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Contents

LSQ Vol. 56, No. 4 (December 2016)

Foreword

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

While the Apostle John states the purpose of the Gospel bearing his name in John 20:30–31, disagreement exists regarding the understanding of these verses. In the paper, "The Purpose of the Gospel of John According to John 20:30–31," Dr. Michael K. Smith reviews how these verses have been interpreted, evaluates these interpretations, and analyzes the verses themselves. Dr. Smith teaches New Testament studies at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota.

As pastors, we face a variety of situations, issues, and problems in our parishes. Taking the life-giving Word and applying it to these many situations, issues, and problems is a challenging task for the pastor as *Seelsorger*. With this in mind, and also considering the upcoming five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, it is worthwhile to consider the pastoral practices that were established and practiced in the Reformation—pastoral practices that remain established and are to be practiced among us still today. This is the point of the essay "Pastoral Care Today Drawn from Luther the *Seelsorger*" by the Rev. Luke Ulrich, pastor of Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Mankato, Minnesota.

The next essay provides an interesting and thorough presentation of the doctrine of *adiaphora*, which refers to things that are neither commanded nor prohibited in Holy Scripture. In this discussion, care must be taken so that the church is not led into legalism or indifference. In addition, this confessional truth must be maintained: Nothing is an *adiaphoron* when confession and offense are involved. The Rev. Christian Eisenbeis explores these important issues in his essay "We Are Free to Serve." Pastor Eisenbeis serves First Trinity Lutheran Church in Marinette, Wisconsin.

God hid Himself in the suffering and death of the cross so that we might know His love. In the *Heidelberg Disputation* Luther insists, "He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering…. God can be found only in suffering and the cross" (LW 31:53). This is the theology of the cross which is the heart and core of the Scripture, as St. Paul writes, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Luther explicates the biblical doctrine of the theology of the cross in the *Heidelberg Disputation*. The Rev. Robert Harting summarizes this important doctrine in his essay "Pastors of the Cross: A Review of the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 with Applications for the Pastor." The Rev. Robert Harting is pastor of Richland Lutheran Church in Thornton and Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Mason City, Iowa.

Most confessional Lutherans today are better acquainted with the history of the "Old Lutheran" immigrations and the history of midwestern Lutheranism than the history of Lutheranism in the eastern part of our country. The essay, "The American Recension of the Augsburg Confession and its Lessons for Our Pastors Today," gives the history of the struggle for confessional Lutheranism among eastern Lutherans. Individuals such as the Henkels and Charles Porterfield Krauth made a valiant stand for the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The writer of this essay is the Rev. David Jay Webber, who is pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Also included in this *Quarterly* a review of the book *All Glory to God*.

– GRS

Presidential Quotes From the Past

LSQ Vol. 56, No. 4 (December 2016)

TRUTH CANNOT BE COMPROMISED. AND WHY not? Because it is in its very nature unalterable. You may seek to get away from it by subterfuge, but you will only be led into blind alleys, whence there is no escape. Try to write the biography of that child begotten in 1917, and which fittingly bears the name "The Norwegian Lutheran Merger," and you will not have to go very far in the records before you discover its illegitimacy. To call H.A. Preus, J.A. Ottesen, and U.V. Koren your spiritual forebears, while you also want an Elling Eielsen, a C.L. Clausen, an F.A. Schmidt and a B.J. Muus to be listed in that category, will simply not do. You may erect massive monuments in honor of our sainted fathers and write glowing tributes in praise of their noble work, but it will be but a mockery to their very memory if their principles be trampled into the dust. LSQ

Excerpt from Norman A. Madson, "President's Message," *Synod Report* 1943:10.

The Purpose of the Gospel of John According to John 20:30–31

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OF THE FOUR CANONICAL GOSPELS OF THE NEW Testament, the Gospel "According to John" (KATA IΩANNHN) includes the clearest statement of its purpose: "Therefore many other signs Jesus did in the presence of [his] disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written in order that you may believe that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30–31).[1] Considering such an ostensibly clear statement, consensus on the precise purpose of John's Gospel does not seem to exist. This paper will seek to illuminate the topic of the purpose of John's Gospel according to John 20:30–31 by describing briefly some of the more important interpretations of this passage, analyzing the passage itself and a few other pertinent questions, and critically evaluating the interpretations given at the beginning of the paper.

Interpretations of John 20:30–31

As stated above, John 20:30–31 is interpreted in various ways.[2] D.A. Carson's initial interpretation of these verses focuses on two key elements: the tense of πιστεύ[σ]ητε (aorist or present [subjunctive]), and the subject of the final clause (Jesus or Christ). He states that those who

[1] Author's translation.

[2] For a cogent summary of the history of the interpretation of the purpose of John's Gospel in the twentieth century, see D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 268–273.

believe the textual evidence points to the aorist subjunctive infer a more evangelistic tone for the Gospel, i.e., "that you may [*come* to] believe," the intended recipients of the Gospel therefore being unbelievers. Those who side with the present subjunctive lean toward an understanding that the Gospel was intended for believers, since the verse would read "in order that you may [*continue* to] believe."[3] Carson does not believe that such focus on the tense is determinative in arriving at the meaning of this verse, however. He prefers to examine precisely the subject of the ὅτι clause. Drawing primarily on the work of Lane C. McGaughy,[4] Carson believes that the subject of the clause is ὁ χριστός instead of Ἰησοῦς and thus the initial ἵνα clause should be translated, "in order that you may believe that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus."[5] Because the question behind that answer would be "Who is the Christ?" instead of "Who is Jesus?" John's Gospel is intended for non-Christian Jews, as opposed to non-Christians in general who would need to know who Jesus truly was.[6]

In an article published eighteen years later, Carson shifts his assessment of these verses slightly by acknowledging his preference for the present subjunctive (πιστεύητε) as the original reading.[7] However, he does not believe that anything substantive regarding John's purpose can be gleaned from this since John uses both the present and aorist subjunctives in his Gospel to apply to believers and unbelievers alike.[8] In opposition to Gordon D. Fee he maintains the translation of the ὅτι clause in which "the Christ" is the subject instead of "Jesus."[9]

This latter article by Carson was written primarily in response to Fee's criticism of Carson's previous article. Fee argues quite strongly that the lacuna of P^{66} involving πιστεύ[σ]ητε points to the use of the present subjunctive and that the use of this tense is meaningful.[10] The meaning he derives from John's use of the present subjunctive is that the Gospel

[3] D.A. Carson, "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:31 Reconsidered," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106, no. 4 (1987): 640 (italics added).

[4] *A Descriptive Analysis of EINAI,* Society of Biblical Literature, Dissertation Series, Number Six (Missoula, Montana: University of Montana, 1972).

[5] Carson, 643.

[6] Ibid., 645.

[7] Carson, "Syntactical and Text-Critical Observations on John 20:30–31: One More Round on the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124, no. 4 (2005): 700.

[8] Ibid., 708.

[9] Ibid., 712.

[10] Gordon D. Fee, "On the Text and Meaning of Jn 20:30–31," *The Four Gospels 1992: Festscrift Frans Neirynck*, vol. 3 (Louvain: Peeters, 1992), 2195, 2199ff.

was directed toward believers and not unbelievers. He sees "the Gospel as making most sense as having been produced within, and for the sake of, a believing community that stands over against forces from within and without, with the meaning and significance of Jesus as the central point at issue."[11]

Andreas J. Köstenberger highlights the importance of the destruction of the second temple as background when considering the purpose of John's Gospel. Köstenberger maintains that John wrote in part to promote Jesus as the replacement of the temple, making him the new center of worship. Thus John wrote primarily to Jewish Christians to urge them to shift their attention and allegiance to Jesus as their Messiah.[12] Köstenberger is another who prefers the rendering "the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus" at the end of John 20:31.[13]

Keeping in mind the immediate context of Thomas' confession of Jesus as Lord, Craig S. Keener posits that the purpose of John's Gospel is stated so succinctly by John in 20:30–31 that it might be easy to overlook: to elicit faith. "John is calling his audience to a full confession of resurrection faith: Jesus is God in the flesh, and therefore his claims cannot be compromised, for synagogue or for Caesar. John will settle for no faith less secure than this."[14] Keener lays emphasis also, therefore, on how John is seeking faith that perseveres, or genuine discipleship.[15]

J.A.T. Robinson highlights the intra-Jewish struggles featured in the Gospel of John and believes such a focus aids in determining how one should interpret John 20:30–31. These struggles are primarily between the Judean Jews and the Diaspora Jews. That John 20:31 states in part "that you may believe" is in keeping with how almost every intra-Jewish struggle featured in the Gospel ends on a similar note. John presents Jesus as the one who will gather together his one flock under him alone as their shepherd.[16]

In seeking to arrive at the purpose of John's Gospel, Tom Thatcher builds a case for why John *wrote* his Gospel which then assists the

[11] Ibid., 2205.

[12] Andreas J. Köstenberger, "The Destruction of the Second Temple and the Composition of the Fourth Gospel," *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John*, ed. John Lierman (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 107–108.

[13] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 582.

[14] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 1216.

[15] Ibid.

[16] J.A.T. Robinson, "The Destination and Purpose of St. John's Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 6, no. 2 (January 1960): 125–127.

understanding of John 20:30–31.[17] He places the writing of John's Gospel in a period of strong opposition to the true message about Jesus, this opposition arising from many "AntiChrists" who sought to promote a different "memory" of Jesus. In order to prevent such disputation of the truth, John recorded his Gospel and thereby limited discussion of Jesus' teachings and life to the written word. Thus John 20:30–31 should be understood to demonstrate that the Fourth Gospel was written for believers so that they could continue in the one true faith in Christ Jesus.[18]

R.C.H. Lenski does not dwell at length on the textual variant πιστεύ[σ]ητε in his interpretation of these verses. Rather, he emphasizes the all-inclusive nature of the σημεῖα which John mentions and how they relate to the purpose of his Gospel. These "signs" indicate not only Jesus' miracles but all his significant actions. John's selection of these signs was quite particular, since he intended them to bring about faith in Jesus: to "produce faith in those who are not believers" and to "confirm faith in those who believe."[19] Thus Lenski would include both an evangelistic and a confirmatory purpose of John's Gospel.

Analysis of John 20:30–31

A very literal translation (more literal than above) of John 20:30–31 is as follows:

(30) Therefore (on the one hand) many and other signs Jesus did in the presence/sight of [his] disciples, which are not written in this book;

(31) (on the other hand) these have been written in order that you (pl) may believe that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Verse 30

John begins the conclusion[20] of his Gospel with οὖν, which draws an inference most immediately from Jesus' statement to Thomas' response

[17] *Why John Wrote a Gospel: Jesus—Memory—History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

[18] Ibid., 157ff.

[19] R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 1394–1396.

[20] Keener explains well that "ancient writers did not need to stop writing after a conclusion even if it adequately summarized what had preceded … and writers were perfectly capable of composing their own anticlimactic epilogues without needing redactors to add such appendices for them. … But 20:30–31 functions not only as the close of the resurrection narratives but as the close of the body of the Gospel itself, to be followed by its epilogue" (1213).

of faith when he beheld the resurrected Christ. Jesus pronounced a blessing on anyone who believes in him *without* seeing him physically/bodily, and John proceeds to show that such a faith is the goal of his record of Jesus' signs. Just as there were those who believed in Jesus without seeing him physically, so also those who read John's record well after the risen Jesus appeared bodily might very well believe.

The μὲν … δέ should not be overlooked completely but need not be emphasized to a large degree. With this construction John provides a tidy framework of his purpose statement, since the μὲν … δέ demonstrates a nice balance between verse 30 and 31.[21]

The σημεῖα which are the focus of verse 30 are modified by πολλά and ἄλλα. These adjectives indicate John is well aware that his record of Jesus' activity is far from comprehensive; not only does he know of additional signs because he was an eyewitness of Jesus' earthly ministry, "many and other" may also very well show that John is acquainted with the existing written records of Jesus' life and teachings, namely, the other (synoptic) Gospels. Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. AD 350–428) states:

> With these words the evangelist shows that there were countless signs the Savior performed before the disciples. In addition, he testifies that the words of the Gospels are true, namely, those scattered accounts composed accurately by the other [Evangelists] but were omitted by him. With his words here he demonstrates that he did not report those words without any polemical intention, but he shows that the words of the other [Evangelists] are true and sufficient for the one who comes in faith and considers, reads and understands them.[22]

What precisely are the σημεῖα which John holds forth as worthy of producing faith? This descriptor of Jesus' work is preferred by John in comparison to the Synoptists and is most likely used by him to emphasize the meaning behind the miracle.[23] It is differentiated from two other common words used to describe Jesus' miracles, δύναμις and τέρας. Δύναμις emphasizes more the *power* demonstrated by Jesus when

[21] D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 661.

[22] Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, New Testament vol. IVb, John 11–21 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 375. Also, see Keener (1214–1215) for a comprehensive description of this somewhat hyperbolic rhetorical device in other ancient writers.

[23] W.H. Griffith Thomas, "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125, no. 499 (July 1968): 255.

he worked a miracle, power that was inherent in him as the God-man. Τέρας brings to the fore the *reaction* of the witnesses of Jesus' miracles, that they were struck with awe and wonder. The nuance of σημεῖον is that it shifts the focus outside of itself; in this case, it points to something greater and better.[24] Since Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, especially the promises of God sending his Messiah, John's use of this word to describe Jesus' miraculous works is quite appropriate: he wants his readers to consider these σημεῖα and be brought to faith in Jesus as the fulfillment of the promise of eternal salvation. These signs John describes *attest* to Jesus' true identity.

The next noteworthy phrase in verse 30 is ἐνώπιον τῶν μαθητῶν [αὐτοῦ]. It is true that Jesus performed miracles in the presence of those who may or may not have believed in him, such as the changing of water to wine at Cana (John 2) and the feeding of the 5000 (John 6). The witnesses John specifies here are those who were his constant companions, those who were in the locked room when he appeared also to Thomas, those who could claim to have "touched [Jesus] with our hands" (1 John 1:1); namely, the Twelve.[25] These men were those whom Jesus had taught specifically for three years so that they could be well qualified to serve as his witnesses after his ascension (Acts 1:8). They are also aptly designated as his apostles (Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13), because they would be the ones "sent out" by Jesus to carry on the work of his kingdom. It was vital for Jesus' plan of spreading the message of eternal salvation to the whole world (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 1:8) that the carriers of this message be firmly convinced of Jesus' identity; the signs they witnessed provided that level of conviction.

John concludes verse 30 with a relative clause whose antecedent is σημεῖα: ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ. This clause adds specificity to the fact that the signs are ἄλλα; there are more about which John could have written.[26] John's use of the perfect participle of γράφω may very well indicate that John knew he was writing Scripture, since he uses the perfect tense to refer to Scripture in 2:17; 6:31, 45; 8:17; 10:34; 12:14, 16; and 15:25.[27] It should be noted also that John modifies βιβλίῳ with τούτῳ. This may be taken to emphasize either the distinction between John's written record and the written records of others (such as

[24] *God's Word to the Nations: New Testament* (Cleveland: Biblion Publishing, 1989), Appendix 2.B., 528–530.

[25] This is not to exclude the two candidates for Judas' replacement noted in Acts 1:23.

[26] This is a point which he elucidates in John 21:25.

[27] Keener, 1215.

the Synoptists),[28] or that the signs to which he refers are not limited to those recorded in his account of Jesus' resurrection, but those recorded in his entire Gospel.

Verse 31

John's sentence continues with the adversative δέ. As noted above, this announces the completion of the framework which John began with μέν in the previous verse. It brings to light the contrast between what John had *not* written and what he had. Ταῦτα stands in contra-distinction to the foregoing relative clause and rounds out the contrast John wishes to express. In line with the comments above concerning the perfect tense of γράφω, John indicates clearly that the signs he has recorded are more than noteworthy.

The all-important purpose clause gives the first reason why John recorded his set of signs: "in order that you may believe." John's initial purpose of his Gospel could therefore be summarized in one word: faith.[29] (Faith/belief in *what* is explicated below.) John desires that his readers examine the signs of Jesus he has presented, with the accompanying teachings, and be brought to believe. Unfortunately in some ways, a textual variant at the beginning of this ἵνα clause provides seemingly endless fodder for debate which may detract from John's clear statement.

The textual variant involves one letter: is the original reading πιστεύητε (present active subjunctive) or πιστεύσητε (aorist active subjunctive)? The editors of the UBS text give preference to neither reading (giving the present tense a "C" rating), but still include the sigma in brackets.[30] In part, this variant receives so much attention because of its supposed effect on understanding the recipients of the Fourth Gospel. That is, if the present subjunctive is the correct reading, the nuanced rendering might be "that you may *continue* to believe," implying an intended audience of believers whose faith John wishes to be strengthened. If the aorist subjunctive is the correct reading, the nuanced rendering might be "that you may *come to* believe," implying an

[28] Lenski, 1395.

[29] Thomas points out that John uses πιστεύω ninety-eight times in his Gospel but never the word πίστις (260).

[30] Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 219–220.

audience of unbelievers. The question is then asked, "Is John's Gospel apologetic or evangelistic?"[31]

The protracted (primarily by means of time) dialogue between D.A. Carson and Gordon Fee concerning this variant and its implications is worth noting. In an article published in 1987, Carson briefly lists the textual evidence for each reading and states that most of the commentators of his day opt for the present subjunctive. He continues by suggesting that the meaning of the purpose clause is not determined by the variant, and puts forth as evidence similar uses of the subjunctive of πιστεύω in John's Gospel (11:15; 4:48; 6:29) which show that "both the present subjunctive and the aorist subjunctive can occur both in the context of coming to faith and in the context of continuing in faith."[32] Five years hence Gordon Fee provides (in part) a rebuttal of Carson's opinions concerning the proper reading of the text and its import. In detailed fashion Fee presents the manuscript evidence for each reading, focusing primarily on the lacuna of P^{66}. The proper reading of P^{66} has a bearing on the debate because it dates to the late second century in Egypt. Along with the Egyptian manuscripts ℵ and B, the evidence for the present subjunctive is quite strong, Fee believes.[33] In addition, he maintains that John's use of the present subjunctive is intentional and meaningful. After examining each of the uses of ἵνα clauses with πιστεύειν, Fee concludes that the present subjunctive in the initial ἵνα clause in John 20:31 shows that John intended his Gospel for believers.[34]

Thirteen years pass before Carson responds to Fee's article. In his initial article, Carson had not dwelt so much on the debate concerning the present or aorist subjunctive since neither could be conclusively shown to be the correct reading and since neither had primary significance in determining the purpose of John's Gospel.[35] Even so, in 2005 Carson defers to Fee's conclusion that the present subjunctive is the

[31] For example, see Keener, 1215; Carson, *John*, 661; Köstenberger, 582; A. Wind, "Destination and Purpose of the Gospel of John," *Novum Testamentum* 14, no. 1 (January 1972): 27; and Won-Ha Hwang, "The Identity of the Recipients of the Fourth Gospel in the Light of the Purpose of the Gospel," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 63, no. 2 (June 2007): 695.

[32] D.A. Carson, "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20:31 Reconsidered," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106, no. 4 (1987): 640.

[33] Fee, 2194–2195.

[34] Ibid., 2205.

[35] The matter which, for Carson, *does* have significance in determining the purpose of the Gospel will be explained below.

original reading, but does not share Fee's enthusiasm for the significance thereof in determining the purpose of the Gospel.[36]

Fee presents a cogent and sufficient argument for the present subjunctive as the original reading. Even so, it is best to echo Carson's caution in inferring too much from the tense alone. In the context of the Gospel as a whole, aiming at continuance of faith is a viable option. As Keener notes, "Throughout the Gospel, many people become initial believers, but their initial faith proves insignificant without perseverance (2:23–25; 8:30, 59). John's goal is not simply initial faith but persevering faith, discipleship (8:30–32; 15:4–7). John's purpose is to address believers at a lesser stage of discipleship and to invite them to persevere as true disciples."[37]

With a ὅτι clause John explains the content of the desired faith: ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ. Even though the vocabulary of this clause is not difficult to understand, reaching consensus on the most accurate translation of the clause is not necessarily straightforward. The majority of translations in English effectively render this clause, "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." In his 1987 article, however, Carson argues that this clause should be more accurately rendered, "that the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus."[38] His argument is based on the work of McGaughy, who studied all the uses of εἶναι in the New Testament and arrived at a set of rules for determining the subject of the sentence/clause. One of the rules states, "The word or word cluster determined by the article is the subject."[39] According to this rule, in the clause under consideration ὁ χριστός should be the subject. However, Carson points out that McGaughy notes five exceptions to his rule, including John 20:31, which are all Christological statements. Thus McGaughy believes that the anarthrous "Jesus" in these instances is the subject.[40] Carson, drawing on the work of E. Goetchius,[41] does not recognize these instances as exceptions. Rather, he submits that ὁ χριστός in the clause in John 20:31 should be considered the subject, giving a translation of "the Christ, the Son of God, is Jesus." He postulates that the question this

[36] Carson, "Syntactical and Text-Critical Observations on John 20:30–31: One More Round on the Purpose of the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124, no. 4 (2005): 697, 701.

[37] Keener, 1216.

[38] Carson, "Purpose," 643.

[39] Ibid., 642.

[40] Ibid., 643.

[41] He cites the reference as E.V.N. Goetchius, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 147–149, and states that this was a review of McGaughy's book.

clause answers was, "Who is the Messiah/Son of God?" not "Who is Jesus?"[42] Thus Carson believes that John's Gospel targeted "unconverted Jews, along with proselytes and God-fearers, for the category 'Messiah' was important to them, and the concern to identify him would be of great interest."[43] He maintains that the Fourth Gospel was therefore evangelistic in nature.

John continues by explicating the ultimate purpose of his selective written record of Jesus' signs with an additional ἵνα clause: καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ. This clause describes what John desires for his readers and also the means by which it might be made their possession. He makes use of a present participle, πιστεύοντες, adverbially and circumstantially to describe how his readers attain life ("by believing"). The present participle indicates that such believing is concurrent with the readers' possession of life. John also emphasizes that those of his readers who are brought to faith are already possessors of life since he uses the present subjunctive ἔχητε.[44] Life is not a goal or merely something that the believer can anticipate having in the future, distant or otherwise. Ζωή is the same life which plays so prominent a role in John 3:16, namely, eternal life. This same life John connects to Jesus by using the prepositional phrase ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ. John has thus come full circle from where he began in his prologue where he connects ζωή to Jesus (John 1:4) and connects belief/faith to Jesus' name (1:12). The ὄνομα of Jesus "is the revelation which brings Jesus to us as the Christ, the Son of God, so that we may know and embrace him by faith. The ὄνομα is the one and only means. … The entire Gospel of John, yea, the entire gospel as such, is nothing other than 'His NAME.'"[45]

Returning briefly to a consideration of the intended recipients of this Gospel: it is best to conclude that even if John had specific people in mind when he penned his words, such as Jews or those at least acquainted with the Old Testament, his Gospel has applicability to believers and unbelievers alike.[46] Whether his readers are brought to faith or strengthened in their faith in the God-man, Jesus, is somewhat immaterial. What matters is the effect the Gospel has on the individual reader.

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[42] Carson, "Purpose," 643–644. In "Syntactical," Carson holds to the same view. Köstenberger (*John*, 582) agrees with Carson's assessment.

[43] Carson, *John*, 662.

[44] Lenski, 1398.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Köstenberger, *John*, 582.

Evaluation of Interpretations

What can be said about the interpretations of these two verses of John's Gospel sketched at the beginning of this paper? While Carson concerns himself quite a bit with the textual variant in the purpose clause of John 20:31,[47] he does so because so many others make the original reading determinative for the intended recipients and, therefore, the purpose of the Gospel. While many commentators who believe the present subjunctive is the original reading see John's purpose as trying to strengthen the faith of believers, Carson believes that the present subjunctive is the original reading but sees the purpose of John's Gospel as evangelistic.[48] His conclusions regarding the precise translation of the ὅτι clause, while seemingly not shared by many commentators nor English translations, are well-constructed and supported.[49]

Fee's focus on these verses is slightly myopic in that he spilled much ink arguing for the originality of the present subjunctive in the initial ἵνα clause of verse 31. While he makes a convincing argument for πιστεύητε, his conclusions regarding John's concentration on the significance of Jesus seem overshadowed.[50]

The approach taken by Köstenberger regarding the importance of the destruction of the second temple as background for John's Gospel probably dovetails with Carson's conclusions to an extent in that both see John's audience as primarily Jewish. His reasons for preferring the same translation as Carson of the ὅτι clause of John 20:31 are unclear.[51] Additional argumentation for such would be beneficial.

Keener's understanding of the purpose of John's Gospel according to John 20:30–31 is succinct and uncluttered. He stresses aptly that the tense of the subjunctive (πιστεύ[σ]ητε) does not settle questions regarding the Gospel's purpose, but that the evidence of the Gospel as a whole must be considered. While he prefers to view the intended audience of the Fourth Gospel as believers, Keener perceives that this was

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[47] This is in reference primarily to the two articles cited, not his commentary.

[48] Carson, *John*, 662.

[49] Daniel B. Wallace (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996], 46) disagrees with Carson's analysis and concludes that there is no grammatical argument to support John's Gospel being written primarily to a Jewish audience.

[50] To be fair to Fee, he does state in regard to his preference for the present subjunctive, "Such a conclusion does not mean that one has thereby solved the issue of purpose for this Gospel …" (2205).

[51] He simply states, "Moreover, the emphasis here probably lies on identifying the Messiah as Jesus rather than Jesus as Messiah …" (*John*, 582).

a way for the Gospel to be brought to unbelievers: "From the perspective of marketing strategies, the intrinsic probabilities favor a primary audience of believers."[52] This approach carries certain appeal since it corresponds well to the whole of Scripture.

Robinson makes a relatively strong argument for John's Gospel being written with a Jewish audience in mind, with the added wrinkle that struggles between the Judean and Diasporan Jews were in the foreground. He may be overstating his case slightly when he says that in John's Gospel, "Jesus is not presented as a revelation to the Gentiles," and he thereafter discounts the account of the Samaritan woman (since she claimed the same "father Jacob") and the healing of the centurion's servant (who was supposedly a Herodian).[53] Yet Robinson marshals enough evidence from the Fourth Gospel to substantiate his case, and draws attention to the division of apostolic labor cited by Paul in Galatians 2:9 where John is listed among those who were to go to the "circumcised."[54]

The interpretation of John 20:30–31 that Thatcher posits is tied directly to his thesis concerning why John would bother to *write* his Gospel while living in an illiterate culture which relied on memory for passing on truths and traditions. His emphasis on the apologetic nature of John's Gospel might be somewhat too strong, since such a nature is predicated on the existence of the false teachers which John so clearly battles in his epistles. However, Thatcher argues well for at least part of John's purpose being to limit the debate concerning what Jesus truly said and did.

Lenski's approach to the purpose of the Fourth Gospel according to John 20:30–31 is relatively balanced in a way similar to Carson's and Keener's: John wrote his Gospel to produce faith in both believers and unbelievers. Such an approach is appreciated since it emphasizes the timeless and universal nature of the gospel message: that the purpose of the incarnation of the Son of God is to bring eternal life to everyone, both Jew and Gentile.

Conclusion

By definition, a "gospel" is good news. The Apostle John makes clear at the end of his 20th chapter of his gospel that the "news" he has presented is intended to bring about the ultimate good: eternal

[52] Keener, 1216.
[53] Robinson, 120.
[54] Ibid., 126.

life for those who believe in Christ Jesus. Regardless of the tense of πιστεύ[σ]ητε, John's purpose is to bring about faith. Regardless of the original intended audience, John's message has universal and timeless applicability. Regardless of the subject of the ὅτι clause, John's purpose is to show that eternal life comes about through Christ. This is the good news; this is the Gospel according to John. LSQ

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Pastoral Care Today Drawn from Luther the Seelsorger

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PASTORS FACE A VARIETY OF SITUATIONS, ISSUES, and problems in their parishes. How they take theology and apply it to their people in these many situations, issues, and problems is a challenging task! Yet it is a task that must be valued and taken seriously. In practical, pastoral theology the "rubber hits the road." Pastors and *Seelsorger* take God's Word and deliver its life-changing message to the people.

With the fast-approaching 500th anniversary of the Reformation and with a renewed zeal to study Martin Luther and Reformation history, this paper takes the opportunity to look at the practical, pastoral theology of Martin Luther. While taking a historical look at Luther and his pastoral practices, we find much value for ourselves—ever-timely things that we can take and apply to our own ministries.

First we will discuss the ways in which Luther qualifies as a "pastor" and more importantly, a "*Seelsorger*." Secondly, we will consider the devotional life that, as Luther explained, formed him as a pastor and *Seelsorger*, while being encouraged to make this devotional life our own. Finally, based primarily upon *Luther's Letters of Spiritual Counsel* and other selected writings from Luther, we will identify various aspects of his pastoral care while considering how pastors today might emphasize them as well.

1. Luther the *Seelsorger*: Possessing a Pastoral Heart

Martin Luther was "a man of all seasons"—"a Renaissance man" of sorts. One can quickly name many of his vocations. There was Luther the theologian, the reformer, the professor, the preacher, the translator, the family man, the musician and hymn-writer, and many others of which we could make note. It is mind-boggling to consider the massive output of work that Luther produced. He was clearly a gifted individual. Gifted with a remarkable memory, Luther had no problem quoting large sections of the Old and New Testaments. He was also gifted with an extensive knowledge of the classics and the writings of the Church Fathers, as well as a keen understanding of his own culture and society. Luther had an incredible amount of data from which to draw when writing and preaching, giving him the ability to write with great speed and fluidity as well as giving him the skills to debate and sermonize. Because of these skills Luther was almost constantly producing work to be sent to Hans Lufft's print shop, which would be immediately printed, distributed, and consumed by the people, resulting in more questions and letters being delivered to Luther, which would necessitate more responses from him.[1] These skills contributed to the timeliness and viral nature of his work, but it also meant that Luther was constantly engaged with work.

Obviously Luther was quite busy with the many hats he wore. With so many other things going on in Luther's life (as mentioned above), rarely is he considered and discussed as a "pastor"—and technically speaking, he never was. Martin Luther was ordained a priest in 1505, though he explains that his original task was to serve as a "Mass Priest" or "Sacrificer," conducting masses (often, private masses for money, as was the custom in the Roman Catholic Church).[2] Starting in 1512 he was appointed a "Subprior" in the monastery, which included a level of pastoral oversight of the other monks, and he also took on the duty of preaching to them. Luther then became the assistant to the sickly pastor of St. Mary's, the city church in Wittenberg, in 1514, a position that he kept until his death in 1546. Yet, Luther was not a "pastor" in the strict sense, for he never held the divine call of "pastor."[3] This was the call held, of course (starting in 1523), by Johannes Bugenhagen.

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[1] E.G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 578.

[2] LW 54:156.

[3] Schwiebert, 620. Luther had written to distinguish between the priesthood of all believers and the office of the ministry: "If, therefore, we know of a pious man, we select

Though never labeling himself to be "the pastor," Luther was constantly participating in the Public Ministry of the Word. He was preaching, teaching, and professing the Word of God. He was providing spiritual counsel and advice to many who approached him for his expertise. One might also point out that Luther was spiritually overseeing a rather sizeable group of people (in a sense, a "congregation," consisting of immediate family, relatives, students, even strangers and enemies) who were staying in Luther's home, the Black Cloister. Whenever Bugenhagen left town, Luther, as the assistant to the pastor, would readily serve in his place, assuming the pastoral office and its duties as a substitute. It should also be noted that during times of distress Luther assisted Bugenhagen in other aspects of the Public Ministry. For instance, when the bubonic plague hit Wittenberg in the summer months of 1527, Luther assisted in visiting the sick and dying to offer these afflicted people the comfort of the Gospel. Especially in these times of great distress, as people faced affliction and hardship, Luther demonstrated that he clearly understood what was involved in the close, personal relationship between a pastor and his flock, and he served these people with comfort and counsel that could only come from one who knew and loved the Gospel and possessed a pastoral heart.

It is clear that Luther possessed a pastoral heart. He was, without question, a *Seelsorger,* that is a "caretaker," or "curate," or "shepherd of souls." Though personally dealing with issues of major *gravitas*—that he must have known and realized (at least to some extent) would impact the course of world history—Luther made time to counsel and interact with the common folk as well. He spent his time not only dealing with princes, kings, and important theologians, but also with the Wittenberg townspeople. Luther was happy to discuss current events with his students during free moments after supper, or to write letters on behalf of wronged peasants, or even to intercede for love-sick young people whose parents might be disapproving of their proposed spouse. It made no difference to Luther if the person was of high esteem or low, he understood there was a soul in need of God's grace and it was his duty not only as a neighbor but as a participant of the public ministry to care for them.

Good and proper pastoral care was of the utmost concern to Martin Luther. One may rightly contend that the event that birthed

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him; and on the basis of the Word which we possess, we give him the full authority of preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments." This was the office to which Johannes Bugenhagen was appointed in 1523.

the Reformation was driven primarily by pastoral concern for the common people. Luther's nailing of the 95 Theses to the Castle Church door demonstrates a loving concern for the laity who were suffering the abuses of a corrupt Roman Catholic Church. Certainly, the content of his 95 Theses speaks for and speaks to the common people concerning the errors and abuses especially of corrupt clergy and concerning the sale of indulgences, but it is also important to consider the placement and timing of the 95 Theses. They were nailed to the Castle Church door on the day before many of the common townsfolk and also pilgrims would walk past that very spot in order to partake in the All Saints' Day veneration of Elector Frederick's vast collection of relics and to obtain a special indulgence. Certainly Luther was intending to begin a dialog concerning the many abuses within the church with church leaders and theologians, but he was also purposefully, conscientiously involving the common people who were being misled. Again, Luther's desire was to love and help his neighbor, and it did not matter whether that neighbor was of high or low esteem. Each individual was a soul in need of God's grace—a top concern for one possessing a pastoral heart.[4]

Luther's pastoral heart and his genuine desire to be a *Seelsorger* would make a great impact upon future generations of pastors, emphasizing that they too were to be *Seelsorger.* From very early on he was considered to be the preeminent pastor—one whose pastoral approach should be emulated. In fact one of the first textbooks of pastoral theology within Lutheranism was put together by Conrad Porta (1541–84); *Pastorale Lutheri* was published in 1582 in Eisleben where he was serving as pastor. The full title of the book explains its true purpose: *A Pastoral Book of Luther: That Is, Helpful and Necessary Instruction Belonging to the Most Important Parts of the Holy Ministry and Correct Answers to Some Important Questions about Difficult Cases That May Occur in the Aforesaid Office. For Beginning Preachers and Church Ministers Collected from Both Editions of All of His Books Printed in Wittenberg and Jena, and Also from*

[4] Luther's concern for ministering to the common people is also reflected in his work on translating the Bible into the vernacular of the people. The work to which he dedicated himself at the Wartburg Castle was for the people, even though he was absent from them during that time. His writings concerning the priesthood of all believers and on the doctrine of vocation also demonstrate his love and concern for the common people. His *Small Catechism* was specifically for the common people who had become completely ignorant of basic Christian doctrine. Also of special note: when Luther died in Eisleben on February 18, 1546, he was there in order to settle a dispute between feuding noblemen of Mansfeld. His final trip was made for the purpose of a pastoral act.

the One in Eisleben and from Other Writings.[5] Apparently, the W.W.L.D. movement ("What Would Luther Do?") has been around for quite some time.

We understand that Luther is not perfect. He had his own failings and foibles that can be rightly criticized. We also can see that there is a legitimate "culture gap" between the pastoral approach taken by a 16th-century clergyman and by those seeking to be *Seelsorger* today.[6] But just as there was a desire to study Luther's own pastoral practices even in 1582—which were compiled in order to help aid Lutheran pastors—there is still great value for pastors today to consider Luther's practical, pastoral theology, in order to aid them in their goal of likewise becoming more dedicated *Seelsorger* who possess genuine pastoral hearts.

Throughout the generations the primary place to find Luther's practical, pastoral theology has been in compilations and collections of his letters of spiritual advice and counsel. These collections, which have been reworked and republished by nearly every generation, reflect "the problems and tastes of the age as well as the interests of the compiler … [and have been] regarded as authoritative and were cited as such in Protestant works of casuistry and manuals for clergymen."[7] There are about 3000 extant letters of Luther, with many more having been lost. Also beneficial to consider, when one desires to review Luther's pastoral practices, are his table talks and other devotional writings. Practically speaking, for English-speaking pastors, the most readily

[5] Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2009), 2–3. Porta's compilation has not been translated into English.

[6] Certainly this does not imply that we are more "enlightened" or that we are interpreting Scripture differently than Luther did, but rather the sentiments, sensitivities, and humor of the people have changed a considerable bit in 500 years. For instance, modern manners and tact would discourage a pastor from counselling a grieving family whose child was stillborn or miscarried by telling her she can have more children—yet, this is an approach that Luther had taken as he counselled those who had lost children (*Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel,* 66–67).

[7] Theodore G. Tappert, ed. and trans., *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel,* vol. XVIII, *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 22. (Hereafter abbreviated "LLSC.") It is remarkable how timely Luther's counsel and advice is even for our current issues and questions. It is difficult not to start plugging in our current events as Luther discusses how Christians should react and function in various situations. For instance, Luther's discussions about the relationship between the two kingdoms and where Christians distinguish between civil affairs and spiritual affairs seems especially timely when considering HHS Mandates, RFRA Laws, the rights of bakers in Colorado and pizzerias in Indiana to discriminate, and the Kentucky clerk, Kim Davis, who on the basis of her Christian faith refuses to issue wedding licenses to same-sex couples.

available resources include *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, edited and translated by Theodore G. Tappert, as well as *Luther's Works*: *Devotional Writings I & II* (Volumes 42 and 43). There are other helpful volumes in the American Edition of *Luther's Works* in this regard as well. By looking at Luther's letters and other devotional writings we now seek to characterize the counsel and advice that Luther offers and apply it to our own ministries today.

2. What formed Luther still forms pastors today

A pastor's personal devotional life will shape his work and ministry. Practically speaking, as the pastor visits his people, prepares sermons, or carries out other pastoral acts, the influence of how he prays, what he has been reading and meditating upon, and also his own personal stress and trials will be reflected in his interactions with his flock. Certainly this was also the case for Luther. In fact, these devotional aspects of Luther's personal life are what he points to as he describes his own self-development as a theologian and *Seelsorger*. Luther also promotes these devotional aspects of a pastor's life for anyone else who desires to be a theologian and more importantly, a *Seelsorger*!

The traditional formula that Luther would have been taught as a monk to become a good theologian and pastor was a deliberate and planned pattern of meditation and prayer. Through such work the individual was trying to achieve a "rapture" or "ecstasy"—resulting in a spiritually enlightened heart—bringing about a "mystical union" between the believer and God. This practice of spirituality was described by four terms: reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation.[8] Luther, having utterly failed in his attempts to achieve such spiritual illumination, realized that it was not a person's own work and effort that brought him into a union with God; it was instead the work of God (as Luther and all Lutherans would confess in his explanation to the 3rd Article of the Creed: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Ghost has …"). Luther understood that this also applied to those in the public ministry. They are not making themselves into theologians and *Seelsorger*. Instead, this was God's work: forming, making, and training the workers in His vineyard through (as Luther saw it) *oratio, meditatio,* and *tentatio*.

[8] John W. Kleinig, "Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio: What Makes A Theologian?" *Concordia Theological Quarterly,* 66, no. 3 (2002)*:* 257. Note: We also understand that there is a proper way of speaking about a "mystical union"—where Christians have a close relationship with God. However we understand this is a relationship brought about through the work of God, not by man or by man's efforts.

Luther outlines these aspects of a *Seelsorger's* spiritual, devotional life in the "Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings" of 1539. We will briefly consider them and see that they still are necessary and formative for *Seelsorger* today.

Oratio—Prayer

Luther writes, "Firstly… kneel down in your little room [Matt. 6:6] and pray to God with real humility and earnestness, that He through His dear Son may give you His Holy Spirit, who will enlighten you, lead you, and give you understanding [of the Holy Scriptures]."[9] Before one dives into Scripture, it is important to recognize who the real teacher of Scripture is. God's Word must be taught by God Himself, as Luther explains, "See how David [in Psalm 119] … wants to lay hold of the real teacher of the Scriptures Himself, so that he may not seize upon them pell-mell with his reason and become his own teacher. For such practice gives rise to factious spirits who allow themselves to nurture the delusion that the Scriptures are subject to them and can be easily grasped with their reason."[10]

The *oratio* that Luther speaks of and promotes is a prayer of humility before God. It is a prayer that acknowledges both the inability of the man and the power of God. Obviously, such a prayer has no works-righteous emphasis to it. That was the old system that Luther rejected. Instead of achieving the "mystical union" by one's own means, those who practice Luther's *oratio* are humbling themselves before God, calling upon and trusting in God to draw them into a relationship with Him by means of His external Word and Sacraments.

This is a timely reminder to pastors and theologians of all generations! There is no place for prideful, pompous pastors working in God's vineyard. He wants pastors and theologians who will put their trust in Him! Those who practice *oratio* in this sense are seeking to follow St. Paul's encouragement as he quotes the prophet Jeremiah: "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:31).[11] For Luther, all the prayers of a *Seelsorger* should reflect this attitude—as he, himself demonstrated and prayed in his "Sacristy Prayer":

> Lord God, You have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in Your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I could have

[9] LW 34:285–286.

[10] LW 34:286.

[11] All Scripture quotations are from the NKJV.

> ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon You: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument—but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.[12]

This attitude, wherein the pastor humbles himself and trusts instead in the power of God, will also manifest itself in the pastor's prayer life as he intercedes before God on behalf of his sheep. If a pastor trusts in God's power and in the promises given in the Scriptures, he will happily offer his prayers regularly and often. In this context, we better understand Luther's own well-publicized practice of two hours each day in prayer—a joyful task we should seek to emulate.

Meditatio—Meditation & Worship Life

Luther continues in his discussion of what makes a theologian (and for our purposes, a "pastor" or *Seelsorger*), by encouraging the study of and meditation on Holy Scripture. Having now asked in *oratio* that God would send his Holy Spirit, the theologian and *Seelsorger* should dive into the Scriptures—the external Word—through which God bestows His blessings.

In *meditatio* Luther envisions a real "wrestling" with God's Word. Even sections that might be familiar and have been studied and dwelt upon before must not be taken for granted. Luther writes:

> You should meditate, that is, not only in your heart, but also externally, by actually repeating and comparing oral speech and literal words of the book, reading and rereading them with diligent attention and reflection, so that you may see what the Holy Spirit means by them. And take care that you do not grow weary or think that you have done enough when you have read, heard, and spoken them once or twice and that you then have complete understanding.[13]

Luther goes on to describe how King David, in Psalm 119, boasts of how he talks, meditates, speaks, sings, hears, and reads God's Word day and night. In this way, Luther explains that David is following

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[12] There are many versions of Luther's Sacristy Prayer. This version is from http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/LutherASacristyPrayer.pdf

[13] LW 34:286.

God's command to "write, preach, read, hear, sing, speak, etc.,"[14] –thus connecting *meditatio* to the divine service where God comes to man and builds him up through these very things. Luther presumes that there is an activity involved in *meditatio*—not that our activity is the efficient cause of becoming theologians and *Seelsorger*, but as we "wrestle" with the Word, God is working to form those He has chosen as theologians and *Seelsorger*.

For those who desire to be theologians and *Seelsorger,* there is certainly an academic aspect to *meditatio*. In order to interpret and to properly preach the Word, academic knowledge and study is necessary. But the *meditatio* that Luther is speaking of here has to do with receiving the means of grace through daily worship. Certainly, with busy lifestyles and the demands of busy parishes, many pastors are lacking time, but considering the treasures that God offers through the means of grace, and also considering again the fact that we men are weak and must have God's power in order to carry out our work as theologians and *Seelsorger,* it is of utmost importance to set aside time for *meditatio.*

Tentatio—Anfechtung or Temptation

For Luther the final part of becoming a theologian and *Seelsorger* was by suffering crosses and afflictions. As we face *tentatio*—or "temptations" (or in German: *Anfechtung*, meaning "tribulation, challenge, or struggle")—we are trained to put our whole-hearted trust in God simply because we understand there is no other place to turn when Satan assails us. In this way Romans 8:28 ("We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose") is properly understood. God works for our good even through the midst of hard times and difficulties. And through the school of experience and suffering, God trains us to put our trust in Him and to rely upon His external Word.

Luther once again points to King David and to Psalm 119 as an example of God working to build up His theologians and *Seelsorger* through *tentatio*. He writes, "You see how David, in the Psalm mentioned, complains so often about all kinds of enemies, arrogant princes or tyrants, false spirits and factions, whom he must tolerate because he meditates, that is, because he is occupied with God's Word (as has been said) in all manner of ways."[15] Certainly the devil raged against David, and yet David, placing his trust in God and His Word,

[14] Ibid.
[15] LW 34:287.

came through these attacks. David serves as an excellent example of *tentatio*, and in this way serves as a foreshadowing and type of Christ, of the One who had to bear for us the greatest *tentatio*. This was a point that Luther frequently emphasized as he encouraged and comforted those dealing with their own *tentatio*. This is something we must also take to heart, and to be encouraged when we are facing hardships.

Luther explains his own personal experience of how the devil's raging against Him was worked by God for his good:

> As soon as God's Word takes root and grows in you, the devil will harry you, and will make a real doctor of you, and by his assaults will teach you to seek and love God's Word. I myself (if you will permit me, mere mouse-dirt, to be mingled with pepper) am deeply indebted to my papists that through the devil's raging they have beaten, oppressed, and distressed me so much. That is to say, they have made a fairly good theologian of me, which I would not have become otherwise.[16]

For many, including *tentatio* as part of a person's devotional and spiritual life seems shocking—this defies modern sensibilities that would not equate affliction and trouble with a spiritual experience. But the benefit of the experience does not lie in the affliction or trouble; rather, it lies in how God's Word strengthens and bolsters a person's faith in spite of the affliction or trouble. And when the Word comes to the rescue in times of distress, the one who gives the Word and who plants it in hearts—namely God—harvests a bountiful crop.

Of course, in the midst of trouble and affliction it is difficult to rejoice and thank God that He is working to strengthen us, build us up, and form us as theologians and *Seelsorger*. Yet, this is precisely what Luther calls upon us to do when facing hardships. Luther himself admitted how much of a struggle this could be especially after the death of his 12-year-old daughter, Magdalena, in 1542. In spite of his bitter weeping and prayers, Luther's daughter died in his arms. And though having made a beautiful confession of her faith ("Yes, dear Father, as God wills!"[17]), Luther was terribly devastated and overcome by grief. There is a noticeable change in Luther's tone from this time forward. Previously, he would be rather harsh in preaching the law to those whose grief was severe and lasting, but after Magdalena's death, Luther took a gentler, more sympathetic tone, explaining how he too knew great loss

[16] Ibid.

[17] LLSC, 51.

and grief and admitted several years later that he still mourned.[18] Yet, Luther also acknowledged that through this heartache and loss, through this *tentatio,* he was learning to pray as Magdalena prayed: that "the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God may be done."[19] May pastors today be able to pray in the same way!

Reviewing *oratio, meditatio,* and *tentatio*—the ways in which God forms the theologian and *Seelsorger*—is not necessarily new or earth shaking for a gathering of Lutheran pastors who are already theologians and *Seelsorger*, having lived this devotional life themselves. And in regard to practical application, we have hardly scratched the surface of what pastors face in the vast field of practical, pastoral theology. However, I believe it is important for us to review these concepts as we are taking a deeper look at Luther (especially as the 500th anniversary of the Reformation approaches). It helps us put his life and work into context. It helps us grasp other important Reformation concepts. It also gives us a starting point for our own work and ministries as we carry out the principles of the Reformation in our own ministries. Most importantly, it provides us with encouragement to turn to God and trust that the work we are doing is His work; the Holy Ministry belongs to Him. He will form us as theologians and *Seelsorger*. He is the one who gives us our abilities and direction as He works through our own personal devotional lives and spirituality.

3. Luther's emphases that may be especially helpful for pastors to emphasize today

We now move to the final section of the paper which will be more subjective in nature. Upon studying *Luther's Letters of Spiritual Counsel* and other works that describe Luther's pastoral practices and his interactions with the people he was serving, it struck this author that some of his pastoral practices and emphases could be especially helpful for us to consider and emphasize among the people we are serving today.[20]

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[18] Ibid., 81.

[19] Ibid.

[20] The items I have chosen to comment on in this final section will certainly reflect my own personal tastes and opinions. They betray my own personal interests and also my own personal "growth areas," those places where I feel that my own ministry could improve. In no way am I bringing up points in some sort of judgmental way where I am making claims that my fellow pastors and brothers in Christ are failing or need improvement in these topics. If you have noticed a certain pastoral practice that you know was emphasized by Luther and overlooked here, and of which it would be beneficial for us to make note, please bring it up during our discussion time.

Suffering Is a Fact of the Christian Life

For many, a prolonged illness or seemingly hopeless trouble can bring spiritual despair and a falling away from the faith. This is especially the case for those who fall into the trap of prosperity gospel thinking or into works-righteousness. They are led to believe that the trouble and suffering they face has been brought on by something they lacked—that they were not good enough, or that they failed to propitiate an angry God. When we come across such people, we have an opportunity to follow Luther's lead and to point people to a God who has been propitiated and dearly loves us. With this in mind, we understand that God will be working for our good through the hardships and difficulties we face.

Martin Luther had much to say to people who were suffering and struggling, especially in regard to God's attitude toward them as they suffered. Many letters were addressed to family, friends, and acquaintances who were experiencing tremendous problems. These people were dealing with terrible persecutions, physical afflictions, guilt-ridden consciences, melancholy and depression, grief and loss, all of which could lead to doubting God. It is interesting that when Luther sensed that someone was close to or struggling with doubt, he wasn't hesitant to preach the law to that person, but Luther would let the Gospel predominate. Consider the "Table Talk recorded by Anthony Lauterbach. March, 1536":

> Dr. Martin [Luther] visited an honorable sick woman, Mrs. Breu, an exile from Leipzig. On account of the death by drowning of her husband she was overcome by such great grief and sorrow that she became ill and fainted fifteen times the first night… .[Luther] asked her how she was feeling and admonished her to submit to the will of God, who (as is His wont) was chastising her after freeing her from all the evils of Satan and abominations of the pope. "A daughter," he said, "should bear the chastisements of the Father unto death or life. We are the Lord's, whether we live or die. The Lord says, 'Because I live, ye shall live also.' He has sent you a very precious gem when He brought this suffering upon you, and He will give you the strength to bear it. Pray, therefore."[21]

[21] LLSC, 43–44.

Luther "admonishes" the woman. He preaches the law to her when he senses that she was unwilling to submit to the will of God. Yet also note the way in which Luther helps the woman realize the positive aspect of her suffering: "God has sent you a very precious gem when He brought this suffering upon you." Luther's awareness and emphasis of *tentatio* and *Anfechtung* is reflected and emphasized also among the people he served. Luther understood that God was not only forming theologians and *Seelsorger* through trouble and affliction, but He was lovingly drawing the common people to Himself as well, giving them opportunity to hide themselves in His Word and promises.

One of the most powerful proclamations of the Gospel in *Luther's Letters of Spiritual Counsel* is found in a letter addressed "To Mrs. M. January 11, 1543." Mrs. M. had uttered some unmentionable words in a fit of rage and she felt as if her soul was lost to Satan. It is apparent that she was afflicted by her guilty conscience. Luther comforts this woman:

> Certainly it was not Christ who put into your mind the notion that you belong to the devil, for Christ died in order that those who belong to the devil may be released from his power. Therefore, do this: Spit on the devil and say: "Have I sinned? Well, I have sinned, and I am sorry. [But I shall not despair, for] Christ has taken away the sins of the whole world, of all who confess their sins. So it is certain that this sin of mine has also been taken away. Begone, devil, for I am absolved. This I am bound to believe. And if I had committed murder or adultery, or had even crucified Christ Himself, this too would be forgiven if I repented and acknowledged the sin, as Christ said on the cross, 'Father forgive them.'"[22]

Luther was a master at comforting the afflicted and troubled. Granted, what he was offering to the people at that time was new to them, for he was proclaiming the total forgiveness and complete absolution of their sins. As the Gospel was being clearly proclaimed, people's suffering had to be seen in a different light. If God has forgiven their sins, then the hardships they faced were not due to God's angry retribution; it was the opposite. God is a loving Father that will miraculously work good out of the situation!

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[22] LLSC, 102–103. Another worthy topic and emphasis that we will not spend time discussing is reflected here. Luther possessed and preached an awareness of the reality and role of the devil along with his power and powerlessness.

On April 16, 1530, Luther preached a powerful sermon in Coburg, on Cross and Suffering. This is a message that is fitting for all generations (it is highly recommended reading!). In this sermon Luther uses the fitting illustration of St. Christopher as an example of the Christian who bears a cross.

> Each Christian is called Christopher or Christ-bearer in that he or she takes up the faith. … When a person takes up the faith, he or she does not think it to be a heavy burden but a small child that is cute and well formed and easy to carry, as happened for Christopher. At first the gospel appears to be a dear, friendly, and childlike teaching. … But [Christopher] did not discover how heavy the child was until he was in the deepest part of the water. … Then the child began to feel heavy to carry. [The water] rose so high for the good Christopher that he came close to drowning. … Consequently, when one puts Christ, the dear child, on one's back, one either has to carry Him all the way through the water or drown. There is nothing in between. It is not good to drown; therefore, we want to get through the water with Christ, even if it might seem that we will get stuck in there. … Thus, we have an example in Christopher and a picture that can strengthen us in our suffering and teach us that the fear and trembling are not as great as the comfort and the promise. We should know that in this life we will have no rest when we carry Christ, but that in our afflictions we should turn our eyes from the present suffering and toward the comfort and promise. Then we will learn what Christ says is true; "in Me you…have peace" [John 16:33]. [23]

Later in the same sermon, Luther explains:

> God must discipline and drive us, so that our faith grows and becomes stronger and we bring the Savior deeper into our hearts. Just as we cannot live without eating and drinking, so we also cannot live without affliction and suffering. Therefore, we must experience peril from the devil through persecution or a secret thorn piercing our hearts, as St. Paul laments (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7). Since it is better to have a cross than not to have

[23] Philip D.W. Krey and Peter D.S. Krey, eds. and trans., *Luther's Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007), 155–157. John 16:33 was a favorite verse of Luther's to use for those who were suffering.

> one, no one should be upset or terrified over it. You have a good, strong promise on which and by which you can comfort yourself. Besides, the gospel cannot come out in the open except through suffering and the cross.[24]

Luther understood how dire and dangerous it was for those who held to the evangelical faith. Luther's own friends and pupils were being imprisoned and martyred for their faith. Yet Luther wrote to those who were becoming terrified by the prospect of suffering and persecution to remain strong in their faith: "Do not be discouraged on account of the martyrs but joyfully praise God for the fruits which He produces on earth by means of their martyrdom."[25] Luther understood that those who suffered and even died for the faith were preaching a powerful sermon with their own blood—pointing to the one whose blood was shed first of all for them! "Christ is enough for us, even if we have lost everything," Luther proclaimed.[26]

What do we as *Seelsorger,* who follow in the steps of Luther, have to offer those in our flock who suffer? We must not skirt the issue of suffering. Our people do suffer and are living in a day and age where it seems that the potential for suffering and persecution for our faith is increasing. In spite of it all, like Luther we can proclaim to our people that "if you are a lily and a rose of Christ, therefore, know that you will live among thorns."[27] We can reassure our flocks that God is working for our good through any suffering that we might face. Like Luther, we will let the Gospel shine as brightly as possible in the midst of suffering so that the people might be strengthened to continue patiently in their suffering, which brings great glory and praise to God.

The Revealed Will vs. the Hidden Will of God

Another emphasis that one sees again and again in Luther's pastoral approach is the distinction that he draws between God's hidden will and His revealed will. Countless people get themselves into spiritual trouble when they attempt to force information out of God that God has chosen to keep to Himself. Satan uses this desire to lead people away from God. Luther explains that this is the very reason why death and destruction are present in our world:

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[24] Ibid., 159.
[25] LLSC, 210.
[26] Ibid., 220.
[27] Ibid., 111.

> What do you think drove Adam to eat of [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil]? He wished to know what God's secret intention was with regard to this tree that he should not eat of it, and he thought, God certainly has something extraordinary on this tree. He was searching out God apart from the Word. … We do the same thing in our relation to God. We wish to know what He has not commanded us to know. We should eat of every tree that He allows us to eat of, and we should rejoice to do so, but none of the fruit tastes so good to us as that of the tree we are forbidden to touch and on account of which He closed paradise and heaven to us so that we may know nothing of Him except what He has revealed to us in His Word. If you wish to know what God's secret intention is, His dear Son will show it to you. We must have a God who is hidden from us, but we should not investigate into Him, else we shall break our necks. It is God's will that we should be agreeable sons of His because we believe in His Son. There is no wrath here. Be satisfied with this.[28]

In line with this is the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura,* "Scripture alone." Luther understood and taught that when God's Word speaks, that should be enough for us as Christians. Aren't we called to simply trust in God? Who are we to question Him or demand more from Him? Obviously, this distinction between the revealed and hidden wills of God played large roles in Luther's theology. It applied to his dealings with the Scholastics and with Erasmus. It was a central feature of his disagreements with Zwingli over the real presence in the Lord's Supper. Luther emphasizes the revealed will of God in the Scriptures as he argues against clerical celibacy, proclaiming that celibacy was not part of God's revealed will, it was instead wrongly foisted upon individuals, and thus they should have no qualms of renouncing their oaths and taking a spouse.[29]

The distinction between God's hidden and revealed wills must also be maintained when discussing election and predestination (which the

[28] Ibid., 136.

[29] Ibid., 260. Along these lines, there is also an interesting account in LLSC that describes a time when Luther was visited by a certain individual who had mathematically calculated the date of the end of the world and was proposing strange end-time ideas. Luther greatly upsets the individual who had made an elaborate presentation on his work of "decoding" the book of Daniel when he basically says, "So what?" and emphasizes that these things are not taken from God's revealed will. LLSC, 302–304.

history of our little synod can attest to). Luther fielded many question about the topic, and every time answered by refusing to say more than what God reveals in His Word. He did, however, acknowledge to people with such questions the difficulty in doing this. Luther admitted, "I know all about this affliction. I was myself brought to the brink of eternal death by it. … Now, such thoughts as yours are a vain searching into the majesty of God and a prying into His secret providence."[30] Luther then redirects this affliction and uses it as a way not to dwell on things that are hidden from our understanding, but rather to emphasize what God wants us to know: "If such thoughts still come and bite like fiery serpents, pay no attention to the thoughts or serpents. Turn away from these notions and contemplate the brazen serpent, that is, Christ given for us. Then, God willing, you will feel better."[31]

When the hidden will of God is being called into question, the grace of God must be emphasized. Of course there are times when this is difficult for people to see, but ultimately it comes down to Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane: whether we are willing to pray, "Your will be done!" Luther encouraged a grieving, bereaved father in this way:

> Certainly it is the good will of God that your son should die, although human nature cries out against this and imagines that God is angry. It is characteristic of our human nature to think that what we wish is best and what God does is unsatisfactory to us. But it would not be good if our will were always done because we would then become too sure of ourselves. It is enough for us that we have a gracious God. Why He permits this or that evil to befall us should not trouble us at all.[32]

Seelsorger today will continue to make this distinction between God's revealed and hidden wills. When ministering to a struggling person who might ask "Why?!" we should refrain from human opinion or from putting words into God's mouth. We do not presume to know the hidden will of God, but we do know and can emphasize the revealed will of God. We know of God's love and salvation, as His Word clearly proclaims it, and we can let that be our focus in all circumstances.[33]

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[30] Ibid., 115.

[31] Ibid., 116.

[32] Ibid., 69.

[33] The task of distinguishing between the hidden and revealed wills of God may be especially challenging as one ministers to Millennials. Those classified as Millennials have been raised to question everything and are trained to be able to find nearly any

The Means of Grace Are Awesome!

As we are ministering to our people who are afflicted and suffering, we not only point them to the clear Word of God as revealed in Scripture, but we also point to the Word and promises that God joins with earthly elements: to the Sacraments.

In his ministry, Luther often would point people to the Sacraments as sources of the greatest comfort found in this world. In a letter Luther wrote to his own mother as she was upon her deathbed, he points her (and also himself) to the means of grace: "God has graciously called you. In the Gospel, in Baptism, and in the Sacrament [of the Altar] you possess His sign and seal of this vocation, and as long as you hear Him addressing you in these, you will have no trouble of danger. Be of good cheer, then, and thank Him joyfully for such great grace, for He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."[34]

Obviously, in the Small Catechism, Luther wrote about the "Power" and "Blessings" of the Sacraments. In his ministry he put them to use and showed how much he valued the means of grace. In his letters to bereaved parents, Luther would point to the comfort of Baptism and to its regenerational, saving power.[35] Luther also understood the importance of the Lord's Supper, remaining in Wittenberg in 1527 to assist with visiting the sick and ensuring that they received the Lord's Supper for the strengthening of their faith as their bodies weakened and their physical health declined.[36]

S*eelsorger* today should still emphasize the great treasures that are found in the means of grace, and should point their people to the comfort God shares with them in the Sacraments. In moments when we have nothing more to say—as we are at an impasse with our people because we dare not venture into the hidden will of God—we can share the revealed will of God as it is connected to simple water and to bread and wine which brings forgiveness and the absolute certainty of our salvation.[37]

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information and answers to questions at their fingertips (thanks to technology). I would suggest that this is a worthwhile topic to emphasize among our young people.

[34] LLSC, 35–36.

[35] Ibid., 63, 80.

[36] Ibid., 248–250; LW 43:133–135.

[37] Being privileged to minister to our sainted Professor Mark Harstad, it was at first daunting to me, wondering if I would have something relevant or encouraging to say to him as I shared a devotion with him who possessed so much more knowledge and understanding than could fit in my head. I thought it was presumptuous for me to try and proclaim God's Word to him! Yet, in spite of my trepidation, he always warmly

How One Loves His Neighbor

As one studies Luther and his interactions with the people he was serving, one quickly sees that he took the second table of the law seriously. Luther showed tremendous love to his neighbors. Luther was unconcerned with his own money (just ask his wife Katie!) or welfare or time. If someone—and it didn't matter who it was—was in need of help, he would be there. Luther would intercede even for a poor peasant that had been cheated by a nobleman,[38] or some elderly friars who were being evicted from their monastery,[39] or a poor university student who had no money to buy food or to return home.[40] Whatever the situation was, Luther would go far out of his way, using his influence to try and help.

Luther felt a keen obligation to love his neighbor, understanding that in this way Christians are serving Christ (as Matthew 25 points out). Yet, actually putting this into practice the way that God desires is difficult. Especially during times of plague or pestilence or religious persecution, Luther had to become forceful in his preaching of the Law to people who were not seeking the good of their neighbor, but rather seeking their own good:

> Let everyone who has an obligation to a wife, brother, child, sister, or neighbor stay here to help [and minister in the common peril]. Each one of us owes it to his neighbor to be ready to lay down his own life. Even so, as your pastor and substitute preacher, I am bound to remain in my pulpit. A hundred pestilences will not drive me from it. Moreover, together with my deacons I am ready to visit the sick. If we die while engaged in this work of love, it will be well with us, for the hour of death will be sweeter to us than a hundred thousand years of life. … Do you think that it is right to enjoy the freedom of the city in times of health, peace, and prosperity and then to flee from it in evil times and forsake neighbors?[41]

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welcomed me as his pastor and especially rejoiced in the means of grace, taking great comfort in the Lord's Supper and in the Absolution that I as his pastor shared with him. It was indeed a humbling experience; it helped me better appreciate the pastoral ministry as Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 4:1, "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."

38 LLSC, 337–339.

39 Ibid., 322.

40 Ibid., 250.

41 Ibid., 248–249.

This was also the emphasis in Luther's 1527 pamphlet, "Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague." He emphasizes that God gives Christians obligations to each other in their various vocations. It would be better to stay and carry out these obligations for the sake of loving one's neighbor, even if it meant one might become ill themselves, rather than sinfully abandoning the people because of selfish concern.[42]

Americans today have very comfortable lives. Having grown used to such comforts and conveniences and being unwilling to give such things up, it becomes difficult for people to show love to their neighbors as they should. Of course how we go about loving our neighbors as we should involves a difficult balance, especially for pastors and *Seelsorger,* since we have our own families to attend to with limited time and funding. We do not want to be conned or taken advantage of by scoundrels. We find ourselves making excuses as we bring up government assistance and the like. We would like to excuse ourselves from helping as we blame our neighbor's own inadequacies or laziness or addictions as reasons not to help. However, if we are considering Luther's example and how we might emulate it, it would serve us well to reconsider how we and our flocks might grow in better loving our neighbors.

Knowing the people—not afraid to connect with them

There is a well-known quote in our midst by our sainted ELS pastor, Paul Petersen, who said, "Lift up the corner of the rug of your life so that your students know there is dirt under it, but don't show them the whole pile." Martin Luther would have appreciated this! It is certainly the way he went about his ministry. Unlike aloof hierarchical clergy in the Roman Catholic Church, who covered up and masked their mistakes and infidelities, Luther was among the people. They knew him as an approachable person, who was definitely not a holier-than-thou Pharisee, but was one who happily proclaimed himself *simul iustus et peccator!* In many of his letters of counsel, Luther would finish the letter by signing, "Also a sinner."[43]

Luther was a man of the people. He was friends with the common people, taking the time to associate with them, get to know them, and speak with them. It is clear that he knew his people on an intimate personal level. His writings reflect an awareness of people's personalities and humor. For instance, in Luther's pamphlet, "A Simple Way to Pray," he writes in answer to a question from his friend Peter the Barber. In

[42] LW 43:119–138.
[43] LLSC, 42.

this published work, Luther includes a humorous homage to his hair stylist as he writes:

> So, a good and attentive barber keeps his thoughts, attention, and eyes on the razor and hair and not forget how far he has gotten with his shaving or cutting. If he wants to engage in too much conversation or let his mind wander or look somewhere else he is likely to cut his customer's mouth, nose, or even his throat. Thus if anything is to be done well, it requires the full attention of all one's senses and members… .How much more does prayer call for concentration and singleness of heart if it is to be a good prayer![44]

Luther would regularly employ humor and what many considered coarse or vulgar speech. But to his people, this was endearing—they saw him as one of their own, and Luther considered himself to be one of them. Even with small children, Luther was able to connect with them and communicate with them as is evidenced in a letter he wrote to his young son Hans. Father Luther speaks of the joys of a beautiful garden (heaven) where Hans and his friends Lippus and Jost (sons of Philip Melanchthon and Justas Jonas) can enjoy delicious fruits and pony rides![45]

The old adage "A house-going pastor makes a churchgoing people," would apply to Luther. Clearly the people knew and loved their preacher, and he knew his congregation: the people of Wittenberg. From among his people is where he found the themes of his sermons. Again, pastors today will find much value in emulating Luther, maybe not so much by sharing dirty or off-color jokes *(in our synod, noble attempts at humor and puns are typically met with loud groans—especially during synod convention. You can judge for yourself if you find that endearing.)*. But we should emulate Luther's love and concern for his people! This is an important task for a *Seelsorger*.[46]

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[44] LW 43:199.

[45] LLSC, 144–145.

[46] We also make the caveat that there must be no "personality cult" that develops around the pastor. This is destructive to a church. But certainly pastors can be warm and friendly, knowing their people while still proclaiming the words of John the Baptist: John 3:30, "He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease."

Conclusion

As pastors, we face a variety of situations, issues, and problems in our parishes. Taking theology and applying it to these many situations, issues, and problems is a challenging task. It is a task that we must value and take seriously. In practical, pastoral theology the "rubber hits the road." We who are pastors and *Seelsorger* take God's Word and deliver its life-changing message to the people.

With this in mind, and also considering the upcoming 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it is worthwhile to consider the pastoral practices that were established and practiced in the Reformation, pastoral practices that remain established and are to be practiced among us still today. May God's will and may His work be done through us as His ministers, and as those who desire to be His *Seelsorger!* LSQ

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We Are Free to Serve

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The following essay was originally presented to the pastors of the WELS South Central District, who gathered for their fall study conference at Trinity Lutheran Church in beautiful Mountain Home, Arkansas on October 19–20, 2015. The theme of the conference was, "If Christ Sets You Free, Then You Are Free Indeed!" The other essays included an exegesis of selected verses from Galatians, an overview of "freedom passages" in the Scriptures, and a discussion of legalism among our churches today. The following, for better or for worse, served as the "Luther and the Confessions" paper.

The use of scientific models in the "ecological" portions of this essay—apparently the most controversial thing a simple pastor can do these days—were not meant to challenge sola Scriptura*, nor were the more casual, even lighthearted anecdotes from American pop culture, Chinese philosophy, and the author's own experience and upbringing; these were merely intended to provide the pastors with illustrations of Christian freedom and to cleanse palates during seventy-five minutes of reading from a script.*

Unless otherwise noted, scriptural quotations are taken from the English Standard Version. Confessional quotations are from Kolb-Wengert. Citations from The Freedom of a Christian *are taken from Mark Tranvik's translation.*

Introduction: *Trachydosaurus rugosus*

CRUISING ALONG THE TWO-LANE BLACKTOP just north of Adelaide, we see an unusual sight—no, make it *two*; two unusual sights wait for us a few hundred yards ahead, dead center in the road. At first glance, they look like two strips of rubber—a shredded tire? Upon closer inspection, they look like two strips of rubber with the overlapping, scaly texture of a pinecone. Whatever these two strips are, they don't move, even when we pull over to solve the mystery. Here in the middle of the blacktop are two prime examples of Australia's "dragons of the dry," more commonly known as lizards. These two specimens are shinglebacks, and it is clear to us that, although both are immovable, one is alive and one is dead.

To say that shinglebacks live life at a leisurely pace is an understatement; there's a good reason they're also known as "sleepy lizards." Their manner, docile to a fault, endears them to herpetologists in the Outback. The ease with which these lizards are tracked, caught, and banded for study makes them a favorite of zoologists who are, perhaps, past their prime; a shingleback moving at top "speed" is no match for an eighty-year-old man. But what fascinates the scientists who study the shingleback more than anything else is the lizard's enduring faithfulness to its mate.

Shingleback monogamy is a commitment rarely found outside the world of birds (and, theoretically, humans). For twenty years or more, every spring, no matter how far off the two may have wandered separately in the bush, Shingleback and Wife come back to each other. For the next several weeks following the reunion, the male will keep in step with the female, following her wherever she goes. After several more weeks, the next generation appears. Soon after this, in their unhurried, sleepy way, the shingleback and its mate will bid each other farewell and good luck, with a promise of another reunion in the springtime.

The glacial pace that makes the shingleback so endearing to scientists also makes them susceptible to those who cruise along the two-lane blacktop. Shinglebacks commonly go the way of the raccoon and the armadillo. Yet it is in death that the faithfulness of the shingleback is at its most astonishing. For several days, and even weeks, the living mate stays by its beloved's side, all day and night. It does not move, no matter how close those murderous motorists might get. As we consider this miracle of love and fidelity before us, chewing a thoughtful Clif bar as

we broil under the hundred-degree sun, we might ask, "Why doesn't he move on? Doesn't this sleepy lizard know he's *free to go*?"

What keeps a shingleback in step with its mate, spring after spring, year after year? What force of nature keeps a shingleback in the blacktop's dead center, faithfully, jealously holding that middle ground for days and weeks on end, even though it's free to leave?

"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Here we have yet another of the apostle Paul's profound paradoxes: the Christian is called to be immovable (ἀμετακίνητοι)—in a state of perfect rest—and, at the same time, to abound in the work of the Lord (περισσεύοντες ἐν τῷ ἔργῳ τοῦ κυρίου)—in a state of constant motion. How is this possible?

Christ alone is the answer. Only in Christ, who set me free, can I live my life as a free man, subject to none. Only in Christ, who gave everything He had, including His last breath, for me, can I live my life as a servant, subject to all. This is the tension of Christian freedom: to live by these paradoxes and hold to our precious "narrow Lutheran middle" jealously, while simultaneously and harmoniously abounding in the work of the Lord and in loving service for the good of our neighbor, so that the narrow middle does not become the dead center.

Martin Luther and the men who wrote our Confessions lived and struggled in this tension, too. Their struggle is the subject of this essay.

I. FC X: Christian jealousy *in casu confessionis*

> *I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.* (Acts 20:29–30)

> *Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.* (Colossians 2:16)

> *But now the archdeacon began to meditate on some strong measures of absolute opposition. Dr Proudie and his crew were of the lowest possible order of Church of England clergymen, and therefore it behoved him, Dr Grantly, to be of the very highest. Dr Proudie would abolish all forms and ceremonies, and therefore Dr Grantly*

> *felt the sudden necessity of multiplying them. … It was true that he himself could not intone the service, but he could procure the co-operation of any number of gentleman-like curates well trained in the mystery of doing so. He would not willingly alter his own fashion of dress, but he could people Barchester with young clergymen dressed in the longest frocks, and in the highest-breasted silk waistcoats. He certainly was not prepared to cross himself, or to advocate the real presence; but, without going this length, there were various observances, by adopting which he could plainly show his antipathy to such men as Dr Proudie and Mr Slope.*[1]

With the promulgation of the *Augsburg Interim* on May 15, 1548, Charles V had, at last, found a "Christian and suitable means" for all the factious subjects of his Holy Roman Empire to live "peacefully and amicably" in "greater Christian concord and moderation." Such was the opinion—perhaps biased—of the men who wrote it. They stated as much in the preface.

Published just over a year after the imperial army's victory over the Smalcald League at Mühlberg, the *Interim* was intended to be an ecclesiastical cease-fire until the Council of Trent completed its work. In reality, however, the defeated Lutherans were expected to abide by every decision of the Council as it was adopted.

Here were the main terms of the *Interim*:

> Clerical marriage and Communion in both kinds would be tolerated among the Lutherans … for now.
>
> In all other matters, Catholic doctrine, practice, and church government would be restored.
>
> Justification included the renewal of the Holy Spirit.[2]

Cleverly tucked away at the back was the twenty-sixth article, concerning church rites. Lutherans were ordered to retain the following ceremonies without exception:

> Exorcism and chrismation in the rite of baptism.
> Canonical hours.
> Prayers to the saints.
> Feast days, including the Feasts of Corpus Christi and the Blessed Virgin.

[1] Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers* (New York: Modern Library, 1950).

[2] Robert Kolb and James Nestingen, eds., *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 144.

Fasting on Friday and Saturday.
Adoration of the Host.[3]

Reactions to the *Interim* were varied. John Agricola, former ally of Luther and *Interim* contributor, may have been exaggerating when he said that the *Interim* "reformed the pope and made the emperor a Lutheran."[4] The decidedly unreformed pope, Paul III, found it too soft and immediately made the motion to revoke the concessions on marriage and the Lord's Supper. Though the faithful dwelling in the lands of the Reformation faced deportation, imprisonment, and even execution, they refused to comply, whether in the silence of empty churches in southern Germany or in more vocal forms of protest in the north, protests encouraged by the brave examples of church leaders who had relocated to Magdeburg from Wittenberg. The *Augsburg Interim* proved to be unenforceable; a dead letter from the beginning.

Moritz, now Elector of Saxony, had been having second thoughts about his betrayal of the Smalcald League. To win back his subjects without losing the favor of the emperor, he gathered theologians from Leipzig and Wittenberg to formulate another plan for Christian concord and moderation. The fruit of their labors was the *Leipzig Interim*, published on December 22, 1548.

The following is a summary of *Interim 2.0*:

Justification does, in fact, include the renewal of the Holy Spirit.
Faith, hope, and love—all of which are good works—are necessary for salvation.
What the Church teaches is always right.
We take back what we said about the pope and the bishops.
We will retain the exorcism in the rite of baptism.
And auricular confession. No one will be admitted to the Supper without it.
There will be penance, complete with prescribed prayers, fasts, and almsgiving.
There will be extreme unction.
The sermon will be preached on the Gospel text.
The trappings of worship will be retained.
The canonical hours will be observed.
So will the festivals.

[3] Ibid., 182.

[4] F. Bente, ed., *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), sec. 122.

And those Friday and Saturday fasts.
In the interest of "tranquility, peace, and unity," we can agree on adiaphora, "even when in use by the other party," without compromising Scripture.[5]

One Wittenberg theologian who had answered the elector's call was Philip Melanchthon. Melanchthon was a typical man. Typical men prefer peace to freedom. In his opinion, "The devastation of churches was a greater offense" than any compromise over ceremonies.[6] This was just one example of how he justified his actions at Leipzig. Another was his belief that the Lutheran Reformation was still in its infancy. But the stock ticker of his conscience didn't let him get away with this self-deception:

AC XV … Ap XV … AC XXIV … Ap XXIV … AC XXVIII … Ap XXVIII … Tr . …

Had the guiding presence of Luther ever been more sorely missed?

The furor that erupted in the wake of this "truce over the corpse of true Lutheranism" was fanned into flame by Matija Vlačič, better known as Matthias Flacius.[7] To Flacius and his fellow Gnesio-Lutherans the second version of the *Interim* was worse than the first. Flacius published *De veris et falsis adiaphoris* in 1549. Yielding to adiaphora, wrote the fiery Croatian, would be the "entering wedge" of Catholic domination and a contract with the Antichrist.[8] It is from Flacius that we receive our motto regarding the "state of confession": *Nihil est adiaphoron in casu confessionis et scandali.*

Though the *Leipzig Interim* was made irrelevant by the Peace of Passau and the Peace of Augsburg, the controversy lived on. For nearly thirty years, the unionistic Philippists and the vindictive Gnesio-Lutherans dug in deeper and deeper as the battle over adiaphora continued to rage, until the Concordists marked and occupied the "narrow Lutheran middle" between the trenches.

FC X teaches us that adiaphora are indeed "indifferent matters," but they do not exist in a vacuum; it might be better to call them "neutral"

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[5] Ibid., 183–196.

[6] Bente, ed., *Concordia Triglotta*, sec. 126.

[7] Ibid.

[8] See Neelak Tjernagel, "We Believe, Teach, and Confess: A Twentieth Century Tribute to the Formula of Concord," Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary Essay File, 1977, 15.

rather than "indifferent."[9] Adiaphora are like those vessels found in the great house in Paul's second letter to Timothy, "some for honorable use, some for dishonorable."[10] The golden chalices dedicated to the glory of God in the Temple were slobbered on by drunken Babylonians at the house of Belshazzar (Daniel 5:3–4). On their own, they are indeed neutral, these *Mitteldinge*, neither commanded nor forbidden by God, but adiaphora take on almost ionic charges based on their use and the motivation behind their use.[11]

Perhaps a cautionary tale from nature can serve to illustrate this.

Bufo marinus, better known as the cane toad, was minding its own business, living in a state of ecological equilibrium throughout its natural range, which, at the beginning of the twentieth century, stretched from the Rio Grande to the Amazon. Its extremely toxic skin kept a great number of would-be predators at bay—a great number, but not all; there were enough species immune to the dreaded *bufotoxin* to keep the cane toad in check.

Cane toads were called "cane toads" because they were known to feast on insect pests that plagued sugarcane. This taste for sugarcane pests was not lost on sugarcane growers in Queensland, the north-eastern province of Australia, where *Dermlepida albohirtum*, the cane beetle, had been laying waste to their fields for years. Surely, thought the Queenslanders, the cane toad would find the cane beetle a taste sensation!

In 1935, with the very best intentions, 3,000 cane toads were shipped from South America to the merry old land of Oz. The result was a catastrophe. The cane toad turned up its nose at the cane beetle and, with nothing better to do, got down to some serious reproducing. The 3,000 soon became millions, hopping all across northern Australia, coast to coast, killing untold numbers of native species, pets, and even humans. The new set of would-be predators, such as the (heretofore) fearsome monitor lizard, could not overcome the *bufotoxin* and were decimated.

This is not to say that Aussie ingenuity hasn't harnessed the power of the cane toad. Golfers drive them off tees and post the videos on YouTube. Cane toad purses fetch a handsome sum. A chemical extracted from *bufotoxin—bufotenin*—is a strong hallucinogenic that is

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[9] Bjarne W. Teigen, *I Believe: A Study of the Formula of Concord* (Mankato: Bethany Lutheran College, 1977), 17.

[10] 2:20.

[11] FC Ep 3–5; FC SD 5–8.

classified as a Schedule 1 controlled substance in Australian law, along with cocaine and heroin. Licking the toads, however, is discouraged.

Team Bufo advocates for the swift eradication of this invasive species. You can visit them at www.canetoadsinoz.com. Unfortunately, they do not sell their t-shirts to the public.

The cane toad, previously a neutral entity, was introduced with good intentions, but it was introduced in the wrong place at the wrong time, and it was a disaster. Its tragic failure shows that the rule of logic is shattered by the multifoliate details of each unique environment. This is the danger that Christians face if we try to solve the paradox of Christian freedom with hard and fast rules. Rules are what we don't need; what we need is *the* Rule: the rule of love.

Adiaphora may be matters of indifference, but they are not used indifferently. When others try to bind our consciences in the name of peace, we fall back on our Christian freedom and stand behind our clear confession:

> We also believe, teach, and confess that in a time when confession is necessary, as when the enemies of God's Word want to suppress the pure teaching of the holy gospel, the entire community of God, indeed, every Christian, especially servants of the Word as the leaders of the community of God, are obligated according to God's Word to confess true teaching and everything that pertains to the whole of religion purely and publicly. They are to do so not only with words but also in actions and deeds. In such a time they shall not yield to the opponents even in indifferent matters, nor shall they permit the imposition of such adiaphora by opponents who use violence or chicanery in such a way that undermines true worship of God or that introduces or confirms idolatry.[12]

FC X also teaches us that we have the freedom to use or not to use adiaphora. In either case, the motivation remains the same: the glory of God and the edification of God's people.[13] With feet firmly planted between the ditches of legalism and unionism, we remain truly evangelical, desiring true fellowship with those who gather around the pure Gospel.[14]

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[12] FC SD 10.

[13] FC Ep 10, 12; FC SD 9, 30.

[14] FC Ep 7; FC SD 31.

What stands out in this article, this "conscience of Protestantism," this "veritable citadel for our time,"[15] is the language of jealousy:

> For in such a situation it is no longer indifferent matters that are at stake. The truth of the Gospel and Christian freedom are at stake. The confirmation of open idolatry, as well as the protection of the weak in faith from offense, is at stake. In such matters we can make no concessions but must offer an unequivocal confession and suffer whatever God sends and permits the enemies of his Word to inflict on us.[16]

Jealousy is not synonymous with "envy," as so many of our fellow Americans understand it, but the unwillingness to lose something precious. Jealousy itself is an adiaphoron. It can certainly be put to bad use. There are convicts on death row who will testify to this. Yet God, writes C.S. Lewis, is the ultimate object of human jealousy.[17] FC X clearly summons us to the jealous protection of our Christian freedom.

We would expect this from men who confessed the doctrine of Luther. Had he not published *The Freedom of a Christian* some sixty years before?

II. 1520: The year of jubilee

> *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor.* (Isaiah 61:1–2a)

> *We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.* (John 9:4)

> *If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.* (Philippians 1:22a)

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[15] C. F. W. Walther, in Eugene F. Klug, *Getting into the Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977), 64.

[16] FC Ep 6.

[17] C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Mariner, 2012 [1960]), 38.

> *He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature; purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood, and his innocent suffering and death.*[18]

The conclusion of *The Freedom of a Christian* foreshadows the confession of FC X. Christian freedom, Luther writes, does not insist on observing ceremonies. At the same time, it does not insist on abolishing ceremonies. We are not righteous because we observe the rites, nor are we righteous because we *don't* observe them. The middle way is vital.

What does this life in the middle look like? Walking the middle path means opposing "inflexible ceremonialists" in "bold and shocking ways" so that their false teaching might cease.[19] Jesus and His disciples set the standard for "bold and shocking" when they plucked heads of grain on the Sabbath in Matthew 12:1–8.[20] Deliberately provocative acts—like eating wheat—are necessary to oppose all the godless who support the superstition of justification by works. They have no authority over us, even in adiaphora.

But walking the middle path also means bearing with our brothers and sisters who are weak in faith (Romans 14:1, 14). They are recently released prisoners, just now realizing their liberation from the captivity of Rome. They must be acclimated to this new spiritual life. We fight wolves, but we tend sheep. As *theodidacti*, "men taught by God," His Word alone guides us along the path of love between the unloving extremes of unionism and compromise (Deuteronomy 28:14; Romans 14:3).

With that, Luther put the finishing touches on the year 1520, the year of jubilee. All that was left on his agenda was the public burning of *Exsurge Domine* on December 10.

1520 was the eye of the storm for Luther. It was the year between the Leipzig Debate and the Diet of Worms. While negotiations took place behind the scenes as to when and where he would stand trial for heresy, Luther worked. In the afterglow of the "tower breakthrough," when the Holy Spirit led Luther to a right understanding of Christ's righteousness imparted to the sinner by faith, Luther wrote about the

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[18] Luther's explanation of the Second Article of the Apostle's Creed.

[19] Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian,* trans. Mark D. Tranvik (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2008), 91.

[20] Cf. Ap XV 34.

life of the Christian in the world, focusing on the practical effects of this "new" theology.[21]

It was a year of remarkable productivity:

March: *Treatise on Good Works*
June: *On the Papacy at Rome*
August: *Address to the German Nobility*
October: *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*

Luther labeled this last essay a *praeludium*, a prelude to something that "the Roman see had never seen before."[22] Attached to this "something," published in November, was a letter of best wishes to Leo X, which he had written in September, a letter which merits its own essay as a study in psychology, since Luther had received the bull of excommunication on October 10 but left the best wishes intact. The following essay, as Luther closed the letter, was his "sign of peace and good hope," a "summary of the whole Christian life."[23]

The "canticle" of Luther,[24] *The Freedom of a Christian*, opens with its famous paradox, a restatement of 1 Corinthians 9:19:

Christianus homo omnium dominus est liberrimus, nulli subjectus.

Christianus homo omnium servus est officiosissimus, omnibus subjectus.

If only such a paradox could be resolved, Luther writes, the propositions would "serve our purposes beautifully."[25] With little concern about spoiling the dramatic flow of his essay, Luther solves the mystery quickly, and our purposes are thus beautifully served. The paradox is reconciled only in Jesus Christ, the Lord of all born subject to the Law (Galatians 4:4–5), the Son of God and the Suffering Servant (Philippians 2:5–8), the Shepherd and the Lamb (John 10:11, 1:29), the sinless sin offering (2 Corinthians 5:21), the Ladder upon whom the angels ascend and descend (John 1:51). His righteousness alone is the declaration of liberty for those in bondage to sin.

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[21] Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and Devil,* trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven: Yale, 1989), 154.

[22] AE 36:126.

[23] Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, 45.

[24] Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1950), 128.

[25] Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, 50.

How is this righteousness unto freedom obtained? How can I be reconciled to God and serve His purposes beautifully? Returning to a theme begun in the *Treatise on Good Works*, Luther writes that nothing outside us—certainly nothing prescribed by popes, bishops, or priests—produces righteousness (or, for that matter, unrighteousness) in us. The soul receives nothing salutary from the body. There is only one thing the soul needs for salvation, the one thing needful: the Gospel that proclaims Christ (Matthew 4:4; John 8:36).

The righteousness of Christ, proclaimed in the Gospel, is apprehended by faith alone. Faith is the work of God in us (John 6:29), the "incomparable treasure" that brings us "complete deliverance" (55). It is the inner confession of faith, not the outward performance of works, which makes the soul righteous or unrighteous (Luke 6:45; Romans 10:10). Faith frees us from the Law and the slavery of justification by works. Faith honors God and consents to God's will. Faith bestows on us the honor of serving God as kings and priests (1 Peter 2:9). By faith even cross, trial, and death serve our purposes beautifully (Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 3:21–23; 2 Corinthians 12:9). Faith trusts that God accepts our works as righteous acts. The righteousness of Christ that is ours by faith—i.e., justification—is the source of our Christian liberty.

When faith is present in our hearts, not only do we begin to trust God, but we begin to know ourselves and our neighbor's needs: "Through faith we are caught up beyond ourselves into God. Likewise, through love we descend beneath ourselves to serve our neighbor."[26] As new creations in Christ, set free from the righteousness of works, our sole desire in the life of sanctification is to serve, not with any thought of gain, but only to please the God of our salvation. Paradise is restored to us; the freest of all godly works, Luther writes, was man's original work in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15).[27] Here man yielded to God in a spirit of spontaneous love; now the sufficiency of justification produces the spontaneity of good works in us. The abundance of faith produces a surplus of works, given as freely as we have received, with Christ as our example:

> So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same

[26] Ibid., 88–89.

[27] Genesis 2:15; cf. Fischer 10:11.

> love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:1–8)

Why should we not do for our neighbor what Christ has done for us? Are we not "little Christs," interceding for our neighbors and even taking on their sins? Bainton writes that this concept "ought to be placarded as the epitome of Luther's ethic."[28]

How can I presume to be "Christ" for my neighbor? I can be Christ to my neighbor because Jesus has given me His precious name:

> Faith unites the soul with Christ just as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this solemn vow, as the Apostle Paul teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh. And if they are one flesh, there is a true marriage between them—indeed, the most perfect of marriages because human marriages are but a shadow of this one true union. Given the marriage between Christ and the soul, it follows that they hold everything in common, the good as well as the evil. Accordingly, the soul that trusts Christ can boast and glory in him since it regards what he has as its own. And it follows that whatever the soul has Christ claims as his own.[29]

Faith unites the soul with Christ. Luther had introduced this metaphor in the *Address to the German Nobility*. Here, in this "lyrical rapture," it finds its fullest expression.[30] Our Savior exchanges righteousness, life, and salvation for sin, death, and hell. He seals this with the wedding ring of faith. This is the supreme act of love, found in the most joyful, most unjust exchange of all time. This, Luther writes, is a "most pleasing

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[28] Bainton, 179.
[29] Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, 62.
[30] AE 36:5.

picture not only of communion but also of blessed battle that leads to victory, salvation, and redemption."[31]

This joyful exchange is the central event of the Christian's life.[32] By this exchange, the source of Christian liberty, Christ and His Church are wed. They live for each other. To all the wonders God worked through his servant Martin Luther in this year of jubilee, we can add this: the restoration of true love.

III. Scholastic love: The miseducation of Martin Luther

> *If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?* (James 2:15–16)

> *Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.* (Luke 10:31)

> *Begging priests and prophets frequent the doors of the rich and persuade them that they possess a god-given power founded on sacrifices and incantations. If the rich person or any of his ancestors has committed an injustice, they can fix it with pleasant rituals … and they persuade not only individuals but whole cities that the unjust deeds of the living or the dead can be absolved or purified through ritual sacrifices and pleasant games. These initiations, as they call them, free people from punishment hereafter, while a terrible fate awaits those who have not performed the rituals.*[33]

> *Feed men, and then ask of them virtue!*[34]

> *"Come and kiss me, and let me congratulate you on your great promotion. I do so very heartily."*
>
> *"Thank you, grandpapa," she said, touching his forehead with her lips, thus being, as it were, very sparing with her kiss. But those*

[31] Ibid.

[32] Oberman, 183. Cf. Bainton, 179, and Armin Scheutze, "Ministering to God's Free People" (WLS Essay File, 1967), 6.

[33] Plato, *Republic,* in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

[34] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (Norwalk, CT: Easton, 1979).

> *lips now were august and reserved for nobler foreheads than that of an old cathedral hack. For Mr Harding still chanted the Litany from Sunday to Sunday, unceasingly, standing at that well known desk in the cathedral choir; and Griselda had a thought in her mind that when the Hartletop people should hear of the practice they would not be delighted. Dean and archdeacon might be very well, and if her grandfather had even been a prebendary, she might have put up with him; but he had, she thought, almost disgraced his family in being, at his age, one of the working menial clergy of the cathedral. She kissed him, therefore, sparingly, and resolved that her words with him should be few.*[35]

If Aristotle had not been a typical man, Luther would have considered him the Antichrist.[36] This seems a bit excessive, considering that Aristotle was searching for the same Rule, stumbling around without the guiding light of faith. Several theses Luther presented at the Scholastic Disputation of September 1517 condemn the one whom Thomas Aquinas called, simply, "the Philosopher."[37] Luther expanded on these theses three years later in the *Address to the German Nobility*, calling Aristotle a "blind, heathen teacher," whose *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *De anima*, and—most anti-Christ of all—*Ethics*, should be handed over for destruction.[38]

With these pronouncements Luther made a clean break from his education. As a young man in Erfurt, he was fed a steady diet of the Philosopher. He took courses in *Prior* and *Posterior Analytics*, *Metaphysics*, and the notorious *Ethics*. He was taught to solve academic (and theological) disputes with Aristotelian logic. Ironically, his first series of lectures as a professor in Wittenberg was on *Ethics*.[39] But Luther could never overlook two very important points: Aristotle did not believe in the immortality of the individual soul, but did believe that man *becomes* good by doing good.

Scholastic disputations aside, not everything Aristotle wrote merits the bonfire. In Ap IV 24 Melanchthon quotes Aristotle as (rightly) saying, "Neither the evening star nor the morning star is more beautiful

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[35] Trollope, *Framley Parsonage* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962).

[36] Oberman, 121.

[37] AE 31:3–16.

[38] AE 44:200–201; cf. Daniel M. Deutschlander, *The Narrow Lutheran Middle* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2011), 8.

[39] Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 46, 62.

than righteousness."[40] If Aristotle came to BIC and talked about what he thought about the heavens and the earth, I would walk back to the parsonage thinking, "I have plenty to work with here." His teaching about the Prime Unmoved Mover, one and eternal, gives us some material, especially when it comes to his philosophy of service. Everything that is moved has a mover.[41] The soul transmits to the body the movements by which it is itself moved.[42] It is a characteristic of *grace*, no less, that we serve the one who has shown grace to us. To those who have been gracious to us there are debts that can never be repaid; e.g., to our parents and to the gods. Life is not long enough for us to serve everybody as we should.[43]

Those of us dwelling in the Lutheran middle can appreciate Aristotle's quest for the ethical mean. "All questions," he wrote, "are a search for the middle."[44] There is no substance in the extremes of excess and deficit.[45] *Ethics* instructs us to return to the center, where virtue is found.[46]

For Aristotle, it is in the perfect exercise of virtue that we find happiness.[47] While he calls this exercise an activity of the soul, in reality it is much more worldly. The body's actions produce the virtues or vices in the soul, not vice versa. We become just by doing just acts, and unjust through unjust acts. This produces startling admissions: a man can steal without being a thief,[48] a good citizen is not necessarily a good man,[49] and a man who cowers on the battlefield *becomes* a coward.[50]

What's more, a man cannot exercise virtue perfectly without a certain amount of prosperity: "The best life is the gift of virtue, when virtue has external goods enough for the performance of good actions."[51] It is this infatuation with wealth that ruins *Ethics*. Wealth stains every Aristotelian virtue. For example, magnificence is found in spending money on honorable, religious, and public objects.[52] Justice,

40 *Ethics* V, 1129b.
41 *Physics* VII, 241b.
42 *De anima* I, 406a.
43 *Ethics* V, 1133a; VIII, 1163b; IX, 1170b.
44 *Posterior Analytics* 90a.
45 *Metaphysics* XIV, 1090b.
46 Ibid., II, 1106b–1107a.
47 *Ethics* I, 1102a; X, 1177a; *Politics* VII, 1332a.
48 *Ethics* V, 1134a.
49 *Politics* III, 1276b; *Ethics* II, 1105b.
50 *Ethics* II, 1103b–1104a.
51 *Politics* VII, 1323b.
52 *Ethics* IV, 1122b.

the most complete virtue, especially as it guides our relationship with our neighbor, is ultimately defined in terms of proportional returns, rewards, and contracts for services rendered.[53] The mean of just action doesn't sound very happy to me when it lies between *acting* unjustly and *being treated* unjustly.[54] Is this what it means to live righteously: to walk around all day worrying about being treated unjustly? Doesn't this make me sound a little full of myself, and quite boring as well? In the end, it should not surprise us that pride, not justice, is the crown of virtues in *Ethics*.[55]

It is worth asking if Luther was rebelling against Aristotle, the historical student of Plato, or against "Aristotle," the synthetic result of a process that began with Aristotle's rediscovery by Arab philosophers and ended with the toppling of Platonism, or "Platonism" as Augustine and Gregory understood it, as the predominant academic system in Western Europe. It was the philosophy of this "Aristotle," the "supreme truth and philosopher" of Al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes (as well as the Sephardic Jewish philosopher Maimonides) that was translated into Latin for the scholastic theologians to use, for young Martin Luther to study, and for the Reformer to condemn.[56]

Like adiaphora, it is not so much to the man himself, or the Arab/Latin version of the man himself, but to the *use* of Aristotle that Luther objects; in the Scholastic Disputation and the *Address to the German Nobility* it is clear that by "Aristotle" Luther means the whole system of scholastic theology, especially its champion, Thomas Aquinas.

Aside from his doctrines of sin, grace, faith, and works, there is little that is objectionable in Thomas's theology. What did he have to teach us about Christian service, or charity?

For all his compendious quotes of Scripture, it is the Philosopher, not the Word of God, who defines love in Thomist theology; since all four Aristotelian causes (i.e., formal, material, efficient, and final) are found in charity, it is the essence of virtue. It is created by the initial movement of faith, the initial infusing of grace, and—according to a misreading of Galatians 5:6 (ἐνεργουμένη/*operatur* as passive instead of middle/deponent)—we are perfected by our meritorious acts that spring from this virtue.[57]

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[53] Ibid., VIII, 1155a.

[54] Ibid., V, 1133b.

[55] IV, 1124a–1125a.

[56] Cf. Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought,* rev. ed. Vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987 [1971]), 237–239.

[57] *Summa Theologica* II, 2, q. 23–24; cf. FC SD III 62.

Within this world of merit, there is an *ordo caritatis*, an order of charity. The cornerstone of this order is found in Song of Songs 2:4:

הֱבִיאַנִי אֶל־בֵּית הַיָּיִן וְדִגְלוֹ עָלַי אַהֲבָה

Note how the Vulgate improperly translates the noun דִּגְלוֹ as a verb:

Introduxit me in cellam vinariam ordinavit *in me caritatem.*[58]

Does exegesis matter? From this improper translation the whole structure of merit is built.

Thomist charity is an unequal love. Its inequality is reinforced negatively; i.e., it is a greater sin *not* to act according to certain loves, such as the command to love your immediate family in 1 Timothy 5:8. Thus, concludes Thomas, the good Christian man will of course love God more than man, but also Dad more than Mom, parents more than wife, and friends more than enemies; the greater love means greater merit.[59]

Jack Barry and Dan Enright (not their real names) thought they were really onto something when they created the game show *Twenty-One*, which premiered on NBC in 1956, brought to you by the good people at Geritol. The goal was simple: the previous show's champion and the contender would answer questions worth anywhere from one to eleven points until one of them reached, appropriately enough, a score of twenty-one.

Now, I'm no mathematician, but it seems to me that the simplest thing to do would be to ask for one eleven-point question and one ten-point question and take home my $500 (in Eisenhower-era currency) for every point I scored above my opponent. Contestants on the first few episodes of *Twenty-One* agreed with this logic. They kept asking Jack Barry for the big score. However, the ten-point and eleven-point questions were worth that much for a reason, and those first few contestants wasted the entire half hour demonstrating how little they knew. The show was nearly canceled. Ironically, if those contestants had succeeded in walking home after two questions, NBC and Geritol executives would've been just as enraged: they paid for a half hour and, by Geritol, they were going to get it.

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[58] The LXX translates this as τάξατε, an imperative.

[59] *STh* II, 2, q. 26–27; cf. Ap XV 25–26.

What was the solution? After a few episodes of fumbling, bumbling honesty, the entire show was rigged—ain't that America? See it for yourself in Robert Redford's 1994 film *Quiz Show.*

This is scholastic love: to take advantage of a rigged system and merit twenty-one points as easily as possible. It is as passionate as my father giving my mother an answering machine for their twentieth anniversary; as romantic as the cover of England Dan and John Ford Coley's seminal 1976 album *Nights Are Forever*. Like his hero's *Ethics*, Thomas offers us a "handbook of propriety" worthy of a theologian who calls the Gospel the "New Law";[60] like the Philosopher's supreme ethical man, the result is something "very different from a Christian saint," as Bertrand Russell—no friend of ours—wrote.[61]

The *ordo caritatis* established the "holy orders" of the Catholic Church: priests, bishops, monks, and nuns all dedicated to the meritorious love of God over the sacrificial love for one's neighbor—and even for Mom and Dad—withdrawing from the world's reality and the liberating, active love of Christ for a life of contemplative incarceration, all for the sake of the beatific vision and the "privilege" of living a life free from distractions. But did one find inner tranquility within those walls?[62]

The fruits of the *ordo caritatis* are obvious, and the unscriptural traditions that hold it up usurp the position of Christ as the only Mediator.[63] Our merits count, not His. Acts that perpetuate these traditions, not the renewed attitude of the heart, become paramount;[64] *ex opere operato* follows closely behind. Merits of penance replace mercy. Asceticism trumps marriage, the raising of children, and hard work as the highest calling, a lesson not lost on the young Luther:

> With my own eyes I saw [Prince William of Anhalt]. I was fourteen years old at Magdeburg. I saw him carrying the sack like a donkey. He had so worn himself down by fasting and vigil that he looked like a deaths'-head, mere bone and skin. No one could look upon him without feeling ashamed of his own life.[65]

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[60] Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1926), 72. Cf. John A. Braun, "Christian Freedom: The Struggle to Remain Free" (WLS Essay File, 2001), 14; Siegbert W. Becker, "Christian Liberty" (WLS Essay File, 1983), 4.

[61] Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1945), 175.

[62] Cf. Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 180.

[63] Ap XV 8.

[64] FC SD X 15.

[65] Bainton, 25.

It was this kind of shame that led Luther to knock on the door of the Black Cloister in Erfurt on July 17, 1505, seeking to find the merciful God through the rejection of the world and the abuse of the body, exchanging his student clothes for a novice's habit, by which, according to the novice's vow, "he shall deserve to inherit eternal life."[66]

In the monastery Luther discovered the great deception behind the *ordo caritatis*: its supreme virtue is neither Thomist charity, nor Aristotelian pride, but the lust for domination with a minimum of effort.[67] Within those walls, men kept the one talent they had been given to themselves, believing that God was a hard man, reaping where He did not sow (Matthew 25:24). For all his scholastic education, Luther had also stumbled into a true Platonic republic, the "maximum of static perfection,"[68] in which the clergy, while clothing their outer selves like Christ,[69] lived like Plato's philosopher-kings, dominating their republic with their sacred celibacy and "royal lies,"[70] refusing to stoop to the level of "slavish things" such as ministry.[71] Luther described their "love" as "mathematical," divorced from the incarnation of Christ, divorced from the care of souls, scorning the work of the Gospel:[72]

> If the bishops wanted to be true bishops and to attend to the church and the gospel, then a person might—for the sake of love and unity but not out of necessity—give them leave to ordain and confirm us and our preachers, provided all the pretense and fraud of unchristian ceremony and pomp were set aside. However, they are not now and do not want to be true bishops. Rather, they are political lords and princes who do not want to preach, teach, baptize, commune, or perform any proper work or office of the church.[73]

IV. The restoration of love

The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you.

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66 Oberman, 127–128; Kittelson, 52.
67 Plato, *Meno*, 73d; cf. Augustine, *De civ. Dei* V.19, *Conf.* III.16.
68 Russell, 106.
69 Bainton, 28.
70 Durant, 35.
71 *Republic* III, 395a; V, 459c.
72 E.g., Luke 13:14; AE 27:52.
73 SA III [10] 1–2.

> *Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at the table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.* (Luke 22:25–27)

> *While I was still wearing an officer's uniform after my duel, I talked about servants in general society, and I remember everyone was amazed at me: "What!" they asked, "are we to make our servants sit down on the sofa and offer them tea?" And I answered them, "Why not, sometimes at least." Everyone laughed. Their question was frivolous and my answer was not clear, but the thought in it was to some extent right.*[74]

> *Music-master Mian* [in ancient China, the "music-master" was actually the lowest of servants and almost always blind—CE] *called and, when they reached the steps, the Master said: "Here are the steps." When they reached the mat, the Master said: "Here is the mat." When they all sat down, the Master informed him: "So and so is there, so and so is there." After music-master Mian had left Zizhang asked: "Is speaking about such things with music-masters in accordance with the Way?" The Master said: "Yes, that is certainly the way to assist a music-master."*[75]

> *If I am sure of anything I am sure that [Christ's] teaching was never meant to confirm my congenital preference for safe investments and limited liabilities. I doubt whether there is anything in me that pleases Him less. And who could conceivably begin to love God on such a prudential ground—because the security (so to speak) is better? Who could even include it among the grounds for loving? Would you choose a wife or a Friend—if it comes to that, would you choose a dog—in this spirit?*[76]

The text for consideration in Wittenberg on January 16, 1519 was John 2:1–11. In his sermon that day, later published as the "Sermon on the Estate of Marriage,"[77] Martin Luther preached that the shortest

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[74] Dostoevsky.
[75] Confucius, *Analects.*
[76] C.S. Lewis.
[77] AE 44:3–14.

path to heaven was not found in forsaking the world for holy orders, but in marriage and the raising of children.

This is not the Luther who begged to be accepted as a novice in 1505. Who—or what—was responsible for this complete transformation in his theology, this profound spiritual development?

Luther owed a tremendous debt to Staupitz, his confessor and mentor, who not only raised Luther up from sweeping the floor at the monastery to "Chair of Bible" at the university in Wittenberg, but successfully brought his bright young charge to the proper understanding—displayed in the sermon above—of the relationship between the inner and outer man, between faith and works.[78]

The mystics, who fascinated Staupitz, gave Luther the initial push down this path, filling his mind with beautiful images of love and marriage. Bernard's sermons on Song of Songs abound in wedding imagery. The soul desires to be "married to the Word" and joined with "the sweet yoke of love with the King of angels."[79] From this royal source, love draws the power to flow continuously in two currents: the contemplative love of God and the active love of our neighbor.[80]

Meister Eckhart also preached on this same wedding motif, although the text was not exactly marital: Luke 10:38–42. According to the German mystic, the house of the "virgins" Mary and Martha provides us with a glimpse into the mystical union. In our marriage with Christ, He is one with us and we with Him, and we bear fruit, "radiant and shining with Him in one single unity," "living in the truth that is joyously present in good works."[81] When we are bound to ceremonies and external acts, like Martha (although in a later sermon, oddly enough, Eckhart would take Martha's side), we are distracted from God, our true love. Tauler calls this kind of love *jubilatio*, an intense awareness of God's grace.[82] In his *Condemnation*, Eckhart confessed the primacy of faith over the external motions, in words that call to mind FC X nearly three centuries in advance.[83]

But mysticism could only take Luther so far; after all, it is not we who seek God; God seeks us. The mystics' stress on inner illumination above *all* works and images—and even words themselves—easily led

[78] Bainton, 43–45; Oberman, 136.

[79] Sermon 83, from Bernard McGinn, trans., *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1986), 257–259.

[80] Sermon 50, from McGinn, 525.

[81] Sermons 2, 86, from McGinn, 36–38, 531–532.

[82] Sermon 39, from McGinn, 181.

[83] McGinn, 497.

to a rejection of the means of grace, especially in Eckhart's theology.[84] Thankfully, in 1509, Luther began to study Augustine.

Luther found in Augustine not only the break with scholastic theology he had been looking for, but also a curb to keep him from straying too far into unscriptural mysticism: "Before I called to you, you were there before me."[85] Augustine's ethics are predicated on this important truth. The man who does what God wants loves the good already, for the triune God has instilled that good in him. God is the beginning *and* the end of virtue.[86]

The middle is Christ (Matthew 18:20, Luke 23:33). He is the means to this end.[87] Christ as the one true Mediator is an image that Augustine returns to over and over throughout his work. The Son of God visits us in our mortality and misery, *in forma Dei* and *in forma servi*, conforming himself to those who were doomed to die, and He sets them free. He alone offers the long-searched-for "short cut" to participation in the divine nature.[88] He opened up this path by His death on the cross, preferring to *be* the sacrifice rather than receive it.[89] There is no mystical ladder to climb in order to become the beloved of God, for Jesus is the ladder that descends to us;[90] only through Him do we have lasting, eternal unity with God.[91]

For Augustine, the freedom found in Christ's incarnation leads us to live a life of service. The consecrated body becomes an instrument of the consecrated will, an instrument of righteousness, offering sacrifices for the glory of God. To God we owe service, both by receiving His sacraments and offering up sacrifices of humility and praise on the "altar of our heart." The fire that burns on this altar is charity.[92]

At the altar of our heart we turn to face our Groom, in whom Eros, the jealous love, and Charity, the submissive love, find their embodiment:

> But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of

[84] E.g., Sermon 101, from McGinn, 416.
[85] *Confessions*, V.2.
[86] *De civ. Dei* XIV.6, XXII.30.
[87] *De civ. Dei* XI.2.
[88] Ibid., IX.15.
[89] Ibid., X.20.
[90] *Confessions* VIII.15; XIII.30, 36.
[91] Ibid., VII.24.
[92] Ibid., I.16; X.3, 6; cf. Bernard, Sermon 49.

> the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. (2 Corinthians 3:16–18a)

"Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1b). While everyone was sitting on their hands, our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night in which He was betrayed, took off His outer garment, wrapped a towel around His waist, and, in the form of the lowliest servant, the basest slave (even lower than the Chinese music-master mentioned above), washed His disciples' feet. He did this with no hesitation, no sighing, no clucking of the tongue. He didn't ask, "How will this make me look?" He did not ask any board or committee for permission. He did not require any money. He did this "knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands" (John 13:3b). When He had washed their feet, He spoke of His great love for them and sealed His declaration of love—*the* Rule, the *mandatum Dei*—by providing His beloved with the wedding supper of bread and wine, of His precious body and blood. After they had all partaken of the same loaf and drunk from the same cup of the New Testament in His blood, the same tired argument of "who was the greatest" flared up yet again, an argument He doused with one simple statement: "I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27b).

Then Jesus prayed to His Father, preparing Himself to submit to His Father's will for the sinful world. In these prayers Jesus demonstrated His jealous love for His disciples:

> Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost. (John 17:11b–12a)

The flame of our Redeemer's jealous love would never die, as Jesus went on to pray for every soul the Father would give into His hands:

> I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one. (John 17:20–22)

In the garden of Gethsemane, when those who would be greatest slept, leaving their Master isolated in the grip of that sorrowful night, "there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him" (Luke 22:43). Jesus is the Son of Man, the Ladder on whom the angels ascend and descend, just as His prayers ascend and descend. In submission He approaches His Father in prayer and protects His own in the world with jealousy and passion; yet, for all the fire of His love, He continually whispers to us, "I am among you as the one who serves."

I felt just a little out of place as I stood shivering inside the Church of St. Nicholas, waiting for the wedding to begin. Michael, the only friend I still had from high school besides my wife, was marrying Jamie, and while I couldn't have been happier for them and was delighted to stand up as best man, it still seemed unreal that the few of us were gathered together in this Baroque masterpiece of a church on the northwest corner of the Old Town Square in Prague two days before Christmas.

The vows that Michael and Jamie spoke that day seemed out of place, too, but as they looked into each other's eyes and repeated after the pastor, I looked at my wife holding our little daughter, and she at me, and we both understood that the words made sense, and we understood how beautiful a moment this was for all of us. Michael and Jamie were not speaking the typical "richer and poorer, sickness and health," and all that. They were speaking the words of one widow to another, the bereaved woman of Moab to the bereaved woman of Bethlehem (Ruth 1:16–17). They echoed those promises of fidelity and faithful service that never fades, a promise born of faith in the heart of Ruth, who was, as we said of the shingleback, "free to go."

For Luther, the wedding images of Scripture paint this most beautiful picture of forgiveness, freedom, fidelity, and service:

> My beloved is mine, and I am his. (Song of Songs 2:16)

> And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. (Hosea 2:19)

> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or

> wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:25–27)

In the great exchange of love between Christ and His Bride, sealed with the wedding ring of faith, we become "altogether beautiful" (Song of Solomon 4:7),[93] dedicating our Christian freedom to serving Him, loving God, loving our neighbor, risking all, laboring for all, and loving all for His sake:

> For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. (2 Corinthians 5:14–16a)

"Regarding no one according to the flesh" is to see the world through the eyes of our Lover, to see that this narrow Lutheran middle, which we protect so jealously, opens up into a mission field as broad as time and space allow. The Eros that defends the faith finds content in the Charity that extends the faith.[94]

Is there a need to perpetuate these wedding images, the "sure signs and pledges" of this love above all loves, which are the Word and Sacraments themselves, among our people?[95]

This summer I was pinch-hitting for a pastor in our circuit. I asked the Bible class what portion of a modern wedding best expressed the love of Christ for His Church.

The answer was silence.

Conclusion: We are free to love and serve

> *And out of this worldwide festival of death, this ugly rutting fever that inflames the evening sky all round—will love someday rise up out of this, too?*[96]

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[93] Cf. Christopher W. Mitchell, *The Song of Songs* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 963–965.

[94] Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 90, 110; AC XX 29; Werner H. Franzmann, "Being Made All Things to All Men – 1 Corinthians 9:19–22" (WLS Essay File: 1955), 6.

[95] AE 12:265.

[96] Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain* (New York: Knopf, 1953).

> *To all I say: work very hard at this game of love, that you may join me, and him, in the kingdom.*[97]

> *Think of the time when you will be the pastor of a congregation and make a vow to God that you will adopt the apostle* [Paul's] *method, that you will not stand in your pulpits sad-faced, as if you were bidding men to come to a funeral, but like men that go wooing a bride or announcing a wedding.*[98]

> *And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.* (Colossians 3:14)

Mencius, the most important follower of Confucius, had had it with "village poseurs," men who went through the motions of the Way with no sincerity. This was not what Confucius, the Master, intended. The Master had taught the way of "cultured spontaneity." Cultured spontaneity, ironically, required a great deal of effort, a host of prescribed rituals, which "trimmed" inborn emotions. The Master's rival, Laozi, encouraged men to forsake rituals and not waste time trying to fix a corrupt world.[99] Effort poisons experience. Yet Mencius couldn't help but notice that the rival had his own host of rituals.

The goal was the same for both teachers. By participating in the *Dao* (道 "Way"), or *Tian* (天 "cosmic order"), we achieve *de* (德 "virtue"). The problem, as Mencius saw it, was not the external act (or non-act), but the attitude of the heart. He, too, was searching for the Rule. The Master taught that one had to love the *Dao* before genuine instruction could take place.[100] The Master's rival said the same. What was a man to do? Should he settle for being a village poseur, a "thief of *de*"? How could his heart be sincere before following the Way? How could the road that leads to virtue only work for those who were already virtuous? Where did that kind of pre-existing virtue come from? Mencius found himself caught between the traditionalist effort of Confucius and the primitive effortlessness of Laozi.

Did Luther not find himself in the same position, a medieval Mencius at the crossroads of Catholic tradition and the radical, primitive

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[97] Anthony Burgess, *Man of Nazareth* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

[98] C.F.W. Walther, *Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981).

[99] Lao-tzu (Laozi), *Tao Te Ching,* trans. D.C. Lau (London: Penguin, 1963), 38.

[100] *Analects* 6.12, 7.8, 7.30.

anarchy of Zwinglians and Zwickau Prophets, fire-breathing Müntzer and iconoclastic Anabaptists? Apparently this spiritual problem is not endemic to the West.

In *Trying Not to Try*, Edward Slingerland, Professor of Asian Studies and the Canada Research Chair in Chinese Thought and Embodied Cognition at the University of British Columbia (!), claims that the ancient Chinese concept of *wu-wei* (無為 "not-doing") is the key to unlocking the mysterious phenomenon that an athlete in the West might call being "in the zone" or "on fire," a higher dimension of effortless effort, of spontaneity over calculation, of nothing but net; in Slingerland's terms, "hot" over "cold" cognition.[101]

What will foster sincere love for the *wu-wei* unto *de*, this path of spontaneity, this life of hot cognition? How can we reconcile the ways of Confucius and Laozi and solve the problem for Mencius? For Slingerland, the solution exists in a "community of trust" based on shared values (though not, he assures us, an adherence to "ancient texts") instead of rewards and punishments, an "entity of commitment" filled with sincere "cooperators" who understand that in any entity such as this, "defectors," or "thieves of *de*," will be around in their own insincere way—like weeds in a field of wheat![102] Haven't we heard that metaphor somewhere before?

If the distinguished Chair of Embodied Cognition had tripped over a copy of our Confessions as he walked between the moldy stacks of the library, he would've discovered that a handful of medieval Germans, of all people, had found both the way to live spontaneously and the way *to love* that spontaneous way of life, joyfully and sincerely:

> We also believe, teach, and confess that all people, particularly those who have been reborn and renewed through the Holy Spirit, are obligated to do good works. In this sense the words "necessary," "should," and "must" are used correctly, in Christian fashion, also in regard to the reborn; in no way is such use contrary to the pattern of sound words and speech. Of course, the words *necessitas*, *necessarium* are not to be understood as a compulsion when they are applied to the reborn, but only as the required obedience, which they perform *out of a spontaneous spirit* [*libero et spontaneo spiritu*]—not because of the compulsion

[101] 27–28.

[102] 112, 178–180.

or coercion of the law—because they are "no longer under the law, but under grace."[103]

Like Mencius, the world will continue to agonize under the paradox of spontaneity. We will live by ours. In view of our Savior's righteousness, the source of our Christian liberty, let us shed the pessimistic view of ministry along this middle way as a "dangerous calling" beset with uncountable chances for failure, for unfaithfulness to the Bride *and* the Groom. Let us heed the admonition given to the Ephesian Christians and return to our first love (Revelation 2:4), to this blessed, mystical union with Christ, to His declaration of love in the Gospel, His betrothal to us in Baptism, and the wedding supper He serves us at His Table, that we may love each other with "jealousy unyielding as the grave" (Song of Songs 8:6; NIV), with the immovable fidelity of the shingleback, abounding in grace and peace and living sacrifice. Out of the Spirit of spontaneity, let us risk all that we have for this middle path, this "royal road" between the righteousness of works and the righteousness of anarchy,[104] and embrace this life on the edge with our Lord Jesus, "in whom all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9; NIV), for "in him all things"—contemplation and action; Eros and Charity; effort and effortlessness; West and East; inner spirit and external work; freedom and service; life and death; time and eternity; God and man—"hold together" (Colossians 1:17b). LSQ

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[103] FC Ep IV 8–10.
[104] AE 26:343.

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Pastors of the Cross:
A Review of the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 with Applications for the Pastor

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BILL WAS MY BAPTIST NEIGHBOR. HE WOULD update me on the battle he had with prostrate cancer. Each visit would end up the same. He would have a long, forced, explanation that if he had faith strong enough, and really believed God would heal him, then he would be healed. Though I tried to speak the truth of the cross for his comfort, he did not seem interested in this and reverted back to his theology of glory.

Gertie, a 104 year-old Lutheran, was getting so weak and frail. Her enduring comfort was in the Lord Jesus and his pardon for all her sins at the cross of Calvary. No matter what was going on in her life, she knew of God's love and forgiveness for her as the blessings of the cross were bestowed upon her in her Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Holy Absolution. She lived under the cross of Christ.

For this reason, God has made us pastors of the cross. Here is a brief summary of the theology of the cross:

> God reveals himself in concealment, God's wisdom appears to men as foolishness, God's power is perfected in weakness, God's glory parades in lowliness, God's life becomes effective in the death of his Son.[1]

[1] Walter von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), 11.

Our goal will be to reflect upon the Heidelberg Theses of 1518 in order to sharpen our understanding of the distinction between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross and then make a few applications to the ministry of the pastor. Martin Luther was asked to present theses for debate for the Augustinian brethren in Heidelberg. The 28 short theological theses are like bombs that blow away lies and reveal the eternal truth. They call it like it is. Luther prepares us for this study: "Distrusting completely our own wisdom, according to that counsel of the Holy Spirit, 'Do not rely on your own insight'" (Prov. 3:5).[2]

By God's grace our teaching and preaching as pastors in Christ's Church will be to "call the thing what it actually is," in other words, to teach the pure Word of God which gives a person life in Christ alone. In 1 Corinthians 1:23–24, St. Paul says, "…but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."[3]

The theses can be grouped as follows:

I. 1–12 (Good Works)
II. 13–18 (Free Will)
III. 19–24 (Two Theologies)
IV. 25–28 (God's Work)

I. Good Works (Theses 1–12)

Thesis 1: The law of God, the most salutary doctrine of life, cannot advance man on his way to righteousness, but rather hinders him.

There is absolutely no path to righteousness by the law. "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law." In Romans 5:20, the Apostle states, "Law intervened, to increase the trespass," and in Romans 7:8, he adds, "But when the commandment came, sin revived." So much for the law of God as a way to righteousness!

Pastors of the cross, by God's grace, seek to preach having the proper distinction of law and gospel. Preachers of the cross wield the law in all its fullness to kill any attempt to come to God in our own righteousness. Since we are all legalists by our sinful nature, both pastor and hearer need to hear the law lest we hinder that God-given righteousness that

[2] Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), LW 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 39.

[3] NKJV used unless the Bible is within a cited quotation.

comes by the cross. The theology of the cross has as its goal eventually to preach the gospel with all fullness and joy. Dividing the law and gospel rightly, "We preach Christ crucified!" (1 Corinthians 1:23)

Thesis 2: Much less can human works, which are done over and over again with the aid of natural precepts, so to speak, lead to that end.

If the law of God fails to advance us to righteousness, how much more futile are human works for that purpose.[4]

Not only is preaching the sermon (with proper law/gospel distinction) a proclamation of the cross but also the entire divine service is such a preaching. The pastor of the cross knows that solid liturgy and hymns teach the futility of any works, whether those works are based on the law of God or from man. Rather, the liturgy and hymns show us our sin and lead us to Christ and his cross alone.

Thesis 3: Although the works of man always seem attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins.

> Christ says concerning the Pharisees in Matt. 23:27[–28, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men's* bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."]… God does not judge according to appearances but searches "the minds and hearts" (Psalm 7:9). For without grace and faith it is impossible to have a pure heart. Acts 15:9, "He cleansed their hearts by faith."[5]

Those who take the way of the law are under a curse. Thus they are mortal sins, meaning without salvation. In all probability, the person living by the theology of glory is in mortal sin, meaning trusting in himself and not the Savior.

As pastors of the cross we will expect much persecution for speaking in this way concerning the law and its curse. We are calling works righteousness evil when the world calls it good. This will be highly offensive! Jesus explains to the preacher of the cross, "Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile *you,* and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap

[4] LW 31:43.
[5] Ibid.

for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets" (Luke 6:22–23). But, dear Lutheran pastor of the cross, look what you are offering them by applying the law and gospel properly: "The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up" (1 Sam. 2:6). "… as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:9–10). Preachers of the cross will be often charged with being negative and gloomy by not holding up man's works as meritorious, but remember, what is unattractive, the cross, is the most beautiful: salvation in Christ!

Thesis 4: Although the works of God are always unattractive and appear evil, they are nevertheless really eternal merits.

> That the works of God are unattractive is clear from what is said in Isa. 53:2, "He had no form of comeliness," and in 1 Sam. 2:6, "The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up." … In this way, consequently, the unattractive works which God does in us, that is, those which are humble and devout, are really eternal, for humility and fear of God are our entire merit.[6]

The works of God in Christ and the cross are eternal life! The pastor of the cross holds up that life that comes alone in the crucified Savior through His appointed means of grace, as unattractive as those ordinances may be.

Thesis 5: The works of men are thus not mortal sins (we speak of works which are apparently good), as though they were crimes.

These works of men are civil righteousness. They are not true good works in the eyes of God. The term "mortal sins" is not used here as if they were crimes which our government would punish but rather sins which are under the curse of God. The way of the law leaves us under such a curse.

Thesis 6: The works of God (we speak of those which he does through man) are thus not merits, as though they were sinless.

Here, "works of God" are the good fruit of faith. Yet, as Christians we are at the same time a sinner and a saint (*simul iustis et peccator*).

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[6] Ibid., 44.

"Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins."[7]

All Christians sin. But what about when he is doing a true good work? Yes, he is still a sinner, even then. Some people may say that the righteous man indeed sins, but not when he does good. Luther, however, uses this comparison: "If someone cuts with a rusty and rough hatchet, even though the worker is a good craftsman, the hatchet leaves bad, jagged, and ugly gashes. So it is when God works through us."[8]

Thesis 7: The works of the righteous would be mortal sins if they would not be feared as mortal sins by the righteous themselves out of pious fear of God.

> To trust in works, which one ought to do in fear, is equivalent to giving oneself the honor and taking it from God, to whom fear is due in connection with every work. But this is completely wrong, namely to please oneself, to enjoy oneself in one's works, and to adore oneself as an idol.[9]

The pastor of the cross knows of the godly fear of God, that is, faith. This is the filial fear of God and not a servile fear. The result is a trust in our heavenly Father who sent his beloved Son to suffer and die for us and our salvation. With reverence we are servants of the mysteries of God which are received in holy fear or faith. With reverence we minister in the divine service to his people who worship in reverent fear.

Thesis 8: By so much more are the works of man mortal sins when they are done without fear and in unadulterated, evil self-security.

> The inevitable deduction from the preceding thesis is clear. For where there is no fear there is no humility. Where there is no humility there is pride, and where there is pride there are the wrath and judgment of God, "for God opposes the haughty." Indeed, if pride would cease there would be no sin anywhere.[10]

> A theology of success looks upon financial gain and external growth as sure sign of divine blessing. The theology of glory,

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7 Ecclesiastes 7:20, quoted in LW 31:45.
8 LW 31:45.
9 Ibid., 46.
10 Ibid., 47.

> understood in this way, is constantly in search of progress in this world. It draws up programs which are designed to make the kingdom of God sufficiently manifest that we may recognize at least the outlines of paradise in this world. But since sin, death, and the devil cannot be overcome except through the daily forgiveness of sins, and since the power of this world has not been eliminated, the theology of glory stands in sharp contrast to the form of God's kingdom under the cross.[11]

Success-glory theology is poison for pastors. Pastors of the cross offer Christ's grace and forgiveness, an eternally successful victory over all our enemies of sin, death, and the devil.

Thesis 9: To say that works without Christ are dead, but not mortal, appears to constitute a perilous surrender of the fear of God.

> For in this way men become certain and therefore haughty, which is perilous. For in such a way God is constantly deprived of the glory which is due him and which is transferred to other things, since one should strive with all diligence to give him the glory.[12]

Thesis 10: Indeed, it is very difficult to see how a work can be dead and at the same time not a harmful and mortal sin.

God despises what is not alive, as is written in Proverbs 15:8, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." The will loves a dead work, and therefore it loves something dead.

Thesis 11: Arrogance cannot be avoided or true hope be present unless the judgment of condemnation is feared in every work.

> For it is impossible to trust in God unless one has despaired in all creatures and knows that nothing can profit one without God. Thus arrogance must be avoided, not only in the work, but in the inclination also, that is, it must displease us still to have confidence in the creature.[13]

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[11] Karl Wengenroth, "The Theology of the Cross," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (October 1982): 274–275.

[12] LW 31:47.

[13] Ibid., 48.

How can we grow in humility and trust in Christ alone? Luther teaches the pastor three elements of spiritual growth: *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio*. He prays for the Spirit to teach him as he humbly and earnestly reads the Word and joins the saints in the divine service. He contemplates and takes to heart the Word, studying the texts in the original languages, inwardly digesting it. Struggles and affliction will give many opportunities to trust the Word as the devil will work hard to separate him from Christ and his Word.

Thesis 12: In the sight of God sins are then truly venial when they are feared by men to be mortal.

God uses *Anfechtung* to lead pastors to despair of any pride and show us the seriousness of our sin. *Anfechtung* is the most real experience of the Christian living under the cross. Yet when tempted to despair or disbelieve, when the clouds are dark and thick, when the *Anfechtung* is greatest, we can turn back to the cross of Jesus and there find comfort, peace, and even joy. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:1–4). Here we can cling to the cross and confess, "Here I stand!"

II. Free Will (Theses 13–18)

Thesis 13: Free will, after the fall, exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do, it commits a mortal sin.

> [T]he will is captive and subject to sin. Not that it is nothing, but that it is not free except to do evil. According to John 8:34, 36, "Every one who commits sin is a slave to sin. … So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."[14]

Can our will help the cause? Do we even want righteousness that avails before God? Does our will prepare us for being saved by grace? "Do your best" is an empty hope.

[14] Ibid., 48–49.

Thesis 14: Free will, after the fall, has power to do good only in a passive capacity, but it can always do evil in an active capacity.

"Free will, however, is dead, as demonstrated by the dead whom the Lord has raised up."[15] What can we do? We are passive. We have no active capacity. Like heating up a pot of water, our conversion comes from the outside, like raising a corpse. There is no small active capacity.

This thesis finds application in outreach work of the church. The work of conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit alone. It is a joy to hear evangelism presentations that confess this. The Word is to be preached and God works on the hearts. "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44).

Thesis 15: Nor could free will remain in a state of innocence, much less do good, in an active capacity, but only in its passive capacity.

Even before the fall there is no active capacity! Adam is still saved by grace even if he never fell into sin. He is given life and everything all by grace. Adam also lived by faith alone. We were never made to stand alone but only in God's grace. The fall is the active capacity to lie.

Children may seem to some to be innocent as Adam before the fall. But the pastor of the cross knows the work he has in instructing children. He knows they need to be taught the theology of the cross. He sees the value of Lutheran schools and home schools where the law and gospel are properly divided. A Christ-centered, cross-centered education views that education as a service to a humble, needy soul that needs to be rescued and taught by God. Support by the pastor is helpful to the parents who desire Christian education, for the parents face the pressure to be part of the glory of the public school's activities, sports and fine facilities. A little Lutheran school or a humble homeschool may look weak but is the power of God because the cross is in the center of every subject, as all learning takes place with its inseparable tie to the cross of Jesus.

Thesis 16: The person who believes that he can obtain grace by doing what is in him adds sin to sin so that he becomes doubly guilty.

> While a person is doing what is in him, he sins and seeks himself in everything. But if he should suppose that through sin

[15] Ibid., 49.

> he would become worthy of or prepared for grace, he would add haughty arrogance to his sin and not believe that sin is sin and evil is evil, which is an exceedingly great sin. As Jer. 2:13 says, "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water," that is, through sin they are far from me and yet they presume to do good by their own ability. [16]

Here the theology of glory bottoms out. Thesis 17 and following are a great turn to the gospel. Christ now enters the scene. The Apostles' Creed can be heard.

Thesis 17: Nor does speaking in this manner give cause for despair, but for arousing the desire to humble oneself and seek the grace of Christ.

> [T]he kingdom of heaven is given to children and the humble (Mark 10:14,16), and Christ loves them. They cannot be humble who do not recognize that they are damnable whose sin smells to high heaven. Sin is recognized only through the law. It is apparent that not despair, but rather hope, is preached when we are told that we are sinners.[17]

Preaching to show the crisis leads to the peace of the crisis in the cross:

> A sick person seeks the physician when he recognizes the seriousness of his illness. Therefore one does not give cause for despair or death by telling a sick person about the danger of his illness, but, in effect, one urges him to seek a medical cure. To say that we are nothing and constantly sin when we do the best we can does not mean that we cause people to despair (unless we are fools); rather, we make them concerned about the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.[18]

This dying and drowning of the old man and rising of the new man in Christ is experienced daily in the remembrance of the promises of

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[16] Ibid., 50.
[17] Ibid., 51.
[18] Ibid.

God to us in our Holy Baptism. From these promises in Baptism, the new man arises to live a new life in Christ.

Thesis 18: It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.

> The Apostle does [this] in Rom. 2 and 3:9, where he says, "I have already charged that all men are under the power of sin." However, he who acts simply in accordance with his ability and believes that he is thereby doing something good does not seem worthless to himself, nor does he despair of his own strength. Indeed, he is so presumptuous that he strives for grace in reliance on his own strength.[19]

Like an addict, we must first despair of our condition. Then the cross of Christ is our only hope.

Part III: Two Theologies (Theses 19–24)

The arch has made its way from law to gospel and this section makes up the great keystone. These are the most referred to theses of the Disputation. Here Luther uses the expression "theology of the cross." The concern in this section is not so much of the two theologies but the theologian himself. Is he a pastor of the cross?

Thesis 19: That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened (Rom. 1:20).

The so-called theologians of glory are really pseudo-theologians, no true pastors at all. They claim to know all about God as he is revealed in nature as St. Paul describes in Romans 1:20: "For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse…." Yet to know the power of God does not make one a pastor of the cross. Contrast Romans 1 with 1 Corinthians 1 where we find the great passage on the theology of the cross: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block

[19] Ibid., 52.

and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:21–25).

The pastor of the cross learns how God is a hidden God. God is hidden in that he reveals what he wants to reveal and it is not much. Moses, being a theologian of glory, said,

> "Please, show me Your glory." … But He [God] said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." And the Lord said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen. (Exodus 33:18–23)

God showed him his backside. We see God's backside as we view the cross. We see God as Jesus is presented by Pilate with the words, "*Ecce Homo*!" Philip was also a theologian of glory, not satisfied with Jesus' lowliness.

> If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him. Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, "Show us the Father"? (John 14:6–9)

Pastors of the cross realize how much we really don't know about God. We only know the small bit he reveals of himself in the Scriptures. The best he wishes to show us is revealed in the weak things, such as the Lord Jesus Christ, the crucified. We are taught by God to be content with the bit he shows us until the day of glory.

Thesis 20: He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

Pastoral care under the cross has us asking how we will handle suffering. Fallen reason wants to either eliminate suffering or the person himself. Under the cross we don't necessarily remove suffering but live

under the cross with the suffering. Under the cross, a pastor can shed the light of the gospel upon the darkness of suffering lives.

Making the sign of the cross as we pray in the midst of suffering is no empty Romanist ritual but a teaching of the gospel personally applied to us. The cross is the heart of our confidence in God's grace and mercy. Some may visit a sufferer with all smiles and lighthearted false joy yet the sufferer is no fool. The cross, even pictured, described, or signed with the hand, reminds the sufferer of Christ crucified and our cross as we follow Him. A giddy visitor to a sick room is not willing to call a thing what it is. A pastor of the cross is willing to call it what it is. It is real suffering, real cross bearing. How many a sufferer grows in extraordinary faith while the successful one in glory loses his faith, such as in our earlier examples of Bill and Gertie.

Gethsemane finds our Savior facing death and suffering, but these are not welcomed with open arms and a fake cheery countenance. Suffering is completely repugnant. Jesus prays that it be taken away. Jesus also prays for God's will to be done. Angels are sent to comfort Him. If we face sin and death on our own we are in a theology of glory. Only Jesus can take on death and overcome it.

> The experience of defeat and the feeling of helplessness is good for pastors. Jesus experienced apparent defeat and helplessness, we call it Good Friday. Suffering puts us at the foot of the cross beside parishioners. We suffer together to learn of the peace that does "pass all human understanding." Defeat is the way of the cross, but ironically, defeat acknowledged in faith becomes victory. …"Where is God in all this?" We go to the cross and we answer, "Right in the middle of it all!"[20]

Thesis 21: A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

> He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls "enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18), for they hate the

[20] Richard C. Eyer, *Pastoral Care Under the Cross* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994), 33.

> cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Thus they call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good.[21]

The pastor of the cross is free to call it like it is. Such words as sin, law, repentance, judgment, wrath, punishment, perishing, death, devil, damnation, and the cross are all real things to be spoken about with courage and at the right times. In *The Bondage of the Will*, Martin Luther is regularly pointing out to Erasmus the foolishness of not wanting to make any assertions and exhorting him rather to call a thing what it is.[22]

We are ministers of the cross, authorized to call a spade a spade and that means speaking clearly and making assertions about the gospel as well. For the cross is the post in the ground that holds all truth in place. If we lose that post all will be blown away. The more we try to avoid the offense, the more people are hurt. The cross is God's attack on our sin. The cross is salvation from sin. The cross is shorthand for the entire work of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus.

Thesis 22: That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.

> Because men do not know the cross and hate it, they necessarily love the opposite, namely, wisdom, glory, power, and so on. Therefore they become increasingly blinded and hardened by such love, for desire cannot be satisfied by the acquisition of those things which it desires. Just as the love of money grows in proportion to the increase of the money itself, so the dropsy of the soul becomes thirstier the more it drinks, as the poet says: "The more water they drink, the more they thirst for it." The same thought is expressed in Eccles. 1:8: "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing." This holds true of all desires.[23]

Once on the glory train, it is hard to get off. Pastors are suckers for the glory train. Programs, numbers, "success" comparisons to other pastors … our sinful nature can't get enough of this poison. We get easily

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[21] LW 31:53.

[22] Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, tr. Henry Cole (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 19.

[23] LW 31:53–54.

discouraged and depressed when we don't see more and more glory. The theology of the cross will keep us safe in Christ the crucified.

Thesis 23: The "law brings the wrath" of God (Rom. 4:15), kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not in Christ.

Therefore he who boasts that he is wise and learned in the law boasts in his confusion, his damnation, the wrath of God, in death:

> For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, *"Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"*). (Gal. 3:10–13; emphasis added)

The theology of glory, the way of the law, so puffs up and blinds and yet it destroys. Like a balloon that swells and rises higher and higher, pastors of glory get confused and confounded, worrying about sin and not being able to live up to the law. They may even cease to care. The way of the law is a tricky enemy. The balloon of glory will burst and we will come crashing down.

Those of the cross live on! They will not look full and rising but will be the humbled, the lowly, the suffering, and looking so very small. It is not a sin to be small—a small congregation, a small synod, a small Lutheran school, a small Bible class—as long as we have Christ. Jesus at one time had large numbers leave him: "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 we join Peter to say: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:66–69).

Thesis 24: Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner.

"Indeed the law is holy (Rom. 7:12), every gift of God good (1 Tim. 4:4), and everything that is created exceedingly good."[24] The pastor of the cross is no antinomian. No. The law is good as it leads us to despair of ourselves and look to the cross. "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). This way the believer glories in nothing "except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).

IV. God's Work (Theses 25–28)

Thesis 25: He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ.

> [T]he righteousness of God is not acquired by means of acts frequently repeated, as Aristotle taught, but it is imparted by faith. "He who through faith is righteous shall live" (Rom. 1:17), and "Man believes with his heart and so is justified" (Rom. 10:10). …Not that the righteous person does nothing, but that his works do not make him righteous, rather that his righteousness creates works . … [Righteousness is all God's work.] Rom. 3:20 states, "No human being will be justified in His sight by works of the law," and, "For we hold that man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (Rom. 3:28). …Works contribute nothing to justification.[25]

In Thesis 25, the theology of the cross comes full blown. This is really a statement about justification without the deeds of the law. Luther does not go soft at the end.

Thesis 26: The law says, "Do this," and it is never done. Grace says, "Believe in this," and everything is already done.

> [F]aith justifies. "And the law (says St. Augustine) commands what faith obtains." For through faith Christ is in us, indeed, one with us. Christ is just and has fulfilled all the commands of

[24] Ibid., 55.
[25] Ibid., 56.

> God, wherefore we also fulfill everything through him since he was made ours through faith.[26]

This must seem like nonsense to the theologian of glory, either an exaggeration or simply false. But the law can't do what it demands. Look to Christ; he has done it all!

*Thesis 27: Actually one should call the work of Christ an acting work (*operans*) and our work an accomplished work (*operatum*), and thus an accomplished work pleasing to God by the grace of the acting work.*

> Since Christ lives in us through faith so he arouses us to do good works through that living faith in his work, for the works which he does are the fulfillment of the commands of God given us through faith. If we look at them we are moved to imitate them. For this reason the Apostle says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Eph. 5:1). Thus deeds of mercy are aroused by the works through which he has saved us.[27]

Where can true good works be emphasized by the pastor? Only the cross sets us free, declaring us to be righteous in Christ. We have an imputed righteousness that takes away the curse of the law and the terror of God's wrath, and because of this the Christian is free to be God's servant. Christ is now working through the believer. Here is where the pastor of the cross can instruct the hearer about vocation. Luther, in *Concerning Christian Liberty*, says, "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one."[28] In our daily vocations, the Christian is completely set free so that the law is now gladly sought out and one wishes to follow it, for God has set us free to serve and do good works in thanksgiving to the Savior.

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 56–57.

[28] Martin Luther, *Concerning Christian Liberty* The Project Gutenberg eBook, http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1911 (accessed August 24, 2015), 25.

Thesis 28: The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.

Luther contrasts the love of God and the love of man. They are quite different:

> [T]he love of God which lives in man loves sinners, evil persons, fools, and weaklings in order to make them righteous, good, wise, and strong. Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good. Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive. …Thus Christ says: "For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:13). This is the love of the cross, born of the cross, which turns in the direction where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it may confer good upon the bad and needy person. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).[29]

What a marriage God has made in Christ and his bride, the Church. Pastors of the cross know that this marriage is one-sided in that God chose us to be his bride, not because God found us pleasing and beautiful but because he made us pleasing and beautiful. "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25–27). In contrast, men love what first pleases them. It finds what attracts and the love comes into existence. In marriage, there is an exchange between the man and woman of all that they have and are. Christ takes from us all our sins and we receive from him perfect righteousness. So we truly are sinners but also at the same time saints.

This is the climax, and what a joy it is to read, "We are attractive because we are loved." He calls to being that which is nothing. This is grace. This is the theology of the cross, and God has made you a pastor of the cross.

[29] LW 31:57.

With our spirit bear Thou witness
That we are the sons of God
Who rely upon Him solely
When we pass beneath the rod;
For we know, as children should,
That the cross is for our good.
(TLH 226:4)
LSQ

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The American Recension of the Augsburg Confession and its Lessons for Our Pastors Today

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Part I

THOSE CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS OF THE Christian church that are of enduring value and authority emerged in crucibles of controversy when essential points of the Christian faith, as revealed in Scripture, were under serious attack. These symbolical documents were written at times when the need for a faithful confession of the gospel was a matter of spiritual life or death for the church and its members. For this reason those symbolical documents were thereafter used by the orthodox church as a normed norm for instructing laymen and future ministers, and for testing the doctrinal soundness of the clergy with respect to the points of biblical doctrine that they address.

The ancient Rules of Faith of the post-apostolic church, which were used chiefly for catechetical instruction and as a baptismal creed, existed in various regional versions. The version used originally at Rome is the one that has come down to us as the Apostles' Creed. These Rules of Faith were prepared specifically with the challenge of Gnosticism in view. Since the Apostles' Creed in particular summarizes the cardinal articles of faith regarding God and Christ, it emphasizes the truth that the only God who actually exists is the God who created the earth as

well as the heavens, and the truth that God's Son was truly conceived and born as a man, truly died, and truly rose from the grave.[1]

The Nicene Creed was formulated in the context of the Arian Controversy. The terminology employed in this fourth-century text exemplifies an important didactic principle that had by this time begun to be embraced by the church—namely that an official creedal statement may depart from the *terminology* of Scripture in order to clarify and preserve the *meaning* of Scripture. Arius and his followers has put a false meaning onto all the biblical terms that were originally intended by the prophets and apostles to testify to the eternal divinity of Jesus Christ. This made it necessary for St. Athanasius and the other orthodox Fathers of the fourth century to employ precise extra-biblical terms—such as *homoousios*—in their explications of the biblical doctrine. The orthodox Fathers did not think that this represented an addition of new binding doctrine above and beyond what the Scriptures required. In fact, they understood, as a matter of conviction, that such a thing was *forbidden* to them as pastors and teachers of Christ's *apostolic* church.[2] Martin Luther, in reflecting on the actions undertaken at the Council

[1] Each one of these doctrinal points, while seemingly self-evident and obvious to us, was a deliberate finger in the eye of the Gnostics with their extreme spiritual-material dualism, and with their idea that human salvation requires *man's escape from* the physical world, and not *God's entrance into* the physical world.

[2] St. Athanasius himself stated that "The holy and inspired Scriptures are fully sufficient for the proclamation of the truth" (Against the Heathen I:3; quoted in Carl A. Volz, *Faith and Practice in the Early Church* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983], 147). And among the Cappadocian Fathers, St. Basil the Great expressed himself on this point in this way: "They are charging me with innovation, and base their charge on my confession of three hypostases, and blame me for asserting one Goodness, one Power, one Godhead. In this they are not wide of the truth, for I do so assert. Their complaint is that their custom does not accept this, and that Scripture does not agree. What is my reply? I do not consider it fair that the custom which obtains among them should be regarded as a law and rule of orthodoxy. If custom is to be taken in proof of what is right, then it is certainly competent for me to put forward on my side the custom which obtains here. If they reject this, we are clearly not bound to follow them. Therefore let God-inspired Scripture decide between us; and on whichever side be found doctrines in harmony with the Word of God, in favor of that side will be cast the vote of truth" (Letter 189 [to Eustathius the physician], 3, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983 reprint], *Second Series*, Vol. VIII, 229). Again, St. Basil wrote, "What is the mark of a faithful soul? To be in these dispositions of full acceptance on the authority of the words [of the Scripture], not venturing to reject anything nor making additions. For, if 'all that is not of faith is sin,' as the Apostle says [Rom. 14.23], and 'faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God' [Rom. 10.17], everything outside Holy Scripture, not being of faith, is sin" (Cap. 22, The Morals, in *The Fathers of the Church,* Vol. 9 [Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962], 203-04).

of Nicea, describes the deceptive verbal tactics that had been employed by the Arian heretics, and the theological and pastoral response of the Nicene Fathers to those tactics:

> It is certainly true that one should teach nothing outside of Scripture pertaining to divine matters … which means only that one should teach nothing that is at variance with Scripture. But that one should not use more or other *words* than those contained in Scripture—this cannot be adhered to, especially in a controversy and when heretics want to falsify things with trickery and *distort* the words of Scripture. It thus became necessary to condense the meaning of Scripture, comprised of so many passages, into a short and comprehensive word, and to ask [the Arians] whether they regarded Christ as *homousius*, which was the *meaning* of all the words of Scripture that they had distorted with false interpretations.[3]

The original form of the Nicene Creed, as adopted at Nicea in AD 325, was revised at the Council of Constantinople in AD 381, chiefly by the addition of a lengthy section on the Holy Spirit, his person, and his work in and through the church.[4] This was to address the errors of

[3] Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 41 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 83 (emphasis added).

[4] The later addition of the *Filioque* by the Latin Church and all the issues surrounding the controversy that ensued need not be discussed in detail here. We will simply refer to the way in which Martin Chemnitz deals with this subject in his *Loci Theologici*, especially noting his statement that this issue was actually resolved (in 1439) by representatives of the Eastern and Western Churches at the Council of Florence: "Long and acrimonious was the controversy between the later Greek theologians and the Latin church regarding the procession of the Holy Spirit. The older Greeks often said that the Holy Spirit was from the Father through the Son, as we have it in that most notable confession of Gregory of Neocaesarea. And Hilary, *De Trinitate*, at the same time clearly and with express words writes, 'The Holy Spirit is, proceeds, and emanates from the Father and the Son, and just as He proceeds from the Father, so He proceeds from the Son.' … Epiphanius says the same thing in his *Ancoratus*, 9, and Augustine in his *Contra Maximinum*, 2.5. … Both parties confessed that the Spirit is of the Son as well as of the Father; but the Greeks said He is 'from the Father through the Son,' and the Latins said 'from the Father and the Son.' They each had reasons for speaking the way they did. Gregory of Nazianzus, on the basis of Romans 11, says that the prepositions *ek*, *dia*, and *eis* express the properties of [the three persons in] one unconfused essence. Therefore, the Greeks said that the Holy Spirit proceeds from (*ek*, *ex*) the Father through (*dia*) the Son, so that the property of each nature [or person] is preserved. Nor did the Latins take offense at this formula for describing the matter. For Jerome and Augustine both say that the Holy Spirit properly and principally proceeds from the Father, and they explain this by saying that the Son in being begotten of the Father receives that which

yet another new heretical group, the Pneumatomachians, who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.[5]

The Western Church's third Ecumenical Creed is the *Quicunque vult,* commonly called the Athanasian Creed.[6] In a style that shows the influence of St. Augustine's formulations, this creedal document once again and in its own way addresses the errors of Arianism—which was still embraced by some of the Germanic tribes in western Europe, and which for this reason posed a continuing threat to the church in that part of the continent. And this creedal document—more so than the Nicene Creed had done—clarified the doctrine of the person of Christ by setting forth the basic position of the Council of Ephesus of AD 431 and of the Council of Chalcedon of AD 451 over against the errors and imbalances of Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, and Eutychianism.[7]

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proceeds from the Father, namely, the Holy Spirit; but the Father receives from none, but has everything from Himself. … But in the passage of time, when major distractions arose, the Greeks spoke anathemas against those who confessed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son. ...and the Latins in turn condemned those who say the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. ... This division was healed at the Council of Florence. … When the Greeks saw the explanation of the Latins and how they believed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son and on the basis of what evidence they established their case, they agreed with the statement" (*Loci Theologici* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989], Vol. I, 142-43).

[5] The version of the Creed that had been adopted at Nicea in AD 325 was intended chiefly to be a mechanism by which the soundness of a bishop's doctrine could be tested. But the augmented version that was approved in AD 381 soon became, in the Eastern Church, also the chief catechetical text for the instruction of the laity, supplanting the local Rules of Faith that had previously been used in the various regions. In Greek Christendom, the Nicene Creed accordingly came to play the role that the Apostles' Creed plays in Latin Christendom: as each Christian's "baptismal" creed. This is also why the Nicene Creed is liturgically confessed in the Eastern Church in the personalized form of "I believe …" rather than "We believe …" as was the case with the version from AD 325.

In addition to its primary focus on refuting the Arian and Pneumatomachian heresies, the Nicene Creed retains the standard verbiage of the ancient Rules of Faith, thereby reiterating the church's opposition to Gnosticism. It also takes on one of the errors of the third-century controversial figure Origen, who had suggested that the scope of Christ's redemption included the fallen angels as well as fallen humanity. The Creed's response to that particular notion was to frame its discussion of the incarnation, and of Christ's salvific work, in such a way as to state that it was "for us *men*" that God's Son "became man" (or that it was "for us *humans*" that God's Son "became human").

[6] Its historical origins are still a bit murky, but it probably arose in what is now southern France in the late fifth or early sixth century. This originally-Latin creed was not, however, authored by the Greek Father Athanasius.

[7] Apollinarianism denied that Jesus had a human mind. Nestorianism divided the human nature from the divine nature. Eutychianism blended the human nature into the divine nature.

This was the creedal patrimony of the church catholic of which the Lutherans in the sixteenth century were heirs.[8] And the Lutherans understood the importance of this heritage and legacy as can be seen in Article I of the Augsburg Confession, which—in effect—picks up where the Ecumenical Creeds left off:

> In the first place, it is with one accord taught and held, following the decree of the Council of Nicea, that there is one divine essence which is named God and truly is God. But there are three persons in the same one essence, equally powerful, equally eternal: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All three are one divine essence, eternal, undivided, unending, of immeasurable power, wisdom, and goodness, the creator and preserver of all visible and invisible things. … Rejected, therefore, are all the heresies that are opposed to this article. …[9]

Part II

The writing of the Augsburg Confession was occasioned by the Lutheran Reformation movement in general, and in particular by the request of Emperor Charles V that those within the Holy Roman Empire who had introduced various ecclesiastical reforms should, at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, be prepared to explain and defend those reforms. The Lutheran Reformation in general had arisen in the context of the pastoral crisis that was brought on in 1517 by the sale of indulgences in regions close to Wittenberg, Electoral Saxony, where Luther was serving as preacher and professor. The Dominican monk Johann Tetzel's hawking of these indulgences was carried out with the use of dangerously extravagant claims regarding their benefits, even by medieval standards. This fired up Luther's pastoral heart and set in motion his theologian's pen.

It was soon evident that Luther's criticism of indulgences was also a criticism of the medieval penitential system as a whole, since that system obscured and distorted the gospel of God's free and full forgiveness in Christ to be received by faith alone. And it was soon evident as well that Luther's criticism of indulgences was also a criticism of the pope and of

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[8] For more on the place of the Lutheran Reformation within the broader sweep of Christian ecclesiastical history, see David Jay Webber, "Reformations Before the Reformation," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (December 2011): 303-30.

[9] Augsburg Confession I:1-3,5 (German), in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 36.

papal authority, since it was on the basis of the authority that the pope claimed for himself that such indulgences were promulgated in the first place.

By 1523 Luther had been excommunicated by the pope. But in the larger church, his biting criticisms of papal abuses and his clear proclamation and application of the gospel—which were made known far beyond the environs of Wittenberg by the printing presses of Germany—were like a match in a tinder box. The Reformation movement that Luther had inaugurated spread like wildfire, far beyond the reach and impact of his own personality, because the pastoral concerns that led him to say what he said were shared by other churchmen throughout the Western Church. By 1530, within the Empire, Lutheran-type religious reforms had been formally instituted in seven territories and in two free cities.

The modest original intention of the Elector of Saxony was to describe and defend the various corrections of abuses that he had undertaken in his territory and the reasons for these corrections, and a document had been prepared for that purpose. But when he and his party arrived in Augsburg for the Diet, they were there confronted with a published tract, written by the Romanist theologian Johann Eck, which accused the Lutherans of holding to and advocating a total of 404 historic heresies. As a response to this slander, the Saxons resolved to draft a series of doctrinal articles also for presentation at the Diet which would reject the claim that the Lutherans were advancing any heresies at all, and which would set forth instead, systematically, their scriptural and genuinely catholic teachings. These doctrinal articles, when combined with the previously-prepared articles on corrected abuses, became the Augsburg Confession. The primary author and editor was Luther's Wittenberg colleague Philip Melanchthon. And when the representatives of the other Lutheran territories and cities who were on hand in Augsburg reviewed Melanchthon's work, they were pleased by what they saw and all decided likewise to become signatories to this one unifying document.

When the Augsburg Confession was formally presented and read on June 25, 1530, the Lutheran reform movement became, in that moment, the *Evangelical Lutheran Church*: testifying to the divinely-given marks of the church and confessing, with thoroughness and clarity, its Christ-centered evangelical faith. The Lutheran confessors at Augsburg declared to their Emperor, "Wherefore, in most humble obedience to Your Imperial Majesty, we offer and present a confession of our pastors' and preachers' teachings as well as of our faith, setting forth

on the basis of the divine Holy Scripture what and in what manner they preach, teach, believe, and give instruction in our lands, principalities, dominions, cities, and territories."[10]

Luther, as an excommunicated "heretic" under the imperial ban, was not there. And it is probably a good thing that he was not there exercising a direct influence, because the faithfulness of Melanchthon and of those who stood with him, without Luther's personal presence, demonstrated that none of this was really about Luther or the mesmerizing power of his personality. It was about God, God's Word, and God's church. Luther was a servant of all this, as were many others. People other than Luther can indeed confess the faith of Luther, because the faith of Luther is not a faith that *comes from* Luther. And in this spirit, Luther himself became an enthusiastic subscriber to, and a devoted promoter of, the Augsburg Confession and of its Apology, which was prepared by Melanchthon (with the assistance of others) in the following year. Luther solemnly affirmed:

> We must confess that the doctrine which was declared and submitted at Augsburg is the true and pure Word of God, and that all who believe and keep it are children of God and will be saved, whether they already believe it or will be illuminated later. For this Confession will endure to the end of the world on Judgment Day. It is indeed written that whosoever believeth on Him and shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Rom. 10:11,13). And we must take note not only of those who will be added in the future, but also of the Christian church, which preaches the Word, and of our own people, according to the word: "As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), which passage excludes none; therefore all who believe and live according to the teaching of the [Augsburg] Confession and its Apology are our brethren, and their peril concerns us as much as does our own. As members of the true church we dare not forsake them, regardless of when they join us, whether they do so secretly or openly, whether they live among us or in the diaspora. This we say and confess.[11]

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[10] Augsburg Confession, Preface: 8 (German), Kolb/Wengert, 32.

[11] Martin Luther, "Opinion on the Recess of the Imperial Diet," in C. F. W. Walther, *The True Visible Church*, tr. John Theodore Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 44.

The ancient Creeds, the Augustana, and the Apology were combined with the Lutheran Symbolical Books that came later—to bring added clarity to Reformation teachings—in the Book of Concord of 1580. They all, collectively, are a true and faithful statement and exposition of the Word of God, and are accordingly able to serve as a normed norm for doctrine and practice in the church. We therefore appreciate Joseph A. Seiss's description of these confessions as timeless teachers of biblical truth within any church that embraces them. He writes that

> the Symbols of the orthodox Church of Christ are the matured fruits of the deepest devotion, experience and learning of its greatest and wisest members in its most trying ages; and as we may practically learn much from the biographies of the good, so we may learn much more from the Spirit-moved biography of the Church and the principles and testimonies which mark her life of faith. They are the sign-posts set up by the faithful along the King's highway of salvation to designate the places of danger to those who come after them, to warn and admonish us where we would otherwise be liable to err and miss the goal of our high calling in Christ Jesus. They are not laws to rule our faith, for the Word of God alone is such a Rule; but they are helps and tokens to enable us the more surely to find the true import of the Rule, that we may be all the more thoroughly and sincerely conformed to that Rule. They are the human tracks which the best of the saints have left, by which we may the better detect the way which God has laid out and opened for the fallen and sinful children of men to travel, that they may fill their Christian vocation and come to everlasting life.[12]

Part III

The ancient Fathers, as they composed and promulgated the Ecumenical Creeds, and the Reformers of the sixteenth century, as they composed and promulgated the distinctly Lutheran Confessions, were acutely aware of the fact that almighty God had appointed them—as called public teachers of the church—to defend and proclaim the truth of Christ as it is revealed in Holy Scripture over against the faith-destroying heresies of their respective eras. The symbolical books of the church, written by divine vocation and under divine providence in such

[12] Joseph A. Seiss, "Our Confessions in English," *Lutheran Church Review* I, whole no. 3 (July 1882): 216.

circumstances, are not just curious historical relics of bygone ages. They are, rather, highly relevant testimonies to God's unchanging truth for the benefit of the church of all generations. This is why those in our time who conscientiously seek to confess the full truth of God's Word will, as a matter of principle, "reject every effort to reduce the confessions contained in the Book of Concord to historical documents that do not have binding confessional significance for the church today."[13] Instead, they will gratefully and humbly acknowledge—for the sake of their own faith and teaching—that

> the Lutheran Confessions in the Book of Concord clarify, as precisely as human language allows, what the Bible teaches about God, sin, Christ, justification, church and ministry, repentance, the sacraments, free will, good works, and other articles of faith. They identify abuses in doctrine and practice, and most clearly state what Lutherans do not believe, teach, and confess. They are declarations of belief, making clear that Lutherans have convictions which are not open to question. The confessions clarify the Lutheran concern that only the Word be taught. Soon after its initial publication, the Book of Concord became the standard in doctrinal confrontations with Roman Catholics and with Calvinists. Where a Lutheran position seemed unclear or uncertain, the Book of Concord became a reference point for the authentic Lutheran view. Whereas the writings of Luther, as notable as they are, reveal the insights of one man, the Book of Concord expresses the theology of the whole Lutheran movement.[14]

With respect to those unique occasions in history when God brings the church to a greater depth of conviction, a greater precision in expression, and a greater consistency in teaching and practice, Martin Chemnitz affirms the insights of St. Augustine by pointing out that this happens, providentially, when an important article of faith is overtly challenged or denied, and must therefore now be earnestly defended. Chemnitz writes that in such a time of doctrinal controversy

> the Scriptures are examined more carefully, and those theologians who had preserved the correct teaching are now noticed

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[13] *This We Believe* (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod), I:17.

[14] James F. Korthals, "Publication of the Book of Concord—425th Anniversary," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 102, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 227-28.

> with greater appreciation than perhaps had been the case before the controversy. Augustine is correct and truthful when he says in *De Civitate Dei*, 16.2, "Many points pertaining to the catholic faith have been stirred up by the cunning trouble making of heretics, so that we have had to defend these points against them, consider more carefully, define more clearly, and preach more powerfully. The question has been raised by the adversary, and the opportunity is present for better learning." This point is certainly most true in church controversies.[15]

The creeds and confessions of the church were produced precisely at such times in history, and the Fathers and Reformers who labored over them were beneficially impacted in their work precisely by these kinds of advantageous circumstances and salutary influences.

The Reformers knew that Christ had promised to preserve his church until the end of time, and in the history of the church they observed that "in order to keep the Gospel among men, he visibly pits the witness of the saints against the rule of the devil; in our weakness he displays his strength. The dangers, labors, and sermons of the apostle Paul, Athanasius, Augustine, and other teachers of the church are holy works, true sacrifices acceptable to God, battles by which Christ restrained the devil and drove him away from the believers."[16] And from our perspective today, looking back on the events of the Reformation era, we would say as well that the dangers, labors, and sermons of Luther, Chemnitz, and their colleagues were likewise providentially used by Christ for the protection of his believers from devilish deceptions. The creeds and confessions of the church are enduring testimonies to these historic victories for truth and salvation, won for his church by Christ through the ministries of Fathers and Reformers who were uniquely gifted for the challenges that they rose to meet.

Part IV

Regarding the state of the Lutheran Church in the generations that followed the publication of the Book of Concord, Robert D. Preus observes that "the strict confessionalism of Lutheran orthodoxy is a

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

[16] Apology IV:189-190, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 133.

well-known fact."[17] While the seventeenth-century dogmaticians did not often directly cite the Confessions in theological writings that were intended to be read also beyond the confines of the Lutheran Church, they did cite the Confessions when the issue at hand was the question of what the genuine Lutheran position on some subject actually was. Preus points out that

> among fellow Lutherans, particularly against the Syncretists, the Lutheran Confessions very often entered into discussion and were frequently quoted at great length. In such cases the Symbols were never placed above the Scriptures but were used as a touchstone for genuine Lutheranism. In fact the Syncretists, like the Roman Catholics, compelled orthodox Lutherans to rethink the whole question of the relation between Scripture and the Symbols of the church and to reiterate unequivocally the Lutheran position.[18]

This kind of respect for the Confessions began to be diminished when Orthodoxy gave way to Pietism in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. And this attitude changed dramatically and tragically when Pietism gave way to Rationalism in the mid- to late-eighteenth century.

The mainstream adherents of Pietism—when that movement was in the ascendancy—continued to profess their agreement with the doctrinal content of the Confessions and continued to subscribe to the Confessions. But they minimized the overall importance of sound doctrine as compared to their greater emphasis on interior religious experience.[19] There were some key divergences between this

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[17] Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, Volume I: A Study of Theological Prolegomena (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 36.

[18] Ibid., 38. Syncretism was a theological movement based in Helmstedt, Germany, and led by George Calixtus, which advocated the idea of reuniting Christendom on the basis of the consensus of the ancient creeds and councils of the church—turning back the clock, as it were, on medieval and Reformation-era developments and divisions.

[19] Martin Schmidt summarizes the character and grandiose intentions of the Pietist movement, noting that "its avowed purpose was to bring about a second reformation. After a good start, so Pietism asserted, the Reformation had stranded in orthodoxism and was stuck in the shoals of institutionalism, dogmatism, and polemics. Favorite pietist concepts and slogans were: 'Life versus doctrine,' 'Holy Spirit versus the office of the ministry,' or 'Reality versus the appearance of godliness.'… Faith, the chief element in the teachings of the Reformation, was more clearly defined as 'living faith'; and the evidence that faith is 'living' was sought in the 'fruits of faith' … i.e., in sanctification of life, above all in the exercise of love. … The reformers and the orthodox

new emphasis and the biblical dogmatic content of the Confessions, especially with respect to matters of soteriology. Much of what the Confessions teach about conversion and regeneration, justification and sanctification, would need to be minimized or ignored—even if formal lip-service were still given to this teaching—in order to press the Pietist agenda.

An interesting historical datum that illustrates the theological weakness of Pietism comes from the time when the (Protestant) Stuart dynasty of the British royal family died out in 1714 with the passing away of Queen Anne.[20] The heir to the British throne was now Elector George of Hanover.[21] He was a second cousin of Anne and a matrilineal descendant of the Stuarts. And he was a Lutheran. As Elector of Hanover he was the *ex officio* overseer and guardian of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Hanover. We might expect this to have been a problem for George in view of the fact that the King of England is obligated to function as the earthly head of the Church of England, and accordingly to be a member of *that* church.

C. Emmanuel Schultze offers us this interesting—yet bewildering—historical account of how that potential problem was solved: "At the accession of George I, the agreement of both churches was, by a conference of English and German divines, investigated into and pronounced to be as perfect as possible, which removed the doubts of their king, who is said to have declared that he would not renounce his religion for

theologians had given central place to the Word of God and the doctrine of justification. But Pietism's central subject was regeneration (conversion, rebirth). … Pietism focused its attention on man, on individual man. … As a result, Pietism also modified the concept 'church.' The church is no longer the community of those who have been called by the Word and Sacraments, but the association of the reborn, of those who 'earnestly desire to be Christians.' … Only little weight is attached to the ministry of the Word, to worship services, the Sacraments, to confession and absolution, and to the observance of Christian customs; a thoroughly regenerated person does not need these crutches at all. Pietism stressed the personal element over against the institutional; voluntariness versus compulsion; the present versus tradition, and the rights of the laity over against the pastors" ("Pietism," in *Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church,* ed. Julius Bodensieck [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965], Vol. III, 1898-1899). In the Pietists' reading of the Scriptures—as compared to the Reformers' reading of the same Scriptures—different assumptions led to different conclusions, different priorities, and different methodologies in the faith and life of the church.

[20] Queen Anne was the mother of several children, but they all died before she did.

[21] There were still active Stuart claimants to the throne until the nineteenth century, but since they were Roman Catholic, the Crown and Parliament Recognition Act of 1689 disallowed their claims. That act, passed in conjunction with the Glorious Revolution, requires the monarch to be a Protestant.

a crown."[22] George's desire to remain true to his Lutheran faith—to the extent that he understood its character and obligations—is admirable. But the behavior of the Hanoverian theologians—who told him that the agreement between Lutheran doctrine and Anglican doctrine is "as perfect as possible"—is not admirable at all. At this time in history, the notorious "black rubric" was printed as a part of the Communion Rite in every copy of the Anglican Church's *Book of Common Prayer*. That rubric states that "the natural Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ are in Heaven, and not here; it being against the truth of Christ's natural Body to be at one time in more places than one." What were those Lutheran theologians who advised King George thinking?

Pietism, with the intense and draining experiential demands that it made on people, was not able to endure as a large-scale movement. It basically wore people out, spiritually and emotionally. The time when the appeal of Pietism was beginning to diminish was also the time in which Enlightenment thinking was beginning to rise up in France. And when Enlightenment ideas crossed the border into Germany, Rationalism invaded the church in its now-weakened theological condition and wreaked havoc.

Part V

Most of the German Rationalists could fairly be described as Socinians and Unitarians as far as their own beliefs about God were concerned. But they did not usually expend much effort in attacking the classic dogmas of the faith as much as they simply ignored them, and focused their attention instead on the inculcating of a practical morality in those who still came to church and who were willing to listen to the inane sermons that were preached during this time period. John A. W. Haas summarizes the horrid effects of this insidious movement:

> Rationalism … changed the whole appearance and life of the Church. Churches were made lecture-rooms, the pulpit became the desk above the altar, which dwindled into insignificance. From the hymns all distinctively Christian thought was removed, and commonplace rhymes of the shallowest order were added, which praised reasonable virtue, delight of nature, and care of the body. Sermons were long-winded moral

[22] C. Emmanuel Schultze, Preface, *Six Sermons Preached by the Late Mr. Lawrence V. Buskirk, Candidate for the Holy Ministry* (1797), 5, in Henry Eyster Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), 279.

> treatises on the utility of things. The old Church Orders and Agenda were mutilated, Baptism and the Lord's Supper robbed of their meaning, Private Confession totally abolished, and Confirmation degraded into a promise of virtue. Catechisms contained natural religion and shallow morality on the happiness of man.[23]

[23] John A. W. Haas, "Rationalism," in *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, ed. Haas and Henry Eyster Jacobs (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 402.

Evidence of how far Rationalism departed from the beliefs and practices of the Reformation could be seen most vividly in the area of public worship. The Lutheran Confessions lay out a well-thought-through theology of worship and a theologically-based understanding of the purpose and character of the rites and ceremonies that are used in worship. The Augsburg Confession teaches, "Concerning church rites," that "those rites should be observed that can be observed without sin and that contribute to peace and good order in the church, for example, certain holy days, festivals, and the like. However, people are reminded not to burden consciences, as if such worship were necessary for salvation" (Augsburg Confession XV:1–2 [Latin], Kolb/Wengert, 49). It further states that "ceremonies are especially needed in order to teach those who are ignorant" (Augsburg Confession XXIV:3 [Latin], Kolb/Wengert, 69). The Apology of the Augsburg Confession elaborated on this point, in saying that "ceremonies should be observed both so that people may learn the Scriptures and so that, admonished by the Word, they might experience faith and fear and finally even pray. For these are the purposes of the ceremonies" (Apology XXIV:3, Kolb/Wengert, 258). The overall relationship between Christian freedom and pastoral responsibility in matters of liturgy and worship, according to the understanding of the Lutheran Reformers, is well summarized in these words of the Apology: "But just as the different lengths of day and night do not undermine the unity of the church, so we maintain that different rites instituted by human beings do not undermine the true unity of the church, although it pleases us when universal rites are kept for the sake of tranquillity. Thus, in our churches we willingly observe the order of the Mass, the Lord's day, and other more important festival days. With a very grateful spirit we cherish the useful and ancient ordinances, especially when they contain a discipline by which it is profitable to educate and teach [the] common folk and [the] ignorant" (Apology VII/VIII:33, Kolb/Wengert, 180).

Some of the Pietists, when they were in positions of influence in the late seventeenth and early- to mid-eighteenth centuries, may not have liked certain aspects of the public ritual of the Lutheran Church. But few substantial changes were made by them in the orders of service of the various Lutheran territories.

The iconoclastic arrogance of the Rationalists was, however, of a completely different spirit. Joseph Herl describes the liturgical agenda of Rationalism in Germany and the motivations behind the implementation of this agenda: "Calls for liturgical reform written from a Rationalist perspective began to appear in the 1780s. They called for drastic modifications to the traditional liturgy or even wholesale abandonment of it. … Johann Wilhelm Rau argued in 1786 that the old formulas were no longer usable because the expressions in them were in part no longer understandable and in part objectionable. Fixed forms in general were not good, and even the Lord's Prayer was meant only as an example to follow and not as a prayer to be repeated. Some said that liturgical formulas served to ease the task of the pastor and preserve order in the service.

At this point in Lutheran history, at least as far as the institutions of the church were concerned, Lutheran Confessionalism was dead. There were still some pockets of Pietism that had never surrendered to the ascendant Rationalism. And there was also now a new push in certain corners—especially in Prussia—toward joining together what was left of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches into a confessionally-tolerant united "evangelical" church. It was felt that this kind of non-confessional homogenized Protestantism would be able to push back more effectively against the rank infidelity of Rationalism. And so finally, in 1817, the King of Prussia decreed such a church into existence in his kingdom, forcibly joining the Lutherans and the Reformed into one ecclesiastical structure.

But also in 1817, Claus Harms of Kiel penned a new set of "95 Theses" against both Rationalism and Unionism, and thereby inaugurated a Confessional Revival within institutional Lutheranism. Many people who had never completely forgotten the soothing evangelical doctrine of their Small Catechism finally decided that they had had enough of the lunacy of Rationalism. They knew that they did not want to be Reformed either. And so a new fire of faith was ignited. Three telling theses from Harms are these:

But [according to Rau] the advantages were specious: very few pastors had so little time left over from other duties that they could not prepare a service, and in Dortmund (for example) no liturgical formulas were prescribed, without disruption to the service. Each pastor used his own self-written order or spoke extemporaneously. According to Rau, the most important abuses to curb were the too-frequent use of the Lord's Prayer, the making of the sign of the cross, the Aaronic benediction, chanting by the pastor, the use of candles on the altar, private confession, the use of the appointed lectionary texts for sermons, and various superstitious practices surrounding communion, such as carrying the houseling cloth to catch crumbs that might fall and referring to the 'true' body and blood of Christ. … Peter Burdorf, writing in 1795, argued that repetition in the liturgy weakened the attention of the listener and the impact of the form. The current liturgy did not hold people's attention, nor did the sermon. … Some liturgy was necessary for public services to be held, but it should be as simple as possible in order to meet the needs of contemporary Christians. Rationalist writers backed up their words with deeds and produced a number of new liturgies written with the above concerns in mind. Luther Reed … offered the opinion that these liturgies 'ranged in character from empty sentimentality to moralizing soliloquy and verbosity.' … Hymns were rewritten as well with a view to removing 'superstition' and outdated theology" (Joseph Herl, *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism: Choir, Congregation, and Three Centuries of Conflict* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2004], 127-129). The rationale and rhetoric of the Rationalists were frighteningly similar to the rationale and rhetoric of many advocates of so-called "contemporary worship" in our day.

50. We have a sure Bible Word, unto which we take heed (2 Peter 1:19); and to guard against the use of force to turn and twist this like a weathercock we have our Symbolical Books. …

75. As a poor maiden, the Lutheran Church is now to be made rich by being married. Do not perform the ceremony over Luther's bones. They will become alive at it, and then—woe to you! …

78. If at the colloquy at Marburg, 1529, the body and blood of Christ was in the bread and wine, it is still so in 1817.[24]

Part VI

These developments in European Lutheranism were paralleled in the history of North American Lutheranism. The Lutheran Church had originally been brought to America in the seventeenth century by Swedish and Dutch settlers, and many German Lutherans arrived in the first half of the eighteenth century. The earliest Lutherans in the American colonies were for the most part Orthodox in their orientation. For example, the avowedly Orthodox ministers of the New York Classis, under the leadership of Pastor Wilhelm Christoph Berkenmeyer, declared in their 1735 church order that they would "regulate their teaching and preaching according to the rule of the divine Word, the Biblical prophetical and apostolical writings, also according to our Symbolical Books, the Unaltered Confession of Augsburg, its Apology, the Smalcald Articles, both Catechisms of Luther, and the Formula of Concord." They declared furthermore that they would not "teach or preach, privately or publicly, anything against these [Confessions] nor even use any other new phrases which would contradict the same."[25]

The Confessions also held an important place in the theology and practice of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, who is often styled the "Patriarch" of the Lutheran Church in America.[26] The congregations and pastors of the Pennsylvania Ministerium, organized in 1748 under Muhlenberg's leadership, were expected to subscribe to "the Evangelical Lutheran doctrine, according to the foundation of the Prophets and

[24] "Theses of Claus Harms," *The Lutheran Cyclopedia*, 513-14.

[25] Karl Kretzmann, "The Constitution of the First Lutheran Synod in America," *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly* 9 (1936): 5.

[26] Socrates Henkel notes that Muhlenberg and his co-laborers in the Pennsylvania Ministerium, organized in 1748, did not "teach any other doctrines, nor endeavor to establish, in this country, any other system of faith, than that inculcated in the Lutheran Confessions and Catechisms" (*History of the Evangelical Lutheran Tennessee Synod* [New Market, Virginia: Henkel & Co., 1890], 2).

Apostles, and the unaltered Augsburg Confession and all the other Symbolical Books."[27] And at a personal level, Muhlenberg took great umbrage at those who questioned his doctrinal soundness as a Lutheran pastor. He stated:

> I ask Satan and all his lying spirits to prove anything against me which is not in harmony with the teaching of the apostles or of our Symbolical Books. I have stated frequently that there is neither fault nor error nor any kind of defect in our evangelical doctrines, founded on the teaching of the prophets and the apostles, and set forth in our Symbolical Books.[28]

Muhlenberg was, and was known to be, an adherent of the Pietist movement. But his Pietism was of a pronounced churchly bent.[29] When the Pennsylvania Ministerium was organized in 1748, one of the first orders of business was the adoption of a standardized Lutheran liturgical order and agenda. This liturgy included a few modifications for circumstances in America, but it was clearly rooted in the orthodox Lutheran liturgical traditions of Europe. In essence, "The service reproduced in Pennsylvania is the old, well-established, conservative service of the Saxon and North German liturgies."[30]

Part VII

But there were noticeable weaknesses in Confessional understanding and practice in some sectors of eighteenth-century American Lutheranism which established an unhealthy trajectory for the future of the church in the New World. Bishop Dr. Jasper Svedberg of Skara, in Sweden, wanted the Swedish congregations in America to follow a very "ecumenical" policy in their relations with the Anglican Church. And the Swedish congregations in America complied with his wishes. Pastor

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[27] Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, report of the consecration of St. Michael's Lutheran Church in Philadelphia, *Hallische Nachrichten* (1787), 284-85 in Vergilius Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology: A Study of the Issue between American Lutheranism and Old Lutheranism* (New York: The Century Co., 1927), 9.

[28] Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, *Hallische Nachrichten*, in Jürgen Ludwig Neve, *A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America* (Second Revised and Enlarged Edition) (Burlington, Iowa: The German Literary Board, 1916), 72.

[29] Muhlenberg's clash with Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf in Pennsylvania and his opposition to the Moravians' enthusiastic indifference to the doctrinal norms of the Lutheran Church are well known.

[30] Beale M. Schmucker, *Lutheran Church Review* I, 171, in Jacobs, 268.

Andreas Sandel, the Swedish Lutheran Provost in Philadelphia from 1702 to 1719, explained this:

> Although between them and us there is some difference with respect to the Lord's Supper, yet he does not want that small difference to rend asunder the bond of peace. We do not attempt any discussion upon it; neither do we touch upon such things when we preach among them, nor do they attempt to persuade our people to their opinion in this respect; but we live on intimate and fraternal terms with one another, as they also call us their brethren. They have the government in their hands; we are under them; it is enough that they want to have this intercourse with us; we can do nothing else than render them every service and fraternal favor. …[31]

Muhlenberg, too, in spite of his sincere desire to be and remain a Confessional Lutheran, is known to have preached in Reformed and Anglican/Episcopal churches and to have invited Reformed and Anglican/Episcopal clergymen to preach in his.[32] As someone who was born and raised in Hanover, and who then served as a pastor in British North America, Muhlenberg may very well have been taken in by the errant judgment of those who had told King George that Anglicanism and Lutheranism are essentially the same. Muhlenberg put to paper his perceptions of the Church of England in a 1771 letter:

> Their articles of faith have been extracted from the Word of God as well as ours; their church prayers are taken from the Holy Bible as well as ours; they have the two holy sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as we; their explanations of their articles of faith are as good Evangelical Lutheran as one could wish them to be; in a word, the doctrines of the English Established Church are more closely allied to ours than those of any other denomination in the wide world. We, therefore, have always studied to live in harmony with them.[33]

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[31] Andreas Sandel, in Jacobs, 98-99. In the nineteenth century, the churches of the former Swedish colony along the Delaware River were finally absorbed into the Episcopal Church.

[32] Neve, 72-73. Among those from non-Lutheran churches who preached in Muhlenberg's pulpit was the "Great Awakening" English preacher George Whitefield.

[33] Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, Letter to Nova Scotia (Nov. 15, 1771); quoted in Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States,* 280.

We must agree with the opinion of Henry Eyster Jacobs, that in this letter "the great founder of the Lutheran Church in America was giving away far more than he was conscious of."[34]

Article XXVIII of the Anglican Thirty-nine Articles, after stating that the doctrine of transubstantiation "cannot be proved by holy Writ" and "is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture," teaches instead that "The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner" and that "the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith." And Article XXIX asserts that when those who are "wicked, and such as be void of a lively faith" partake of the bread and wine of the sacrament, "in no wise are they partakers of Christ: but rather, to their condemnation, do eat and drink the sign or Sacrament of so great a thing." In his claim that these Anglican articles are as "Evangelical Lutheran" as one could wish them to be, Muhlenberg was obviously lacking in discernment, either with respect to the dogmatic substance of the Lutheran Confessions, or with respect to the dogmatic substance of the Thirty-nine Articles, or both.

The Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England clearly teach the Calvinist position on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. They basically set forth a false alternative: one either believes in transubstantiation, or one believes in a spiritual presence of Christ—according to which an unbelieving communicant receives merely the outward "sign" of the body and blood of Christ, while "in no wise" receiving the Lord's actual body and blood in the consecrated elements that are eaten and drunk. Gone is any semblance of the Lutheran shibboleth of the *manducatio indignorum*, by which Lutherans in the Reformation era tested the genuineness of someone's belief in an objective Real Presence—as based on the Word and institution of Christ, and not on the subjective personal faith of the communicant.[35]

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[34] Jacobs, *A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States,* 280.

[35] C. Emmanuel Schultze, who was married to Muhlenberg's daughter, was even more bold than his father-in-law—ecumenically-speaking—in opining that "there is not a great difference in point of doctrine in all the Protestant churches. … With the Church of England, however, the Lutherans have and ever had a closer connection than with others, owing to a more perfect similarity in church government, festival days, ceremonies, and even some particulars in doctrine. … The Thirty-nine Articles fully agree with the Augustan Confession, and every Lutheran can subscribe them" (Preface to *Six Sermons Preached by the Late Mr. Lawrence V. Buskirk, Candidate for the Holy Ministry* [1797], 5, in Jacobs, 279). Schultze's brother-in-law and the patriarch's son, John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg—when he was serving a Lutheran parish in Woodstock, Virginia—had done just that in 1772. That is, the younger Muhlenberg subscribed

Part VIII

The confessional situation in the American Lutheran Church got much worse, however, when Father Muhlenberg and his generation passed from the scene and when men who had come under the influence of European Rationalism (and of New England Unitarianism) rose to prominence in the church in their stead. References to the symbolical books disappeared from "Lutheran" synodical constitutions and from "Lutheran" ordination rituals. *Confessional* Lutheranism almost completely disappeared.[36]

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formally to the Thirty-nine Articles, and received Anglican ordination in London, England, so that he could serve as a pastor in Virginia with all the rights and privileges that were afforded there to a clergyman of the established church. He had already been ordained as a Lutheran pastor in 1768, and even after 1772 he still considered himself to be a Lutheran. The Woodstock parish that he served likewise considered itself still to be a Lutheran parish. (Even with his two ordinations—Lutheran and Anglican—J. Peter G. Muhlenberg did not remain in the ministry. During the Revolutionary War he served as a General in the Continental Army. After the war he went into politics, serving at various times in the Pennsylvania state government, as a member of the United States House of Representatives, and as a United States Senator.)

[36] Charles Porterfield Krauth describes the grievous situation in which both European and American Lutheranism—and European and American Christianity as a whole—found itself, at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century: "After our fathers fell asleep our Church in America began to exhibit evidences of decline in faith and life. … Deism had run riot in England, and Atheism in France, and from those powerful nationalities had spread their influence through Europe and America. Rationalism in the Lutheran, Reformed, and Romish Churches, had been growing stronger in times so well fitted for its growth. Socinianism, which had triumphed in the Calvinistic Churches of the Continent, and of England … appeared in New England, the American Geneva, and from it went forth with a might which seemed to threaten the very existence of the Gospel faith in all the churches. Universalism arose and spread. … The religious life characteristic of the period, in some sense, aided the evil. Unionism, Pietism, Moravianism, and Methodism were alike in the indeterminate character of their doctrinal basis. The defenders of revelation showed a difference of opinion, rather than of spirit, from its assailants; the maintainers, in some degree, of the old faith, often made good their cause by abandoning a large part, and half betraying what they pretended to advocate. It was the saddest era in the history of the Church since the Reformation—the era of spurious 'illumination.' The light itself had become darkness, and the darkness was great indeed. Our Church in America shared in this terrible defection. Socinianism worked furtively, and at length openly, in parts of it. Precious doctrines were diluted, ignored, or abandoned. The Confessions were set aside virtually, even where the antecedents of the past made it impossible to abandon them openly. The history of our Church, the tradition of her faith and life, was still strong enough to make caution necessary; and the evil worked rather by the withholding of the truth, than by the formal annunciation of error. The Church was drugged with narcotics, not with irritants, or, indeed, was starved to death, rather than poisoned. We had a weak, indecisive pulpit, feeble catechisms, vague hymns, [and] constitutions which reduced

The situation was worst in the New York Ministerium, which had been founded in 1786 under the leadership of a son-in-law of Muhlenberg, John Christopher Kunze. Kunze himself was a Pietist, who like his father-in-law harbored some naïvely optimistic views regarding the theological compatibility of Lutheranism and Anglicanism.[37] But after Kunze's death in 1807, and the election of Frederick Henry Quitman as his successor to the presidency of the Ministerium, the character of New York Lutheranism changed for the worst very quickly and very noticeably.

Quitman had been trained in the Rationalism that was prevalent in Germany during the time of his education there in the late eighteenth century and had thoroughly imbibed it. Quitman joined the New York Ministerium in 1796, and as an intellectually-gifted individual rose quickly to prominence within that body. Perhaps because of Quitman's highly-developed sense of morality and ethics, the older Pietist pastors among whom he and others of his persuasion worked and exercised influence—as the nineteenth century dawned—seem not to have grasped the serious threat to genuine Christian faith that his Rationalism posed.

In 1814, Quitman published his *Evangelical Catechism* as a replacement for Luther's Small Catechism in providing religious instruction to the youth of the church. It differed from Luther's Catechism both in its highly cerebral form and (in spite of its title) in its unevangelical

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the minister to the position of a hireling talker, and made Synods disorganizations for the purpose of preventing anything from being done. Our sun had gone down, and the only relief from absolute night was the diffused light which still lingered from a happier time. … In the United States there were nominally Lutheran Synods which were largely Unitarian. … In the deadness of our whole land, in the rationalism of Europe which was imported, and in the Socinianism of New England, which was of native growth, had originated the fearful change which came over our Church, and to these influences we owe nearly every trouble under which our Church afterward labored" ("The General Council Before Its First Anniversary," *The Lutheran Church Review* XXVI, no. 4 [October 1907]: 660-62).

[37] In 1797, under Kunze's presidency, the New York Ministerium adopted a comity policy which held, "That on account of an intimate relation subsisting between the English Episcopalian and Lutheran churches, the identity of their doctrine and the near approach of their church discipline, this consistory will never acknowledge a newly erected Lutheran church in places where the members may partake of the services of the said English Episcopal Church" (Jacobs, 318). At this time overtures were being made from representatives of the New York Ministerium to the Episcopal Church, exploring the possibility that the Lutherans might actually be united with the Episcopal Church officially and formally via the Episcopal re-ordination of the Lutheran pastors (Jacobs, 319). Nothing, however, ultimately came of this.

doctrinal content. The closest that this work comes to affirming the divinity of Christ is its statement that "although born of a humble Jewish woman, the Deity was closely and in a supernatural manner connected with him."[38] In a bit of prosaic silliness, Quitman states that "in the character of Jesus, as delineated by the evangelists, there is something so excellent and divine that few of his most violent enemies have attempted to find fault with it" (33). He also speaks of Jesus being "styled the 'only begotten Son of God,' as well on account of his exalted dignity and preeminence above all created beings, as on account of the great love which his heavenly Father has manifested for him" (34). Much is also left to be desired when Quitman writes that "the chief tenor of the Gospel" is "that God is a propitious Father of the whole human race, that as a pledge of this truth had sent his only begotten Son into the world, so that if men repent of their errors and sins, and believing in Jesus Christ as their Savior take him for their guide, he will not only pardon their sins, but also enable them, by the assistance of his Holy Spirit, to lead a godly life, and in this manner prepare and render them meet for a better and happier world."[39] Quitman's doctrine of sin is likewise severely lacking. He writes that (natural) man is not "deprived of free moral agency." If man were so deprived, then "how should God judge the world and treat us as accountable beings? Besides this, religion addresses man as a free agent and ascribes to him the power of choice and resistance. She admonishes him to exert all his powers and faculties in her service, and whilst she promises great rewards to her faithful friends, she threatens severe punishments to those that neglect to obey her precepts. All this would be absurd and even insulting if man were not a free agent" (20).

In his catechism, Quitman says nothing about the regenerating power of Holy Baptism or about the Real Presence of Christ's body and blood in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. And this does not surprise us in view of Quitman's assumptions about faith and about why people believe the things that they believe. He asserts that "to believe in anything" is "to take it for granted; to be convinced of its truth." He adds that "the grounds that ought to constitute the basis of rational belief" are "either natural perception and experience, or the authority of competent witnesses, or finally, unquestionable arguments of reason."[40] And more

[38] Frederick H. Quitman, *Evangelical Catechism: or a Short Exposition of the Principle Doctrines and Precepts of the Christian Religion* (Hudson, New York: William E. Norman, 1814), 164.

[39] Ibid., 36-37.

[40] Ibid., 5-6.

specifically, "Faith in Christ" is understood to be "a firm belief in the divine authority of Jesus, and of his doctrine and promises, expressed by a sincere zeal to cherish Christian sentiments and dispositions, and to cultivate Christian graces."[41]

In other writings, Quitman expands on his views regarding the relationship between human reason and the revelation of Scripture. Demonstrating that nothing of the spirit of Luther remains in him, he writes in his *Three Sermons* that

> Reason and revelation are the only sources from which religious knowledge is to be derived, and the rules by which all religious questions ought to be decided. … And where else should we look for certainty in the pursuit of religious truth? Are not both reason and revelation descended from heaven, always in harmony with and supporting one another?[42]

And in *A Treatise on Magic*, Quitman articulates a very un-Lutheran hermeneutic, declaring "that in dubious scriptural passages we must first enquire what reason dictates and what daily experience teaches, and explain such passages accordingly."[43] This is an example of the kind of absurdly bombastic and theologically insipid hymn verses that fill this book: "Supreme and universal light! / Fountain of reason! Judge of right! / Without whose kind, directing ray, / in everlasting night we stray. /

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[41] Ibid., 47-48.

[42] Frederick H. Quitman, *Three Sermons*..., second edition (Philadelphia: William Fry, 1818), 33-34.

[43] Frederick H. Quitman, *A Treatise on Magic, or, on the Intercourse Between Spirits and Men* (Albany, New York: Balance Press, 1810), 57.

The sterile theology that one finds in Quitman's personal writings is reflected also in the English-language service book and hymnal that was edited by Quitman and Augustus Wackerhagen (who was married to Quitman's step-daughter), and that was published by the New York Ministerium in 1814. Henry Eyster Jacobs makes these observations, with respect to the liturgical prayers and sacramental rites of this work: "'Supremely exalted and adorable Jehovah,' 'Infinite and Incomprehensible Jehovah,' 'Self-existent and infinite Jehovah,' have become favorite modes of addressing God, instead of the nearer and more familiar term of 'Father, reconciled in Christ.' … All allusion to original sin is omitted from the baptismal address, which dwells upon the significative character of the sacrament. The Lord's Supper is preceded by the invitation: 'I say to all who own him as their Saviour, and resolve to be his faithful subjects: ye are welcome to this feast of love.' The formula of distribution has, 'Jesus said,' and the rubric says that the 'minister is at liberty to substitute any other words in place of these'" (*A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States,* 342).

Assist us, Lord, to act, to be, / what all thy sacred laws decree; / Worthy that intellectual flame, / which from thy breathing spirit came."[44]

Part IX

All of this nonsense was, in the final analysis, too much for most Lutherans in America to stomach, and this resulted in a decisive reaction. There were some Lutherans who had never fully abandoned their commitment to a theology that followed the basic contours of the Lutheran Confessions, and who, of course, would never have had any interest in the Rationalism of Quitman and those who followed him. This conscious Lutheran remnant was to be found especially in the Tennessee Synod, organized in 1820, with a clerical membership comprising primarily members of the Henkel family. Pastor David Henkel, intellectually gifted and articulate, was a particularly forceful proponent of a restoration of a consistent Confessional consciousness within American Lutheranism. In this way he was, in certain respects, the American equivalent of Claus Harms.

But most of the opposition to Quitman's kind of post-Lutheran "Lutheranism" arose from those who were influenced more so by the residual religious culture of American Puritanism, or by the Revivalism of the Second Great Awakening, or by both, so that their response to Rationalism was decidedly less Lutheran than that of the Henkels. Many of these Lutherans, to the extent that they still had some awareness of developments in Germany, were also influenced by the generic "evangelical" theology that was a driving force behind the Prussian Union.

The weakness of Muhlenberg and those of his era—in not fully appreciating classic Anglicanism's divergence from a sound sacramental theology—was now amplified; and a general indifference to the doctrines that historically separated Lutheranism from *all* other Protestant churches settled in as the norm. Jacobs notes that movements in America for a union, or at least for a closer cooperation, between Lutherans and the Reformed, were indeed

> partially reactionary against the widespread rationalistic influences that were entering. When the most vital and most central

[44] *A Collection of Hymns and a Liturgy for the Use of the Evangelical Lutheran Churches*, ed. Frederick H. Quitman and Augustus Wackerhagen (Philadelphia: G. & D. Billmeyer, 1814), 192, in Benjamin A. Kolodziej, "Frederick Henry Quitman and the Catechesis of the American Lutheran Enlightenment," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 70, no. 3/4 (July/October 2006): 345.

> doctrines were assailed, it was not unnatural for Christian ministers of diverging confessions to feel drawn toward each other in their defense. There would be more sympathy between a conservative Lutheran and a conservative Reformed theologian than between him [i.e., the conservative Lutheran] and the professed Lutheran theology represented by the catechism bearing in 1814 the indorsement of the New York Ministerium.[45]

In keeping with this sort of non-confessional, broadly-Protestant spirit, Johann Augustus Probst, a pastor in the Pennsylvania Ministerium, made a series of truly breathtaking assertions in a book advocating an American version of the Prussian Union:

> The doctrine of unconditional election cannot be in the way. This doctrine has long since been abandoned; for there can scarcely be a single German Reformed preacher found who regards it as his duty to defend this doctrine. Zwingli's more liberal, rational and scriptural view of this doctrine, as well as of the Lord's Supper, has become the prevailing one among Lutherans and Reformed, and it has been deemed proper to abandon the view of both Luther and Calvin on the subject of both these doctrines.
>
> The whole mass of the old Confessions was occasioned by the peculiar circumstances of those troublous times, has become obsolete by the lapse of ages, and is yet valuable only as matter of history. Those times and circumstances have passed away, and our situation both in regard to political and ecclesiastical relations, is entirely changed. We are therefore not bound to these books, but only to the Bible. For what do the unlearned know of the Augsburg Confession, or the Form of Concord, [or] of the Synod of Dort. …[?]
>
> All enlightened and intelligent preachers of both churches agree, that there is much in the former symbolical books (or confessions of faith) that must be stricken out as antiquated and contrary to common sense, and be made conformable with the Bible, and that we have no right to pledge ourselves to the mere human opinions of Luther, or Calvin, or Zwingli. …[46]

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[45] Jacobs, 324.

[46] Johann Augustus Probst, *Die Wiedervereinigung der Lutheraner und Reformirten* (1826), 74, 76, 80, in Samuel Simon Schmucker, *The American Lutheran Church,*

Even though this unionistic attitude was purportedly in the interest of a greater effectiveness in beating back the errors of Rationalism, more of the assumptions of Rationalism than they may have realized still permeated the theological methodology of the "Lutherans" who were now thinking in this way. Samuel Simon Schmucker, the President of the Lutheran seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, emerged as the leader of what came to be called the "American Lutheran" movement in the first half of the nineteenth century. He had much more of an affinity for the hermeneutical assumptions of Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin than for those of Luther. This can be seen in a speculative theological soliloquy that he included in his seminary textbook, *Elements of Popular Theology*, about the manner in which God "ought" to give humans "information" about himself and about religious subjects in general beyond what is accessible to their reason and their powers of rational observation in the world. Schmucker writes:

> In short, if God sees fit to grant to mankind any additional information beyond what the heavens and the earth and the structure of the human soul afford, the most suitable method of its accomplishment so far as we can see, would be this: To communicate these truths *which will of course be reasonable in themselves*, to one or more suitable individuals; appoint them to teach these doctrines; attest the divinity of their mission by satisfactory evidence, and provide for the accurate transmission of these truths and evidences to all future generations for whom they were intended.[47]

Schmucker goes on to opine that the written Scriptures, inspired and infallible, satisfy this need for the church of all time. What Schmucker writes here calls to mind Calvin's bold statement that "the Lord has instituted nothing that is at variance with reason."[48] Schmucker himself reproduces Calvin's rationalistic sentiment when he writes elsewhere in his textbook that "a divine revelation cannot contain any thing which is contrary to the plain and indisputable dictates of reason."[49] This, of course, contrasts sharply with Luther's significantly *different*

Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated (Springfield, Ohio: D. Harbaugh, 1851), 220-21.

[47] Samuel Simon Schmucker, *Elements of Popular Theology* (Philadelphia: S. S. Miles, 1845), 21-22 (emphasis added).

[48] John Calvin, "Genevan Catechism," *Calvin: Theological Treatises,* ed. J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 26.

[49] Schmucker, *Elements of Popular Theology*, 73.

assumptions, as he approaches the reading and interpretation of sacred Scripture:

> The knowledge of lawyers and poets comes from reason and may, in turn, be understood and grasped by reason. But what Moses and the prophets teach does not stem from reason and the wisdom of men. Therefore he who presumes to comprehend Moses and the prophets with his reason and to measure and evaluate Scripture according to its agreement with reason will get away from the Bible entirely. From the very beginning all heretics owed their rise to the notion that what they had read in Scripture they were at liberty to explain according to the teachings of reason.[50]

The doctrinal character of the "American Lutheran" movement that emerged from this religious stew—as contrasted with the convictions of the "Old Lutheran" Confessionalists in Germany who were inspired by Claus Harms' theses—is reflected in an 1845 letter from several of the "American Lutheran" movement's leaders to representatives of the Prussian Union Church:

> Now as to our doctrinal views, we confess without disguise, indeed confess it loudly and openly, that the greatest majority of us are not old Lutherans, in the sense in which a small party exists in Germany under that name. We are convinced that, if the great Luther were still living, he would not be a member of it either. We believe that the three last centuries have also produced men who were capable of independent thought, research and growth equal to the 16th. Yea, as insignificant as we consider ourselves, we are nevertheless emboldened, particularly through our feeling of duty, to investigate and explore Scripture, and to draw our doctrinal views from this heavenly source. But, nevertheless, we are Evangelical Lutheran. Committed to Luther's fundamental principle that God's Word is without error, we have proved that Luther's doctrinal construction is essentially correct. In most of our church principles we stand on common ground with the union or merged church of Germany. The distinctive views which separate the old Lutherans and the Reformed Church we do not consider essential; and the

[50] Martin Luther, Sermon on Luke 2:21, in *What Luther Says: An Anthology,* ed. Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 1165.

> tendency of the so called old Lutheran party seems to us to be behind our time.[51]

The Prussian Unionists in Germany, with the force of the Prussian state apparatus, physically persecuted the "Old Lutherans" in their midst. Their kindred spirits in America did not have access to those kinds of coercive civil mechanisms for suppressing their ecclesiastical opponents. But the "American Lutherans" were not above taking pejorative verbal swipes at those in the New World who wanted to be and remain Confessionally Lutheran. And in the process, they also often mischaracterized the actual teachings of the Confessionalists, so as to make those teachings—and those teachers—seem as unsophisticated and backward as possible.

One of the nastiest examples of this comes from the pen of Pastor John Bachman of Charleston, South Carolina, who, interestingly enough, had grown up in New York, and had been trained for the ministry there by Quitman. Referring to the Tennessee Synod and to David Henkel in particular, Bachman stated in 1837:

> Some years ago several individuals residing in North Carolina, who had previously been members of our church, on account of some dissatisfaction separated themselves from our communion. They chose as a leader an individual by the name of Hinkel, (hence they are called Hinkelites,) a weak and illiterate man, whose ground of dissent, as far as can be gathered from the crude, visionary and inflammatory publications, which have from time [to time] appeared, either under his name or that of his sect, was, the Evangelical Church had departed from the true doctrines of the Reformation, which he and his church had attempted to restore. … Those doctrines which they profess to have derived from the Lutheran Church … may be classed under the three following heads: 1st, that baptism is regeneration. 2nd, that in the Lord's supper the elements become the actual flesh and blood of Christ; and thirdly, that the participation of the sacraments entitles us to salvation. These sentiments, so directly opposed to the Gospel of Christ, and the express declaration of the Reformers, and fraught with so much evil,

[51] "Aus Amerika," *Zeitschrift fuer Protestantismus und Kirche* 11 (1846): 263-64, in E. Clifford Nelson, ed., *The Lutherans in North America* (revised edition) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 220. The letter was signed by Samuel Simon Schmucker, Benjamin Kurtz, Henry N. Pohlman, John G. Morris, and Henry I. Schmidt.

> were immediately denounced by all the members of our Church as unscriptural, and not warranted by any article of our creed. No Synod in our country has ever acknowledged, or given countenance to, this sect.[52]

One wonders if Bachman was deliberately lying in this slanderous execration, or if he was himself "a weak and illiterate man" as far as his understanding of classic Lutheran theology was concerned.

Part X

One interesting contribution that Schmucker did make to the character of the "American Lutheran" movement was a partial reintroduction of the Augsburg Confession as a qualified norm for doctrine in the church. As we have already noted, under the influence of Rationalism, after the death of Muhlenberg, all references to the Confessions disappeared from synodical constitutions and from the approved rites for ordination. But under Schmucker's influence, the seminary where he taught, beginning in 1825, required of its professors an oath that included the following affirmations:

> … I do *ex animo* believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the inspired word of God and the only perfect rule of faith and practice. I believe the Augsburg Confession and the Catechisms of Luther to be a summary and just exhibition of the fundamental doctrines of the word of God.[53]

There is a deliberate ambiguity in this wording. Do the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession and the Catechisms *correlate with* the fundamental doctrines of the Word of God so that the professors are subscribing to all of the doctrines in these standards, while acknowledging that there might also be non-fundamental doctrines that are not included within them? Or do the Augsburg Confession and the Catechisms contain a mixture of fundamental doctrines, to which the professors are subscribing, and non-fundamental doctrines, to which they are not subscribing? And if the latter interpretation is the intent of this oath, which are which?

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[52] John Bachman, *A Sermon on the Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (1837), in part in Schmucker, *The American Lutheran Church*, 216, and in part in Ferm, *The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology,* 154-55.

[53] *Constitution of the Theological Seminary of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America*, in Ferm, 79.

The Gettysburg seminary was operated by the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, which had been formed by several "American Lutheran" regional synods in 1820. A further development in the wording of the doctrinal basis of the "American Lutheran" movement can be seen in the recommended constitution for district synods of the General Synod which was approved by the general body in 1829. District synods were therein called upon to restrict pastoral ordination to those men who were willing to state publicly their agreement with a series of interrogatories, which included the following:

> 1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the word of God, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice? 2. Do you believe that the fundamental doctrines of the word of God are taught in a manner substantially correct, in the doctrinal articles of the Augsb[urg]. Confession?[54]

This ordination pledge is noticeably less restrictive than the seminary oath. The Catechisms of Luther are not mentioned, although it was expected that most pastors would use the Small Catechism as the basis for catechetical instruction in their congregations. The reference to the Augsburg Confession is now limited to the first part of that document, excluding the section on corrected abuses. And an additional qualifying term—"substantially"—is now added. So, there is enough wiggle-room here for a General Synod pastor to say that he rejects any doctrine of the Augsburg Confession that he does not consider to be a "fundamental doctrine," and also to demur from any formulation that is used to explicate even a fundamental doctrine as long as he considers that incorrect formulation not to be impinging on the "substance" of the doctrine in question.

But even if these official texts are ambiguous, Schmucker himself was not ambiguous in his own explanations of what he thought his qualified subscription to the Augsburg Confession actually obligated him to teach. In a thorough presentation that he made at a General Synod district synod convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1840, Schmucker said that "Luther had wisely regarded the reformation as unfinished, and exhorted his followers to turn away from his works, and study the bible more attentively." And yet, in spite of Luther's advice, the Lutheran Church—after his death—rigidly adhered to his interpretations, and elevated his writings almost to a "canonical" status. This

[54] "Chapter XIX, Ordination," in Ferm, 83.

improperly stifled "all efforts to continue the work of reformation so gloriously commenced by him."[55] Now, however—at least according to Schmucker—the necessary continuing "reformation" of the Lutheran Church has finally been allowed to recommence. And on the basis of a more careful study of the Bible, several notable "improvements" have accordingly been made in the contemporary Lutheran Church. Schmucker elaborates:

> The *first* feature of improvement … is *the entire rejection of the authority of the Fathers in ecclesiastical controversy*. … [I]t is a principle which the experience of ages has clearly established, that in all controversies … *the bible, the whole bible, and nothing but the bible*, must be the armor of the Protestant.
>
> *Another* feature of improvement in the Lutheran church consists in her *no longer requiring assent to the doctrine of the real presence of the Saviour in the eucharist*. … At the present day, whilst some shades of difference exist in the Lutheran church, all are permitted to enjoy their opinions in peace, and the most general received view, if we mistake not, is: "That there is no presence of the glorified *human* nature of the Saviour, either substantial or influential; nor anything mysterious or supernatural in the eucharist; yet, that whilst the bread and wine are merely symbolic representations of the Saviour's absent body, by which we are reminded of his sufferings, there is also a special *spiritual* blessing bestowed by the divine Saviour on all worthy communicants, by which their faith and Christian graces are confirmed.[56]

Schmucker's third and fourth items of "improvement" are the abandonment of the practice of personal announcement to the pastor, and private confession and absolution before communion; and the dropping of the exorcism of the baptizand (or a similar abjuration) from the baptismal rite. He then continues:

> The *fifth* item of improvement in the Lutheran church is the more *systematic adjustment of her doctrines*. Luther … in the earlier part of his life … believed the Augustinian view of predestination. … But he at the same time entertained other

[55] Schmucker, *The American Lutheran Church*, 59-60.
[56] Ibid., 60-61, 63 (emphasis original).

> views inconsistent with this. Melanchthon … led the way in the process of harmonizing their conflicting elements. …
>
> The *sixth* feature of improvement is the adoption of a more regular and rigid system of church government and discipline in this country. …
>
> The *last* item of improvement … is the practice of the Lutheran church in this country, not to bind her ministers to the minutiae of any human creed. The bible and the belief that the *fundamental doctrines* of the bible are taught in a manner substantially correct in the Augsburg Confession, is all that is required. … [T]he orthodox denominations of the present day coincide as much in doctrinal views, as did the Christians in the golden age of Christianity. If they could walk together in love, and their minor differences created no difficulty then; why should not Christians in the present day unite in the same manner? … Happy, thrice happy too is the Lutheran church, that she, who was the first to cast off the yoke of Roman superstition and oppression, should lead the way in breaking the bonds of Protestant sectarianism. …[57]

Although it is not directly mentioned in this essay, the "American Lutherans" also dissented from the Reformers' teaching on the regenerative power and efficacy of Baptism, especially with respect to infants. Bachman, in his diatribe against the Tennessee Synod, had asserted, in regard to apostolic practice, that

> When men became converted to the Christian religion they were admitted by water baptism as members of the Church of the Redeemer. But the water that was used was only an emblem of the Holy Spirit. … Something more was necessary, and our Saviour taught Nicodemus, that in order to be prepared for the invisible Kingdom of God, he must be born of the Spirit—his heart must be converted to God by the divine influences from above.[58]

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[57] Ibid., 65-69 (emphasis original).

[58] Bachman, *A Sermon on the Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,* in Ferm, 155.

In formally setting forth its doctrinal position in 1834, the Synod of the West—a district synod of the General Synod—was a little more careful in what it said regarding Baptism: "We consider baptism to be a sacrament appointed by Jesus Christ, as the initiatory rite into his Church, and as a *means of grace*, i.e., of regeneration and sanctification. By the right use of this ordinance, we believe that the promised grace is not only

In describing where his instruction at the seminary departed from the teaching of the Book of Concord and from the teaching of those who were trying to revive the theology of the Book of Concord in his time, Schmucker referred to "the obsolete views of the old Lutherans, contained in the former symbols of the church in some parts of Germany, such as exorcism, the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the eucharist, private confession, baptismal regeneration, immersion in baptism, as taught in Luther's Large Catechism, etc."[59] With respect to the teachings of the Augsburg Confession in particular, Schmucker claimed that while certain "remnants of Romanism" were "retained indeed in the Confession," those errors are "universally rejected by our church in the present age." Included in this category is "especially the doctrine of the bodily presence" in the Lord's Supper.[60] Positively, Schmucker elsewhere expressed his opinion that "the grand and cherished doctrines of the illustrious reformers of the sixteenth century, which threw a halo of heavenly light around the renovated church" and which *are* therefore enduringly binding on all Lutherans, are the following: "the doctrine of the unity of God and the holy Trinity of persons in the Godhead—[the] divinity of the Saviour—the fall and depravity of man, both by nature and practice—the glorious work of redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ—regeneration by the Holy Spirit—justification by grace alone through faith—the divinely appointed sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper—the immortality of the soul, and eternal rewards and punishments."[61]

Part XI

The lack of orthodox Lutheran books in the English language during the time when Lutherans in America were making their transition to that language was probably one of the important factors that facilitated the development of "American Lutheranism." Lutherans of the "Muhlenberg tradition" had begun to switch over to the use of English during the time of Rationalism's ascendancy. As we would expect, there was little interest at that time—on the part of Rationalist pastors—in

offered and exhibited, but really conferred by the Holy Ghost; yet we do not confine the efficacy of the rite to that moment of time, wherein it was administered" (Evangelical Lutheran Synod of the West, Proceedings of the Convention [1834], 7, in Ferm, 103 [emphasis original]).

[59] Schmucker, *The American Lutheran Church*, 270.

[60] Ibid., 219.

[61] Samuel Simon Schmucker, in *Lutheran Observer* 23, no. 52, Whole No. 1163 (December 21, 1855): 2, in Ferm, 275.

translating the Book of Concord and other classic Lutheran materials into English. When the critical reaction to Rationalism finally set in, those Lutherans who knew that they did not want to be Rationalists but who were unable to read German were limited in their exposure to the full range of alternatives to Rationalism. For many, the situation was not that they had really understood Confessional Lutheran theology and had made an informed decision to reject it in favor of a Puritan or Revivalist alternative. Rather, they had a very weak grasp on what their Lutheran forebears in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had actually believed and on why they had believed it because there was no body of literature available to them that was able to introduce them to and instruct them in the orthodox Lutheran faith of their ancestors. Jürgen Ludwig Neve writes that

> the English language reached ever widening circles at a time when there was not yet an English literature breathing the Lutheran spirit. English speaking Lutheran laymen had to resort to a devotional literature full of Methodistic and Puritanic suggestions; while ministers, barely familiar with the German tongue, filled the shelves of their library with books of Reformed authorship and assimilated erroneous view-points. Thus many lost the sense of consistent Lutheranism. They recognized as fundamental those features which all denominations held in common, and considered as non-fundamental the special heritage from the Church of Luther.[62]

The Tennessee Synod and its pastors sought to remedy this problem. Before his untimely death in 1831, David Henkel had written several theological treatises in English. He and others also translated some of the writings of Luther into English. The Tennessee Synod's crowning achievement in this respect was an English translation of *The Christian Book of Concord*, published in 1851 in New Market, Virginia, by the press of Solomon D. Henkel and Brothers. An improved second edition appeared in 1854. The second edition was produced with the direct assistance of Lutheran scholars from outside the Tennessee Synod, including men from within the General Synod who were at this time moving away from Schmucker and his influence, and toward the theology of the Confessions. And a movement away from "American Lutheranism" and toward historic Confessional Lutheranism was

[62] Neve, *A Brief History of the Lutheran Church in America*, 104.

indeed beginning to take place within the General Synod in the middle part of the nineteenth century.

Abdel Ross Wentz notes, "It is a clear indication of the new spirit that was arising in the General Synod that this English book found a ready acceptance in all parts of that body." Wentz notes that even "the professors and students in the seminary and college at Gettysburg studied it."[63] This is not as surprising as it might seem, when we note that Charles Philip Krauth—the father of a more famous son, Charles Porterfield Krauth—was also teaching at the Gettysburg seminary during this period. The elder Krauth, who was among those who assisted in revising the Henkel Book of Concord for its second edition, had been moving further and further away from the theological ideas of his faculty colleague Schmucker.

At an earlier stage of his theological struggle and transition, Charles Philip was quoted to have said, "I find the Lutheran doctrine of the Sacraments hard to accept, in view of my Puritanic training, but I find the Scripture passages quoted in favor of them still harder to get over and explain away, and this I apprehend is the feeling of many who see the truth, but are slow to make a decided and public demonstration of it."[64] By 1849, however, he had publicly "come out" with a ringing endorsement of orthodox, Confessional Lutheran theology:

> Our verdict is unequivocally in behalf of the study, the thorough study, of this theology. We would have it thrown over our Church with a liberal hand; we would have all our ministers acquainted with the Symbolical Books; we would have them all versed in the distinctive theology of the Church. We would have introduced into our theological schools the study of the Symbols, and didactic and polemic theology so administered as to bring before the view pure, unadulterated Lutheranism. The gain to our ministry and to our Church would be immense, if this course were adopted. As things are, we have no standard, no guide. Everyone is left to fix his own views; and while we presume there is general agreement in our Church on the fundamental doctrines of the Bible, our ministers display, in the

[63] Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), 134.

[64] Charles Philip Krauth, in Adolph Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. I (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1898), 18-19.

> opinions they entertain, sometimes a decided Calvinist influence, sometimes an extreme Arminian, sometimes a Pelagian.[65]

And in the following year, Charles Philip had reached the point where he was able to share these observations *with a convention of the General Synod:*

> The Lutheran church in this country is in a state of reaction. She has passed, in some parts, through an extreme subjectivity, an extreme leaning to the emotional in religion. … She is now retracing her steps, acknowledging her error, seeking release from crude views and objectionable measures. She is hunting amongst the records of the past for the faith of former days, and endeavoring to learn what she was in her earliest form. The desire for the symbols of our church, the attention that is paid to them, [and] the admiration that has been expressed of them … all indicate a new state of things. … [T]he church is disposed to renew her connection with the past, and in her future progress to walk under the guidance of the light which [the past] has furnished. There is no fear of any doctrine which our symbols contain, no unwillingness to give it a fair examination, and a predisposition, rather than the contrary, to receive and assent.

In speaking specifically of the theory and practice of Confessional subscription in the General Synod, the elder Krauth goes on to say:

> We believe that there has been too much looseness in our church, in regard to the necessity and utility of creeds, in general. The change from the original ground occupied by the church, the disuse of the symbols, [and] the latitudinarianism about them, were calculated to be productive of much evil. … Now we suppose that this requires a remedy, and we can suggest no other, in the present state of our church, than the use of the Augustan Confession as a creed, and requiring the subscription of it, within certain limits, by every minister of Jesus Christ who serves at our altars. It may be said, that it has been used, [and] that it has received the sanction of the General Synod of our church. … This is true, but we object to the liberty allowed in that subscription. … The terms of the subscription are such

[65] Charles Philip Krauth, a review of Heinrich Schmid's *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch lutherischen Kirche*, *Evangelical Review* 1, no. 3 (July 1849), in Spaeth, *Charles Porterfield Krauth*, Vol. I, 21-22.

> as to admit of the rejection of any doctrine or doctrines which the subscriber may not receive. It is subscribed or assented to as containing the doctrines of the word of God substantially; they are set forth in substance, the understanding is that there are some doctrines in it, not contained in the word of God, but there is no specification concerning them. Every one could omit from his assent whatever he did not believe. The subscription did not preclude this. It is at once evident that a creed thus presented is no creed, that it is anything or nothing, that its subscription is a solemn farce.

And then, in a concluding admonition, he states:

> Too ignorant have we been of our own doctrines, and our own history, too little have we known of the fountain from which we sprang, and we have taken pride in times past in claiming a paternity in every reputable form of Christianity, and have denied our proper parentage, in our mendicancy for foreign favors. Shame that it has been so! … Let us go back to our father's house. …[66]

The war was on.

Part XII

The theological character of the Pennsylvania Ministerium—which in 1826 had harbored men like Johann Augustus Probst—had changed dramatically by mid-century. This change occurred through a combination of the Ministerium's receiving into membership many recently-arrived Lutheran immigrants from Germany, who had in their fatherland come under the influence of the Confessional Revival, and the theological reassessment that many native members of the Ministerium were undertaking. In its 1853 convention—at which it voted to rejoin the General Synod, after many years of aloofness from the general body—the following resolution was unanimously adopted by the Pennsylvania Ministerium:

> Whereas the Evangelical Lutheran Church has, of late, arrived at clearer views of its doctrinal and other distinctive features; and Whereas, we are justified in expecting that both the internal

[66] Charles Philip Krauth, "The Lutheran Church in the United States," *Evangelical Review* II (July 1850): 1-16, in Ferm, 168-69.

and external welfare of our church will be thereby essentially promoted; and, Whereas, we recognize the importance of a historico-confessional basis for the church; therefore, *Resolved:*

(A) That we also, in common with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of our Fathers, acknowledge the collective body of the Symbolical Books, as the historico-confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and that we also, like the Evangelical Lutheran Church of former times, accord to the unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism, an especial importance among our Symbolical Books generally.

(B) *Resolved*, That we enjoin it on all the Ministers and Candidates of our church as their duty to make themselves better and more thoroughly acquainted with these venerable documents of the faith of our fathers, than has hitherto been the case with many.

(C) *Resolved*, That it is not by any means our intention hereby to diminish the absolute authority of the Holy Scriptures, but much rather to place them in the clearest light possible, and that we by no means design through these Symbols to place constraint on the consciences of any, but much rather through them to bind the conscience to the Holy Scriptures as the divine Source of Truth.[67]

The same kind of developments were taking place also within various regional synods of the General Synod. And new independent synods were also forming—especially in the mid-western region of the country—which comprised almost exclusively recent immigrants from Europe who were fleeing from the darkness and oppression of Rationalism and Unionism and who had come to embrace the theology of the Confessional Revival. Most notable among these was the Missouri Synod, organized in 1847. The Missouri Synod was also exercising an influence on many within the General Synod—at least on those who could read German—through two popular and theologically conservative publications edited by the Missourian leader C. F. W. Walther: *Lehre und Wehre* and *Der Lutheraner*.

[67] *Minutes of the 106th Annual Convention of the German Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and the Adjacent States* (1853), 31-32, in Ferm, 148. The Pennsylvania Ministerium had left the General Synod in 1823 because it wanted to cultivate closer relations with the Reformed Church. In 1853 it rejoined, because it now wanted to cultivate stronger relations with other Lutherans and to try to have an influence on them in the interest of encouraging a stronger Lutheran consciousness.

Within the General Synod, Samuel Simon Schmucker was *losing* influence. Even his own son, Beale Melanchthon Schmucker, repudiated his father's compromises and embraced the Confessional Revival. Desperate times called for desperate measures. And so, in a last-ditch effort to hold the line against what the "American Lutherans" feared might be a total Confessional takeover of the General Synod, a scheme was devised among several "American Lutheran" leaders to publish an edited version of the Augsburg Confession to remove any ambiguity as to which doctrines in the original Augustana were the fundamental ones that still needed to be held to and which were not.

Part XIII

What emerged from this effort, in 1855, was a pamphlet entitled *Definite Platform, Doctrinal and Disciplinarian, for Evangelical Lutheran District Synods; Constructed in Accordance with the Principles of the General Synod.* Those who prepared this document were not identified within its pages, although in time Samuel Simon Schmucker admitted that he was its primary author. The rationale and methodology for this effort were explained by its anonymous editors as follows:

> This Platform was prepared and published by consultation and co-operation of ministers of different Eastern and Western Synods, connected with the General Synod, at the special request of some western brethren, whose churches desire a more specific expression of the General Synod's doctrinal basis, being surrounded by German churches, which profess the entire mass of former symbols. As this Platform adds not a single sentence to the Augsburg Confession, nor omits anything that has the least pretension to be considered "a fundamental doctrine of Scripture," it is perfectly consistent with the doctrinal test of the General Synod. … Hence any District Synod, connected with the General Synod, may, with perfect consistency, adopt this Platform."[68]

The Definite Platform included the Apostles' Creed,[69] the Nicene Creed, some material from the Formula of Concord testifying to the

[68] *Definite Platform, Doctrinal and Disciplinarian, for Evangelical Lutheran District Synods; Constructed in Accordance with the Principles of the General Synod* (Philadelphia: Miller & Burlock, 1855), 2.

[69] The Apostles' Creed as it appeared in the Definite Platform omitted—in Methodist fashion—the clause on the descent into hell.

supreme authority of Scripture, and additional commentary that took issue with various "errors" in the Confessions and that defended the "American Lutheran" alternatives. The centerpiece of the Definite Platform was an "American Recension of the Augsburg Confession," based on the 21 doctrinal articles of the historic Augustana, but omitting all antitheses as well as those lines and sections of the historic text that taught the doctrines which the "American Lutherans," in their private writings, had long alleged to be erroneous and unbiblical. But the Definite Platform was intended to be more than just another private writing, repeating these criticisms of the old Augsburg Confession. It was, instead, intended to be a *new* Augsburg Confession, to be formally adopted by as many of the district synods of the General Synod as could be persuaded to do so.

From the perspective of its advocates, the Definite Platform, when adopted, would serve two purposes. First, it would clarify for the public where the General Synod and its regional affiliates differed from the more recently-organized emigree synods that taught all the old doctrines of the Reformation. It was no doubt hoped that potential church members from within the American Protestant environment, who were repelled by the foreign character and Romanizing doctrines of groups like the Missouri Synod, would be drawn to a kinder and gentler version of Lutheranism if they knew that there was such an option. And second, the Definite Platform, when adopted by a synod, would make it official that this synod was not going to allow itself to regress in its doctrinal position in the way that the Pennsylvania Ministerium (for example) had done. It was hoped that a formal adoption of the Definite Platform would decisively settle whatever theological controversies might be taking place within a synod—between those who held to the received "American Lutheran" position and those who were agitating for a return to the Confessional position—and permanently curtail the influence of the latter.

According to Jacobs, the preparation of this "American Rescension" of Lutheranism's chief symbolical book was prompted by a newly-strengthened conviction on the part of the "American Lutherans" that "confessions of faith should declare with such explicitness the faith of those who subscribe them, that all ambiguity and room for variety of interpretations should be excluded; and that the General Synod, no longer holding to certain articles in the Augsburg Confession in the sense in which they were understood by its authors, should, without

hesitation or reservation, say so."[70] Previously, it was thought that the combination of an ambiguous wording regarding the scope of the authority of the Augsburg Confession, combined with the general consensus that existed in the General Synod on which Reformation-era doctrines were not biblical and correct, would preserve the theological character of the General Synod as Schmucker and his friends envisioned it. But due to the influence of the Confessional Revival, that consensus was no longer there. And so, the ambiguity regarding the Augsburg Confession's scope of truth and authority should now be tightened up as well.

The five "errors" in the historic Augsburg Confession that were edited out of the American version were: 1) Approval of the Ceremonies of the Mass, 2) Private Confession and Absolution, 3) Denial of the Divine Obligation of the Christian Sabbath, 4) Baptismal Regeneration, and 5) the Real Presence. Examples of the kind of altered texts that were to be found in the "American Recension" of the Augsburg Confession can be seen in its renderings of these articles:

> IX. Concerning baptism, our churches teach, that it is "a necessary ordinance," that is a means of grace, and ought to be administered also to children, who are thereby dedicated to God, and received into his favor.
>
> X. In regard to the Lord's Supper they teach that Christ is present with the communicants in the Lord's Supper, "under the emblems of bread and wine."[71]

One can easily detect the influences that had led to this travesty. And a rejection of these five objectionable Lutheran teachings—to the extent that they were being accurately summarized by Schmucker and his people—was not a new phenomenon either. Already in the sixteenth century, the Reformers had dealt with Enthusiasts and Sacramentarians who held to the essential components of the "American Lutheran" viewpoint. Now that the Book of Concord was being studied once again, both by German-speaking and by English-speaking Lutherans, its testimony against these old errors, which the "American Lutherans" had revived, was persuading people in large numbers of the soundness of

[70] Henry Eyster Jacobs, "Definite Platform," *The Lutheran Cyclopedia*, 153.
[71] *Definite Platform,* 11.

the classic Lutheran position. Schmucker noticed this, feared this, and wanted to protect his unique brand of Lutheranism against this.

Some of the charges preferred against the Augsburg Confession in this document were reflective of serious doctrinal differences that did exist between the "American Lutherans" and genuine Confessional Lutherans. But others were downright silly. Jacobs noted that "some of these charges could have no weight among an educated ministry." The two instances of this kind of ignorant criticism, to which he was referring, were these:

> The Augsburg Confession, e.g., refers to the Lord's Supper by the name "mass," without in any way compromising the abhorrence of its adherents toward "the mass" as understood in the Roman Catholic Church. To the present day Scandinavian Lutherans designate their chief service on the Lord's Day as "the mass." But it was not so easy a matter to dissipate the prejudices of people to whom such words of the confession as these were read: "Ours are falsely accused of abolishing the ceremonies of the mass." Between the "private"—that is, individual—"confession" of the Lutheran, which is a voluntary privilege of a sin-burdened conscience, and the private, or enforced, confession of the Romanist, demanded as a condition of the forgiveness of sins, there is all the difference in the world. Nowhere is this difference more clearly explained than in the Lutheran confessions. But the similarity of terms was employed to excite a storm of prejudice.[72]

The Definite Platform's ludicrous assertions concerning the "Ceremonies of the Mass" in particular were no doubt strongly influenced by Schmucker's lifelong Puritanical "antipathy for ceremonial observances, liturgies, and rigid ecclesiastical customs."[73] Schmucker's son Beale remarked that "the whole cast of his mind" revealed "his aversion to a liturgical service" and "his rejection of all right of past usage to influence the present."[74] Yet at the same time, Schmucker harbored no reservations in allowing the introduction of revivals and other "new measures" into the Lutheran Church, freighted though they may

[72] Jacobs, 425.

[73] Ferm, 327.

[74] Beale Melanchthon Schmucker, "Samuel S. Schmucker," *The Pennsylvania College Book, 1832-1882* (Philadelphia: Alumni Association of Pennsylvania College, 1882), 157, in Ferm, 327.

have been with wide-eyed fanaticism and implicit semi-Pelagianism. Schmucker's friend and fellow "American Lutheran" Benjamin Kurtz was especially known for his advocacy of such practices.[75] The Definite Platform attempted to impose these personal bigotries and subjective tastes onto the whole General Synod.

Part XIV

Within the General Synod, the reaction to the publication of the Definite Platform was not what Schmucker and his collaborators had expected. They has misjudged the extent to which the Confessional Revival had in fact already penetrated the General Synod. And there were many in the General Synod, who may not have been all that strong in their own embracing of the historic Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church, who nevertheless felt that actually changing the text of the Augsburg Confession—to suit the interests of a relatively localized and idiosyncratic version of "Lutheranism"—was both arrogant and presumptuous. And so, as Jacobs notes, "Wherever the attempt was made to secure for it synodical approval, the 'Platform' was almost universally rejected, while strong resolutions repudiating and condemning it were passed in a number of the larger and older synods."[76]

The issuing of the Definite Platform did not inaugurate a new controversy as much as it was the last gasp of the "American Lutheran" side in a controversy that had been raging already for many years. More than anything else, it served as a rallying point for the advocates of a restoration of the teaching and practice of genuine Confessional Lutheranism so that in the end, the position and influence of "American Lutheranism" within the General Synod was significantly weakened, and not strengthened, by this scheme.

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[75] Benjamin Kurtz wrote, "If the great object of the anxious bench can be accomplished in some other way, less obnoxious but equally efficient—be it so. But we greatly doubt this. We consider it necessary in many cases, and we believe there are circumstances when no measures equally good can be substituted. Hence we are free to confess that we go for this measure *with all our heart"* ("Notes on the 'Anxious Bench'," *Lutheran Observer*, December 1, 1843, 3, quoted in Nelson, 215 [emphasis original]). And with a remarkably obtuse interpretation of how Rationalism had developed in the Lutheran Church, Kurtz also wrote, "The Catechism, highly as we prize it, can never supercede the anxious bench, but only, when faithfully used, render it more necessary. During the whole time that the Church was declining in Germany, and even in the most languishing state, it was gorged with catechetical instructions, and so continued to be until nearly the whole church had fallen into neology and lifeless formality" ("Notes on the 'Anxious Bench'," *Lutheran Observer*, November 24, 1843, 2, in Nelson, 216.).

[76] Jacobs, "Definite Platform," 153.

William Julius Mann of the Pennsylvania Ministerium led the way in opposing the "American Recension" and in defending the original Augsburg Confession in a treatise entitled *A Plea for the Augsburg Confession, in Answer to the Objections of the Definite Platform*. Mann, who served as a pastor in Philadelphia, described the Definite Platform as its authors' "Declaration of Independence" from the Augsburg Confession "by which the Lutheran public is informed of their absolute freedom from any pollution produced by contact with the errors of the Augsburg Confession." And Mann's wittiness continues, when he goes on to say of these authors:

> We give them credit for this honest avowal of their partial apostacy from the most important Confession the Lutheran Church, as such, has to boast of. We do this the more cheerfully because we expect that they will give us credit for our open and unequivocal free-will offering of a Plea for the old Augsburg Confession, and even for those parts which seem to be very unbecoming stains on the face of the old document.[77]

In the course of his pamphlet, Mann pointed out those places where the Definite Platform is mistaken in its characterization of what the original Augsburg Confession actually teaches. But Mann's primary efforts were expended in defending the biblical and evangelical character of the sacramental teachings of the Augsburg Confession, which he did very effectively.

Schmucker responded to Mann—and his other critics—with a book entitled *American Lutheranism Vindicated*, in which he restated his view that the Augsburg Confession should be conditionally and qualifiedly subscribed to, only with reference to the "fundamental doctrines" of the Christian faith which it accurately sets forth and not with reference to all of its doctrinal content. And according to Schmucker, "A *fundamental doctrine* of Scripture is one that is regarded by the great body of evangelical Christians as essential to salvation, or essential to the system of Christianity; so that he who rejects it cannot be saved, neither be regarded as a believer in the system of Christian doctrine."[78] But notice the human factor in determining what a "fundamental doctrine" is. A doctrine is understood to be of a "fundamental" character if it is so

[77] William Julius Mann, *A Plea for the Augsburg Confession, in Answer to the Objections of the Definite Platform* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1856), 4.

[78] Samuel Simon Schmucker, *American Lutheranism Vindicated* (Baltimore: T. Newton Kurtz, 1856), 4 (emphasis original).

regarded by "the great body of evangelical Christians." Left uncontemplated is the possibility that "the great body of evangelical Christians" might be *wrong* in their rejection of the sacramental theology of the Scriptures because of the unsound rationalistic assumptions through which they filter the Scriptures.

In any case, Schmucker then offered a listing of what the "fundamental doctrines" of the Christian faith are, which he had previously honed for another publication the previous year:

> 1. The Divine inspiration, authority and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures. 2. The right and duty of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures. 3. The unity of the Godhead, and the Trinity of persons therein. 4. The utter depravity of human nature in consequence of the fall. 5. The incarnation of the Son of God, his work of atonement for sinners of mankind, and his mediatorial intercession and reign. 6. The justification of the sinner by faith alone. 7. The work of the Holy Spirit in the conversion and sanctification of the sinner. 8. The Divine institution of the Christian ministry, and the obligation and perpetuity of Baptism and the Lord's Supper and 9. The immortality of the soul and the judgment of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, with the eternal blessedness of the righteous and the eternal punishment of the wicked.[79]

So, insofar as the Augsburg Confession teaches these articles of faith, which sectarian churches also claim to teach, it is subscribed to. Insofar as the Augsburg Confession goes beyond these articles of faith and teaches doctrines which the sectarian churches renounce and declaim, then it is not subscribed to.

In the minds of most observers, "American Lutheranism" was *not* vindicated through this exchange, but rather stood accused under the indictment of the real Augsburg Confession—and behind it, of Holy Scripture itself. The Confessional movement continued to grow and develop, leading not only to the organization of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America in 1867—by synods that had withdrawn from the General Synod—but also to a relative firming-up of the confessional position of what remained of the General Synod. In comparison to the General Council, and especially also in comparison to the more recently-organized Confessional synods in the mid-west, the General Synod remained a confessionally

[79] Schmucker, *American Lutheranism Vindicated*, 5.

weak church body. But after the controversy that had been stirred up by "American Lutheranism" in general and had been brought to a head by the publication of the Definite Platform in particular, the General Synod was not as confessionally weak as it used to be, or as confessionally weak as Schmucker had wanted it to be.

In 1855, with respect to the then recently mailed out Definite Platform, James Allen Brown—at that year's convention of the East Pennsylvania Synod—had called upon that body to express its "unqualified disapprobation of this most dangerous attempt to change the doctrinal basis, and revolutionize the existing character, of the Lutheran Churches now united in the General Synod"; and also to warn its sister synods "against this dangerous proposition."[80] When Schmucker—under some pressure—retired from his professorship in the Gettysburg seminary in 1864, he was replaced on the faculty by Brown (who remained as a professor there until 1881). When Schmucker died in 1873, the overt agenda of "American Lutheranism," which was already dead, was buried with him.

Part XV

What lessons can we learn from this? Insofar as there are some strictly historical lessons to be learned, we would agree with these observations of David A. Gustafson:

> The American Lutherans advocated that the Lutheran church should possess characteristics similar to those of their Protestant neighbors in America. These characteristics included the practice of revivals, an essentially Zwinglian view of the sacraments, and an informal liturgy. The American Lutherans held liberal views regarding the Lutheran Confessions. They accepted only certain portions of the Augsburg Confession and claimed that, ultimately, the Bible was the only rule of faith. The confessional party, on the other hand, argued that the Lutheran church should adhere to both the Scriptures and the Confessions, should not give up its particularities, and should continue to maintain a unique identity in America.[81]

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[80] James Allen Brown, in John Alden Singmaster, "The General Synod," in *The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States* (fourth edition) (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1914), 51 (punctuation slightly revised).

[81] David A. Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis: The Question of Identity in the American Republic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 165.

But for us, the matters we have been discussing cannot be seen simply as detached historical curiosities, with no bearing on the challenges and temptations that we face in the life and mission of the church today.

In this essay we have concentrated on the processes that led up, over the decades, to the publication of the Definite Platform. The Definite Platform did not emerge in a vacuum. In order to avoid the kind of culminating error that was embodied in the Definite Platform, the church of the present and of the future must also avoid the kind of contributing errors that preceded it and prepared the way for it. And therefore the church must be aware of what preceded it and prepared the way for it.

The Lutheran Church in America did not go to bed one night with Berkenmeyer, consciously embracing the sacramental theology of the Book of Concord, and then wake up in the morning with Schmucker, consciously rejecting it. This loss of faith and identity was a gradual process, passing through a Pietist stage, which saw a neglect of the Confessions and a lack of valuing and carefully studying them; then passing through a Rationalist stage, which saw a total ignoring and rejecting of the Confessions; and then coming finally to the "American Lutheran" stage, which saw a partial correction of Rationalism but also a hybridization of Lutheran theology and various sorts of sectarian theology. The "American Lutherans" formally recognized the Augsburg Confession, albeit in a highly qualified and incomplete way. But the underlying spirit of their beliefs was fundamentally incompatible with the underlying spirit of the Augustana. The Augsburg Confession, while acknowledged *de jure* as a matter of remote tradition, was repudiated *de facto* in actual preaching and practice. It had become a foreign thing to their hearts, even while their rhetoric had kept its bare name on their lips.

How familiar are we with the Confessions? How often do we allow ourselves to be instructed by them? How much do we allow them to shape our thinking and speaking with respect to the articles of faith that they address? Perhaps there is a fear that if we devote ourselves too much to their study, we will thereby be elevating them—at least in our own minds—to the level of sacred Scripture. So, in order to show our honor for the Bible, we may dishonor, by neglect, the Book of Concord. But we should not think of this as a "zero sum game." The time and effort spent in increasing our appreciation for the teachings of the symbolical books, do not, to that same degree, diminish our appreciation for the teachings of the sacred Scriptures. To study the Confessions and to

learn from them is to study and to learn the doctrine of Scripture which they faithfully reproduce. This is the satisfaction and the edification that open-minded and open-hearted Lutherans have and experience, when—through their attentive reading of the symbolical books—they, in effect, sit at the feet of some of the greatest teachers the Christian church has ever known.[82]

The more we learn from the Confessions, the more we are led into the Scriptures and into their true Christ-centered meaning. The Lutheran Confessions serve the purpose of facilitating a "fundamental, enduring unity in the church," by virtue of the fact that they are "a general summary of teaching" that has been "drawn together from God's Word."[83] To be sure, the confessional principle of the Lutheran Church is not premised on the notion that the Scriptures are not intrinsically clear and require a creed to make them clear. But the confessional principle *is* premised on the observation that the Scriptures as a whole are *fully* clear in regard to a certain article of faith only when *all* the passages of Scripture that pertain to that article have been "drawn together" and taken into account. The Confessions, as they draw together all the various strands of biblical teaching on the subjects they address, thereby draw us ever more deeply into what the Bible says about those subjects.

Part XVI

The Confessions are not a supplement to the Scriptures, speaking dogmatically on matters with regard to which the Scriptures do not speak dogmatically. And the Confessions, in their practical use in theological discussions, should not be employed and treated as if they were such a supplement. It should be possible for anyone who quotes from the Book of Concord, in making a point in a theological debate, also to show where in Scripture the statement that he has quoted is rooted or has its basis.[84] The Book of Concord has no authority *over* our conscience beyond its ability to *persuade* our conscience that its doctrine is the Bible's doctrine. This happens as our reason is taken captive by

[82] This is especially the case when one considers also the patristic quotations that are included in the Reformation-era Confessions from the writings of St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, St. Jerome, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and other notable Fathers of the church.

[83] Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration: Rule & Norm Heading, Kolb/Wengert, 526.

[84] A good resource for showing the biblical basis especially for the various articles of faith that are included in the Augsburg Confession is Carroll Herman Little, *Lutheran Confessional Theology: A Presentation of the Doctrines of the Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943).

the Word of God through the Confessions' contextual and hermeneutically responsible expositions and explanations of Scripture. This would include also a recognition of the *ministerial* use of reason that was employed by their authors, as they explicated—through a careful analysis of interrelated lines of biblical thought—what Chemnitz describes as "dogmas … which are not set forth in so many letters and syllables in Scripture but are brought together from clear testimonies of Scripture by way of good, certain, firm, and clear reasoning."[85]

We believe *a priori* that whatever the Scriptures teach on some particular point will be and is true before we have even studied the Scriptures on that particular point. This is because the Scriptures are inspired by God and are by necessity reliable and infallible. In comparison, we believe only *a posteriori* that what the Confessions teach on some particular point is true, by virtue of the fact that their teaching is in accord with the teaching of the Scriptures. The Scriptures are like the sun and are for us the source of the light of divine truth. But the Confessions are like the moon, which reflects upon us that light of divine truth. The light of the Confessions is accordingly the same light as the light of the Scriptures, because it is a light that originates in the Scriptures.

To borrow some terminology from Charles Porterfield Krauth, we recognize "that *correct human explanations* of Scripture doctrine are Scripture doctrine, for they are simply the statement of the same truth in different words."[86] Together with all Confessional Lutherans throughout history, we have concluded that the Confessions are indeed correct human explanations of Scripture doctrine. In keeping with this conclusion, but also and in keeping with the distinction that exists between Scripture as such and correct explanations of Scripture, "We do not claim that our Confessors were infallible. We do not say they could not fail. We only claim that they did not fail."[87]

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[85] Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 249.

Harold Wicke writes, "We may establish our doctrinal statements by means of true inferences, deductions, enumeration, comparison, conclusion, summarization, identification, direct quotation. If in so employing our reason we are faithful to Scripture, these statements have the same force as Scripture, because they are but Scripture faithfully reworded. But we dare never go beyond Scripture" ("What is 'Doctrine' According to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 57, no. 2 [April 1960]: 89).

[86] Charles Porterfield Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1899), 184 (emphasis original).

[87] Ibid., 186.

While the Lutheran Church's confessional obligation "does not extend to historical statements, 'purely exegetical questions,' and other matters not belonging to the doctrinal content of the symbols," nevertheless, "all *doctrines* of the Symbols are based on clear statements of Scripture."[88] This section of the *Brief Statement* also affirms that "the confessional obligation covers all doctrines, not only those that are treated *ex professo*, but also those that are merely introduced in support of other doctrines." Consequently, the authority of the Book of Concord, as "a confession of the doctrines of Scripture over against those who deny these doctrines,"[89] rises or falls with the authority of Holy Scripture itself. In speaking of the relationship between a creed or a *confession* of faith and Scripture as the *rule* of faith, Charles Porterfield Krauth also states:

> We do not interpret God's word by the Creed, neither do we interpret the Creed by God's word, but interpreting both independently, by the laws of language, and finding that they teach one and the same truth, we heartily acknowledge the Confession as a true exhibition of the faith of the Rule—a true witness to the one, pure, and unchanging faith of the Christian Church, and freely make it our own Confession, as truly as if it had been now first uttered by our lips, or had now first gone forth from our hands."[90]

And as Seiss aptly remarks, "We do not believe *in* the Symbols; we only believe *with* them, and that for no other reason than that we are persuaded that they do fairly and truly grasp and declare what, on

[88] *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* (1932), Section 48 (emphasis original).

[89] Ibid., Section 45.

The distinction that the *Brief Statement* makes between the doctrinal and non-doctrinal content of the Confessions is a valid distinction. But this distinction should not be misused in such a way as to mute some of the legitimate doctrinal content of the Confessions or to obscure some of the necessary practical implications of that doctrinal content through resorting too quickly to related distinctions between doctrinal "prescriptions" and non-doctrinal "descriptions" or between doctrinal "principles" and non-doctrinal "applications." The context of many of the statements in the Confessions shows us that its doctrine is often simply confessed, without accompanying prescriptions or commandments, in so many words, that others also must confess it. And in many cases, the practical application of a doctrine is actually an intrinsic component *of* that doctrine—such as with the Formula of Concord's teaching on the divinely-instituted threefold sacramental action of the Lord's Supper, which dogmatically is not just a matter of "This is," but also of "This do."

[90] Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology*, 169.

adequate examination, is found to be the true sense, intent and meaning of God's holy Word on the points presented in them."[91]

The authority of the Confessions—as true and faithful statements of Scripture doctrine—is a derived authority. The authority of the Confessions is not an autonomous, self-contained authority. But the authority of the Confessions, for the reasons we have stated, is a *real* authority. We do not dishonor Scripture by studying them and seeking to learn from them. Instead, the more we know the Confessions, the more we will know the Scriptures, because the Confessions lead us into the Scriptures not away from the Scriptures.

Schmucker and the "American Lutherans" set up their human reason as a grid or filter through which the Scriptures were to be read. This the Confessions do not do. We likewise must not do this. The Confessions testify to the profound mysteries of the Trinity and the incarnation, of God's redemption and revelation in Christ, of justification and regeneration, and of the means of grace and the gift of faith—as all of these weighty, integrated truths are taught in Scripture. And as the Confessions testify to these mysteries, they teach us to be in awe of these mysteries and to believe in these mysteries.

The Scriptures are inherently clear in what they intend to teach. And the basic message of Scripture, that Jesus Christ is our Savior from sin and death, is clear to anyone who reads those passages where this basic message is set forth. But we should not overestimate the clarity of *our human minds*, infected as they are by sin, in fully and accurately perceiving and appreciating what the Scriptures as a whole say about all the subjects they address. Surrounded as we are by a theological environment of experiential religion and by a secular culture of post-modernism, we should welcome the assistance that is rendered to us by the Confessions of our church in shining a spotlight on the Scriptures and in showing us how the Scriptures work together to teach the whole counsel of God.

We are in some respects like the Ethiopian eunuch, and the Book of Concord is in some respects like Philip the deacon and evangelist:

> So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. (Acts 8:30-31, ESV[92])

[91] Seiss, 215 (emphasis original).

[92] Scripture quotations marked "ESV" are from the Holy Bible, English Standard Version ®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News

What Philip then did was explain to the Ethiopian that the passage from Isaiah that he was reading was a description of Christ, and he shared with him, beginning with that passage, the full message of Christ's redeeming work—including also a discussion of the Lord's institution of Holy Baptism and of the blessings that are offered and bestowed by means of Baptism (vss. 36–38). Philip guided the Ethiopian into and through the Scriptures, and in this way was a servant of the Scriptures for the sake of the Ethiopian's faith. And that is what the Confessions can be for us.

As tested touchstones of biblical orthodoxy, and as timeless testimonies to God's truth, the Confessions guide us into and through the Scriptures and help to diffuse from our minds the smoke and mist of our contemporary confusions. The Confessions serve to lift our minds above the limitations of our own experience and personal blind spots and to carry us into the larger catholic consciousness of the church—not so that we will not need to hear the divine voice of the Scriptures, but precisely so that we then *will*, with greater clarity of perception and fewer distractions, be able to hear the divine voice of the Scriptures.

Part XVII

The kind of unionism that the "American Lutherans" embraced in the nineteenth century did not go away when the "American Lutheran" movement as such was ultimately discredited. The Prussian "Evangelical" Church remained as an ecclesiastical "black hole" into which European Lutherans, whenever they weakened in their theological stamina, would be sucked. And the twentieth century saw a great resurgence of this unionistic spirit, not only in Europe, but also once again in America, largely through the influence of the "Neo-Orthodox" theology of the Reformed theologian Karl Barth and of disciples of Barth, such as the Lutheran theologian Martin Niemoeller.

Norman A. Madson, the dean of the seminary of the Norwegian Synod (now the Evangelical Lutheran Synod), addressed this problem in a sermon that he preached at the diamond anniversary gathering of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America in 1948. Looking at the American situation and at the dangerous trends that he saw in the bigger picture of American Lutheranism, Madson said:

> It is not only the European churches bearing the Lutheran name which are so under the spell of Barthian theology, that they imagine the only way to ensconce themselves against the threats of a resurgent Rome, is to unite so-called Evangelicals. That spirit of surrendering the *sola Scriptura* of a Luther and his fellow reformers is making itself felt throughout large sections of American Lutheranism. And what is at the root of it all? May it not be that there has been too little study of Martin Luther in our seminaries of late, too little searching of that monument to the Christian faith, the Book of Concord?[93]

Madson then refocused his attention on some similarly dangerous attitudes that he saw closer to home, within the Synodical Conference. He continued:

> What was it that made a Walther the tower of strength which he became in our American Lutheran Zion? Walther was an assiduous student of Luther, even as a Luther had been but an humble follower of Paul. Yes, we hear ever so often, even within our Synodical Conference: "Let us forget the fathers, and get back to Scripture." Again that may sound very pious and praiseworthy. But what if Scripture, to which they appeal, has something to say about those fathers who have spoken unto us the word of God? Can we then do as we please about what they have spoken? Not unless we want to violate this injunction of the Word itself. And this is what Holy Writ enjoins upon us all: "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." Heb. 13, 7.[94]

Madson goes on to ask two rhetorical questions, to both of which the implied answer is to be a resounding "No!"

> Is it isolationism to hold aloof from those whom God Himself has admonished [us] not to fraternize? Is it narrow legalism to be bound to the clear-cut statements of our Lutheran Confessions? A Niemoeller may tell us that "God is not bound

[93] Norman A. Madson, "The Crying Need of our Beloved Conference" (sermon preached at the 75th Anniversary gathering of the Synodical Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 10, 1948), *Preaching to Preachers* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1952), 203 (punctuation slightly revised).

[94] Ibid.

> by any such confessions." But God is bound by His Word. And until it be shown that the Confessions to which we stand pledged are not a proper exposition of that Word, let us not be over-troubled by those who accuse us of sixteenth century confessionalism. Let us continue to ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein.[95]

Part XVIII

In the Preface to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Melanchthon very sensibly writes, "In these controversies I have always made it a point to adhere as closely as possible to traditional doctrinal formulas in order to promote the attainment of concord."[96] This touches on another important role of the Lutheran Confessions within the larger Lutheran Church, namely their ability to serve as an aid in helping us to recognize doctrinal agreement where that agreement does exist, and as a guide for fraternal understanding and fraternal cooperation among those who are so agreed. It is possible for a particular Lutheran synod to develop its own internal parochial theological vocabulary to such an extent that Lutherans whose theological formation took place in other settings would not be fully able to understand what is being said from within that synod. But if Lutherans in general agree that, whenever possible, they will not only learn together from the Confessions but also teach their common faith together with a shared use of the terms and categories of the Confessions, the cause of unity is helped.

This is the underlying theme of what Jakob Aall Ottesen and Nils O. Brandt reported to the old Norwegian Synod in 1857, after they had been tasked by their church body to investigate the various manifestations of what was then passing for "Lutheranism" in America, to see if there were any genuinely Confessional Lutherans out there with whom the Norwegian Synod could, with a clear conscience, establish God-pleasing fraternal relations. This was their conclusion, once they had gotten acquainted with the pastors and institutions of the Missouri Synod of that time:

> It is a real joy to be able to say, in gratitude to God, that we have invariably got the impression that they are all possessed of the same spirit … : a heartfelt trust in God, a sincere love for the symbols and the doctrines of the fathers, and a belief that in

[95] Ibid.

[96] Apology, Preface:11, Kolb/Wengert, 110.

> them His holy Word is rightly explained and interpreted; and therefore a sacrificial, burning zeal to apply these old-Lutheran principles of doctrine and order. May the Lord graciously revive this spirit throughout the entire Lutheran church, *so that those who call themselves Lutherans may no longer wrangle over questions settled by the Lutheran Confessions*. May they rather show their true Lutheranism by truly believing that God's Word is taught rightly and without error in the Lutheran Confessions. Otherwise, the Lutheran name is but duplicity and hypocrisy.[97]

Ottesen and Brandt, in their American Lutheran odyssey, had apparently also bumped into some of the "American Lutherans." And they wanted nothing to do with them!

The Lutheran theologian Joseph Stump elaborates on Ottesen's and Brandt's basic point:

> Confessions or symbols are official formulations of the common faith of the Church. They are public testimonies as to the manner in which the Church apprehends and teaches the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures. … They serve the twofold purpose of exhibiting what the Church believes and teaches, and of guarding against error and heresy. … They are useful also as criteria by which those who hold the same faith may know one another and join together in one organization.

Stump then explains the way in which the Lutheran Church—as a confessing ecclesiastical entity—uses its confessions to ensure that the doctrine that its individual preachers preach will be the biblical doctrine that it believes and in which it wants its members to be instructed:

> Bona-fide subscription to these Confessions is required of Lutheran ministers, because the Church must see to it that those who go forth in her name preach only the pure doctrines of the Gospel as she holds them. No one is compelled to subscribe. But if any minister refuses to do so, he thereby testifies that he is not in harmony with the doctrinal position of the Lutheran Church, and has no right to preach in her name. On the other hand, if he is a Lutheran in his convictions, he will be

[97] Jakob Aall Ottesen and Nils O. Brandt, "Indberetning fra Pastorerne Ottesen og Brandt om deres Reise til St. Louis, Missouri; Columbus, Ohio; og Buffalo, New York" (1857), in Carl S. Meyer, *Pioneers Find Friends* (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1963), 63 (emphasis added).

> glad to subscribe to the Confessions and to preach the doctrines set forth in them.[98]

We have no right to teach as we please, according to our own perceptions and judgment, when what we have been *called* to teach is a certain defined body of established doctrine. The confessional pledge that the church demands of us, before it in God's name lays upon our shoulders the mantle of pastoral authority, is not a declaration of our hermeneutical method. It demands instead a declaration of the *results* of our hermeneutical method. When we are ordained, the church is not satisfied simply to hear us say that we will set forth the doctrine of Holy Scripture. It wants to hear from us what we—through our preceding study and reflection—understand the doctrine of Holy Scripture to be. The church is not satisfied with a formal rhetorical articulation of the *Sola Scriptura* principle, such as can be heard also in any Baptist, Reformed, or Pentecostal church, and such as would have been heard in any "American Lutheran" church in the nineteenth century. The *real* Lutheran Church wants to hear from us an articulation of what we believe "Scripture alone," when rightly interpreted, really teaches.

For a pastor or a theologian, constantly reinventing the wheel and always trying to come up with new ways to articulate old truths, is, with few exceptions, an unwise and unnecessary exercise in futility. It often betrays more than a little misplaced pride in one's own ability. And it raises suspicions. If someone believes the old faith, then why can he not use the old familiar terms to confess it? We must avoid any steps—even small steps—that would take us back in the direction of the "American Lutheran" chaos of the mid-nineteenth century, which caused Charles Philip Krauth to bemoan in exasperation, "As things are, we have no standard, no guide. Everyone is left to fix his own views."

Part XIX

The Book of Concord does not offer detailed expositions of doctrinal points that were not in controversy in the sixteenth century. For this reason the Lutheran Church of our time may and should explore and implement helpful ways of explaining and defending the biblical teaching on matters such as creation and the order of creation and the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, which are not addressed in a comprehensive way in the Confessions. But even if we would

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[98] Joseph Stump, *The Christian Faith: A System of Christian Dogmatics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), 24-25.

recognize that the symbolical books do not contain exhaustive treatments of these modern controverted issues, we can still see that they do touch on them to one extent or another.

The sixteenth century was a virtual cauldron of competing and conflicting theological ideas. Nascent versions of almost all of today's heresies were already a part of the mix that was the religious chaos of Reformation-era Europe. The Lutheran Confessions accordingly do usually address and refute, at the very least, these *nascent* versions of the popular false teachings of our time. And so, where the Confessions *do* touch on the things that we today are working through and discussing, we should use the Confessions in our theological efforts: to show that we are willing to be instructed by them in accordance with God's Word, to the extent that they are able to help us better understand a certain disputed point; and to show that what we are saying about this disputed point in more detail today is in harmony with what the Symbols already say, more briefly, about this point.

And when we are dealing with a topic that the Confessions do explicitly and thoroughly address and discuss—because it was a subject under discussion in the sixteenth century—then our confessional subscription does obligate us to teach as the Confessions teach on these matters, even if that means correcting some inadvertent departures from the confessional pattern of teaching that we may have slipped into ourselves, or that others within our ecclesiastical fellowship may have slipped into. For example, the Book of Concord has a lot to say about the true purpose and character of public worship and about the public administration of the means of grace. The Reformers were prompted to a careful study of these matters by the errors of both Rome and the Enthusiasts. The same can be said about the doctrine of the ministry and the doctrine of the sacraments, which are both dealt with at length in the symbolical books. These subjects, too, needed to be explored and understood in an evangelical and biblical way in the sixteenth century in response to the unevangelical and unbiblical teaching of Lutheranism's opponents on both the right and the left.

It is troubling when Lutherans today, who should know better, contradict, or seem to contradict, what the Lutheran Confessions already say about these and other topics. Perhaps the Book of Concord does not answer every question that is being raised in contemporary conservative Lutheran circles about the liturgy, about pastors and teachers, or about the Lord's Supper. But it does answer more of them than many seem to

realize.[99] "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings …" (Hebrews 13:8-9a, ESV).

If, after careful study, reflection, and consultation, a Lutheran minister concludes that he cannot teach what the Confessions teach—either because he no longer believes that it is what the Bible teaches, or because he no longer believes that what the Bible itself teaches is correct—then he must lay down the mantle of his office. We are servants of the Lutheran Church, not its masters. We are not allowed to change the established, public doctrine of the Lutheran Church—as Schmucker and his associates thought they had the right to do; as the Rationalists before them thought they had the right to do; and as many liberal and "ecumenical" Lutherans in our own time still think they have the right to do. But, we *should* allow the established, public doctrine of the Lutheran Church to *change us*, when and where such changes are necessary. And that is because this doctrine is God's doctrine.

Part XX

Wilhelm W. Petersen, a former president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod's Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, points out—from the perspective of both doctrine and history—that it is important for Lutherans to be acquainted with the confessions of their church

> because the Confessions are a correct exposition, or interpretation, of the Bible; and it is in our Confessions where we as a Lutheran Church publicly confess our faith before the world, and confidently declare: "This we believe, teach, and confess." They are also the banner under which we march, and by which we identify one another as brethren. I believe that it is fair to say that if it were not for our Confessions, the Lutheran Reformation would not have gotten off the ground; and consequently, there would be no Lutheran Church today. It is also fair

[99] For more on this, see 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, nos. 2-3 (June-September 2012): 195-248; and David Jay Webber, *Spiritual Fathers: A Treatise on the Lutheran Doctrine of the Ministry, with Special Reference to Luther's Large Catechism* (second edition) (Phoenix: Klotsche-Little Publishing, 2015).

> to say that if we depart from our Confessions, as many have, the time may come when there will be no true Lutheran Church.[100]

The nineteenth-century Lutheran pastor and theologian Charles Frederick Schaeffer was married to Samuel Simon Schmucker's sister, but he strongly disagreed with his brother-in-law's way of doing theology.[101] In the midst of the controversy over "American Lutheranism," Schaeffer—even at the risk of family disharmony—posed several provocative questions that are just as applicable to our time as they were to his:

> Have we really made such progress in the discovery of truth since the era of the Reformation, that we understand the Scriptures more thoroughly than those who framed the Symbolical Books? When Luther and his associates were prepared to surrender their lives, but not the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Schmalkald Articles, and the Catechism, had these men of faith and prayer discovered treasures of divine truth of less extent and less value than we possess in modern times? When the Elector Augustus with holy fervor prayed to God that the authors of the Concord-Formula might be guided by the Divine Spirit in the preparation of that admirable work, was his prayer for the illumination of the Spirit less efficacious than modern prayers are? If the writers of the Symbols were unworthy of regard, or are erroneous in their exhibition of truth, who are the men that are more competent to unfold the Scriptural doctrine? … Are we wiser, more holy, richer in divine grace, more useful through the inspiration of the "spirit of the times" than our pious fathers were? We are weary of the superior intelligence of the Nineteenth Century in matters of Christian faith.[102]

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[100] Wilhelm W. Petersen, "Pastor, I Have A Question," *Lutheran Sentinel* 68, no. 2 (Feb. 1985): 4 (punctuation slightly revised).

[101] Together with his brother-in-law and Charles Philip Krauth, Schaeffer also served for several years on the faculty of the Gettysburg seminary.

[102] Charles F. Schaeffer, *Evangelical Review* I (1849): 482, in Theodore E. Schmauck and C. Theodore Benze, *The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911), 684.

Henry Eyster Jacobs reports a statement made by Elector John Frederick the Magnanimous to an ambassador who had been sent to Saxony by King Henry VIII of England: "… the Elector … assured the English ambassador that 'he received the living Word of God according to the Augsburg Confession, and thus publicly professed it, without which there is no true knowledge of God or hope of salvation; and from

May it likewise be said among *us*, that *we* are weary of the superior intelligence of the *twenty-first* century in matters of Christian faith. And may the joyful confidence that animated the authors of the Formula of Concord also animate us, as we—through our own subscription to the Book of Concord—with them repeat these solemn words:

> Therefore, it is our intent to give witness before God and all Christendom, among those who are alive today and those who will come after us, that the explanation here set forth regarding all the controversial articles of faith which we have addressed and explained—and no other explanation—is our teaching, faith, and confession. In it we shall appear before the judgment throne of Jesus Christ, by God's grace, with fearless hearts and thus give account of our faith, and we will neither secretly nor publicly speak or write anything contrary to it. Instead, on the strength of God's grace we intend to abide by this confession.[103] LSQ

this Confession he would not recede even though he were compelled to lose life, and all that he had'" (*The Lutheran Movement in England during the Reigns of Henry VIII. and Edward VI., and Its Literary Monuments* [revised] [Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1908], 152; quoting Veit Ludwig von Seckendorf, *Commentarius Historicus et apologeticus de Lutheranismo sive de Reformatione* [3 Vols.] [Leipzig, 1692], Vol. III, 225 sq.).

[103] Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration XII:40, Kolb/Wengert, 660.

Book Review

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Book Review: All Glory to God

C.F.W. Walther, *All Glory to God.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016. 556 pages. $39.99.

Dr. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (1811–1887), the father of Confessional Lutheranism in this country, was urged to write a dogmatics text for the use of pastors and called workers in this country. Walther had hoped to write such a text, but the work never came to fruition. Rather he produced an amplified version of Baier's *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, which was used in the dogmatics courses at St. Louis. However, beginning in 1873 and finishing in 1886, he produced a series of essays which articulated the chief teachings of the Lutheran faith under the title, "The Doctrine of the Lutheran Church Alone Gives All Glory to God, and Irrefutable Proof That Its Doctrine Alone Is True."

Walther's essays from this period of time, printed in the book *All Glory to God*, are a virtual dogmatics including most of the essential doctrines of the Scripture. As Walther explains his main points, he touches on nearly every teaching in Scripture. This book is the dogmatics that many desired Walther to write, but which he never was able to complete. Walther demonstrates that only teachings which give all glory to God are scriptural. Only in the teachings of the Lutheran Church is God alone given all glory, and this is incontrovertible proof that its teaching is the only true and correct one. The doctrines and applications presented, such as that of election, justification, the means of grace, civil government, and family, speak to the church today.

Walther's hermeneutical method when he presents a particular doctrine is this: first, he discusses the pertinent

passages which explicate the scriptural doctrine. There is a proper exegesis of the *sedes doctrinae*. Then he shows that the Lutheran Confessions agree with the exegesis of the proof passages. The Lutheran Confessions are a correct exposition of Holy Scripture. Finally, he points out that this doctrine of Scripture was confessed by the church fathers.

It wasn't only the dogmaticians like Gerhard, Calov, and Quenstedt who maintained the verbal inspiration of Scripture. Contrary to the German theology of his day, Walther asserts that Luther believed in the verbal inspiration of Scripture.

> Therefore there is no comparison at all between doctrine and life. "One dot" of doctrine is worth more than "heaven and earth" (Matt. 5:18); therefore we do not permit the slightest offense against it. (*Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, AE 27:41) … God forbid that there should be one jot or tittle in all of Paul which the whole church universal is not bound to follow and keep! (*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, AE 36:25). (21)

Walther demonstrates that Scripture teaches the total depravity of man and that conversion is completely a work of God. At the same time, he clarifies that after an individual is brought to faith in the Savior he is able to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. He quotes Gerhard in this regard:

> After we have been reborn through the Holy Spirit, we are led in such a way as to also become active, that is, the will of man operates not through the powers given by nature, but rather through the power given by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and then is an active, cooperative instrument. (*Loci theologici* [Jena, 1672] 2:70) (50)

A proper view of Christology and the communication of attributes is essential for understanding the work of Christ. Walther uses this quote from Gerhard in teaching this truth:

> The Calvinists oppose the glory of Christ's high priestly office: 1. In that they through their dangerous *alloeosis* apply Christ's suffering, which He endured for the sins of the whole world, only to His human nature. If that were the case, then Christ's merit could not keep its worth and its efficacy; for Christ's suffering is the complete satisfaction for sins for the very reason that it is not the suffering of a mere man but of the God-man, that is, of God's Son Himself, which He endured in His assumed human nature. (71)

Contrary to the views of some today, Walther and the dogmaticians maintained universal redemption and objective and universal justification. He quotes Calov as teaching:

> In Christ all are redeemed, in Christ all are reconciled,

> in Christ all have their salvation earned, in Christ they are already saved. Therefore, the damned in hell will someday have to say: "I didn't go to hell because I wasn't redeemed, for God in Christ gave me all that was necessary for salvation. I didn't go to hell because I was such a great sinner, for my sins were washed away through Christ. But I was rejected because I refused to accept this salvation from God's hand, because I refused to believe." (67)

For Walther, Christ's resurrection is the declaration of universal justification for all people.

> Faith is not a condition to be met, under which God will then give to us, but He has already given. For when God raised His Son from the dead, He did not forgive Him His own sins, but the sins of all mankind that He had taken upon Himself. God did not blot out Christ's own guilt but our guilt, which Christ had assumed. So the entire world was justified by the resurrection of Christ, which man must now accept by faith. Therefore, when Scripture says we are justified by faith, basically nothing is said but this, that we are saved by grace, as the apostle writes in Romans 4:16—not that faith is an acceptable good work. (90)

Salvation was announced to all people by the open tomb, but how is that treasure brought to mankind today? Walther teaches that it comes to us in the witness of the Word, Baptism, and the Supper, as the Scripture teaches in 1 John 5:8.

> Yes, John assures us that there are three witnesses of this grace in heaven, the Father, the Word (that is, the Son), and the Holy Spirit [1 John 5:7, KJV], and that there are also three witnesses of this grace on earth, namely "the Spirit [Word of God] and the water [Baptism] and the blood [Holy Communion]; and these three agree" [1 John 5:8]. That is, they witness on earth exactly as do the witnesses in heaven to whom they correspond. (118)

As Walther discusses the means of grace, on the basis of Matthew 23:2–3 it is shown that the validity of the means of grace does not depend on the holiness or faith of the pastor or officiant:

> The validity of the Means of Grace does not rest upon the holiness of people or of angels, but upon God's Word. How comforting this is! Because of it, the dear children of God are not victims of the despicable false prophets and godless knaves…. Even if the latter [the pastor] is a hypocrite, an imposter, this does not bother them at all in this connection. With his hypocrisy, he cannot change the Means of Grace,

> he cannot remove the kernel. Therefore, they need not look into his heart, but look only on the hand and thereby hold to the Lord's declaration: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice" (Matthew 23:2–3). This passage shows that the validity of the Means of Grace is not dependent upon the worthiness or unworthiness of those who administer them. Those who deny this are judged by the Word of God: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength" (Jeremiah 17:5). (128, 143)

Walther adds this important note concerning the means of grace. He explains that if a pastor and his church body publicly teach that there is no Trinitarian Baptism, as the rationalists and unitarians, or that the Supper is not Christ's body and blood, as the Reformed teach, they remove the real sense of Christ's word and institution, they have the sound but not the word itself, and thus, have no Sacrament (132).

At times, people pose this question: do infants resist the power of the Holy Spirit in Baptism? Walther has this answer for the question:

> We do indeed believe that when in childhood we were baptized, we were really born again. For in children we find no willful resistance. But when a person has grown to adulthood and has attained consciousness of himself and then falls in love with the world, he loses his rebirth and must once more be born again. When one remains in his baptismal grace, it is not necessary for him to be converted again. But he constantly needs the Word of grace for his inner being, or it will die—just as a child without nourishment must die. (100)

There are times when we meet individuals who confide in us, "I really want to believe that Jesus died for my sins on the cross, but I am not sure if I believe or not." We may have had thoughts like this ourselves: "I desperately want to believe in the Savior, but I don't feel as if I am saved. I don't know if I have faith or not." Such ideas can lead to utter despair. To such thoughts Walther responds, "Now, dear friend, be comforted—you are a believer; it is impossible to long for faith without having faith" (207). Even the desire or longing for salvation in Jesus indicates that saving faith is already present (Mark 9:24). Be comforted that the desire to trust in Jesus indicates that the Holy Spirit has already worked faith in the heart, for apart from Jesus we can do nothing, not even desire Him (John 15:5). Walther then quotes the Formula, emphasizing this comfort:

> Paul says, "For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" [Philippians 2:13]. To all godly Christians who feel and experience in their

> hearts a small spark or longing for divine grace and eternal salvation this precious passage is very comforting. For they know that God has kindled in their hearts this beginning of true godliness. He will further strengthen and help them in their great weakness to persevere in true faith unto the end [1 Peter 5:10]. (FC SD II 14) (206–207)

In the paragraphs above, one finds a sampling of the topics which Walther discusses in these essays. He covers nearly every theological topic that one would find in a dogmatics text. His style is articulate and interesting. These essays are far from dry bone theology or the speculation of ivory tower theologians. They are filled with comfort and speak to the needs of Christians today. Walther points out that only teachings which give all glory to God are scriptural. Only in the teachings of the Lutheran Church is God alone given all glory, and this is definite proof that its teaching is the only true one. Walther confirms this truth using the words of Gerhard.

> Every dogma which depreciates the glory of God, the Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ, who with Him is equal in essence and majesty, and with that of the Holy Spirit, is neither sound nor genuine. And each *communion* which harbors and stubbornly defends false teachings which damage God's honor, is not the true church, though it ever so zealously color its exterior with twisted and misunderstood references to Scripture. (368)

These essays contain a plethora of quotes from the early church fathers, the seventeenth-century dogmaticians, and nineteenth-century German theologians. Many of the quotations can only be found here in translation. He includes theologians familiar to us such as Augustine, Luther, Bugenhagen, Gerhard, Calov, Quenstedt, Baier, and Flacius. There are also individuals that are rarely mentioned like Lactantius, Carpzov, Kromayer, Müller, and Rudelbach.

The influence of Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther can hardly be overestimated. He was the greatest theologian of the LCMS and one of the most important leaders of confessional Lutheranism in America. Walther might justly be called the *Lutherus redivivus* (Luther living again) for America and far beyond its boundaries. The confessional scriptural stand of our synod and the WELS was strengthened through his important work. He was indeed the "American Luther." Concordia Publishing House is to be congratulated for translating and producing these essays in book form. It is virtually a complete Lutheran dogmatics. This book, *All Glory to God*, is a valuable tool for every confessional Lutheran pastor and layperson. It is filled with vital truth for the church today.

– Gaylin R. Schmeling

Index to Volume 56

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Book Reviews

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