and liberation from the Law, sin, and death. And yet he says here that after they have forsaken the Spirit, they are now being ended with the flesh. **Thus 'flesh' is the very righteousness and wisdom of the flesh and the judgment of reason, which wants to be justified through the Law.** Therefore whatever is best and most outstanding in man Paul calls 'flesh,' namely, the highest wisdom of reason and the very righteousness of the Law."

***Or isn't it? Does the Gospel still apply, even if you are a Christian?
Or doesn't it?***¹¹

Whether it be personal effort believed to have made one a Christian or faith in one's performance of the Law maintained since the Spirit "got the ball rollin'," the reason of works is an unwelcome intrusion into the economy of salvation. This intrusion, says Luther, is "the greatest possible damage to consciences"—condemnation dressed up as justification.¹²

3:4–5 — Did you suffer so many things in vain? ... if it is in vain? Does He who supplies the Spirit to you and works powerful deeds among you do so by works of the Law or by hearing with faith?

Paul writes in Philippians 3 of the attendant "loss suffered"—the great *robbery* of human righteousness: his eighth-day circumcision, pedigree of Benjamin's tribe, Pharisee credentials, his zeal for persecution. *Everything* with which Paul could paint himself into God's favor is stripped from his self-justifying hands, that Christ might fill that void instead—the righteousness that comes by faith. The Law has done its native work on these Galatians, stripping them of all glory and pride. Luther even notes that this attendant "suffering" that comes with the Gospel would certainly have included "dangers to ones possessions, wife, children, body and life."¹³ And after suffering all this loss-to-flesh, will this suffering be *in vain*?

Paul's qualifying phrase—"if it is in vain"—establishes his remaining hope for these Christians lost in error's maze. Like the Shepherd fixated on the one lost sheep, Paul too becomes myopic toward these imperiled Christians: "Still I do not cut off all hope from you, if you will only return to your senses. For children who are sick, weak, and full of sores are not to be rejected but must be cared for and cherished even more diligently than those who are healthy."¹⁴

Paul's concluding rhetorical question is unimpeded Third Article grace. There is no cooperating function in the Christian's right-standing

¹¹ R. Rosenblatt, "The Gospel for Those Broken by The Church," 1517 Legacy Project. Retrieved September 17, 2015 from: <https://www.1517legacy.com/freebies/RosenblattThe%20Gospel%20For%20Those%20Broken%20By%20The%20Church.pdf> (emphasis added).

¹² LW 26, 217.

¹³ Ibid., 218.

¹⁴ Ibid., 219.

with God. The same Spirit who called the dead, blind, and lost sinner with the Gospel, also *presently* enlightens, sanctifies and keeps that called one with Jesus Christ in the true faith. The Gospel beginning of the Galatians wasn't the Gospel's swan song in their midst. The Gospel-delivering-Spirit keeps *Gospeling*: "It was not enough that God gave you the Spirit once. But the same God has always abundantly supplied and increased the gifts of the Spirit, so that when you have once received the Spirit, He might always grow and be more efficacious in you."¹⁵

The distortion artists have clearly and predictably been pointing to the fruits of faith present in the lives of these redeemed Galatians and making them to be self-grown fruit—the *new platform* for Christian faith. By contrast, Paul eagerly attributes these fruitful deeds to be the Gospel's happy continuation in and among the Galatians rescued from the works-of-the-law platform. Says Luther, "These are certainly powerful deeds of the Spirit. 'And these powerful deeds,' he says, 'you received and had *before* these false teachers came to you. But you did not receive them from the Law; you received them from God, who supplied and daily increased the Spirit in you in such a way that the Gospel had a very happy course among you as you taught, believed, worked, and bore your adversities."¹⁶

From Experience to Scripture's Example

Thus far Paul has been eliciting the memory of the Galatians, inviting them to remember exactly how faith had come to them and how it had functioned in their midst. Having made his appeal to the experience of their humanity, Paul now directs them to Scripture, to the history of how faith was produced in the patriarchs and saints. He points to blessed Abraham.

3:6–9 — Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying: "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.

Applause for and admiration of Abraham: these are the natural reflexes of reason upon reading this Pauline anecdote of Abraham.

¹⁵ LW 26, 219.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 220 (emphasis added).

“Abraham believed God”... *Great job Abraham! How can I be more like you?* But Paul isn’t exalting Abraham here. Something came before Abraham’s *believing*. *The Scripture* came preaching to and for Abraham. The Scripture preached the Gospel to Abraham. The preached-to Abraham is the Abraham who “believed God.” The *Gospel-ed* Abraham is the one whose faith was reckoned to him as righteousness. Luther counts two gifts in this history lesson, 1) faith and 2) the righteous reckoning, and both of them are divine: “For, as I have said, these two things make Christian righteousness perfect: The first is faith in the heart, which is a divinely granted gift and which formally believes in Christ; the second is that God reckons this imperfect faith as perfect righteousness for the sake of Christ, His Son, who suffered for the sins of the world and in whom I begin to believe.”¹⁷ While Paul points to “belief” and “faith” as the certainties of Galatian salvation, he juxtaposes these with human works. Abraham’s believing, his faith, is justifying before God because faith renders to God the work that belongs to Him alone.¹⁸ The believing then, that Paul holds forth here is not an active will and strength of Abraham’s person but the passivity of God-gifted faith receiving the Good News proclaimed to it.

The justification of Gentiles by faith—that is, still in their Gentile state, completely apart from conformity to any works of the Law given at Sinai—this compels Luther to pick at the most *reasonable* question of all: *Are these Gentiles just OR are they lawless (Gentiles)?* Luther utterly spurns the law of human reason by teaching the *simultaneous existence*—the Just Gentile:

Thus a Christian man is righteous and a sinner at the same time, holy and profane, an enemy of God and a child of God. None of the sophists will admit this paradox, because they do not understand the true meaning of justification. This was why they forced men to go on doing good works until they would not feel any sin at all. By this means they drove to the point of insanity many men who tried with all their might to become completely righteous in a formal sense but could not accomplish it. And innumerable persons even among the authors of this wicked dogma were driven into despair at the hour of death, which is what would have happened to me if Christ had not looked at me in mercy and liberated me from this error.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid., 231–232.

¹⁸ Ibid., 227.

¹⁹ Ibid., 232–233.

To be “blessed with Abraham” is, for a Jewish sinner (like Abraham or Paul) or Gentile sinner (as many of the Galatians, Luther, you or me), to be reckoned with the righteousness of Christ through the passivity of faith and apart from any working out of the Law. Any other way of righteousness before God is no longer “good news” at all. In fact, it is *a curse*. . . .

3:10–14 — For all who rely on works of the Law are under a curse. For it is written: Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, and do them. Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the Law; for the righteous shall live by faith. But the Law does not rest on faith. For he who does them shall live by them. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written: Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree. That in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles.

Luther, adept in Paul’s use of rhetoric and argumentation, grabs on to what seem to be incongruous subsets from Paul and Moses respectively. Paul puts forward a set that is *all* cursed through reliance “on works of the Law.” But to establish his point, he cites Moses, also speaking of a cursed set of people.²⁰ Moses, however, seems to grant a bit of a way out from underneath the curse. He seems to make an escape for those who “abide by all things written in the book of the Law, and (who) **do** them.”

Upon hearing these two seemingly different statements, the syndrome-stricken heart of man begins to look high and low within “self” for “the doer of the Law.” But to do so, Luther says, is a fool’s hunt—looking for the cart in front of the horse. “You cannot produce anyone in all the world to whom the title ‘doer of the Law’ applies apart from the promise of the Gospel. ‘Doer of the Law’ is, therefore, a fictitious term, which no one understands unless he is outside and beyond the Law in the blessing and the faith of Abraham.”²¹

And as the reasonable heart fails in its quest to find a righteous verdict somewhere underneath the “doer-of-the-Law” demand, it begins to make its own version of righteousness. It reasons that *God does not demand the impossible from us*. It reasons that what God is really after is

²⁰ Deuteronomy 27:26.

²¹ LW 26, 255.

the sincerity of our intent to be a “doer of the Law.”²² And this “reasonable” corruption does nothing more than perpetuate the syndrome. It causes the one already accused and abused by the *Law* to go back to it for comfort and refuge.

Such is the sad and bewitched plight of the Galatians. So Paul opposes bewitched reason, with the plain evidence: that no one—*NOT ONE!*—is offered and supplied rest and good standing with God by the working of the Law. The Law does not give rest until the “do-this” demand is done; entirely and always fulfilled. And the “do-this” demand is *never done*.

In the economy of justification—and so far as Paul is concerned with the Galatians *right now*, there *is* no other economy—the Law is always against us. It always demands. It always accuses. It never gives righteousness or grants a favorable verdict in any way. But where the Law is against us, there Christ is supplied. And Christ is *for us*.

Luther latches on to that tiny little phrase—“for us”—and ascribes to it in particular all the weight and substance of Justification before God.

The whole emphasis is on the phrase ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν. Therefore we should not imagine Christ as an innocent and private person who is holy and righteous only for Himself; this is what the sophists and nearly all the fathers, Jerome and others, have done. ***It is, of course, true that Christ is the purest of persons; but this is not the place to stop.*** For you do not yet have Christ, even though you know that He is God and man. You truly have Him only when you believe that this altogether pure and innocent Person has been granted to you by the Father as your High Priest and Redeemer, yes, as your Slave.²³

One can't help but be reminded of Luther's gracious use of this same simple phrase in explanation of the Sacrament: The body Jesus gave over to death is given *FOR YOU*, the blood Jesus shed for the remission of

²² C. Walther and C. Schaum, *Law and Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 90.

²³ LW 26, 287–288 (emphasis added). See also the Apology: “The law condemns all men, *but* by undergoing the punishment of sin and becoming a sacrifice *for us*, the sinless Christ took away the right of the law to accuse and condemn those who believe in Him, because He Himself is their propitiation, for whose sake they are now accounted righteous.” Apology of the Augsburg Confession, IV.179 in Theodore G. Tappert, trans. and ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 131.

sins is shed *FOR YOU*.²⁴ That the holy Son of God died as the sinner of all sinners is historical. It is unfathomable. That He did so *FOR YOU* is justification. Only in this way does the blessing of Abraham come to us Gentiles that we too might receive the promised Spirit—“freedom from the Law, from sin, death, the curse, hell”—and this through faith.²⁵

3:15–18 — To give a human example, brethren: no one annuls even a man’s will, or adds to it, once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say: And to offsprings, referring to many; but, referring to one: And to your offspring, which is Christ. This is what I mean: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance is by the Law, it is no longer by promise.

Some Illustrating

Paul has been very personal with the Galatians, biting so. Paul has been rhetorical with the Galatians, almost like catechism class was in session. He has been tactical in his argumentation. But now he begins to dabble a bit more in the humanities. He gives the Galatians an illustration, a “human example,” that this too might assist in rescuing them from returning to a bondage underneath the Law. They know about a man’s will. They know there can be no additions or subtractions after a signature ratifies it. And this matter applies to God speaking both through Abraham and through Moses: “It is as though he were saying: ‘In wills and in other human business there is a performance, and what the law commands is observed. Why does not the same thing happen even more in the testament of God, which God Himself promised to Abraham and to his offspring?’”²⁶

Luther calls these God-given assurances to Abraham a *testament*: a promise that is signed and sealed, only not yet delivered. Then regarding this testament, several other points are essential. First, a testament is *not* a law; it is always a gift. For a testament to be thought of or esteemed as a two-party contract, each bringing bargaining chips to the table, is

²⁴ Martin Luther, “The Lord’s Supper; SC VI.” Retrieved September 17, 2015, from <http://els.org/beliefs/luthers-small-catechism/part-6-the-lords-supper/>.

²⁵ LW 26, 293.

²⁶ Ibid., 298.

for it to cease to be a testament.²⁷ Secondly, these promises were made *to* Abraham. The culmination of these promises would be a blessing *for* “all nations.” And this culminating promise is specifically *about* a singular Offspring—namely, Christ.²⁸ Finally, Paul makes the weighty case of the promise holding *prior precedent* over the Law. The Law came secondarily (the purpose of which Paul holds in waiting) and that gives it a servile role in respect to the predecessor promises. Luther argues God’s timeline this way:

It was intentional that He preceded the Law with the promises; for if He had wanted us to be justified by the Law, He would have given it four hundred and thirty years before the promise or certainly with the promise. But now He is completely silent about the Law at first; He establishes it finally after four hundred and thirty years. Meanwhile, for that entire time, He speaks about His promises. Therefore the blessing and the gift of righteousness came before the Law, through the promise. And therefore the promise is superior to the Law.²⁹

Then Luther brings this rationale up-to-speed in his own day to bring the gracious weight of the Gospel to bear: “In the same way we can say: ‘Our Christianity existed four hundred and thirty years before our monastic life; that is, our sins were expiated by the death of Christ one thousand six hundred years ago, before any monastic order, any penitential canon, or any merit of congruity and condignity had ever been thought up. How, then, would we do satisfaction for our sins now by our works and merits?’”³⁰

If this, *NOT* that

The Spirit and the works of the Law; the promises and the Law—Paul has attested clearly to the existence of these two distinct *words* of God. More importantly, though, he has been demonstrating that in matters of our heir-relationship with the holy God of heaven, only one of these two words gets air-time. So Paul bluntly brings the matter to a head: “For if the inheritance is by the Law, it is no longer by promise.” Corresponding with Timothy, St. Paul calls this “rightly dividing the Word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). This is what Dr. Walther terms *The Proper*

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 300.

³⁰ Ibid., 301.

Distinction Between Law and Gospel: “Natural reason, no matter how blind it is, is still forced to admit that it is one thing to promise and another thing to demand, one thing to grant and another to accept. If a horse could speak, it would be forced to say that it is one thing when a stableboy offers it oats to eat and another thing when the stableboy mounts it and rides it. Therefore the promise and the Law are as far apart from each other as heaven and earth.”³¹

With his “If this ... not that” rhetoric, Paul puts a dagger through the semi-Pelagian notion previously ascribed to the Galatians—a faith that begins with the Gospel but is finished or perfected by a “doing” of the law. God doesn’t make heirs out of a cocktail of promises given *and* laws kept. The heirs of God are heirs always and only as Abraham was—heir by straight promise, no chaser.

3:19–22 — Why, then, the Law? The Law was added because of transgressions. Till the Offspring should come to whom the promise had been made. And it was ordained by angels through an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one. But God is One. Is the Law, then, against the promises of God? Certainly not. For if a Law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the Law. But the Scripture consigned all things to sin. That what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

What, exactly, do ya’ do here?

Paul has elevated the Gospel as the only “word” of God that gets to speak in the courtroom of the justification of the sinner before God. But because the Law of God is still in the room, conspicuous by its silence, Paul anticipates with his own reason the coming objection: “Why, then, the Law?” If the Law of God has no word to speak in acquitting the sinner, if the works of the law have no merit in producing right-standing with Him, *what exactly is the Law doing here?*

Human reason cannot fathom a word of command from God which isn’t there for our ultimate achievement. Luther says such a command

³¹ Ibid., 303. See also Apology IV: “Men judge by nature that God ought to be appeased by works. Nor does reason see a righteousness other than the righteousness of the Law, understood in a civil sense. Accordingly, there have always existed in the world some who have taught this carnal righteousness alone to the exclusion of the righteousness of faith; and such teachers will also always exist.” Apology IV.393–394 in Tappert, 167.

mocks our natural reason.³² Jesus Himself, however, employs this very *Word of command* with the rich young ruler who desires to work the works of eternal life (Matt. 19). Jesus gives him the 2nd Table of the Law. And when the man's heart has swelled with self-righteousness, Jesus lets the rest of the Law loose to do what it always does: accuse him of his idolatry, strip him of any and all hope to work himself into eternal life.

In the face of this Gospel-only justification, Paul offers the question that reason is begging to be asked: "Why, then, the Law?" And while the Scriptures are clear on the matter, Luther doesn't pretend that the clarity of the Word ever rests easily with us: "Therefore this is a difficult question. Reason is brought short by it and cannot answer it but is offended by it in the highest degree. Because reason does not know anything except the Law ... when (reason) hears this statement of Paul's, novel and unheard-of in the world, that the Law was given on account of transgressions, it judges as follows: 'Paul is abolishing the Law, for he is saying that we are not justified through it.'"³³

Luther, according to his reason, sympathizes with the Prodigal's elder brother. It is, after all, a *very* reasonable objection. The Father has seemingly abolished any use of the clear facts: he agreed that his conduct, his behavior has far surpassed the wild and lawless ways of his younger brother. And yet, his brother receives the robe, the ring and regal feast?!

Luther allows this reasonable difficulty, but only until Paul supplies the humanly *unreasonable* purpose of the Law: "The Law was added because of transgression," that is, "in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure."³⁴ While the reason of man expects a Law for the purpose of measuring himself into right standing with God, God gives the Law for the purpose of attributing an immeasurable sin and guilt to man. How uncanny that the King whose reason and wisdom went unmatched should be used by the Spirit to confess, "There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 16:25).

³² Martin Luther, J.Packer, and O.R. Johnston, *The Bondage of the Will: The Masterwork of the Great Reformer* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1957), 158.

³³ LW 26, 305.

³⁴ Romans 7:13. "Paul discusses this magnificently in Rom. 7. Therefore the true function and the chief and proper use of the Law is to reveal to man his sin, blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, hate and contempt of God, death, hell, judgment, and the well-deserved wrath of God. Yet this use of the Law is completely unknown to the hypocrites, the sophists in the universities, and to all men who go along in the presumption of the righteousness of the Law or of their own righteousness." LW 26, 313.

Coming to know and confess that the “way that seems right” to reason, the way of works, is in fact “the way of death”: This is the primary purpose of the Law. Luther calls this the theological or spiritual use of the Law.³⁵ This function is fast at work when the psalmist is terrified at the thought of the Lord keeping a tally sheet of sins against God’s law.³⁶ Isaiah is familiar with the Law’s primary use as his uncleanness, his *ruination*, cowers in the presence of the Lord’s holiness.³⁷ It brought the enormity of sin to bear before the eyes of Peter’s Pentecost assembly. It cut all the way through the sinews of self-righteousness to the heart.³⁸

But Luther accounts for a second use as well: a civic use. As the Law functions this way, it restrains sin, not by a love of what is good and right but through a fear of the sword.³⁹ This working of the Law God brings about in the ungodly even as it works to curb the onslaughts of the sinful flesh within the regenerate.⁴⁰ God works and maintains untold goodness and safekeeping through this restraint of the Law, in spite of the woeful lack of virtue and good will on the part of man.

The Law is “On the Clock”

The Law, then, was added because of transgressions: to restrain course outbreaks in society and to bring their devastation into full view of the Christian. But to this, St. Paul adds a sort of timeline, an impermanence to the Law: “... added till the Offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.” What is one to make of this? “It is necessary,” says Luther, “to know the predicate. ...”⁴¹ He says, “It is necessary to know ... how long the reign or tyranny of the Law was to go on revealing sin, showing us what we are like and manifesting the wrath of God. Those who really feel all this would perish instantly if they did not receive comfort. Unless the days of the Law were shortened, therefore, no one would be saved (Matt. 24:22). And so it is necessary to pre-determine the manner and the time of the Law, beyond which it is not to prevail.”⁴²

Paul gives the Law boundary at the coming of the Offspring: the arrival of God’s Christ. From here Luther offers us a layered and

³⁵ LW 26, 309.

³⁶ Psalm 130:3.

³⁷ Isaiah 6:5.

³⁸ Acts 2:37.

³⁹ LW 26, 308.

⁴⁰ Apology IV, 22–23 in Tappert, 110.

⁴¹ LW 26, 316.

⁴² Ibid.

practical understanding of the temporal nature of the Law. First, there is a *literal* understanding. The Law *timed out* when the kingdom of heaven came near in the person of Jesus. “The Law lasted until Christ. . . . ‘From the days of John until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force’ (Matt. 11:13, 12). At that time Christ was baptized and began to preach, when in a literal way the Law and the whole Mosaic system of worship came to an end.”⁴³

This temporality of the Law gave us the liberty to enjoy bacon this morning at breakfast. It gives us freedom to refrain from sacrificing a calf on the altar this weekend. While these ceremonial freedoms may seem of little implication today, we do well to remember that the church of Luther’s youth had run back into the “ceremonial law” in the form of monasticism. To presume the church today is beyond manufacturing its own up-to-date version of such syndrome is to deny the existence of our natural reason that has its default setting in just these ways.

Secondly, Luther points to a *spiritual* end of the Law. This end is not noted on the calendar of history but rather in the clockwork of the conscience.

The Law must not rule in the conscience any longer than the predetermined time of that Blessed Offspring. Therefore when the Law has disclosed my iniquities to me, has terrified me, and has revealed to me the wrath and judgment of God, so that I begin to blanch and to despair, then the Law has reached the prescribed manner, time, and purpose when it must stop exercising its tyranny, because then it has discharged its function by adequately disclosing the wrath of God and creating terror. . . . When these terrors and complaints come, it is the time and the hour of the Blessed Offspring. Then let the Law withdraw; for it was indeed added for the sake of disclosing and increasing transgressions, but only until the point when the Offspring would come.⁴⁴

As a day ends, or an hour, or a minute, so too does the Law have this repetitive *spiritual ending*. When the Law of God has spoken its proper words: when it has accused the heart of hatred and lust, when it has terrified the conscience with the mountainous record of pride—with the bottomless void of love for neighbor, when the Law has served the papers of condemnation, there Christ comes. Christ is the end of

⁴³ Ibid., 317.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

the Law.⁴⁵ Christ is the Word that comforts, supplies hope, promises victory, and delivers salvation. “Therefore the time of Law is not forever; but it has an end, which is Christ. But the time of grace is forever; for Christ, having died once for all, will never die again (Rom. 6:9–10). He is eternal; therefore the time of grace is eternal also.”⁴⁶

In pointing out the intermediary nature of the Law, Paul makes a slight digression from the main thrust of his argument.⁴⁷ Nonetheless it serves two purposes. First it reinforces two entities—the holy God and His unholy people—at odds with one another. Second it highlights how the Law of God, when given at Sinai, was mediated to His estranged people by their own request.⁴⁸

Destroying the Strongholds

And while God and His people are two distinct parties separated by holiness and transgression, God is not in conflict with Himself. “God is one,” says Paul. With this transition Paul returns to methodical argumentation. He sets out to destroy another of reason’s foreseeable false dichotomies: “Is the Law, then, against the promises of God?” The logical fallacy tracks like this: If a) the promises of God are the only means of rescue from sin, the only way of righteous standing with God, and b) the Law is always restraining outward sin and especially revealing the utter unrighteousness of man, then c) the Law is contrary to the promises.

Paul welcomes the question so that his negation of it might be all the more emphatic.⁴⁹ In the crosshairs first is what’s implied: that the Law and the promises can only coexist if they are equal in function. Paul dispatches with this rather simply, saying in essence, *If the Law were given to do equal work (the same function) as the promises (make alive) then the Law would be and the promises would cease to be! Or more, the promises would never have been given in the first place!*

Held forth instead is the gracious inequality of functions. For God’s giving of the Law is in service to that which was previously promised, “that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” The Scripture places all things under sin, coming up short of the standard of God’s Law. The function is succinct and sweeping:

⁴⁵ Romans 10:4.

⁴⁶ LW 26, 342.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 318.

⁴⁸ Exodus 20:19—“Then they said to Moses, “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

⁴⁹ Walther, 261.

In clear terms this passage consigns and subjects to sin and the curse not only those who sin against the Law openly or fail to keep it outwardly but also those who are subject to the Law and bend every effort to keep the Law. ... In other words, whatever is outside Christ and the promise—with no exceptions, whether it be the Ceremonial Law or the Moral Law or the Decalog, whether it be divine or human—is consigned to sin. When someone says “all things,” he does not except anything.⁵⁰

But this is the penultimate Word of Scripture. This Word of the Law brings about the loss of any and every effort and good intention the flesh may have in mind to bring with it into God’s courtroom.⁵¹ The Law sanctions the loss of all things under sin so that what was promised by faith to the blind, corrupt, hostiles might be delivered *not* to the hands that earned it by working but to the hand of faith that begs for it *in spite of* what has been earned. The Law came and still comes so that the promises of God might remain just that: *PROMISE*.⁵² Luther says, “Therefore the Law is a minister and a preparation for grace. For God is the God of the humble, the miserable, the afflicted, the oppressed, the desperate, and of those who have been brought down to nothing at all.”⁵³

3:23–29 —Now before faith came, we were confined under the Law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the Law was our custodian until Christ came. That we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no

⁵⁰ LW 26, 333.

⁵¹ As emphasized by Koehler, 97: “The Law excites sin and causes it to burst forth... why does it do so? *That the Promise might be given through faith in Christ Jesus. ...* The Law renders service to the Gospel precisely when the Law is allowed to retain its nature and purpose; to kill and condemn.”

⁵² “Remission of sins is something promised for Christ’s sake. Therefore it cannot be received except by faith alone. For a promise cannot be received except by faith alone. ... Accordingly, Paul says, Gal. 3:22: ‘But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.’ He takes merit away from us, because he says that all are guilty and concluded under sin; then he adds that the promise, namely, of the remission of sins and of justification, is given, and adds how the promise can be received, namely, by faith. And this reasoning, derived from the nature of a promise, is the chief reasoning [a veritable rock] in Paul, and is often repeated.” (See also Apology IV in Tappert, 119.)

⁵³ LW 26, 314. As a corresponding note, Koehler cites 4 points in Paul’s discourse here that establish that “the Law has no independent value.” 1) *It was added* (it came secondarily), 2) *because of transgressions* (it is an effect of a cause—sin), 3) *Until the Seed should come* (its temporal nature), and 4) *Through the hand of a mediator* (the Gospel didn’t need a mediator/buffer) (Koehler, 94–95).

longer under a custodian. For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

And again:⁵⁴

4:1–7 — I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father. So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elements of this world. But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law. So that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying: Abba! Father! So through God you are no longer a slave but a son. If a son, then an heir through Christ.

Under Until You Are In

Paul now leans back upon several guardian analogies to help establish the justified status of the Galatian Christians, indeed, of all believers in reference to the word of the Law and the word of faith. The temporal qualifying of the Law again places the reader squarely in the courtroom of justification. We were under the restraint—under the custody of the Law *until* Christ (the object of faith) came. But now, that prescribed custody has run its course.

A schoolmaster is extremely necessary for a boy, to instruct and chastise him; for otherwise, without this instruction, good training, and discipline, the boy would come to ruin. . . . To what end and for how long? So that this severe, hateful authority of the schoolmaster and the slavery of the boy will last forever? No, but for a predetermined time, so that this obedience, prison,

⁵⁴ “You see how ardently and astutely Paul tries to call the Galatians back, and how he presents his case with powerful arguments based on experience, on the example of Abraham, on the Scriptures, on chronology, and on analogy. He does this so much that often he appears to be repeating a case he has already concluded” (LW 26, 359).

and discipline may work for the boy's good and so that in due time he may become the heir and the king.⁵⁵

While Paul maintains a saint/sinner view of these Galatians, his teaching of them continues to put the Law in submission—to rebuke it. This is Paul taking the Law and Gospel's *timing* into account. The Law is not only present among the Galatians, it is speaking loudly. Now the problem isn't *that* the Law is present, but *how* it is being presented by the distortion artists: as a kind friend who will adorn them with what is pleasing before God. In this way, the Law is what Luther calls "the most widespread pestilence in the whole world, that is, hypocrisy and confidence in one's own saintliness."⁵⁶

With the *pestilence* present, and prominently so, Paul's chief aim is to restore the Law to its true, God-given purpose. It will frighten and annoy their consciences. Finally it will drive them all the way to the depths of their separation from God under the weight and enormity of sin. And in this way the Law drives the sinner *to Christ*.⁵⁷

Underneath the full weight and enormity of sin is precisely where God, at His chosen time, commissioned His Son. He sent Him so that when that wicked pestilence of self-sanctification is stripped from the sinner's clutches underneath the Law's judgment, Christ might take the sinner's place there. For there, underneath Law, Christ bears the full-throated burden of its condemnation that the sinner might be raised from underneath the deadly burden to hear the voice beyond the Law.⁵⁸ Luther continues, "You have been snatched beyond the Law into a new birth that took place in Baptism. Therefore you are no longer under the Law, but you have been dressed in a new garment, that is, in the righteousness of Christ."⁵⁹

While these dear and tenuous Christians are being taught the Law to lead them to righteousness, Paul, by contrast, speaks of Baptism. With this watery word, He speaks these redeemed ones out from underneath the slavery of "do this" and into the sonship: the rest of Christ's righteousness, where "do this" is already done.

To be baptized is to be *in Christ*. And because Christ was placed *underneath the Law* for us, to be *in Christ* is to be liberated from the weight of the Law's condemnation. So Luther graciously asserts, "There

⁵⁵ LW 26, 346.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 335.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 346.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 335.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 353.

is no slavery in Christ, but only sonship; for when faith comes, the slavery ends.”⁶⁰

The coming of faith, the passive receipt and apprehension of Christ, is liberty indeed. What it is not, is easy street. Rather the coming of faith is the coming of this persisting tension given expression by the father of the demon-possessed boy: “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”⁶¹ There is more than sufficient difficulty for the faithful with this divine liberty: “How difficult a thing faith is; it is not learned and grasped as easily and quickly as those sated and scornful spirits imagine who immediately exhaust everything contained in the Scriptures. The weakness and struggle of the flesh with the spirit in the saints is ample testimony how weak their faith still is. . . . Therefore Paul says correctly that in this life we have only the first fruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23) and that we shall have the tithes later.”⁶²

And so, to the faithful, God grants the Spirit of His Son, the Spirit who is “crying out” for us and through us.⁶³ And such crying out gives both a sober-minded look at the ever-present flesh and especially the certainty of present sonship of the Father *in His Son*.

4:8–10 — Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elements, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years!

“Unplugged” with the Galatians

At this point, Paul begins to get increasingly *human* with the Galatians. He has made his appeals logically and chronologically, doctrinally and rhetorically. But now it’s as if he “unplugs” from the more formal discourse, allowing himself the privilege of accessing their mutual history together. He speaks of what they were when he first met them: idolaters. They did not know the true God. The “gods” they did

⁶⁰ Ibid., 390.

⁶¹ Mark 9:24.

⁶² LW 26, 394.

⁶³ “Then there is emitted a little sigh, which silences and drowns out that violent roaring; and nothing remains in your heart but the sigh that says: ‘Abba! Father! However much the Law may accuse me, and sin and death may terrify me, nevertheless Thou, O God, dost promise grace, righteousness, and eternal life through Christ.’ And so the promise produces the sigh that cries: ‘Father!’” Ibid., 389.

know were by their very nature *not gods* at all. Paul speaks to what he knows they are now: those who know God—or more precisely, those who are known by God through faith in His Son.⁶⁴ Finally, Paul warns them of their bewitched spiritual course: going back again to slavery under the “weak and beggarly elements”—the righteousness of the Law familiar to and sought by reason.⁶⁵

Paul has been harsh in his critique of the Galatians. Now, his harshness is directed toward the Law, calling it the “weak and beggarly elements of this world.” Luther even wonders aloud if Paul is blasphemous for employing such language with respect to the Law of God.⁶⁶ But he posits only that the right and godly response might also be given: “When he calls the Law ‘weak and beggarly elements,’ therefore, he is speaking of the Law as it is used by proud and presumptuous hypocrites, who seek to be justified through it. . . . For in its proper use, as we have said so often, the Law restrains the wicked but terrifies and humbles the proud. On this score it is not only a powerful and rich element but omnipotent and extremely wealthy, in fact, an invincible omnipotence and wealth.”⁶⁷

Luther notes Paul’s peculiarity from the other apostles in using such sharp language of God’s Law. Yet, he does not note it for rebuke but for study. He urges that “every student of Christian theology carefully observe this way of speaking that Paul has.”⁶⁸ This Pauline language makes manifest what Luther calls “a lovely depreciation.”⁶⁹

Those who seek to be justified through the Law receive the benefit of becoming weaker and more beggarly day by day. On their own they are already weak and beggarly, that is, they are “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3), sentenced to death and

⁶⁴ “The statement, ‘You have come to be known by God,’ means ‘You have been visited by the Word; you have been granted faith and the Holy Spirit, by whom you have been renewed.’ Therefore even with the words ‘You have come to be known by God’ he is disparaging the righteousness of the Law and denying that we obtain a knowledge of God because of the worthiness of our works. ‘For no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him’ (Matt. 11:27).” *Ibid.*, 401–402.

⁶⁵ “Men judge by nature that God ought to be appeased by works. Nor does reason see a righteousness other than the righteousness of the Law, understood in a civil sense. Accordingly, there have always existed in the world some who have taught this carnal righteousness alone to the exclusion of the righteousness of faith; and such teachers will also always exist.” *Apology IV*, 393–394 in Tappert, 167.

⁶⁶ *LW* 26, 402.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 366.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 404.

to eternal damnation; and now they take hold of something that is sheer weakness and beggarhood in order to become strong and rich. Therefore everyone who falls away from the promise to the Law, from faith to works, is doing nothing but imposing an unbearable yoke upon himself in his weak and beggarly condition.⁷⁰

It is the absence of grace—the void of a righteous standing with God *apart from the deeds of the Law*—that brings about such a weak, beggarly and bewitched status. Whether this good news has never been present or, in the case of the Galatians, when it is being forfeited, this is when one becomes *bewitched*: a fool *looking for love in all the wrong places*.⁷¹ In what seems a reasonable disconnect, Luther asserts that “without the knowledge ... of the Gospel of Christ, it is impossible for a man to think that the Law is a weak and beggarly element, useless for righteousness.”⁷² And in this matter—a blindness toward the righteousness that comes *from God* in Christ—Luther speaks from his own spiritually tortured experience.

Under the papacy I saw many of the monks who performed many great works with burning zeal in order to acquire righteousness and salvation; and yet there was nobody in the world more impatient, weaker, and more miserable than they, and nothing more unbelieving, fearful, and desperate than they. Political officials, who were involved in the most important and difficult issues, were not as impatient and as womanishly weak, or as superstitious, unbelieving, and fearful as such self-righteous men.⁷³

Paul sees this blindness falling upon the Galatians once again, noting as an example their return to “observing days, and months, and seasons and years.” In citing this example, Paul examines and instructs the conscience of the Galatians and not the practice of their hands. The blindness they are exhibiting is not in *what* they are practicing, but *why* they are compelled to practice such things again; namely, “as a means of obtaining justification.”⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ “Wesley was convinced that wherever he found the ‘L’ word (love)—he had found the gospel.” Rosenblatt, Galatians Lectures series.

⁷² LW 26, 408–409.

⁷³ Ibid., 404.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 410.

4:11–20 — I am afraid I have labored over you in vain. Become as I am, for I also have become as you are. Brethren, I beseech you, you did me no wrong. You know that it was because of weakness of the flesh that I preached the Gospel to you at first; and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. What has become of the blessedness you felt? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. Have I, then, become your enemy by telling you the truth? They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. For a good purpose it is always good to be made much of, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you! I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone.

If the gravity of his concern has been left implied thus far in his teaching and in the nature of his tone, now Paul says it straight out: *I am fearful for you, that my labor to supply you with a righteousness with God by faith wholly apart from works of the Law has come up empty.* His sharp tone from earlier chapters has softened. “He mutes his pen” says Luther, “and addresses them very sweetly.”⁷⁵ His *pen* that makes doctrinal assertions has given way to the *Seelsorger* in Paul. “Become as I am, for I also have become as you are.” Luther says, “This passage is not ‘Become as I am; that is, think about doctrine just as I do.’ No, it is, ‘Take the same attitude toward me that I take toward you.’ It is as though he were saying: ‘Perhaps I have rebuked you too harshly. But forgive me my harshness. Do not judge my heart on the basis of my words, but judge my words on the basis of the attitude of my heart.’”⁷⁶

And even as Paul is granting that his harshness of tone may have been an offense to the Galatians, he is adamant that they have in no way wronged him. With this assurance, Paul takes away any *ad hominem* angle that may be ascribed to his rebuke thus far. Then, he effuses with praise for the Galatians’ reception of him, and this in spite of the burden of his weakness.⁷⁷ And should his praise for their reception of him be at

⁷⁵ Ibid., 412.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 415.

⁷⁷ “Jerome and certain other of the ancient fathers explain this weakness of the flesh in Paul as either a disease of the body or a temptation of sexual desire. Those good fathers were living when the church was enjoying temporal success, free of any cross or persecution.” Ibid., 418.

all in question, Paul bolsters it with the extremes of compassion he saw waiting to be shown him. He notes these as kindnesses shown toward him but cites them here as fruit of the Gospel preached to them and *not* of his person or theirs.⁷⁸

And after all this—after liberty in Christ was proclaimed to the Galatians freely, apart from any works of the Law; after they received that proclamation with great joy and in spite of the burden of his weakness, after being moved by the Gospel to become burdened themselves for Paul's sake—*after all this*, exclaims Paul, *do I become your enemy for telling you the truth?!*

Paul is anticipating objections to his plea. It's as if he expects to hear the same rebuttal from the Galatians as one would expect from the syndromic young lady in denial about her abductor: *Why are you being so hard on him? He says I'm beautiful! He loves me.*⁷⁹ In becoming especially *human* with them here in these verses, Paul has welcomed them to observe the Gospel-driven nature of his proclamation, even while granting harshness in word and tone. By this personal approach he means to set himself in contrast to these false teachers in their midst. He needs the Galatians to be able and willing to discern not merely the words and actions of distortionists but their motives above all. "They make much of you, but for no good purpose." Luther comments, "Driven by a foolish zeal, they imagine that they have some special sanctity, modesty, patience, and learning. Therefore they are confident that *they can contribute to the salvation of all men*, that *they can teach doctrines that are more sublime and salutary*, and that *they can establish better forms of worship and ceremonies than other theologians*, whom they despise, whose authority they minimize, and whose good teachings they corrupt."⁸⁰

Though the age of many of them would refute the possibility, the Gospel has given "little children" to Paul in these imperiled Galatians. Paul's anguish over the Galatians poised for apostasy continues to express itself as a parent's love for a child under the spell of an abuser, as compassion for a child vexed by a *love affair* with a narcotic that can do nothing for them but take their money, their shelter, their clothing and leave them for dead. His beginning with them was in Christ and so

⁷⁸ "They were so captivated and realized so vividly what a magnificent, heavenly, and precious teaching it (the Gospel) was. They had been transformed in heart, mind, and soul." Walther, 433.

⁷⁹ LW 26, 424.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 428–429 (emphasis added).

he remains with these vulnerable children now, until Christ is formed again.

4:21–31 — For I am perplexed about you. Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the Law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory. These women are two covenants. One is from Mt. Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.

Now Hagar is Mt. Sinai in Arabia. She corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written:

Rejoice, O barren one that dost not bear; break forth and shout, thou who art not in travail; for the desolate hath more children than she who hath a husband.

Now we, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now. But what does the Scripture say? Cast out the slave and her son; for the son of the slave shall not inherit with the son of the free woman. So, brethren, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

The Syndrome Allegorized

The Galatians are “bewitched,” spellbound by reason’s “gospel”—the righteousness of the flesh. And so Paul is “perplexed.”

If one is born into the system of abuse and has never known another life, there is some empathy and explanation in their remaining there, not because it’s healthy but because it’s familiar—because it’s the only kind of “love” they’ve ever known. But when one rescued from this bastardized love and lavished with a real, self-sacrificing love, is found scurrying back into the abusive “love”—that’s perplexing. Paul, in his perplexity can only ask with exasperation, “Do you not hear the Law?” In their desperation to “reclaim” their place under the Law, these bewitched Galatians are effectively needing to push God’s sent Son out of the way. And to hear what? To hear the “do this” that is never done, to hear the “don’t do that” which is constantly at work in this body of death.

So Paul takes occasion for one final illustration. *You have defected to the Law*, says Paul, *wanting to be under it and to gain wisdom from it.*

*Therefore I shall discuss the Law with you.*⁸¹ So Paul paints the Law in terms of the slave and her offspring, as opposed to the free woman and her offspring.

The allegory is only employed to bring light to the question now long at hand: is freedom and righteousness by promise or by works of the Law? And so Luther follows Paul straight to the Keys. There is no distinction in the biological father of the two sons. The mothers are different in their social status, slave and free, and yet, notes Luther, this is only a contributing factor to the allegory.⁸² The marked difference is the vocable that preceded the birth of each respectively: “When Hagar conceived and gave birth to Ishmael, there was no voice or Word of God that predicted this; but with Sarah’s permission Abraham went in to Hagar the slave, whom Sarah, because she was barren, gave him as his wife.”⁸³

This corresponds to what Paul calls “born according to the flesh.” This was the way that seemed right to human flesh, and yet it proves the way of slavery, indeed, of death.⁸⁴ The blessed distinction from Ishmael’s birth “according to the flesh,” then, is the son “born through promise”—the life gifted through God’s Word, entirely apart from the reason and working of the flesh.

When this blessed Word of a promised son came to Sarah in her ripe old age she laughed at the paradox of biology. Yet, when Paul references the blessed barren one from Isaiah 54:1, it is not a blessed paradox of biology but of soteriology.

The prophet grants that the church is engaged in a conflict; otherwise he would not urge it to rejoice. He grants that in the eyes of the world it is barren; otherwise he would not call it a barren and desolate one that does not bear. But he says that it is prolific in the eyes of God. Therefore he tells it to rejoice. It is as though he were to say: “Desolate and barren, you do not have the Law as your husband; therefore you do not have children either. But rejoice. For even though you are deprived of the husband Law ... you, I say, who are desolate and deserted by the husband Law and are not subject to marriage with the Law, will be the mother of an infinite number of children. ... How? Not through the husband Law but through the Word and the

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 433.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 434.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Proverbs 16:25.

Spirit of Christ, given through the Gospel, it conceives, bears, and rears its children.⁸⁵

Paul's allegory has the Galatian Christians—indeed, the whole church militant—as children of the free-woman Sarah. She is the “Jerusalem above, your mother.”⁸⁶ Her children are born free, not from their biological pedigree but by the blessed Word of promise given her from God. So Luther takes the Church's blessed soteriology and applies it to her missiology: “This allegory teaches in a beautiful way that the church should not do anything but preach the Gospel correctly and purely and thus give birth to children. . . . That Isaac is the heir and Ishmael is not, even though both are genuine sons of Abraham, takes place through the Word of promise.”⁸⁷

Conclusion: You Who Are Free, Be Free

Paul's final appeal is that these bewitched Galatians know and remember who they are and *how*. They are children of God by the promise of God gifted to them. This addresses with precision the source of their syndrome which is nothing short of a spiritual identity crisis. The false teachers among them have jettisoned the Gospel. And with the promise of the Gospel gone and the natural lens of the Law still looming large, they are only able to see the demands of the Law as reason gives it: as a lift-chair into right standing with God.

The child of the flesh, the church born of works, will always be a persecutor of the child of promise. It cannot be otherwise for the very legitimacy of the slave-child's birth and his existence are undermined by the Gospel birth and continuing existence of the free-child, *the progeny of Promise*. And what shall we make of this great skirmish between the Promise and the flesh?

We shall commend this cause of His to Him; and we shall watch and see, happy and secure, who will win, Christ or they. According to the flesh, of course, we are sorry that they, our Ishmaelites, hate and persecute us so furiously. But according to the spirit, we boast of our afflictions, both because we know that we are not bearing them on

⁸⁵ LW 26, 444.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 439: “You must not interpret ‘above’ anagogically, as the sophists do, applying it to what they call the church triumphant in heaven; you must apply it to the church militant on earth.”

⁸⁷ Ibid., 441.

account of our sins but are bearing them on account of Christ, whose goodness and glory we illuminate.⁸⁸

The syndrome, the *mystery of loving an abuser*, is a spiritual reality, and not only for Galatia. The nature of flesh is predisposed to a righteousness that is by works of the Law—by doing what is demanded. And apart from the Gospel of Christ's undeserved love, natural man is bent on knowing the Law as one who loves him back. So the rescue effort, the end of the syndrome, is as sure as it is succinct: *real, no-strings-attached love*. It is the love of God in Christ: Christ promised of the Father, Christ commissioned under the Law for the lawless, Christ suffered for the insufferable, Christ crucified for the guilty, Christ raised and reckoned as righteousness through faith.

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! (1 John 3:1) [LSQ]

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⁸⁸ Ibid., 453–454.

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Luther's "On the Councils and the Church": An Historical Study with Application for Parish Ministry

Daniel J. Hartwig
Pastor, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Okauchee, Wisconsin

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BECAUSE OF THE BIRTH OF MY THIRD CHILD, I missed last year's General Pastoral Conference. And yet you apparently were thinking of me. When I got the phone call asking me to do this paper I agreed, partially out of guilt for not being present with the brothers in Minneapolis. And so I went about my work examining the material assigned to me with the hope that I could produce an informative, yet practical presentation which would benefit the majority of us in our work as parish pastors.

Unfortunately, what I found as I dove into the text is this: Luther's final conclusion in this work is pretty simple. The pope does not define the church. God does. And in its simplest form the church is merely God's saints gathered around his means of grace. That is all. Luther spends 169 pages of text, composed of approximately 314 paragraphs, to tell us that the Church is God's saints gathered around Word and Sacrament. This is certainly not a shocking conclusion to us. In our black Catechism explanation¹ this is quite succinctly explained. The 7th and 8th graders at Holy Trinity can comprehend this in less than an hour.

And so the question for me as a presenter became quite intimidating: How do I make such a paper interesting and engaging?

Do I merely summarize Luther's work? That would seem redundant as Luther's writing style is quite approachable. Why should I summarize something that you can easily read for yourself?

¹ CC § 197–209 (pp. 136–141).

Do I simply reiterate the doctrine Luther is teaching? I could examine his conclusion through the lens of systematic scholars in the time after Luther into the present day, but I fear that would be an underwhelming task because, as previously mentioned, the doctrine Luther is teaching here is comparatively simple to those of us on this side of the Reformation.

Do I critically engage Luther's work and nit-pick the places where he potentially errs? The books available to me today are quite a bit more substantial and numerous than the paltry volumes Luther had available to him. Because of this, nagging Luther on every jot and tittle of his work would probably come off as petty. And, at the end of the day, who am I to criticize Dr. Luther?

The answer to the above questions is, “yes”—not to any one of the questions in isolation, but to all the questions *in toto*. As a parish pastor presenting to an assembly of parish pastors, my main goal in this examination of Luther's *Von den Consiliis und Kirchen* is to apply Luther's insights to your parish ministry today. And in order to do that, a brief examination of all these things will help us to see how this sixteenth-century document is still applicable today, showing us the importance of precision in our speaking and writing, and defining the work we do in our congregations week in and week out as the Lord of the Church uses us to do His work among His people.

History and Context of the Treatise

Luther Writes in an Era of Post-Augsburg Tumult

In the “gesima” season of 1539,² Luther was worked up. Decades of theological quarreling had left him somewhat cynical. In his 1520 letter *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*,³ Luther had called for an ecclesiastical council to discuss the authority of Scripture and the errors of the medieval church. This council never materialized. Instead, Luther's writings were condemned (*Exsurge Domine*, 1520), he was excommunicated (*Decet Romanum Pontificem*, 1521), and he was involved in conflict for the rest of his life.⁴ Despite numerous calls for a council, nether pope nor reformers could agree on terms, and any plans for councils were delayed

² In the middle of the essay, Luther mentions “this Schrovettide season,” referring to the time before Ash Wednesday. AE 41:32.

³ AE 44: 115–217.

⁴ This conflict included the presentation of the *Augsburg Confession* (1530) and the formation of the *Smalcald League* (1531).

and ultimately discarded.⁵ The whole process gave Luther an acute awareness of the futility of working through the established church hierarchy for reform.

What is more, in this latter part of Luther's life, he was worked up not only by the papists, but also by the growing body of Radical Reformers.⁶ The polarization of churches in Europe was accelerating with the refusal of the papists for a council; the formation of the Smalcald League⁷ as a haven for Lutherans; and the lingering trouble caused by the Anabapists, Zwinglians,⁸ and Calvinists.⁹

The Smalcald League gives this essay of Luther its context. In February of 1537, Elector John Frederick called together the Smalcald League to prepare for a forthcoming ecumenical council called by Pope Paul III to be held at Mantua. For this meeting at Smalcald, the Elector specifically requested Luther to draw up a series of articles—the *Smalcald Articles*—summarizing the biblical position of the Lutheran princes and reformers against the errors of Rome.¹⁰ However, desiring to keep superficial peace with the Southern Germans who had a more Zwinglian proclivity, Philipp Melanchthon discouraged the League from adopting Luther's articles. Melanchthon's own *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* ended up being officially adopted at this meeting instead. Though Luther's *Smalcald Articles* were not officially

⁵ "In 1536 Paul III issued a call for a council to meet at Mantua in May, 1537; in April, 1537, he postponed it until November of that same year, then until May 1, 1538, naming Vicenza as the new meeting place. The prelates did not assemble, however, and finally on May 21, 1539, the council was postponed indefinitely because the emperor was at war with France." AE 41:6.

⁶ Starting with the "Zwickau Prophets" (Nicholas Storch, Thomas Dreschel, and Markus Stübner), these radical reformers are the *Schwärmer* who caused Luther to be called out of hiding at the Wartburg to resume his work in Wittenberg. The Radical Reformation movement typically includes among its members Thomas Müntzer (1489–1535), and Andreas Karlstadt (1486–1541). For more, see James F. Korthals, "The Freedom of the Will in the Radical Reformation," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (March 2009): 30–58.

⁷ The Smalcald League was established in 1531 by Philip I of Hesse (1504–1567) and John Frederick I of Saxony (1503–1554). It was a union of Lutheran civil leaders who united together for the promotion and defense of their territories against the papist Holy Roman Empire, personified in Charles V (1500–1558).

⁸ Those following the theology of Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531).

⁹ Those following the theology of John Calvin (1509–1564).

¹⁰ Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell, eds., *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 337.

adopted, they were discussed and informally subscribed to by many of the individual attendees.¹¹

Because this treatise began to be written at about the same time as the *Smalcald Articles*, and was published just a few years later, it is often viewed as an unofficial supplement to them. It is here that Luther clearly defines what the church is, and condemns what it is not.

Luther Writes in the Style of Renaissance Humanism

In the midst of this discussion about ecclesiastical councils, papish errors, and doctrinal compromise, it is no wonder Luther was worked up in the spring of 1539. These external factors certainly influenced his composition of *On the Councils and the Church*. As these councils were seen by some as an end-all solution to the problems besetting any attempt at serious reform, Luther felt compelled to remind people, especially the laity, that even if such an ecclesiastical counsel were to be convened, it would be ruled by the pope and, thus, no true reforms would occur. Furthermore, Luther felt compelled to remind everyone that the history of such councils was already filled with such contradictory, unbiblical, and entirely impractical regulations, that even the most important of the ecumenical councils held no weight except in the very narrow areas of doctrine they helped articulate.

To this end, *On the Councils and the Church* can be viewed not necessarily as a scholarly work of Luther, composed in Latin for the academy, but rather as a more popular work, composed in German to persuade as many common people as possible.¹² Luther is attempting to “rally the church around the gospel.”¹³ In dealing with the subjects of church history and conciliar authority he is really emphasizing the catholicity of the Lutheran faith to his reader in the style of Renaissance humanism. Keeping this in mind as we wade into Luther’s text is necessary because, as he is wont, Luther is quite long-winded in this treatise. To the modern reader (whose 7th and 8th grade students understand the *una sancta* as well as the next guy) Luther can come off as beating a dead horse. In the first part of this treatise he goes on and on about the contradictory statements made by the councils of the past, getting sidetracked by several seemingly tangential subjects along the way. He remains on the subject of conciliar history for the longest part of his

¹¹ See, Friedrich Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 47–62.

¹² Later, in 1557, a Latin edition was produced by Justus Jonas in Basel; however all earlier printings were German. AE 41:8.

¹³ Lull, 363.

treatise—Part II—concluding all along the way that the context of those aforementioned councils made their conclusions utterly irrelevant to the current debates. Finally, in the third part, he gets to his point.¹⁴

In so thoroughly discussing the history and outcomes of previous councils, Luther is employing the scholarly method of Renaissance humanism and simultaneously eschewing the method of medieval scholasticism. In simplest terms, the medieval scholastics were citation theologians: using the quotes of the fathers, divorced from their context, to prove their point. Renaissance humanism stood in contrast to such scholasticism by using not just quotations, but the record of history to give those quotations context and meaning. The Donation of Constantine is an excellent example of these two methods. The scholastics simply said, "Look at this document—It plainly says that Constantine gave Rome to the pope. This discussion is over." The humanists said, "Look at this document—It is written in a style, and employs a vocabulary, which was not used until many centuries after Constantine's death. It is clearly a forgery."¹⁵ Critically examining the document and giving it context was central to the Renaissance humanist method which rightly exposed it as a forgery.¹⁶

Luther is long-winded in the first two sections of his paper because, although he was not a humanist in the proper sense,¹⁷ he still strove to make his arguments approachable and ironclad. To that end he spent his

¹⁴ Note: Lull's edition of *On the Councils and the Church* consists only of the third part, and most every other study I consulted for this essay really only dealt with the third part as well.

¹⁵ As a side note, Luther came to this same conclusion about the Donation of Constantine by employing the tools of Renaissance humanism. "His reading of Valla's critique of the Donation of Constantine in a 1520 edition from humanist Ulrich von Hutten helped accelerate Luther's move away from the papacy. ... In 1537 Luther unleashed his own blast against the forgery." Robert Rosin, "Humanism, Luther, and the Wittenberg Reformation," *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 97.

¹⁶ "The most important elements in the humanist approach to religion and theology were the attack upon the scholastic method and the emphasis upon the return to the classics, which in this case meant the Christian classics, that is, the Bible and the Church Fathers." Paul Oscar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 69–70.

¹⁷ "Martin Luther was most assuredly no humanist. Still, he had belonged to an undergraduate generation from whom some exposure to the delights of classical literature and the aspirations of humanist educational reformers was unavoidable. He himself lamented that because of his old-fashioned education he had not developed the elegant Latin style that was becoming fashionable." Charles G. Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 143.

time philologically¹⁸ examining the chief councils, assembling as many facts and quotes from reputable sources as he could. This was necessary because these primary sources were not nearly as plentiful in the sixteenth century as they are today. For his audience to be convinced, he wanted to lay the words and context of the previous councils before them with indisputable clarity. The first two sections of this treatise are, then, a miniature library of conciliar history to lay the foundation for Luther's conclusion of a truly catholic church.

Humanism used in this way was merely a tool to articulate doctrine.

The true driving force of the Reformation did not come from Renaissance humanism but from Luther's striking insight into what he and his followers regarded as the true inner spirit of Christians. For Luther and his most perceptive followers, the real issue of the Reformation was not crooked priests or even superstitious ceremonies, but true doctrine.¹⁹

This drive for a true doctrine of ecclesiology was the fuel behind Luther's treatise *On the Councils and the Church*.

Content of the Treatise

The Councils Are Contradictory and Only Selectively Followed

Luther's Introduction

Luther begins his treatise by comparing the forthcoming, farcical council proposed by the pope to a dog getting comically slapped in the face by a knife. The reformers, he says, are the dogs, being offered bread only to be hurt and humiliated by those calling the council.

I have often joined in the general laughter when I saw someone offer a morsel of bread on the tip of a knife to dogs and then, as they snapped at it, slap their snouts with the knife handle, so that the poor dogs not only lost the bread but also had to suffer pain. That was a good joke. It never occurred to me at that time that the devil could also play his jokes on us and consider us such wretched dogs, until I learned how the most holy father, the pope, with his bulls, books, and daily practices

¹⁸ Philology is the study of language and literature in context. For more on Renaissance humanism's use of philology, see Kristeller, 72–75.

¹⁹ Nauert, 170–171.

plays the same kind of a dog's joke on Christendom. But, Lord God, with what great harm to the soul and with what mockery of divine majesty! It is just what he is doing with the council now: the whole world has been waiting and clamoring for it; the good emperor and his whole empire have been working to attain it for nearly twenty years; and the pope has always made vain promises and put it off, offering the morsel of bread to the emperor, as to a dog, until, at the opportune moment, he slaps him on the snout while mocking him as a fool and dupe.²⁰

PART I

A Council Controlled by Rome Will Reform Nothing

Luther argues that Rome does not desire reform because it perceives itself as perfect already. Luther sarcastically says that his friends are not as holy as the papists because the evangelical reformers contemplate Scripture too much, and

there is indeed neither time nor space left even to wonder whether there ever were councils or fathers, much less to concern ourselves with such sublime things as crowns, chasubles, long robes, etc., and with their profound sanctity. ... This is why they should be gracious and merciful with us and not condemn us because we cannot match their holiness yet.²¹

While the papists argue over the decrees of councils past, the reformers are still trying to meditate on God's Word, follow the Ten Commandments, and live Christian lives which the papists believe they have already mastered.

The Fathers Prove Nothing Because They Contradict

Luther recalls St. Bernard (1090–1153) using a picture of drinking from the spring rather than the brook to describe reading the Bible instead of commentaries.²² He criticizes Gratian of Bologna (c. 1300s) for trying to harmonize the statements of the ecumenical councils. "He succeeded, like a crab walks; he often cast aside the best and kept

²⁰ AE 41:9.

²¹ AE 41:17.

²² AE 41:20. An interesting exception to note is this: "unless they use the brook to lead them to the spring."

the worst, and yet he neither compared nor harmonized.”²³ This is so because of how thoroughly contradictory the conciliar statements can be. Unsurprisingly, Luther speaks glowingly of St. Augustine (354–430), who did not hold all councils to be equal, but designated the first two ecumenical councils as authoritative, i.e., Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381). Luther contends that the list of “authoritative” councils would also include Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) for which Augustine was not alive. Luther prefers the term *principal councils* for these four, and alludes to the fact that they were not called by the ecclesiastical, but by secular rulers instead.²⁴

The Jerusalem Council Is Not Followed Today

After this discussion of the fathers, Luther switches gears to talk about the councils themselves. He starts, not with one of the aforementioned principal councils, but back to the first council in Scripture itself: Acts 15:1–29, the Jerusalem Council. The conclusion of the biblical account says that Gentile converts need not be circumcised, but everyone should still abstain from eating meat sacrificed to idols, etc. Luther says that to follow the Jerusalem Council in their medieval context, the dietary restriction stated in Acts 15 would apply to them and they would not be able to eat any of their sausages and meats made with blood.

There we hear that the Holy Spirit (as the preachers of councils boast) commands that we eat nothing that has been sacrificed to idols, no blood, and nothing that is strangled. Now if we want to have a church that conforms to this council (as is right, since it is the first and foremost council, and was held by the apostles themselves), we must teach and insist that henceforth no prince, lord, burgher, or peasant eat geese, doe, stag, or pork cooked in blood, and that they also abstain from carp jelly, for there is blood in them, or, as cooks call it, “color.” And burghers and peasants must abstain especially from red sausage and blood sausage, for that is not only fluid blood, but also congealed and cooked blood, a very coarse-grained blood. Likewise we are forbidden to eat rabbits and birds, for these are all strangled (according to hunting customs), even if they were only fried, not cooked in blood.

²³ AE 41:21.

²⁴ AE 41:21–24.

Should we, in obedience to this council, refrain from blood, then we shall let the Jews become our masters in our churches and kitchens.²⁵

Luther argues that it is clear different popes and councils contradicted each other regularly, but Scripture cannot contradict itself. Therefore, if we do not follow the Holy Spirit's council in Acts 15, how can we expect to follow the much more spurious and often contradictory councils of later years?

The Pope Uses the Word "Council" to Artificially Increase His Authority

Next, Luther says it is easy to preach about obeying the councils, but since the pope is constantly changing the letter of the councils, maybe we should be honest about it and simply let the pope decide what is right and wrong. After all, he is going to do it anyway, as history bears out. Luther then goes on to describe the elaborate ways in which the pope could compose the decrees of his own individual council. The pope and his bishops could become professional "penmen" (*Stulschreiber*) and write the letters of the word "c-o-u-n-c-i-l" with such color and beauty that everyone would gladly see them. Cardinals and bishops could become painters and sculptors, musicians and singers, to make the decrees of the councils beautiful. All of this would be without regard to if anyone actually followed the decrees, which they certainly would not—but at least they would look beautiful for posterity's sake.²⁶

The Nicene Council Is Not Followed Today

Luther turns his attention to Nicaea now. Nicaea produced more than just the first draft of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. It also produced a number of decrees which fell into disuse thereafter. For example, the Council of Nicaea seems to speak sharply against military service for a Christian. Luther encourages the pope to rule according to Nicaea's declarations and make illegal his own army, and all the armies of Europe. He sarcastically says, "One needs no soldiers; the devil is dead; and all the years since the time of the council have been golden years"²⁷—therefore we are free to enforce Nicaea's prohibition against warfare. Obviously, Luther says no one in his time followed

²⁵ AE 41:28.

²⁶ AE 41:32–33.

²⁷ AE 41:35.

this particular point of Nicaea because they had been engaged in bloody warfare for centuries.

At this point, Luther gets topical. For example, Nicaea introduced the idea of the pope taking charge of the territories surrounding Rome. This was decreed because the bishop of Alexandria had already taken charge of the churches surrounding him in Egypt. Therefore, Luther contends, if Nicaea gave the bishop of Rome charge of the churches surrounding Rome because the bishop of Alexandria had authority over the churches in Egypt, then that logically meant that the bishop of Rome did not have authority in Egypt, or anywhere else for that matter, as later councils and popes claimed.²⁸ Nicaea also issued a decree essentially promoting the heresy of Donatism, writing that people who were baptized by heretics should be re-baptized.²⁹

Only Scripture Itself Is Authoritative

In the midst of this historical overview, Luther offers this succinct summary of the situation between the reformers and the papists:

While we both thus cull from the councils and the fathers, they what they like, and we what we like, and cannot reach an agreement—because the fathers themselves disagree as much as do the councils—who, my dear man, is going to preach to the poor souls who know nothing of such culling and quarreling? Is that tending the sheep of Christ, when we ourselves do not know whether what we are feeding them is grass or poison, hay or dung? And are they to dangle and hang until it is settled and the council arrives at a decision? Oh, how poorly Christ would have provided for the church if this is how things have to go on!³⁰

Ultimately, Luther falls at the feet of God through His Word. God's Word is superior to any council because God's Word has our whole salvation laid out for us. Luther says that even the good councils (Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon) are only authoritative on one particular doctrine apiece. "In summary, put them all together, both father and councils, and you still will not be able to cull

²⁸ AE 41:41–42.

²⁹ AE 41:44–46.

³⁰ AE 41:47.

from them all the teachings of the Christian faith, even if you culled forever."³¹

The Councils' Numerous Decrees Create New Doctrine

PART II

So far, in my approximation, we have traversed through 83 paragraphs of Luther's work, encompassing some 44 pages of text in English translation. Now we will briefly examine the lengthiest part of Luther's treatise.

Context Is Everything

One could summarize the beginning of this treatise's second part with the phrase, "Context is everything."

I shall illustrate it to make it simpler: if one peasant brings suit against another, saying, "Dear judge, this man calls me a rogue and a rascal," these words and letters, by themselves, convey the idea that the plaintiff has suffered a great wrong, and that they are false and sheer lies. But if the defendant appears and gives reasons for such words, saying, "Dear judge, he is a rascal and a rogue for he was flogged out of the city of N. for his rascality, and he was saved from hanging only through the great efforts and pleading of pious people, and now he wants to do violence to me in my own home," the judge will understand these letters differently than he had before—as daily experience in government shows. For before one learns the reason and the motive for what a man says, it is only letters, the shouts of choristers, or the songs of nuns.³²

To apply this concept, Luther examines the giving of the Keys to St. Peter (Matthew 16:19). As Jesus gives this authority to bind and loose to Peter, "the pope takes the letters, rides into Never Never Land with them, and interprets them as, 'Whatever I do in heaven and on earth is right. I have the keys to bind and to loose everything and all.'"³³ Obviously, the context has nothing to do with temporal authority, but only the spiritual authority to forgive sins on Christ's behalf. Luther says, "There are many passages in Holy Scripture that are contradictory

³¹ AE 41:52.

³² AE 41:53.

³³ Ibid.

according to the letters; but when that which motivates them is pointed out, everything is all right.”³⁴

Jumping ahead to near the end of this section, Luther gives this succinct summary of the four principal councils:

These then are the four principal councils and the reasons they were held. The first, in Nicaea, defended the divinity of Christ against Arius; the second, in Constantinople, defended the divinity of the Holy Spirit against Macedonius; the third, in Ephesus, defended the one person of Christ against Nestorius; the fourth, in Chalcedon, defended the two natures in Christ against Eutyches.³⁵

These descriptions by Luther will serve as headers to help us digest the information we will now consider.

*Nicaea “Defended the Divinity of Christ Against Arius”*³⁶

With this said, Luther returns to Nicaea. What was the reason the bishops were called together at Nicaea? Arius. Constantine called them together because of Arius. They had other subjects they wanted to discuss, but Constantine forced the bishops to stay on task.

Now when the council met, [Constantine] sat down among the bishops, on a chair lower than theirs. ... After the bishop of Antioch, Eustathius (who chaired this council), had thanked and praised the emperor for his kindness, Arius’ doctrine was publicly read (for it appears that Arius himself was not present, being neither a bishop nor a delegate); it stated that Christ was not God, but was created and made by God, as the histories record at length. At this the holy fathers and bishops arose from their seats in indignation, tore the document to pieces, and declared it was not true; and so Arius was openly condemned by the furious council, so deeply did it hurt the fathers and so unbearable was it for them to hear this blasphemy of Arius. All the bishops signed this condemnation. ... So the emperor dissolved the council on the same day, and he himself, and the council too, sent out a written report of this event throughout the world. And the emperor Constantine, very happy that the

³⁴ AE 41:54.

³⁵ AE 41:121.

³⁶ Ibid.

matter was settled and disposed of, treated the bishops very kindly, especially those who had been persecuted.³⁷

Thus, Arius and his heresy were condemned in a single day. But, Luther laments, after Constantine had departed, the bishops continued the council in the following days where they discussed all the subjects Constantine rejected before. "Most of this was sheer clerical squabbling ... and more of such silly prattle."³⁸ Thus, the heart and purpose of Nicaea—to defend and articulate the doctrine of Jesus' divinity—is the only "binding" part of the council, and it merely reiterated the doctrine of the Bible. The rest of Nicaea's proclamations had nothing to do with the central purpose of the meeting. So no wonder they end up being essentially nonsensical in late medieval context.

*Jerusalem Was Called to Affirm Salvation Through Grace
Against the Judaizers*

This same humanist-style examination of a council's context Luther now applies to Jerusalem.

This is the substance and the main concern of this council, namely, that the Pharisees wished to establish works or merits of the law, over against the word of grace, as necessary for salvation; that would have nullified the word of grace, including Christ and the Holy Spirit.³⁹

Luther exclaims, "I am so weak in keeping the Ten Commandments that it seems to me all Mosaic ceremonies would be far easier for me to observe, if the Ten Commandments would not press me so hard."⁴⁰ Luther then goes on to examine the pronouncements of St. Peter and St. James at the Jerusalem Council. Peter emphasizes freedom through Christ. James encourages the observance of certain parts of the Law. Do these two decrees contradict? No.

For it did not harm the Gentiles before God to avoid the external custom of eating blood, strangled meat, and meat sacrifices to idols in public (since grace had liberated their conscience from all that) and to desist, for the benefit and salvation of the Jews, from giving wilful offense; besides, in the absence of the

³⁷ AE 41:57.

³⁸ AE 41:59.

³⁹ AE 41:70.

⁴⁰ AE 41:71.

Jews they could eat and drink what they wished, without jeopardy to their conscience.⁴¹

James tells them to observe certain parts of the Law, not out of compulsion, but out of love for the weaker brethren—the Jews. The observance of the Law in this way would fade away in time.

Arius Used Orthodox Vocabulary to Preach Heretical Doctrine

At this point, Luther transitions back to Nicaea and examines the methodology of Arius. His reason is entirely practical:

And because it is necessary for Christians to know such an illustration, and since the ordinary reader does not study history so closely and does not realize how useful it is as a warning against all other sectarian spirits whom the devil their god makes so slippery that one cannot catch or grasp them anywhere, I will relate this affair briefly in several items.⁴²

Luther then examines Arius' teachings which, in isolation, are easy to refute. However, in context they are more difficult to discern.

Now tell me, if Arius would still today come before you and confess to you the entire creed of the Nicene council, as we sing it today in our churches, could you regard him as heretical? I myself would say that he was right. And if he nevertheless would, like a knave, believe otherwise and subsequently interpret and teach these words differently, wouldn't I have been nicely duped?⁴³

Luther stresses here that it is important to hear and read the words of all teachers and critically examine them against the rule of Scripture.

*Constantinople "Defended the Divinity of the Holy Spirit Against Macedonius"*⁴⁴

Moving to the next council, we see "one error always begets another and one misfortune another, without end and cessation."⁴⁵ The Council of Constantinople was not even called together without controversy.

⁴¹ AE 41:77.

⁴² AE 41:81.

⁴³ AE 41:84.

⁴⁴ AE 41:121.

⁴⁵ AE 41:86–87.

When questions about the Holy Spirit's relation to the Holy Trinity came up, both Rome and Constantinople wanted to host the gathering of the bishops. The end of the location debate placed the council at the latter.

Thus the two churches, Rome and Constantinople, wrangled over the invalid primacy with vain, rotten, lame, and useless squabbles, until the devil finally devoured them both, the ones in Constantinople through the Turks and Mohammed, the others in Rome through the papacy and its blasphemous decretals.⁴⁶

In the end, Constantinople made several decrees.

First, it affirmed that the Holy Spirit is true God, simultaneously condemning Macedonius, who averred and taught that the Holy Spirit was a creature. Second, it deposed the heretical bishops and appointed true bishops, particularly in Antioch and Jerusalem. Third, it made the bishop Nectarius of Constantinople a patriarch, which enraged, incensed, and infuriated the bishops of Rome—although the dear fathers may have done it with the best of intentions.⁴⁷

The first result of the council, the defense of the Holy Spirit's divinity, is the main point of the council. The condemning of the bishops was not a bad result, but it certainly was not an article of faith. Neither was the election of the patriarch a morally binding point of doctrine.

*Ephesus "Defended the One Person of Christ Against Nestorius"*⁴⁸

At Ephesus, Nestorius was commonly believed to have been falsely teaching that Mary could not be called *theotokos* (God-bearer) because a human cannot give birth to anything but a human. However, the more Luther read, the more he realized that Nestorius' error was not always correctly understood. Luther, therefore, spends several pages trying to articulate exactly what Nestorius was being condemned for, so that the point of the Council of Ephesus can be clearly understood.

⁴⁶ AE 41:91.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ AE 41:121.

One can see from this that Nestorius, as an ignorant, proud bishop, adheres faithfully to Christ, but in his ignorance does not know what and how he is speaking, like one who does not quite know how to speak of such things, but still wants to speak as an expert. We too know very well that God did not derive his divinity from Mary; but it does not follow that it is therefore wrong to say that God was born of Mary, that God is Mary's Son, and that Mary is God's mother. I have to illustrate this with a plain example: if a woman bears a child, a rotten Nestorius . . . may be proud and ignorant and puzzle out, "This woman has given birth to the child, but she is not the child's mother because the child's soul is not derived from her nature or blood, but from elsewhere—for instance, from God. Thus this child is, to be sure, born of the woman according to the body; but since the soul is not from her body, she is not the child's mother, for she is not the mother of the child's soul."⁴⁹

Nestorius is rejecting the *genus idiomaticum*, i.e., he is saying that even though there is both a divine and human nature in Christ, the attributes of each nature are not communicated to the person. This means that though Mary is the mother of Jesus, she still cannot be the mother of God. This distinction was rejected, and the personal union of Jesus' dual nature was affirmed at Ephesus.

*Chalcedon "Defended the Two Natures in Christ Against Eutyches"*⁵⁰

For the fourth principal council, we dig even deeper into the well of Christology. If you thought the error of Nestorius was difficult to understand, wait until you meet Eutyches. Luther says, "I should be glad to learn from someone else why this council met, for no trustworthy history has been transmitted to us."⁵¹ He also says, regarding his hazy understanding of Chalcedon and its binding status as a principal council, "Now advise me, how am I, who does not understand this council or know what it did, going to be saved? And what happened to the dear saints and Christians who throughout these many centuries did not know what this council established?"⁵² After probing several sources, Luther comes to this conclusion:

⁴⁹ AE 41:98.

⁵⁰ AE 41:121.

⁵¹ AE 41:106.

⁵² AE 41:107.

I shall give you my ideas; if I hit the mark, good—if not, the Christian faith will not fall herewith. Eutyches' opinion is also (like that of Nestorius) in error regarding the *idiomata*, but in a different way. Nestorius does not want to give the *idiomata* of humanity to the divinity in Christ, even though he maintains that Christ is God and man. Eutyches, on the other hand, does not want to give the *idiomata* of divinity to the humanity, though he also maintains that Christ is true God and true man.⁵³

Luther employs this helpful illustration to aid our nuanced understanding of the difference between Nestorius and Eutyches.

It is just like your son Peter being called a scholar, although this *idioma* is only of his soul and not of his body. A Eutyches might quibble and say, "No! Peter is not a scholar; his soul is." And again, a Nestorius might say, "No! I did not flog your son, but his body." That sounds as though one wanted to make two persons out of Peter, or to retain but one nature, though it is not meant that way.⁵⁴

Now Luther applies the lessons learned in this investigation to himself, emphasizing that the proper articulation of biblical doctrine is extraordinarily important so that one is not misunderstood, and that one does not teach false doctrine via sloppy speech.

*A "Council" Is Merely a Consistory, Pronouncing Judgment According to Holy Scripture*⁵⁵

Finally, we arrive at the closing section of the historical chapter of Luther's *On the Councils and the Church*. At this point in this lengthy historical treatise, Luther concludes

Whoever is thus disposed may read more of the history of the councils; I read myself into a bad humor with it. Such bickering, confusion, and disorder prevailed there that I am really inclined to believe Gregory of Nazianz, the teacher of St. Jerome, who, having lived before this time and having witnessed better councils and fathers, still wrote, "To tell the truth, I believe it advisable to flee all the councils of bishops; for I saw nothing good

⁵³ AE 41:108–109.

⁵⁴ AE 41:110.

⁵⁵ AE 41:133.

resulting from the councils, not even the abolition of evil, but rather sheer ambition and quarreling over precedence,” etc.⁵⁶

However, having covered all this history, Luther must now get to his point. “This brings us to the main question prompting me to write this booklet: what, then, is a council? Or, what is its task?”⁵⁷ Though he answers this question with a series of eleven points,⁵⁸ ultimately, his definition of a council is very simple:

A council, then, is nothing but a consistory, a royal court, a supreme court, or the like, in which the judges, after hearing the parties, pronounce sentence, but with this humility, “For the sake of the law,” that is, “Our office is *anathematizare*, ‘to condemn’; but not according to our whim or will, or newly invented law, but according to the ancient law, which is acknowledged as the law throughout the entire empire.” Thus a council condemns a heretic, not according to its own discretion, but according to the law of the empire, that is, according to Holy Scripture, which they confess to be the law of the holy church.⁵⁹

In summary, the principal councils are only binding in the areas where they clearly defend biblical doctrine against heretical teachings. The other proclamations of councils everywhere are contradictory and irrelevant because they were not the true subject matter of the councils in question. The councils were never meant to create doctrine, only articulate it.

The True Church Is Defined by God Through His Word

PART III

Ecclesiology is a somewhat malleable word. Coined in the 19th century, it originally referred to the study of church architecture. It comes from *ἐκκλησία* and *λογία*. Today the term is usually used to describe the systematic study of the essence of particular denominations, e.g., Lutheran ecclesiology contrasted with Roman Catholic ecclesiology.⁶⁰ In a broader sense, however, it can be used to describe not

⁵⁶ AE 41:119–120.

⁵⁷ AE 41:123.

⁵⁸ See Appendix A: Luther’s Eleven Point Definition of Councils.

⁵⁹ AE 41:133.

⁶⁰ Alister E. McGrath, “Ecclesiology,” *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 127.

just a particular church, but the entire *una sancta*. In this third part of his treatise, we will see that Luther not only employs the latter meaning here, but that the latter is clearly present in the former in the case of the Lutheran church.

Beginning this study, Luther defines the word *ἐκκλησία*.

In Acts 19 [:39] the town clerk uses the word *ecclesia* for the congregation or the people who had gathered at the market place, saying, "It shall be settled in the regular assembly." Further, "When he said this, he dismissed the assembly" [vs. 41]. In these and other passages the *ecclesia* or church is nothing but an assembly of people, though they probably were heathens and not Christians. It is the same term used by town councilmen for their assembly which they summon to the city hall. Now there are many peoples in the world; the Christians, however, are a people with a special call and are therefore called not just *ecclesia*, "church," or "people," but *sancta catholica Christiana*, that is, "a Christian holy people" who believe in Christ.⁶¹

This term is not a "church" in the sense of a building of brick and stone. Neither is it a collection of ancient patriarchs and apostles. Luther disparages the attachment of the adjective *Romana* to the word *ἐκκλησία*, as if only the members of the Roman Church were holy.⁶² Their definition of holiness, based on merit, was laughable. "Just throw a surplice over your head and you are holy in accordance with the Roman church's holiness, and you can indeed be saved without the Christian holiness."⁶³ Instead,

Christian holiness, or the holiness common to Christendom, is found where the Holy Spirit gives people faith in Christ and thus sanctifies them, Acts 15 [:9], that is, he renews heart, soul, body, work, and conduct, inscribing the commandments of God not on tables of stone, but in hearts of flesh, II Corinthians 3 [:3].⁶⁴

Remember the post-Augsburg tumult in which Luther is writing? At this point, Luther pauses from his criticism of Rome and addresses the Reformed movement of Antinomianism. They do not comprehend

⁶¹ AE 41:143.

⁶² AE 41:145.

⁶³ AE 41:148.

⁶⁴ AE 41:145.

the nature of the Church either. And because they reject the Law, they have no Gospel and thus no church.

For [the Antinomians], having rejected and being unable to understand the Ten Commandments, preach much about the grace of Christ, yet they strengthen and comfort only those who remain in their sins, telling them not to fear and be terrified by sins, since they are all removed by Christ. They see and yet they let the people go on in their public sins, without any renewal or reformation of their lives. Thus it becomes quite evident that they truly fail to understand the faith and Christ, and thereby abrogate both when they preach about it.

At this point, Luther begins to explore the things which truly make the church the Church, and he defines the marks of the church with a sevenfold list.

First, the holy Christian people are recognized by their possession of the holy word of God. To be sure, not all have it in equal measure, as St. Paul says [I Cor. 3:12–14]. Some possess the word in its complete purity, others do not.⁶⁵

This is the premise upon which all his commentary before and after hinges.

This is the principal item, and the holiest of holy possessions, by reason of which the Christian people are called holy; for God's word is holy and sanctifies everything it touches; it is indeed the very holiness of God.⁶⁶

Now, wherever you hear or see this word preached, believed, professed, and lived, do not doubt that the true *ecclesia sancta catholica*, "a Christian holy people" must be there, even though their number is very small. . . . And even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there, for God's word cannot be without God's people, and conversely, God's people cannot be without God's word.⁶⁷

Luther's following points flow from the first.

⁶⁵ AE 41:148.

⁶⁶ AE 41:149.

⁶⁷ AE 41:150.

Second, God's people or the Christian holy people, are recognized by the holy sacrament of baptism, wherever it is taught, believed, and administered correctly according to Christ's ordinance. That too is a public sign and a precious, holy possession by which God's people are sanctified.⁶⁸

Third, God's people, or Christian holy people, are recognized by the holy sacrament of the altar, wherever it is rightly administered, believed, and received, according to Christ's institution.⁶⁹

Fourth, God's people or holy Christians are recognized by the office of the keys exercised publicly.⁷⁰

Fifth, the church is recognized externally by the fact that it consecrates or calls ministers, or has offices that it is to administer.⁷¹

On this fifth point, concerning the public ministry, Luther adds many extra comments. First, the ministry of a parish pastor is a practical, albeit divinely instituted, arrangement. Second, it is limited to males. After that, he spends a considerable amount of time condemning clerical celibacy.⁷²

Continuing with Luther's next point, we read

⁶⁸ AE 41:151.

⁶⁹ AE 41:152.

⁷⁰ AE 41:153.

⁷¹ AE 41:154.

⁷² "The people as a whole cannot do these things, but must entrust or have them entrusted to one person. Otherwise, what would happen if everyone wanted to speak or administer, and no one wanted to give way to the other? It must be entrusted to one person, and he alone should be allowed to preach, to baptize, to absolve, and to administer the sacraments. The others should be content with this arrangement and agree to it. Wherever you see this done, be assured that God's people, the holy Christian people, are present. ... It is, however, true that the Holy Spirit has excepted women, children, and incompetent people from this function, but chooses (except in emergencies) only competent males to fill this office, as one reads here and there in the epistles of St. Paul that a bishop must be pious, able to teach, and the husband of one wife. ... In summary, it must be a competent and chosen man. Children, women, and other persons are not qualified for this office, even though they are able to hear God's word, to receive baptism, the sacrament, absolution, and are also true, holy Christians, as St. Peter says [I Pet. 3:7]." AE 41:154–155.

Sixth, the holy Christian people are externally recognized by prayer, public praise, and thanksgiving to God. Where you see and hear the Lord's Prayer prayed and taught; or psalms or other spiritual songs sung, in accordance with the word of God and the true faith; also the creed, the Ten Commandments, and the catechism used in public, you may rest assured that a holy Christian people of God are present.⁷³

Seventh, the holy Christian people are externally recognized by the holy possession of the sacred cross. They must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh (as the Lord's Prayer indicates) by inward sadness, timidity, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness, and weakness, in order to become like their head, Christ.⁷⁴

As one reads Luther's comments surrounding this list of seven marks, one sees clearly his idea of what the church is. In summary,

The *ecclesia*, "the holy Christian people," does not have mere external words, sacraments, or offices, like God's ape Satan has, and in far greater numbers, but it has these as commanded, instituted, and ordained by God, so that he himself and not any angel will work through them with the Holy Spirit. They are called word, baptism, sacrament, and office of forgiveness, not of angels, men, or any other creature, but of God.⁷⁵

Application of the Treatise

Lutheran Ecclesiology Is Distinctively Biblical

The problem with Luther's numeration of the marks of the church is this: I teach my catechism students two marks of the church: 1) The Word properly preached, and 2) the Sacraments administered according to God's command. Is Luther's sevenfold system contrary to the common twofold one? Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), the arch-systematician of Lutheranism, quotes Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621)

⁷³ AE 41:164.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ AE 41:171.

as accusing the Lutherans of this very inconsistency with regard to the marks of the church. But Gerhard responds:

In the same place Luther himself confesses explicitly that those marks are not all of the same category nor are they all necessary in the same way. He admits that only the first is absolutely necessary and that all the rest, except for the first, can be missing.⁷⁶

Gerhard argues that after Luther's first mark of Gospel proclamation, the rest are essentially expansions on that same theme which each fit under the two headings of Word or Sacraments. Though Luther's seven points do not mathematically correspond with the standard two marks, there is no conflict between the *content* of the two lists.⁷⁷

Here, we can see the Renaissance humanist tradition manifest itself in the theologians after Luther, as Gerhard capably digests the meaning of Luther's seven marks and shows them to be nothing but applications of the Word and Sacraments properly administered. The reason Gerhard's and Luther's content matches is because they purposely draw from the same well: Holy Scripture. Luther's treatment above is bolstered by Scripture at every turn. In fact, the first two parts of his essay were designed to specifically reject any definition of the church *not* drawn from Scripture. For Luther and the Lutherans after him, it is easy to confess: "God be praised, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is: holy believers and 'the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd.'"⁷⁸

Councils do not define the church. Popes do not define the church. Traditions do not define the church. Opinions do not define the church. Pastors do not define the church. Scripture alone defines the church. As Luther beautifully stated, "God's word cannot be without God's people, and conversely, God's people cannot be without God's word."⁷⁹ This is why, in our synod's Catechism explanation, the definition of the *una sancta* is simple enough that my 7th and 8th grade students can understand it in under an hour: "The Church is called catholic, or universal,

⁷⁶ Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces*, Commonplace XXV, *On the Church*, tr. Richard Dinda, ed. Benjamin T.G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 238–239.

⁷⁷ See Appendix B: Johann Gerhard on Luther's "Marks of the Church."

⁷⁸ SA III.12 (KW 324–325).

⁷⁹ AE 41:150.

because God invites all people to enter it, and because it is to be found in all parts of the world where the Gospel is preached.”⁸⁰

Biblical Ecclesiology Is “Practical Theology”

Because Lutheran ecclesiology is truly biblical ecclesiology, it is also immanently practical. As Lutheran parish pastors we are the caretakers of these little pockets of Christianity in our communities. And though we usually think of our work in view of the traditional twofold definition of the church, perhaps Luther’s expanded sevenfold definition is better for us to keep in mind in the parish. Consider this: If I say the heart of my job is 1) preaching the Gospel and 2) administering the sacraments, then it is easy for me to see these two things in isolation, executed once a week, in my vestments, for the Sunday service. However, such a narrow view of “church work” is not really reflective of the broad nature of biblical ecclesiology.

Looking at Luther’s seven marks,⁸¹ one sees not only a once-a-week preaching schedule, but a daily life of 1) preaching and teaching effectively so that God’s Word can truly dwell with His people, 2 and 3) offering the Sacraments as often as they are needed, 4) constantly counseling our members with Law and Gospel, 5) faithfully discharging all the duties of our office as the calling congregation directs, 6) leading the people in worship and holy living, and 7) comforting them in the midst of the sorrows of this life.

In a broad sense, everything we learn in the seminary study of “Practical Theology” could be relabeled as “Ecclesial Theology” or “Ecclesiology,” because preaching, teaching, counseling, organizing, worshiping, and comforting are all definitely features of Lutheran ecclesiology. All of these things flow from the central work of faithfully preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments. These are the things we *do* in the parish as we shepherd our parishioners to hear the voice of their Good Shepherd in every aspect of congregational life. Contemplating Luther’s lengthier list may help us to keep the genuinely ecclesial nature of our work in focus as we are pressed on many sides with mundane things which sometimes seem so un-ecclesial.

Record-keeping does not always *feel* pastoral, but the names on the rolls are *your* names—the souls entrusted to your care by divine call.

⁸⁰ CE §202 (p. 138).

⁸¹ 1) Word of God, 2) Baptism, 3) Holy Communion, 4) Confession and Absolution, 5) Public Ministry, 6) Prayer, praise, singing, and thanksgiving, 7) Possession of the Cross—Suffering.

Folding bulletins does not always *feel* pastoral, but these simple slips of paper will be used to aid your people in hearing their Good Shepherd's voice. Sweeping the narthex does not always *feel* pastoral, but as the pastor you model a servant's heart in so doing, and, if the Lord wills, you can lead your people to produce the fruits of faith in their own lives as well. Obviously, some activities you and I do as we manage our little flocks are more "pastoral" than others. But everything we do should be kissed by the Gospel so that our people may grow in their faith thereby. This is what the Lutheran parish and her pastor looks like. Therefore, this is what Lutheran ecclesiology looks like.

Because of this, Luther views the common parish as being far superior to any ecumenical council, and he esteems the seemingly unremarkable work of the common parish pastor because through his ministry he is bringing up the next generation of pastors.

A pastor and a schoolteacher deal with small, young rascals and constantly train new people to become bishops and councils, whenever it is necessary. ... Oh, they have a precious office and task, and they are the church's richest jewels; they preserve the church. Therefore all the lords should do their part to preserve pastors and schools. For if indeed we cannot have councils, the parishes and schools, small though they are, are eternal and useful councils.⁸²

In addition, if the schoolteacher is a godly man and teaches the boys to understand, to sing, and to practice God's word and the true faith and holds them to Christian discipline, then, as we said earlier, the schools are truly young and eternal councils, which perhaps do more good than many other great councils.⁸³

Luther's strong views on supporting good schools can be applied today as an admonition to educate people of all ages in our congregations, making our parishes miniature schools every Sunday morning. This does not only apply to those parishes among us with parochial schools. This encouragement is especially imperative for congregations without schools, so that we go out of our way to make the Sunday worship experience as educationally effective as possible.

⁸² AE 41:134–135.

⁸³ AE 41:176.

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay was challenging: Write a paper about another paper. And yet my goal was clear: I went about my work examining the material assigned to me with the hope that I could produce an informative yet practical presentation which would benefit the majority of us in our work as parish pastors.

Luther's conclusion is simple to us on this side of the Reformation. But in post-medieval Europe it was quite radical. Whereas the church bodies produced by the Reformation and more radical reformations thereafter were not considered real "churches" by the Roman curia, a truly biblical ecclesiology suggested otherwise. If the church is merely God's saints gathered around His means of grace, then this invisible church is shown visibly among the Lutherans, and, to a lesser extent, among the Papists and other Reformed groups as well. The pope did not hold a monopoly on the church, and the record of history, especially the ecumenical councils, bears this out through their contradictory and often erroneous statements.

Today, you and I practice biblical, Lutheran ecclesiology in the parishes we serve. Because of this, Luther reminds us of the importance of speaking and writing precisely so that the Gospel is not profaned among us—as it was in many of the councils—and to do our work faithfully week in and week out as the Lord of the Church uses us to do His work among His people gathered around His means of grace. LSQ

Abbreviations

AE = *Luther's Works: American Edition*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, Hilton Oswald, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Boyd Brown. 75 vols. St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955– .

CE= *An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism*. Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2001.

Note: references to this work will be made by question number, indicated by the \$ mark, followed by page number in parentheses.

- KW= Kolb, Robert, and Timothy Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.
- SA= *Smalcald Articles*

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Appendix A: Luther's Eleven Point Definition of Councils

Drawn from *Luther's Works: American Edition*, Vol. 41. *Church and Ministry III*. Edited by Eric W. Gritsch. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966.

First, a council has no power to establish new articles of faith, even though the Holy Spirit is present. (AE 41:123)

Second, a council has the power—and is also duty-bound to exercise it—to suppress and to condemn new articles of faith, in accordance with Scripture and the ancient faith. (AE 41:123)

Third, a council has no power to command new good works; it cannot do so, for Holy Scripture has already abundantly commanded all good works. (AE 41:123)

Fourth, a council has the power—and is also duty-bound to exercise it—to condemn evil works that oppose love, according to all of Scripture and the ancient practice of the church, and to punish persons guilty of such works. (AE 41:124)

After this point there are several pages of explanation.

Fifth, a council has no power to impose new ceremonies on Christians, to be observed on pain of mortal sin or at the peril of conscience—such as fast days, feast days, food, drink, garb. (AE 41:130)

Sixth, a council has the power and is bound to condemn such ceremonies in accordance with Scripture; for they are un-Christian and constitute a new idolatry or worship, which is not commanded by God, but forbidden. (AE 41:130)

Seventh, a council has no power to interfere in worldly law and government, etc.; for St. Paul says, “He who wants to serve God in spiritual warfare should refrain from engaging in civilian pursuits” [II Tim. 2:4]. (AE 41:130)

Eighth, a council has the power and is bound to condemn such arbitrary ways or new laws, in accordance with Holy Scripture, that is, to throw the pope's decretals into the fire. (AE 41:130–131)

Ninth, a council has no power to create statutes or decretals that seek nothing but tyranny, that is, statutes on how the bishops should have the power and authority to command what they will and everybody should tremble and obey. (AE 41:131)

Tenth, a council has the power to institute some ceremonies, provided, first, that they do not strengthen the bishops' tyranny; second, that they are useful and profitable to the people and show fine, orderly discipline and conduct. (AE 41:131)

After more pages of explanation, one last point for a council is offered.

Finally, a council should occupy itself only with matters of faith, and then only when faith is in jeopardy. (AE 41:136)

Appendix B: Johann Gerhard on Luther's "Marks of the Church"

Drawn from Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces*, Commonplace XXV, *On the Church*. Translated by Richard Dinda. Edited by Benjamin T.G. Mayes. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010.

(II) From this foundation it becomes clear what answer we must give Bellarmine as he accuses us of inconsistency and divisions of opinion in this question, for he writes as follows, *De eccles.*, bk. 4, § 2, *Lutherus*:

In the last part of his book *De concilio et ecclesia*, Luther proposes these seven marks: first, the true and uncorrupted preaching of the Gospel; second, the legitimate administration of Baptism; third, the legitimate use of the Eucharist; fourth, the legitimate use of the Keys; fifth, the legitimate election of ministers to teach and give out the Sacraments; sixth, public prayer, psalmody, and catechization, but in a language that all understand; seventh, the mystery of the cross, that is, tribulations within and without. But others usually propose only two, which include the first five marks of Luther, that is, the pure preaching of the Word of God and the pure use of the Sacraments. The Augsburg Confession and its Apology, as well as Brenz, teach the same thing, etc. To these two marks the Centuriators add two others that can be reduced to Luther's fifth and seventh, that is, constancy of

perseverance in the confession of faith and obedience to ministers of the Word insofar as they declare the Word.

We respond. In the same place Luther himself confesses explicitly that those marks are not all of the same category nor are they all necessary in the same way. He admits that only the first is absolutely necessary and that all the rest, except for the first, can be missing. He writes as follows: "If one could see no other mark but this one" (he means the first), "that still would be enough to convince minds that the church catholic is there." Furthermore, those marks that Luther divides are listed together by others. We refer the legitimate use of Baptism and the Eucharist to a single mark, namely, the legitimate administration of the Sacraments. The preaching of the Gospel, catechism, the election of ministers, the invocation likewise belong to one mark: the pure preaching of the Word. Obedience due to the ministry, which Philipp Melancthon (*Exam.*), Cassander (*Consult.*), and others add on the basis of Cyprian (*De cultu virginum*) and Augustine (*De fide et symb.*), is included in those two marks. It is particularly evident in the hearing of the Word and use of the Sacraments, from which it is produced like fruit from a tree. The cross is an accident and condition of the church but is not a proper and essential mark. Yet it is numbered with the other marks because it is the nearly constant companion of the true church. If we are talking about the proper and essential marks, we all say with one mouth that there are two such marks of the church: the pure preaching of the Word and the legitimate administration of the Sacraments.⁸⁴

Appendix C: An Index of Tangential Topics in Luther's *On the Councils and the Church*

Drawn from *Luther's Works: American Edition*, Vol. 41. *Church and Ministry III*. Edited by Eric W. Gritsch. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966.

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⁸⁴ Gerhard, 238–239.

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The Absent God of Mormonism

Gregory L. Sahlstrom¹
Fayetteville, North Carolina

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THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY Saints (hereafter LDS) has the distinction of being a religion born right here in America, along with the Church of Christ, Scientist; the Church of Scientology; and the Jehovah's Witnesses. As the story goes, Joseph Smith, Jr. received a heavenly vision as a young boy on the west end of his father's upstate New York farm. In an 1838 account of this First Vision, God told Joseph that the creeds of all churches were an abomination and that all of their pastors were corrupt.²

According to a second vision, a soldier prophet turned angel named Moroni appeared to Joseph.³ This angel stands at the pinnacle of Mormon temples to commemorate his leading Joseph to a hill called Cumorah to unearthen an ancient book of buried scripture. Written in an unknown language called Reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics,⁴ this Book

¹ Pastor Sahlstrom, organizing pastor of Hope Lutheran Church near Salt Lake City, has researched Mormonism since 1984, written a manual for evangelizing Mormon missionaries, and is currently writing a book that responds to Mormon doctrine on the topics of Scripture, God, and salvation.

² Joseph Smith, *History* 1:19, found in the Pearl of Great Price.

³ Joseph Smith, *History* 1:30–33.

⁴ 1 Nephi 1:2, Mosiah 9:23.

of Mormon was reportedly recorded on golden plates and translated by Joseph Smith using a pair of magic spectacles⁵ and a seer stone placed in a hat.⁶ This was the first of three volumes of what are believed by the Mormon faithful to be scripture, including the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price, which along with the Bible are referred to as the Standard Works.

After Joseph Smith was jailed and then shot to death by an unruly mob in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1844, thousands followed Brigham Young, the Mormon Moses, on a great pioneer exodus across the western frontier to Salt Lake City, as the new American Zion. Today bolstered by an army of over 80,000 missionaries, this church gains 300,000 converts per year. It has grown to over 15 million members⁷ in more than 150 countries.⁸ By mid-century, there could be more Latter-day Saints than Lutherans, and by the end of the century, their numbers could rise to a quarter billion.⁹

To what may we attribute this rapid growth? Perhaps it's the Mormon emphasis on families and their motto: "Families are Forever." Their colorful and charming television commercials depict model caring parents who exhibit patient wisdom in relating to their children. Maybe it's that instead of abstract theological concepts, their missionaries appear to answer all of people's questions about God with confident simplicity. But LDS growth may have broader implications: (1) in an increasingly fearful world, people are more disposed to surrender personal judgment to perceived authorities;¹⁰ and (2) as distraction increases, people become less discerning and more vulnerable to believing what is contrary to

⁵ Joseph Smith, *History*, 1832, quoted in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 1:30.

⁶ John Philip Walker, ed., *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism: Correspondence & A New History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 286.

⁷ Church Membership: Total Membership 15,082,028; New Children of Record 115,486; Converts Baptized 282,945; Missionaries: Full-Time Missionaries 83,035; Church-Service Missionaries 24,032 (*Ensign* 43, no. 5 [May 2013]: 28). Church Membership: Total Membership 10,752,986; Increase in children of record during 1999: 84,118; Converts baptized during 1999: 306,171; Missionaries: Full-Time Missionaries 58,593 (*Ensign* 30, no. 5 [May 2000]: 22).

⁸ <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-stats>, or perhaps over 175 countries; see "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints membership statistics," Wikipedia (accessed 12 August 2014).

⁹ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Mormonism*, ed. Reid L. Neilson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 22.

¹⁰ Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 159–60; Milton Rokeach, *The Open and Closed Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1960), 62–63, 225–26.

evidence.¹¹ Yet having trusted the confident claims and friendly faces, all the new convert has is the absent God of Mormonism.

Past—Preexistence: *Before God became God*

But doesn't everyone believe in the same God, at least those who claim to be Christians? As they say, all that glitters isn't gold. In a course on the Trinity at St. Sophia Seminary in Ukraine, students were presented with a creed and asked what they thought of it. Their response was "*Normalno, ne pohano*" ("All right, not bad"). Then their instructor informed them that Arius, the notorious heretic of the early fourth century, had written it. Definitions matter, and when an LDS presidential candidate confesses, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," we have reason to ask what he means by those words. The details in the doctrine of God, debated for one hundred thirty-three years, from the rise of the Arian controversy in 318 to the Council of Chalcedon in 451, really do matter!

Who is the God of Mormonism? Latter-day Saints sometimes speak of "Heavenly Father, his Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost." The Book of Mormon even declares that they are one.¹² That sounds a lot like what we believe, so why would this writer speak of the "absent God of Mormonism"? Let's start at the beginning, with creation and the first chapter and verse of the Bible in Genesis. This is where the LDS Church's Gospel Doctrine class started on the first Sunday in January (2014) and it's the first lesson of the Gospel Principles class for new members. Yet there is a dramatic difference between how Latter-day Saints study Genesis and how orthodox Christians do.

Though the official translation of the LDS Church is the King James Version (KJV), it has published its own distinctly LDS edition of the Bible since 1979. Inside you find the familiar KJV text, but special study notes from the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) suggest a change of wording to more than six hundred verses.¹³ Many of these are in the book of Genesis. Of 659 verses in Genesis, the JST changes 135 and

¹¹ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 81, 86–87, 209; Philip Zimbardo and Michael Leippe, *The Psychology of Attitude Change and Social Influence* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991), 156–57, 208.

¹² 2 Nephi 31:21.

¹³ Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 148–49; Robert L. Millet, et al., *LDS Beliefs: A Doctrinal Reference* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 370; George A. Horton, Jr., "A Prophet Looks at Exodus through Deuteronomy: Insights from the Joseph Smith Translation," *Ensign* 16, no. 2 (February 1986): 23.

adds an additional 181. The altered JST text of Genesis (1:1–6:13) is recorded in the Pearl of Great Price as the Book of Moses (1:1–8:30).¹⁴ To make this a little more complicated, a greatly expanded version of the first two chapters of Genesis appear in the Pearl of Great Price as the Book of Abraham (1:1–5:21), purportedly translated from ancient papyri found in an Egyptian mummy's sarcophagus. So when studying the opening chapters of Genesis, Latter-day Saints are largely examining entirely different books.

The topics of the second *Gospel Principles* lesson are that (1) we were all with God before coming to earth, (2) he is literally our Father, and (3) we came down to earth so that we could become like him. In other words, "We can become Gods like our Heavenly Father."¹⁵ But there's something the lesson doesn't mention. If we can become Gods like Heavenly Father, might there have been a time when Heavenly Father wasn't God but became God like his father before him?¹⁶ Though no LDS scripture addresses this topic,¹⁷ the Latter-day Saint answer to this question is "Yes!" One source is Lorenzo Snow, the fifth LDS president, prophet, seer, and revelator, whose teachings were studied last year (2013) in Priesthood classes around the world. In a little couplet written by President Snow: "As man now is, God once was: As God now is, man may be."¹⁸ In 1844, three months before his death, Joseph Smith proclaimed the same doctrine in his King Follett sermon:

It is necessary we should understand the character and being of God, and how he came to be so; for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that

¹⁴ For example, the Joseph Smith Translation adds two verses before Genesis 1:1, which are recorded in Book of Moses 2:1–2. Genesis 1:1 is reworded and recorded as Book of Abraham 2:3.

¹⁵ *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978), lesson 1 (5–7), lesson 2 (9–12), lesson 47 (274–80). The quotation is from the 1978 edition that includes details later omitted. See Alma 12:31; Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) 76:58, 88:107, 132:19–20; and Book of Moses 4:28–29.

¹⁶ In a sermon preached eleven days before he died, Joseph Smith preached on Revelation 1:6, declaring, "If Jesus Christ was the Son of God ... you may suppose that He had a Father also. Where was there ever a son without a father?" (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts [Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1902], 6:476).

¹⁷ Craig Blomberg and Stephen Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 87.

¹⁸ *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012), 83.

God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and will take away the veil [*sic*], so that you may see.¹⁹

And thus we speak of the absent God of Mormonism. The Book of Mormon speculates about whether God could cease to be God.²⁰ Mormon theologian John Widtsoe conjectured about whether there might have been a time when there was no God.²¹ We might respond with Psalm 90:2 (KJV), “From everlasting to everlasting thou art God,” but it’s really not that simple. How words are understood depends upon how they are defined and even though this biblical phrase and many others affirm God’s eternity,²² Latter-day Saints limit the meaning to existence prior to and after this present mortal existence.²³ For Mormons, “in the beginning” includes matter and man,²⁴ but not God as God. When referring to God, LDS don’t understand eternal as an adjective but merely as a name.²⁵

So where was God during these long infinite ages of time, as intelligences waited to be begotten by heavenly parents so that they might become spirit children?²⁶ Who then waited to descend from heaven and become human beings, and thus “gods in embryo,”²⁷ with a potential for Godhood themselves? Though LDS leaders don’t like to speak of a time

¹⁹ The King Follett Sermon, April 7, 1844, in B. H. Roberts, *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity: The Roberts–Van Der Donckt Discussion* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1982), 227; also see Blomberg and Robinson, 85.

²⁰ Alma 42:13, Mormon 9:19.

²¹ Expunged prior to publication from John A. Widtsoe’s *Rational Theology: As Taught by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Published for the Use of the Melchizedek Priesthood by the General Priesthood Committee, 1915); see Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 279; and B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, ed. Stan Larsen (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 289.

²² Genesis 21:33; Romans 1:20; Habakkuk 1:12; Psalm 74:12; 55:19; 48:14; 90:1–2, 4; Isaiah 26:4; and Jude 1:25.

²³ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 1:12.

²⁴ D&C 93:29, 33; 128:23; Book of Abraham 3:18; 4:22–23; Milton Hunter, *The Gospel Through the Ages* (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, 1945), 127–28.

²⁵ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 233; D&C 19:6–7, 10–12.

²⁶ Stan Larson, editor’s introduction to Roberts’s *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, xlviii.

²⁷ John A. Widtsoe, *A Rational Theology: As Taught by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Presiding Bishopric of the Church, 1926), 5; Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969); Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 21.

when there was no God, who was God before Heavenly Father attained to that status? Was his father God before him? And if so, did his father cease to be God or are we left to worship a God who is himself subordinate to one who was God before him, and others before them? There is no answer, but only the empty silence of a universe without a truly eternal God: the absent God of Mormonism. To all of these creative emendations, the great prophet Isaiah responds (Isaiah 43:10–11 [KJV]):

Ye *are* my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I *am* he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, *even* I, *am* the Lord; and beside me *there is* no saviour.

Present: *The Latter-day Saints' God Is a Man*

As Latter-day Saints view history, a world-changing event happened in the spring of 1820. According to the earliest account, written twelve years later, a young fourteen-year-old boy named Joseph Smith read the following words in the Bible (James 1:5 [KJV]): “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” Joseph reportedly responded by walking out the door of his family’s cabin, and, walking west and crossing Crooked Creek,²⁸ he knelt for prayer in a wooded area now referred to as the “sacred grove.” As he described the event in 1839, initially after kneeling for prayer he felt overwhelmed by darkness:

I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction.²⁹

This easily calls to mind the experience of a man twelve centuries earlier who in about AD 610 prayed in a cave on Mount Hira near Mecca. When he heard a voice, he feared that it was the voice of a genie:

²⁸ Crooked Creek has since been renamed Hathaway Brook.

²⁹ Joseph Smith, *History* 1:15.

Muhammad came to himself in a state of terror and revulsion. The idea that he had, against his will, probably become a *jinn*-possessed *kabir* filled him with such despair ... that he no longer wanted to go on living. ... But on the mountainside he had another vision of a being which, later, he identified as Gabriel.³⁰

Muhammad's wife Khadija reassured him that it really was an angel, and thus began a new monotheistic world religion, but one that, in the words of Pope John Paul II, is "very distant from Christianity."³¹ We may wish that both Muhammad and Joseph Smith had stayed with their first impressions and not entrusted themselves to the words of the apparition. In the case of Joseph Smith, the vision is thought to describe God as someone more comprehensible but in fact gives us a second reason for realizing that he is actually the absent God of Mormonism.

Early accounts of Joseph Smith's vision merely record seeing the Lord Jesus or a visitation of angels.³² In later accounts, Joseph spoke of two personages,³³ and in his official 1838/39 account he became more specific:

I saw personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name, and said—pointing to the other—"This is my beloved son, hear him."³⁴

Two striking details should have been immediately apparent: (1) that the Father and Son were two separate and distinct Gods, and (2) that not only Jesus but also the Father was a man! If Joseph had been

³⁰ Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 45, 82–83, 85.

³¹ "Some of the most beautiful names in the human language are given to the God of the Koran, but He is ultimately a God outside of the world, a God who is only Majesty, never Emmanuel, God-with-us. Islam is not a religion of redemption. There is no room for the Cross and the Resurrection. Jesus is mentioned, but only as a prophet who prepares for the last prophet, Muhammad." John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 92–93.

³² Joseph Smith, *History 1882–3*, quoted in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:28; Milton V. Backman, Jr., "Joseph Smith's Recitals of the First Vision," *Ensign* 15, no. 1 (January 1985): 14.

³³ 1834: Milton V. Backman, Jr., "Confirming Witnesses of the First Vision," *Ensign* 16, no. 1 (January 1986): 32; November 9, 1835: Joseph Smith, *Diary*, 23, quoted in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:43.

³⁴ Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:7; also Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:60.

reading his Bible carefully, Deuteronomy 6:4 might have come to mind, reminding him that God “is one,” not two or many. On the matter of whether God the Father is a man, he might have reflected on Numbers 23:19, “God is not a man.”³⁵ But even more importantly are two tests of a prophet and prophecy given by Moses. The first test was that a true prophet’s predictions must always be fulfilled (Deuteronomy 18:21–22). The second is that the God he proclaims must be the same God as the one proclaimed by Moses:

If there arise among you a prophet ... and ... he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet. ... And that prophet ... shall be put to death. (Deuteronomy 13:1–3, 5 [KJV])

That should have been sufficient, but instead of “hearkening” to the words of Scripture, Joseph Smith and the church that he founded concluded that Scripture and the consistent teaching of the church throughout history must be in error, as encouraged by the personages in the vision:

I asked the personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right—and which I should join. I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in His sight: that those professors were all corrupt.³⁶

One could easily go line by line through the statements in the three ecumenical creeds to show that they are completely in agreement with Scripture. Though this is beyond the scope of the present article, this information is readily available on the Internet.³⁷ While Joseph Smith didn’t have such resources at hand, there is a quicker test for truth here: one of plausibility. Is it really likely that all Christian churches got even the most central Christian message wrong soon after the apostles and then perpetuated that false message throughout history? There is a reason that we have creeds. While they are not our source of Christian doctrine, they are summaries of scriptural teaching. In the case of the ancient Apostles’ Creed and other baptismal creeds, there is continuity

³⁵ Also see 1 Samuel 15:29 and Hosea 11:9.

³⁶ Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:7; also Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:61.

³⁷ You can find this information at www.CGIoutreach.org.

throughout Christian history, during which catechumens in preparation for receiving baptism and confirmation have memorized creeds.³⁸

Latter-day Saints celebrate that Heavenly Father is a man and is their literal father in heaven. We can understand the attraction to believing in a God that we can wrap our mind around. Surprisingly, Mormons are not alone in imagining that God the Father is in some sense embodied or that there is more than one God.³⁹ Instead of picturing God according to his infinite attributes, it is much simpler to picture him as a man who is also exalted far beyond what we are. In fact, this may sound quite similar to the historic Christian conception of Jesus as sinless man and also infinite God. There is, however, a world of difference.

Where is God right now? We would answer: everywhere. It isn't that God is so big that he fills the universe, but what we call the ubiquity of God: that God is not limited by space. We also speak of God as dwelling in heaven, as in "Our Father who art in heaven" in the Lord's Prayer, but we know that God also dwells with each of us here on earth. Where do Latter-day Saints believe that God is right now? According to the Book of Abraham:

And I saw the stars, that they were very great, and that one of them was nearest unto the throne of God; and there were many great ones which were near unto it; And the Lord said unto me: These are the governing ones; and the name of the great one is Kolob, because it is near unto me.⁴⁰

So, according to Latter-day Saint scripture God lives near a star named Kolob. Does that mean that Heavenly Father does not dwell here? Yes, the absent God of Mormonism is believed *not* to dwell here. There can be some confusion about this. For example, according to LDS scripture "the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in

³⁸ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longman, 1976), 31, 63–71, 76, 80, 94–96; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 380–81, 383–84.

³⁹ For example, Open Theism as taught by evangelical theologian Clark Pinnock considers that God may in some sense be embodied (Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001], 33–34), while Richard Swinburne concludes that there must be three Gods (Richard Swinburne, "Could There be More Than One God?" *Faith and Philosophy* 5 [1988]: 225–41).

⁴⁰ Book of Abraham 3:2–3.

us.”⁴¹ Yet, oddly enough, the LDS Church doesn’t teach that the Holy Ghost dwells in us, since he is not omnipresent, and so is incapable of being in more than one place at a time:

As a Spirit personage *the Holy Ghost has size and dimensions. He does not fill the immensity of space, and cannot be every where present in person at the same time. . . . The Holy Ghost as a personage of Spirit can no more be omnipresent in person than can the Father or the Son.*⁴²

Even the “gift of the Holy Ghost” is not understood as the Holy Ghost actually dwelling in us, but only as “the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost as long as you are worthy of it.”⁴³ We need to explain *companionship*. This doesn’t mean that he is with us. Latter-day Saints distinguish between the Holy Ghost as a member of the Godhead — a committee of three who work as one: Father, Son and Holy Ghost — and the Holy Spirit that is not God at all. Though these are the same words in the original Greek of the New Testament, Latter-day Saints teach that the Holy Ghost is not the same as the Holy Spirit or the Light of Christ and is not a person or deity but a pervasive substance that functions as God’s power and influence: “It is everywhere present and accounts for the omnipresence of God. It is the agency of God’s power and the law by which all things are governed.”⁴⁴ “The chief agent or agency by which the Holy Ghost accomplishes his work is usually spoken of as the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God. It is a universe-filling medium or influence.”⁴⁵ The same may be said of Heavenly Father:

He can be omnipresent in a certain sense. There is a spirit, an influence, that proceeds from God, that fills the immensity of space, the Holy Spirit, the Light of Truth.⁴⁶

⁴¹ D&C 130:22.

⁴² Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:38, 40; also Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness For the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 271–72.

⁴³ *Uniform System For Teaching The Gospel* (USA: Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1986), 2:18; also see “Church President Joseph F. Smith,” in McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 312–13.

⁴⁴ McConkie, *New Witness*, 70; Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon, 1891), 29, 39–40.

⁴⁵ John Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 76, 62; also Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:54.

⁴⁶ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–1886), 26:22.

So God is omnipresent only in the sense that the Holy Spirit is God's influence or power where God himself is not personally present. Thus *omnipresence* takes on a new and peculiarly LDS meaning: as absent but not impotent, distant but not unrepresented. As B. H. Roberts wrote, "God may and is said to be present where he is personally absent."⁴⁷

Latter-day Saints not only disagree with God's omnipresence, their authors and missionaries confidently lampoon our belief in God's omnipresence as a "false concept that God is a formless blob" or a "shapeless, sexless, unrecognizable mass filling the immensity of space."⁴⁸ It's easy to feel like responding in kind while being completely unaware that beyond such flippant comments are some carefully reasoned and lengthy responses from very intelligent LDS authors such as Orson Pratt, *Absurdities of Immaterialism* (34 pages); Brigham Henry Roberts, *Mormon Doctrine of Deity* (300 pages); and Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (719 pages).⁴⁹ What we need are not dismissive rejoinders but a humble recognition that details about the Trinity and Christ's incarnation are neither easy nor self-evident but often beyond explanation and incomprehensible. With this in mind, we can pause to understand why our theological opponents disagree and then take the time to provide carefully prepared responses from Scripture. In today's world, such books are exceedingly rare.

How does the LDS understanding of Heavenly Father compare with our orthodox understanding of Jesus? Like the Mormon God, Jesus is both God and man, but with an important difference. We believe that Jesus has two natures, while Latter-day Saints believe that he has only one. Latter-day Saints make no distinction between a divine and human nature. Man is seen as a "God in embryo," that is, man in process of becoming God, so that deity isn't a different kind of being but one farther advanced in spiritual progress. Latter-day Saints don't believe that Jesus is the eternal Son of God who took on a human nature, but an (1) eternal intelligence who was (2) begotten by Heavenly Father and one of his celestial wives in the preexistence to become a spirit child

⁴⁷ Roberts, *Mormon Doctrine of Deity*, 241.

⁴⁸ Duane S. Crowther, *Doctrinal Dimensions: New Perspectives on Gospel Principles* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1986), 145; Sterling W. Sill, *That Ye Might Have Life* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 119–20.

⁴⁹ Orson Pratt, "Absurdities of immaterialism, or, A reply to T. W. P. Taylder's pamphlet, entitled, 'The materialism of the Mormons or Latter-day saints, examined and exposed,'" in *Orson Pratt's Works* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1851); Roberts, *Mormon Doctrine of Deity*; McConkie, *New Witness*.

of God—like everybody else, including you and me and Lucifer — and (3) came down from heaven to be born of a human mother, become a human soul⁵⁰ and so become more like God.

According to LDS doctrine, the only difference between you and me and Jesus is that Jesus (1) is the first-born in the preexistence,⁵¹ (2) is farther advanced and has achieved godhood, and (3) was the son of God in the most literal sense, having been “sired” by Heavenly Father and Jesus’ mother Mary⁵² to become “the only begotten in the flesh.”⁵³ If you ask how Mary the mother of our Lord could have remained a virgin, such details are scrupulously avoided.⁵⁴ Jesus is thus not with us any more than Heavenly Father, because according to LDS theology, Jesus was not eternal God who took on a human nature, but an eternal intelligence who progressed to the status of godhood, as all men may do.⁵⁵

Historic orthodox Christianity teaches that Jesus is both God and man. As Lutherans we believe that because of the communication of attributes, Jesus’ human nature is able to make use of the attributes of his divine nature, including being omnipresent rather than spatially limited. Thus his words “This is my body . . . this is my blood” (Matthew 26:26, 28) in the Lord’s Supper are not a metaphor. We receive communion “in remembrance” (Luke 22:19), but not as an LDS remembrance of an absent body and blood of Christ.⁵⁶ He is not an absent Jesus forgiving us from afar. Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20 [KJV]), and promised, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20 [KJV]). As Francis Pieper wrote, “God never works in absentia.”⁵⁷ God’s omnipresence doesn’t mean that God is merely aware or well represented. Such a “presence” is no more than fancy language to cover up the deficiencies of the absent God of Mormonism. The Bible

⁵⁰ “[T]he soul consists of both a body and a spirit (see D&C 88:15), and we lived in our premortal life as spirit children of our Heavenly Father” (*Come Unto Me: Relief Society Personal Study Guide*, 1988 [Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987], 43).

⁵¹ *Gospel Principles* (2009), lesson 2 (9–12).

⁵² Benson, *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 7.

⁵³ James Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 143; McConkie, *New Witness*, 67,111; Daniel H. Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 729.

⁵⁴ For example, notice the lack of detail in Millet, et al., *LDS Beliefs*, 653.

⁵⁵ James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–1975), 5:30.

⁵⁶ D&C 20:77,79.

⁵⁷ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1950–1957), 1:442–43.

teaches that Jesus is with us, and so is God the Father and the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸

This has practical implications. Lutherans gather for worship because God is with us. Latter-day Saints gather for “meetings” since the absent God of Mormonism isn’t there to worship. And then there are those times when we most especially feel the need to know that God is near. The August 2014 issue of the LDS *Ensign* magazine⁵⁹ includes an article entitled “We Know Where He Is.” The article was written about a Mormon couple in Colombia whose 14-year-old son contracted a serious infection and died. His father confidently affirmed, “Because of the plan of salvation, we know where Ezequiel is and whom he is with,” but he didn’t say where or with whom. At a Mormon funeral of a teenager who died tragically in the late 1980s, a number of men spoke at the podium and confidently said, “I know where he is,” but no one said where. Finally, after the graveside service, two elderly women were talking and one said to the other, “Wasn’t that wonderful? It was almost as if God was here.” God was there, giving me comfort as I thumbed through my pocket New Testament for words of hope; the absent God of Mormonism was believed to be millions of miles away.

Future: *The Latter-day Saints’ God and Three Heavens*

Having talked about the absent God of Mormonism in the “preexistence,” and in “mortality,” this brings us to the question of the presence of the Mormon God in the “postmortal” existence. Despite confident words of reassurance like those spoken above, the same uncertainty persists as Latter-day Saints consider what awaits them in the next life.

A major feature of Mormonism is its inclusiveness. It not only has Old World scripture (the Bible) but also New World scripture (the Book of Mormon). Latter-day Saints embrace not only ancient prophets but living prophets as well. Latter-day Saints not only hope to gain heaven but to become Gods as well. The LDS belief in three heavens aspires to be more comprehensive than a simple alternative of heaven or hell. Not only the most virtuous of saints are welcome, but even unbelievers are welcome who don’t hear the Mormon gospel until after this life.

Latter-day Saints find a scriptural basis for three heavens⁶⁰ in their expanded Joseph Smith Translation of 1 Corinthians 15:40 and its

⁵⁸ John 14:18 (Son), 14:23 (Father and Son), and 14:16–17 (Holy Spirit, who is the same as the Holy Ghost).

⁵⁹ Hernando Basto, “We Know Where He Is,” *Ensign* 44, no. 8 (August 2014): 13.

⁶⁰ This is not to be confused with the “third heaven” in 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4 that is an idiom for being in God’s presence and is synonymous with being in paradise. For

reference to a “celestial” and “terrestrial” glory. This is augmented by the JST note at the bottom of the page in the LDS Bible, which substantially alters its meaning. Compare the KJV and JST, below:

There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. (1 Corinthians 15:40 [KJV])

Also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial, and bodies telesial; but the glory of the celestial, one; and the terrestrial, another; and the telesial, another. (1 Cor 15:40 [JST])

The words *celestial* and *terrestrial* in the King James Version of 1 Corinthians 15:40 appear as *heavenly* and *earthly* in contemporary translations. The Joseph Smith Translation adds a “telesial” glory, which appears to be merely a conflating of the words celestial and terrestrial. Look closely at the context, such as in 1 Corinthians 15:35. This verse doesn’t ask *where* we go after the resurrection, but what kind of *body* comes forth in the resurrection. Thus the contrast in verse 40 is between the terrestrial (that is, earthly) bodies people now have and the celestial (that is, heavenly) bodies that those in Christ look forward to after the resurrection. With the JST changes, the contrast becomes different places to spend eternity. According to the JST, there is a *celestial* (that is, top) heaven, *terrestrial* (that is, middle) heaven, and *telesial* (that is, bottom) heaven. These three “glories” are detailed in Doctrine and Covenants 76 as follows:

Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of Gods. ... These shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever and ever. ... These are they whose bodies are celestial, whose glory is that of the sun, even the glory of God, the highest of all. (D&C 76:62, 58, 62, 70a)

And again, we saw the terrestrial world. ... Who received not the testimony of Jesus in the flesh, but afterwards received it. ... These are they who receive of the presence of the Son, but

Latter-day Saints, paradise is not heaven, but one of two places that people go to await the resurrection (paradise and prison). See LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 177; and Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 309.

not of the fulness⁶¹ of the Father. Wherefore, they are bodies terrestrial, and not bodies celestial, and differ in glory as the moon differs from the sun. These are they who are not valiant in the testimony of Jesus; wherefore, they obtain not the crown over the kingdom of our God. (D&C 76:71a, 74, 77–79)

And again, we saw the glory of the telestial, which glory is that of the lesser, even as the glory of the stars differs from that of the glory of the moon in the firmament. These are they who received not the gospel of Christ, neither the testimony of Jesus. ... These are they who are thrust down to hell. These are they who shall not be redeemed from the devil until the last resurrection. ... These are they who receive not of his fulness in the eternal world, but of the Holy Spirit through the ministration of the terrestrial. ... And thus we saw, in the heavenly vision, the glory of the telestial, which surpasses all understanding. (D&C 76:81–82, 84–86, 89)

The celestial (that is, top) heaven is for those who were “valiant” in keeping all of the LDS rules for getting to heaven⁶² as well as those who die before they become eight years old, at which point children reach the age of accountability and become responsible for their sins.⁶³ Also included in the celestial kingdom are all who died without hearing the LDS gospel but would have accepted it if they had heard.⁶⁴ This is a position similar to the “anonymous Christian” theology later embraced at Vatican II by the Roman Catholic Church in the 1960s.⁶⁵ Within the celestial glory are various subglories, so that some may become Gods while others may be angels or servants.⁶⁶

⁶¹ A distinctively Latter-day Saint spelling of *fulness* (*Style Guide for Publications of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 3rd ed. [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998], 17).

⁶² D&C 76:52.

⁶³ D&C 137:10; Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:380; *A Companion to Your Study of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 365; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 3:176. These are “promised ... a place in his Father’s kingdom.”

⁶⁴ D&C 137:7.

⁶⁵ Theology of Karl Rahner, discussed in John Hick, “Christ in a Universe of Faith,” <http://qug.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/HICK.pdf>; John H. Leith, ed., *Creeeds of the Churches* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977), 467 (Vatican Council 11, 1962–1965).

⁶⁶ D&C 132:17; Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:32.

Normally when we think of heaven, the goal is to be with God and dwell with Christ forever.⁶⁷ The celestial kingdom is described above in Doctrine and Covenants 76:62 as a place where the promise is made that they shall “dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever,” but nothing in Mormon theology is quite as simple as it sounds. Though Latter-day Saints believe that the earth will become one of God’s dwelling places, the ultimate LDS goal is to become a God of your own planet. Thus, the absent God of Mormonism wouldn’t actually be with you in your celestial glory, any more than Latter-day Saints believe he is with you now:

Suppose we were living on one of these very remote bodies ... and supposing that our eyes ... could behold the light of His countenance without traversing this space ... would we not be in the presence of God?⁶⁸

Thus Latter-day Saints hope to see God, and to have an occasional visit, but not actually to dwell with God.

What about the terrestrial (that is, middle) glory? This would include most Latter-day Saints, since less than twenty percent of Latter-day Saints have a temple recommend,⁶⁹ and “no person can receive an exaltation in the celestial kingdom without the ordinances of the temple.”⁷⁰ According to Doctrine and Covenants 76:77, they receive the “presence of the Son,” but not of the Father. So the terrestrial glory is a place that neither God nor Jesus dwells, but Jesus may visit. Neither can those in the terrestrial or testitial glory progress up to the celestial glory to go be with God.⁷¹

With those dwelling in the testitial kingdom, things get even worse. Though Doctrine and Covenants 76:89 describes it as “a place that surpasses all understanding,” verse 84 adds that the way into the testitial kingdom is through hell, where one must suffer during a thousand-year

⁶⁷ Colossians 3:1–4; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23; and 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

⁶⁸ N. B. Lundwall, *The Vision or The Degrees of Glory* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, n.d.), 81. Also see 89–90.

⁶⁹ A card similar to a driver’s license in appearance, received after interviews every other year with a bishop and stake president that enables an adult Latter-day Saint to enter an LDS temple.

⁷⁰ Chuck Sackett, *What’s Going on in There?* (Thousand Oaks: Sword of the Shepherd Ministries, 1982), 5; Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:45.

⁷¹ Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:31; Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 50; Kimball, *Miracle of Forgiveness*, 243–44; Bruce R. McConkie, “The Seven Deadly Heresies,” in *BYU Speeches of the Year: 1980* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1981), 78.

millennium before ultimately being released into the telestial glory. According to Latter-day Saints, this is the anticipated fate of Lutherans and others who believe in baptizing children:

Behold I say unto you, that he that supposeth that little children need baptism is in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; for he hath neither faith, hope, nor charity; wherefore, should he be cut off while in the thought, he must go down to hell.⁷²

There is also a fourth option. Those “sons of perdition” who have had a knowledge of Christ but persist in denying him are cast into outer darkness or hell for eternity.⁷³ For the rest, one of the three glories awaits them, and it is assumed that very few will suffer forever. On the surface, this sounds like a kinder, gentler brand of religion with few lost and almost all ultimately saved. Yet, as the saying goes, the devil is in the details. While historic Christianity has only one heaven and one hell, Mormonism effectively has four hells and no place that we would call heaven, since the absent God of Mormonism doesn’t dwell in any of its three glories. If a religion gives you anything, it should provide a sure and certain hope of dwelling with God in heaven. For those who put their trust in the absent God of Mormonism, there is no such hope.

The Latter-day Saints’ God: *A Closer Look at His Divine Attributes*

There is one more way that the God of Mormonism is absent. We have already noted that according to Mormon doctrine, God is not personally omnipresent nor eternally God. What about Heavenly Father’s other divine attributes? It’s helpful to divide these attributes into two groups: positive and negative. Positive attributes are qualities that humans may share to a limited degree but God possesses without any limitation. For example, people may have knowledge and power but God has unlimited knowledge and power, that is, omniscience and omnipotence. Negative attributes address human limitations that do not apply to God. People occupy limited space, have a beginning in time, and are changeable. By contrast, God is ubiquitous (cannot be spatially limited), is eternal (without beginning or ending), and is unchangeable (immutable). To a limited extent, people may have the positive attributes

⁷² Moroni 8:14.

⁷³ D&C 76:31–39. This involves the “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost,” D&C 132:27. Also see Matthew 12:31–32; Mark 3:29; and Luke 12:10.

in common with God. This is not the case with the negative attributes, which involve limitations, and God by definition has no limits.

A common basic biblical definition of God is that he is the creator of all that is⁷⁴ or as Thomas Aquinas put it, the first cause.⁷⁵ In order to be creator of everything, God would need to have all power (omnipotence) and all knowledge (omniscience)—both positive attributes. According to BYU emeritus professor Stephen Robinson, God the Father has these qualities and also other divine attributes as well:

In the LDS view God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, infinite, eternal and unchangeable. Besides all the biblical passages ... the Book of Mormon adds concerning God's omniscience, "... He knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it" (2 Nephi 9:20). Of God's omnipotence, Mosiah 3:5, ... "The Lord Omnipotent who reigneth. ..." My point in citing these few sources ... from LDS Scripture is that it just won't do to claim Mormons believe in a limited God, a finite God, a changeable God.⁷⁶

This sounds as though Latter-day Saints and orthodox Christians have all of these beliefs in common, until you look at the details. On the same page that Professor Robinson speaks of God being omnipresent, he also writes that God is not "*physically* present in all things." So although Professor Robinson uses the word *omnipresent*, he doesn't mean that God is actually present everywhere as orthodox Christianity teaches. When it comes to God being omnipotent, early LDS theologian Parley P. Pratt wrote that it isn't the Holy Ghost, but the Holy Spirit, that permeates space. Latter-day Saints do not believe that the Holy Spirit is God or a person but that this is the source of God's power. Notice the word *it* in the following quotation: "It is endowed with knowledge, wisdom, truth, love, charity, justice and mercy, in all their ramifications. In short, it is the attributes of the eternal power and Godhead."⁷⁷

Thus Latter-day Saints use the word *omnipotent*, but it doesn't mean that God personally has all power. He simply has access to power. What about omniscience? Mormon apostle James Talmage wrote that

⁷⁴ Genesis 1:1; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 33:6, 9; Isaiah 37:16; Isaiah 40:25, 28; Isaiah 45:3, 5–6, 14, 18, 21, 22; Jeremiah 10:6, 10–11; Acts 14:15; 1 Corinthians 8:4–6; Ephesians 3:9; Hebrews 11:3; and Revelation 14:7.

⁷⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *An Aquinas Reader*, ed. Mary T. Clark (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1972), 136–237 (*Summa of Christian Teaching*, 1, 30).

⁷⁶ Blomberg and Robinson, 77–78.

⁷⁷ Pratt, *Key to ... Theology*, 40.

by *omniscient* Latter-day Saints mean: “Through the agency of angels and ministering servants, He is in continuous communication with all parts of creation, and may personally visit as He may determine.”⁷⁸ So God doesn’t actually have all knowledge, but as with his power, God has access to knowledge, through angels, and also through the Holy Spirit, as if he were accessing the Internet.

Then there are the negative attributes, such as God’s being infinite and immutable. As we have seen already, the LDS Church doesn’t believe that God is infinite in the sense of being eternal God. Latter-day Saints believe that everything is eternal, but that God progressed until he finally became God. He is believed to have become immutable only after becoming God. Neither is God omnipresent or ubiquitous, but spatially limited, since he is not personally present.

How can Professor Robinson write that God the Father is “omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, infinite, eternal and unchangeable”? Is he being disingenuous? Having met and corresponded with Professor Robinson on a number of occasions, this is not my impression. Instead, Latter-day Saints have very different definitions of theological terms than Lutherans or other orthodox Christians. Such books as *How Wide the Divide?* by Craig Bloomberg and Stephen Robinson, and *Claiming Christ* by BYU professor Robert Millet and Gerald McDermott⁷⁹ are noteworthy attempts at Evangelical Christian dialogue with Mormons. Nevertheless, any impression that historic Christianity and Mormonism agree at any point about God’s attributes is nothing more than miscommunication. Contrary to Professor Robinson’s protestations, the Mormon God is indeed very limited.

Some of these limitations are visible by reading B. H. Roberts’s *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity*, which N. B. Lundwall describes as the “epitome of instruction” on this subject.⁸⁰ B. H. Roberts writes that when talking about God’s attributes, Latter-day Saints use figurative language rather than speaking literally. They address attributes of his mind rather than qualities of his person:

These are all abstract terms; and in describing the extent of any attribute of God or man, we are bound to speak figuratively. We

⁷⁸ James Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, rev. 12th ed. (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 43–43.

⁷⁹ Bloomberg and Robinson; Robert L. Millet and Gerald R. McDermott, *Claiming Christ* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007).

⁸⁰ N. B. Lundwall, *A Compilation Containing The Lectures On Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, n.d.), 56.

thus speak of “infinite power” of “boundless love,” of “illimitable wisdom,” of “unbounded influence,” of “unlimited authority,” of “infinite goodness” &c.⁸¹

God’s “infinity,” so far as it is spoken of in scripture, does not refer to his person, but evidently to the attributes of his mind—to his intelligence, wisdom, power, patience, mercy, and whatsoever other qualities of mind or spirit he may possess.⁸²

Thus, Latter-day Saints use many of the same words to describe God’s attributes but with different definitions from orthodox Christianity. For example, years ago the LDS Church used to give out copies of the Book of Mormon at Salt Lake City’s Temple Square. After you received one, if you thumbed to the Testimony of the Three Witnesses, you could find the following words: “the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God.”⁸³ If you quoted these words to the attendant who gave you the book and commented, “Oh, you believe in the Trinity,” sometimes they would say “Oh, yes” and other times they would say “Oh no, we don’t.” It is all a matter of which definition they were using. While conversing with a Latter-day Saint, if you think that you are agreeing on any point of doctrine, you are almost certainly misunderstanding each other.

Do details and doctrinal definitions matter? It is very easy for people to conclude that we are just wrangling over words. But as Eric Mascall once wrote, “The Trinity is not primarily a doctrine ... the Trinity is God.”⁸⁴ God cares that we believe in him as he really is, not as people may choose to define him. If we get the words right but their definitions wrong, we are no different from the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai who celebrated a feast to the Lord, but worshiped a golden calf (Exodus 32:5). God was not pleased.

Joseph Smith taught about, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes in, a God who became God, and they believe that we can progress to become Gods too. The problem is, as Paul Copan and William Lane Craig point out, that “a collection formed by successive addition cannot be actually infinite.”⁸⁵ In other words,

⁸¹ Roberts, *Mormon Doctrine of Deity*, 240.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 119–20.

⁸³ Or to the place in 2 Nephi 31:21 where it is written that “the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God.”

⁸⁴ Peter Toon, *Our Triune God* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996), 44.

⁸⁵ Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 211.

no matter how long you add to something that is finite and limited, it remains something that is finite and limited. Thus even a man who had progressed in knowledge and various qualities for an eternity would still be only a better but still limited man. He would never become infinite God as the Bible defines God. In order to make deity an attainable goal, Latter-day Saints needed to change the definition of deity, so that man might be *called* God, but would not truly *be* God.

Here lies the ultimate irony in the theology of the Mormon Church. Not only does the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints define God as someone who was once absent before becoming God and as a God who is not with us in this world or the next, the absent God of Mormonism isn't God in any real sense at all and so is absent in the sense of simply not existing. [\[SQ\]](#)

Positive Points for Our Pastors and Parishes

Herbert C. Huhnerkoch
Pastor Emeritus
Kissimmee, Florida

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A FEMALE WINTER VISITOR IN THE LAKE HAVASU City congregation always expressed her approach to daily Christian life with this motto: “When I get up in the morning, I can choose to be happy or I can choose to be sad. I choose to be happy.” This was not her version of Robert Schuler’s “Possibility Thinking” or a blind ignoring of reality. It was her way of saying that in Christ she was not going to let difficult circumstances destroy her joy. She was beginning her day with Christ and recalled that in him whatever depressing elements lay ahead were overcome. She had good company in the Apostle Paul who wrote, “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:11–13; all verses *English Standard Version*).

If we choose to be sad and depressed concerning the Lord’s work, which is what our sinful nature desires for us, we will never have to look very far to find lots to be depressed about. There is plenty wrong with us and the congregations and schools we serve. Our beloved communities and nation have plenty to dampen our spirits. Not only is the nation in a moral slide, but much of the nation cheers the downward trend as progress and the media and institutions of government to the highest levels have legitimized much of the moral nosedive. We are saddened

and frightened about these developments and not hopeful that anything but the worst kind of persecution of Christians will ensue. The world's attitudes depress our congregations as well. Like the remnant of ancient Israel, our congregations are small to begin with, without much influence in the community, and seem to be getting smaller even in areas where the general population is growing. We agonize over this. Even though in some congregations our schools are real bright spots right now and provide tremendous opportunities to enlighten the next generation with the gospel of forgiveness, still we wonder: How long before even these successes collapse?

We know from the Scripture and the history of the Church that ours is not the first age in which Satan's apparent successes can lead God's people to pessimism. Habakkuk complained to the Lord: "Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted" (Habakkuk 1:3-4). The Psalms contain complaints about the sad state of the world: "For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73:3). Christ himself lived with his glory deeply hidden during his humiliation: "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:2-3). The Apostle Paul often faced terrible and depressing circumstances and wrote: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (2 Corinthians 4:8-10). The early Christian church faced horrid persecution. The Reformers faced the hatred of the Roman church on one hand and the murderous Muslim hordes on the other. And we still face these same relentless enemies.

Though we are not the first generation of Christians facing dire and depressing circumstances, it is true that we are the first to face the unique sin-multiplier effect of smart phones and social media and the first to live in an America where 5 of 9 justices on the high court have imposed same-sex marriage on us all as a "right" we must recognize. Things are obviously bleak. Still we choose to be happy, because happiness is a Spirit-wrought choice in the heart of Christians who humbly

abandon reliance on self and leave all things in the hands of Christ. The Scripture's promise is this: "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:2–4).

Actually, when the world is the darkest and most deeply mired in godlessness is when the gospel will shine the brightest. The contrast will be unmistakable, just as the arrival of God's incarnate Son was so many centuries ago: "The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light" (Matthew 4:16)! It was the night sky in which the shepherds saw the Bethlehem star. It is against the backdrop of sin and perversion that Jesus the morning star appears to be brighter than ever. As society around us becomes darker and darker in its godlessness and immorality, it is certain that the forgiveness offered through Jesus Christ will shine yet more intensely. And God grants us the privilege to reflect Christ's light brightly in the most trying of times. "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character; and character produces hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:3–5).

Positive points for our pastors and parishes begin with all this background in mind. Positive ministry in our congregations certainly comes with the recognition that the Lord himself gives us plenty of Spirit-wrought reasons to make the daily conscious choice to be happy and positive in spite of circumstances, keeping the following truths in mind as well. First of all ...

It is not about us. It is about Jesus.

It is so easy for us pastors to see all lack of success in congregational life as our own failure (or on the other hand, God forbid, seeing the success as the result of our great preaching or something). If the Bible class is small, we may ask, "What am I doing wrong?" (If the Bible class is growing, we may wrongly think ourselves great!) If that visiting family did not return to worship again, we are inclined to ask ourselves, "What did we fail to do? Perhaps if our preaching had been more dynamic, they would have returned!" (Even worse, if they do return, we are so sinfully driven to conclude that it was our great work!)

Certainly assessing the quality of Bible class, preaching, and other work is important. There is most likely something wrong and something right with all of it. Yet the Lord would have us be optimistic that even

with all our faults, He is still strong and still quite capable of producing Christian faith in dead hearts and thereby growing His church. We look to Christ alone and in regard to our efforts assess things as Paul did: “We have this treasure in jars of clay” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Whether we are doing things wrong which need to be corrected or doing some things right which need to continue, in the end, absolutely everything we try to accomplish ourselves will end in shipwreck and sadness. On the other hand, all that is accomplished in and through Christ ends in victory. “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57) and “for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). How wonderful that it is not about us! It is about Jesus. Therefore, in the Spirit’s sanctification we choose to be happy.

Word and Sacrament are still powerful.

In a related way, what gives us comfort every day in our congregations with all our limitations and failures is that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). The gospel is still “the power of God for salvation” (Romans 1:16).

Satan can appear to be so powerful, so well-funded, and so successful as he rants and raves and appears to have the whole world on his side. His message of throwing off the fetters and limitations of God and “liberating” us to be ourselves resonates with hundreds, thousands, even millions of people. The horror of this is even worse when we see pews often half-filled where the Word of life is being proclaimed. How can we be positive?

It is difficult for us to understand this, but there is more power for eternal good in one gospel sermon delivered to a half-full church than in all the beautifully adorned deceit of a thousand satanic messages. We simply need to know this and be confident in this knowledge. We stand firm on the principle that Word and Sacrament are still powerful. They are always more powerful at their weakest point than Satan at his strongest.

Jesus anticipated Christians being small in number when he said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Matthew 18:20) or “For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matthew 7:14). When our churches appear to be weak, it is very tempting to give up on the one

hand or to resort to gimmicks or at least focus on methodology over substance on the other hand. It is true that we can increase the number of those loosely under our spiritual care through various programs which “bring them in” and lead them toward the water of life. Senior groups, potlucks, youth groups, family nights, and schools can be those avenues. But for God’s kingdom to grow, we depend on the law and gospel and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

As different as called and lay leaders’ reactions can be to the discouragements, setbacks, and roadblocks in the ministry, the reactions always have something in common. Whether we react to discouragements by thinking that our working harder is the answer, whether we resign ourselves to a complacent going through the motions, or whether we resort to tricks and gimmicks, in every case what has happened is that we have lost confidence in the power of the gospel.¹

We do not lose confidence in the power of the gospel. Therefore, let us continue to “engage others with Jesus” not because we are small and want to grow, but because it is the holy and just and right thing to do with the only message of true life this world will ever know.

The preaching of the Gospel still produces two very predictable results.

Related to the point above is the very predictable outcome of preaching the gospel. In fact, there are just two outcomes and each is a success in its own way, because each in its own way achieves God’s purpose: either His *antecedent will* to save all mankind or His *consequent will* to condemn those who reject him. The gospel will be a sweet fragrance unto salvation for some, but a pungent odor unto damnation for many others. That is the fact. “For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life” (2 Corinthians 2:15–16).

We do not always know what has come of those who once worshiped the Lord with us but have since departed from the church. Some still worship the Lord elsewhere, no doubt. But others have probably joined the throngs of those who long ago did the same to Jesus as they rejected

¹ Pastor Richard Gurgel, “An Optimistic Theology of the Cross” (delivered at “Sharing Our Blessings: A Networking Workshop for Large Congregations” at Cousins Retreat Center, St. Francis, Wisconsin, February 4–6, 1997), 3.

the Savior's love and turned their backs on Him: "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him" (John 6:66). How depressed the Son of God could have been, who had just proclaimed that no one can have life without consuming Him in faith! His humble sadness can be seen in the question He posed to the remaining twelve: "Do you want to go away as well" (John 6:67)?

God wants all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. We share that desire fervently as we tell of God's love in Christ. It is a fantastic experience to witness the light go on in a benighted soul and watch someone embrace Jesus in faith for the first time. There is no greater joy than to see that happen in a baptized infant or a person who finally came to faith through the Word later in life.

What we need to realize too, though, is that to preach Christ so clearly that some reject Him and turn their backs on Him is also an important outcome of gospel preaching. There is something positive which happens when the Lord God ultimately takes care of the chaff as well as the grain. Though we don't like it that our Savior's Word is rejected, we are happy that people are confronted with the truth and must react openly and honestly. The only sadness for us would be to have to realize that our preaching and teaching were so bland, that unbelief was never challenged and that the lost were able to proceed in a lukewarm and pathetic dying stupor. Open rejection always means there is more for us to do.

Therefore, let us be positive about the two outcomes of gospel preaching.

There are still places to go where the Gospel is welcomed.

When Jesus sent out the 12 apostles two by two on their first "solo" evangelism work, he told them frankly that there would be places where His word was going to be widely and even universally rejected. They were not to remain there and continue to cast their pearls before swine as it were. They were to move on to more fertile fields. "And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town" (Matthew 10:14-15).

By God's grace, most often there are always still a few who hear the gospel with joy and believe in the Lord. But if some of our congregations simply have little or no success after their best and most patient efforts to reach their communities, it is not necessarily a negative thought to

consider working with a neighboring congregation or perhaps even suspending congregational work in one area so that pastoral and financial resources can be set free to extend Christ's work elsewhere. These decisions are never easy and seldom viewed positively. Nonetheless, should it become true that a congregation needs to disband and its members continue to serve Christ in a different arrangement, we need to look for the positive even there, where a pastor is available to serve in a more fruitful area and those remaining Christians are able to be served through neighboring congregations.

People are still dying to get to heaven.

When we look at our synod's statistics and notice that the numbers in our congregations have remained flat or even decreased through the years, our first reaction may be negative. But there is this positive note. Many wonderful Christians have transferred to the church triumphant during that time. We rejoice that through our ministries the Lord has populated His eternal mansion with the souls of His saints who await the resurrection. That is a huge reason to choose to be happy in the Lord.

Some Practical Things to Do

Focus on positive leadership in the congregation.

The right kind of positive leadership takes into account the above truths. It does not blindly ignore problems and pretend that they do not exist nor does it assume that there are no solutions and therefore present a pessimistic image.

I located an essay of a WELS seminary student who wrote about Professor Valleskey's childhood experience in his father's parsonage:

As he watched his father handle the ministry needs of his congregation as its pastor, he noticed that ministry was always positive and that upbeat words were never far from his father's lips. Later, involved in his own ministry, Professor Valleskey would learn about some of the difficulties his father faced at that church, and noted that those things never made it home and never dampened his father's gospel joy. Instead, his father

modeled the positive spirit of the gospel ministry and encouraged his children to do the same.²

The same optimistic model is critical in the congregation. The Lord would have us lead cheerfully not because we ignore reality, but because we know the true reality of victory in Christ. Habakkuk, the complainer, was told to wait patiently on the Lord and to learn that “the righteous shall live by his faith.” Faith trusts the completed work of the Savior, who as the exalted King of kings and Lord of lords sits at God’s right hand and rules all things for the good of His church.

Even when dealing with negative issues within the congregation, speak in a positive way.

If we serve a small congregation, we all know that it is small. We do not have to dwell on it, wondering out loud, “Where is everybody?” In fact, we can take advantage of being small in that we can spend a great deal of time preparing ourselves and those under our care to be more effective instruments of the Lord in our vocations.

If our stewardship is not what it might be, rather than focusing on lagging offerings, we can express appreciation that even though the Lord never sends a bill, God’s people willingly part with their resources out of love for Christ to support their pastor and extend the work of the Lord even beyond their own community.

Do not get overly excited about outward success.

All of us have probably had those times when we said, “If only we could have a church full like this every week.” We are grateful to the Lord for these times and for our thriving schools and the great opportunities God places before us. But true, Spirit-wrought optimism is to be a level kind of joy, which is evident in both abundant times and lean.

Willingness to think in terms of the success of the wider church.

There is a great deal of joy to be derived from focusing on the great blessings which extend beyond the confines of our local congregations to the joint work of our synod and even beyond that to our sister synod. Especially these days it is so easy to stay in touch with our mission fields around the world, our college and seminary, our synodical leaders and servants and the other congregations near us. It is important to cultivate

² P. James Wilcox, “The Effect of Professor Emeritus David Valleskey’s Leadership Model: An Insight into the Pastor’s Heart,” class notes, December 6, 2006, for Church History 3031, for Professor James Korthals, 1.

these relationships, especially if our work locally is depressing us a bit. There is great encouragement to be derived from the fellowship of believers.

Conclusion

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and does not depend on events or circumstances outside us. Since we pastors and the people we serve are both saint and sinner, we face the daily struggle against the flesh which desires to sink us into pessimism as we face difficulties all day long. Our joy derives from focusing on Christ and his Word as we begin our day with Him and remind ourselves of His presence all day long. This produces a proper optimism which church leaders are called to model before the people we serve. To this end may God help us. LSQ

The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of the Clergy Bulletin/ Lutheran Synod Quarterly

Gaylin R. Schmeling
President, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
Mankato, Minnesota

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The Clergy Bulletin, 1941–1961

The Early Years

In July of 1941 a sample of a proposed clergy bulletin for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod was distributed. The first paragraph of the sample states:

This sample copy of a projected clergy bulletin is the direct outgrowth of a suggestion made by one of the pastors in the Iowa-So. Minnesota conference. ... It was decided that such a venture ought to have the thoughtful consideration and full approval of the general conference before launched. ... It was pointed out that much good can no doubt come of such a bulletin. ... But if not properly supervised, also much harm. ... Witness various organs in the Synodical Conference that are responsible to no one in particular. ... Brothers Dorr, Galstad, and Ingebritson were asked to give you this sample, foretaste, and prospectus.

The first issue of the *Clergy Bulletin* was dated August 21, 1941. This issue was one page in length and contained this introduction.

That the Lord will use this humble sheet to the glory of His name is our sincere prayer as we send out this first “Clergy

Bulletin.” May it under His guidance serve to keep us better informed and better equipped for work in our Synod. . . . It is also our fervent wish that our pastors will make intelligent use of the Bulletin, realizing that it is a means by which one can reach other pastors in Synod. This thing can be made a real clearing house of information, but may we all remember that before anything can come out of a house it must first go in.¹

The early issues of the *Clergy Bulletin* were usually one or two pages in length and consisted mainly of news items. One could find notes from the treasurer concerning “dry” seasons and the needs of the synod, dates for committees and conferences, and various other announcements. On September 18, 1941, there was this “LAST MINUTE FLASH: It is still not too late for students to enroll at Bethany.”

Beginning in 1942 the location where the particular issue was printed was placed in the masthead of the *Clergy Bulletin*. That year the *Clergy Bulletin* was printed in Forest City, Iowa, and Tracy, Minnesota. Pastors took turns assuming the responsibility of printing the publication. In this case the pastors were Stuart Dorr of Forest City and U.L. Larsen of Tracy. By 1943 this statement was added to the heading of the magazine: “Published by authority of the General Pastoral Conference of the Norwegian Synod.”

The first substantial theological article appeared in 1945 when Dr. S.C. Ylvisaker wrote a paper entitled, “Our Preaching—with Special Reference to Law and Gospel.”² In the same year, Prof. G.O. Lillegard published a major paper on the doctrine of church and ministry. The church and ministry debate was under discussion in the Synodical Conference at this time.

The *Clergy Bulletin* did not contain the name of an official editor until September of 1948. That year the Rev. F.R. Weyland of Thornton, Iowa, was designated the editor of the publication. The Rev. Weyland continued as editor until 1951 when he was succeeded by the Rev. J.B. Madson (1951–53), the Rev. R. Branstad (1953–55), the Rev. T. Teigen (1955–58), the Rev. A. Merseth (1958–60), the Rev. P. Madson (1960), the Rev. G.O. Lillegard (1960–62), the Rev. M.H. Otto (1962–69), the Rev. J.B. Madson (1969–76), the Rev. T.A. Aaberg (1976–79), the Rev. G.E. Reichwald (1979–80), the Rev. W.W. Petersen (1980–97), and the Rev. G.R. Schmeling (1997–).

¹ *Clergy Bulletin* I, no. 1 (Aug. 21, 1941): 1.

² S.C. Ylvisaker, “Our Preaching—with Special Reference to Law and Gospel,” *Clergy Bulletin* 4, no. 8 (Apr 16, 1945): 1–3.

With the editorship of the Rev. J.B. Madson in 1951, the submission of longer theological essays increased. Each issue of the *Clergy Bulletin* was generally larger. Often a particular essay continued through a number of issues. A sprinkling of Latin and Greek proverbs were to be found in the issues indicating the great love Madson had for the classical languages.

Church Fellowship Discussions

Throughout the 1950s the synod's doctrinal concerns were plainly evidenced in the *Clergy Bulletin*. There were a number of articles concerning the Common Confession, church fellowship, and Romans 16:17. Controversy over the doctrine of church fellowship was threatening to rip the Synodical Conference apart.

In 1955 the *Clergy Bulletin* sadly reported the break in fellowship with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The LCMS had been the bulwark of orthodoxy throughout the world. Yet in the 1930s this mighty defense began to crumble. In 1935 the Missouri Synod accepted separate invitations from the American Lutheran Church and from the United Lutheran Church to negotiate for the purpose of establishing pulpit and altar fellowship. The ELS and WELS rejected those invitations because they thought that the ALC and ULC merely wanted union without real doctrinal agreement, which conjecture soon became evident. In the negotiations between the ALC and LCMS, the ALC drew up a document called the *Declaration*, which was ambiguous on many important doctrines (Scripture, salvation, church and ministry, Sunday, and the last things). Missouri's adoption of it in 1938 alongside its own *Brief Statement* (1932) began its slow but steady decline. Discussion between the two churches continued. In 1950 the LCMS and the ALC produced a new union document called the *Common Confession*. Still, it too was an ambiguous and compromising statement.

The rift between Missouri on the one hand and the ELS and WELS on the other continued to widen. Missouri began to make a distinction between prayer fellowship and joint prayer so that they could pray at meetings with church bodies with whom they were not in fellowship. In 1945, forty-four of their pastors drew up a statement known as the *Statement of the Forty-Four* in which they openly rejected the old Missouri stand on church unity and related doctrines. There were even questions concerning inerrancy at the St. Louis seminary. As the hope of settling these differences gradually faded, the ELS with deep regret

declared at its convention in 1955 that its fellowship relations with the LCMS were suspended. The synod resolved

THEREFORE WE HEREBY DECLARE with deepest regret that fellowship relations with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod are suspended on the basis of Romans 16,17, and that the exercise of such relations cannot be resumed until the offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned have been removed by them in a proper manner.³

In September of 1960 a new masthead was found on the *Clergy Bulletin*. The magazine was still being published by the authority of the General Pastoral Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, but at the same time it was edited by the theological faculty of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. From this point on, a member of the seminary faculty was always the editor of the magazine and it was published quarterly. This issue explained that there would be a new format for the magazine. Under the title, "A New Venture," editor G.O. Lillegard gives this information.

At its last meeting (April 1960), the General Pastoral Conference of the ELS decided to publish a theological journal, replacing the *Clergy Bulletin* which has served us for many years. The Theological Faculty was asked to take charge of this project. We have been uncertain as to what to name this journal and what form the publication should take. In the meantime, we owe at least an informal beginning of this task to our fellow-clergymen, and ask their indulgence with our first fledgling efforts.

It is our aim to make this new quarterly become a place where we can give the literary productions of our brethren a more adequate organ than we have had hitherto in the old *Clergy Bulletin*. Conference papers, theological studies, anything of general theological interest will be welcomed by the editor for possible use in our next number (December 1960). Book Reviews of current publications, historical data, the present critical situation in American Lutheranism all would

³ "Action of the Thirty-Eighth Regular Convention of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church," *Clergy Bulletin* XIV, no. 10 & 11 (June-July 1955): 106.

be welcomed. Let us seek to make our “Theological Magazine” worthy of attention also outside of our immediate circles.⁴

The Lutheran Synod Quarterly, 1961–2001

A New Name and a New Look

The General Pastoral Conference in September of 1960 decided to change the name and format of the synod’s magazine for pastors. However, it was not until June 1961 that a new name, *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, was found on the magazine, which in the meantime had become a quarterly. Other names offered for the magazine were *Synod Theological Magazine* and *Lutheran Theological Journal*, but *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* was chosen.

At this time the logo of the *Quarterly* appeared, which would be its logo for many years to come. This logo had a picture of the Scripture superimposed on a sword with the Latin inscription *Spiritus Gladius*, which means the Sword of the Spirit. This inscription is taken from Ephesians 6:17 where St. Paul writes, “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” The purpose of the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* was always to proclaim the inerrant, life-giving Word of God which is the church’s sure defense, comfort, and stay.

In the early 1960s, an historical paper by Prof. R.E. Honsey continued in several issues. The paper was entitled, “King Sverre’s Ecclesiastical Controversies.” This paper presented many important aspects of Norwegian church history in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It was of special interest because of our Norwegian heritage.

The articles in the *Quarterly* indicate that the doctrine of church fellowship was still an issue for the synod in the early 1960s. The *Quarterly* printed the resolutions of the WELS convention in which it severed fellowship with the Missouri Synod in 1961.⁵ Prof. Glenn Reichwald reported on the 1961 convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession at Spokane, WA. This church body was made up of those who left the LC-MS, WELS, and the ELS because of questions

⁴ G.O. Lillegard, “A New Venture,” *Clergy Bulletin* XX, no. 1 (September 1960): 1.

⁵ “The Resolutions on Church Union Matters Adopted by The Thirty-Sixth Biennial Convention of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod Assembled at Wisconsin Lutheran High School Milwaukee, Wisconsin August 8–17, 1961,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* II, no. 1 (September 1961): 22–29.

concerning the doctrine of church fellowship.⁶ The Rev. Theodore Aaberg wrote a review of the CLC statement on fellowship entitled, "Concerning Church Fellowship, A Statement of Principle."⁷

The Otto Years

Prof. M.H. Otto became the editor of the *Quarterly* in 1962. He began teaching at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary in 1957 and would be named dean of the seminary in 1968. As a teacher at the seminary he exerted a wholesome influence on the students. He taught them how to preach sermons and they appreciated his pastoral approach to theology. He was always a Christian gentleman and was highly respected by his colleagues. Prof. M.H. Otto continued in the position of editor until 1969 when Prof. J.B. Madson became editor, but Otto remained managing editor. In 1965 the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* was upgraded. Before this it had been mimeographed on 8½ by 11 sheets. Now it was put into booklet or magazine style and was professionally produced.

At the request of the synod, Prof. B.W. Teigen gave a report in the September 1964 *Quarterly* concerning the Lutheran free churches in Europe. He had traveled to Europe and made contact with these church bodies. The article described the situation in Scandinavia and Germany. Contact was made with the Rev. Tom Hardt of Stockholm, whose articles would appear in the *Quarterly* in the future. Mention is also made of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, our sister synod in Germany.

There are basically four groups of Lutheran Free Churches in Germany who have had some connection with the Synodical Conference in America. The first is the *Evangelisch Lutherische Freikirche*. This is the group that has been in fellowship with the Missouri Synod for many years. Their president is Pastor Heinrich Willkomm. Drs. Oesch and Kirsten from the Free Church Seminary at Oberursel belong to this group.⁸

An essay by Dr. Hermann Sasse appeared in the June 1965 issue of the *Quarterly*. The essay was entitled, "The Impact of Bultmannism

⁶ Glenn Reichwald, "CLC Convention," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* II, no. 1 (September 1961): 30-31.

⁷ Theodore Aaberg, "Concerning Church Fellowship, A Statement of Principle," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* II, no. 4 (June 1962): 20-23.

⁸ B.W. Teigen, "The Lutheran Free Churches in Europe," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* V, no. 1 (September 1964): 4.

on American Lutheranism, with Special Reference to His Demythologization of the New Testament.” The essay was introduced with this paragraph.

The article which appears here under the name of Dr. Sasse was a lecture he delivered to a free conference of over 100 pastors, teachers and laymen in Mankato, Minnesota, on March 8, 1965. It was an informal lecture and Dr. Sasse has not had the opportunity to check this material which was taken off the taped record of his lecture. This conference was sponsored by Bethany Lutheran Seminary of Mankato.⁹

The free conference would become the first of the annual Reformation Lectures at Bethany. These lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. These lectures would regularly be printed in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*.

In the latter part of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s there were a number of articles concerning biblical authority and inerrancy. As the battle for the Bible was being fought in American Protestantism, the *Quarterly* reaffirmed the synod’s stand on the inspired and inerrant Scriptures. Other contemporary issues are also addressed. Prof. B.W. Teigen wrote an essay concerning millennialism;¹⁰ Prof. E.T. Teigen submitted an essay on Pentecostalism.¹¹

The Aaberg Years

The Rev. T.A. Aaberg became the editor of the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* in 1976. That same year he was called to be the first full-time president of the seminary. He was the author of the book, *A City Set on a Hill*, and was beyond a doubt one of the leading theologians of the ELS. Prof. Aaberg wrote one of the finest presentations of church fellowship for the 1977 ELS General Pastoral Conference. He began his essay explaining the practical value of this scriptural doctrine:

⁹ Hermann Sasse, “The Impact of Bultmannism on American Lutheranism, with Special Reference to His Demythologization of the New Testament,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* V, no. 4 (June 1965): 2.

¹⁰ B.W. Teigen, “Some Background Material for Understanding the Problem of Millennialism Among Lutherans,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XII, no. 2 (Winter 1971-72): 1-47.

¹¹ Erling T. Teigen, “The Baptism of the Holy Spirit, Speaking in Tongues and the New Testament Exegesis,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XII, no. 3-4 (Spring-Summer 1972): 1-61.

The doctrine of church fellowship is not a set of dry, formal man-made church regulations which hinder the work of the Holy Spirit and make it hard, if not impossible, for pious pastors, teachers, missionaries, and evangelists to witness for Church and to bring the Gospel to mankind.

The doctrine of church fellowship is rather a spiritual, living truth from God's very Word, connected to the heart of the Gospel itself, that of a poor sinner's justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith.¹²

At the cornerstone laying of the new seminary building on October 16, 1977, Prof. Bjarne Teigen preached, using the text Revelation 21:1–6. The mid-October date chosen for the cornerstone laying of the new building was in keeping with synod tradition. Since the founding of the old Norwegian Synod's first school at Decorah, Iowa, in the 1860s, October 14 had been the anniversary for remembering the founders of the synod and their dedication to Christian education. Many of the old Norwegian Synod's school buildings were dedicated on or around the 14th of October.¹³

In 1978 articles were printed concerning the doctrine of the church, indicating the intense discussions concerning church and ministry that were occurring in the synod. This doctrine was also the subject matter of the 1978 Reformation Lectures which had this theme: *The Pulpit and the Pew in Luther and the Confessions*. The first lecture dealt with the office of the ministry and the second with the role of the laity. The presenter was Dr. Herman A. Preus.¹⁴ The discussion concerning the doctrine of the church came to a God-pleasing resolution at the 1980 synod convention when the ELS Church Theses were adopted.

The synod's interest in mission work can be noted in the September 1978 *Quarterly*. The Rev. N.A. Madson presented a history of the synod's mission work in Latin America. He noted that the synod began world mission work in earnest in 1968 when the convention resolved to begin mission work in Peru. "The Rev. and Mrs. Ted Kuster

¹² Theodore A. Aaberg, "The Doctrine of Church Fellowship," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XVII, no. 2 (Winter 1976–77): 1.

¹³ Theodore A. Aaberg, "Seminary Cornerstone Laying, October 16, 1977," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XVII, no. 5 (Fall 1977): 1–3.

¹⁴ Herman A. Preus, "1978 Reformation Lectures," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XIX, no. 1 (March 1979).

and their four children, and lay-workers, Mr. and Mrs. Orlin Myrllie, arrived in Lima, Peru on July 16, 1968 to begin their missionary work.”¹⁵

The June 1979 issue of the *Quarterly* began in this way, “The familiar initials T.A.A.—Theodore A. Aaberg—have temporarily been replaced with G.E.R.—Glenn E. Reichwald. President Aaberg has been granted a sick leave and Prof. Reichwald is substituting. We all hope and pray that the initials T.A.A. will soon return.”¹⁶ The hopes of Prof. Reichwald were not realized. President Aaberg tendered his resignation because of ill health in August of 1979 and passed away in January of 1980. Prof. Glenn Reichwald served as acting president of the seminary and editor of the *Quarterly* for the 1979–1980 school year.

The Petersen Years

The Rev. Wilhelm W. Petersen accepted the call of the Board of Regents to be the new president of the seminary and began his work on August 1, 1980. In the September 1980 *Quarterly*, the first that bears his name as editor, Prof. Petersen wrote:

One of the duties of the undersigned, as president of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, is to serve as editor of the Lutheran Synod Quarterly. It is with a sense of trepidation that he assumes this position for he is aware of the responsibility that goes with it. Here again he derives courage for the task from the words of Holy Writ: “But our sufficiency is of God.”¹⁷

The Rev. Wilhelm Petersen faithfully served as president of the seminary for 17 years. He is remembered by his students for his emphasis on the Law/Gospel distinction, for his pastoral heart, and for an evangelical approach to the pastoral ministry.

The year 1984 was the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Dr. Sigurd Ylvisaker, who was an early leader of the synod. The December issue of the *Quarterly* began with a sermon by Prof. J.B. Madson, which was delivered on Synod Sunday, June 17, 1984, in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Ylvisaker’s birth. He served as president of Bethany Lutheran College from 1930–1950 and of Bethany

¹⁵ Norman A. Madson, “A History of ‘ELS’ Latin American Missions, 1968–1978,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XVIII, no. 3 (September 1978): 39.

¹⁶ Glenn Reichwald, “Foreword,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XIX, no. 2 (June 1979): 1.

¹⁷ W.W. Petersen, “Foreword,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XX, no. 3 (September 1980): ii.

Lutheran Theological Seminary from 1946–1950.¹⁸ The same issue of the *Quarterly* contained an essay on apologetics entitled, “The Role of Apologetics in Lutheran Theology” by the Rev. Steven Petersen.¹⁹ This was a subject under discussion at the time.

A proper understanding of the Lord’s humiliation and exaltation is an important aspect of Lutheran Christology. In the June 1985 *Quarterly*, the Rev. J.A. Moldstad, Jr. presented an excellent exegesis of Philippians 2:5–11, the *sedes doctrinae* of this vital doctrine of the faith. The Rev. J.A. Moldstad, Jr. was called as a seminary professor in 1994, and served as the book review editor of the *Quarterly* during his tenure.²⁰

The year 1987 marked the one-hundredth anniversary of the death of C.F.W. Walther, often referred to as the American Luther. The December 1987 *Quarterly* contained an article by Pastor Herbert Larson on “The Centennial of Walther’s Death.” Pastor Larson showed from the history of the Norwegian Synod that there existed a warm and cordial relationship between Dr. Walther and the leaders of the synod. For this, the synod is truly indebted to this man of God.²¹ The Walther Centennial was also the theme of the 1987 Reformation Lectures.²²

In the 1980s there was considerable discussion concerning the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper both within the ELS and outside of it. Several articles concerning the Sacrament are to be found as one pages through the issues of the *Quarterly* during this period. In fact, the entire December 1988 *Quarterly* was reserved for the Doctrine Committee’s presentation of the Lord’s Supper entitled, “The Theology of the Lord’s Supper.” This essay summarized the biblical and confessional doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. The words of institution by virtue of our Lord’s original institution effect the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in a valid administration of the Lord’s Supper (consecration, distribution, and reception). One cannot fix from Scripture the point within the sacramental *usus* when the real presence of Christ’s body and blood begins, yet we know from Scripture and we acknowledge in the

¹⁸ Juul Madson, “Sermon Preached at the ELS Convention Service Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Birth of S.C. Ylvisaker,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XXIV, no. 4 (December 1984): 1–10.

¹⁹ Steven Petersen, “The Role of Apologetics in Lutheran Theology,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XXIV, no. 4 (December 1984): 31–45.

²⁰ J.A. Moldstad, Jr., “A Look at the Lord’s Humiliation and Exaltation,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XXV, no. 2 (June 1985): 8–28.

²¹ J.H. Larson, “The Centennial of Walther’s Death,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XXVII, no. 4 (December 1987): 9–43.

²² *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XXVIII, no. 1 (March 1988).

Confessions that what is distributed and received is the body and blood of Christ.²³

In 1990 the *Quarterly* contained a history of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod from 1918–1927. The editor noted concerning this essay, “The Evangelical Lutheran Synod will celebrate the 75th anniversary of its reorganization in 1993. Pastor George Orvick, president of the ELS, presents a brief history of the first nine years of its reorganization. This issue contains a summary of the first six years and the next issue of the *Quarterly* will present the following three years.”²⁴ The Rev. G.M. Orvick was the author of *Our Great Heritage*, a popular history of the ELS. The Rev. G.M. Orvick faithfully served as president of the ELS for 28 years.

The June 1996 *Quarterly* contained a brief report of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) held April 23–25, 1996, in Puerto Rico. The constituting convention was held in Oberwesel, Germany, in April of 1993. The CELC is built on the same doctrinal principles as The Synodical Conference of North America, which was dissolved in 1967. The CELC presently consists of twenty-nine confessional Lutheran churches throughout the world including the ELS and WELS from the U.S.A.²⁵

The Turn of the Century, 1997–2001

In 1997 the present editor was called as a professor and president of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. In the first issue of the *Quarterly* edited by him this note is found:

The Lutheran Synod Quarterly is issued by Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary as a testimony of its theological convictions, as a witness to the saving truths of the inerrant Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, and in the interest of the theological growth of the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. This was the purpose of the *Quarterly* while President Wilhelm Petersen was its editor and this continues to be its purpose. As President Petersen enters his retirement, we thank him for his faithful work and for a job well done during his seventeen years of editorship. We wish him God’s blessing as he

²³ *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XXVIII, no. 4 (December 1988).

²⁴ W.W. Petersen, “Foreword,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XXX, no. 2 (June 1990).

²⁵ Gaylin R. Schmeling, “The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference: An International Lutheran Meeting That Was Different,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XXXVI, no. 2 (June 1996): 8–10.

continues to write and teach for the edification of Christ's body the church.²⁶

The same issue of the *Quarterly* reports the dedication of the new seminary building at 6 Browns Court. Sunday, June 15, 1997, was an historic day for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. On that day, the new seminary building was dedicated to the honor and glory of our triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Rev. Raymond Branstad performed the rite of dedication and President George Orvick preached the dedication sermon based on Luke 15:1–10 using the theme: *The Good Shepherd: A Pattern for Parish Pastors*.²⁷ This issue of the *Quarterly* also included Prof. Wilhelm Petersen's sermon for the installation of the new seminary president.²⁸

In 1998 the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* took on a new look. The color of the *Quarterly* became a light blue, Luther's seal became its regular logo, and it was bound in a more professional manner.

In 1999, as the world prepared for a new millennium in fear and anxiety, this was the sentiment of the *Quarterly* and the ELS in general:

This will be the last *Quarterly* of the millennium. We are approaching the dawn of a new millennium and the 2000th anniversary of the dear Savior's birth for our salvation. He is the Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Heb. 13:8) He took upon Himself our flesh made from dust so that through unity with His divinity He might conquer sin, death, and all our foes in the flesh and raise us to His divine glory—eternal life in heaven. It is indeed a time to celebrate 2000 years of grace. The theme of this *Quarterly* will center on Christology or the doctrine of the person of Christ.²⁹

The issue began with a sermon on the important prophecy concerning the Messiah in Genesis 49:8–12, which points to the great Lion of Judah who would overcome the sharpness of death and give new life for man. The Old Testament is definitely the book of Christ.

²⁶ Gaylin R. Schmeling, "Foreword," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XXXVII, no. 3 (September 1997): 1.

²⁷ George Orvick, "Seminary Dedication Sermon," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XXXVII, no. 3 (September 1997): 4–10.

²⁸ Wilhelm W. Petersen, "Seminary President Installation Sermon," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XXXVII, no. 3 (September 1997): 11–18.

²⁹ Gaylin R. Schmeling, "Foreword," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XXXIX, no. 4 (December 1999): 304.

An exegetical article was included in the issue on Hebrews 1:1–4 by Prof. J.A. Moldstad, Jr., emphasizing the Christological content of Hebrews. Christ the God-Man is indeed our great High Priest who offers Himself as the one sufficient atoning sacrifice for all people. Another article discussed the importance of the Seven Ecumenical Councils for the study of Christology.

The *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, 2001–2016

The New Millennium

In 2002 the *Quarterly* began to be produced in a three-issue per year format, with the June and September issues combined. This allowed for each issue to be larger, with the June–September issue as most comprehensive. This also alleviated some of the cost of postage.

The ELS celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Norwegian Synod in 2003. A commemorative anniversary edition of the *Quarterly* was assembled for the occasion. The commemorative edition emphasized the importance of our past history as we look to the future.

In commemoration of the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the Norwegian Synod, of which the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is the spiritual heir, this issue of the *Quarterly* is being devoted to a special remembrance of our history and tradition. This is a time to remember all the wonderful blessings that the Lord has poured out upon His church during the past one hundred fifty years. We have received a great heritage from our forefathers and we thank the Lord for all His blessings in the past. While looking forward to the future, we want to use the lessons of the past to help guide us on the pathway on which the Lord is leading us.³⁰

This issue contained material by Prof. Juul Madson, Prof. Sigurd C. Ylvisaker, the Rev. Ulrik V. Koren, the Rev. Bjug A. Harstad, the Rev. Helge M. Tjernagel, the Rev. Justin A. Petersen, the Rev. J.B. Unseth, the Rev. Christian Anderson, the Rev. C. Monrad Gullerud, Prof. Norman A. Madson, and Prof. Theodore A. Aaberg. The Reformation Lectures continued the anniversary theme with essays

³⁰ Gaylin R. Schmeling, "Foreword," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XLIII, no. 2–3 (June–September 2003): 119.

on three important fathers of the synod, Herman Amberg Preus, Jakob Aall Ottesen, and Ulrik Vilhelm Koren.³¹

Until recently there has been little interest in the Lutheran theology of the seventeenth century. This is in large part due to the persuasive influence of pietism and rationalism. The study of this period has many gaps, to say the least, if it is not a complete wasteland. Yet the confessional Lutherans who made up the Synodical Conference considered their doctrine to be a repristination of the seventeenth-century dogmatists.

Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) was one of the important seventeenth-century dogmatists. In fact, he was the greatest of the dogmatists. It is said that Gerhard was third (Luther, Chemnitz, and Gerhard) in the series of Lutheran theologians and after him there was no fourth. If one were to speak of a fourth, the position would be assigned either to the Prussian theologian Abraham Calov or to Gerhard's nephew, Johann Quenstedt. The December 2004 issue of the *Quarterly* contains an essay entitled "Gerhard—Theologian and Pastor" and an essay, "Strenuus Christi Athleta Abraham Calov," written by Dr. Timothy Schmeling. Another essay on Lutheran Orthodoxy was produced by Dr. Schmeling, entitled "Lutheran Orthodoxy Under Fire: An Exploratory Study of the Syncretistic Controversy and the *Consensus Repetitus Fidei Vere Lutheranae*."³² A link between Chemnitz and Gerhard is found in Polykarp Leyser (1552–1610). He published new editions of many of Chemnitz's works and continued the harmony of the Gospels begun by Chemnitz and finished by Gerhard, which is known as *Harmonia Evangelica*. The 2010 *Quarterly* contains an article concerning Leyser as the bridge between Chemnitz and Gerhard.³³

In 2006 the June–September *Quarterly* was set aside as a commemorative anniversary edition celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary is the pastor-training school of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. It was founded in 1946 and shared space with the college until 1978 when the first seminary building was built. A new

³¹ "The 36th Annual Reformation Lectures: The Legacy of the Norwegian Synod," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (March 2004): 5–116.

³² Timothy R. Schmeling, "Lutheran Orthodoxy Under Fire: An Exploratory Study of the Syncretistic Controversy and the *Consensus Repetitus Fidei Vere Lutheranae*," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (December 2007): 316–355.

³³ Gaylin R. Schmeling, "Polykarp Leyser (1552–1610): A Theological Bridge Between Chemnitz and Gerhard," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 50, no. 2–3 (June–September 2010): 187–207.

seminary and synod office building on Browns Court was completed in 1997. Those teaching at the seminary at the time were Prof. Adolph Harstad, Dr. Thomas Kuster, Prof. Dennis Marzolf, Dr. Michael Smith, Prof. Erling Teigen, and Prof. Gaylin Schmeling.

The year 2008 marked a number of anniversaries in the Lutheran church. It was the 90th anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. In 1918 a number of pastors gathered at Lime Creek Lutheran Church in rural Lake Mills, Iowa, desiring to remain on the old paths of the inerrant Word and holy Sacraments. The outcome of this meeting was the founding of our ELS.³⁴ The year was the 450th anniversary of the death of Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558). Bugenhagen, was born June 24, 1485, in Wollin, Pomerania. He translated the Bible into Low German (*Plattdeutsch*), the language of most northern Germans. He was responsible for organizing church life in much of northern Germany, Denmark, and Norway. He helped establish a new church order for the Scandinavian churches. This is the reason that the Danish–Norwegian Order is often called the Bugenhagen Order (ELH Rite I). He is best remembered as Luther’s pastor. He was an exemplary Lutheran pastor and *Seelsorger*.³⁵ In that year many magazines and journals commemorated the Wilhelm Löhe (1808–1872) bicentennial. However, another important missiologist of the Lutheran Renewal (*Erweckungsbewegung*) also was remembered in 2008. The year marked the 200th anniversary of the birth of Ludwig Harms (1808–1865). His Hermannsburg mission house sent men to South Africa, America, India, and Australia.³⁶

Another New Look

In 2010 the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* received a total facelift with a number of other changes.³⁷ The usual light blue cover became much darker and each issued portrayed the altar and crucifix of the Good Shepherd Chapel in Bethany Seminary. The crucifix reminds us of Paul’s words, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). The cross, which signifies the suffering of Christ as His redemptive act, is an event which

³⁴ Gaylin R. Schmeling, “The 90th Anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (December 2008): 383–385.

³⁵ Gaylin R. Schmeling, “Luther’s Pastor: Johannes Bugenhagen: The 450th Anniversary of the Death of this Great Lutheran Pastor and Preacher, 1485–1558,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (December 2008): 387–393.

³⁶ Gaylin R. Schmeling, “Foreword,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (December 2008): 296.

³⁷ In 2012, the *Quarterly* began to be offered also in PDF format.

appears to be a tragedy, but which is in fact the grandest event God ever performed, the salvation of man. The theology of the cross recognizes God precisely where He has hidden Himself, in His suffering and in all which the theology of glory considers to be weakness and foolishness. This is the paradox of the cross.

Isaiah 53 is the passion history of the Old Testament. Christ is portrayed as wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. In this chapter, His great sacrifice is seen as accomplished and the bright rays of the glorious Easter morning are evident. In the December 2010 *Quarterly* an essay by Prof. Mark DeGarmeaux, entitled, “Lamb of God: Isaiah 53 in Light of Eden, Passover, the Day of Atonement, and Good Friday,” provides an excellent exegetical study of this chapter which centers in the Gospel proclamation of salvation.³⁸

In the 2011 *Quarterly* the Rev. Paul Meitner contributed an essay entitled, “The Norwegian Hermeneutic.” It indicated that the hermeneutical method of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is based on the confessional principle of *Sola Scriptura* along with a deep appreciation for the Lutheran symbols and the historic practices of the Lutheran Church.³⁹

This year marked the 200th anniversary of the birth of Dr. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (1811–1887). Walther was born on October 25, 1811 in Langenchursdorf, Saxony. He was the greatest theologian of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and one of the most important leaders of confessional Lutheranism in America. Walther might justly be called the *Lutherus redivivus* (Luther living again) for America and far beyond its boundaries. It is Luther who taught Walther to understand the Holy Scriptures properly and especially the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He was in many ways the Luther of America. The article, “Walther: The American Luther,” gave a brief summary of Walther’s life and work.⁴⁰ The second essay for the Walther anniversary, entitled “The Centennial of Walther’s Death With Special Reference to Our Synod’s Indebtedness to Him,” was originally printed in the *Quarterly* in 1987

³⁸ Mark E. DeGarmeaux, “Lamb of God: Isaiah 53 in Light of Eden, Passover, the Day of Atonement, and Good Friday,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (December 2010): 229–298.

³⁹ Paul S. Meitner, “The Norwegian Hermeneutic,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (March 2011): 89–119. This essay was taken from his master’s thesis, “From Strangers to Sisters: The Growth of the Fraternal Relationship between the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Between 1917–1955,” prepared for Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

⁴⁰ Gaylin R. Schmeling, “Walther: The American Luther,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (December 2011): 271–276.

to remember the centennial of Walther's death.⁴¹ This essay summarized the close connection between Walther and the Norwegian Synod. It was written by J. Herbert Larson, a pastor emeritus living in New Braunfels, Texas.

In preparation for the centennial of the ELS in 2018, the Rev. Craig Ferkenstad produced an excellent historical essay, "A Half-Century of Mission Involvement: ELS Foreign Mission Work prior to 1968." Looking back at a half-century of synod history, the author pointed out God's blessings regarding foreign mission work. There were only eleven years when the ELS did not have a foreign mission presence. The ELS never sought a foreign mission field by saying, "Where shall we go with the Gospel?" but the Lord opened many doors and thrust the fields upon the synod. The personnel was not available, but God sent the missionaries.⁴²

The year 2014 was the centennial of the death of George Stoeckhardt (1842–1913). His life spanned two continents and two centuries. He was a stalwart Lutheran confessor and one of the most important exegetes of the Synodical Conference. He had a profound influence on generations of LCMS pastors, inspired the founders of Wauwatosa Theology in the WELS, and through his commentaries and sermon books, was a great blessing to our synod. These points were explicated in the essay, "Centennial of the Death of George Stoeckhardt (1842–1913)."⁴³

A portion of Stoeckhardt's monogram, entitled *Lectures on the Three Letters of John*, is included in the *Quarterly*, which gives an excellent defense for including the *Comma Johanneum* in the sacred text. The *Comma Johanneum* is a section of 1 John 5:7–8 not found in many of the ancient manuscripts but is a clear witness to the doctrine of the Trinity: "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood;

⁴¹ J. Herbert Larson, "The Centennial of Walther's Death With Special Reference to Our Synod's Indebtedness to Him," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (December 2011): 277–301.

⁴² Craig A. Ferkenstad, "A Half-Century of Mission Involvement: ELS Foreign Mission Work Prior to 1968," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (December 2012): 369–402.

⁴³ Gaylin R. Schmeling, "Centennial of the Death of George Stoeckhardt (1842–1913)," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (December 2013): 405–417.

and these three agree as one.” His defense is found in the article entitled “Stoeckhardt and the *Comma Johanneum*.”⁴⁴

The 100th anniversary of the birth of Milton H. Otto (1914–1982) occurred in 2014. 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 St. 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, Prof. 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 the December 2014 issue of the *Quarterly* are a number of articles commemorating the life of Milton H. Otto.⁴⁵

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,” for the December 2014 *Quarterly*, the Rev. Glenn Obenberger gathered considerable information concerning the use of the exordium, which is extremely valuable for understanding this Scandinavian Lutheran festival tradition.⁴⁶ The Rev. Obenberger is pastor of Parkland Lutheran Church, Tacoma, Washington, and vice-president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Friedrich Schmidt (1837–1928) was a professor at the Norwegian Synod seminary at the time of its founding in 1876 in Madison, Wisconsin. His name is closely associated with the Election Controversy

⁴⁴ George Stoeckhardt, “Stoeckhardt and the *Comma Johanneum*,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (December 2013): 419–424.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth (Otto) Hermanson, “The Early Life of Milton H.A. Otto;” Craig A. Ferkenstad, “Milton Otto Tribute;” Paul E. Schneider, “Milton Otto Remembrance,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (December 2014): 345–369.

⁴⁶ Glenn R. Obenberger, “The Festival Exordium: An Oral Tradition,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (December 2014): 371–408.

of the 1880s. Schmidt and his followers held that God elected and converted some in view of the faith (*intuitu fidei*) that they would someday possess. This implied, contrary to Scripture, that faith was a work of man on the basis of which God elected us. The biographical essay on F.A. Schmidt in the March 2015 *Quarterly* was presented at the General Pastoral Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1947. The author of this essay was the Rev. Christian Anderson (1847–1959), who was pastor at Belview, Minnesota, at the time.⁴⁷

Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference

The twentieth anniversary of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) occurred in 2013. The CELC is the third largest worldwide Lutheran fellowship, following the larger Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the International Lutheran Council (ILC). The LWF was established in 1947, and 144 church bodies belong to this organization with an approximate membership of 72,000,000. The ILC was founded in 1952, and 35 church bodies belong to this organization with an approximate membership of 3,450,000. The largest church body in this organization is the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS). The CELC was organized in 1993 at Oberwesel, Germany, and includes 29 church bodies with approximately 500,000 members.⁴⁸ The *Quarterly* has continued to include reports on the conventions and various activities of the CELC.

The Proper Use of the Divine Service

During this period of time many questions were raised concerning the liturgical service and worship forms. The divine service is first and foremost God's service to us. Here God serves us with Word and Sacrament, and secondarily, we serve Him with praise and thanksgiving. There were issues in regard to nontraditional formats in worship and contemporary worship. What are the proper guidelines for Lutheran worship? The main principle in the discussion of worship forms is that the liturgy properly proclaims Law and Gospel—that the doctrine of the Gospel be correctly taught, and the Sacraments rightly administered. Therefore a beneficial guideline in considering worship forms is that the church follow the historic outline of the divine service because

⁴⁷ Christian Anderson, "Biographical Essay on F.A. Schmidt," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (March 2015): 91–102.

⁴⁸ Gaylin R. Schmeling, "20th Anniversary of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (March 2013):114–116.

it has served and continues to serve as the preeminent means to present properly the Word and Sacrament. Concerning this discussion a number of essays were produced.⁴⁹

Ministry Discussions

In the early 1900s, questions began to arise in the Synodical Conference concerning the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of the public ministry. The questions centered on the following issues:

- a. Some restrict the concept of a divinely instituted church local (the Church of Christ as it appears on earth—*ἐκκλησία*, Matthew 18) to the local congregation and consider all gatherings of believers, groups of Christians beyond the local congregation, such as synods, conferences, etc., a purely human arrangement.
- b. Others find in the descriptive name of church (*ἐκκλησία*, they who are called out) a term which applies with equal propriety to the various groupings into which the Holy Spirit has gathered His believers, local congregations as well as larger groups.
- c. Some restrict the idea of a divinely instituted ministry to the pastorate of a local congregation and consider such offices as teachers, professors, synodical officials, etc., branches of this office without a specific command of God, established in Christian liberty.
- d. Others see in “ministry” a comprehensive term which covers the various special offices with which the ascended Lord has endowed His Church.⁵⁰

In addition to this, outside of the Synodical Conference there were questions concerning the office of the keys. Individuals such as Johannes Grabau (1804–1879) maintained that the keys (proclaiming the Gospel, administering the Sacraments, and forgiving or retaining sin) had been given only to the ministerium and were handed down through the rite

⁴⁹ Donald Moldstad, “The Biblical–Confessional Lutheran Doctrine of Worship,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 49, no. 2–3 (June–September 2009): 204–231; David Jay Webber, “‘Walking Together’ in Faith and Worship: Exploring the Relationship between Doctrinal Unity and Liturgical Unity in the Lutheran Church,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 52, no. 2–3 (June–September 2012): 195–248; Gaylin R. Schmeling, “The Divine Liturgy and its Use,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (December 2012): 335–368.

⁵⁰ *Proceedings of the Synodical Conference, 1949: 141.*

of ordination. The Synodical Conference maintained that God gave the keys to the church and therefore to each Christian. The authority to administer the keys publicly is conferred by God on those who are properly called into the public ministry through His church.

This doctrine was discussed in the 1930s and 1940s, but no conclusion was reached because the doctrine of church fellowship came to the forefront in Synodical Conference relations. The departure of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod from the biblical doctrine of church fellowship led to the demise of the Synodical Conference.

With the break-up of the Synodical Conference in the early 1960s the study of the doctrine of church and ministry resumed in the ELS. In 1980 theses on the church entitled “The Doctrine of the Church” were adopted by the ELS as noted above. It was assumed that theses on the doctrine of the public ministry would be soon in coming. This was not the case because the synod was engaged in a discussion on the Lord’s Supper for most of the 1980s and 1990s.⁵¹

In the early 1990s, the study of the doctrine of the ministry continued in the ELS. A number of papers were written on this subject and the General Pastoral Conference took up the topic. In 2005, theses on the public ministry entitled “The Public Ministry of the Word” were adopted by the ELS. Pres. Moldstad prepared a summary essay on the public ministry discussions in the ELS, entitled “Public Ministry: ELS Perspective.”⁵² There have been a number of other articles on this subject in the recent years.⁵³

A Proper Use of Apologetics

There is a considerable amount of discussion among Christians today concerning apologetics. The term “apologetics” refers to the defense of the Christian faith. Defending the Christian faith may include an explanation of the basic beliefs of Christianity. It may also include giving

⁵¹ Gaylin R. Schmeling, “Sixty Years at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 46, no. 2–3 (June–September 2006): 179–180.

⁵² John A. Moldstad, “Public Ministry: ELS Perspective,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 51, no. 2–3 (June–September 2011): 143.

⁵³ John A. Moldstad, “A Closer Look at the Sedes Doctrinae for the Public Ministry—1 Corinthians 12:27–31,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (June 2001): 168–171; John A. Moldstad, “A Closer Look at the Sedes Doctrinae for the Public Ministry—Ephesians 4:11–12,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (June 2001): 172–175; Gaylin R. Schmeling, “A Brief History of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Germany Including Its Recent Ministry Discussion,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (December 2002): 310–323; Michael K. Smith, “An Exegesis of 1 Peter 2:1–10,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (March 2004): 117–138.

grounds or reasons for accepting the Christian gospel message as true or a refutation of criticisms of the faith, as well as exposing inadequacies in alternative religions and worldviews. The 2014 Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures centered on the topic of apologetics.⁵⁴ In addition to the 2014 Reformation Lectures, the *Quarterly* has carried a number of other essays on apologetics and worldview.⁵⁵

Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures

In 2012, the name of the Reformation Lectures was changed to the Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures. Dr. B.W. Teigen was instrumental in the establishment of these lectures. Dr. Teigen was president of Bethany Lutheran College and was an important theologian in the ELS. He also had a deep interest in English literature.⁵⁶

The annual Reformation Lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. The purpose of these lectures is to increase an interest in and knowledge of the Reformation period. In the Reformation, the article of justification by faith alone was restored to its truth and purity. We are declared righteous by nothing we do or accomplish, but alone on the basis of Christ's redemptive work which is counted as ours through faith in the Savior. He accomplished salvation for all on the cross and announced it to all by His resurrection, declaring the whole world innocent. This treasure is brought to us personally through the means of grace and is received by faith alone in the Savior which is worked through those very means of grace. The first Reformation Lecture was held in 1965 with Dr. Hermann Sasse of Adelaide, Australia, as the lecturer, as noted above. The format of the Reformation Lectures has always been that of a free conference and thus participation in these lectures is outside the

⁵⁴ "2014 Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures: Apologetics in Lutheranism," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (March 2015): 9–52.

⁵⁵ Steven P. Petersen, "The Role of Apologetics in Lutheran Theology," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* XXIV, no. 4 (December 1984): 31–45; Lyle W. Lange, "Lutheran Apologetics: From Our Classrooms and into the World," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (December 2011): 331–373; Allen J. Quist, "Defending the Christian Faith," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (December 2015): 345–367; Allen J. Quist, "Preaching Christ to a Postmodern World," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (December 2013): 299–313; David C. Thompson, "How False Worldviews Worm Their Way into Christian Schools," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (December 2010): 323–348; David C. Thompson, "An Introduction to the Study of Worldviews," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 47, no. 2–3 (June–September 2007): 228–242.

⁵⁶ Erling T. Teigen, "The Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (March 2013): 9–13.

framework of fellowship. These lectures have had a beneficial effect on confessional Lutheranism in America.⁵⁷ The Reformation Lectures have touched on many theological discussions in confessional Lutheranism over the years.⁵⁸

Conclusion

In this anniversary year, as the staff of the *Quarterly* looks to the future it finds encouragement in the words of Nehemiah 4:16–18. Nehemiah directed the workmen in Jerusalem to build the walls of the city with one hand, and hold a sword in the other ready for battle. They were to use the sword and the trowel. This is the purpose and goal of the *Quarterly*. As the Holy Spirit builds the walls of Zion, the church, the servants of the Lord are directed to use both the sword and the trowel (Luther's *Schwert und Kelle*), both doctrine and defense. The *Quarterly* will continue to use the trowel, proclaiming that a man is justified or declared righteous not by anything he does or accomplishes, but alone through Christ's righteousness which is ours by faith in Him as the Savior. At the same time it will continue to use the sword, battling false doctrine as it rises on every side. [LSQ](#)

Addendum I

The Reformation Lectures at Bethany Lutheran College and Theological Seminary

The annual Reformation Lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. The purpose of these lectures is to increase an interest in and knowledge of the Reformation period. Below you will find the topic and lecturers for the Reformation Lectures.

1965 "The Impact of Bultmannism on American Lutheranism," Dr. Hermann Sasse, Adelaide, Australia

⁵⁷ Gaylin R. Schmeling, "Sixty Years at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 46, no. 2–3 (June–September 2006): 182.

⁵⁸ See Addendum I.

- 1967 "The Word as Truth, the Word as Life," The Rev. Kurt Marquart, Toowoomba, Australia
- 1969 "The Present State of Confessional Lutheranism," Dr. Wm. Oesch, Oberursel, Germany
- 1970 "Lutheranism and the Defense of the Christian Faith," Dr. John W. Montgomery, Deerfield, IL
- 1971 "Confessional Lutheranism's Answer to Today's Problems," Dr. Hans Kirsten, Oberursel, Germany
- 1972 "Studies in the Lutheran Heritage: Law, Love, and Order," Dr. N.S. Tjernagel, Rochester, NY
- 1973 "How is the Lutheran Church to Interpret and Use the Old and New Testaments?" Dr. Robert D. Preus, St. Louis, MO
- 1974 "Means of Grace, Church and Fellowship," Dr. Manfred Roensch, Oberursel, Germany
- 1975 "The Lutheran Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," Dr. Bjarne W. Teigen, Mankato, MN
- 1976 "Quest for True Lutheran Identity in America," Prof. E.C. Fredrich, Mequon, WI
- 1977 "The Doctrine of Justification," Prof. Kurt Marquart, Ft. Wayne, IN
- 1978 "The Pulpit and Pew in Luther and the Confessions," Dr. Herman A. Preus, St. Paul, MN
- 1979 "The Lutheran Theology of Certitude," Dr. Wilbert Kreiss, Chatenay-Malabry, France
- 1980 "Luther on the Christian's Cross and His Final Deliverance," Dr. David Scaer, Ft. Wayne, IN
- 1982 "Luther and the Christology of the Old Testament," Dr. Raymond Surburg, Ft. Wayne, IN
- 1983 "Luther and the Doctrine of Justification," Dr. Gottfried Hoffmann, Oberursel, Germany
- 1984 "Law and Gospel in Luther & the Confessions," Pres. Armin Schuetze, Mequon, WI
- 1985 "Martin Chemnitz—The Second Martin," Dr. Eugene Klug, Fort Wayne, IN; Dr. J.A.O. Preus, Garfield, AR
- 1986 "Luther, The Shepherd of Souls," Dr. George R. Kraus, Fort Wayne, IN
- 1987 "C. F. W. Walther," Dr. Robert Kolb, St. Paul, MN; Dr. August Suelflow, St. Louis, MO; Prof. Arnold Koelpin, New Ulm, MN
- 1988 "Luther the Musician," The Rev. Kurt Eggert, Milwaukee, WI

- 1989 “Luther the Missionary,” Dr. Eugene Bunkowske, Fort Wayne, IN
- 1990 “Luther the Educator,” Dr. James Kittelson, Columbus, OH
- 1991 “Christian Martyrdom,” Dr. Paul Maier, Kalamazoo, MI
- 1992 “Scripture, Doctrine, Confession,” Dr. Robert Preus, Ft. Wayne, IN
- 1993 “Studying the Bible Under Martin Luther,” Dr. Robert Kolb, St. Paul, MN
- 1994 “Luther, Erasmus, and Calvin,” Dr. Heiko Oberman, Tempe, AZ
- 1995 “Hermann Sasse,” Dr. Ronald Feuerhahn, St. Louis, MO
- 1996 “Luther and the Fanatics: The Gospel Under Fire Then and Now,” The Rev. Harold Senkbeil, Elm Grove, WI
- 1997 “Philipp Melancthon, the Second Reformer,” Dr. Oliver Olson, Minneapolis, MN
- 1998 “Luther’s Legacy: The Luther–Erasmus Debate Revisited,” Prof. Arnold J. Koelpin, New Ulm, MN
- 1999 “Eschatology,” Dr. Charles Arand, St. Louis, MO; Dr. Stephen Minnema, Mankato, MN; Prof. John Brenner, Mequon, WI
- 2000 “Biblical Interpretation,” Dr. Kenneth Hagen, Lake Mills, WI; Dr. John Brug, Mequon, WI
- 2001 “Luther as a Historian,” Dr. James Kiecker, Milwaukee, WI
- 2002 “Lutheran Missiology,” Dr. K. Detlev Schulz, Fort Wayne, IN; Prof. David Haeuser, Lima, Peru
- 2003 “Reformation Legacy of the Norwegian Synod,” Rev. Rolf Preus, E. Grand Forks, MN; Pres. em. George Orvick, Mankato, MN; Prof. Erling Teigen, Mankato, MN
- 2004 “The Reformation Legacy on American Soil: Pieper, Hoenecke, and Krauth,” Dr. Lawrence Rast, Fort Wayne, IN; Prof. Lyle Lange, New Ulm, MN; Prof. David Jay Webber, Ternopil’, Ukraine
- 2005 “Luther and Education,” Dr. Mark Lenz, New Ulm, MN; Dr. Paul Lehninger, Milwaukee, WI; Prof. Dennis Marzolf, Mankato, MN
- 2006 “Synodical Conference Exegetes,” Dr. Joel Pless, Milwaukee, WI; The Rev. Peter Prange, Morton Grove, IL; Prof. Stephen Geiger, Mequon, WI
- 2007 “Paul Gerhardt – 400th Anniversary,” Pres. Gaylin Schmeling, Mankato, MN; Dr. Carlos Messerli, Chicago, IL
- 2008 “Freedom of the Will in Three Reformations,” Prof. James Korthals, Mequon, WI; Dr. John Maxfield, St. Francis, MN; Dr. Cameron MacKenzie, Fort Wayne, IN

- 2009 "Lutheranism and Islam," Dr. Adam Francisco, Fort Wayne, IN; Dr. Roland Cap Ehlke, Mequon, WI
- 2010 "Baptism in the Three Reformation Camps," The Rev. Thomas Rank, Scarville, IA; Dr. Robert Koester, Milwaukee, WI; Dr. Lawrence Rast, Fort Wayne, IN
- 2011 "Lessons from Laypeople of the Reformation," The Rev. Jerome Gernander, Princeton, MN; Dr. David Schroeder, New Ulm, MN
- 2012 "Bible Translations for the 21st Century," Pres. Paul Wendland, Mequon, WI; Dr. Cameron MacKenzie, Fort Wayne, IN
- 2013 "Confessional Lutheranism's Answers to the Challenges of Modern Society," Dr. Harold Senkbeil, Brookfield, WI; Prof. Mark Harstad, Mankato, MN
- 2014 "Apologetics in Lutheranism," Prof. Allen Quist, St. Peter, MN; Dr. Daniel van Voorhis, Irvine, CA
- 2015 "Lutheranism and the Arts," Prof. William Bukowski, Mankato, MN; Dr. Robert Rosin, St. Louis, MO; Prof. Brian Dose, New Ulm, MN

Sermon on John 6:66–68

Shawn D. Stafford
Pastor, Hartland and Manchester Lutheran Churches
Hartland and Manchester, Minnesota

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Text: *From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?” But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:66–68).*

A *LREADY GONE. THAT IS THE TITLE OF A BOOK BY* Christian apologist Ken Ham. Ham argues on the basis of a survey of 1,000 twenty-somethings who were raised in the church but are no longer attending, that the reasons why they’re “already gone” is not because of worship style and not because there are not enough programs, but because their churches did not ground them in the teachings of God’s Word. Their churches did not teach them how to answer the skeptical questions they will face in their day-to-day lives. Ham’s book is a plea for the church to stand on the authority of God’s Word in an uncompromising way, so that believers are taught to build their thinking in every area on God’s Word.

“Already gone.” That phrase would also describe Jesus’ concern over His disciples in our Scripture lesson today. Jesus was at a crossroads in His earthly ministry. Up to this point, the crowds had grown larger and larger. The enthusiasm of the crowds reached its climax at the feeding of the five thousand. But then came a turning point. Jesus preached His “Bread of Life” discourse. He said, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of

the world. . . . Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed” (John 6:51, 53–55).

How did the crowd react to this teaching? “On hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’” (v. 60) “From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him” (v. 65).

Today, many teachings of the Bible are considered “hard sayings,” even in the church. This is to be expected, as Paul wrote to Timothy, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers” (2 Tim. 4:3). Nothing is more common than for people to take offense at the Word of God. Sometimes its strictness offends them. For example, contrary to the attitudes widely held today and portrayed in television and movies, Scripture defines marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman and calls all sexual activity outside of marriage “sin.”

It’s not just the law teachings that are “hard teachings” to our sinful nature. The Gospel itself is a great stumbling block to each of us by nature. By the Gospel, all our human efforts to try to earn our salvation are excluded. All our good works are shown to have no value in achieving eternal life. The Gospel points us outside of ourselves, to Jesus Christ, who, by His perfect life, innocent death, and victorious resurrection, has accomplished our salvation for us. His finished work is received by faith, the empty hand into which God places all the blessings of salvation. Even this faith is a gift of God, worked by the Holy Spirit. The Gospel also offends many today because it teaches salvation exclusively in Jesus Christ, who alone is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the only Way to the Father” (Jn 14:6). Not all paths lead to the same place. Not all religions are the same. It is not just believing that saves you, but rather in whom you believe, namely Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

As college students, you are at a crossroads in your lives. You face new choices and challenges. You enjoy new freedoms, and face new responsibilities, and decisions. The temptation is very strong—from the world that scoffs at the Gospel, from peers, from the example of others, from the devil—to leave your Christian faith behind. The question arises, “What role will my Christian faith play in my plans and decisions, and my day to day life as I embark on this new stage of my

life?” In other words, “Will you bring Jesus with you into the next stage of your life?”

As “Christians at the crossroads,” Jesus asks us, “Do you also want to go away?” (v. 67) Jesus’ question, in the original Greek, expects a negative answer. “You do not want to leave too, do you?” (NIV) Jesus asks this question for our sake. He wants to draw us closer to Himself. He desires to increase our faith, through frequent use of His Word and Sacraments.

Peter points us to where to go for this when he says, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (v. 68). Sin is our greatest problem, for it leads to death, and if we continue in sin and unbelief, it leads to eternal death in hell. By contrast, Jesus has the “words of eternal life.” His Words do not merely show the way to eternal life. They actually impart eternal life, by the Holy Spirit’s working faith through them. By faith in Christ, eternal life is ours.

As we stand at the crossroads in our lives as Christians, Jesus asks us, “Do you also want to go away?” (v. 67) May Bethany continue to stand on the authority of God’s Word, that we may be taught to build our thinking in every area on God’s Word. God grant us by His grace that we always be prepared to answer along with Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (v. 68). In Christ alone, as He comes to us in His Word and Sacrament, is the strength to face the challenges of each new day and of the turning points of our lives. He alone can satisfy our soul’s greatest need, as we will sing in our hymn today:

Lord, Thy words are waters living,
Where I quench my thirsty need;
Lord, Thy words are bread life-giving,
On Thy words my Soul doth feed...
Take them never from my heart,
till I see Thee as Thou art,
When in heavenly bliss and glory,
I shall greet Thee and adore Thee” (ELH 230:3, 4).

Sermon on 2 Samuel 15:12–31: Crossing of the Kidron

Gaylin R. Schmeling
President, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
Mankato, Minnesota

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Prayer: O great David's Greater Son, King of our hearts, today we again praise You with our hosannas and palms and welcome You as the lover of our souls. As You once crossed the Kidron for our salvation so this week cross into our hearts through the Word and the Sacrament. Then this Holy Week will be for us a time of renewal and spiritual strengthening. Amen.

Text: *And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people crossed over. The king himself also crossed over the Brook Kidron, and all the people crossed over toward the way of the wilderness. There was Zadok also, and all the Levites with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar went up until all the people had finished crossing over from the city. Then the king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, He will bring me back and show me both it and His dwelling place. But if He says thus: 'I have no delight in you,' here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him." The king also said to Zadok the priest, "Are you not a seer? Return to the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will wait in the plains of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me." Therefore Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem. And they remained there. So David went up by the Ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered and went barefoot. And all the people who were with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went up. Then someone told*

David, saying, "Aithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "O LORD, I pray, turn the counsel of Aithophel into foolishness!" (2 Samuel 15:23–31; NKJV)

“**R**EJOICE GREATLY, O DAUGHTER OF ZION! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). So spoke the prophet Zechariah filled with the Holy Spirit beholding in his mind’s eye the Messiah entering Jerusalem for the last time preparing for the cross. This prophecy was fulfilled on Palm Sunday when Jesus came into Jerusalem having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey. He was the King foretold by all the prophets so that the Angel Gabriel could say to Mary, “He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and His kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:33). He was indeed a king, but the king of the cross. He rides on in majesty but He rides on to die. The crowds shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” But they crowned Him with thorns and a filthy purple robe. This passion of David’s greater Son was already pictured in the Old Testament in the life of His father David. We then consider the **Crossing of the Kidron.**

I. We behold first the suffering in that crossing. There are probably no two people more closely connected in the Scriptures than David and Jesus. As Gabriel announced Christ’s birth to Mary, it was foretold that “the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David” (Luke 1:32). The Christmas Gospel to the Shepherds explains, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). When the sick and the burdened called out to Him for help, they sighed, “O Son of David have mercy on us.” Jesus the Messiah was even spoken of as **David** in prophecy. When old king David was long dead and buried in his grave, Ezekiel wrote, “I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd” (Ezekiel 34:23–24; see also Hosea 3:4–5).

When one stops to compare the lives of David and Jesus, we see many amazing similarities. They were both born in Bethlehem and originated from the stem of Jesse (Isaiah 11). As a young man, David shepherded the flocks of his father and fought for the defense of the sheep (1 Samuel 17:34–36); so Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for sheep and no one will be able to

take the sheep out of my hand” (John 10). David defeated the giant Goliath, freeing Israel from the bondage of the Philistines, but Jesus defeated a much greater giant, the Devil, freeing all people from the bondage of sin and death. David endured many years of humiliation, treated like a common criminal by Saul, but was finally raised to the throne of all Israel. So Jesus after His Great Passion arose triumphant from the grave and was raised to the position of power and authority at the right hand of God.

David then wasn't only an ancestor of Christ and a prophet who foretold Christ's coming, but he was also a type or picture of Christ. This is seen especially in this text. Absalom, David's own favorite son, rebelled against his father and tried to take his place. As the rebels neared Jerusalem, David fled across the Kidron with his faithful followers. He went in great sorrow; the text says, “David went up by the Ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered and went barefoot” (15:30). It was then that he learned that even Ahithophel, his trusted advisor, had betrayed him and sided with Absalom.¹

As Jesus crossed the Kidron that first Holy Week, finding His Ahithophel, His betrayer Judas in the Garden, He bears that same great sorrow as old king David fleeing before his own son (Psalm 41:9; John 13:18). David fled in innocence, his heart broken by one he loved. The same was true of Jesus. Humanity was created to be the sons and daughters of God in the beginning. But humanity rebelled against God, wanting to be as God, desiring to take God's throne. Every one of us is a little Absalom who tries again and again to drive Jesus off the throne in his heart. We decide we know better than God what is for our good. We violently stand up and shake our fist at the Almighty, declaring, “I'm going to do what I want to do.” That shameful rebellion Jesus bore as He crossed the Kidron.

But as David didn't want to see Absalom die, so Jesus still loved us when He sorrowfully crossed the Kidron. He loved us so much that He took our burden of sin and rebellion upon Himself and carried it to the cross. There He endured all the wrath and punishment that we deserved for sin. So great was His love.

Joan was in a car accident. She was a beautiful woman now scarred, swollen, and broken. Her husband came into the room, took one look at

¹ Much of this sermon is based on a sermon written by George Stöckhardt, entitled “Der Gang über den Kidron,” found in *Passionspredigten*, pp. 1–13; and on a sermon written by Wilhelm Ziethe, “Der Gang über den Kidron,” found in *Siloah*, pp. 286–297.

her and said, "Oh no! I can't handle this, no way, good-bye." She never saw him again. She had lost her cosmetic beauty and he had lost his cosmetic love. Across the hall there was Ann who had a stroke, the right half of her body was paralyzed. Half of her face was baggy, droopy, and drooling. She was frightened, crying, a nervous wreck. Her husband sat by her bed comforting her saying, "Love, don't worry. I'll take care of everything." He leaned over his wife and in conquering love twisted his lips to fit hers. He took on her weakness in order to show her the depth of his love.

That was Christ's love for us as He crossed the Kidron, bearing our sins to the cross. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). The ugliness and the scars of our sin didn't bother Him. He loved us. He took on our flesh and died a twisted, painful death so we wouldn't have to die the rebel's death of Absalom but that we would again be the sons and daughters of God with an eternal existence. Because of His great love we can be certain that God won't abandon us when things turn ugly in our lives. The one who carried our burden of sin to the cross will also be with us in every need of day-to-day living.

As David went on his way, Shimei, a relative of the former king Saul, came out and cursed him (2 Samuel 16:5-13). He cursed David because David was king in the place of Shimei's family. David had every right to repay this curse but he patiently endured it, leaving vengeance to the Lord. Likewise as Jesus crossed the Kidron in Holy Week journeying to the cross, He endured mockery, cursing, and insults on every side. Think how He was treated by the Jewish leaders and the Roman guards. Think of how the Scribes and Pharisees harassed Him on the cross. Thus Isaiah wrote, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7). Here He silently bore our burden in our place, winning our Salvation.

II. In the crossing of the Kidron, David and Jesus were similar in their suffering and also in the people that accompanied the crossing. As David went his way, his faithful followers accompanied him in sorrow. One of the people with David was Ittai the Gittite, one of David's soldiers. This Ittai wasn't even a Hebrew. David told him that this wasn't his fight. He should return to his people. He didn't have to follow David into exile. But Ittai replied, "As surely as the Lord lives and as my lord the king lives wherever my lord the king may be, whether it

means life or death, there will your servant be” (2 Samuel 15:21). In the same way Jesus’ faithful followers accompanied Him to the cross. To be sure, His disciples forsook Him and fled in the Garden. One of His disciples betrayed Him and another denied Him. Still there were the pious women from Galilee who went with Him to the cross. There was His mother the Virgin Mary and John the disciple whom Jesus loved.

May each of us this Holy Week be gathered with that little band beneath the cross of Jesus. Rather than denying Him by our lifestyle, we will say with Ittai the Gittite, “Wherever my Lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be.” We will take up our cross and follow Him.

That means that especially this most solemn week we will meditate on His great passion. In our personal devotions we will study the history of His suffering and death. This Thursday night we will gather here to behold Him the true Passover Lamb prepare for us the New Testament Passover where He gives us all the blessing of His redemptive sacrifice with His flesh and blood. On Good Friday we will stand here below the cross as His mother, seeing the sacrifice accomplished which opened the gates of glory for us and gives us peace and purpose in this life. When we so follow Him this Holy Week in true repentance and faith then Easter for us will be a time of great renewal and joy and not just a time to eat chocolate bunnies.

Our Lord’s royal entry into Jerusalem was a wonderful thing to see and yet in everything there is a very somber note. He rides on in majesty but He rides on to die. He is a king but the king of the cross. He crossed the Kidron in sorrow for He bears the sin and rebellion of all humanity. As certainly as He came that first Palm Sunday, so He still comes to us today through the Word and Sacrament. Therefore may we join the procession, holding our palm branches, shouting for joy, “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest.” Amen. LSQ

Poetry for Holy Week

*Matthew W. Crick
Pastor, Faith Lutheran Church
Medford, Oregon*

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Palm Sunday

Into the City of the King

Praises galore,
Right through the front door
Of the city of the king,
Her temple to the world's king
Seated on high,
Beacon to the world's need
Burning brightly of peace,
 Not war.
 And I,
Riding the colt, blessed, foretold,
Gently entered in—
 Palm branches,
 Travel cloaks,
 Laid down before me.
Children sang and danced,
Women cried,
“Blessed is He who comes
In the name of the Lord!”
I saw light in many, many eyes.

Yet, on this day's *hosanna* praise,
Darkness crept into the midst of day,
Unbelief diluted honest praise.
Many, disciples of a king
I came not to be.

Do I don a crown?
Do I muster a force?
Do I rally my cause
On a fire-breathing horse?
No, not on this day,
Or any day before.
The only sword I draw—
The sword of my Word.
So gird yourself my soul,
Things are about to turn:
Romans, Jews, Pharisees, priests,
Drawing blood
In the city of the king.

“Pierce ‘God’—three nails!”
“His crown?—many thorns!”
“The time has come; receive our scorn.”

But I say,
“How else should a king's love
Be adorned—for his city,
For his very world in need?
This is the king I came to be.
I draw the sword of my Word.
Come; take me. I am all yours.”

Maundy Thursday

*Psalm for Asaph*¹

On the day
Of solemn feasting,
At the time of vespers prayer,
A voice arose—
Approaching thunder.
We did not understand.

It spoke of something too large impending:
Full judgment of the man,
His vineyard ripening unto harvest,
Desolation of the land.

“I, the Lord your God, will save you,
I descend as man to man,
To shed my blood,
For divine assembly,
To reign as God and man.

“Open now your heart—
I’ll fill it,
(Though you may never
Understand).
Take, now,
The finest of wheat;
Taste the flesh
Of lamb.”

¹ This poem intends to capture the angst of Asaph’s psalms, with allusions to Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Judgment Day. It is loosely based on Psalm 81, from the King James Version.

Good Friday

*Outside the West Gate*²

Seat yourself outside the city wall,
 City West Gate,
 At break of day.
 Marvel at the massive stones
 Expertly cut,
 Expertly laid.

Watch now

Merchants hustle into, out of, the gate,
 Flipping bright coins as they stalk,
 As if to say, “All bets are good,
 All bets are off,”

Plots hatched inside the walls, inside the gate,
 Inside the temple and the courts
 Where “might makes right” there,
 The one unbending human rule.

An old man approaching, slowly, the gate,
 Pulling his makeshift cart
 Of daily burdens
 Up, up, the ascending way.
 He stops as if to pray,
 “When will God come, help,
 His suffering people?”

Meanwhile, vultures begin to circle,
 Gather.

They know—outside the city West Gate,
 At break of day.

² This poem sets the scene for Jesus’ trial and his journey to the cross that Good Friday morning.

Easter Sunday

Linen and Stone

A strip of finest linen
 —Right fit for a burial—
 Wrapped ritually 'round face and jaw
 In solemn honor
 By well-meaning friends.
 Yet, on the third day,
 (Just as I told them),
 I began to breathe again
 To the cadence of my now-beating heart,
 Inhale, exhale,
 The quickening of God in man,
 Man in God,
 My eyes burning like righteous lamps
 In darkness,
 The Word to speak,
 Death unable to keep hold my silence.
 And the linen?
 It was laid aside with all due respect.
 It served its purpose, did its best.

 Next up, a small matter:
 That of the large stone
 Rolled over the entrance
 Of my tomb—
 A giant wheel set with Pilate's seal
 To serve this goal:
 Prevent the flight of my dead body
 In the night.
 But how could that which is “only stone” know
 It was I, the King of kings, lying in state?
 I, who was born to brighten up
 Any dark place,
 I, who created the dawn,
 Then arose full with it—
 Life behind the unknowing stone,
 Marking a brand new day.

And so surprised were Pilate's men,
Resurrection bursting upon them!
They stood stiller than stone,
Frozen to the very bone,
Sensing only *threat*,
These poor experts in death. LSQ

Book Reviews

LSQ Vol. 56, Nos. 2–3 (June–September 2016)

Book Review: The Tale of Two Servants

Shawn Kauffeld. *The Tale of Two Servants*. Menomonie: Books of the Way, 2015. 117 pages. \$10.00.

The Tale of Two Servants, written by the Rev. Shawn Kauffeld, is a commentary on portions of Isaiah. The thesis of his work is that chapters 40 to 66 of Isaiah present a comparative story involving two different “servants” and that the best way to study those 26 chapters is with that dichotomy in mind. The one servant should be spelled with a lowercase “s” and stands for Zion or the church. The other Servant, with an uppercase “S,” is Jesus. Recognizing the interplay between the two servants is seen as the key to understanding the prophet’s message in these latter chapters of Isaiah. The Suffering Servant lived a life of perfect obedience in accord with the will of His heavenly Father

for our salvation. However, God’s people, the other servant, have often been disobedient, and yet the gracious Lord continues to have compassion upon them.

The cover of the book has a thought-provoking drawing summarizing the thesis of the book. The illustration compares and contrasts the two servants found in these chapters of Isaiah. This intriguing drawing was produced by Jesse Kauffeld, the son of the author.

Pages 4–73 consists of Kauffeld’s translation and commentary. The commentary includes comparisons with other portions of Scripture that relate to his thesis. Not all portions of Isaiah 40–66 are addressed in the commentary. Pages 74–117 are the author’s fine translation of those chapters with no commentary.

Commenting on Isaiah 49:1–3, the author states concerning the incarnation of the Suffering Servant,

He [the Servant] says that "He was called from the womb." And then He adds, "His name has been mentioned from the belly of His mother." Indeed, what an interesting way to describe what was going to happen. The Servant who existed as Yahweh in eternity has entered into the womb of time and mortality. This Servant whose going forth was from eternity was also indeed called by His name before His birth. Gabriel fulfilled those words: "You shall call Him Jesus for He will save His people." This was His Role; He was the salvation of His people, and therefore His name would be Salvation. (20)

The most significant chapter in this section of Isaiah is, of course, Isaiah 53. It is the very heart of the Old Testament Gospel, causing Isaiah to be designated the Old Testament evangelist. The chapter clearly explicates the substitutionary atonement of the Savior. This is the center of the Christian faith. The Suffering Servant took the place of every sinful individual who has ever lived and who will ever live, suffering the punishment that all people deserved so that every person is declared righteous in Christ. The author connects Isaiah 53 with the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22, as many authors have done before him. He compares the faith and obedience of Abraham and Isaac with that of the Suffering Servant (34).

Isaiah 55 clearly points to Christ as the greater David. David, the

shepherd boy, is indeed a type of the Good Shepherd who was to come. Concerning this picture, the author writes,

The wording here is quite interesting. "I will make an everlasting covenant, the sure mercies of David." In those words it is shown that David was a type, a picture of the one who was to come. This One to come would be their Shepherd. His covenant and blessing would be sure and faithful. They had abused and turned away from the covenant they had been given, but that abuse and turning away from it had not ended the covenant. It was an everlasting covenant that would be started again, but they needed to come and listen. Here we have another name and description of the Servant. Note that He is the Shepherd of the flock, the Leader and guider of His people. (36)

In Isaiah 60, the prophet speaks of the great light of the Suffering Servant. In a world covered with the darkness of sin, the Promised One arose, shining forth with salvation. The author compares this section of Isaiah with the many passages of the New Testament that refer to Jesus as the light of the world. Jesus is the light that enlightens our benighted race. Through the Gospel, He draws those walking in darkness to the light as the author notes,

The reaction which came because of that light is exactly what the Servant said it would be. The Gentiles in the New Testament age responded accordingly. When the servant arose and displayed the Gospel in Christ, the Gentiles were drawn like moths to its brightness. The result fulfilled the words which the Servant said would take place; sons and daughters came from every direction. (51)

Throughout the book, Kauffeld compares and contrasts the two servants of the second portion of Isaiah. He directs the reader to the many beautiful prophecies that clearly point to Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior. The Suffering Servant is seen as obedient to His Father unto death, even the death of the cross, while the people of God, the other servant, are often disobedient and turn away from the Lord. In this contrast, the work of the divine Suffering Servant shines ever more brilliantly.

The author has worked very hard to produce this insightful commentary. It provides nourishment and spiritual growth for the Christian's faith-life as one studies and meditates on the words of Isaiah. It would be a beneficial read and excellent study for any Bible class. We thank the author for his interesting and thought-provoking book.

– Gaylin R. Schmeling

LSQ

Book Review: Unexpected Treasures

Becker, James P., and Joshua J. Becker. *Unexpected Treasures: Finding Value in Bible Names, Dates, and Genealogies*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2014. 138 pages. \$16.00.

Unexpected Treasures belongs to the NPH “Bible Discovery Series,” a series described by NPH as “background resources to help you read and understand the text of Scripture.” *Unexpected Treasures* is true to that description, providing clear and practical help in the difficult areas of Scripture chronology, genealogies, and names.

Author James Becker teaches theology at Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee. Author Joshua Becker, James' son, is a 2006 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, currently serving as pastor of Christ Lutheran Church, Saginaw, Michigan.

The book comprises three main parts: Part I: Getting Started, Part II: Genealogies and Lists of Names, and Part III: The Significance of Bible Names.

Part I (60% of the entire book) focuses on understanding the difficulties in determining precise historical dates for scriptural persons and events. The authors emphasize that the persons and events of the Bible are not fiction but history. But because ancient cultures utilized unique methods of recording dates and events, it is difficult to correlate events in one culture to those of a neighboring culture. The authors

offer the interesting insight that while modern society is obsessed with assigning a precise year, month, and day to an event, Scripture instead often emphasizes the “who” and the “what” over the “when” of an event.

“Anchor points” are quite certain dates for significant historical persons and events. That certainty results when a scriptural person or event is corroborated by the records of neighboring societies, and then linked to our modern chronology. Scripture events are true and accurate because they are recorded in the inspired Word of God, not because they have been corroborated elsewhere. But corroboration and the ability to fit a Scripture event into modern chronology can help us understand and appreciate what we are reading.

Brief but helpful discussions on the dating of the Exodus and the fall of Jericho are included. Longer more detailed sections discuss the dating of the birth of Christ and the Apostle Paul’s ministry.

Part II is a very helpful presentation on the importance and meaning of the genealogical lists found in both the Old and New Testaments. Bible readers dread coming upon the genealogies when they have no idea who these people were, what their names mean, or simply how to pronounce the names.

The importance of the genealogies is not primarily chronological, a fact born out by the realization that parallel genealogies often do not exactly match. The authors point out the famous chronology of Bishop Ussher (1581–1656) as an example of the result of using the chronologies

of Genesis 5 and 11 for date setting. Ussher assumed the genealogies were complete, so that by adding up the years of each generation he determined the date of creation to be October 23, 4004 B.C. But the genealogies are not complete, nor do they make any claim that they are complete. They serve the purpose of tracking God’s gracious promise of salvation from Adam to Christ, not the purpose of simply marking the passing of time.

Taking the time to search out the names in the genealogies produces hidden treasures. For example, when Absalom fled after murdering his brother Amnon, he fled to Talmai, king of Geshur (2 Samuel 13). But if we go back to the genealogy list at the beginning of 2 Samuel, we learn that Talmai, king of Geshur, was Absalom’s grandfather.

Part III answers common difficulties encountered with scriptural names. Often biblical characters were known by more than one name, a custom that seems odd to us. Abram is later known as Abraham, Sarai becomes Sarah, and Jacob becomes Israel. Names changed relative to significant life events.

Biblical names all had distinct meanings, descriptive of a quality or significant event unique to that person. Abram meant “exalted father,” and Abraham meant “father of many.” Jacob meant “heel grabber”—a fitting name for one born holding on to his twin brother’s heel.

New Testament characters often had two names, one Hebrew and another Roman. Simon was also

known as Peter, and Saul is better known as Paul.

The authors offer some handy general rules in appreciating biblical person and place names. *El* means God, so names containing *el* have something to do with God: *Israel*, *Peniel*, *Bethel*. In Hebrew, *beth* means house: *Bethany*, *Bethel*, *Bethlehem*. *Ben* means son, so *Benjamin* means “son of my right hand,” and *Ben-Hadad* means “son of Hadad.” *Ab* means father, so *Absalom* means “father of peace” and *Abimelek* means “my father is king.”

Part III closes with a discussion of pronunciation of biblical places and personal names. The authors point out that there are different schools of thought on pronunciation, differing between church denominations. In reality we cannot say for certain precisely how names were pronounced. The web address to a helpful NPH site with audio pronunciations of biblical names is listed as a resource.

Unexpected Treasures would be a welcome volume in any church library or pastor’s study, offering skills, tools, and insights for a more satisfying and edifying experience of reading the Bible.

– Karl J. Anderson

LSQ

Book Review: Hard Sayings of Jesus

Seifert, Joel C. *Hard Sayings of Jesus: Embracing His Words of Life*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2015. 83 pages. \$13.50 for book; \$42.50 for CD of Bible study lessons.

In brief

Hard Sayings of Jesus: Embracing His Words of Life is a part of the Bible Discovery Series by Northwestern Publishing House, and can be purchased with a companion CD that contains Leaders Guides, Student Lessons and a Promotional Toolkit.

The intent of this study is to clear up the confusion about difficult or controversial statements of Jesus, so that participants may understand Jesus’ words more clearly.

The book

The book consists of 13 chapters. Each chapter discusses a difficult or controversial statement of Jesus. The typical format of each chapter is:

- Presentation of a challenging statement or teaching of Jesus by use of biblical examples or passages
- Resolution or explanation of the challenge by using Bible passages and key points
- Wrap up with brief life application.

The average length of each chapter is 5–6 pages.

The companion CD

The companion CD also consists of 13 student lessons (and teachers’ guides), each of which coordinates

with a chapter from the book. Each lesson follows this basic format:

- Brief opening worship
- Passages to look up and discuss
- Summary of key points
- Life application suggestions for the week

Use the book and CD together

I actually found the CD companion Study Guide to be more beneficial than the book itself. I found it easier, as a teacher, to pick up more quickly on the author's train of thought and on the basic points to be stressed in each lesson. At times, the book seems almost too brief in trying to move the reader from the challenging or difficult statement to the resolution or key points. The teacher's guide proves helpful in offering suggestions for more resources to fortify the resolution to the difficult statements.

Since there is no clear progression from chapter to chapter, a Bible study leader could use some or all of the lessons, or rearrange the lesson order without doing damage to the train of thought. Each lesson can be used as a "stand alone" lesson.

Lesson 1: Translations! Traditions! Troubles!

Can the innocent party in a divorce remarry ... or not? Seifert contends that the KJV translation of one particular Greek word in Christ's discussion on divorce can lead to misunderstandings regarding Christ's teaching. Next, he uses an example of an inaccurate traditional interpretation of the "eye of a needle" to show that a faulty interpretation can lead to some bad theology. The author's key points:

- Misleading translations can obscure the point of Jesus' sayings.
- Sometimes misleading or inaccurate traditional interpretations need to be exposed before we can understand what Jesus is saying.
- Not everyone is able to evaluate every translation or see through every interpretation. Don't be afraid! Use the context of the rest of Scripture to help shed light on Jesus' meaning.

Lesson 2: Does Jesus Contradict Himself?

Sometimes Jesus says things that seem to contradict some of his other words. How do we properly understand those sayings? The author uses several examples, including the contrast between Jesus telling Peter to put away his sword, while earlier telling his disciples to buy a sword if they don't already have one. The author's resolution:

- When Jesus' words seem difficult or seem to contradict, slow down and pay attention to the context. Make sure you're not reading into the words something that isn't there.
- While we are to live peaceably in this world, we shouldn't forget: this world will regard us as enemies.

Lesson 3: The Upside-Down Kingdom

In this lesson, Seifert looks at the contrast between the world's view of what it means to be blessed and Jesus' teaching regarding blessedness. He also looks at the contrast between the Bible's statement, "an eye for an eye," and Jesus' command to turn the other

cheek and to love our enemy. The key points:

- Jesus says life in this world doesn't work the way it *seems* it should. Because that's true, much of what he says can seem upside down to us.
- God's will for our lives is summed up in *love*. Our first concern is to love those around us.
- A Christian can find the reason and strength to do this in God's love for us.

Lesson 4: Jesus Challenges Our View of Ourselves

This lesson looks at a difficult teaching regarding the heart. While we may be tempted to believe that we are basically good, Jesus teaches the opposite: our hearts are wells of poison. The author discusses how easy it is to put the "stuff" of life ahead of love for God. The key points:

- Jesus' words make us face the difficult truth that our hearts are, by nature, wellsprings of evil.
- As believers, our new hearts are daily faced with choices of what (and whom!) we'll love.
- God gives us encouragement to keep our focus on him because he wants to give our hearts true peace.

Lesson 5: Jesus Is Coming Back ... Soon?

Jesus said that there were some in his audience who would not taste death before they saw the kingdom of God come with power...seeming to imply his immanent return...yet it's been 2000 years since he spoke those words. As a result, some modern

critics assume that the Bible isn't completely true. The resolution:

- The "kingdom of God" or "kingdom of heaven" isn't the same as heaven itself. It's the preaching of the gospel here on earth and has been present since the days of Christ and the apostles.
- Jesus calls us to eagerly expect his return at any moment.
- Though God's "soon" and our "soon" aren't always the same thing, we know God will come back at just the right time.

Lesson 6: Unbelievable Faith

Sometimes Jesus makes promises that seem unbelievable. For example, he says that if we have faith as small as a mustard seed, we can move mountains ... yet our small faith doesn't seem to be able to accomplish the things we want. Seifert discusses the concept that ultimately, faith's desire is that God's will, not mine, be done. Key points:

- Faith is a living, active, powerful thing. Through faith, God moves mountains.
- The heart of a believer's prayer is, "Lord, bless me the way you know is best."
- Knowing God's loving response to us is an encouragement for our faith.

Lesson 7: Who Is Jesus?

In this lesson, the author discusses the concept that sometimes Jesus seems to speak as if he is less than God, and other times, he clearly claims to be God. How can this be? Seifert discusses the human and divine natures of Christ and defines

and discusses the humiliation of Christ. The author's resolution:

- Jesus has a true human nature. According to that nature, he is *less* than the Father.
- Jesus has a true divine nature. According to that nature, he is *equal* to the Father.
- While Jesus' two natures are impossible for our minds to reconcile, the truth brings us great comfort: He really is our brother, who faced the challenges of our lives and died our death. And he really is our God, whose life paid the price for our sins and who continues to reign over all things for our good.

(Because of the depth and complexity of this topic, the chapter seemed too brief to me, and would best be augmented by more material.)

Lesson 8: More Righteous Than Teachers of the Law?

If Jesus teaches salvation by grace, why does it seem that he at times emphasizes good works when he discusses salvation? In this lesson the author explains that righteousness is what gets us to heaven...but it's the righteousness of Christ, not ours. Key points:

- Jesus preaches that perfect righteousness is necessary because it is. When he does this, his words reveal the sin that we like to ignore.
- Grace, when properly understood and received in faith, changes our lives and moves us to action.
- In the clearest terms possible, Jesus preaches the gospel that salvation comes by God's grace.

Lesson 9: Unless You Hate Your Father and Mother ...

Jesus tells us to love everyone... even our enemies, yet, elsewhere he tells us to hate our family members. How can these two concepts stand side-by-side? The resolution:

- Jesus does want us to love all people.
- Because Jesus loves our families and us, he doesn't want anything to come between him and us.
- To hold on to Christ's love, we need to be ready to let go of anything that comes between him and us.

Lesson 10: Be Like Snakes!

Christians are to be truthful and to present the truth of God's Word clearly. So what, then, does Jesus mean when he calls us to be as shrewd as snakes? Is he saying we should be deceptive? Key points:

- Christians are to exercise shrewdness as we deal with the people of this world.
- Being shrewd does *not* mean Christians have a license to sin.
- Exercising shrewdness is all the more important because of the precious goals we are pursuing: the salvation of other souls.

Lesson 11: Pearls Before Swine and Bread to Dogs

Jesus tells us not to judge, yet he often seems to tell us just the opposite. Jesus himself seems to say some very judgmental things, like telling the Canaanite woman that she was a dog. The resolution:

- Even when Jesus seems harsh or disrespectful, he's acting in

love and to further the gospel's purpose.

- Though God clearly condemns hypocritical judging of others, he still calls Christians to use an honest, scriptural judgment out of love for God's Word and our fellow human beings.
- When God seems to be presenting a cold face to us, faith has the opportunity to hold him to his grace and to grow.

Lesson 12: Words From a Hard Place

This lesson discusses the seven last words of Christ from the cross. Some words seem to show God's love, while others seem to display God's anger. How can this be reconciled?

- Jesus' words from the cross bring us face-to-face with how terrible God's anger over sin is.
- Jesus' words from the cross bring us face-to-face with the love of God that's so deep, it's almost unbelievable!

Lesson 13: Hard Sayings—So That We Won't Hear?

God clearly tells us that he wants all people to be saved, yet Jesus said he spoke in parables so that some would not understand. Doesn't this seem like a contradiction? The resolution:

- God's chief purpose in sharing his Word is to lead people to faith.
- A secondary purpose of God's Word is to harden the hearts of persistent unbelievers.

Good deep discussions

I appreciate the opportunity this study gives to look at some challenging issues in Scripture. I would highly encourage that the book

be used in conjunction with the companion CD Study Guide. I'm quite certain that this study, used in a Bible Class setting, would lead to some good, deep discussions about the Bible, about translations, about principles of interpretation, about the Christian in culture, about justification and sanctification, as well as many other topics.

— Mark F. Bartels

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Book Review: Wittenberg vs. Geneva

Thomas, Brian W. *Wittenberg vs. Geneva: A Biblical Bout in 7 Rounds on the Doctrines that Divide*. Irvine: New Reformation Publications, 2016. 201 pages. \$15.95.

Several years back this reviewer had a visitor to his congregation who identified herself as Reformed. The tag "Reformed" is shorthand for many different denominations in our circles, but this person was actually Reformed: a member of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). Until coming into contact with the Wisconsin Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, she had no idea there were Lutherans who believed and taught from Scripture. That first meeting turned into several adult instruction classes with her and her husband (who had been confirmed in the ELCA). While there many areas of doctrinal agreement, there were also profound differences. However, by the work of the Holy Spirit through His Word, both she and her

husband eventually came forward to be confirmed in a confessional Lutheran church.

This reviewer was reminded of his encounters with Reformed theology when he opened to the first pages of Brian W. Thomas' new book, *Wittenberg vs. Geneva: A Biblical Bout in 7 Rounds on the Doctrines that Divide*. The goal of *Wittenberg vs. Geneva*, as Thomas puts it, is to "provide a biblical defense of the key doctrines that have divided Lutheran and Reformed churches for nearly five centuries" (xii). He fulfills that goal by providing a fun and spirited debate, letting Scripture determine the outcome of the "fight" with regard to seven key areas of doctrinal differences: atonement, predestination, sacramental theology in general, baptism, the Lord's Supper, Christology, and the perseverance of the saints. Thomas' strategy to keep the "fight" fair involves establishing some "Pre-fight Rules" pertaining to hermeneutical principles. The two governing principles in the debate are: (1) Scripture interprets Scripture (clear passages interpret unclear passages) and (2) the words of Scripture are interpreted according to their literal, or natural, sense (xiii).

Every chapter but one is based on an exegetical analysis of key Bible passages related to the topic in question. Thomas consistently and effectively arrives at the issue at hand and then brings Scripture to bear on that particular issue. Thomas also makes extensive use of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions. On the Reformed side, Thomas makes many references to Calvin's *Institutes*, along

with the Westminster Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. In addition to Reformation-era sources, Thomas also employs contemporary commentators and theologians from both sides of the debate, citing men like Sproul and Horton for the Reformed and Pieper and Scaer for Lutherans. He even refers to men of our fellowship such as Schaller and Hoenecke, and also has a couple of references to B. W. Teigen's popular work, *I Believe: A Study of the Formula of Concord* (19, 91).

Thomas exhibits great care with his sources, often letting them speak for themselves to avoid caricatures and misunderstandings of positions held by both sides. As a man who began his walk in the Christian faith in the Presbyterian Church and who now finds himself a pastor in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, he wants the debate to be fair. Thomas himself is not impartial, however. The book firmly embraces the doctrines of the faith as revealed in Holy Scripture. At the end of the book, Thomas closes with the encouragement that his readers follow the example of the Bereans: "May you receive the message with great eagerness and examine the Scriptures to see if what I have said is true" (159).

Thomas' reliance on Scripture to evaluate and compare Lutheran and Reformed dogma is admirable. In many cases, Thomas exposes the weakness of the Reformed doctrine as being *eisegesis* and not *exegesis*, revealing how in order to interpret a Bible passages a certain way, they must *read something into* the passage

instead of *drawing meaning out* of the passage.

Wittenberg vs. Geneva also works to bring lofty theological concepts to a level where biblically literate laymen can comprehend them. In his first chapter on the Lord's Supper, for example, Thomas walks the reader through the three *genera* of the communication of attributes of the two natures of Christ. In addition to defining each of the genera in plain English, he also uses illustrations. Regarding the *genus maiestaticum*, Thomas refers to the analogy of fire and iron found in the Formula of Concord to explain how divine attributes can be communicated to the human nature of Christ. He points out what happens when you put a piece of iron into a hot fire: "The essential attribute of the fire—its heat—is assumed by the iron, yet both maintain their distinct attributes as iron and fire without confusion. Moreover, this personal union is not merely a figure of speech as you can see the iron glowing red, and if you were to touch it, you would certainly be burned" (105).

Perhaps one doctrinal weakness exists in the area of biblical interpretation. The example in question is Thomas' usage of the account of Naaman's leprosy in 2 Kings 5. The prophet Elisha instructs Naaman to wash himself in the Jordan River seven times. At first he refuses to do so, but then, trusting the Word of the Lord, he washes and is cleansed. The example is used in connection with proving the efficacy of baptism as a washing that cleanses one from sins (74–75). Thomas is careful

to distinguish between Naaman's cleansing and the cleansing of the sacrament. However, one could come away with the impression that Naaman's cleansing is totally symbolic of the cleansing of baptism (another subtle form of *eisegesis*).

The strengths of *Wittenberg vs. Geneva* far outweigh the weaknesses, however. *Wittenberg vs. Geneva* crystallizes the differences between Lutherans and Calvinists and elucidates the biblical underpinnings of Lutheran doctrine. It is useful both for the pastor as well as the laity in gaining insight into the beliefs of those who come from a strict Calvinist background.

Again, the strength of the book in all these areas is its reliance on Scripture as the foundation for faith and understanding, reminding us why Lutherans are Lutheran in the first place. In a Q&A interview, author Brian Thomas states, "My last name is Thomas and I am of Welsh descent. I am a Lutheran because I earnestly believe that the Lutheran church is the most biblically faithful within Christendom." Lutheranism is not about an ethnic heritage which includes a shared love for lefse or bratwurst (or even, *gulf*, lutefisk). When one puts all the Garrison Keillor-esque stuff aside, hopefully Lutherans are Lutherans because of a shared love for the Word of God, and especially for the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

The book includes acknowledgments, an introduction, seven chapters and a postscript, addressing atonement, predestination, baptism, the Lord's Supper and the assurance

of salvation. Two chapters deal with the Lord's Supper, one addresses Christology and the other the promises of Christ regarding His presence and pardon in the Supper. Interestingly the book also contains

a new translation (by Thomas) of the Saxon Visitation Articles of 1592, along with an extensive bibliography and index of Scripture passages.

— S. Piet Van Kampen

LSQ



Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
6 Browns Court
Mankato MN 56001

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