

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY



VOLUME 57 • NUMBER 1
MARCH 2017

**2016 Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation
Lectures: The Cost of Confessing:
Luther and the Three Princes**
Luther and Frederick the Wise

Luther and John the Constant

Martin Luther and John Frederick: The Confessor
of the Faith and His (Emergency) Bishop

Articles

Presidential Quotes from the Past

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as it Relates to Hermeneutics
and Biblical Interpretation

A Story from Livonia: Hermannus Samsonius

Examining the Crusades in Context:
A Review and Evaluation

Book Reviews

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LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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Foreword

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IN THIS ISSUE OF THE *QUARTERLY* WE ARE PLEASED to share with our readers the annual Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures, delivered October 27–28, 2016, in Mankato, Minnesota. These lectures are sponsored jointly by Bethany Lutheran College and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary. This was the forty-ninth in the series of annual Reformation Lectures which began in 1967. The format of the Reformation Lectures has always been that of a free conference and thus participation in these lectures is outside the framework of fellowship.

This year there were three presenters. The first lecture was given by Dr. Roland Ziegler of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana (CTSFW). Dr. Ziegler joined the faculty of CTSFW in 2000. He serves as the Robert D. Preus Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Confessional Lutheran Studies. Born in the state of Baden-Württemberg, Germany, he studied at the Universities of Tübingen and Erlangen. He received his M.Div. (1993) from the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Oberursel. A scholarship enabled him to study as an exchange student at CTSFW. He received his Dr.Theol. from the Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen in 2011. Dr. Ziegler served as a teaching assistant at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Oberursel (1993–1995), a vicar in Berlin (1995–1997), and a pastor in Konstanz (1997–2000). He has been serving on the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri

Synod (LCMS) since 2010 and has been involved in the conversations between the International Lutheran Council and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Union since 2015. Dr. Ziegler is the coeditor of *Hermann Sasse, In statu confessionis III* (Göttingen: Edition Ruprecht, 2011) and the author of *Das Eucharistiegebet in Theologie und Liturgie der lutherischen Kirchen seit der Reformation. Die Deutung des Herrenmahles zwischen Promissio und Eucharistie* (Göttingen: Edition Ruprecht, 2011). He is on the editorial advisory board of *Encyclopedia of Martin Luther and the Reformation* (Cascade Publishers, 2017).

The second presenter was Dr. Charles Cortright. Dr. Cortright was baptized into Christ as a college student at St. Mary's College, Moraga, California. He later undertook instruction in the Lutheran Church by the Rev. Harold Dorn. While studying at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin, he met his wife, Connie Joan *née* Laabs. The couple was married while he was attending Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS). He graduated from WLS in 1981 and served Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) congregations in Escondido, California; Clovis, California; East Brunswick, New Jersey; and Van Nuys, California. In 1994 Pastor Cortright was called to serve at Northwestern College as it transitioned to Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota. In 2002 he was called to Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He earned his Ph.D. in historical theology at Marquette University, Milwaukee. His dissertation, "‘Poor Maggot-Sack That I Am’: the Human Body in the Theology of Martin Luther," is slated for publication by Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht as part of their REFO500 series. Dr. Cortright retired from WLC at the close of the 2015–16 academic year and has recently transitioned to the LCMS where he has been called to serve the synod's Eurasia Mission Region as a theological educator. Dr. Cortright has served on the editorial board of *LOGIA: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* for over 20 years and is secretary to the Board of Directors of the Luther Academy. From 1996–2004 he served as a visiting professor at St. Sophia Lutheran Seminary in Ternopil, Ukraine. The Cortrights have four sons and are grandparents to eight (nine is on the way!) grandchildren.

The third lecture was given by Dr. David Lumpp of Concordia University in St. Paul, Minnesota. Dr. David Lumpp has taught at Concordia University since 1990. Educated at Concordia Senior College, Fort Wayne, Indiana (B.A.) and Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, Missouri (M.Div., S.T.M., and Th.D. in systematic theology), he began his teaching ministry in 1984 at Concordia College, Ann Arbor,

Michigan. From 2008 through 2011 he was dean of the College of Vocation and Ministry at Concordia–Saint Paul, and from 2012 through June of 2016 he was dean of Concordia’s College of Arts and Letters. He has been a frequent presenter at academic conferences and seminars, and he has published in theological journals in the United States, Germany, and Australia. He is the author of *First Things First: A Primer in Lutheran Theological Prolegomena* (Concordia Seminary Press, 2012), and he is a collaborating editor of *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology*, a two-volume dogmatics (Concordia Publishing House, 2017). In this dogmatics, under the general editorship of Samuel Nafzger, he is the drafter of the locus on Prolegomena. Dr. Lump’s denominational service includes three years on the LCMS Commission on Worship and nine years on its Commission on Theology and Church Relations. He and his wife, Shirley, live in Roseville, Minnesota.

The theme of the lectures was “The Cost of Confessing: Luther and the Three Princes.” The first lecture, given by Dr. Ziegler, was entitled “Luther and Frederick the Wise.” The second lecture, presented by Dr. Cortright, was entitled “Luther and John the Constant.” The third lecture, given by Dr. Lump, was entitled “Luther and John Frederick.”

The Reformation Lectures presented the life and work of the three princes who ruled during Luther’s lifetime. God, through these men, provided the environment and political situation which made the restoration of the Gospel possible. They defended and protected the Reformation movement in its infancy. Great Lutheran confessors they were to a man.

In this *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. This series is being produced by the Rev. John Moldstad, the president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Questions arise among orthodox Lutherans concerning the proper use of the church fathers. There have been times in church history when individuals have been more interested in what the fathers have written than what the Scripture clearly teaches. At other times there has been a complete neglect of the fathers. The purpose of the paper on the church fathers is to find a correct use of the fathers as it relates to hermeneutics and biblical interpretation.

Chemnitz, Gerhard, Calov—these are figures usually brought to mind when one considers the Age of Orthodoxy in the history of Lutheranism. A lesser-known but nonetheless important figure who was steadfast in his promotion of Lutheranism in eastern Europe was Hermannus Samsonius of Livonia (modern-day Latvia and Estonia). The Rev. Uģis Sildegs explains who Samsonius was and his struggles to remain steadfast against the Jesuits in “A Story from Livonia: Hermannus Samsonius.” The Rev. Sildegs is co-pastor of Confessional Lutheran Church in Riga, Latvia, and serves as a member of the Theological Commission of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference.

The original purpose of the crusades was to defend the holy sites in Palestine and to protect the Christian pilgrims visiting these sites. It was assumed that this meant a re-conquest of the Holy Land from the Muslims. However, there were also improper motives involved in the crusades that led to disaster and devastation, such as the fourth crusade against Constantinople in 1204. In the paper, “Examining the Crusades in Context: A Review and Evaluation,” the Rev. Paul Fries answers many questions concerning the crusades and gives an evaluation of this movement. The Rev. Fries is the Communication Director of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Also included in this *Quarterly* are several book reviews.

– GRS

Luther and Frederick the Wise

*Roland Ziegler
Concordia Theological Seminary
Ft. Wayne, Indiana*

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LUTHER STARTED OUT AS AN OBSCURE MONK, continued to be a locally known professor, and became a world historical figure. From a political non-entity, he became a politically highly significant person, even though he never shaped history in a political process. Unlike some professors and pastors in later times, he did not exchange the pulpit and classroom for the corridors of power. But the Reformation was, as we all know, not only a theological phenomenon, it was also a political movement. And of course, the person most directly affected was Luther's prince, Frederick the Wise. If Frederick the Wise would have simply obeyed the demands of the Roman Curia, the Reformation as we know it would have never happened and Luther would have died an early death as a heretic on a stake in Rome. Humanly speaking, without Frederick the Wise, there would have been no Lutheran Reformation.

Maybe you remember the last film on Luther, with Joseph Fiennes as Luther. Peter Ustinov gave one his last performances as Frederick the Wise, nicely portraying the tactics of stall and delay of the historical Frederick the Wise. The film, though, took the license to show a personal meeting between Frederick and Luther, a meeting that never happened. For Frederick confessed to seeing Luther only at the diet of Worms in 1521. That might sound strange to us, that these two that lived not only in close vicinity to each other, but also at many times in the same town—a small town at that, maybe five thousand people—never met.

But sixteenth-century Wittenberg was a different time. Frederick was no politician who shook hands, rubbed elbows, and worked the room. He was a prince and an elector, and the social distance between him and Luther was so wide that no accidental meeting would have ever occurred. Still, it remains curious that Frederick never gave his famous professor an audience.

What about other contacts? We know that Frederick the Wise wrote four times to Luther, and thirty-seven letters from Luther to Frederick are extant. Not much for the twelve years Luther was a professor at Wittenberg during Frederick's lifetime. The picture changes, though, if one takes into account the letters between Spalatin, the personal secretary of Frederick the Wise, and Luther, numbering 304 while Frederick was alive.¹ Thus, Frederick the Wise certainly was well informed and kept close contact with Luther, though indirectly—for tactical reasons. Frederick avoided direct contact so that he could truthfully say against the pressure by the emperor, his fellow princes, and the papal court, that he had no personal contact with Luther. It was part of his stall and delay tactic.² And even if this seems to a rather obvious maneuver, it helped Frederick avoid open confrontation. It is quite interesting that Luther, not known for stealth, dissimulation, or evasive tactics in his own life, saw his prince in this positively: "And I do not doubt, that the prince will be unharmed in the future, as long as he does not publicly confess my cause or approve of it."³

The first letter written by Luther might serve as an example of the relationship.

To my most gracious and dear Lord, Duke Frederick, elector of
Saxony
To His Grace: *Personal*
Jesus.

Most Gracious Lord and Sovereign: Since Your Grace
promised me a new cowl a year ago, as Hirschfeld told me, I
now come and ask Your Grace to remember this promise. I

¹ Hermann Kunst, *Evangelischer Glaube und politische Verantwortung. Martin Luther als politischer Berater seiner Landesherrn und seine Teilnahme an den Fragen des öffentlichen Lebens* (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1976), 35.

² WA.B 3, 68f, Letter by Spalatin to Luther, 13 May 1523. Luther had written on behalf of Wolf Leimbach concerning some money Frederick owed him. Spalatin writes in the name of Frederick, but also explains the difficulty since Frederick has avoided any direct dealings with Luther so that he was able to say to pope, emperor, and estates, that he had no contact with Luther.

³ WA.B 3, 169, 13–15.

beg, however, gracious Lord, if Pffeffinger is again to make the arrangements, that he do so now in deed and not just with a friendly promise. He is very good at spinning fine words, but these do not produce good cloth.

Most Gracious Lord, I have been told by the prior at Erfurt (who had learned of it from Your Grace's father confessor) that Your Grace is annoyed at Doctor Staupitz, our esteemed and dear father, because of a certain letter. Therefore when [Doctor Staupitz] was here and sought Your Grace at Torgau, I talked to His Honor and declared that I would not like to see Your Grace's displeasure come upon His Honor. Truthfully, from the long conversation in which we discussed Your Grace all evening, I found out nothing else than that he has Your Grace in his inmost heart, that the Elector of Saxony is his dear sovereign, and that he is more than well-disposed toward Your Grace. This was so much the case that he finally stated: I do not know how I have ever provoked my Most Gracious Lord, unless it be that I held His Grace in too high a regard(!). Therefore, Most Gracious Lord, I plead on his behalf—as he has suggested to me several times—that Your Grace continue to favor and to be loyal to him, just as Your Grace has undoubtedly experienced his loyalty many times.

Most Gracious Lord, that I too may show my faithfulness toward Your Grace, and may earn my courtly cowl, let me add the following: I have heard that Your Grace plans, at the end of this tax period, to impose another and perhaps even heavier tax. If Your Grace will not scorn the plea of a poor beggar, I beg that for the sake of God you will not let it come to that. I and many others who mean well with Your Grace are sincerely sorry that even the last taxation has reduced Your Grace's reputation, name, and good will. Of course God has provided Your Grace with so much intelligence that sees further in such things than I, or maybe all of Your Grace's subjects. But it may well be, indeed, God wills it so, that even great wisdom sometimes be guided by the lesser, so that no one may depend upon himself but only upon God, our Lord. May he preserve Your Grace in

good health for our benefit, and thereafter Your Grace's soul to salvation. Amen.⁴ Your Grace's dedicated priest,
Doctor Martin Luder at Wittenberg

We see how Luther mixes in this letter personal and business matters and also acts as an intermediary. Luther reminds the prince of his promise of a new cowl—not an insignificant promise to a mendicant monk—voicing his frustration at the delay caused by the elector's treasurer, Deginhard Pfeffinger. He intercedes for his old friend and mentor Johann von Staupitz because of some friction between him and the prince, and finally even raises a political concern, namely the rumor of a new tax, appealing to the effect such a new tax will have on the reputation of the prince in his country and thus interceding for the people in Saxony. Though the tone is respectful, Luther is not servile, and though he is a monk, he also takes an interest in a civil matter.

Frederick the Wise

His life and family

Frederick was a member of the house of Wettin, whose ancestral castle is at a ford of the river Saale, about fourteen miles north of Halle. The House of Wettin had inherited in 1423 the duchy of Saxony and with it the electorate, thus becoming part of the highest nobility in the Holy Roman Empire. Just as the Holy Roman Empire was not a nation state but combined different peoples, though the heartland was German-speaking, so also Frederick, if one looks at his ancestry, was European. His ancestors were of the German nobility, but also from the Polish royal family, the Visconti and Scala in Italy, and others. His Grandfather, Friedrich II, the Sanftmütige, had two sons, Ernst and Albrecht. Albrecht had three surviving sons, Georg the Bearded (1471–), Henry the Pious (1473–), and Fredrick (1474–1510), the High Master of the Teutonic Knights (1498–1510).

Ernst died August 26, 1486 in Colditz because he fell off a horse during a hunt. His mother, Elisabeth of the House of Wittelsbach (February 2, 1443–March 5, 1484) had died a year earlier. Frederick had an older sister, Christine (1461–1521) who married the Danish king, John II. Their son was King Christian II, who later played a role in the history of the Reformation as an exile in Wittenberg. Frederick, born

⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 48: Letters I* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 50.

January 17, 1463, had two younger brothers, Ernst (1464–1513), who became the administrator of the archdiocese of Magdeburg in 1476 (at age twelve!), in 1489 archbishop of Magdeburg, in 1479 coadjutor of the diocese of Halberstadt, and in 1480 its administrator. In Ernst, you see the successful princely policy to get younger sons of ruling houses elected as bishops of neighboring dioceses and thus bring them under control of the family, including the fact that several bishoprics could be combined in one person. This phenomenon is known to all of us of course through the successor of Archbishop Ernst, Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz, Magdeburg, and bishop of Halberstadt—in Albrecht, the house of Hohenzollern, north of Saxony, had beaten the house of Wettin to the trough. This happened also concerning the next brother of Frederick, Albrecht (1467–1484), administrator in 1480, then in 1482 archbishop of Mainz. The youngest brother, Johann, later known as John the Constant or Steadfast, born in 1468, died in 1532, will be the subject of the next lecture. He succeeded his brother, and became the ancestor of the branches of the continuing Ernestine line of Wettin.

Frederick never married, but had a concubine, which at that time was a kind of a common-law marriage. We do not know the name of his concubine, but he had at least sons Frederick and Sebastian with her.⁵ Concubinage was forbidden by church only in 1511.⁶

About Frederick's youth and education not much is known. He did learn writing, reading, and arithmetic, Latin in such a way that he understood it well, even if he did not like to speak it. Frederick was also fluent in French. He participated in the pastime of jousting and was an avid hunter. From his later years, we know that one of his pastimes was wood-turning, a quite popular hobby at that time—even emperor Maximilian did it.

His public life

The division of Saxony: In 1485, Saxony was divided among the two brothers, Ernst and Albrecht, in the so-called Leipzig division (August 26, 1485). Ernst and Albrecht had ruled together for twenty years, but then decided to part ways. Why is not known. But Saxony, which was the second-largest principality in the empire, now was cut

⁵ WA.TR 4,322,5.

⁶ Concubinage was a lesser form of marriage between two persons of different social standing who could marry, without the full legal implications of marriage (e.g., no right to inherit for the concubine or the sons). It was originally tolerated by the Roman Catholic Church, and finally forbidden by the Council of Trent (G. Holzherr, "Konkubinat," *LThK*², 6,460–461).

in twain, two territories that were not continuous and with many legal questions between the two not resolved in the treaty and thus bearing the potential for conflict. The Ernestine Territory comprised the electoral circuit, the area around Wittenberg, and the Thuringian territories. The Albertine territory comprised Leipzig with its University and the Ore Mountains (*Erzgebirge*), though the silver mines there were administered jointly.

As an elector, Frederick was one of the seven highest princes of the realm. He was for a while quite close to the emperor Maximilian, so much that at the reform of the empire in 1500 he was appointed *locum tenens* of the emperor in the imperial government, though this was a post that did not mean much, because the reform efforts concerning the government of the empire did not amount to anything. After the death of Maximilian, he could have become emperor. Frederick was also the favourite candidate of England, Venice, and the Pope.⁷ But he declined because of his age and the lack of resources necessary for this office.⁸

Religious opinions

Frederick was a pious prince. He attended mass every day, spent significant money on sacred vessels and vestments, and seemed to be especially close to the Franciscans. We know that he had a Latin lectionary with the readings for mass as a devotional. With that also went, as was not unusual at the time, a belief in astrology. Famous is his collection of relics. At the eve of the Reformation, Frederick had collected 19,331 relics whose veneration gained one indulgences of 1,902,209 years and 270 days. Frederick's collection increased around the time of the foundation of the university. For the money that was paid for the indulgences went to the collegiate church, many of whose canons were also professors at the university. Thus, the indulgences were indirectly funding the university. Scholarship has long been divided on the question if he stayed a reform Catholic or if he embraced Luther's reformation. We know that he stopped buying relics after 1519. It is at least significant that in 1522 he had put on the right sleeve of the uniform of the employees of the court VDMIAE—*Verbum domini manet in aeternum*, one of the slogans of the Reformation, which was also put on coins. Finally, on his deathbed, Frederick did receive

⁷ Johannes v. Walter, "Friedrich der Weise und Luther," *Christentum und Frömmigkeit* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1941), 167.

⁸ There is a legend that he was actually elected emperor, but after a few hours resigned.

communion under both kinds. More concerning his religious opinions will become clear in this paper.

His character

One of his favourite sayings was, "One should not easily say yes, but what one promises, one ought to keep."⁹ He was cautious.¹⁰ He loved peace.¹¹ Frederick was very deliberate. He could send back twenty times a document to his civil servants he was supposed to sign.¹² He was also rather reticent and not a vain man. Thus, when some princes and counts sang for him at the diet of Worms, he wrote to his brother: "But I have pretended not to hear it ... for, dear God, it is not my custom to engage in society."¹³ Another one of his favourite sayings was "Nothing lies on earth as much as man." He had no tolerance for dishonesty. But he was not some misanthropic crank. He was scrupulously honest with money and expected his civil servants to be honest too. He made restitution for damage by a hunt.¹⁴

Luther and Frederick the Wise

The University

Founding in 1502¹⁵

After the partition of Saxony, the university of Leipzig was in the ducal part, which left Frederick without a university. A university was not only an object of prestige; there were also obviously economic advantages. The state, which in the process of modernization increased its administration, needed especially legally trained civil servants. Students would stay in the state and the money would not flow to other states, plus, there would be no brain drain. A university would also foster the economy of the town in which it was. Universities were, though, not simply the business of the local prince. Rather, the custom was to first get the agreement of the pope, then the emperor. Frederick received the imperial diploma July 6, 1502 and published a decree about

⁹ v. Walter, 168.

¹⁰ WA 40 III, 230,5–231,16 WA.TR 5,225–226,3.

¹¹ WA 19,646,17–28.

¹² v. Walter, 168.

¹³ Ibid., 169. "der Gesellschaft so auszuwarten."

¹⁴ WA 43,411,15.

¹⁵ This is closely following Ingetraut Ludolph, *Friedrich der Weise. Kurfürst von Sachsen 1463–1525* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 315ff.

the opening of the university with his brother John on August 24, 1502. The university was opened on October 18, 1502, the feast of St. Luke the Evangelist. The departments were: liberal arts, theology, canonical and secular law, medicine, poetry, and other arts. The papal confirmation of the foundation of the university was given by Pope Julius II in 1507. Staupitz himself went to Rome to receive the bull in person.

But of course besides the obvious advantages of a university, there were also some issues. A university costs money. There are salaries to be paid and buildings to be built and maintained. At the foundation of the university, there was a comprehensive plan regarding the finances. Frederick first permitted the use of the castle and the castle church to the university. In 1507 the castle church became the university church and thus was the place for any solemn official acts and served also as a lecture room and as the place for disputations. The university library was in the castle. Salaries for the professors were first paid by Frederick directly, except for the professors of theology and canon law. Those professors were either monks from the Franciscan or Dominican monastery in town, or canons of the All Saints Collegiate Church. The university was not self-governing, but there was a council, the reformers, consisting of four members of the university, appointed by Frederick. Frederick also appointed the professors whose salaries he paid; the professors taken from the collegiate church were appointed by the senate, but the prince had some input.

Luther's Influence on University matters

Georg Spalatin became Frederick the Wise's advisor on matters of the university after he joined the court. In 1518, Spalatin asked, in the name of Frederick, the most important members of the faculty concerning a reform of the university.¹⁶ It seems that Luther suggested first a reform of the department of liberal arts, the propaedeutic school, so to speak the college department of the university. He wanted to establish chairs in Greek and Hebrew, lectures on Pliny, mathematics, and Quintilian and abolish the obligatory lectures on the logical textbook by Peter of Spain, the texts by the Scotist Petrus Tartaretus, and Aristotle. Thus, the required classes were completely redesigned. Aristotle was, though, not abolished, but rather the texts themselves were read without the commentaries.

¹⁶ The following according to Walter Friedensburg, *Geschichte der Universität Wittenberg* (Halle a. d. S.: Verlag Max Niemeyer, 1917), 110ff.

Of course, now one needed professors for Greek and Hebrew. The elector had asked Johannes Reuchlin, one of the foremost German humanists, for counsel regarding candidates for these chairs. Reuchlin recommended his great-nephew, Philip Melanchthon. While Luther was undecided, Spalatin opposed Melanchthon, but Frederick the Wise appointed him after he had met him at the diet of Augsburg in 1518.¹⁷ And thus Melanchthon came to Wittenberg, a true Wunderkind, twenty-one years old and looking almost like a boy, and soon won over faculty and students.

The next attack on the medieval way of teaching followed the next year when Luther and others petitioned the elector to abolish the Thomistic lectures on the physics of Aristotle and use the time for lectures on the *Metamorphosis* by Ovid and give the salary saved to Melanchthon as a reward for his industry.¹⁸

Luther was not only active in regard to the liberal arts department. The university was small, and so Luther was also active in writing petitions, for example, for the medical department. Thus, in 1522 he signed a petition to Frederick the Wise in regard to the vacant chair of pharmacy, to give the position to Heinrich Stackmann, who was already teaching physics in the liberal arts department and had a licentiate in medicine.¹⁹

Frederick the Wise as Luther's protector

Before Worms

Frederick the Wise was the reason that Luther was not extradited for his trial as a heretic and executed. The story of Luther's trial is quite complex and cannot be narrated here in detail. Thus, what follows are just some examples of Frederick as Luther's protector.²⁰

Luther's ecclesiastical trial started for him when on August 7, 1518, he received the summons to appear in Rome and defend himself against the accusation of suspicion of heresy. He had 60 days after having received the letter to follow the summons; otherwise he would be automatically excommunicated. His situation become even more difficult when Cajetan, who attended the diet of Augsburg, received a letter dated August 23 that called Luther not a suspect of heresy, but a heretic,

¹⁷ Ludolphy, 329. WA.B 1, nr. 80, 5–10.

¹⁸ Friedensburg, 128.

¹⁹ Letter of Nov. 5, 1522 WA.B, 614.

²⁰ The trial is extensively described in Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther. His Way to Reformation, 1483–1521* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 239–273, 389–432.

and instructed Cajetan to get Luther in his power so that he could be moved to Rome and tried, unless he would come to Cajetan voluntarily and repent. At the same time, the pope wrote to Frederick, appealing to his piety and faithfulness to the papacy, asking him to avoid any appearance that he supports false teaching and to extradite Luther to the pope. The pope would not believe that Luther's claim that the prince protected him, was true. Frederick was assured that Luther would get a fair trial.

Frederick's tactic was to stall and delay. Frederick succeeded in having Luther interrogated not in Rome, but in Augsburg. Rome agreed to it, but instructed Cajetan that the meeting would be an interrogation, not a disputation. As is well known, Luther's meeting with Cajetan October 12–14, 1518 did not resolve the issue. He had some leverage with the curia because of the election of the emperor after the death of Maximilian I on January 12, 1519. The curia wanted to prevent the election of Maximilian's grandson, Charles of Spain, who eventually would become emperor. For this, Frederick was needed.

Already in 1518, when Leo X demanded the extradition of Luther, he threatened that if Frederick refused, electoral Saxony would face the interdict and he might lose his fiefdom.²¹ These threats were later repeated. On January 9, 1520, the curia demanded that Frederick be summoned, interrogated, and declared to be a heretic. When this news came to Wittenberg, the lawyers were asked to write a memo what should be done if Frederick were to be banned. Thus, Frederick took upon himself a significant personal risk in protecting Luther. After the election of Charles V as emperor, Frederick lost that bargaining chip and the trial against Luther in Rome came to its end with the papal bull threatening Luther with excommunication, "Exsurge Domine," published July 24, 1520. Luther was given sixty days to recant; otherwise he would be excommunicated. Sixty days after Luther had received the bull, on December 10, 1520, he threw his copy of the bull in the bonfire at the Elster gate, in which members of the university burned copies of the canon law and some anti-Lutheran writings.

At Worms

Though Aleander, the papal nuncio, had originally hoped that Frederick could be convinced to extradite Luther, already before the diet of Worms he had given up hope. In his letters to Rome, he did not hide his dislike for Frederick. He calls him a *basilisk* and says Frederick

²¹ v. Walter, 175.

looks like a fat marmot with the eyes of a dog, never looking straight at people.²² That Frederick was on Luther's side is also documented in a letter to his brother John during the diet, in which he writes about Luther's case: "It is the work of God, not the work of man."²³ But of course the fact that Frederick did not hand over Luther to the churchly authorities but protected him at the Wartburg and later on is the clearest witness that Frederick, as reticent and cautious he was not to endorse Luther's teaching publicly in any way, in fact was on Luther's side, even if he might not have agreed with everything that Luther did. His acts defied the edict of Worms, in which not only Luther was declared to be an outlaw and his books to be burned, and that he should be apprehended and be delivered to the emperor, but also that everybody supporting to him should be dealt with in the same way and his property was to be confiscated.²⁴

Luther's Letter to Frederick, February 22, 1522

Luther wrote to the elector after the unrest in Wittenberg. In this letter he congratulates him on the occasion of the acquisition of a new relic of the true cross. Though, this is of course not a relic, but rather the suffering the prince now has to endure for the gospel. He encourages him to not lose heart in these struggles. The tone is, at least at the beginning, almost a little facetious, with the word play on "true cross," how Luther takes up the piety of Frederick and gently nudges him away to a true embrace of the Christian's cross. It is, though, also an eminently pastoral letter in a difficult situation, giving a theological interpretation of the unrest—it has to be, since Satan is combating the gospel, but Satan is already overcome in the resurrection of Christ.²⁵

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 178.

²⁴ For the text of the edict of Worms, see <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/Doc.64-ENG-Luther_Charles.pdf>.

²⁵ "To my most gracious Lord, Duke Frederick, elector of Saxony: Grace and joy from God the Father on the acquisition of a new relic! I put this greeting in place of my assurances of respect. For many years Your Grace has been acquiring relics in every land, but God has now heard Your Grace's request and has sent Your Grace without cost or effort a whole cross, together with nails, spears, and scourges. I say again: grace and joy from God on the acquisition of a new relic!

Your Grace should not be terrified by it; stretch out your arms confidently and let the nails go deep. Be glad and thankful, for thus it must and will be with those who desire God's Word. Not only must Annas and Caiaphas rage, but Judas must be among the apostles and Satan among the children of God. Only be wise and prudent, and do not judge according to reason or outward appearances. Do not be downhearted, for things have not yet come to such a pass as Satan wishes. Your Grace should have a little

Luther's Letter to Frederick the Wise, March 5, 1522

Frederick was alarmed when Luther announced that he would return to Wittenberg. Luther, already on the way to Wittenberg, wrote one of his most famous letters to Frederick.²⁶ The fact was that he

confidence in me, fool though I am, for I know these and other similar tricks of Satan. I do not fear him [because I know] that this hurts him. Yet all of this is only a beginning. Let the world cry out and pass its judgments. Let those fall away who will—even a St. Peter [or persons like] the apostles. They will come back on the third day when Christ rises from the dead. This word in II Corinthians 6[:4, 5] must be fulfilled in us, 'Let us prove ourselves in tumults,' etc. I hope that Your Grace will take this letter in good part. I am in such haste that my pen has had to gallop, and I have no time for more. God willing, I shall soon be there. But Your Grace must not assume responsibility in my behalf. (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 48: Letters I* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963], 387).

²⁶ "To the Most Serene, Noble Sovereign and Lord, Sir Frederick, duke of Saxony, elector of the Holy Roman Empire, landgrave of Thuringia, margrave in Meissen, my Most Gracious Lord and Patron Jesus. Grace and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jest Christ, and my most humble service. Most Serene, Noble Elector, Most Gracious Lord: Your Electoral Grace's kind letter and opinion reached me Friday evening as I was preparing to depart the next day. I need not say that I know Your Electoral Grace has the very best of intentions, for I am as certain of it as a man can be. On the other hand I am convinced by more than human means of reckoning that I too have good intentions. But this does not get us anywhere. I take the liberty of supposing on the basis of Your Electoral Grace's letter that Your Electoral Grace was somewhat offended by that part of my letter in which I wrote that Your Electoral Grace should be wise. Yet this impression of mine is canceled by the confidence I have that Your Electoral Grace knows my heart better than to suppose that I would sneer at Your Electoral Grace's well-known wisdom in such unseemly terms. I hope that it will always be that I have a thoroughly unaffected love and affection for Your Electoral Grace above all other sovereigns and rulers. What I wrote was done out of concern to reassure Your Electoral Grace, not for my own sake (of that I had no thought at the time) but for the sake of that untoward movement introduced by our friends in Wittenberg to the great detriment of the gospel. I feared that Your Electoral Grace would suffer great inconvenience from it. Moreover, I myself was so overwhelmed by the calamity that had I not been certain that we have the pure gospel, I would have despaired of [our] cause. Whatever I have suffered hitherto for this cause has been nothing compared with this. I should willingly have averted the trouble at the cost of my life if that had been possible. We can answer neither to God nor to the world for what has been done. And yet it is blamed on me and, what is even worse, on the gospel. This pains me deeply. Accordingly, Most Gracious Lord, my letter concerned only the action of these men, not my own, in order that Your Electoral Grace should not pay attention to the ideas of the devil now unfolding in this drama [at Wittenberg]. Although such admonition may have been unnecessary for Your Electoral Grace, yet it was necessary for me to write it. As for myself, Most Gracious Lord, I answer this: Your Electoral Grace knows (or, if you do not, I now inform you of the fact) that I have received the gospel not from men but from heaven only, through our Lord Jesus Christ, so that I might well be able to boast and call myself a minister and evangelist, as I shall do in the future. I offered to appear for

disobeyed the wishes of his prince, to whom he was deeply indebted. At hearings and trial not because I had doubts about [my mission] but out of excessive humility, in order to persuade others. But since I now see that my excessive humility abases the gospel, and that if I yield an inch the devil will take a mile, I am compelled by my conscience to act otherwise. I have served Your Electoral Grace well enough by staying in hiding for this year to please Your Electoral Grace. The devil knows very well that I did not hide from cowardice, for he saw my heart when I entered Worms. Had I then known that as many devils were lying in wait for me as there were tiles on the roofs, I should nevertheless have leaped into their midst with joy. Now Duke George is still far from being the equal of one devil. Since the Father of infinite mercies has by the gospel made us daring lords [with power] over all devils and over death and has given us such an abundance of confidence that we may venture to call him our dearest Father, Your Electoral Grace can see for yourself that it would be a great insult to such a Father not to trust him enough to take the measure of Duke George's wrath. I know myself well enough to say that if the condition that exists in Wittenberg existed in Leipzig, I would go to Leipzig even if (Your Electoral Grace will excuse my foolish words) it rained Duke Georges for nine days and every duke were nine times as furious as this one. He takes my Lord Christ to be a man of straw. My Lord and I can suffer that for a while. I shall not conceal from Your Electoral Grace that I have more than once prayed and wept for Duke George, that God might enlighten him. I shall pray and weep once more and then cease forever. I beg Your Electoral Grace also to help in praying and to have others pray that the judgment which (O Lord God!) moves in on him without let-up might be averted. I would slay Duke George with a single word if I knew that this would settle the matter. I have written this so Your Electoral Grace might know that I am going to Wittenberg under a far higher protection than the Elector's. I have no intention of asking Your Electoral Grace for protection. Indeed I think I shall protect Your Electoral Grace more than you are able to protect me. And if I thought that Your Electoral Grace could and would protect me, I should not go. The sword ought not and cannot help a matter of this kind. God alone must do it—and without the solicitude and co-operation of men. Consequently he who believes the most can protect the most. And since I have the impression that Your Electoral Grace is still quite weak in faith, I can by no means regard Your Electoral Grace as the man to protect and save me. Since Your Electoral Grace wishes to know what to do in this matter and thinks that you have done too little, I humbly answer that Your Electoral Grace has already done far too much and should do nothing at all. God will not and cannot tolerate your worrying and bustling, or mine. He wishes the matter to be left [in his hands] and no one else's. May Your Electoral Grace act accordingly. If Your Electoral Grace believes, then Your Electoral Grace will be safe and have peace. If Your Electoral Grace does not believe, I at least do believe and must leave Your Electoral Grace's unbelief to its own torturing anxiety, such as all unbelievers have to suffer. Inasmuch as I do not intend to obey Your Electoral Grace, Your Electoral Grace is excused before God if I am captured or put to death. Before men Your Electoral Grace should act as an elector, obedient to the authorities and allowing His Imperial Majesty to rule in your cities and lands over both life and property, as is his right according to the Imperial constitution; Your Electoral Grace should by no means offer any resistance or request such resistance or any obstruction on the part of others in case [His Imperial Majesty] wants to capture me or put me to death. For no one should overthrow or resist authority save him who ordained it; otherwise it is rebellion and an action against God. But I hope they will have the good sense to recognize that Your Electoral Grace occupies too lofty a position [to be expected] to

the same time, Luther was not going to put off what he saw was necessary for the preaching of the gospel. But what about the danger? Luther rejects any earthly concerns:

I have written this so Your Electoral Grace might know that I am going to Wittenberg under a far higher protection than the Elector's. I have no intention of asking Your Electoral Grace for protection. Indeed I think I shall protect Your Electoral Grace more than you are able to protect me. And if I thought that Your Electoral Grace could and would protect me, I should not go.

These are daring words, even words that seem quite mad and insubordinate. After all, in what way could Luther, the outlawed monk give any protection to a prince of the realm? But Luther did not see his story as a story that could be adequately described in political terms. He saw God in all of this and thus, trusting that he was doing God's work. Luther describes himself as minister and evangelist, but with his claim that he has received the gospel from Christ himself is likening himself to St. Paul. Luther goes to Wittenberg to fight the devil, who has caused the unrest and the desertion of the gospel in favour of another form of legalistic Christianity expressing itself in liturgical reforms. Luther sees clearly the problems that will cause to Frederick. It is one thing to hide Luther and pretend that Frederick did not know the whereabouts of Luther, it is another one when Luther, excommunicated, banned,

become my executioner. If the representatives [of the Imperial government] themselves or their deputies come to capture me and Your Electoral Grace admits them and upholds their Electoral safe-conduct, then Your Electoral Grace will have done enough in the way of obedience. They can ask no more of Your Electoral Grace than that you do not hold Luther back. [I can be taken prisoner] without causing Your Electoral Grace trouble, work, or danger. For Christ has not taught me to be a Christian at another's expense. If they are so unreasonable as to command Your Electoral Grace to lay hands on me, I shall at once tell Your Electoral Grace what to do. [In any case] I shall see to it that Your Electoral Grace suffers no harm and danger in body, estate, or soul on my account, whether Your Electoral Grace believes this or not. Herewith I commend Your Electoral Grace to the grace of God. If necessary we shall speak further of the matter very soon. I have written this letter in haste so that Your Electoral Grace may not be disturbed at hearing of my arrival [in Wittenberg], for if I would be a true Christian I must be everyone's consoler and do no harm to anyone. It is Someone other than Duke George whom I have to consider. He knows me rather well, and I have some real knowledge of Him too. If Your Electoral Grace believed, you would see the glory of God. But because you do not believe, you have not yet seen. Love and praise to God forever. Amen." (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 48: Letters I [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963], 389–393)

lives openly in one of the electoral residences, so to speak under the nose of the prince. Luther, in a grandiose disclaimer, indemnifies, so to speak, Frederick, from all consequences, encourages him to do his duty as a prince of the realm, with no claims by Luther of special protection. Luther is ready to die, but trusts that he is safe in God's protection. But Luther not only assures Frederick that he will not cause any trouble, he again also writes as a fellow Christian, chiding him for his lack of faith—a rather bold statement from a subject to his prince. Luther knows that he is the subject, but in matters spiritual he certainly takes up a tone that is anything but servile.

Luther dedicates writings to Frederick the Wise

It was common at the time of Luther to dedicate books to patrons in hope that the patron, flattered by the compliment, might give favours to the author. Luther dedicated several books to Frederick the Wise, but not in the hope of raises, positions, or gifts.

Dedication of the Operationes in Psalmos

Luther had his second lecture on the psalms, the *Operationes in Psalmos*, successively printed. He dedicated the first fascicle to Frederick the Wise.²⁷ Luther first rehearses the reasons for dedication: scholars need protection, since scholars face enmity from the envious and the evil. Others dedicate their works in hopes that the person to whom they dedicate the book will thereby become famous and his name live on, so that future generations will emulate his virtues. Others finally dedicate a book to give thanks for favours received. But, so Luther, these are not his reasons. For he knows well the deficiencies of his work. Secondly, Frederick's fame and his love for the sciences is such that a dedication would not increase it.

Who does not know that Prince Frederick has become an example to all princes in his fostering of the sciences? In your city Wittenberg Greek and Hebrew are taught. The liberal arts are taught better then before, the pure theology of Christ triumphs over the opinions and questions of men who opine or ask almost nothing. All this flourishes under your auspices, on your money, under your protection.

Why, then, is Luther dedicating these lectures, which he only calls "labors," not "interpretations" or "commentaries"? Because of Frederick's

²⁷ WA 5, 19–23.

love for holy Scripture. Luther then tells a story he had heard from Staupitz. In a conversation at court on preaching, Frederick said that the sermons that are based on the acumen of men and the traditions of men are cold, lame, and powerless to convince, because nothing is so ably reasoned that there could be something even more subtle. Only Scripture with its majesty and power sounds even without our works in such a way that it overcomes all disputations and forces man to admit that no man has taught like this, here is the finger of God, it does not teach like the scribes and Pharisees, but as one that has authority. For Luther, this is a saying that would be worthy of the most holy bishop, and theologians should take that to heart, especially the different schools of scholastic theologians. When Luther had heard this story, he started to Frederick, because Luther cannot help but love those who love the Scriptures, just as he cannot help to hate those who pervert and despise the Scriptures.

We see here how Luther sees Frederick as the benefactor and protector of the new theology, a theology that is based on languages, on the language arts, and focuses on the interpretation of Scripture, not the scholastic discussions. But Frederick does not only provide the institutional framework, but also his inner attitude is in sympathy with the *syncera theologia: ad bibliam!*

Tesseradecas consolatoria pro laborantibus et oneratis

When Frederick returned from the election of Charles V, he became seriously sick, so that there was fear that he would die. Spalatin urged Luther to write a devotional book for the prince. Luther wrote in Latin, the book was later translated into German, and even though it was intended for the prince alone, it was then later published. In his preface, he justifies his book for two reasons: the prince is a fellow Christian and thus as a member of the body of Christ; Luther has a responsibility toward him. It is Christ who suffers in him, since Christ identifies himself with the Christians. But besides the church as the body of Christ, there is also the body politic, of which Frederick is the head. And as such his suffering is shared by all members of the body politic. We see here that we are far from modern concepts that see the government founded on some kind of contract. Luther has additionally a special debt to Frederick, since Frederick has shown great benevolence toward him.²⁸ Here we see how Luther describes the different

²⁸ "Thus, Most Illustrious Prince, since I saw that your Lordship has been stricken with a grave illness and that Christ also is sick in you, I have deemed it my duty to visit

levels by which he and Frederick are tied together: as Christians in the church, as the head of the body politic and one member, and finally as benefactor and recipient. Among these multiple relations there are two that are hierarchical, one that is not hierarchical. Luther upholds both with delicacy, the equality of all members in the body of Christ and the inequality in the secular realm. Thus he can address Frederick implicitly as a brother in Christ, while keeping the social distinctions intact.

Luther opposes Frederick the Wise: The case of the All Saints' Collegiate Church

Not always were the relations between Luther and his prince harmonious. A point of contention during the early 1520 was the All Saints' Collegiate Church. We have seen that this institution was not only important as for court, as a depository of the collection of relics, but also for the university, since it funded several professorships. Luther wrote already during his stay at the Wartburg to Spalatin concerning his wish that the elector should abolish the collegiate church, calling it "Beth-Aven," the term used by Hosea (4:15; 10:5) as a name of

your Lordship with this little writing. I cannot pretend that I do not hear the voice of Christ as it cries to me out of your Lordship's body and flesh, saying, 'Look, I am sick.' Such evils as sickness and the like are borne not by us Christians, but by Christ himself, our Lord and Savior, in whom we live and who plainly testifies in the Gospel, 'Whatever you have done unto the least of mine, you have done unto me' [Matt. 25:40]. And while we have the duty to visit and console all who are afflicted with sickness, we are especially obligated to those of the household of faith. Paul clearly distinguishes between strangers and those of the household, those bound to us by intimate ties, Galatians 6:[10]. But I also have other reasons for performing this my duty. I realize that as one of your Lordship's subjects, I should share in your Lordship's illness together with the rest of your subjects, and suffer with you, as a member with its head [Rom. 12:5], on whom all our fortunes, all our safety and happiness, depend. We recognize in your Lordship another Naaman, by whom God is now giving deliverance to Germany, as in times past he gave deliverance through him to Syria [II Kings 5:1]. Therefore, the whole Roman Empire turns its eyes only to your Lordship and venerates and admires you as the father of the fatherland, as the symbol of the entire empire, as the armament and protector, particularly of the German nation. However, we are bound not only to console your Lordship with all our powers and to make your condition our own, but also much more to pray to God for your safety and health, which I hope is being done with all diligence and devotion by your Lordship's subjects. But as for me, whom your Lordship's many and signal benefactions have made your debtor above all others, I recognize it to be my duty to express my gratitude by rendering some special service. But since because of my poverty both of mind and fortune, I can offer nothing of value, Doctor George Spalatin, one of your Lordship's chaplains, opportunely suggested to me that I prepare and present to your Lordship a spiritual consolation, and that such a service would be most acceptable to your Lordship." (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 42: Devotional Writings I [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969], 122)

reproach for Bethel.²⁹ Luther continues to complain to Spalatin on January 2, 1523, adding moral accusations: the priests, except for maybe three, fornicate every night, witness to that is Amsdorf, and then in the mornings they say mass. Luther reminds Spalatin of the divine judgment for tolerating these sins: “Now think, what this abomination will merit for the people and the prince.” Maybe, so Luther, the gospel has not brought the fruit hoped for because these godless people are not only tolerated, but allowed to deal with divine things. For, even though nobody is to be forced to believe anything, public wickedness has to be stopped. Would the prince at least stop the masses that are paid out of his chest!³⁰ Less than two weeks later, on January 14, 1523, Luther sends another letter to Spalatin in which he urges action in regard to the All Saints’ Collegiate Church. Here he calls it “the idolatry of Amazia,” the priest in Bethel who opposed Amos.³¹ Since nothing happened, Luther writes to the provost (Justus Jonas) and the canons of the collegiate church on March 1, 1523, after the death of the leader of the party opposing the Reformation, dean Lorenz Schlamau, had died, demanding that the canons will abolish the abomination of the mass. There has been enough of a time of transition. If the canons do not abolish the mass, then Luther cannot regard them as fellow Christians anymore.³² Justus Jonas, Amsdorf, and Karlstadt were the minority party favouring reform. On March 2, Jonas read Luther’s letter to the chapter. Matthäus Beskau, Johann Dölsch, Georg Elner, and Johann Volmar declared they had to ask the elector. Thus, they send a copy of Luther’s letter to the elector and asked, what they should do, since the collegiate church was a foundation of the elector and since they themselves in no way thought that the traditional worship of the collegiate church was in any way against the gospel. The elector answered that the masses

²⁹ Letter to Spalatin, 22 November 1521: “May God grant that our Sovereign also abolish his Bethaven at Wittenberg; after the present residents have died he may distribute the income among the poor, of which we have quite a number around here, even among the nobles, as you know. This kind of generosity would be worthy of the Sovereign, and would open the eternal kingdom to him. What good does this ungodliness do, which is only strengthened by him?” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 48: Letters I (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 338 (WA.B II, 405, 14–19). The same complaint is raised in the letter to Spalatin of July 4th, 1522: “Deus destruat Bethauen illud, vt censibus a Clamosis sacerdotibus raptis ad vsus bene docentium transferatur.” (WA.B II, 574,25–27) “May God destroy that Bethaven, so that the income, robbed by shouting priests, may be give to the use of those who teach well.”

³⁰ WA.B III,1,5–2,22.

³¹ WA.B III, 16,6.

³² WA.B III, 34,1–35,25.

for the dead and other services, funded by his ancestors and himself, are celebrated not without justification. Thus, the attempt to change the worship in the castle church did not succeed.³³ Luther continued to press on. He attacked in the sermon on the Lord's Prayer on Monday, March 9, telling the congregation that the prayers in monasteries and at the collegiate church are not true prayers.³⁴ In a letter dated maybe March 11, 1523, Luther urges Spalatin, that suitable men, i.e., men who despise the abominations of the mass, will be elected who will *without the prince* reform the liturgical life at the collegiate church.³⁵ Here Luther obviously has lost patience with the elector and wants now to push the reform of the collegiate church without him through a change of personnel. In the sermon on the ninth Sunday after Trinity, August 2, 1523, Luther makes public that he had admonished the canons twice to give up their papistic abuses and unchristian ceremonies and conform to the gospel. But since they resist, he admonishes them publicly this third time. Though the canons claim the authority of the prince for their continued worship, Luther asks, "But of what concern is to us the command of the prince? The prince is a secular ruler, who is to take care of the sword, not the preaching office. They know that they ought to obey God more than men. Also, they cannot truthfully say that they do not understand the issue. Without doubt, there are several among them who understand, and if they lack understanding, why do they avoid our assembly and do not listen to God's word?" Luther does not want to use force, but first wants to ask God to enlighten them so that they should abstain from their godless doings. But it is his task as a preacher to not let the congregation be confused by the continued idolatry at the collegiate church.³⁶

On November 17, 1524, Luther wrote to the chapter complaining that the sacrament was distributed under one kind, against what was assured to him before. "Since I sense with you, that our great patience, with which we have born till now your devilish being and the idolatry in your church, does not accomplish anything but that you nourish and strengthen your sacrilege and obstinacy through it ... I am forced, as a common preacher of this congregation, with God's grace to take counsel and means against this." Luther argues that the prince has no issue with them doing what is right. He asks them again to abolish masses, vigils for the dead and similar things. He asks for a clear answer till next Sunday,

³³ The aftermath is told WA.B III, 35–36.

³⁴ WA 11, 56,12–14.

³⁵ WA.B III, 46, 1–47,14.

³⁶ WA 12, 647–651.

if they would comply.³⁷ Members of the collegiate church send a copy of the letter to Frederick, defending themselves that the occasion of the communion under one kind was a singular event, asking for protection in case that Luther would attack them from the pulpit and cause the people to riot. Frederick answered on November 24, telling the chapter that he would send Schurf and Pauli to Luther to tell him to abstain from public attacks. But Luther did not heed the words of Frederick, but attacked in his sermon on the first Sunday of Advent, November 27, 1524, the canon of the mass, and called upon the city counsel to act against the chapter.³⁸ He ends his sermon with this appeal:

I say that all brothels, which God has strictly forbidden, even manslaughter, theft, murder and adultery, are not as pernicious as this abomination of the papist mass. Therefore, I ask all princes and authorities, mayor, city counsel, judges, that they would take such cruel blasphemy to heart, and call to account those who are responsible for such blasphemy. If it is allowed to you from God to punish a daring knave who blasphemes on the market, then let it be allowed to you to concerning this abominable great anti-Christian blasphemy and take it out of your city, lest the terrible wrath of God may enrage like a fiery furnace over your lacklusterness and punish you with the idolatrous priests most terribly. Love God and honour his honour. Since you have the sword, God will protect you from all princes of the devil, death, and also save you from Pharaoh and lead you into the blessed eternal fatherland. Amen. May God's grace strengthen you all times in faith. Amen.³⁹

Thus, two mayors, ten council men, the rector of the university and the pastor of the city church went to the chapter, demanding that the canons abolish the masses, otherwise they would have no fellowship with them, would not protect them, and start an economic boycott. Three of the canons wrote a letter to prince on December 2, telling him that they could not keep their oath and perform the duties they had sworn to and asked for directives. Frederick wrote to the city council, expressing his dismay about the procedure, but the pressure was successful: on December 24, a new order of worship was introduced at the collegiate church.

³⁷ WA.B III, 376,1–377,35.

³⁸ WA 15,758–774.

³⁹ WA 15,744,19–32.

We see here how Luther continues to argue, and, one might even say, to agitate against the worship in the collegiate church, even against the wishes of Frederick, even questioning Frederick's authority in this matter. In the end, Luther creates so much public pressure that the prince gives in, though certainly not happily. We see here Frederick's conservative mindset. For while he did not oppose the reforms in the city of Wittenberg or in his territory in general, neither did he take the opportunity to advance the Reformation in the collegiate church which was under his direct control.

Letter to the Princes of Saxony on the Rebellious Spirits

In 1524, Luther wrote "A Letter to the Princes of Saxony On the Rebellious Spirit."⁴⁰ Thomas Müntzer got into trouble with the authorities because he was suspected of inciting the people of Allstedt, where he served as a pastor, to use violence against a shrine with a miraculous image of Mary close to Allstedt. First a building nearby burned down, then the bell was stolen, finally the chapel with the image itself was torched. Müntzer's point was that the Old Testament fight against idolatry is the model for Christians. He even had opportunity to preach in a service attended by Frederick and John the Steadfast on the duty of the civil authorities to exterminate the ungodly. As we have seen, Luther is not quite the forerunner of the modern concept of religious freedom or religious neutrality of the government. These are enlightenment values. On the other hand, Luther rejected also the mediaeval synthesis where the civil government was supposed to not only protect the church (i.e., the one church, the Roman Catholic Church), but also to deal with doctrinal deviancy identified by the church swiftly and, if necessary, with the death penalty. In this letter, Luther describes the duty of the government in regard to the church.

Luther sees Müntzer together with the enthusiasts as part of a wider spiritualist movement. But the issue now is not its spiritualism, but its actions. And there, Luther repeats to the princes that their duty as secular rulers entrusted with the sword is to keep the peace and punish the rebels. If Müntzer and his adherents claim that the Spirit leads them, then the Spirit must be tested (1 John 4:1). Regarding the civil authorities, Luther counsels the princes that they should allow the enthusiasts to preach. For there have to be divisions. "Let the spirits clash on each other and come to close quarters. If some will be led astray, well, that's what happens in war. Where there is fighting and

⁴⁰ WA 15,210–221.

battle, some will be killed and wounded. But he who fights valiantly, will be crowned.”⁴¹ But this tolerance is limited: if the enthusiasts or the Lutherans want to do more than fight with word, if they want to use violence, then the princes are to act and to exile whoever does not keep the peace. For this is a spiritual struggle, not a physical one. In regard to monasteries and shrines, Luther wants to pull the hearts away from them, then, once nobody clings to them for religious reasons, the princes might do with them what they want. “What concern to us is wood and stone, if we have the hearts?” But what about the claim that the law of Moses demands a much more hands on approach to false worship and belief? The Jews in the Old Testament had a certain command from God for the destruction of the altars in the high places, the Christians don’t. The difference between Old and New Testament has to be observed. Offences have to be done away with the word, for a mere external destruction does not solve the spiritual problem. Luther asks the princes to keep the peace, hinder any rebellious acts done in the name of God, so that in religious questions the battle is fought solely with the Word of God.

Conclusion

There is a temptation to see the Reformation in purely heroic terms. Many a Luther statue follows such an iconographic program, and the Luther at Worms with his “Here I stand” is the archetype. Frederick the Wise does not fit this heroic image. His image is rather one of stalling, delaying, negotiating, when necessary, a slow change. Luther, as much as he was devoted to his prince, was not always agreeing with him, though he was also not simply the firebrand subsequent times made him out to be. Luther did understand that the prince had to gain time, that he did not boldly confess his adherence to the Lutheran cause. But when necessary, as in the case of the All Saints’ Collegiate Church, Luther was willing to seek the conflict and use tactics bordering on civil disobedience. To see Luther and Frederick the Wise together might help us to see that there is a place not only for the heroic confessing moment, but also for patient diplomacy. But this is not without tension. The confessor will push for clear action because he thinks the time is ripe, the diplomat will hesitate and want to delay. Who is right? Only in retrospect this might become clear. When we look back, we certainly are thankful that Frederick did not pursue an aggressive course of action that might have caused a war in the early 1520, a war the Lutherans most likely would

⁴¹ WA 15,219,1–4.

have lost and might have led to the drowning of the Reformation in the blood of its adherents. Frederick might not be our hero, but we owe him thanks.

But besides the political role that Frederick played as Luther's protector, we should not forget that Frederick provided the institutional foundation not only for Luther's position as a professor of theology, but also gave the university enough freedom to engage in fundamental curricular reforms that reshaped theology. The reform of the church started as a reform of the university. In an age where higher learning is under increasing financial pressure and seminaries are in perpetual need to justify their existence, the example of Frederick as a patron of learning and theology shines even brighter. In the U.S. American context, there are no princes that will finance theological schools, but dedicated lay people. May they take Frederick as their example, in their love for theology, in their love for Holy Scripture, in their generosity that makes an educated ministry possible. [LSQ](#)

Luther and John the Constant

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In accord with the edict of Your Imperial Majesty, we have desired to present the above-mentioned articles. They exhibit our confession and contain a summary of the instruction of our teachers. If anything is found to be lacking in this confession, we are ready, God willing, to present more extensive information according to the Scriptures.

Your Imperial Majesty's faithful and humble subjects,
JOHN, duke of Saxony, Elector¹

ELECTOR JOHN, DUKE OF SAXONY, BROTHER OF Elector Frederick the Wise and father of Duke John Frederick the Magnanimous, was the first signatory of the Augsburg Confession, the “birth certificate” of the Lutheran Church. Just as John Hancock’s outsized signature on the American Declaration of Independence was meant to make it impossible for “Fat George” the English king to miss it, Elector John’s signature on the Augsburg Confession was meant to allow (albeit in politer tones) the Catholic Emperor, Charles V, to make no mistake as to John’s loyalties vis-à-vis

¹ AC, Conclusion, 6–7. According to the best mss. copies of the AC, the other signers at the diet were George, margrave of Brandenburg; Duke Ernest of Braunschweig; Philip, landgrave of Hesse; John Frederick, the electoral prince of Saxony and John’s son; Duke Francis of Braunschweig, brother of Ernest; Prince Wolfgang of Anhalt; Albrecht, count of Mansfeld; and the representatives of the cities of Nürnberg and Reutlingen.

his faith. If for no other act than this, John earned the sobriquet “the Constant.”

Nonetheless, John the Constant might be considered the “quiet prince,” occupying in the trio of Luther’s princes a somewhat similar position as Isaac occupies with respect to the trio of Jewish Patriarchs. Sandwiched between the titanic figure of Father Abraham and the complex career of his more famous son Jacob, Isaac often recedes by comparison in focus and importance, at least in terms of perception. Similarly, John the Constant may be dwarfed in Lutheran perception by the crafty and critical involvement of Frederick the Wise in the unfolding drama of Luther’s protest, trial, and principled stand against the Roman Church and the emperor, and by the dire battle for the Lutheran Church’s integrity and survival undertaken by Elector John Frederick in the 1530s and ’40s. But if so, it is a mistaken perception.

John was *Kurfürst*, Elector of (Ernestine) Saxony for only seven years, from Frederick the Wise’s death in 1525 to his own in 1532. However, viewing these years as part of the *Grund* against which the *Gestalt* of the Reformation’s activity is viewed, these were years—to borrow from Martin Brecht—which “shaped and defined the Reformation.”² The formulation and presentation of the Augsburg Confession within this period has already been mentioned. But these years included as well the Peasants’ War (1525), the two Diets of Speyer (1526, 1529), the Saxon Visitation (1527), and the Marburg Colloquy (1529), along with such developments as Luther’s *Formula Missae* and *Deutsche Messe*, the two Catechisms, and a host of other writings and changes. Much that came to characterize the Lutheran Church as an institution was put in place through John serving as *Notbischof* of Saxony especially after the first Diet of Speyer. Moreover, concerning the duke, it should be remembered that Frederick shared the rule of Ernestine Saxony with John, just as John shared authority with his son, John Frederick. Thus John’s involvement with Luther was not restricted to the seven years of his electorship, but included as well the events of Luther’s life from the 95 Theses forward to John’s death on 16 August 1532.

John the Constant, 30 June 1468

A brief word about sources to begin: in investigating the interaction of Luther and Elector John, one finds that there are no English-language biographies of John or studies of his relationship with Luther.

² Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521–1532*, tr. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), iii.

Information about the elector as a *person* is limited to biographical/informational entries in various encyclopedias, handbooks, and histories concerning early modern Europe and the Reformation. With regard to the *role* of Elector John in the Reformation, German resources along these lines are extant, but are difficult to obtain. Your essayist is moderately capable in German, but the high and dry (*auf dem Trockenen*) academic German of some of these resources remained impenetrable for all practical purposes. Most useful was the volume *Das Jahrhundert der Reformation in Sachsen* edited by Dr. Helmar Junghans, particularly his contribution to the volume, “Die Ausbreitung der Reformation... III. Unter der Förderung Johanns des Beständigen von 1525 bis 1532.” General histories of the Reformation such as Steven Ozment’s *The Age of Reform 1250–1550*, etc., all assist via their indices in tracing the elector’s part in the flow of Reformation history, but by far the most fruitful secondary resources are the “usual suspects” in studies such as these, *viz.*, Martin Brecht’s magisterial biography of Luther (especially volume II), in concert with Oberman, Bornkamm, von Loewenich, etc. Luther himself remains most useful via the various tracts, letters (especially these!), and sermons from the time of Elector John as the source attributions will demonstrate. There are some references to the elector in the *Tabletalk*, that unique source of (sometimes outrageous) “Lutherisms.” However, since John died on 16 August 1532, all of these references are reminiscences on Luther’s part coming after John’s death and provide information concerning Luther’s interactions with the elector mostly in the form of brief anecdotes or illustrations. One final note is to call attention to Scott Hendrix’s recently released Luther biography (2015), *Martin Luther, Visionary Reformer*. This new biography offers a broad and full discussion of Luther’s life and deserves David Steinmetz’s assessment of it as the *primus inter pares* of current one-volume treatments of Luther and his age, including his relationship with the three princes.

To continue with a brief biographical word, *Johann der Beständige*—John the Constant, (a.k.a. the Steadfast)—was evidently known by this title as a result of Luther’s praise of him especially in connection with his faithful stand in defense of the gospel at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530. Luther preached two funerary sermons at the elector’s death in 1532 calling to mind “how [at Augsburg] our beloved elector openly confessed Christ’s death and resurrection before the whole world and he stuck to it (*dar auff blieben*)” and that “[the elector] so confessed the gospel and remained steadfast (*beharret*) in the Christian confession and

died in the same, that I have no doubt that when the trumpet of the archangel is sounded he will joyfully rise in an instant from this crypt.”³

John was of the House of Wettin, the fifth child of Elector Ernst of Saxony (1441–1486) and his wife Elisabeth von Bayern (1443–1484). Born in Meißen 30 June 1468, he was five years younger than his brother Frederick with whom he would jointly rule Ernestine (Electoral) Saxony until Frederick’s death in 1525. Two other brothers, Ernst (1464–1513) and Adalbert (or Albrecht, 1467–1484), entered the service of the church and became respectively archbishop of Magdeburg (later combined with Halberstadt) and administrator of Mainz. However, both passed from the scene before the tumults of the Reformation broke, sparing both Frederick and John potential conflict with their brothers.⁴

Little definite is known about John’s youth and princely formation. He was schooled in typical fashion for the Saxon nobility. It is possible that he received some of his education at the *Kaiserhof* in addition to the court of his father, the elector. Military training in the arts of knighthood was undoubtedly involved; some sources suggest that the young prince distinguished himself in Emperor Maximilian’s campaigns against the Turks.⁵

Under Frederick, John was responsible for the western lands of Saxony around Weimar which included the Wartburg and the Coburg. As a result, Weimar became the permanent residence of the *duke* of Ernestine Saxony while Torgau was the residence of the *elector*. The joint rule of Frederick and John was characterized generally by mutual understanding and cooperation. Matters of importance went forward by means of joint consultation with and advice to one another, something of special note with regard to all things Luther. While this way of proceeding was sometimes cumbersome and slow, it protected against internecine disputes and rivalry between the two.

John’s first wife, Sophie of Mecklenburg (1481–1503), gave birth to the couple’s son, John Frederick, but died as a result. The duke remarried

³ *WA* 36: 246, 270; *LW* 51: 237, 255. John was buried in the Castle Church in Wittenberg like his brother, Frederick the Wise. Both are depicted in statuary in the church today.

⁴ For a discussion of the irony and political ramifications for the House of Wettin caused by the succession of Albert of Mainz after Ernst as archbishop of Magdeburg and Halberstadt, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation*, tr. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 178–79.

⁵ T. Kolde, “John the Steadfast,” <<http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/encyc/encyc06/hlm/iii.lvii.lxxxiii.htm>>. N.p. Accessed 6/12/2016.

in 1513 taking Margarete von Anhalt (1494–1521) as his bride; four children were born to the union.

Personally uncorrupt, John did not share the genius of his brother for administration and diplomacy with its attendant wariness of the wiles of human nature.⁶ Particularly in connection with state finances, Saxony suffered during John's independent rule because of this naiveté towards his officials. After his death in August 1532, his son had to restore the Saxon state treasury and its administration.

From the 95 Theses to the Diet of Worms

When and under what circumstances did Duke John first hear of Dr. Luther? Luther joined the theology faculty of the still new University of Wittenberg in 1512. The duke had been involved with his brother in the university's inception and its credentialing by the emperor (1502) and then the pope (1507), but played at most only a supporting role to his brother's in the process of securing its faculty.⁷ Subsequently, there is no record of his reaction to the *95 Theses* (1517) or the ensuing early controversy. Most likely he seconded Frederick's initial response that "the pope will not like this," and remained largely in the background during Frederick's maneuvers as elector in the crisis years between 1517 and 1520.⁸

However, in May 1520 Luther dedicated his significant *Treatise [Sermon] on Good Works* to John. This sermon belongs to Luther's pastoral writings and followed his earlier *Fourteen Consolations for Those Who Labor and Are Heavy-laden* which was written for Elector Frederick during his illness in 1519.⁹ The dedication "to the illustrious, highborn prince and lord, John" was most likely made at the urging of Georg Spalatin (1484–1545), Frederick's secretary and indispensable diplomatic buffer between himself and Luther, to possibly "offset whatever unfavorable attitude toward Luther may have existed in the royal family."¹⁰ The sermon did much to defang accusations being made against Luther, viz., that he denied good works and urged only faith, baptism, and absolution in Christian life. It additionally provided a strong argument against the cult of the saints—particularly those most

⁶ See *LW* 54: 180 (Table Talk), No. 2910b, for Luther's assessment of John's naiveté in this regard.

⁷ Brecht, *Road to Reformation*, 118.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 202–03.

⁹ The *Treatise* is in *WA* 6: 202–96; *LW* 44: 21–114. The *Fourteen Consolations* is in *WA* 6: 104–34; *LW* 42: 121–66.

¹⁰ *LW* 44: 18n10.

often invoked in popular piety—and related practices such as relics. While Duke John's reaction to the dedication and the contents of the sermon are not specifically known, his subsequent activity a scant three months later with respect to the intrigues surrounding the promulgation of the papal bull *Exsurge Domine* show that the duke was either in or migrating to Luther's corner at that time.

To report the matter briefly, it was John who received the bull in early October 1520 as the elector's deputy (Frederick was in Köln). Dr. Johannes Eck (1486–1543), one of two papal emissaries charged with its dissemination, had it delivered by a messenger to John rather than doing so in person, the Ingolstadt theologian excusing himself via the lame claim that he lacked the proper attire for the duke's court.¹¹ John duly informed his brother of its receipt but neither published it nor acceded to its demand that Luther be handed over to Rome.¹² Rather, in his letters to Frederick he “warmly recommended Luther's protection.”¹³ Later, in December 1520, after Luther had been cited to Worms, Brecht notes with respect to the elector's deliberations over how to proceed that “occasional statements by Luther indicate that at the time the elector's brother, Duke John, and John's son, Duke John Frederick, had taken up Luther's cause.”¹⁴ In keeping with that, when Luther was making his way to the diet in early April 1521, he and his companions stopped in Weimar where the duke presented him with funds sufficient to cover the food and lodging costs of the entire entourage during the journey.¹⁵ In modern terms, John put his money where his mouth was.

Wartburg Interlude and a Defining Moment

The drama at Worms in April 1521 resulted in Luther's protective exile in “the land of the birds,” the brooding Wartburg Castle high above Eisenach. Located in the far western reaches of Duke John's portion of Saxony, the castle was also not far from the territory of Albertine Saxony, home of Duke George, Luther's entrenched enemy. To succeed, the plan to keep Luther's whereabouts needed to be kept

¹¹ Scott H. Hendrix, *Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer* (Yale University Press, 2015), 94.

¹² Luther never did receive the bull officially. Eck bravely delivered it to a Leipzig militiaman who gave it to a citizen of Wittenberg who gave it to Peter Burkhard the Wittenberg rector! See Brecht, *Road to Reformation*, 402.

¹³ Brecht, *Road to Reformation*, 401, 403; Kolde, *John the Steadfast*.

¹⁴ Brecht, *Road to Reformation*, 422. See, for example, Luther's letter to John Frederick, 30 October 1520; *LW* 48: 182–83.

¹⁵ Brecht, *Road to Reformation*, 448.

secret, something about which Luther himself was concerned. Only a few trusted agents of Elector Frederick—such as Spalatin—were privy to the matter; Luther believed that not even the elector knew the plan's details for certain.¹⁶ Luther expressed concern, therefore, that “Satan ... is betraying the matter” via rumors of his sojourn written by “a certain secretary of Duke John” to the court in Torgau.¹⁷ The rumor appears to have been unfounded for Luther wrote Spalatin on 9 September 1521 that “Duke John the Elder *at last* knows where I am; so far he has not known.”¹⁸ On 17 September he reported that “[Duke John] was here [at the Wartburg]!”¹⁹ The duke had come, it appears in part, to consult with Luther concerning how to respond to an exegetical question concerning the ten lepers of Luke 17 which some Franciscan father-confessors at Weimar claimed invalidated Luther's critique of Roman confessional practice in his about-to-be-published “little book,” *On Confession* [*Von der Beicht*].²⁰ Strangely, John did not actually *see* Luther at the castle, but “spoke” with him through the intermediation of the castellan, Hans von Berlepsch. The episode is interesting especially in illustrating the duke's growing reliance on Luther for religious advice at this point in time. One further fruit was the gift of an early copy of Luther's translation of the New Testament sent to Weimar in early September 1522 for the pleasure of the “older Sovereign.”²¹

Luther had left the Wartburg and returned to Wittenberg in March 1522 to quell the disturbances created there by the Zwickau “prophets” and the mercurial Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1486–1541). In the aftermath of his return, he was urged to visit *hin und her* in order to deal with questions of evangelical practice especially where the *Schwärmer* had stirred up matters. Luther opted to make several preaching tours in response. One such tour took him to Weimar in October 1522 at the request of the ducal court preacher, Wolfgang Stein. In a series of six sermons preached in the hearing of Dukes John and John Frederick, Luther spoke especially to the matter of temporal authority. In particular, the fourth sermon preached on 24 October 1522 so impressed Duke John, Stein, and others that Luther was urged to

¹⁶ Luther to Amsdorf, 15? July 1521; *LW* 48: 264; see also footnote 5.

¹⁷ Luther to Spalatin, 15 July 1521; *LW* 48: 269

¹⁸ Luther to Spalatin, 9 September 1521; *LW* 48: 307 (emphasis added).

¹⁹ Luther to Spalatin, 17 September 1521; *LW* 48: 313.

²⁰ *WA* 8: 140ff. The work is not included in *LW*. See, however, Luther to von Sickingen, 1 June 1521; *LW* 48: 246.

²¹ Luther to Spalatin, 20 September 1522; *LW* 49: 15. This was one of Luther's designations for John to differentiate him from John Frederick, the “younger Sovereign.”

have it published. Thus Luther's treatise, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed* came to be written and published a year later in 1523.²²

The treatise was dedicated to John and marked Luther's third foray into the ethics of the Christian and *weltlicher uberkeytt* (*weltliche Obrigkeit*), the first being his *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520), and the second his *Sincere Admonition ... Against Insurrection* (1522).²³ About the treatise delivered into John's hands, Brecht notes:

By and large, *Temporal Authority* is the fundamental and most significant document of Luther's political ethics. ... Luther's work was a grand attempt from the center of his theology to distinguish properly the kingdom of God from that of the world, and yet to relate them to each other. ... It was most successful in acknowledging the secularity of the political sphere on one side, and the freedom of conscience on the other, along with its description of the Christian ruler.²⁴

John's own ethic as a ruler was especially informed by the treatise. It was an important development: in the sixteenth century, the idea of "government" was a foreign idea. As David Whitford notes, "For Luther and his contemporaries, government was not a 'thing' but a 'whom.'"²⁵ John took the treatise very personally as a result with its influence especially exhibiting itself after the imminent turmoil with Thomas Müntzer in John's ecclesial and imperial interactions of the later 1520s.

A Page Turned: The Peasants' War

In the summer of 1524 the storm known as the Peasants' War burst over much of the German lands. The war was a loosely connected series of peasant revolts stretching from Switzerland north to Thuringia that climaxed between March and May 1525. Its complex roots and intertwined political, social, economic, and religious confictions make for a study all their own which exceeds what can be explored here. Initially, however, matters appeared as if the Saxon princes would be heavily

²² *WA* 11: 245–80; *LW* 45: 81–129.

²³ Respectively, *WA* 6: 404–69; *LW* 44: 123–217; and, *WA* 8: 676–87; *LW* 45: 51–74.

²⁴ Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 118–19.

²⁵ David M. Whitford, "Luther's Political Encounters," *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald M. McKim (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 189.

involved in their phase of the war: Thomas Müntzer (c. 1489–1525) was originally one of Luther’s supporters and, on Luther’s own recommendation, had been installed as preacher in Zwickau. But thereafter he became “radicalized” in such a way that he not only split from Luther theologically, but threatened to shred the social and political fabric of the region as well. (Concurrently, Luther’s other former Wittenberg colleague, Karlstadt, was also causing trouble; Luther linked the two—Müntzer and Karlstadt—together.) After leaving Zwickau for Prague and wandering for a time, Müntzer was called in early 1523 to the “new” city church in Allstedt—the call being issued without the statutory permission of the Elector—where he garnered for himself a strong and loyal following on the basis of his fiery preaching and radical reforms. A new Christian order was to be established by the violent elimination of the “ungodly”; “civil rulers must yield to heavenly (i.e., Müntzer’s) directives.”²⁶

Müntzer actually preached this blistering brand of the “gospel” on 13 July 1524 to Duke John himself along with John Frederick as they passed through Allstedt. The duke did not react strongly to the sermon, but John Frederick stated presciently in a letter to Luther that “the Satan of Allstedt’ would have to be opposed with the sword, not with gentleness or letters.”²⁷ Even before Müntzer’s sermon to the princes, Luther had penned his *Letter to the Princes of Saxony* concerning Müntzer, which also indicted Karlstadt as a kindred spirit. The letter toed the same line Luther had drawn in his 1523 treatise on earthly authority that had had such an impact on Duke John: the preaching of Müntzer should not be suppressed by the sword. Satan will see to it that false sects spring up where the Word is present. In such cases, “Let the spirits collide and fight it out.” The Truth will prevail. But where the fanatics’ words give birth to violence and rebellion, “then your Graces must intervene...and banish them from the country.”²⁸ Accordingly, in August 1524, Müntzer was cited to the court in Weimar where evidence was presented and corroborated that he was agitating insurrection. He responded with threats against the Saxon princes which further eroded his position. Vanishing into the night, he popped up in Mühlhausen, later in Nürnberg, and then again in Mühlhausen in the spring of 1525. Events moved quickly to a climax as the peasantry of Thuringia rose in revolt behind him. The duke, aware that his brother lay dying

²⁶ LW 40: 47.

²⁷ Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 154.

²⁸ WA 15: 210–21; LW 40: 49–59. The full title is “Letter to the Princes of Saxony Concerning the Rebellious Spirit.” For the quoted lines see LW 40: 57.

at his hunting lodge in Lochau, was willing to hear the demands of the peasants' "Twelve Articles" to keep the peace, but Luther counseled against any accommodation in view of the violence behind the peasants' demands. Rather, those in authority were duty bound to oppose the peasants because of their unjust cause and revolt. Luther had a first-hand look of the incendiary potential of Müntzer's words during a trip to Eisleben in April 1525 and returned to write his "harsh book," *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*.²⁹

But it was not left for the duke to "smite, stab, and slay" as Luther exhorted: the death of Frederick on 5 May 1525 seems to have paralyzed him just as Müntzer's "hordes" were massing in Frankenhausen under their rainbow-festooned banners. On 15 May it was all over. For several days prior to the battle Müntzer had preached before masses of people telling them that God had taken power from their princes and given it to them. On the morning of the fifteenth, Landgrave Philip of Hesse and his father-in-law, Duke George of Saxony, demanded that Müntzer be delivered up to them or else. The demand was scorned by Müntzer who exhorted his faithful, "Fear not! Gideon with a handful discomfited the Midianites, and David slew Goliath!" As he spoke, a ring appeared around the sun which the peasants took as divine accreditation of the rainbow crest on their banners: they charged. The forces of the landgrave and Duke George countered and surrounded them. Six hundred peasants survived, but five thousand were slaughtered. Müntzer fled but was caught, tried, and beheaded. "The princes then cleaned up the countryside."³⁰

The mopping up was accomplished without the leadership of John despite the mantle of the electorship he had inherited from the departed Saxon Elijah. For his part, Luther was left dealing with the backlash created by the ill-timed publication of his *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*.³¹ Another "open letter" tried to defend the previous tract's call to arms while distancing its author from the terrible payback wreaked on the peasant armies by the swords and lances of

²⁹ *WA* 18: 357–61; *LW* 46: 49–55. On Luther's trip, see *LW* 46: 47. Brecht suggests that this infamous brief writing was originally appended to Luther's earlier *Admonition to Peace* (*WA* 18: 291–334; *LW* 46: 8–43), but took on a life of its own when published outside Wittenberg apart from the *Admonition*. See Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 179.

³⁰ Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career, 1521–1530*, tr. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 384; Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950), 280.

³¹ Although Luther wrote against the peasants ca. 5 May (the exact date cannot be ascertained), its publication and dissemination came after the news of the slaughter at Frankenhausen. See Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 183, 185ff.

the princes.³² Luther's own friends had been taken aback by the timing and ferocity of the tract; his Catholic opposition charged that having encouraged the uprising in his earlier *Admonition to Peace*, the peasants' defeat had sent him "crawling back to the princes." Duke George, uncertain of the new elector's mind and resolve toward the whole matter of the rebellion and of Luther, pressed that the time had come for John to enforce the Edict of Worms.³³ The circle of opposition seemed to be closing what with the condemnation of the fanatics, the opprobrium of the peasants, the censure of the Catholics, and the critique of the moderate humanists (Erasmus's attack in his *Diatribes on the Freedom of the Will* had appeared in September 1524). And where was the new elector? In light of all this, the surprising timing of Luther's betrothal to Katherina von Bora on 13 June 1525 was, at the very least, an act of defiance in the face of the swirl of events.³⁴

However, for the sake of time, we can leave Luther at the altar in his quandary and John in his palace wreathed in uncertainty, and understand the moment on the basis of historical inquiry and analysis as an important turning point in the early Reformation, even if the principals did not see it that way. As Brecht notes, Electoral Saxony should have undergone a "comprehensive restructuring" in accord with the ideas and thinking of the Reformation—both religious and otherwise—long before 1525.³⁵ Frederick the Wise, the principal secular authority of the region, while tolerant, even favorably disposed toward the whole of it, nonetheless had attempted nothing substantial in the way of implementing what was long overdue. At his death, the question of if and how the new elector would address the political, societal, and also religious challenges in Electoral Saxony loomed large. As has been seen, John had long been favorable to the cause of Luther, and saw to it that his son and eventual successor, John Frederick, was deliberately raised in

³² *WA* 18: 384–401; *LW* 46: 63–85. *An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants* took its name from its form as an open letter addressed to the chancellor of Mansfeld, Caspar Müller, a frequent correspondent of Luther's whom Luther entrusted to make public. It was produced in July 1525, but did little to sponge away the perceived injustice of *Against the...Peasants*.

³³ *LW* 46: 59–60; Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 281, 284.

³⁴ Melancthon in particular was especially put out by both the timing—the Peasants' War was by no means over—and by the choice of bride: he thought Katherina was an offense and that she had snared Luther. Philipp had also been left out of Luther's confidence in the matter! See Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 199.

³⁵ Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 239.

“a Lutheran atmosphere” with Spalatin as his primary tutor.³⁶ But most assessments of John acknowledge that he was the lesser son of greater sires in terms of his political acumen, world-wisdom, and general savviness.³⁷ Moreover, his age when he acceded to the electorship (just shy of 57) raised a question about his stamina. But John rose to the needs as events show. Brecht notes:

It was primarily during the seven years of John’s reign, in fact, that the structuring of the Reformation did occur. Luther was able to work with him more intensively than with his predecessor, or even with his successor. . . . It is unmistakable that the change of government meant a marked change for Luther, both in his personal relationship to the government of Electoral Saxony and in regard to the tasks he was called upon to perform with the government in the following period [viz., 1525–30].³⁸

What, especially, was different? Access, for one thing: Frederick had adopted the deliberate policy of indirect contact with Luther for the sake of maintaining the diplomatically valuable chimera of ignorance concerning Luther and his writings. Luther’s correspondence, however, with John now became both direct and prodigious. Even as duke and not yet elector, John had hosted several audiences with Luther; after Frankenhausen they often met personally. Overall, a direct, even personal relationship with his prince and sovereign was forged that replaced Luther’s former go-between process via Spalatin.

Moreover, if John was less subtle and nuanced in his statecraft than his predecessor, it meant he was also without guile. His adherence to the gospel grew and with it a firmness of faith that Luther recognized as extraordinary for one possessing secular power. “Tell my scholars to do what is right without consideration of me,” he reported the elector as saying—frequently.³⁹ This meant that John came to weigh what was spiritual and biblical over what was expedient, something that caused his more “practically-minded” peers such as Philip of Hesse consternation in the days preceding the Augsburg Confession.

But Luther himself was different, too, in the aftermath of Frankenhausen. He remained unshakable in terms of the gospel, but

³⁶ E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 82–83.

³⁷ E.g., E. G. Schwiebert in the passage quoted in footnote 34; also Kolde, et al.

³⁸ Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 239.

³⁹ *LW* (Table Talks) 55: 182, No. 2934a; recorded in early 1533. John had died approximately six months earlier (August) in 1532.

the tension which had been left unaddressed in the early years of the Reformation between the extension of the kingdom of Christ, the true Church, in hearts and souls by the gospel, and its manifestation in time and space (that is, in fallible flesh and blood)—a manifestation which meant addressing the *institution* of the Church—now required attention. What should be done? Evangelical freedom was leading not just to a lack of uniformity, but to chaos, and the vacuum created by the abandonment of the structures and forms of medieval Christendom—the kingdom of Christ under pope and emperor—was producing confusion. Even more, doctrinal divergences (and worse, under the fanatics) imperiled the peace. Many of these things had been the purview of the bishops, but they had not supported reform, nor were their medieval prerogatives and power consonant with the New Testament where, Luther taught, every pastor was a “bishop.”⁴⁰ Political realities restricted Luther’s sights to Electoral Saxony and the church within her borders despite his inherent congregationalism: to establish the reform of the church meant establishing the church territorial; establishing the church territorial meant, for the time being, calling upon the prince to do his Christian duty as *Notbischof*.⁴¹

The Diet of Speyer and the Visitation

Eight years from the day on which he had posted the *95 Theses*, Luther sent a letter to:

The Most Serene, Noble Sovereign and Lord, Sir John,
duke of Saxony, elector, etc., landgrave in Thuringia,
margrave in Meissen, my Most Gracious Lord.⁴²

The letter was actually a memorandum containing several proposals to “His Electoral Grace” that marked the shift in emphasis noted above. The first involved a request that John take steps to insure the finances of the University of Wittenberg which had been adversely affected by the Peasants’ War and which threatened the loss of key faculty such as Melancthon. The next proposal was more wide ranging and asked for the elector’s direct involvement:

⁴⁰ Walther von Loewenich, *Martin Luther: The Man and His Work*, tr. Lawrence W. Denef (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 308; Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 312.

⁴¹ Cf. the discussion concerning Luther’s shift in Hendrix, 173, 175–76.

⁴² Luther to Elector John, 31 October 1525, *LW* 49: 133.

Everywhere the parishes are in such poor condition. No one contributes anything, no one pays for anything, mass fees have been abolished, and there are no rents or they are too small. The common man pays so little attention and respect to preachers and pastors that in a short time there will not be a parsonage, a school, or a pulpit functioning, and thus God's Word and worship will perish, unless your Electoral Grace passes strict laws, and carefully regulates the maintenance of parishes and pulpits. For this reason, may Your Electoral Grace continue to allow God to use Your Grace, and to be God's faithful instrument. . . . [I]ssue an order that [the churches] will be inspected, accounted for, and set in order.⁴³

The elector responded to the first request by adopting a plan put forth by Spalatin to expropriate the endowment used to fund the priests of the All Saints' Chapter in Wittenberg for salaries at the university. With their custodial work ended in caring for the immense relic collection of his deceased brother, John then had the collection brought clandestinely to the electoral residence in Torgau where its gold and silver were stripped and sold to further supply what was needed.⁴⁴ As to this matter in Luther's memorandum, so far so good. However, the request for an inspection was problematic.

In actuality, the inspection (or "visitation" as a bishop's yearly tour of parishes was known) had actually been put forward to Luther by Duke John Frederick as a means for ferreting out unreformed priests and leftover sympathizers of Müntzer.⁴⁵ But the legality of such a move was opposed by the imperial Edict of Worms, a factor that caused John to hesitate. John's reticence was augmented also by the diet due to open in June 1526 in the Rhineland city of Speyer for the purpose, in part, to enforce the Edict's condemnations and strictures. But as time approached for the diet, *Realpolitik* intervened: the diet also had to wrestle with Charles V's need to raise German troops and money to oppose the Ottoman Turks in south-central Europe. This reality forced the Archduke Ferdinand, who was in charge of the diet in the absence of the emperor, to consent to defer the settlement of the religious issue to a future general or national council in order to secure pan-German assistance against the Turks. In the meantime, in matters concerning the Edict of Worms, it was decreed that "every State shall so live, rule, and

⁴³ LW 49: 135.

⁴⁴ Hendrix, 177.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

believe as it may hope and trust to answer before God and his imperial Majesty." This decree was a *de facto* suspension of the Edict of Worms for the time being, and allowed the German princes to act as they saw fit in religious affairs.⁴⁶ The diet thus resolved John's scruple enough for him to act with a clear conscience toward the emperor and the Edict: he ordered the visitation.

The "Saxon Visitation" which resulted from the elector's order was guided by a series of articles for which Melanchthon and Luther were credited as the primary authors, but which were actually developed and reviewed by many others as well. The visitation was both theological and practical. It examined parish priests/pastors in accord with evangelical doctrine and also parish practice with regard to worship, preaching, and education of the young. Its progress and results from 1527 to 1529 led directly to the formulation of Luther's two Catechisms—arguably the most enduring product of the Visitations—and the establishment of the evangelical church in Electoral Saxony as a territorial reality. But church order and cohesion on the one hand were offset problematically on the other in that the principle of *cuius regio, cuius religio* which undergirded the action of the Diet of Speyer, was also implemented by the Visitation against dissenters. Those pastors judged out of compliance were deposed from their pulpits and banned from Saxony. For Luther, this meant that one of his cardinal principles—the freedom of the conscience and faith from compulsion—subsisted now uneasily alongside the exigencies of orderliness and tranquility, and the authority of the state to insure them.

Check, Counter-check, and Confession

In hindsight, this connection between reformatory progress and politics was inevitable. Luther, of course, held no political position during his life, but nonetheless now he was constantly required to deal with matters not just theologically, but with both eyes open to political realities. Likewise, the elector, by dint of his own faith and the considerable influence of Luther's advice, assayed to deal with political issues in accord with his vocation as a Christian prince. One of the primary arenas for his Christian statecraft was in the matter of proposed evangelical alliances with other rulers for the sake of protection and the progress of the Reformation. The diplomacy involved in and the history of the course of these negotiations presents a dense thicket of efforts and events. The elector became engaged in negotiations throughout

⁴⁶ Harold J. Grimm, *The Reformation Era, 1500–1650*, second ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1973), 165.

evangelical Germany (e.g., with Brandenburg-Ansbach and Nürnberg) and beyond with Duke George of (Albertine) Saxony in an attempt to lessen tensions prior to the First Diet of Speyer. As part of the so-called “von Pack Affair” of 1528, however, John agreed to a plan put forward by the Landgrave Philip of Hesse to stage a preemptive war against an alleged alliance of Catholic princes and bishops.⁴⁷ Luther recoiled at the news and convinced the elector to withdraw from the agreement because of its offensive rather than defensive nature. While a Christian prince could resist attack for the sake and safety of his subjects, Luther warned against anything like Philip’s proposal.⁴⁸ The elector hewed to this distinction and principle as a religious scruple afterward.

The Second Diet of Speyer held in March and April 1529 ratcheted up tensions between the various religious alignments by revoking the decisions of the 1526 diet concerning religious practice and reasserting the Edict of Worms. On 19 April, Elector John, the dukes of Brunswick, the margrave of Brandenburg, Landgrave Philip of Hesse, the prince of Anhalt, and fourteen free imperial cities tendered a formal protest to the absent emperor over the revocation of the 1526 “treaty.” Responding to its unilateral repeal, these “Protesting Estates” asserted their freedom to act in accord with their consciences and faith. Charles V ignored the protest and resolved to be physically present at the next diet slated for 1530 in Augsburg.

With the emperor’s express intent to suppress all dissent being bruited openly about, Philip of Hesse sprang into action again to form an alliance to face the common threat. Backing their principles concerning such alliances with their experience in the von Pack Affair, Luther and Melancthon opposed Philip’s plan and bluntly told the elector so. In addition to their objection to any action that could be considered insurrection, they objected to any union involving the sacramentarians

⁴⁷ The von Pack Affair was named after Duke George’s duplicitous counselor, Otto von Pack, who convinced Philip of the existence of an offensive alliance of Catholics to root out the Lutheran heresy and restore the Old Faith. It was a hoax hatched by von Pack to obtain needed money by selling “information” to Philip, who consistently advocated taking the offense and so played into von Pack’s scheme. See Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 357.

⁴⁸ Luther had consistently enunciated this principle. His treatise *Temporal Authority ...* (1523) stated the matter explicitly: “To act [in war] as a Christian, I say, a prince should not go to war against his overlord—king, emperor, or other liege lord—but let him who takes, take. For the governing authority must not be resisted by force, but only by confession of the truth.” *LW* 45: 124.

of Switzerland and Strasbourg.⁴⁹ Before he left Speyer, Philip of Hesse lobbied for a meeting between the Lutherans and the Zwinglians; his efforts resulted in the Marburg Colloquy in early October 1529.

Luther's reticence to attend and his eventual role in the Colloquy are well-known and need not be rehearsed here. However, it should be noted that as negotiations for the Colloquy went forward, Elector John wrote Luther a letter urging him to answer the Landgrave's invitation positively. The elector seemed to have diplomatic concerns behind his words: he did not wish to see Philip pushed into the arms of the Swiss by the Wittenbergers' refusal. Luther agreed to the request, but in his letter to Philip of Hesse said bluntly that he did not expect success: "I certainly know that I am unable to yield [in the matter of the sacrament], just as I know that [Zwingli and company] are wrong."⁵⁰ His words were borne out in due time: Luther went to Marburg not as a negotiator, but as a confessor. He was certain of his position and of the implacability of the Swiss, and returned to Wittenberg (after going first to Torgau to report to John) with his convictions and expectations wholly intact.

However, during the return journey, news arrived from the east of great moment. On 28 September the armies of Suleiman the Magnificent had arrived before the gates Vienna. Inside, Archduke Ferdinand waited with a force of less than 20,000 men to defend the city. An Ottoman victory seemed at hand, but unrelenting rain foiled the Turks' attempts to undermine the city's walls while miring their artillery in mud. A final assault on 12 October failed and the invaders struck their tents and retreated. With Vienna safe and the Ottoman threat lifted for the time being, Charles received the news with relief and firmly set his sights to travel to Germany for the first time since 1521.

The summons to the Imperial Diet at Augsburg in 1530 was issued with a "gracious invitation" that the assembled princes, electors, and representatives should each declare himself on the score of religion.⁵¹ The elector and his chief political advisor, Gregor Brück, started making plans for the diet in March. An announcement was sent to Wittenberg for Luther, Melancthon, and Justus Jonas to join the elector's entourage in Torgau; Spalatin and John Agricola would join them in Thuringia for

⁴⁹ Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), 212ff.

⁵⁰ Luther to Philip of Hesse, 23 June 1529, *LW* 49: 229–31. John's letter is not extant, but Luther refers to its contents in this letter. The quote is on p. 231.

⁵¹ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 322.

the journey to the Coburg.⁵² There, at the southern-most residence of the elector in Saxony, Luther was to be left, 150 miles beyond the grasp of Charles. Thus, the party journeyed to the Coburg staying there a week before leaving Luther behind on 24 April; they arrived in Augsburg ahead of Charles on 2 May.

Luther had to content himself at the Coburg as he had at the Wartburg by working on biblical studies and in sending and receiving letters to and from those at the diet. But at this juncture, the fact that he was not *there* combined with the activity of those who *were* to underscore the reality that the Lutheran movement was much more than Martin Luther. Bainton notes:

The great witness was borne this time not by the friar of Wittenberg or even by the ministers and theologians, but by the lay princes who stood to lose their dignities and their lives.⁵³

Among those in the forefront was Elector John.

Charles made his approach to the city on 15 June. He was greeted decorously by the imperial archchancellor, by Archbishop Albert of Mainz, and the German princes. However, when all knelt to receive the benediction of Cardinal Campeggio, the Elector of Saxony remained “bolt upright.” The next day John was allowed to exercise the prerogative of his office in carrying the emperor’s naked ceremonial sword in the procession to the cathedral. However, when the procession knelt before the high altar, John again remained standing, this time joined by the Landgrave Philip.⁵⁴ George, the margrave of Brandenburg, having initially knelt, rose to stand with them.

Charles met with the German princes alone the next morning. John was there; Philip was there; George, Duke of Saxony was there ... glaring; old George the margrave was there. The emperor curtly informed the Lutherans that their preachers were to remain out of the pulpit while in Augsburg. The princes refused.⁵⁵ The emperor then informed them that they were to take part in the next day’s *Corpus Christi* procession; again, the Lutheran princes refused. When Charles

⁵² Hendrix, 211. Pastoral duties kept Luther’s theological lieutenant and voice, Johannes Bugenhagen, in Wittenberg.

⁵³ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 323.

⁵⁴ Hendrix, 217. For a bit of (delightful) Lutheran hagiography concerning these events, see Theodore Graebner, *The Story of the Augsburg Confession* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), *passim*.

⁵⁵ Luther advised John not to refuse as Augsburg was the emperor’s city. But note his recollection of John’s rejection of his advice: *LW* 54: 182 (Table Talk), No. 2934a.

insisted, the old margrave replied, “Before I let anyone take from me the Word of God and ask me to deny my God, I will kneel and let him strike off my head.”⁵⁶ In this tense milieu Phillip Melanchthon worked at the task of crafting a confession of faith that would profess in words as clearly and stoutly the faith of the Lutheran party as the princes had done by their deeds.

Luther waited for word at his distant outpost. He worried about Master Phillip’s resoluteness and fretted when there was no daily letter or report.⁵⁷ The first draft of the confession-under-construction showed that “it was as stalwart a confession as any made by the princes.”⁵⁸ Luther was sent the draft and responded in a letter to the elector in Augsburg, 15 May, “I have read through Master Philip’s *Apologia*, which pleases me very much; I know nothing to improve or change in it, nor would this be appropriate, since I cannot step so softly or quietly. May Christ, our Lord, help [this *Apologia*] to bear much and great fruit, as we hope and pray. Amen.”⁵⁹ On 20 May another letter came to John in which Luther offered pastoral counsel and encouragement. The letter is significant for its praise to God for the sanctuary for the gospel and the Word provided by God’s grace through his electoral Grace: “God has erected this paradise in your Electoral Grace’s land as a token of His grace and favor for Your Electoral Grace.”⁶⁰

Initially, the confession that evolved to its final form under Phillip’s hand was meant to speak only for Electoral Saxony, but became the confession of all the evangelical Lutheran territories and cities in attendance. The signatories were joined by the Landgrave Philip despite his misgivings that the Swiss were not included.⁶¹ However, he saw that that was their own doing as they rejected the article on the Supper and presented their own statement of faith as did the Strasbourgers.

⁵⁶ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 324.

⁵⁷ See Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 394–98, for a detailed account of Luther’s peevishness over the lack of regular communication from Melanchthon *et al.* during this time.

⁵⁸ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 324.

⁵⁹ Luther to Elector John, 15 May 1530; *LW* 49: 297–98. See footnote 13 for a discussion of Luther’s (possible) “slight sarcasm, or criticism” and its irrelevancy to the quality of the confession. Note, also, that Luther used *apologia*, *confessio*, and *apologia confessionis* interchangeably in reference to the Augsburg Confession.

⁶⁰ Luther to Elector John, 20 May 1530; *LW* 49: 305–10. The quote is on p. 307.

⁶¹ F(riedrich) Bente, “Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,” *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 22.

The story of the presentation and reading of the Augsburg Confession to the emperor on 25 June 1530 is familiar in its various details and does not need to be repeated here.⁶² Bainton considered its presentation “the death day of the Holy Roman Empire,” but it is better viewed as the birth day of the Lutheran Church as a united confession among men under the gospel.⁶³ That its signatories and defenders were the princes and Lutheran cities underscored its institutional reality over against the Roman and Reformed churches, but it stressed not polity, but doctrinal concord as its unifying principle.

Your Imperial Majesty’s faithful and humble subjects,
JOHN, duke of Saxony, Elector ...

John the Constant, † 16 April 1532

The climactic nature of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession, enshrined as it is in the commemorations of the church year among Lutherans today, was certainly not recognized as such at the diet. Charles refused the confession and demanded that the Lutheran confessors accept the verdict of the Roman *Confutation* condemning its many “errors.” Citing his title as protector of the Church, Charles declared that he was God’s instrument for preserving the true faith and threatened the use of force against all the protesting parties. Turning to John, he attempted to pressure the elector politically: unless John withdrew his support from the *Augustana*, he would not be invested “with the electoral dignity” which had not yet been ceremonially consummated. John refused to yield on conscience grounds to Luther’s great joy.⁶⁴

But despite all the roaring of the imperial lion, these threats were again somewhat hollow in that the menace of the Turks had reemerged along with the need to enlist the aid of the evangelical German estates. This reality, together with the intervening events of the next decade-plus, would prevent the emperor from taking positive action until after Luther’s death in 1546. A thwarted Charles gave permission to John to leave Augsburg on 23 September and return to Torgau, but he also issued the Edict of Augsburg giving until 15 April 1531 for all parties to accept his will to return to the Catholic fold or face the sword.

⁶² See, for example, Hendrix, 218, for a brief account of the most salient aspects of the story.

⁶³ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 325.

⁶⁴ Brecht, *Shaping and Defining*, 401.

This “recess” stipulating the emperor’s will until the next diet was seen as toothless for the time being in terms of halting the Reformation. But Charles’ fulminations and threats did galvanize greater unity through the formation of the defensive alliance dubbed the Schmalkaldic League in February 1531 when John joined Philip of Hesse in it. Phillip, remembering fully Luther’s rejection of his earlier attempts in this direction, had asked Luther for an updated opinion of such an alliance in October 1530 and as an “FYI,” informed Luther that *imperial* law forbade the emperor from warring against the estates of the empire.⁶⁵ Moreover, John’s lawyers meeting in Torgau later that same month noted to Luther that imperial law also permitted resistance “in cases of manifest injustice.” To which authority was obedience enjoined? To the emperor-in-error or imperial law? Luther refused to enter as a theologian into the arena of positive law against the lawyers. He maintained his long-held view that the Christian *qua* Christian was not to oppose his king with the sword, but allowed that “princes as princes are permitted to resist the emperor” as a matter of their judgment and conscience.⁶⁶ John viewed the opinion as an open door to the league. The death of Zwingli on the battlefield of Kappel on 11 October underscored the importance of the league among the Lutheran princes; Luther assessed Zwingli’s death in other terms.⁶⁷

In the spring of 1532, the exigencies of the new Ottoman campaign in Hungary forced Charles to seek military assistance from the Lutherans. The imperial diet was being held in Regensburg that year, but Charles’ emissaries to the princes met with them in Schweinfurt near the Coburg. In his negotiations, Charles agreed not to enforce the Edict of Augsburg in exchange for agreement to his terms for assistance. Luther was not present, but advised the elector to accept. The agreement, really a truce, became known as the Peace of Nürnberg after the city in which it was formally concluded. It further deferred Charles’ attempt to regain evangelical Germany for the Catholic Church.

But already at Schweinfurt and Nürnberg, the actual representative of Electoral Saxony was not John, but his son, Duke John Frederick. Age and debilitation were setting in: the elector had lost a toe to gangrene. On 15 August 1532, with the Diet at Regensburg near adjournment, John suffered a stroke at his hunting lodge at Schweinitz not far from

⁶⁵ Ibid., 411.

⁶⁶ Hendrix, 224.

⁶⁷ True to his belief, Luther saw Zwingli’s death as the result of him—a minister of God—taking up the sword and so perishing by the sword. He expressed this at various times. See, for example, *LW* 54: 11 (Table Talk), No. 94.

Wittenberg. Luther and Melanchthon were able to make it to his bedside before he died the next morning. At the funeral on 18 August in the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Luther preached the funeral sermon on the text, "My soul magnifies the Lord." No eulogy was forthcoming: "I will not now praise the elector for his great virtues but let him remain a sinner like the rest of us," he intoned.⁶⁸ Rather, the sermon went on to remember John's "real death" at the Diet of Augsburg where he had faithfully risked this life for the sake of the gospel. It remained Luther's abiding tribute to his prince.

"Well done, good and faithful servant." LSQ

⁶⁸ Hendrix, 236.

Martin Luther and John Frederick: The Confessor of the Faith and His (Emergency) Bishop

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Setting the Theo-political Stage

“**T**O HIS SERENE HIGHNESS, PRINCE JOHN Frederick, Duke of Saxony, Landgrave of Thuringia, Margrave of Meissen, My Gracious Lord and Patron. Serene and high-born prince, gracious lord! May your grace accept my humble prayer and service.”¹ This is the beginning of Martin Luther’s dedication to his exposition of Mary’s Magnificat, dated March 10, 1521, which he wrote to a youthful John Frederick, when the latter was about to turn 18 years old, and more than a decade before the young prince would become the elector of Saxony and Luther’s territorial ruler.

This dedication, one notes again, is dated March 10, 1521. Luther would not actually finish the commentary itself until June 10. It had been a busy and eventful spring. Little more than three weeks after

¹ Preface to Luther’s exposition of the Magnificat (trans. A. T. W. Steinhäuser), in *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, vol. 13, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 297. (All subsequent references to the American Edition [vols. 1 through 54, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, published by Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955–1986; with subsequent volumes, edited by Christopher Boyd Brown, published by Concordia] will be abbreviated “LW.”) Several paragraphs into this preface (LW 21, 297), Luther reminded the young man of the responsibilities entailed by those in the princely office: “[T]he welfare of many people lies in the power of so mighty a prince, once he is taken out of himself and graciously governed by God; on the other hand, the destruction of many people lies in his power if he is left to himself and ruled by God’s displeasure.”

he wrote this dedication, Luther left for the Diet of Worms, where he would be officially and formally condemned by Emperor Charles V on May 26. In April, on his way back to Wittenberg, Luther was spirited off to the Wartburg Castle in Eisenach by agents of John Frederick's uncle, Frederick the Wise. There Luther remained until March of 1522, praying, working intensively (among many other things, translating the New Testament), and anxious for the fate of the reformation in Wittenberg. John Frederick and his father were early visitors to Wittenberg to hear Luther preach.² A more discrete Frederick the Wise maintained a pretense of neutrality with respect to Luther until he received the Lord's Supper "in both kinds" on the eve of his death in 1525; but the loyalties of his brother, John the Constant, and his nephew and Godson, John Frederick, never were—and never would be—in doubt. Eleven years after Worms and the exile at the Wartburg, John Frederick succeeded his father and thus became the elector of Saxony in 1532.

In this role, John Frederick assumed not only the traditional responsibilities of that office. In a series of important treatises dating back to 1520, Luther laid the foundations for a particular understanding of the complex interworking of the church and the secular order.³ As he unfolded his own set of themes and guiding principles, godly princes would assume the role of "emergency bishops" in Luther's configuration. They did so, it is important to add, not by virtue of their positions as secular sovereigns of a given territory nor in confusion of the two governments, but rather as members of the priesthood of all the baptized.⁴ They were Christians first, and they had been entrusted

² Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid-Career, 1521–1530*, trans. E. Theodore Bachmann, ed. Karin Bornkamm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 286.

³ See "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate," of 1520 (trans. Charles M. Jacobs and revised by James Atkinson), in LW 44, 115–217; and "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," of 1523 (trans. J. J. Schindel and revised by Walter I. Brandt), in LW 45, 75–129.

⁴ Note Luther's Preface to the "Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony" (trans. Conrad Bergendoff) in LW 40, 269–273. Concerning John Frederick's father's role in preparation for the Saxon visitations of 1528, the electors proceed "out of Christian love (since he is not obligated to do so as a temporal sovereign) and by God's will for the benefit of the gospel and the welfare of the wretched Christians in his territory" (271). Shortly thereafter he adds, "While His Electoral grace is not obligated to teach and rule in spiritual affairs, he is obligated as temporal sovereign to so order things that strife, rioting, and rebellion do not arise among his subjects" (273).

with the additional vocation of secular ruler of a particular territory.⁵ Properly understood, in a distinctive but nonetheless important sense, the electors of Saxony played as significant a role in the leadership of the Wittenberg Reformation as did the theological faculty of the university.

All too briefly noted, this is the interpersonal and theological-political context for John Frederick's assumption of his electoral authority in 1532. He was the last elector under whom Martin Luther would work and serve.

Luther's Activities from 1532 to 1546: Further Building, Consolidation, and Application

The main outline of Luther's biography, even for these later years under John Frederick as his prince, is sufficiently familiar so as not to require a lengthy rehearsal here. At the same time, one does well to identify, albeit very selectively, the highlights of these years in order to get a sense of how the work Luther did with John Frederick as his territorial ruler helped to expand and further solidify his own theological legacy and enhance the foundation of the theological movement he had initiated 15 years before. This essay will focus at some length on the theology reflected in several key materials that Luther produced during these years, and it does so without apology. Furthermore, this emphasis will underscore a central thesis of this study, namely, that evangelical theology—of the variety confessed at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530—not only informed but drove the partnership between Luther and John Frederick.

This thesis counters the older claim of some historians that in light of the support Luther enjoyed from three successive friendly electors, his movement should be characterized as a "princes' reformation." Frederick the Wise, John the Constant, and John Frederick certainly protected Luther and his (or, almost better, their!) university; and, at least in the earlier days, he owed them his life. Given the other plausible options—imagine, for example, Martin Luther in the years 1517 to 1521 as the subject of Duke George to the south—the triumvirate of electors under whom Luther served were not only indispensable to the movement but in fact were providential gifts in his life. Nevertheless, this was not a princes' reformation. A more sober examination of the primary sources, perhaps especially Luther's letters, has led contemporary historians to

⁵ For an older but still outstanding treatment of this topic in particular, see Lewis W. Spitz, "Luther's Ecclesiology and His Concept of the Prince As *Notbischof*," *Church History* 22, no. 2 (June 1953): 113–141.

revise—and in Luther’s own case vis-à-vis his three electors—even reverse that judgment.⁶

Luther’s theological stature by 1532 was altogether secure, but his life as a subject of the new elector of Saxony was eventful nonetheless. In 1534, with the help and input of colleagues, Luther published his completed German Bible. In 1535, he published the lectures on Galatians, which he had delivered at the university four years before. In 1536, he agreed to the Wittenberg Concord in an attempt to resolve disputes especially over the Lord’s Supper. In December of 1536, a grievously ill Martin Luther both wrote and dictated the Smalcald Articles, which for good reason he identified as his “theological last will and testament.”⁷ In 1539, Luther prepared one of his classic works, “On the Councils and the Church.” Two years later, in 1541, he participated from a distance in the debates over justification at the Regensburg Colloquy. All the while the university professor was lecturing on the book of Genesis, which he began in 1535 and did not complete until shortly before his death in 1546.

John Frederick of Saxony: Brief Biographical Highlights

The three electors of Saxony under whom Luther worked were part of the indispensable supporting cast of the Lutheran Reformation. Their importance is incontestable; but with the exception of Frederick the Wise, their stories often go untold in non-academic contexts. Indeed, the subject of this essay, John Frederick, does not appear in the Luther movies the way his more celebrated uncle does. Since students who have a working familiarity with the life of Luther, the Reformation in general, and the contents of the *Book of Concord* are likely to have only

⁶ For a popular but nonetheless excellent discussion of these issues, see Lewis W. Spitz, “The Political Luther,” *Christian History* XI, no. 2, issue 34 (1992): 42–45. Spitz’s article is reprinted in Issue 115 of the same publication (36–38) in 2015. For a superb and much more comprehensive treatment of the constellation of interrelated topics, see Spitz’ article, “Impact of the Reformation on Church-State Issues” in *Church and State Under God*, ed. Albert G. Huegli (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 60–112. In this essay, Spitz extends his treatment beyond Luther and Lutheranism.

⁷ Luther completed the production of the Smalcald Articles in December 1536 (the dictation beginning at Part III, Article iv, the result of a heart attack). The meeting of the Smalcaldic League, at which the Articles were considered and informally subscribed, took place in February 1537. For language pertaining to Luther’s intent for these Articles, see his comments both in his later preface as well as in his conclusion to the original articles.

an episodic awareness of John Frederick, I will endeavor to set those central or public moments into some wider biographical context.⁸

John Frederick was 20 years Luther's junior, born in 1503 in Torgau. As noted above, he was the son of John the Constant, and the nephew of Frederick the Wise. He was educated especially by George Spalatin, Luther's friend and ally and one of the most important figures in the electoral court. Spalatin's role—in fact, the importance of his entire life—cannot be overstated. Among his many other activities, Spalatin was the personal contact between the faculty of the University of Wittenberg and the Saxon electors; and in that role he conveniently introduces the second thesis of this essay: theology and not princes or politics drove the Reformation movement, to be sure; but it was a theology cultivated and propelled by a particular kind of university education, one informed by the central disciplines of Renaissance humanism. Spalatin, almost exactly Luther's contemporary and the counselor to all three of his three electors, was a humanist, as were the men for whom he worked (at least in terms of disposition if not professional expertise).⁹

John Frederick had supported Luther and his cause even during his adolescence. In 1520, Luther thanked John Frederick for the latter's expression of support following the papal bull, *Exsurge Domine* [Arise, Lord], which had condemned 41 of Luther's teachings and gave him 60 days to recant.¹⁰ Along with his father, John Frederick supported

⁸ While not a biography as such, the 17 essays in *Johann Friedrich I.—der lutherische Kurfürst*, in *Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte*, No. 204 (ed. Volker Leppin, Georg Schmidt, and Sabine Wefers [Heidelberg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006]), are a storehouse of information on many topics, some extending beyond the immediate scope of this essay. Otherwise, information on the life and work of John Frederick appears especially in the third volume of Martin Brecht's magisterial biography of the reformer himself, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532–1546*, trans. James L. Schaff (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). Conveniently, the period covered by this volume coincides exactly with Luther's life and work under John Frederick. See also Ernest G. Schwiebert, *The Reformation*, vol. II, *The Reformation as a University Movement* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). For an old but still convenient popular summary, see Walter G. Tillmanns, *The Word and Men Around Luther* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), 300–302. Also, a great deal of useful information may be gleaned from the introductions to and the footnotes within the materials brought together in the American Edition of Luther's writings.

⁹ For example, John Frederick was concerned to provide his sons with the best possible education, including especially Latin, which he himself lacked. (See "Preface to John Frederick II and John William of Saxony, *Declamations on the Office of a Good Prince, [Etc.] ... by the Illustrious Young Princes of Saxony*," of 1543 [trans. and ed. James M. Estes], in LW 60, 311.)

¹⁰ Pope Leo X published the "bull" on June 24; Luther received it on October 11. See Luther's letter to John Frederick, from Wittenberg, October 30, 1520 (trans. and ed.

the visitations of congregations in Saxony and Thuringia.¹¹ While John the Constant rightfully was front and center politically at the Diet of Augsburg of 1530, his son was there with him; and his is the fifth name among the Confession's signers (see Augsburg Confession, Conclusion, and the names appearing thereafter).¹² Moreover, in the course of these history-defining events at Augsburg, John Frederick was among those who corresponded with Luther and even visited him at Coburg.¹³

In 1532, John Frederick succeeded his father as Elector of Saxony. From this position, his support of the Reformation, its leading theologian, and his university never wavered.¹⁴ What he lacked in political and diplomatic dexterity, he made up for in theological determination.¹⁵ In 1535, his commitment to a well-educated clergy led John Frederick to order the examination, calling, and ordination of pastoral candidates, implicitly again fulfilling his role as "emergency bishop." This order was soon accepted in Lutheran churches everywhere.¹⁶

John Frederick's theological and ecclesiastical resolve was tied to his commitment to the university his uncle Frederick had founded. In 1535 and 1536, he participated in the reorganization of the University of Wittenberg, with a budget and significant financial support.¹⁷ (Because it is so closely connected to the second thesis of this essay, I will be returning to this reorganization in the next section.) In general, John

Gottfried Krodel), in LW 48, 181.

¹¹ See Luther's letter to Duke John Frederick, from Wittenberg, October 30, 1520, in LW 48, 182. See especially the discussion in Spitz, "Impact of the Reformation on Church-State Issues," in *Church and State Under God*, 87–89; and, for John Frederick's role, Robert von Friedeburg, "Church and State in Lutheran Lands, 1550–1675," in *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture, 1550–1675*, ed. Robert Kolb (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 376.

¹² Unless otherwise indicated, all English references to the Lutheran Confessions are from the *Book of Concord* as edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

¹³ See the introduction to Luther's letter to Lazarus Spengler, from Coburg, July 8, 1530 (trans. and ed. Gottfried Krodel), in LW 49, 356–357.

¹⁴ See, among other places, the reformer's comments in the "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings" (trans. Lewis W. Spitz), in LW 34, 328.

¹⁵ See Luther's letter to John Frederick, from Wittenberg, October 30, 1520, in LW 48, 182.

¹⁶ See the introduction to "The Ordination of Ministers of the Word," from 1539 (trans. Paul Zeller Strodach, revised by Ulrich S. Leupold), in LW 53, 122–123. In the case of Wittenberg itself, Luther was frequently the ordinator.

¹⁷ In Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*, he noted (in connection with 28:20–22): "Thus the illustrious prince, John Frederick, Elector of Saxony, contributes annually 3,000 golden guildens for the upkeep of the University of Wittenberg." A gulden was the most valuable gold coin in circulation at the time. See LW 5, 263.

Frederick did everything he could to make the last 15 years of Luther's life as materially comfortable as possible.¹⁸ Also, John Frederick may have thought more highly of Luther's writings than the reformer himself did, repeatedly urging him to publish an authoritative collection of his Latin works.¹⁹ John Frederick confirmed and validated the will of his theological mentor in 1546, in which Luther countered prevailing custom and left his estate to his wife Katie.²⁰

In the early and mid-1540s, Luther was drawn into a complicated web of territorial, political, and religious conflict in which John Frederick helped expel Henry (the Younger) from his position as duke of Braunschweig/Wolfenbüttel. When Henry had explicitly likened John Frederick to a popular German comedy character, Luther responded with *Against Hanswurst*, turning the tables and applying this figure from German satire to Duke Henry himself. In the process, he offered an important elaboration of key elements of Lutheran ecclesiology.²¹

¹⁸ See the Church Postil, Gospel for Easter Sunday, Mark 16:1-8, from 1544, in LW 77, 28n31. Above all, see the comprehensive discussion in Schwiebert, especially 343–350.

¹⁹ See the "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings," from 1545 (trans. Lewis W. Spitz), in LW 34, 325–328. With respect to Luther's preaching, in 1537 John Frederick helped the publishing process along by appointing Georg Röser to be Luther's official scribe. As a result, Mary Jane Haemig and Robert Kolb observe, "Röser's notes and the notes of others supplied editors with material that printers grabbed eagerly, swelling the volume of Luther's total published sermons before the end of the century." See Haemig and Kolb, "Preaching in Lutheran Pulpits in the Age of Confessionalization," in *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture, 1550–1675*, 121.

²⁰ See "Luther's Will," from 1542 (trans. Lewis W. Spitz), in LW 34, 292.

²¹ These elements would include the "essence" of the church and above all Luther's conviction that the movement of evangelical reform and not Rome was faithful to the ancient church (especially in terms of the possession of baptism, the Lord's Supper, the keys, the preaching office and the Word of God, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer; the proper understanding of temporal authority; a correct understanding of marriage; the presence of suffering and martyrdom; and a biblical understanding of grace, atonement, and repentance, contrary to the Roman sacrament of penance with its acts of satisfaction). See "Against Hanswurst," from 1541 (trans. Eric W. Gritsch), in LW 41, especially 194–199, 211, 213–214, 216, 218, and 248. As noted above, a key passage in this treatise is Luther's distinction between "doctrine" and "life" (218): "This we say about doctrine, which must be pure and clean, namely, the dear, blessed, holy, and one word of God, without any addition. But life, which should daily direct, purify, and sanctify itself according to doctrine, is not yet entirely pure or holy, so long as this maggoty body of flesh and blood is alive. But as long as it is in the process of purification and sanctification, being continually healed by the Samaritan [Luke 10:29-37] and no longer decaying in its own impurity, it is graciously excused, pardoned, and forgiven for the sake of the word, through which it is healed and purified; thus it must be called pure. This is why the holy Christian church is not a whore or unholy, because

In this same general context, Luther wrote “To the Saxon Princes,” urging John Frederick (and Philip of Hesse) not to release Henry from his incarceration. Along the way, in the same tract Luther identified “doctrine” with the core of his teaching and reemphasized the now well-established distinction between doctrine and life.²²

The earlier reference to those who have an episodic familiarity with John Frederick’s life and career usually have in mind his role both in the events surrounding the preparation of the Smalcald Articles in late 1536, and in the tragic and heroic events (and both adjectives do apply) almost immediately following Luther’s death in 1546.

With respect to the former, John Frederick consistently wanted nothing to do with a council called for by Pope Paul III. The Elector was suspicious of colloquies and councils in general, and this was a “no win” situation. Luther himself had no illusions about such a council, but he had been calling for one for nearly 20 years. If conducted under the appropriate circumstances and ground rules, the proposed council would be another opportunity for confession of the faith—and, for the reformers, confession of the faith was a witness to the faith.²³ Addressing such matters and more, in 1539 Luther crafted one of his masterpieces, “On the Councils and the Church,” a work that makes any short list of Luther’s most important writings. In any case, careful preparation was necessary before Lutherans would consider attending a council that Rome might call, and to this end John Frederick directed Luther to prepare what came to be called the Smalcald Articles in late 1536. Any ecclesiastical or political decisions would require a firm

it continues to hold to and remain with the word (which is its holiness) without blemish and with strength. ‘You are already made clean (says Christ in John 15[:3]) by the word which I have spoken to you,’ not on your own account.”

²² In “To the Saxon Princes” of 1545 (trans. Frederick C. Ahrens), in LW 43, see the crucial pages 280–281.

²³ In a letter dated “the Friday after the Assumption of Mary 1535,” or August 20, 1535, Luther had written to John Frederick: “I wish and pray that God will still give them [i.e., his Roman opponents] enough sense to convoke a council that is free and Christian. But on this question I am like doubting Thomas. I must put my hands and fingers into the sides and the wounds; otherwise I will not believe it. Nevertheless, God can do even more than that; in His hand are the hearts of all men.” This letter is quoted in LW 2, 21n31; and the sentiments expressed herein were a consistent theme for Luther (see, for example, Luther’s Preface to the Smalcald Articles, in Kolb-Wengert, 299, paragraph 10; also “Against Hanswurst,” from 1541, in LW 41, 223). On the connection between confessing and witnessing, see especially Robert Kolb, *Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church, 1530–1580*, in *Concordia Scholarship Today* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), 133–140.

theological underpinning. I will return to the substance of both the Smalcald Articles and “On the Councils and the Church” shortly.

Finally, John Frederick is probably best known—and fortuitously so—for his role after Luther died in February 1546. These events brought together John Frederick’s greatest weaknesses and his greatest strengths. Tactically and politically, as leader of the Smalcaldic League, he was not up to the machinations of Emperor Charles V or Saxon Duke Moritz. His own armies were routed at the Battle of Mühlberg on April 24, 1547.²⁴ By resigning his electorship, he was spared a death sentence in exchange for life in prison. When imperial and German circumstances changed yet again, he was finally released from prison in 1552. While his father, John, has been called “John the Constant” or “John the Steadfast” by history, it was the son, John Frederick, who was most determined and resolute in the face of even greater adversity. He never wavered in his theological confession, when doing so would have secured his release from captivity. This kind of courage earned him the appellation “John Frederick the Magnanimous” (*der Grossmütige*).²⁵

Luther and His Elector’s Theological Priorities, 1532–1546

Professor Martin Luther worked under and with Elector John Frederick for 14 years. By then the main lines of Luther’s theology were clear; and, in terms of the movement he led, they had come to formal confessional expression at Augsburg in 1530, in its Apology of 1531, and in the two catechisms of 1529.²⁶ But this does not mean that these 14 years were theologically uneventful or somehow dispensable to

²⁴ Heiko Oberman notes that one of the reasons Charles V’s forces were able to surprise those of John Frederick stems from the elector’s decision to give Sunday worship priority over military service. See *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 18.

²⁵ Robert Kolb, writing in connection with the early Lutheran martyrology of Ludwig Rabus, observed in connection with John Frederick: “[Rabus] avoided heralding in all but a very brief and general way the sacrifice of Elector John Frederick of Saxony, who, with Landgraf Philip of Hesse, was imprisoned for his faith, and who certainly was heralded by others as a saint and martyr for his stubborn refusal to buy freedom from imprisonment and a sentence of death by accepting the Augsburg Interim.” See Kolb, *For All the Saints: Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 90–91. Indeed, the unabashedly Roman Catholic resource, *Dictionary of the Reformation*, ed. Klaus Ganzer and Bruno Steimer, trans. Brian McNeil (New York: Crossroad, 2004), in its brief article on John Frederick, writes: “Because of his steadfastness in matters of faith and his imprisonment by the emperor, he is counted among the Protestant martyrs” (163).

²⁶ The Small and Large Catechisms did not gain “official” confessional status until later. However, one point to be reasserted here is that the catalyst for bringing the

Luther's overall project. In what follows, I will identify four theological and methodological themes that recur in the most important writings of this period. First, Luther's understanding of the gospel is absolutely clear, and its place or position—and function—in his work become as vital as its definition. Second, this understanding of gospel arises out of the utterly perspicuous writings of the Old and New Testaments, both of which he read in Christocentric terms. Third, this gospel plays a central role not only in Luther's theologically constructive work, but also in his polemics. Fourth, this gospel elicits a theology of vocation that is central to Luther's understanding of sanctification and is conducive to a "real world" piety sensitive to the exigencies of sixteenth-century German life. (In addition, the vocational emphases may provide some counsel for those living with the challenges of Christian existence in a post-Constantinian age, which shares few of the assumptions common to either side of the Reformation divide in the 16th century.) These themes will be illustrated by an exploration of the most important theological writings Luther prepared during the period in which he was John Frederick's loyal subject.

As noted earlier, Luther published his second and definitive *Lectures on Galatians* in 1535, which he had delivered to university students a year or so before the ascendancy of John Frederick. They are perhaps the clearest and most penetrating presentation of his theology as well as that of his Wittenberg colleagues. Indeed, in "The Argument to the Letter to the Galatians," he identifies as "our theology" the distinction between the "passive righteousness" of God's forgiveness bestowed upon sinners in Jesus Christ, and the active righteousness of human performance.²⁷ This distinction, often implicit or stated differently in other writings, finds its complement in the more pervasive and prominent distinction between law and gospel. Together, these two interdependent distinctions replace all late medieval merit schemes; they serve to keep the gospel promise unconditional; and, they provide the conceptual support for the doctrine of justification as Luther and Melancthon had mined it from especially Romans and Galatians and confessed it at Augsburg.

One important essay that is not usually heralded or anthologized is Luther's *Commentary on Psalm 101*, which he wrote in 1533 or 1534, shortly after John Frederick became Elector of Saxony. This commentary, in turn, followed Luther's *Commentary on Psalm 82*,

catechisms to final completion, the Saxon visitation, had been conducted at the direction and support of Elector John the Constant and his son, Prince John Frederick.

²⁷ See LW 26, 4–12. The first set of Galatians lectures came in 1519.

which he had probably written in early 1530.²⁸ Both commentaries discuss the duties of a Christian prince, the first likely in connection with the Saxon Visitations; and the second, in effect, to speak the truth candidly to one newly in power. Both the spiritual and the temporal estates are ordinances of God, which call for obedience and honor from all (*gehorschen und ehren solle*).²⁹ The role of princes is to promulgate just laws and thereby to preserve the rights especially of the poor, orphans, and widows;³⁰ and, to protect the community against harm, force, and violence, by means of the sword if necessary.³¹ But these two, in Luther's thinking, follow the first "virtue," "profit," "fruit," and "good work" that God has appointed for the prince, namely, to support and protect godly pastors in their ministry of proclaiming and teaching the Word of God.³²

[M]y pastor, who does not glitter, is practicing the virtue [*tugend*] that increases God's kingdom, fills heaven with saints, plunders hell, robs the devil, wards off death, represses sin, instructs and comforts every man in the world according to his station in life [*stande*], preserves peace and unity, raises fine young folk, and plants all kinds of virtue in the people. In a word, he is making a new world! He builds not a poor, temporary house, but an eternal and beautiful Paradise, in which God Himself is glad to dwell. A pious prince or lord who supports or protects such a pastor can have a part in all this. Indeed, this whole work and all the fruits of it are his, as though he had done it all himself, because without his protection and support the pastor could not abide.³³

²⁸ See Jaroslav Pelikan's introduction to LW 13, x.

²⁹ Preface to Luther's *Commentary* (trans. C. M. Jacobs), in LW 13, 42; and Weimar Ausgabe (that is, *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Schriften*); 68 vols. [Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1983], vol. 31, Part 3, 190. Hereafter "WA."

³⁰ Comments on Psalm 82:2, in LW 13, 53, 57, 60.

³¹ LW 13, 53, 57, 60.

³² *Ibid.*, 52, 54–55. For a summary of these three dimensions of the princes' vocation taken together, see these comments on Psalm 82:2, in LW 13, 58: "Such a [prince] should bear with honor the three divine offices and names; therefore he should be called a savior, father, deliverer. For by the first virtue, the furtherance of the Word of God, he helps many to blessedness, that they may be redeemed from sin and death and attain salvation. By the second virtue, the administration of just laws, he supports all his subjects, as a father supports his children; for, as has been said, if it were not for law, no one could keep anything from another. By the third virtue, the suppression of violence and the punishment of the wicked, he protects the poor and preserves peace."

³³ LW 13, 52–53; WA 31, Part 3, 199.

Later in the *Commentary on Psalm 82*, Luther made this categorical statement: “Therefore, as there is no greater jewel in the world than a God-fearing lord, so there is no more hurtful plague in the world than a godless lord.” In the *Commentary on Psalm 101*, Luther wrote in part to ensure that the new elector John Frederick would be the former and not the latter (even though he never actually mentions him by name)—because humanly speaking the already high stakes would only get higher. Luther assumes the foundation laid in the earlier commentary; and now he underscores not only the priority of the spiritual to the secular realm and their connections under the authority of the one Word and will of God, but also their distinctions:

The spiritual government or authority should direct the people vertically toward God that they may do right and be saved; just so the secular government should direct the people horizontally toward one another, seeing to it that body, property, honor, wife, child, house, home, and all manner of goods remain in peace and security and are blessed on earth. God wants the government of the world to be a symbol of true salvation and of His kingdom of heaven, like a pantomime or a mask. He lets the great saints run their course in it, too, some better than others, but David the best of all.

To be sure, God made the secular government subordinate and subject to reason, because it is to have no jurisdiction over the welfare of souls or things of eternal value but only over physical and temporal goods, which God places under man’s dominion, Genesis 2:8ff. For this reason nothing is taught in the Gospel about how it [i.e., the secular government] is to be maintained and regulated, except that the Gospel bids people honor it and not oppose it.³⁴

In the process of unfolding these distinctions and relationships, Luther introduces a cluster of themes that are relevant not only to the electorship of John Frederick, but also to “two governments”

³⁴ Luther’s comments on Psalm 101:5 (trans. Alfred von Rohr Sauer), in LW 13, 197–198. The position taken in the above citation was Luther’s ideal. In the Preface to this Commentary (LW 13, 146), he acknowledged how far short the current (that is, the early 1530s) situation had fallen from this model: “[F]ifty per cent or more of the secular leaders have forgotten their own duties and have occupied themselves with the church and with Masses, while the clergy have in the same measure given up their priestly duties and have busied themselves with hunting, waging war, and such utterly secular affairs.”

considerations in any era, including the 21st century. While these texts provide no definitive answer to a 21st-century query asking what Luther would do if he were here in the present context, he does offer some abiding counsel and cautions. First, princes and clergy must both remember their respective and coextensive roles.³⁵ Second, reason and natural law are to be praised and cultivated; but neither one is universally pursued, much less self-evident. In fact, the opposite is the case.³⁶ Third, the success of princes and kings depends absolutely on the intercessions of “God’s little remnant, the church.”³⁷ Fourth, because moderation (*masse*) is in such short supply, the best course of action is to give priority to (*vorgang*) mercy over justice.³⁸ Finally, extraordinary leaders are “great gifts,” rare figures through whom God Himself rules. Indeed, stability and success are blessings from God and not personal achievements.³⁹

[Princes] should learn ... to trust in God and call upon Him, that He may guide and direct their hearts toward a successful administration. Especially they should ask God not to withdraw His hand or to let them carry on by themselves through their own shrewdness and clever schemes, or to venture boldly into something that is too high for them; for that does not make for stability, and the end thereof will be foul and unsavory.⁴⁰

While not without his personal and political shortcomings, of which Martin Luther was acutely aware,⁴¹ John Frederick never lost sight of

³⁵ LW 13, 146.

³⁶ Luther’s comments on Psalm 101:1, in LW 13, 150, 161.

³⁷ LW 13, 151.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 153; WA 51, 206.

³⁹ LW 13, 165.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴¹ Most notorious is John Frederick’s excessive drinking. Note the Table Talk entry (no. 3514) from December 18, 1536 (in LW 54, 218–219): “The elector [John Frederick] and Landgrave Philip are men with distinguished talents. They occupy themselves with public rather than private problems. If they live ten years longer (for men of affairs like this can’t live long) much that is of value to posterity will happen. He [the elector] is the right man for the job. He himself works from early morning until noon, for he has a calloused finger from writing. He is no drunkard, fornicator, gamester, or avaricious man, but is diligent, godly, and generous. May our dear Lord God preserve this prince! He is cutting down on his drinking. When I was in Torgau recently [September 1536], in the presence of the bishop and the margrave, I sharply reproached the drunkenness which is unworthy of the court, in which subjects ought to be able to find examples of respectability.”

this truth; or, stated in more theocentric terms, he never lost sight of the priority of the First Commandment before every other consideration.⁴²

None of this theological expression occurred in an educational vacuum. All of the early confessional writings from 1529, 1530, 1531, 1536, and 1537⁴³ were prepared by the two most celebrated professors of the University of Wittenberg—a university whose leading faculty members were also directly, intimately, and constructively involved in the parish life of electoral Saxony. Obviously, Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon were persons of theological and academic genius. But they were also men of indefatigable industry who seized and cultivated the tools of the ancient languages, rhetoric, and history and brought them all into the service of theological expression. Fortunately, their electors were also champions of their theological and educational causes, and none of their political lords was more important to these interconnected endeavors than John Frederick.

Shortly before John the Constant died in 1532, he implored his son to support the University of Wittenberg “at all costs,”⁴⁴ because under the leadership of Luther and Melancthon the gospel was now being taught in electoral Saxon schools. The university had been founded by John Frederick’s uncle, Frederick the Wise, in 1502, on the academic model of such more celebrated institutions as Paris and Bologna.⁴⁵ While Luther had presented his fresh and Christocentric reading of the Bible in its lecture halls, the university had come to experience its share of challenges. The imperial condemnation of Luther at Worms and attendant pressure from both Rome and the emperor, the reckless reforms of Karlstadt, and the “enthusiasm” of the Zwickau prophets had all taken their toll on the university—not least on its enrollment.

John the Constant need not have worried. For all intents and purposes, John Frederick made the enhancement of the university one of his most important projects. Very early on, he met with Luther himself, and then with the theological faculty. Soon he set about reorganizing the School of Theology as well as the entire university, so as to inculcate better the “new theology” of Wittenberg.⁴⁶ The reorganization was comprehensive. John Frederick or his immediate emissaries

⁴² This application is drawn from Luther’s comments in LW 13, 150–151.

⁴³ These are the dates, respectively, of the Small and Large Catechisms of Luther, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope.

⁴⁴ Schwiebert, 333.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 332–339.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 335.

devoted their attention to finances (including endowments and scholarships), enrollment, salaries, the structure of degree programs (including the restoration of the theological doctorate, and disputations to that end in 1533),⁴⁷ better living quarters for “star” faculty like Luther and Melanchthon, and major improvement to the library and its holdings.

Bolstering the library, of course, is the transition to the most important and lasting dimension of John Frederick’s university project, and the one most germane to the themes and theses of this essay.⁴⁸ Simply stated, then and now, library holdings serve curriculum; and this is where John Frederick worked with the likes of Spalatin, Justus Jonas, John Bugenhagen, Caspar Cruciger, and especially Luther and Melanchthon, to effect what amounted to a new university. The “Wittenberg theology” was based not on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard or the metaphysics of Aristotle, but on Luther’s exegesis of the *Hebrew Bible* and the *Greek New Testament*. This called for a different kind of curriculum and a different set of research tools for the library, namely, a set of course offerings and resources that reflected and supported a Renaissance humanism grounded above all in philology and classical rhetoric.⁴⁹ With the indispensable help of such linguistic aids, Luther, Melanchthon, and their colleagues had unlocked the treasures of the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and had confessed them before the world at Augsburg. For John Frederick, it was not only a matter of theology and education going together. Rather, both theology and education served mission; and, for the gospel mission to go forward across Europe and beyond, the curriculum of his university had to support it for the next generation of pastors and theologians.

To encapsulate a story of significant complexity and detail, a new set of statutes for the school of theology, crafted by Melanchthon in 1533 and reflecting the curricular reforms sketched above, became part of a second “founding” of the university. The contents of these statutes were incorporated into John Frederick’s “Foundation Document” of 1536 for the entire university.⁵⁰ So important was his work on behalf of the University of Wittenberg that John Frederick is regarded as its

⁴⁷ See Brecht, 115.

⁴⁸ See Joachim Bauer, “Kurfürst Johann Friedrich I. von Sachsen und die Bücher,” in *Johann Friedrich I.—der lutherische Kurfürst*, 169–189, especially 177–189.

⁴⁹ For an excellent and accessible treatment of the introduction and role of humanism and its curriculum at the University of Wittenberg, see Robert L. Rosin, “The Reformation, Humanism, and Education: The Wittenberg Model for Reform,” *Concordia Journal* 16, no. 4 (October 1990): 301–318.

⁵⁰ Schwiebert, 481–490.

“second founder.”⁵¹ Near the end of his meticulously detailed study, Ernest Schwiebert explains why, in terms of both historical detail and theological application:

Our title for this volume, “The Reformation as a University Movement,” does not apply to the university of Frederick the Wise, which was a typical medieval university in which Aristotle reigned supreme. Luther and Melancthon’s changes to an institution of biblical humanism were impressive; but it was the new University of Wittenberg created by Elector John Frederick in 1533–1536 in which Luther’s Theology of the Cross could reign supreme. This is what brought the German Reformation to its fruition and guided it in its spread.⁵²

In the reconstituting of the University of Wittenberg, John Frederick made certain that the specific duties of both Luther and Melancthon were the least specified and the least prescribed of the faculty, simply because so many other tasks demanded their attention and their unique gifts.⁵³ Never was this on greater display than in 1536, when John Frederick directed Luther to prepare what would become the Smalcald Articles (and, for that matter, when Philip Melancthon wrote the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope in early 1537). In addition to their propositional content, the Smalcald Articles are important for what they tell us about the central tenets of Luther’s theology, his hermeneutics, his gospel-centered ecumenism, and his determination to expound the articles of faith in a way that expresses their intrinsic connection to the gospel.

Anchored in the classical Trinitarian and Christological faith expressed in the ancient creeds (SA, Part I), Luther begins Part II with a summary of his *Hauptartikel*, “Christ and Faith.”⁵⁴ Note well how he proceeds. There is minimal exposition. Instead, in five short paragraphs Luther fuses seven absolutely central biblical passages, including two from Isaiah (53:6; 53:6); one from the gospel according to John (1:29), one from Acts (4:12), and three from Romans (3:23–25; 3:26, 28; and

⁵¹ Ibid., 380.

⁵² Ibid., 490.

⁵³ Ibid., 484–485.

⁵⁴ “Christ and Faith” is the bracketed heading appearing above the first article of Part II in the edition of *The Book of Concord* edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 292. It is an editorial insertion that summarizes the content well, and it does not appear as such in either the Kolb-Wengert edition or in the most recent critical edition of *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*.

4:25)—the meanings of which he regarded as self-evident. Together, these passages express the core of Luther’s—and John Frederick’s—gospel. “Nothing in this article can be conceded or given up, even if heaven and earth or whatever is transitory passed away. ... On this article stands all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubt about it. Otherwise everything is lost, and the pope and the devil and whatever opposes us will gain victory and be proved right” (SA II, i, 5).

The rest of the Smalcald Articles demonstrate Luther’s fidelity to the biblical gospel and his adherence to this principle. The remainder of Part II is a tightly argued polemic against the Roman mass, the invocation of the saints, foundations and monasteries, and the papacy itself. In these instances, Luther declares that they lack any foundation in the Word of God and that they burden consciences and are thus injurious to souls. But his overriding argument is a gospel one, that is, each of these Roman institutions is contrary to the gospel itself.⁵⁵ Luther picks up the language of Part I, Article I, namely, that of “Christ and Faith” as the “first and chief article” (SA II, i, 1). The mass “directly and violently opposes this chief article” (SA II, ii, 1). “The invocation of saints is also one of the abuses of the Antichrist that is in conflict with the first, chief article and that *destroys the knowledge of Christ*” (SA II, ii, 25; emphasis added). Fraternities and monasteries are likewise “contrary to the first and chief article concerning redemption in Jesus Christ” (SA II, iii, 2). Finally, the Roman papacy, which draws Luther’s famous identification as Antichrist, invites this indictment because it “negates the first, chief article on redemption by Jesus Christ” (SA II, iv, 3).

Luther had been directed not only to state the central doctrinal elements on which no compromise was possible, but also to identify those articles on which some concession could conceivably be made.⁵⁶ He did not fulfill this element of John Frederick’s instructions, at least not literally. This “omission” was not a matter of personal stubbornness, much less insubordination. Rather, his decision to proceed as he did in

⁵⁵ Of the various practices Luther indicts, SA II, ii, 21, concerning fraternities, is instructive because it brings these three points together: “They are not only purely human trifles, lacking God’s Word, completely unnecessary, and not commanded, but they are also contrary to the first article of redemption, and therefore they can in no way be tolerated.”

⁵⁶ See William R. Russell, *Luther’s Theological Testament: The Schmalkald Articles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 36–38. For Luther’s comments, see his Preface to the Smalcald Articles in Kolb-Wengert, 297–300. For a thorough exploration of the context, see Eike Wolgast, “Johann Friedrich von Sachsen und das Konzil,” in *Johann Friedrich I.—der lutherische Kurfürst* (see note 8 above), 281–294.

Part III of the Smalcald Articles was theologically driven. The topics he took up in Part III, when developed theologically, were all dimensions of the biblical witness organically related to the gospel, that is, to “Christ and Faith” (SA II, i) and to the creedal unfolding of the catholic doctrine of the Trinity and the person and work of Jesus (SA I). Therefore, at the end of the Articles, Luther concludes, “These are the articles on which I must stand and on which I intend to stand, God willing, until my death. I can neither change nor concede anything in them. If anyone desires to do so, it is on that person’s conscience” (SA III, xv, 3). The fact that Luther had every reason to believe that his death was imminent in December of 1536 only heightens the eschatological dimension of his statement and of the articles to which it refers.⁵⁷

The projected council, for which the Smalcald Articles were an indirect part of Lutheran preparation, did not take place (unless one chooses to call the Council of Trent that council). But Luther’s concern for the constellation of issues that came to expression in the Smalcald Articles persisted. The Smalcald Articles were published in 1538, and Luther began preparing “On the Councils and the Church” at the same time, finishing it the following year.⁵⁸ Luther told Melancthon that he was not entirely happy with the final product, but the verdict of history has been much more positive, regarding it as one of Luther’s best and most important treatises. While its contents cannot be discussed thoroughly here, Luther’s essay is known for its treatment of the appropriate role of church councils and the theologians on whom councils often depend, and its expanded discussion of the genuine marks of the church. Along the way, Luther touches on some of his most important and recurrent themes, often in memorable language.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ While Melancthon’s conditional subscription to the Smalcald Articles in February 1537 is well known and does not substantively undercut any of Luther’s claims in the articles themselves, it is also worth observing that all of the most important players in John Frederick’s reorganization of the University of Wittenberg (Luther, Melancthon, Jonas, Bugenhagen, and Cruciger) comprise six of the first seven subscribers to these Articles (Nicholas von Amsdorf is the other). See Kolb-Wengert, 326.

⁵⁸ See the editor’s introduction to “On the Councils and the Church” (trans. Charles M. Jacobs, revised by Eric W. Gritsch), in LW 41, 6–7.

⁵⁹ Among these points are his distinction between error and heresy (LW 41, 50); a particularly vivid characterization of the person and work of Christ, and how these are connected (103–104); his understanding of holiness and the distinction between the first and second table of the law (145–146); the relationship of the royal priesthood and the pastoral office (154, 156); the distinction between the work of God in his majesty and in the human person of Jesus (171); the roles of schools and education (176); and vocation (177).

First, for Luther both church fathers and church councils are a mixed lot, unequal in quality and also contradictory.⁶⁰ Of the church fathers, Augustine is among the very best, especially because he directs audiences to the Holy Scriptures and away from the fathers themselves, from bishops, and from councils—and even away from himself.⁶¹ The source of all doctrine is the Holy Spirit communicating through the public Word of God.

[T]he articles of faith must not grow on earth through the councils, as from a new, secret inspiration, but must be issued from heaven through the Holy Spirit and revealed openly; otherwise, as we shall hear later, they are not articles of faith. Thus the Council of Nicaea ... did not invent this doctrine or establish it as something new, namely, that Christ is God; rather it was done by the Holy Spirit, who came openly from heaven to the apostles on the day of Pentecost, and through Scripture glorified Christ as true God, as he had promised the apostles. It remained unchanged since the days of the apostles until this council, and so on until our own day—it will remain until the end of the world, as he says, “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” [Matt. 28:20]. ... If there were no Holy Scripture of the prophets and apostles, the mere words of the council would be meaningless, and its decisions would accomplish nothing.⁶²

Because these inspired words can be “falsified” by heretics in the midst of controversy, Luther acknowledges that it is sometimes the case that fidelity to the teaching of Scripture requires the use of vocabulary that goes beyond the *ipsissima verba* of the Bible.⁶³ In sum, properly understood, councils lack any power to establish new articles of faith, ceremonies that tyrannize consciences, or good works that exceed the commands of Scripture. Conversely, councils do have the responsibility “to suppress and to condemn” innovative new doctrines, ceremonies that

⁶⁰ LW 41, 20.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 27. Later Luther observes that after the “four principal councils,” the others are of “lesser value,” although he regards *several*—and he repeats the term for emphasis—as “equally good.” See LW 41, 48.

⁶² LW 41, 58–59.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 83.

contribute neither to conduct or discipline, and arbitrary “works that oppose love.”⁶⁴

Certainly the best known passages of this treatise come near the end, when Luther adumbrates his seven marks by which the church of Jesus Christ may be recognized. These are an elaboration of and not a departure from the traditional Lutheran definition that distills the essence of the *notae ecclesiae* to Gospel and sacraments. Thus, Luther begins here with the “holy Word of God,”⁶⁵ stressing its “external” (*eusserlich*) character.⁶⁶ He proceeds through Baptism;⁶⁷ the Lord’s Supper;⁶⁸ the public exercise of the office of the keys;⁶⁹ and the office of ministers, whose task it is to “give, administer, and use” the Word, the sacraments, and the keys, all of which is done “in behalf of and in the name of the church.”⁷⁰ In addition, the people of God can be visibly discerned by the presence of “prayer, public praise, and thanksgiving to God.”⁷¹

Finally, perhaps reflecting on his own life and the struggles of his movement of evangelical reform over more than 20 years, Luther ventured the most famous sentence of this 170-page treatise: “the holy Christian people are externally recognized by the holy possession of the sacred cross.”⁷² For Luther, the scholar who inhabited the world of the Bible and who incurred the wrath of church and empire as a public confessor of the faith, suffering in the New Testament sense of the term was axiomatic for Christians.

[T]he holy Christian people are externally recognized by the holy possession of the sacred cross. They must endure every misfortune and persecution [*verfolgung*], all kinds of trials [*anfechtung*] and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh (as the Lord’s Prayer indicates) by inward sadness, timidity, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness, and weakness, in order to become like their head, Christ. And the only reason they must suffer is that they steadfastly adhere to Christ and God’s word,

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 123–124. Among the points Luther made in this context, very much abbreviated above, is the assertion that “a council has no power to interfere in worldly law and government.” See LW 41, 130.

⁶⁵ LW 41, 148.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 149; WA 50, 629.

⁶⁷ LW 41, 151.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁷² *Ibid.*

enduring this for the sake of Christ, Matthew 5[:11], “Blessed are you when men persecute you on my account.”⁷³

These words would assume new urgency for Luther and especially for John Frederick in the years ahead.

Luther’s theology in the Smalcald Articles of 1536 and his discussion of councils in 1539, as well as John Frederick’s aversion to councils and colloquies, were tested by the Regensburg Colloquy of 1541, which neither reformer nor prince actually attended. In what amounted to the last serious attempt to come to some sort of compromise on the central doctrine of justification (in part for geopolitical reasons), Melanchthon and his Roman counterpart, Gasparo Contarini, ventured what has for convenience been labeled “double justification,” namely, only God’s grace in the merits of Jesus Christ justifies sinners and saves them through faith, but this living faith has to demonstrate itself in works of love for one’s neighbor.⁷⁴ Advising his elector, Luther wanted no part of this compromise, for to him it undercut the unconditional character of the gospel and implicitly encouraged sinners to trust their own good works, rather than Jesus Christ alone, for their salvation.⁷⁵ In this context, the letter from Luther and John Bugenhagen to John Frederick is most instructive, especially in light of this essay’s earlier theological and academic theses:

The saying in Galatians 5 [5:6, concerning faith active through love] does not speak about justification but about the life of the justified. There is much difference between being and acting, as the boys in school learn: the active and the passive verb. It is exact to speak of them differently. ... It is one thing to ask through what means one is justified before God; it is entirely another question to ask what the justified do or cause to happen.

⁷³ Ibid., 164–165; WA 50, 642.

⁷⁴ This is an oversimplification of a complex discussion. Nonetheless, the larger discussion is summarized conveniently in James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 277–278; and, for greater detail, in Brecht, 222–228. It is thoroughly addressed in the published dissertation of Professor Kittelson’s student, Suzanne Hequet, in *The 1541 Colloquy at Regensburg: In Pursuit of Church Unity* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009). For a very accessible and convenient selection from some of the relevant primary source material, see Eric J. Lund, ed., *Documents from the History of Lutheranism 1517–1750* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 72–75.

⁷⁵ See the Letter from Luther and Bugenhagen to Elector Johann Friedrich (May 10 or 11, 1545), in Lund, 74–75. See also Brecht, 224–225.

Becoming and doing are two different things; becoming a tree and bearing fruit are two different things. ...

But the papist trick is this ... that one will be or is justified, not only through faith but also through works, or through love and grace, what they call inherent (which is much the same thing). That is all false and where they have that, they have it entirely and completely, and we have nothing of the sort. For nothing is worthy before God but only and merely his dear Son, Jesus Christ, who is entirely pure and holy in himself, whom God sees and in whom he is well pleased, Luke 3[:22]. Now the Son is grasped and taken hold of in the heart, not through works but only through faith without all works. Then God says, "The heart is holy, and my son will dwell therein through faith."⁷⁶

When Luther was writing or dictating the Smalcald Articles as his theological "last will and testament," when he was writing "On the Councils and the Church" as a mature statement of his ecclesiology (among many other things), and when he was weighing in on controversies about justification, all the while he was also fulfilling his teaching responsibilities at the University of Wittenberg. From 1535 until 1545 he devoted his pedagogical attention to his Lectures on Genesis. Amounting to eight volumes in the American Edition and three in the Weimar Ausgabe, all the major themes of the mature Luther are on display. I will call attention to three of them.

First, one will not read far (or much, for that matter) in these lectures without encountering Luther's intense polemic against monastic life, the institution that he believed had corrupted early Christianity and marked the end of the apostolic period. Monasticism burdened the consciences of the men and women who were unable to keep its vows. Also, just as bad or worse, it falsely offered a qualitatively superior avenue to pleasing God.

While these aberrations were utterly intolerable for Luther—and he hammers monasticism relentlessly in these lectures—the larger point here is that Luther's hostility to monasticism was also the occasion for a more positive theological move. Specifically, this move was an exposition and even celebration of authentic Christian vocation.⁷⁷ What God seeks is not celibacy or works of supererogation, but instead the ordi-

⁷⁶ Quoted in Lund, 75.

⁷⁷ Of the many passages in the *Lectures on Genesis* that reject monasticism and endorse an evangelical and biblical understanding of vocation, the following are among the instances where these two points—namely, the criticism of the former and the

nary faith and trust that clings to God's promises brought to fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This faith, which relies altogether on God's absolution and is itself the gift of the Holy Spirit, sanctifies even the most menial tasks of Elector John Frederick's most ordinary subjects. To those who seemingly contributed little and could claim even less, Luther's doctrine of vocation assured them of God's grace and favor as well as the importance—actually, the holiness—of what they were doing in their home, their workplace, their community, and their congregation. These ordinary saints (to borrow the title of Robert Benne's book) were among the "masks of God," whose faith was active in love and service for the neighbors whom God had placed in their care.

This statement of vocation can be found to one degree or another in many of Luther's writings. In the *Lectures on Genesis* it arises out of his thoroughly Christocentric and promissory interpretation that Luther gives to the book.⁷⁸ The key promises, of course, come in Genesis 3:15 and especially the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. Without equivocation, Luther finds their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Then, following St. Paul in Galatians, he focuses on Genesis 15:6—"Then [Abraham, after hearing a repetition of the promise] believed in the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness." This trust, in the face of every adversity that would challenge the veracity of God's promises, is the essence of Christian existence.⁷⁹

Abraham did not see the final fulfillment of these promises. Moreover, the "intermediate installments" of their fulfillment gave him little reason for optimism. But to Abraham, the patriarchs in general, the apostle Paul, and the Wittenberg reformers including John Frederick, the gospel had nothing to do with optimism. Luther the exegete knew that optimism was not a biblical category. However, promise, hope, and fulfillment *are* biblical—and not just abstract biblical categories but the real sum and substance of God's dealing with estranged human creatures and a broken creation.

Luther read Genesis not in terms of their stories so much as of the triune God at work behind and in those stories. This personal God, whether in Genesis, Judea, or sixteenth-century Germany, is immersed in the lives of the people created in his image. This is a personal God

affirmation of the latter—are expressly made together: LW 1, 344; LW 2, 79, 114; LW 3, 204; LW 4, 7; LW 5, 70, 271; LW 6, 262; LW 7, 194, 312, 344; and LW 8, 69.

⁷⁸ See, for example, LW 1, 197, 242; LW 2, 164, 247, 398; LW 4, 311-312; LW 6, 72; LW 8, 106, 242.

⁷⁹ See LW 3, 20-21, 23, 29.

who makes and keeps promises, most decisively and characteristically in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This fulfillment was more than the center of a theological system for Luther. It was the heart of his comfort, consolation, and eschatological hope. In a few short years, it would prove to be the same for his elector too.

Epilogue: John Frederick the Confessor, Post-1546

Luther concluded his lectures on Genesis in November 1545, saying, “This is now the dear Genesis. God grant that after me others will do better. I can do no more. I am weak. Pray God for me that He may grant me a good and blessed last hour.”⁸⁰ His death three months later left John Frederick without his most important theological ally. But their partnership—precisely because it was grounded in a set of immovable theological convictions—did not end in February of 1546. One could argue that with respect to Elector John Frederick, Luther’s theology bore its greatest fruit after his passing.

It may strike some as strange to place in an epilogue a brief reexamination of the events for which John Frederick is likely most well known and celebrated. This essay touched on those events in Part III, John Frederick’s biographical sketch. To review, the conspiracy of Emperor Charles V and erstwhile evangelical Duke Moritz led to the defeat of the Smalcaldic League in spring 1547, John Frederick’s imprisonment, and the loss of his position as elector of Saxony.⁸¹

More important than the intrigue or the political machinations are the theological stakes involved. The faculty of the University of Wittenberg, the intellectual headquarters of the evangelical movement,

⁸⁰ This is the last sentence of the lectures, in LW 8, 333.

⁸¹ For an exceptionally helpful survey of this material, see Robert Kolb, “Historical Background of the Formula of Concord,” in *A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 12–87, with the material especially relevant to John Frederick on 17–26. More recently, see Irene Dingel, “The Culture of Conflict in the Controversies Leading to the Formula of Concord (1548–1580),” in *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture, 1550–1675*, especially 18–28. See also, Georg Schmidt, “Der Kampf um Kursachsen, Luthertum, and Reichsverfassung (1546–1553)—Ein deutscher Freiheitskrieg?” in *Johann Friedrich I.—der lutherische Kurfürst*, 55–84; and Dieter Stievermann, “Kurfürst Johann Friedrich von Sachsen, seine hegemonale Stellung und der Schmalkaldische Krieg,” on 101–125 of the same volume. More recently, see Kolb’s essay, “The ‘Culture of Controversy’: The Smalcald War, the ‘Interims,’ and the Adiaphoristic Controversy,” in Charles P. Arand, Robert Kolb, and James A. Nestingen, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 171–189, especially 172–173.

scattered.⁸² Melancthon and others debated how best to retain what they could of the Reformation's gains, now that Luther himself had died, their prince was incarcerated, and the Council of Trent had begun two years before. Whether their actions were noble and honorable, pragmatic compromise, or collaborationist to the point of betrayal, continues to be debated. Would the condemnations of Worms from 1521, with all of their implications, finally be realized?

The adjective "unprecedented" is used too frequently, but it does accurately apply to the circumstances confronting princes, their subjects, and their theologians from 1547 to 1552. Yet political confusion did not cloud John Frederick's theological judgment, despite his grim situation. With no bargaining power, John Frederick's resolve was firm and his course of conduct was consistent. In essence, he would do nothing that would entail an abandonment of Luther's theology or an abridgment of the scriptural gospel that Luther had taught him (through above all George Spalatin) since his adolescence. John Frederick's acceptance of the Romanizing Augsburg Interim in 1548 would have meant his immediate release from prison. He declined. Recall the first thesis of this essay: theology and not princes or politics drove the Reformation, and John Frederick was not about to let that change now. The Reformation may be in jeopardy, but theology in general and Luther's gospel in particular were still going to inform his conduct.

The second thesis of this investigation pertained to the intellectual context that had helped give birth to and had sustained Reformation theology, and this context centered in the University of Wittenberg. John Frederick had done everything humanly possible to support this university and especially the theology that came to define it in very intentional ways; but even the University of Wittenberg was a means to an end and not an end in itself. So it was that in connection with the so-called Wittenberg Capitulation on May 19, 1547, John Frederick managed to convince the emperor that the university's library was in fact his own personal property. The library was packaged and transported to Weimar, and then moved to Jena in 1549, where it became the nucleus of the library at the new university there upon its actual founding in 1558.⁸³ The University of Jena, for which John Frederick

⁸² See the discussion in Oliver K. Olson, *Matthias Flacius and the Survival of Luther's Reform* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002), 70–74; and Schwiebert, 364.

⁸³ See the detailed discussion of the library machinations in Schwiebert, 364–365; see also Kenneth G. Appold, "Academic Life and Teaching in Post-Reformation Lutheranism," in *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture, 1550–1675*, 79. Jena began as an academy in 1548; as noted above, it became a university in 1558.

had laid the plans before his death in March 1554, would become the home of Gnesio-Lutheran resistance to the perceived compromises of the 1548 Leipzig Interim and later the Crypto-Calvinist aberrations concerning especially the Lord's Supper and the Person of Christ.⁸⁴ For John Frederick, the academy was intended to serve Martin Luther's doctrine of the gospel and the theology confessed in the Augustana, its Apology, and the Smalcald Articles. If Wittenberg could no longer fill this role, Luther's theology would need to find a new home.⁸⁵

Near the end of his *Lectures on Genesis*, his last great work, Luther stated, "Thanks to the kindness of God, we have a very good prince."⁸⁶ When Luther died on February 18, 1546, about one year after making this comment,⁸⁷ Justus Jonas conveyed the news to Elector John Frederick and to the Wittenberg theologians. John Frederick described his friend and father in the faith as "such a dear man, through whom God's Word has again been brought to light."⁸⁸ For Martin Luther, he knew very well that his Elector, while not without shortcomings, had cultivated and supported a context within which this light of God's Word could shine openly and warm the ground in which the seed of the Gospel had been planted. In the providence of God, they needed each other; and, they depended on each other. In other words, the gratitude was mutual. LSQ

⁸⁴ See Helmut G. Walther, "Von Leipzig nach Jena (1409–1548): Tradition und Wandel der drei wettinischen Universitäten," in *Johann Friedrich I.—der lutherische Kurfürst*, especially 145–153; and Thomas Kaufmann, "Die Anfänge der Theologischen Fakultät Jena im Kontext der 'innerlutherischen' Kontroversen zwischen 1548 und 1561," in the same volume, especially 209–213 and 220–241.

⁸⁵ One could make a case that what Wittenberg had been to the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, and the Smalcald Articles, Jena (along with Magdeburg) was to the theology of the Formula of Concord. It should also be noted that the theology—and leadership role—of the University of Wittenberg would be restored in 1574 under Elector August of Saxony when the Crypto-Calvinist conspiracy was exposed.

⁸⁶ Luther made this comment in connection with Genesis 45:18, in LW 8, 63.

⁸⁷ For the timeframe, see Jaroslav Pelikan's introduction to LW 8, ix–x. This last volume of the lectures in the American Edition covers Genesis 45 through 50.

⁸⁸ This reaction to Luther's death is quoted by Brecht, 377.

Presidential Quotes From the Past

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THE CHALLENGE TO US AND TO ALL THOSE WHO possess the truth of the Gospel is very clear. We must share it with others before it is too late. We are involved in a race which is a matter of life and death. In the year 427 B.C. an army from Athens had put down a revolt on the island of Lesbos. Sometime afterwards the people of Athens voted to severely punish the rebel islanders. So they sent a ship full of soldiers to the island with orders to kill all the rebel men and to sell the women and children as slaves. The next day, however, the people of Athens were sorry they had sentenced the islanders to such terrible punishment. So they quickly sent a second ship with orders to pardon the rebels. But, the first ship had a full day's head start. The sailors on the second ship knew that they were in a race with death. Day and night they rowed, straining every muscle at the oars. Fortunately they caught up with the first ship and so saved the islanders from destruction.

Each day life and death races are going on all around us. Many people do not believe in the Saviour. Others have never heard of His love and goodness. Each day these people are getting closer to the time of their death. When they die it will be too late.

But we have the wonderful message of pardon through our Lord Jesus Christ. We therefore must strain every muscle to bring that message of salvation to them. [LSQ](#)

Excerpt from G.M. Orvick, "President's Message," *Synod Report* 1972:13.

The Proper Use of the Church Fathers as it Relates to Hermeneutics and Biblical Interpretation

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QUESTIONS ARISE AMONG ORTHODOX Lutherans as to the proper use of the church fathers. There have been times in the life of the church that churchmen have been more interested in what the fathers have written than in what the Scripture clearly teaches. Thus individuals pour over the writings of various theological leaders and ignore a proper exegesis of Holy Scripture. The world that Luther faced before the Reformation would be an example of this.

The other extreme is to neglect the writings of the fathers entirely. A theologian strives to carry out an exegesis of the sacred text in isolation from outside influences. This is indeed correct. However, he then does not compare his results with those who have gone before him. It is assumed that the plethora of modern exegetical tools are better than anything in the past. Twenty-first-century knowledge surpasses the understanding of theologians in time past.

What is a proper use of the church fathers as it relates to hermeneutics and biblical interpretation?

Walther and Orthodox Lutherans' High Regard for the Fathers

Walther, in his essay "Church Fathers and Doctrine,"¹ reminds us that Christians should definitely read the works of the fathers. The

¹ C.F.W. Walther, "Church Fathers and Doctrine," in *Essays for the Church*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992).

writings and thoughts of the great heroes of faith who went before us are indeed worthwhile for Christians today. As one of the great church fathers once said, "We are merely pygmies sitting on the shoulders of giants."² The writings of the fathers give us many insights into understanding the truths of Scripture. A treasury of devotional, homiletical, and doctrinal literature has been passed down to us. The terminology developed at the great church councils is virtually indispensable in communicating the doctrines of the faith. Imagine teaching Christian doctrine without using the terms Trinity, person, nature, universal redemption, objective and subjective justification, and inerrancy.

God has so arranged it that human beings should explain God's Word to us. Therefore ... do not despise the books of pious teachers in which Scripture is explained. Otherwise you are shameful despisers of a most precious gift. In fact, the mightier and more powerful an expositor is, the more highly you should esteem him. ... Therefore also, do not despise the writings of the old faithful church fathers, the writings of Luther, Chemnitz, Quenstadt, Gerhard, H. Müller, etc. Otherwise you disobey the Holy Spirit, who commands you, "Do not despise prophecy."³

The Only Source of Doctrine Is the Word of God

While all orthodox Lutherans have a high regard for the fathers they do not base their doctrine on the teachings of the fathers but alone on the inerrant, infallible Scriptures. Walther states that it is wrong to base matters of faith on the writings of the fathers and bind consciences to their doctrinal decisions. This is improper, **first**, because it is contrary to Scripture. Scripture is the source of all spiritual knowledge. It is the only infallible rule and norm for all teaching and teachers, and it is the judge in all religious controversies. Basing doctrine on the fathers is contrary to the nature of the Christian faith which is to be based on the divine certainty of God's Word and not on human opinion that can err. It is contrary to the warnings of Scripture which tell us not to trust in men and human ideas in matters of faith. Basing doctrine on the fathers, **second**, is improper because it is a relapse into the antichristian papacy. In Romanism the authority of the pope and the tradition of the fathers are a source of doctrine. Basing doctrine on the fathers is

² Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, trans. J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 19.

³ Walther, "Church Fathers and Doctrine," 69.

improper, **third**, because it is a falling away from the central tenet of the church of the Reformation which teaches that the articles of faith are not to be based on the writings of the fathers but only on Holy Scripture.⁴

The seventeenth-century dogmaticians, including Gerhard, would certainly agree that Holy Scripture is the only source of doctrine, faith, and life. Gerhard writes concerning the fathers:

Although we are ready to establish, with clear and plain testimonies of the older fathers, each and every article of our faith that is disputed between us and the papists, and though this has already been done often by our people, yet we neither can nor may recognize the writings of the fathers as the *norm* of doctrine in the church: (1) because this dignity and authority belongs only to the canonical writings of the prophets and apostles; (2) because the fathers themselves call for their writings to be tested by the norm of the divine canon; (3) because the papists themselves deny that the authority of the fathers is always authentic (that is, one cannot always know whether the church father has really written what has been ascribed to him); (4) because neither in the doctrines of faith nor in the interpretation of Scripture are the fathers unanimous throughout; (5) because many writings of the ancients are lost; (6) because, on the other hand, the writings that are still extant are forged and corrupt in many places; [and] (7) because in the writings of the fathers dross is found mixed with the gold, stubble with the gems, [and] the leaven of human opinions with the unleavened bread of the heavenly doctrine. (“Locus on the Church,” par. 203 [Ed. Preuss Edition, Berlin, 1867; IV, p. 453])⁵

The Fathers Must Be Distinguished from the Confessions

The term “the fathers” is a wider concept than the Lutheran Confessions and must be distinguished from them. The Scriptures are the *norma normans* (the ruling rule). Scripture is the absolute norm. Scripture as the decisive norm is absolutely necessary, being the norm which decides whether doctrines are true or false. The Confessions are

⁴ Ibid., 68.

⁵ Ibid., 81. See also Johann Gerhard, *On the Church*, trans. Richard Dinda, ed. Benjamin Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 409–410 (*Locus* 25, para. 203).

the *norma normata* (the ruled rule). They are a secondary norm determined by the *norma normans*. They indicate whether a person has clearly understood the doctrines of Scripture. We accept the Confessions not insofar as (*quatenus*) but because (*quia*) they are the correct exposition of Scripture. They present to us the true understanding of the Word. On the other hand, the fathers do not necessarily in every case give a correct exposition of the Word of God. We accept the teachings of the fathers as long as they are in agreement with Scripture and the Confessions. This is the distinction that must be maintained between the Confessions and the fathers.

The Lutheran Confessions serve a hermeneutical function for the church. To be sure, not every individual detail of exegesis in the Confessions is normative for Lutherans today. Yet subscription to the Confessions means that the Lutheran interpreter of the Scriptures will accept not only the conclusions of biblical exegesis that form the basis of the doctrinal content of the Confessions but also the hermeneutical principles used by the Confessions to reach their conclusion. The hermeneutical principles of the Lutheran Confessions give orthodox Lutherans guidance as they interpret the Scriptures.⁶

When orthodox Lutherans explain the truths of Scripture and confess their faith to those outside the Lutheran Church, they base their presentation and arguments on the clear Word of Scripture. Each doctrine of the Bible has its specific *sedes doctrinae*. Quoting the Lutheran Confessions to a Roman Catholic probably will have little value. This is seen in the great *Loci Theologici* of Johann Gerhard. In this massive work, he did not refer to the Lutheran Confessions as frequently as one might expect. He wanted this great teaching tool for the Lutheran Church to be also an apology and explanation of the Christian faith for those outside the Lutheran Church: the Calvinists and Romanists. When orthodox Lutherans explain the truths of Scripture or discuss a particular doctrine with those within the Lutheran Church, they will certainly refer to the pertinent sections of Scripture, but they will also make abundant use of the confessional writings, especially when the Confessions speak directly to the particular subject. This also is seen in the seventeenth-century dogmaticians. The later dogmaticians were writing to solve internal conflicts within Lutheranism and therefore made more frequent use of the Confessions than the earlier dogmaticians.

⁶ Ralph A. Bohlmann, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 122.

For the Lutheran Church the Confessions are not interpreted according to the Scriptures. This is not to say that the Confessions are above the Scriptures. Rather, for the Lutheran Church, the Confessions give the correct exposition of the Scripture.

Again, there are those who are ready to subscribe to the Confessions with the understanding that they be interpreted “according to Scripture,” or “correctly.” In this sense, Reformed theologians, including Calvin, have signed the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. . . . By subscribing to the Symbols a man does not declare his readiness to interpret them “according to the Scriptures,” but the minister or candidate in question makes the solemn declaration to the congregation that he has already discovered what Scripture teaches and he finds the Lutheran Confessions to be the expression of his own faith and confession.⁷

Walther, in explaining this truth for a Lutheran pastor or pastoral candidate, maintains that the Scripture is interpreted according to the Confessions.

A subscription to the confession is the Church’s assurance that its teachers have recognized the interpretation and understanding of Scripture which is embodied in the Symbols as correct and will therefore interpret Scripture as the Church interprets it. If the Church therefore would permit its teachers to interpret the Symbols according to the Scriptures, and not the Scriptures according to its Symbols, the subscription would be no guarantee that the respective teacher understands and interprets Scripture as the Church does. In fact, the Church would make the personal conviction of each teacher its symbol.⁸

One finds similar terminology in the 1853 constitution of the Norwegian Synod and in the writings of the Norwegian fathers.

⁷ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 355–356; see also Charles P. Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and its Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 169.

⁸ C.F.W. Walther, “Why Should Our Pastors, Teachers and Professors Subscribe Unconditionally to the Symbolical Writings of Our Church,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* XVIII, no. 4 (April 1947): 246.

The doctrine of the Church is that which is revealed through God's holy Word in the canonical writings of the Old and New Testaments interpreted in accord with the symbols or confessional writings of the Church of Norway, namely: 1) The Apostles' Creed; 2) The Nicene Creed; 3) The Athanasian Creed; 4) The Unaltered Augsburg Confession, delivered to Emperor Charles V at Augsburg, 1530; 5) Luther's Small Catechism.⁹

In August 1857, J. A. Ottesen and Nils Brandt wrote a report on their trip to find a proper seminary for Norwegian students, in which they characterized the Missourians as having

a heartfelt trust in God, a sincere love for the symbols and the doctrines of the fathers, and a belief that in them His holy Word is rightly explained and interpreted, and therefore a sacrificial, burning zeal to apply these old-Lutheran principles of doctrine and order. May the Lord graciously revive this spirit throughout the entire Lutheran church, so that those who call themselves Lutherans may no longer wrangle over questions settled by the Lutheran Confessions. May they rather show their true Lutheranism by truly believing that God's Word is taught rightly and without error in the Lutheran Confessions. Otherwise, the Lutheran name is but duplicity and hypocrisy.¹⁰

This is not to say that the Confessions treat all articles of doctrine. Controversies have arisen in the church that were not at issue when the Confessions were formulated. It is at times necessary to write additional doctrinal statements. Likewise we do not bind ourselves to all historical, archaeological, and literary remarks in the Confessions nor to the exegesis of every passage but to the doctrinal content of the Confessions.

The Proper Use of the Fathers

It would be a caricature of Walther as a theologian to assume that he had very little concern for exegetical studies, that is, that Walther and the early Synodical Conference fathers did little real exegesis with the

⁹ E. Clifford Nelson and Eugene L. Fevold, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian-Americans: A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1960), 344.

¹⁰ Carl S. Meyer, *Pioneers Find Friends* (Decorah, IA: Luther College Press, 1963), 69.

exception of men like Stöckhardt. When these individuals were faced with a theological problem they are said to have gone immediately to the fathers or the Confessions for their answer. It is implied that they made no real independent study of Scripture. They answered every question with quotes from the Confessions and seventeenth-century dogmaticians. We refer to this caricature as Fathers' Theology (*Väter Theologie*).

To the extent that the early Synodical Conference fathers had such an attitude toward biblical study, it certainly was improper. Lutheran theologians will go first to the inerrant Scriptures which are the only source of doctrine. They will use the proper rules of hermeneutics derived from Scripture to reach a biblical conclusion. In theological controversy they first will study the Bible and prepare a careful exegesis of the pertinent texts. The orthodox Lutheran theologian will make his stand on the inerrant Scriptures.

Each new generation of theologians must study the Scriptures in order to make its teachings its own. They will carefully mine the Scriptures for its truths. When the doctrines of Scripture in this way become our own they will be much easier to defend and be more cherished in our midst than if they were simply handed down to us.

An orthodox theologian will make a careful exegesis of the text of Scripture. He will then compare his conclusions with that of the fathers. A twenty-first-century theologian knows that he is not the only one who ever had great exegetical expertise. He understands that he can be influenced by the worldviews around him. It is very difficult to do exegesis in a vacuum. He compares his conclusions with the generations of Christians that have gone before him. The forefathers of the Synodical Conference, Gerhard and the seventeenth-century dogmaticians, Chemnitz, and Luther may not always be correct. However, one should be very certain of his biblical stance when he says the fathers misunderstood Scripture or taught contrary to them.

For we can affirm with a good conscience that we have, after reading the Holy Scripture, applied ourselves and yet daily apply ourselves to the extent that the grace of the Lord permits to inquiry into and investigation of the consensus of the true and purer antiquity. For we assign to the writings of the fathers their proper and, indeed, honorable place which is due them, because they have clearly expounded many passages of Scripture, have defended the ancient dogmas of the church against new corruptions of heretics, and have done so on the basis of Scripture,

have correctly explained many points of doctrine, have recorded many things concerning the history of the primitive church, and have usefully called attention to many other things. And we long for this, that in the life to come we may see what we believe and hope concerning the grace of God on account of His Son, the Redeemer, as members of the true catholic church; that we may see (I say) the Son of God Himself, the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and fathers, who held to the true foundation, and may enjoy intimate friendship with them to all eternity. Therefore we examine with considerable diligence the consensus of the true, learned, and purer antiquity, and we love and praise the testimonies of the fathers which agree with the Scripture.¹¹

In our interpretation of Scripture we both can and should use gratefully the efforts of the ancients, as well as the more recent teachers of the Church. This rule is set forth by the apostle: "Do not despise prophesying" (1 Thess. 5:20). You see, because God distributes to each His gifts as He wishes (1 Cor. 12:11), to which the gift of prophecy also belongs, we should reverently acknowledge, therefore, the gifts of God in others and gratefully use their assistance in the interpretation of Scripture. One should not think that the witness of an earlier age has been preserved for us in vain. Instead, their witness has been preserved in order to be an aid for searching out the meaning of Scripture and to confirm the spirits of the devout when the true meaning has been grasped from Holy Writ. Philipp, in a letter to a friend: "Although faith does not depend upon human authority but on God's Word, nevertheless, because Scripture wants the stronger to strengthen the weak, it does help to have the witness of the Church in every kind of temptation. Just as we freely consult the living whom we consider to have some experience of spiritual matters, so also do I think that we must consult the ancients whose writings are approved. There are also other reasons why I do not hold the witness of the ancients in contempt, for I think that the Church has universally perceived what they wrote. Nor is it safe to depart from the common position of the ancient Church."

¹¹ Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 1, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 256.

These are the principal rules that must be observed in the true and genuine interpretation of Scripture. In our *Meth. studii theol.*, part 3, sect. 4, c. 2, we discussed in detail the proclamation of the true meaning that has been found and how the preacher should make an application of it in the ecclesiastical homilies for the salvation of his listeners.¹²

The orthodox Lutheran exegete will make that same comparison with the Confessions. He will not go first to the Confessions but to the Scripture and make a proper study of the text. Then he will compare his conclusions with the Confessions. If his conclusions are contrary to the doctrine maintained in the Confessions, he knows that his conclusions are in error for the Confessions are the correct exposition of the Scriptures. We adhere to the Confessions because they present a proper understanding of the Scriptures, while we accept the teachings of the fathers as long as they are in agreement with the Scriptures and the Confessions.

Conclusion

Orthodox Lutherans agree categorically with Walther that we do not base our doctrine on the teachings of the fathers but alone on the inerrant, infallible Scriptures. The Holy Scriptures are the sole authority for faith, doctrine, and life. At the same time, we will not neglect the great treasure the Lord has given us in the fathers of the church. We will want to make use of the two thousand years of rich devotional, homiletical, and doctrinal literature which has been passed down to us. We will hold the fathers in high regard. “We are merely pygmies sitting on the shoulders of giants.” ^(LSQ)

¹² Johann Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and on Scripture*, trans. Richard Dinda, ed. Benjamin Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 487 (*Locus* 1, para. 537).

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A Story from Livonia: Hermannus Samsonius

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THIS ARTICLE IS DEVOTED TO THE PERIOD OF Lutheran orthodoxy and one of its significant representatives from Livonia, Hermannus Samsonius.¹ The age of orthodoxy in Church history is not only the age of stirring chorales, touching devotional literature, and moving sermons, but also the period of dynamic and vast scholarship which systematized the ideas of the Reformation and developed them further in contrast to and competition with the Counter-Reformation thinkers. Theologians of those days were generally well-rounded men, although not as specialized as today.²

Unfortunately, the age of orthodoxy in many ways is underestimated and undervalued. There is often—even among scholars—a sense of embarrassment about such an early modern mindset and mentality. For the contemporary mind, it looks too rigid and conservative. Its tedious and outdated casuistry, scholastic argumentation, and obsolete polemics may easily seem a boring object of study. And, of course, it's not hard to find its faults and get offended by its uncompromising arguments. Such an unsympathetic attitude has created the most ludicrous caricatures of the confessional age. The prominent men such as Hermannus Samsonius have been belittled and labeled obscurantist, being judged exclusively according to our modern sensitivities, an attitude which is

¹ The original article was first published in Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH Heidelberg, 2016.

² Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought: From Its Judaic and Hellenistic Origins to Existentialism*, ed. Carl E. Braaten (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 276.

hardly helpful. Instead, it would be much better to attempt to understand orthodox theologians on their own terms. A more charitable disposition would make the age of orthodoxy and its representatives more intelligible. A sympathetic study of the subject is more likely to effect a better account of reality.³

Pastor, theologian, superintendent, teacher, and prolific author—Hermannus Samsonius (1579–1643) is one of the central figures in seventeenth-century Livonia. Samsonius' life corresponds to a complex period of great political, religious, and cultural upheavals in the Baltic area. During the first decades of the seventeenth century, a great part of Livonia was the stage for a prolonged military conflict between the Polish and Swedish kingdoms. Due to the conflict, the political status of the territory was in a state of constant flux. The side effects of military activities were plagues and famines ravaging the land. The political conflict certainly also had its religious dimension. The Polish Counter-Reformation was in a constant battle with the Swedish kingdom, the champion of Lutheranism. Lutherans were stronger in cities, especially Riga, but Catholics were stronger in the rural areas of Livonia.⁴

Hermannus Samsonius was born in Riga in 1579 and raised in an atmosphere rife with religious contention between the Jesuits and the strong Lutheran majority in the city. There were two important educational centers in Riga: the Lutheran Cathedral School and the school re-opened by the Jesuits. Both battled for the minds and souls of young Riga citizens.⁵

The spirit of religious strife can be recognized even in Samsonius' early biography. A curious story is told about a talented young Hermannus whom Jesuits tried to entice and recruit to their school in Riga. When he refused, Jesuits kidnapped the boy and put him in a cart for transport to their school in Braunsberg. But the young prisoner escaped, ran through the woods, and returned to Riga on foot.⁶

³ Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: A Study of Theological Prolegomena* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 15–29.

⁴ Jānis Krēsliņš, *Dominus narrabit in scriptura populorum: A Study of Early Seventeenth-Century Lutheran Teaching on Preaching and the Lettische lang-gewünschte Postill of Georgius Mancelius* (Wiesbaden: Wolfenbütteler Forschungen, 1992), 127–128.

⁵ Jim Dobreff, *Public Poses Revealed: From Critical Edition to Revision. The Case of Hermannus Samsonius*, in: *Between Scylla and Charybdis: Learned Letter Writers Navigating the Reefs of Religious and Political Controversy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jeanine De Landtsheer and Henk Nellen (Leiden: Brill 2011), 513–529, see especially 516.

⁶ James Dobreff, *Hermannus Samsonius to Axel Oxenstierna: Latin Correspondence from 1621 to 1630 with Linguistic and Historical Commentaries* (Lund, Sweden: Lund

Hermannus attended the Lutheran Cathedral School, which had recently been reorganized in the spirit of better humanist principles. Sponsored by the city government of Riga, he went on to study theology at the most important centers of Lutheran intellectual life: the universities of Rostock and Wittenberg. Being a successful academic student, he received his master's degree in 1605, but was called by the city council to return to Riga in 1608 and was appointed School Inspector in the same year. In 1611 the council made him the Dean of the Cathedral Church, and subsequently in 1616 the Dean of St. Peter's Church.⁷

The period from 1608 to 1621 established Samsonius as the most important graduate of the Cathedral School and the dominant personality in early seventeenth-century Riga. His fame among fellow Lutherans was earned through many things: his aggressive, fearless polemics against the Jesuits, his prolific writing, his popularity as a teacher, etc. His conflict with the Jesuits was one of the key episodes in his life. Samsonius clearly made an impact by his polemics, contributing greatly towards the failure of the Jesuit Counter-Reformation in Riga.⁸

As the Roman Church pursued the recatholisation of northern Europe, Riga and Livonia were considered very essential elements. The whole scheme was orchestrated by the Jesuit priest and apostolic vicar Antonio Possevino and the bishop of Wenden, Otto Schenking.⁹ They made vigorous attempts towards the reintroduction of the Jesuits into Lutheran Riga, which was a truly complicated task. The physically unscathed city of Riga was surrounded by considerable devastation, doubtlessly fermenting with the rage of dispossessed Lutheran nobles who had taken refuge in the city, while the Jesuits at the same time accelerated propaganda, seeking to convert the youth of Riga's best families in their collegium.¹⁰

Returning home after nine years of peaceful studies, Samsonius entered a furious confessional battleground.¹¹ Exceedingly dismayed by

University, 2006), 2. This story is reported in Breverus *In Memoriam*, written shortly after Samsonius' death. It seems impossible here to separate fact from fiction. The value lies in knowing that the story was current in Samsonius' lifetime and thus most likely came from Samsonius himself. It also reflects the significance of relations to the Jesuits in Samsonius' life.

⁷ Dobreff, *Hermannus Samsonius*, 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹ Christian August Berkholz, *M. Hermann Samson, Rigascher Oberpastor: Superintendent von Livland etc.; eine kirchenhistorische Skizze aus der ersten Hälfte des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Riga: n.p., 1856), 59.

¹⁰ Dobreff, *Hermannus Samsonius*, 13.

¹¹ Berkholz, 49.

Jesuit activities, the young theologian urgently made his confessional statement. His inaugural sermon at St. Peter's Church was an open attack on the Jesuits, cheered by an enthusiastic Riga audience.¹² His unbending stand against the Catholic side earned him the enduring respect of Riga's citizens and granted him their loyal support in his persistent confessional campaigns. Fairly soon, Samsonius had become the voice and the leader of the local Lutheran Church life.¹³

Samsonius became a prolific author. He wrote books, both devotional and polemical, that made him popular beyond the borders of his home city. With his reputation growing, he was invited to fill ecclesiastical and educational vacancies in Rostock, Hamburg, and Danzig, yet he always refused. A story was told that even the Jesuits, being impressed and afraid of the man, made a desperate attempt to approach him with some alluring offers, but in vain.¹⁴ As the steadfast character Samsonius certainly was, he remained a local patriot holding Lutheran Riga dear to his heart. In the words of his biographer: "The mutual loyalty between the city and Samsonius remained more or less strong all the 35 years of his service in Riga."¹⁵

Samsonius' life and work can be roughly divided in two major parts: first, under Polish rule; second, under Swedish rule. The major turning point came when Swedish forces captured Riga in 1621. Arguably, the great Lutheran hero of the Thirty Years War, Gustav II Adolph, proved also to be Samsonius' savior in Riga in his battles against the Jesuits.¹⁶ As the Lutheran king arrived in Riga, he was warmly welcomed by Pastor Samsonius who seemed glad about having become the subject of the Swedish crown. The episode is artfully depicted on the stained glass window in the Riga Cathedral Church. Gustavus Adolphus made the Jesuits leave the city and return St. James Church to the Lutherans.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the military operations in Livonia continued, and the Swedish rule was wholly established only after the Treaty of Altmark in 1629. Then, finally came the time for Riga and Livonia to recover and prosper. But up until the treaty, the future of this region was very uncertain.¹⁸

¹² Dobreff, *Hermannus Samsonius*, 14.

¹³ Berkholz, 47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74f.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁶ Dobreff, *Hermannus Samsonius*, 16.

¹⁷ Berkholz, 83.

¹⁸ Dobreff, *Hermannus Samsonius*, 20.

The prolonged war had left the Livonian Church in shambles. The new Swedish rulers realized that the church had neither an economic base nor comprehensive legislation. It lacked any tradition of centralized and effective church government. Recognizing the miserable state of affairs, Swedish authorities looked for ways to rebuild an ecclesiastical organization. In order to lead the revitalization of the Church, the King appointed Samsonius as Superintendent of Livonia in 1622.¹⁹ The reasons for his appointment were many and obvious: Samsonius' authority had widely been established by his polemical fights against the Jesuits as well as his popular books. But, even more importantly, the man had a very good reputation and wide network among leading Swedish Church officials. Since he had studied in Wittenberg, Samsonius had become very good friends with Axel Oxenstierna who now served as the Chancellor of Sweden.²⁰

Undeniably, this appointment became a defining episode in Samsonius' life. He had to undertake the leadership of the church while the war was still going on which made his task extremely difficult. In his letters to Oxenstierna, he complains about ruined churches, the absence of qualified pastors, the lack of resources, and no respect for spiritual authority.²¹ He paints the bleak picture of a religious, social, and cultural wilderness, as everyone tried to rebuild their own houses, yet no one cared for the house of God or the poor pastor.²² Samsonius was entrusted with wide authority to supervise the church and to gain control over the clergy and patronage in ecclesiastical matters. He was authorized to make visitations, examine, ordain, and even remove and replace pastors in agreement with patrons. His power was increased even more by the royal mandate in 1625, assigning him to hold annual meetings in Wolmar to examine his pastors' theological knowledge, preaching, and care of souls, and also to strengthen their resistance against Catholicism and Calvinism. In 1622, when Samsonius started serving as Superintendent, the conditions were so bad that in the Livonian countryside there were only 7 pastors left, and 2 of them died in the same year.²³ During his service as superintendent, noteworthy improvement was made. Altogether 70 new pastors were ordained.

¹⁹ Krēsliņš, 151.

²⁰ Dobreff, *Hermannus Samsonius*, 11.

²¹ Krēsliņš, 151.

²² Dobreff, *Hermannus Samsonius*, 137f.

²³ Pauls Kampe, *Baznīcu celtniecība Vidzemē zviedru valdības pēdējos piecdesmit gados (1660–1710)* (Rīga: Latvijas Universitātes Raksti [Arhitektūras fakultātes sērija II, 2], 1937), 23.

Rural deans were appointed helping him with supervision and visitations. The nobility was compelled to build new churches (mostly wooden buildings) and parsonages.²⁴ Major work was done to establish outward church order, attendance, and discipline. In 1625, a decree concerning schools was issued: they were to provide education for peasant children as well.²⁵ Those were important new seeds and foundations for future development.

An unexpected turn of events for Samsonius came after the Peace of Altmark, as the Swedish King appointed a new governor-general: the well-educated, aggressive magistrate Johan Skytte (1577–1645).²⁶ He arrived in Livonia with a new vision and started reforming the church as he saw fit, regardless of Samsonius' opinion. The arrival of Skytte in 1630 marked a change for the worse, making Samsonius' situation less comfortable.²⁷ Skytte had envisioned a total incorporation of Livonia into the Swedish state. It meant that the church would become a part of the overall administrative network and lose its ecclesiastical independence. The governor-general desired a more centralized, comprehensive Swedish control over all areas, as the church would provide the missing link between cities and the countryside. Samsonius' church policy clearly differed from Skytte's. He regarded himself as a royally appointed and independent bishop of Livonia. Thus a collision between the two men and their visions was inevitable.²⁸

Rather promptly, Skytte managed to advance his plan and succeeded to reorganize the general Livonian church administration, introducing the so-called *consistorium mixtum*, which granted secular authorities the right to participate in church affairs. The implication was that the church no longer had a full control over its own matters. Skytte forced Samsonius to share the chairmanship with a layman, Gotthard Welling, and elevated two other churchmen into the consistory: Georgius

²⁴ Arw. Dzirkalis, *Bubvneeciba zveedru laikos Vidzemē*, in *Latvis* 2307 (03.07.1929), 7.

²⁵ Ludvigs Adamovičs, *Vidzemes baznīca zviedru laikos*, in *Latvis* 2303 (29.06.1929), 4.

²⁶ On Skytte's life and work see Jenny Ingemarsdotter, *Ramism, Rhetoric and Reform: An Intellectual Biography of Johan Skytte (1577-1645)* (Uppsala: Uppsala Studies in History of Ideas, 2011), 42.

²⁷ Dobreff, *Hermannus Samsonius*, 26.

²⁸ Krēsliņš, 152.

Mancelius (1593–1654)²⁹ and Andreas Virginius (1596–1664).³⁰ Furthermore, Skytte had chosen not Riga, but Dorpat as the administrative center for the church, thus depriving Riga of its role as the seat of authority. Needless to say, Samsonius was very upset by Skytte's reforms, especially because his own authority had been undermined severely. For his resistance, the superintendent found a protector in his friend Oxenstierna, who owned large estates in Livonia himself and who did not care for radical changes in the balance of power. Although Oxenstierna only rarely responded to Samsonius' complaints about Skytte's policy, the ecclesio-political alliances in Livonia were clear. However, due to the fact that Skytte stayed in Livonia only a short time and returned to Stockholm as soon as 1633, his vision for the province eventually had to succumb to Oxenstierna's.³¹

Previously, the governor-general had criticized many aspects of Samsonius' leadership. Skytte reproached Samsonius for staying mostly in Riga and rarely traveling to provinces. Samsonius was criticized for visitations being too superficial, for accepting pastors who had no knowledge of the Latvian language, and generally for very sluggish progress. In his defence, Samsonius reported about his numerous and challenging duties. He was overburdened; apart from serving as a superintendent, he fulfilled pastoral duties (thus providing for his family) and became a professor of theology in the newly founded Riga Academic gymnasium, which he helped to establish in 1631 and where he taught for 12 years. As for the local language skills of pastors, Samsonius said that it was a common situation also in Courland that pastors had to acquire their language skills while attending to their tasks.³² In spite of all the conflicts with Skytte, his general position remained firm and strong. In 1638 an estate in Livonia was bestowed upon him by Queen

²⁹ On Mancelius in general see Krēsliņš, 152, and Kristi Viiding, *Das Porträt eines liv- und kurländischen orthodoxen Theologen (Georg Mancelius), anhand der ihm gewidmeten Geleit- und Begrüßungsgedichte*, in *Orthodoxie und Poesie*, ed. Udo Sträter (Leipzig: Leucorea-Studien zur Geschichte der Reformation und der lutherischen Orthodoxie, 2004), 37–46; and *Die lateinische Gelegenheitsdichtung von Georg Mancelius in Dorpat (1632–1638)*, in *Classical Tradition from the 16th Century to Nietzsche*, ed. Janika Päll, Ivo Volt, and Martin Steinrück (Tartu: Acta Societatis Morgensternianae, 2010), 45–85.

³⁰ For Virginius who would become Bishop of Estonia in 1658, see Arend Buchholtz, *Virginius, Andreas*, in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Band 40, Leipzig 1896, 14.

³¹ Krēsliņš, 152–156.

³² August Westrén-Doll, *Die Schwedische Zeit in Estland und Livland*, in *Baltische Kirchengeschichte. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Missionierung und der Reformation, der evangelisch-lutherischen Landeskirchen und des Volkskirchentums in den baltischen Landen*, ed. Reinhard Wittram (Göttingen: n.p., 1956), 87–109, esp. 96.

Kristina and in 1640 he was ennobled now bearing the hereditary title *Himmelsjerna* (“heavenly star”).³³ The name was carried on by his family. Samsonius was married to a merchants’ daughter, Helena Hartmann. They had 8 children; 4 of them died in childbirth, but two sons and two daughters survived.³⁴

His literary production

An essential part of Samsonius’ legacy were his books, which he continued writing throughout his career, producing 65 printed works in Latin and German. He became by far the most prolific Livonian author of his day, being published both by the well-known Mollin’s printing house in Riga as well as abroad. He collected his sermons, wrote polemical pieces, funeral orations, wedding poetry, devotional books, etc. In these works he not only put forth his strong Lutheran views, but also provided an extensive commentary on the political, cultural, and social circumstances of his time. Samsonius wrote about the hectic events of this complex era in a lively and interesting manner. He had exceptional language skills.³⁵ Reading these texts today can be challenging though, since they require extra sensitivity towards the spiritual dimensions and their special *Zeitgeist*. Their first and foremost purpose was to communicate the Christian faith and a biblical worldview. These books were written by a Lutheran cleric during a confessional era with all its urgent drive for truth, conviction, clarity, and a struggle for doctrinal purity: the “pure Gospel.” Samsonius’ style can be characterized by his firm conviction and powerful language. His contemporaries were greatly impressed by his sermons and writings.³⁶ His style displayed all the typical tendencies of ecclesiastical oratory of the age. The constant aim was to instruct, teach, convince, refute heresy, guide, correct, and console his readers. The outward form of the texts was both humanistic and scholastic, but the content in its basic principles was always Lutheran.³⁷

For Samsonius, the basis and starting point at all times and for all occasions was the Bible, from which all doctrines were drawn. He explained and illustrated biblical teachings with wide-ranging references to liturgical texts, the church fathers, Greek and Latin classics, certainly also referring to Luther and the Lutheran Confessions.

³³ Vivian Siirman, *Der literarische Nachlass des Superintendenten von Livland Hermann Samson*, in *Forschungen zur baltischen Geschichte* 5 (2010), 36–58, esp. 40.

³⁴ Berkholz, 183.

³⁵ Siirman, 58.

³⁶ Berkholz, 106.

³⁷ Krēsliņš, 239–241.

Samsonius' purpose was to apply doctrines in order to edify the soul and to encourage faith and persistence during hard times, while giving some sense of peace and calm in a chaotic world. His positions were obviously still grounded in a comprehensive and unified worldview, with God as the absolute ruler, while all things big and small are dependent on him. Within such a worldview, there is the clear superstructure of revelation that provides meaning for the substructure of theological reasoning. Orthodox men like Samsonius held fast to the possibility of a well-ordered and rationally organized systematic theology. Biblical doctrine for them was a meaningful and quite sufficient explanation of the world, both its ordinary and extraordinary historical occurrences.

Extraordinary happenings—comets, pests, plagues, wars, and catastrophic events—were taken as apocalyptic, divine hints, as warning signs and “mirrors of God’s anger.” All of these signs were God-given means of discipline, so that sinners would be called to repent and be saved. Samsonius published a considerable number of penitential sermons, which displayed these events as a “divine rod” driving people to a godly life. It was only by prayer, fasting, repentance, and faith that people could be saved from ruin and damnation.³⁸ In his *Cometen Predigt*, a sermon he published in 1619, he said, “The comet bears witness that a huge fire has been ignited and an entire destructive blaze, which is the anger of God burning like a fire. We cannot extinguish this fire with water from a common well, but only with the water of our tears flowing from the fountain of our eyes, which emerges from the well of true repentance.”³⁹

In the context of the ongoing war and awful devastation in Livonia, it is easy to see why the world was perceived as a battlefield. The cosmic battle against the rule of God was perceived in the variety of political, religious, and social struggles. There was no middle ground or place for neutrality. Every believer had to take a stance, serving in the army of Christ and resisting evil forces. Hence the fierce polemics, the fight for truth, the hatred of all syncretism, and the contempt for doctrinal indifference. In order to read and understand Samsonius' outspoken polemics against Catholics and Calvinists, one always has to keep in mind this extremely intense Christian loyalty and commitment. The evangelical truth had to be not only proclaimed and confessed but also protected. Error and heresy were believed to be terribly dangerous for both this life

³⁸ Siirmani, 54.

³⁹ Hermannus Samsonius, *Cometen Predigt*, Riga 1619, 18.

and the next. Therefore, the pure doctrine had to be constantly guarded against the onslaught of Contra-Reformation or Calvinist ideas.

To respond to these dangers, Samsonius published extensive polemical writings both in German and in Latin, for laymen and for theologians. Already in 1611, he printed his first three blatant anti-Jesuit works. In 1613, he published a controversial sermon collection targeting Calvinists. But probably his most famous polemical work was the 400-page book, *Anti-Jesuita Prima* and *Secunda*, published in 1615, a refutation of a textbook by a Jesuit father Norvegus, *Confessio Christiana* (1604). Laurentius Nikolai Norvegus had been an undercover Jesuit missionary in Sweden. Eventually he was exiled from Sweden, whereupon he went to Braunsberg (1600–1610) and finally came to Riga (1610–1621).⁴⁰

The heightened hostilities between Samsonius and the Jesuits were especially evident during the celebrations of the centennial Jubilee of the Protestant Reformation in 1617. On the Polish king's order, the Protestants of Dorpat were completely forbidden to celebrate the centenary, while those in Pernau were even forced to attend Catholic mass on this day. However, in Riga, Samsonius celebrated the 100-year Jubilee with a fiery sermon against the Pope, using the book of Daniel (11:36) to prove that the Pope was the Antichrist. As a result of such fierce polemics, a series of grave charges against Samsonius were brought before the Polish king, the Diet, and the Royal Court in Warsaw. The Jesuits filed more than 400 legal protests. Yet their interventions were of no consequence. Sigismund III made no move against Samsonius, most likely because he understood that at this point any offence against the Protestants in Riga would play into the hands of the considerable pro-Swedish party in the city.⁴¹

Theologically speaking, the main attacks launched by the Jesuits were directed against the validity and legitimacy of the Lutheran clergy, thus undermining the Lutheran religion in general. Samsonius' refutation stated that the Lutheran faith was not a new invention, but the same age-old purified catholic and universal faith. He argued that Lutheran pastors did not need any blessing or succession from Rome to have validity. Samsonius furiously denied the authority of the Roman Church and the infallibility of the seat of St. Peter, claiming that the Bible was the only supreme and safe God-given rule for faith and life, and therefore all polemical arguments had to be based on the Holy

⁴⁰ Dobreff, *Hermannus Samsonius*, 15.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15–18.

Scriptures.⁴² From the Lutheran perspective, theological books had to be published and theoretical battles had to be fought in order to defend and strengthen the Lutheran identity of this region. Livonia had been a buffer zone, a borderline area between Catholic and Lutheran worlds, and—in the light of the immediate conflicts between the Polish and the Swedish crown—these battles were extremely important with regard to the confessional and political future of the region.

For Samsonius, this conflict definitely ranged not only on the level of human institutions, but something substantially larger: it was a part of an apocalyptic battle between truth and heresy, between the true Church and the forces of the Antichrist, escalating and drawing ever closer to the final resolution at the Lord's second coming. But the battle had to be fought also on a "grass-roots" level. Hearts and minds of the population had to be reformed and converted. During his visitations, Samsonius observed all kinds of superstition and magic, the relics of traditional folk religion, flourishing among the population. People of this era were fascinated by all things unusual, supernatural, and extraordinary. He realized that the clergy was not so well-prepared to deal with demonic phenomena. To meet these conditions accordingly, Samsonius published *Nine Selected and Well-Founded Witch Sermons* in 1626. These were pastoral instructions for preaching against ignorant people who had given in to their whims and wishes, greed and sinful lusts, as they precariously twisted God's order and employed all kinds of devilish means to harm others.⁴³

The *Witch Sermons* is by no means a dry handbook. The collection is skillfully written, easy to read, richly illustrated, and provided with all sorts of examples and explanations. By means of all his artistic oratory, Samsonius intended to turn the hearts of his flock away from magic. For instance, he describes the devil in vivid terms as a king of flies, who follows one around everywhere with his armies; he likens the devil to a mighty hippopotamus and a fiery dragon, the enemy of the Lord and all people. At the same time, Samsonius insists that the only way to resist demonic powers is to use God's Word diligently, to pray, and to remain in faith, guarding against all devilish tricks and witchcraft. In early modern times, witchcraft was considered a very complex sin. There were

⁴² Berkholz, 73.

⁴³ Hermannus Samsonius: *Neun Außserlesen und Wolgegründete Hexen Predigt Darinnen der Terminus Magiae oder Zauberey nach den Logicalischen terminis richtig und kürztlich auß Gottes Wort und andern Schribenten und Historien erkläret und außgeföhret worden und in der Thumb Kirchen zu Riga öffentlich gehalten worden durch Hermannum Samsonium Pastorn und Superintendenten*, Riga 1626.

different shades and stages of this vice. Firstly, at the initial stage, some people were simply overwhelmed by “melancholy and fantasy,” sick in their hearts and minds. Those people were to be treated kindly and compassionately, and no punishment was required for them. Secondly, some persons really had made contact with the dark side, but they had not done any harm to others. They also had to be spared. And, thirdly, there were those who willfully conspired with the devil, harming both people and livestock. Those were the ones to be punished if their guilt, *maleficia*, was sufficiently proven. However, Samsonius argued against any torture and forced confessions.⁴⁴

Presently, it has been widely recognized that his sermons did not lead to any large-scale witch hunt in the area, but only to small-scale trials. Yet, the historical remembrance of Samsonius has been considerably contaminated by the views he expressed on the subject. Dark and confusing phenomena dwelt heavily on people’s minds and required explanation. By his *Witch Sermons* Samsonius attempted to yield such clarification. Being an educated and resourceful man, he tried to interpret these magic phenomena in the style of the demonological literature quite common in contemporary Europe.⁴⁵ Undoubtedly, this book reveals Samsonius as a man of his own era, being overshadowed by the mentality of the age, whose concept of witchcraft was founded upon legal traditions but also supported by verses of Scripture, e.g., “Don’t allow a witch to live!” (Ex. 22:18) To be fair, Samsonius realized that this Old Testament command was not a sufficient basis for a witch hunt; therefore, he had to make reference to Christian freedom, according to which Christian magistrates may use their secular power and persecute witches and thus exercise their duty. In many ways, this writing represents a somber story of doubtful theological reasoning put in the hands of magistrates. At the same time, it has been rather unfortunate that in our contemporary discourse Samsonius is almost exclusively remembered as “the theoretician of witch-hunt,” or as the man who provided the ideological basis for the criminal persecution of witches in Livonia.

⁴⁴ Alnis Svēlpis, *Ideju vēsture Latvijā: No pirmsākumiem līdz XIX gs. 90. gadiem: Antoloģija*, ed. Ella Buceniece (Rīga: n.p., 1995), 59–69.

⁴⁵ See the works of Jean Bodin (1530–1996), Nicholas Remy (1530–1616), Henri Boguet (1550–1619), Pierre de Lancre (1553–1631), Martin del Rio (1551–1608), George Gifford (1548–1600), Henry Holland (1556–1603), William Perkins (1558–1602), John Cotta (1575–1650).

Epilogue

In this paper only a few highlights from Samsonius' life and work could be presented, providing some historical background. Unquestionably, he lived a fruitful and productive life, remaining active until the end of his days. During the last year of his life, Samsonius managed to complete a liturgical handbook for pastors (*Kirchen-agende*), and he was still actively engaged with his students. It is noteworthy that the title of his last sermon was *About the End of Life*, delivered only few weeks before he fell ill and died at age 64.⁴⁶ The legacy of Samsonius, by all means, remains disputed and controversial, as was the man himself during his lifetime.

What is one to make of him? Much depends on individual preconceptions and one's choice of approach. Many have chosen a rather critical and negative attitude toward Samsonius. For most Latvians, his image has been spoiled by the popular Soviet-Latvian cinematic adventure-comedy *Vella Kalpi* (1970; *The Devil's Servants*), which drew an unfavorable caricature of the theologian and depicted him as completely ridiculous. Other sources and reference literature, mainly from the Soviet period, have damaged his name and reputation by constant references to witch hunts, indicating his demonological work as the primary feature of his legacy. Likewise, Samsonius has been described as "one of the more militant Lutheran ideologues of his time in Northeastern Europe."⁴⁷ But the most negative assessments definitely come from seventeenth-century Catholics, who dubbed him the *Rigishen Satan* and *Anti-Christus Rigensis*.⁴⁸

A remarkably more favorable, even affectionate attitude can be found with seventeenth-century Riga citizens who praised him as the great Lutheran hero, the defender of faith. His local contemporaries were captivated by Samsonius' oratorical skills of teaching and preaching. He was much appreciated as a school inspector, professor, and pedagogue. He was even called "Hercules Biblicus" for his impressive learning and knowledge of the Bible and languages. However, above all else, it was his literary production that made Samsonius the most prolific and memorable author of seventeenth-century Livonia. LSQ

⁴⁶ Berkholz, 173-174.

⁴⁷ Krēslinš, 142.

⁴⁸ Berkholz, 170-171.

Examining the Crusades in Context: A Review and Evaluation

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CONDENSING MANY CENTURIES OF HISTORY into a relatively short paper is a difficult task without strict definitions. Though many definitions of “The Crusades” exist, for the purpose of this paper, the definition used will be: an armed expedition led by the Roman Catholic Church offering guaranteed spiritual and earthly benefits to its participants. This paper will focus primarily on the first four major crusades in their historical context as well as an evaluation from a Lutheran perspective.

The Holy Land Before the First Crusade

Islamic Conquest

By the time of the birth of Mohammed around A.D. 570, the Christian faith had spread rapidly and the area surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, much of Europe, and parts of Asia were considered Christian lands. Though the Church had certainly benefitted from the later protections of the Roman Empire, its growth was primarily peaceful and was the result of its message. With the crumbling of the Empire, a power vacuum was left behind. Local rulers fought continually for power, land, and wealth.

Within this void, a new religion arose in the Middle East with Mohammed claiming the status of prophet. Combining faith and earthly might with a divine mandate to conquer all who did not

subscribe to Islam, the new religion gained many adherents, some subscribing fully to the beliefs, others desiring the wealth and power gained from conquest. The armies of Islam, led by Mohammed and his successors, conquered much of the lands in Northern Africa, Southern Spain, and the East. Jerusalem fell to Muslim armies in 638.

Muslim Rule

Initially, Christians were guaranteed the freedom to practice their faith and keep their churches, including crosses and other religious symbols.¹ Over the decades, this guarantee proved meaningless as individuals and rulers alike regularly destroyed churches and monasteries and murdered Christians using crucifixion and immolation as well as many other forms of execution.² Christian pilgrims travelled to the Holy Land in large numbers from the East and in smaller numbers from the West to visit the holy sites and walk where Jesus and His disciples had walked. They were in constant danger of attack, even before Islamic rule of the area, from robbers stealing their few possessions and often leaving nothing but death in their wake.

Motivations for Crusading: Two Primary Theories

Most modern historians follow the current trend of denigrating the West and portraying the Muslim rulers and their subjects as victims of Western colonial conquests, all but ignoring the fact that the Islamic armies had “victimized” the Christian residents of many areas, colonizing their lands through conquest. Two of the most popular explanations for motivation behind the Crusades are money and power. A third motivation, in the past the primary explanation accepted in the West and still the official motivation put forth by the Catholic Church, was religious.³

From an Islamic perspective, virtually nothing is available that would reveal their thoughts on the motivation for the Crusades. The small amount of written information referring to the Crusades from Islamic sources offers little insight and little foundation for asserting that, to the Muslims of the time period, the Crusades were anything but warfare with an enemy:

¹ Rodney Stark, *God's Battalions* (New York: Harper One, 2009), 84.

² *Ibid.*, 85.

³ J. Richard, “Crusades,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967), 4:509.

... the concept of “Crusade” is a Western one. It has no particular resonance for Islamic ears and the Muslim historians are not concerned with it. For them, these are simply wars with an enemy. ... Accordingly, their reflections on the events of the Crusading period have to be pieced together like a jigsaw from stray references, anecdotes and comments tucked away in universal or dynastic histories of the Islamic world and the chronicles of cities. ...⁴

Financial and Power Motivations

One of the more common explanations for beginning the Crusades attempts to show that the Crusaders wanted only the wealth they could gain by conquering the Holy Land. Perhaps there were some involved in the First Crusade who were motivated by this desire, but it seems very unlikely that they were a majority. It seems even less likely that those involved in future crusades would have this motivation. To a large extent, the secular leaders of the armies financed the wars themselves, often mortgaging property to raise funds. The Roman Church did provide some funding through gifts and alms. Christians who could not or would not fight paid for men to go in their place.⁵

The European conquerors did establish “Crusader States” and ruled over them. These were established in conquered areas such as Cyprus, Antioch, and Jerusalem. However, while power was certainly wielded by their rulers, they were in constant need of finances and military assistance from Europe. The Crusades and the resulting maintenance of government in the conquered areas was quite costly. The Crusades were by no means a money-making opportunity.

Religious Motivation

Without a doubt, many were motivated to join the Crusades for religious reasons. Long before the Crusades began, defending fellow Christians was seen as an act of piety. In 878, Pope John VIII promised absolution of sins to troops who died defending Christians from the Muslims invading Italy. This preceded Pope Urban II’s proclamation that began the First Crusade by over two hundred years.

Fighting on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church, synonymous in their belief with fighting for God, would earn forgiveness and salvation.

⁴ Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (New York: Rutledge, 1999), 9–10.

⁵ Richard, 510–511.

Dying in the Crusades would offer absolution and eternal life immediately, while simply fighting earned forgiveness of all sins committed up to that time.

Besides these spiritual rewards, there appears to have been an apocalyptic mindset in those who fought. The knights and soldiers fully expected the imminent return of Christ and perhaps sought to hasten that return through their warfare. One author believes that the motivation behind the Crusades can only be understood by also accepting the reality of this mindset:

... expectation of victory in a faraway military campaign makes sense only in a world expecting the imminent return of Christ. Further examples illustrating the apocalyptic mindset abound: one group of villagers followed a goose that they believed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit; the crusaders attributed their victorious breakout from Antioch to the miraculous discovery of the Holy Lance that had pierced Jesus' side; Jerusalem fell only after a vision of the papal legate Adhemar of LePuy who had died of disease at Antioch, inspired the Crusaders to march barefoot around the walls of the city, led by Peter the Hermit, in penitential imitation of Joshua at Jericho.⁶

Robinson goes on to describe other instances in which the crusaders attempted to match their victories with prophecies from the Old and New Testaments.

The religious reasons motivating men to fight for the cause are dubious or outright heresy when viewed through twenty-first-century Lutheran lenses. In their day, though, these teachings were perfectly legitimate, especially since they were bolstered by the weight of the pope and the Roman church.

The First Crusade A.D. 1096–1099

Appeal for Aid

There are many versions of how appeals came to the pope begging for military assistance in the East. General consensus among historians has emissaries from the East apprising Pope Gregory VII of the dire situation of the Byzantine Empire. There appears to have been an increase in attacks against European and Eastern Christian pilgrims to

⁶ Paul Robinson, "Three Myths about the Crusades and What They Mean for Christian Witness," *Concordia Journal* 42, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 28–40.

the Holy Land. Likely fearing invasion of the West without intervention, leaders in the West began considering their options.

Gregory VII was the first to call for invasion. He planned to join the expedition and, upon success, visit the Holy Sepulcher.⁷ His overconfidence could have proved disastrous, but he died before realizing his plan. Urban II revived the plan at the Council of Clermont in 1094–1095. Immediately following the council, the pope delivered a sermon with one purpose: to unite political leaders behind a Crusade to liberate the Holy Land. He reiterated past pronouncements of forgiveness and salvation to those who would join the fight. The now-famous response of the crowd: “God will it!”

The Crusade

The first group to begin the march was a group of pilgrims unused to fighting. The group, led by Peter the Hermit, never made it to the Holy Land, being almost completely wiped out by the Hungarians and the Turks along the way. Peter survived and joined one of the four main groups.

The groups marched to Constantinople and gathered outside the city. Emperor Alexius Comnenus demanded their loyalty and promise to return his lands to the Byzantine Empire after they were conquered. The crusaders kept at least part of that promise.

In a series of battles and sieges, the crusaders conquered Nicaea in 1097 and returned it to the rule of the Emperor. Edessa and Antioch in Syria were captured in 1097 and 1098, respectively. Jerusalem was taken after a short siege in 1099. Edessa, Antioch, and Jerusalem were not returned to the Emperor, but became part of the Crusader States.

Over the next few years, reinforcements arrived by sea from Italy and Norway, bolstering the crusader armies, which were primarily French up to this time. This larger force captured and occupied more territory, putting it under the rule of the Crusaders. Unfortunately for them, some French and German armies who left for home after the fall of Jerusalem were destroyed along the way by the Turks.

The Second Crusade A.D. 1144–1155

The Fall of Edessa

The Muslims did not take defeat lightly and about forty years later, in 1144, the Turks attacked and took the city of Edessa. Because these

⁷ Richard, 504.

lands had once been ruled by Islam, they were considered Islamic by right. The fall of Edessa to the Turks prompted the organization of the Second Crusade by Pope Eugene III.

The Crusade

French and German armies marched and fought separately. The German army of Conrad III was decimated and the remnants finally joined forces with those of French king Louis VII. Aided by English and Frisian armies, they attacked Damascus in Syria, but failed to take the city. The armies returned home, the Second Crusade ending in failure.

The Third Crusade A.D. 1187–1192

The Fall of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade

Saladin, a great Islamic warrior, reconquered Jerusalem for Islam in 1187. This set off calls for a third crusade. Emperor Frederick Barbarosa marched his army through Turkey, but died accidentally, drowning in a river in Cilicia. His army was joined at Acre by the armies of Philip II of France and English king Richard I (Richard the Lionheart). Acre was recaptured, as well as Jaffa and Ascalon.

Negotiations

Richard the Lionheart, leading the occupation, did not attempt to recapture Jerusalem. Fearing defeat at the hands of Saladin's forces, he negotiated with the Muslim leader. Richard was able only to negotiate passage for pilgrims visiting Jerusalem and the city remained in Muslim hands.

The Fourth Crusade A.D. 1202–1204

Freeing the Holy Places

Because Richard had been unable to recapture Jerusalem, Pope Innocent III called for a fourth crusade to free the Christian holy places. Preaching to organize the crusade began in 1198. Italian and French armies were scheduled to travel by sea and marched to Venice, where ships had been ordered for the passage.

Financial Problems

When the armies arrived, it was discovered that there was no money to pay the ship owners for passage, not to mention for bringing the ships to Venice. To pay the debt, one army was forced to fight the king of Hungary. A relative of German Prince Philip of Swabia, Alexius IV, then promised to join the crusade if the armies would help him retake the Byzantine throne. Unfortunately for the armies, Alexius was overthrown and unable to keep his promise. The armies were left without resources.

The Sacking of Constantinople

Without resources necessary for their survival, circumstances for the crusader armies were grim. Discouraged, hungry, broke, and angry, the armies attacked and looted Constantinople for three days. The destruction and chaos they wrought caused the empire so much injury that it never recovered.⁸ Count Baldwin of Flanders was crowned Emperor of the Latin Empire of Constantinople. From that time forward, no assistance was given to the crusaders in retaking the Holy Land.

Later Crusades A.D. 1212–1272

At least five more crusades were organized between 1212–1272, seeking again to retake the Holy Land. One of the more notable is the “Children’s Crusade” of 1212. Traditional histories tell of this crusade in which young pilgrims set off, unarmed, to convert the Muslims in the Holy Land. Most of them were captured and sold as slaves long before reaching their destination. In addition to the numbered crusades, many other smaller expeditions were also undertaken. The crusades for the Holy Land ultimately ended in failure. In 1453, the Byzantine Empire fell with the capture of Constantinople. Islam has ruled these lands, for the most part, since that time.

The Crusades: An Evaluation

It is a difficult task to examine the Crusades from the vantage point of the twenty-first century. So much time has now passed since that age, but we still hear the terms “crusade” and “crusader” in the news. Muslims, especially in the last two hundred years, have revitalized the terms, associating them with colonization of the last few centuries. Today the terms are used publicly against any military opposed to

⁸ Richard, 508.

Islamic fanaticism and, less publicly, as derogatory terms against people in Western culture in general.

The term “crusade” means “taking up the cross.” As Christians, we are to take up our cross and follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23). Of course, Jesus was not referring to armed warfare when He spoke these words to His disciples. What are we, as Christians, to think of the Crusades?

Even with putting the best construction on the motivation of the men involved, the Crusades are left with little to defend them from a spiritual perspective. Fighting and killing in order to earn forgiveness and salvation are contrary to the gospel. Paying others to fight in order to earn the same benefits is without defense.

Were the Crusades “just wars?” Insofar as they were fought to protect Christians and others from harm, they were. The central problem a Christian should have with the Crusades is not the Crusades themselves, but the church’s involvement in them. So closely was the Roman Catholic Church involved in these wars that the church could hardly be separated from them. To this day, Muslims combine Christians and their governments into a single entity rather than separate entities with separate functions. Islam itself is intertwined with government so that the two cannot be separated. Christianity must not be this way. The Lutheran doctrine of the Two Kingdoms must be preserved.

In our day, we are faced with a continued onslaught of Islamic attacks, though on a much smaller scale than in crusader days. It is our responsibility as citizens to protect our fellow citizens. But it is our responsibility as Christians that is paramount. It is our responsibility to pray for our enemies, including those who want to harm us. It is our responsibility to bring the gospel, in whatever ways God enables us, to the Muslims as well as to everyone else without faith in Christ. It is our responsibility to be “crusaders” in the best sense of the word: to take up our crosses and follow Jesus wherever He leads us. [LSQ](#)

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Book Reviews

LSQ Vol. 57, No. 1 (March 2017)

Bible Study Review: Lessons From the Lives of Powerful Politicians and Lessons From Luther Yesterday and Today

Korthals, James F. *The Word Endures: Lessons From the Lives of Powerful Politicians*. From the *What it Means to be a Lutheran* series. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2016. Available on CD or downloadable. \$44.99.

Koelpin, Paul E. *The Word Endures: Lessons From Luther Yesterday and Today*. From the *What it Means to be a Lutheran* series. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2016. Available on CD or downloadable. \$44.99.

The year 2017 is understandably a monumental year for Lutherans since we observe the 500th anniversary

of the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation. In addition to various celebrations and presentations being planned, those in the parish might also consider some special Bible studies (in addition to the Bible studies which will be distributed as part of the celebration of the anniversary of our synod).

Prof. James F. Korthals of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has written a Bible study that focuses on various politicians who played key roles in the history of the Reformation period. Eight separate studies focus on ten such politicians, from Elector Frederick the Wise to Pope Leo X. These studies should not only provide valuable information about the political scene during the Reformation, but also serve as good lessons for modern-day citizens who strive to respect their rulers.

Prof. Paul E. Koelpin of Martin Luther College has written a Bible study that centers on Luther's

writings about topics that are still relevant today. The studies focus on Christian freedom in the cause of reform, teaching the Word to children, appreciating the role of the Old Testament law, good works, conversion and the will, prayer, marriage, and the Lord's Supper.

Each lesson begins with either a responsive Psalm or hymn verse followed by an introduction to the topic of the study. "The Power of the Word in the Early Church" takes a look at a passage from the New Testament and gleans from it applications for us today via questions and commentary. "The Power of the Word in the Reformation" in Korthals' study brings the focus to the ruler(s) under consideration, providing a brief overview of what role he played in the time of the Reformation. For Koelpin, this section features a key writing of Luther regarding the topic at hand. "The Power of the Word Today" seeks application of the political/religious climate of the Reformation (Korthals) or of Luther's teaching (Koelpin) to modern times. A short summary caps off the lesson for Korthals; Koelpin also includes an "At Home" section with suggestions for making use of what was learned, "Additional Reading" on the topic (e.g., additional Luther, sections from the Confessions), and a closing prayer.

Overall, it appears that these studies would be interesting to congregation

members. In Korthals' study, there is a good balance between "pure history" and the Word. In Koelpin's study, ample time and space are given to the Bible so that it is not overshadowed by Luther. Many opportunities for class participation, including working in small groups, are suggested and would be beneficial. The section which describes the politician under consideration or includes part of Luther's writing *might* be a little lengthy to be read in one chunk. Perhaps the study leader could break this section into a few parts with some questions or comments interspersed.

The lessons in this study are fully customizable and can be adapted to various settings or preferences. Separate leader guides and student lessons are provided in three different file formats and are reproducible for the congregation's use. Included on the CD or in the downloaded package is a promotional kit with various means of publicizing the study such as materials for bulletin announcements, email, Facebook and Instagram, and the congregation's website. Video of interviews with the authors is also available as a promo.

Those who attended or read the 2016 B.W. Teigen Reformation Lectures on the three princes will find Korthals' study to be a good supplement which contains information on additional rulers.

– Michael K. Smith

Book Review: Repetition in the Bible

Cascione, Gioacchino Michael. *Repetition in the Bible*. RedeemerPress.org, 2016. 424 pages. \$19.95.

This book is a study of a pattern found in the repetitions of words and phrases within individual books of the Bible. This pattern is not to be confused with narratives or statements in one book being repeated by another. But there are many instances where a particular phrase is repeated in more than one book, the same number of times. This pattern is a powerful evidence for inspiration, and also knocks higher criticism out of the picture. It reveals that the Bible is written in an elaborate acrostic, which cannot be clearly seen without the aid of a computer. I cannot even imagine any human with the genius to have independently authored any of it without a computer or, of course, supernatural guidance.

This pattern has long been detected by several scholars but not deeply studied. Dr. Cascione also published more than one preliminary work. He is particularly poised to detect poetic formats, being a trained and skillful artist, with the commensurate ability to detect the symbolism and artistic style that is often invisible to most of us. His long career as a theologian and Bible scholar complete his expertise.

This deep study could not have been done if the biblical manuscripts were not available in digital searchable form. Nevertheless, this work required a copious amount of patient effort.

The reader will certainly be inclined to consider this book comprehensive, but the author expects that many more examples of repetition could be found with continued searching. And only a few books, including Genesis, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Revelation have been examined in any detail so far.

I must admit making three false starts in reading the book, since Cascione uses several terms with meanings that were completely foreign to me. The poetic format is called "Hebraic Meter." This was originally discovered in Genesis, where many phrases are repeated, exactly seven, ten, or twelve times. "Cadence" and "rhythm" are also used in related context. The introductory sections were inadequate to match my stubborn background, which groped somewhat in confusion for the properties I had forever associated with those terms. A "metered phrase" in this book is used to denote one that is repeated somewhere within a biblical book, in quantity no more or less than one of those three numbers (or a combination or multiple.) I later discovered all of this well explained in a concluding chapter, including the author's own struggle with choosing his terminology. For me it would have been highly helpful to have read that chapter initially.

The sheer quantity of words and phrases that meet the criteria is overwhelming. It is far beyond any chance of being the result of coincidences. The collections of repetitions are individually tabulated in the book along with verse numbers, original language, and English translation.

Even though I have essentially no knowledge of the original biblical languages, this lack is no barrier to enjoyment of this book. Between the tabulated data are explanatory paragraphs showing particular significances. Often variants between the several manuscripts occur in the phrase. The author demonstrates that the variant that properly completes the “meter” is more than likely the true original. The evidence supporting that view is fully compelling. Among the nine New Testament manuscripts in this study there seems to be no outstanding winner that most often contains the original variant.

One of the book’s guest editors suggests that this book should be read by every Christian. It is a bit too technical for that. But every pastor would benefit from knowledge of this convincing internal evidence for inspiration, evidence contained in the biblical text itself. Supernatural guidance had to be intimately involved in its composition. Verbal inspiration is the only reasonable statistically probable way in which it could have been formed. The author often offers alternate (but impossible) explanations, sometimes even failing to include the inspiration option. I see that as a subtle teasing of the scoffers. But the concluding chapter clearly endorses inspiration as the only logical alternative. Particularly notable is the fact that if the text were originally assembled from a set of original sources (JEDP, Q, etc.), it would be unreasonable to expect the many interlocking patterns to exist. In

fact, there are cases in the book where there are no variants and where a single wrong letter would have caused several different interlocking “meters” to collapse.

After reading many pages and examining the data presented for each word or phrase, the reader should become confident in the completeness and integrity of the data. After that I found it profitable to skip much of the data compilations and simply read the editorial comments. The complete data are available for a deeper study of each phrase, if the reader is so inclined. Many new cases of symbolism also emerge, such as where in Revelation God is mentioned in different forms. Some forms appear in a “triad” of “meters,” which can be recognized as a symbol of the Trinity.

The evidence for a single author of each biblical book is compelling. Strong internal evidence for the same author of the whole Bible is also presented, particularly when comparing Genesis with Revelation. That the entire Scripture has a single theme and message has always been noted theologically, but its mechanical and aesthetic unity is vividly revealed as well in this book. It is a must-read for any serious study of the Bible.

This book merely scratches the surface of where this line of analysis could lead. To quote another private reviewer, “This is a book which could have easily grown into a six-volume set.”

— William Overn



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