

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

A blue-tinted photograph of a crucifix and an altar with an open book. The crucifix is on the right side, and the altar with an open book is at the bottom. The background is dark blue.

VOLUME 60 • NUMBER 4
DECEMBER 2020

**Christ's Descent into Hell: Formula of
Concord Solid Declaration, Article IX**

**A Confessional Lutheran Understanding of
Christian Apologetics and its Practice**

**Foundational Principles in the Study of
Liturgy from a Lutheran Perspective**

**How Are Old Testament Worship Practices
Relevant to the New Testament Church?**

**The Judgement of Solomon: Responding
to The Gressmann Thesis**

**Concerning the Administration of
the Sacrament of the Altar.**

Three Sad Lutheran Christmases

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The journal of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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Foreword

LSQ Vol. 60, No. 4 (December 2020)

WHILE THE TEACHING OF CHRIST'S DESCENT into hell is found in the Apostles' Creed, there are many confused ideas concerning this doctrine in the history of the church and today. This doctrine usually receives relatively less attention than other doctrines in Lutheran preaching. It is probably addressed most often in the setting of Bible class or catechism class. In his essay, "Christ's Descent into Hell: Formula of Concord Solid Declaration, Article IX," the Rev. Glenn Smith presents the proper biblical teaching concerning the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell. He is the pastor of Christ Lutheran Church in Klamath Falls, Oregon.

Confessional Lutherans have discussed, debated, encouraged, utilized, or in some way or another dealt with apologetics for a long time. Our Evangelical Lutheran Synod has given it attention, perhaps more than most. The essay, "A Confessional Lutheran Understanding of Christian Apologetics and its Practice," has a two-fold aim: first to establish a biblical and confessional Lutheran explanation of apologetics, and second to encourage confidence in a proper use of apologetics among both pastors and laity. This essay was written by the Rev. David Thompson, who is pastor of St. Timothy Lutheran Church in Lombard, Illinois.

Worship is a fundamental part of every Christian's life. Though people can argue about whether to emphasize the ritual and historical aspects of worship, or whether the cultural and social aspects should

take prominence, everyone agrees that Christians must worship. It is a necessary byproduct of the Christian faith, articulated in God's Word, and put into practice by each particular group of Christians. The Rev. Daniel Hartwig points out in the essay, "Foundational Principles in the Study of Liturgy from a Lutheran Perspective," that the divine service is first and foremost God's service to us. Here God serves us with Word and Sacrament, and secondarily, we serve Him with praise and thanksgiving. He is pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin.

The Old Testament ritual and worship practices are quite unfamiliar and strange from a modern point of view. However, since these forms are carefully described in the Old Testament, which is part of the inspired Word, they have a God-given purpose for Christians today. This is explained in the essay, "How Are Old Testament Worship Practices Relevant to the New Testament Church?" written by the Rev. Michael Lilienthal, who is pastor of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Albert Lea, Minnesota.

Questions have arisen concerning the judgement of Solomon in 1 Kings 3:16–28. Here in his wisdom Solomon arbitrates between two women claiming a child. This essay is an apologetic presentation concerning the Gressmann thesis on this section of Scripture. The essay, "The Judgement of Solomon: The Gressmann Thesis," is produced by the Rev. Joseph Abrahamson, who is the pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Clara City, Minnesota.

Since concerns and questions regarding some aspects of the administration of the Lord's Supper have been forwarded to the Doctrine Committee for discussion, the Doctrine Committee has prepared guidance on these matters for the pastors and congregations of the synod. Here counsel is offered concerning the elements in the Lord's Supper and the subject of consecration through the distribution formula.

"Three Sad Christmases," the last article in this *Quarterly*, is a strange title. The Christmas season is usually viewed as a joyous time. Our communities are filled with Merry Christmas and our forefathers greeted each other with *Fröhliche Weihnachten* or *God Jul*. There are celebrations everywhere and rightly so. Lutherans stress the mystery of the incarnation and our incarnational theology. Yet as wonderful as the Christmas event is, the Lutheran Church is known for its three sad Christmases of persecution.

Christ's Descent into Hell: Formula of Concord Solid Declaration, Article IX

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LSQ Vol. 60, No. 4 (December 2020)

ARTICLE IX. CHRIST'S DESCENT INTO HELL

Different explanations of the article on Christ's descent into hell have been discovered among some of our theologians just as among the ancient teachers of the Christian church. Hence we let matters rest on the simple statement of our Christian Creed, to which Dr. Luther directs us in the sermon that he held in the castle at Torgau in the year 1533, "I believe in the Lord Christ, God's Son, who died, was buried, and descended into hell." Herein the burial and the descent into hell are differentiated as distinct articles, and we simply believe that after the burial the entire person, God and man, descended into hell, conquered the devil, destroyed hell's power, and took from the devil all his might.

We are not to concern ourselves with exalted and acute speculations about how this occurred. With our reason and five senses this article cannot be comprehended any more than the preceding one, how Christ has been made to sit at the right hand of the almighty power and majesty of God. We must only believe and cling to the Word. Then we shall retain the heart of this article and derive from it the comfort that neither hell nor the devil can take us or any believer in Christ captive or harm us.¹

¹ *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, and Arthur C. Piepkorn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 610.

Introduction

In the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed, we confess our faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God,

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

The point concerning Christ's descent into hell is often misunderstood. It gets relatively less attention than other doctrines in our preaching, and perhaps it is addressed more often in the setting of Bible class and catechism. In our ELS Catechism explanation, there is one question devoted to it under the chapter, "God the Son—Exaltation." Question 163 reads: "What does the Bible teach about Jesus' descent into hell?" Answer: "The Bible teaches that after coming to life in the grave Christ descended into hell, not to suffer punishment, but to proclaim His victory over death and the devil." Two Scripture proof passages are provided: 1 Peter 3:18–19: "*Christ ... was put to death in the flesh but made alive in spirit, in which He also went and preached to the spirits kept in prison*" (GWN); and Colossians 2:15: "*Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross*" (NIV).²

That brief answer says a lot about the timing, mode, and purpose of Christ's descent, in contrast to many false views that have been put forth. In the history of the Christian Church, the article concerning Christ's descent into hell has been a subject of much confusion and controversy. The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article IX, written in 1577, begins by pointing this out:

Different explanations of the article on Christ's descent into hell have been discovered among some of our theologians just as among the ancient teachers of the Christian church.

The Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article IX, identifies some of these "different explanations," which had arisen from the ancient church through the time of the Reformation:

² *An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism* (Mankato, MN: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2001), 118–19.

The questions raised were: When and how, according to our simple Christian Creed, did Christ go to hell? Did it happen before or after his death? Did it occur only according to the soul, or only according to the deity, or according to body and soul, spiritually or corporeally? Does this article belong to Christ's suffering or to his glorious victory and triumph?³

In this paper, first we will address some of the "different explanations" that have been given concerning the timing, mode, and purpose of Christ's descent into hell. Then we will conclude with the Scriptural witness provided in the Formula of Concord, expanding on the passages above from our catechism, as well as others.

The Historical Controversy

To begin with, the Apostles' Creed itself is a gradually developed confessional document which did not appear in its final form until the sixth or seventh centuries. It is called the Apostles' Creed, not because it was composed by the apostles, but because it expresses apostolic and Scriptural truths. It grew out of the necessity of a short summary of faith for purposes of catechetical instruction and as a public confession of candidates for Holy Baptism.⁴ Bente notes that the foundation of the creed was, in a way, laid by Christ Himself, when He commissioned His disciples in Matthew 28:19–20: "*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*" (KJV).

The Apostles' Creed, both as to its form and contents, is evidently but an amplification of the Trinitarian formula of Baptism.... The Apostles' Creed was the result of a silent growth and very gradual formation corresponding to the ever-changing environments and needs of the Christian congregations, especially over against the heretics.⁵

Among the early Christian writers and churches, there is a lack of written record of the gradually developing creed, due to the fact that

³ Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 492.

⁴ Gerhard Struck, "Christ's Descent into Hell" (WELS Michigan District Pastoral Conference, Benton Harbor, MI, June 16–18, 1959), 10.

⁵ F. Bente, "Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church" in *Concordia Triglotta*, ed. F. Bente (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House), 10.

it was transmitted by word-of-mouth. The oldest known form of the Apostles' Creed is one used in the church at Rome even before 150 AD. But it was as late as 337/338 AD when it was for the first time quoted as a whole by Bishop Marcellus of Ancyra, in a letter to Bishop Julius of Rome, for the purpose of vindicating his orthodoxy. Yet the Greek text does not include the article, "He descended into hell."⁶

This is not to say that the doctrine of Christ's descent was absent from the teaching in the church before that. It was well known and discussed by many teachers in the early church.⁷ Paul Koenig wrote:

Augustine says: "*Veritas huius articuli extra omnem controversionem posita est.*" (The truth of this article is beyond all dispute.) Again: "*Qui nisi infidelis negaverit apud infernos fuisse Christum?*" (Who but an infidel would deny that Christ was in hell?) Besides, the following Fathers mention the descent: Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* (386), before 350; Irenaeus, 170, a disciple of Polycarp, a disciple of John; Clemens Alexandrinus (*L. u. W.*, 20, 17) mentions it and distinguishes it from the suffering, death, and burial of Christ. The doctrine of the descent into hell is therefore not a truth which originated later, which was not known to the ancient Church and was spuriously inserted into the Creed, but it is a doctrine which the Church of old always taught and which originated nowhere else than in Scripture.⁸

Various ideas exist as to when the descent of Christ into hell was first formally accepted as part of the Apostles' Creed. An early creedal confession of the descent is found in the Fourth Formula of Sirmium, written in 359 AD. It says the Lord had "descended to the underworld [hell] (εἰς τὰ κατὰχθόνια κατελθόντα), and regulated things there, Whom the gatekeepers of hell saw and shuddered."⁹ Schmeling notes that the descent is also found in the doxology of the Syrian Didascalia; so it

⁶ Bente, *Historical*, 12.

⁷ Struck, "Christ's Descent into Hell," 10. Struck cites Johann Ludwig Koenig in his paper (p. 4), who had listed thirty-nine church fathers as referring to this doctrine in some way before it was finally accepted as part of the Apostles' Creed. Those included are Ignatius of Antioch (first century); Polycarp of Smyrna, Justin Martyr, Tertullian of Carthage, Clement of Alexandria (second century); Origen (third century); Hilary of Poitiers, Athanasius of Alexandria, Ambrosius of Milan, St. Augustine (fourth century).

⁸ Paul Koenig, "Christ's Descent into Hell," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 3, no. 11 (November 1932): 826.

⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (New York: David McKay Company, 1972), 378, quoted in G. Schmeling, "The Descent into Hell," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (September 1985): 14.

seems that the descent figured very early in Eastern credal material. At the end of the fourth century, it was part of the baptismal confession at Aquileia. It appears that only at the beginning of the seventh century was the descent accepted generally in the Apostles' and Athanasian Creeds of the West.¹⁰ According to Bente, the complete form of the present *textus receptus* of the Apostles' Creed, evidently the result of a comparison and combination of the various pre-existing forms of the symbol, may be traced to the end of the fifth century. It is first found in a sermon by Caesarius of Arles in France, about 500 AD. There is included the wording, κατελθόντα εἰς τὰ κατώτατα.¹¹

The church fathers of the first centuries were united in their acceptance of Christ's descent into hell. But there was much disagreement as to the mode in which He descended and His purpose in descending. Part of this problem can be traced to various confused ideas the fathers had about the period of time between a person's death and Judgment Day, and the location where that time was spent. It was believed that all souls of those who died before the death of Christ were kept in the underworld—a place located in the center of the earth according to the popular belief of the ancient Hebrews and also on the basis of references in the Old Testament. It was taught that not even the Old Testament patriarchs had entered paradise. The souls of the pious as well as the evil had to live in the underworld until the Last Judgment, although not in the same manner. In the case of the evil, they existed there miserably in torment and punishment. In the case of the pious, they dwelt there in the greatest bliss, awaiting certain joy which was to be consummated after their resurrection.¹²

As a result of this false teaching, two different interpretations of the descent developed in the Early Church:

According to one, Christ was active during the mysterious three days preaching salvation or else administering baptism to the righteous of the old Covenant, according to the other, He performed a triumphant act of liberation on their behalf. The former found representatives in the author of the *Gospel of Peter*, St. Justin, St. Iranaeus, and Origen.¹³

¹⁰ Schmeling, "The Descent," 10.

¹¹ Bente, *Historical*, 12. Compare Ephesians 4:9: κατέβη εἰς τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς—"He ... first descended into the lower parts of the earth" (NKJV).

¹² Struck, "Christ's Descent," 10-11.

¹³ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 380-381, quoted in Schmeling, "The Descent," 15.

Here Schmeling points out that the main difficulty facing the first line of thought is that the Old Testament faithful hardly needed to be converted, since they had foreseen Christ's coming. Also it was contrary to the Scriptures that the evil have a second opportunity for repentance in the underworld. Hence the second view became established doctrine in the West.¹⁴

Among other false teachings, Pieper rejects as at variance with Scripture that "Christ preached salvation, or the Gospel, in hell either to all the godless as Marcion taught, or to the godless and the devils, as Origen taught, or at least to those who had no opportunity on earth to hear the Gospel."¹⁵ Such teaching of universalism developed more prevalently in the East.¹⁶ During the period of the Ancient Church and Medieval Church, there were always a few, especially in the East, who believed that the descent simply meant that Jesus was buried.¹⁷

Most medieval theologians, in both the East and the West, agreed with the early, undivided church, that 1) only the soul of Christ, and not the body, entered the underworld; 2) that it remained there for three days, during which interval the body of the Lord rested in the grave.¹⁸ In the West, the prevailing teaching was that Christ descended for the purpose of defeating Satan. At the same time, He entered the *limbus patrum*, the haven for Old Testament saints who were waiting for the completion of the atonement by Christ before they could enter heaven. Saint Augustine opposed the idea that unbelievers have another chance to be saved in the afterlife. From his time, the doctrine of the descent was not materially altered until the dawn of the Reformation.¹⁹

What did develop was a trend toward greater departmentalization of the underworld. Aside from the location and condition of the eternally damned, there were also these divisions:

1. the abode or the living place and region of the pious Israelites who had departed in faith, known as the *limbus patrum*.... Also known as Abraham's Bosom and doubtlessly at times also a place of cleansing or purification (*purgatorium*). According to

¹⁴ G. Schmeling, "The Descent into Hell," 5

¹⁵ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. John Theodore Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950-57), 2:316.

¹⁶ Struck, "Christ's Descent into Hell," 13.

¹⁷ Schmeling, "The Descent into Hell," 5.

¹⁸ Struck, "Christ's Descent into Hell," 12-13.

¹⁹ David Scaer, *Christology*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics 4 (Ft. Wayne: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1989), 83; Schmeling, "The Descent," 5-6; Struck, "Christ's Descent," 12-13.

Anselm of Canterbury (1109), Christ destroyed the *limbus* by releasing the Fathers therefrom.

2. *Limbus infantum or puerorum*, the abode of infants who died without baptism.
3. *Purgatorium or ingis purgatorius* where the believers await final and complete cleansing.²⁰

During the time of the Reformation, the Reformed Churches taught that the descent into hell is to be taken in a figurative and not in a real sense. They identify Christ's descent into hell, not with an event occurring between His death and resurrection, but with His entire state of humiliation, or with His suffering, especially His *magna passio* in Gethsemane and on Calvary.²¹ Calvin stated:

The point is that the Creed sets forth what Christ suffered in the sight of men, and then appositely speaks of that invisible and incomprehensible judgment which He underwent in the sight of God in order that we might know not only that Christ's body was given as the price of our redemption, but that He paid a greater and more excellent price in suffering in His soul the terrible torments of a condemned and forsaken man.²²

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) agrees with this view, as seen under Question 44:

Q. Why is there added, He descended into hell?

A. That in my greatest temptations I may be assured, and wholly comfort myself with this, that my Lord Jesus Christ, by His inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors, and hellish agony in which He was plunged during all His sufferings, but especially on the cross, has delivered me from the anguish and torment of hell.²³

Among the Lutherans during the time of the Reformation, there was controversy over the article in the creed concerning Christ's descent into hell. In the next section, we will explore Luther's developing understanding of Scripture's teaching on the subject, which was eventually

²⁰ Struck, "Christ's Descent," 12.

²¹ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:83.

²² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill, The Library of Christian Classics 20 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II, XVI, 10 quoted in Scaer, *Christology*, 83.

²³ Cited from the Orthodox Presbyterian website: http://www.opc.org/qa.html?question_id=243.

reflected in the Formula of Concord. Basically, the two outstanding features of Luther's view were that Christ descended into hell both in His body and soul, and that He descended as a triumphant Victor, not to complete His suffering and the work of atonement. But shortly after Luther's death, a controversy broke out in Hamburg, centered around Johann Aepinus, a pastor and superintendent in the church, who denied these points. This triggered a controversy over the timing, mode, and purpose of Christ's descent. Bente summarizes his view:

Aepinus taught that Christ's descent is a part of His suffering and atonement. While the body was lying in the grave, His soul descended into hell in order to suffer the qualms and pangs required to satisfy the wrath of God, complete the work of redemption, and render a plenary satisfaction, *satisfactio plenaria*. The descent is the last stage of Christ's humiliation and suffering, His triumph first beginning with the resurrection....²⁴

Opponents of Aepinus's view argued that his doctrine conflicted with and invalidated the words of Christ from the cross, such as, "*It is finished*," and, "*Today you will be with Me in Paradise*."

Aepinus died in 1553, and the immediate debate was suppressed at Hamburg. Yet, the theological questions involved were not settled. Some Lutheran pastors took the road of compromise and stated that the descent should be timed with both states of Christ. Even such theologians as Westphal, Flacius, Gallus, and Osiander partly agreed with Aepinus. Osiander said:

I am asked whether the descent of Christ pertains to the satisfaction made for us or only to His triumph over the enemies. I answer briefly that the descent of Christ into hell pertained to the satisfaction He merited for us as well as to the triumph over the enemies, just as His death on the cross does not belong to the one only, but to both.... Thus by descending into hell He rendered satisfaction for us who merited hell, according to Ps. 16.²⁵

As the controversy continued among Lutherans in Germany, a synod held in 1554 at Greifswald

made it a point expressly to deny that the descent of Christ involved any suffering of His soul, or that it was of an expiatory nature, or

²⁴ Bente, *Historical*, 193.

²⁵ Bente, *Historical*, 194.

that this article referred to the anguish of His soul before His death, or that it was identical with His burial. They affirmed the teaching of Luther, *viz.*, that the entire Christ, God and man, body and soul, descended into hell after His burial and before His resurrection.²⁶

With all the confusion and controversy surrounding Christ's descent, it became necessary to clarify this doctrine in the Formula of Concord. The writers of the Formula considered it advisable to handle the matter in Article IX of the Formula of Concord by simply reproducing what Luther had taught in a sermon concerning the descent into hell.

The Formula of Concord and Scripture

In view of all the "different explanations" of the article on Christ's descent into hell, which had been discovered among Lutheran theologians as well as ancient teachers of the Church, the Formula now states:

Hence we let matters rest on the simple statement of our Christian Creed, to which Dr. Luther directs us in the sermon that he held in the castle at Torgau in the year 1533, "I believe in the Lord Christ, God's Son, who died, was buried, and descended into hell." Herein the burial and the descent into hell are differentiated as distinct articles, and we simply believe that after the burial the entire person, God and man, descended into hell, conquered the devil, destroyed hell's power, and took from the devil all his might.

The statement is simple; yet it sets forth clearly the teaching that Luther and the writers of the Formula of Concord arrived at from Scripture concerning the timing, mode, and purpose of Christ's descent into hell.

Given the background of centuries of "different explanations" concerning Christ's descent, it took time for Luther's own understanding from Scripture to develop. The young Luther apparently saw the descent as part of Jesus' suffering. In "A Sermon on Preparing to Die" in 1519, he wrote:

So then, gaze at the heavenly picture of Christ, who descended into hell for your sake and was forsaken by God as one eternally damned when he spoke the words on the cross, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani!"—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

²⁶ Bente, *Historical*, 194.

In that picture your hell is defeated and your uncertain election is made sure.²⁷

Here, Luther seems to be saying that Christ's descent into hell was His suffering the punishment of damnation for us when He was forsaken on the cross. It is not clear whether Luther at this time believed in a literal descent into hell.

The teaching of the mature Luther concerning the descent, referred to in the Formula of Concord, is found in a sermon delivered at Torgau in 1533. Here, Luther made special reference to Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:24, 27:

But we ought ... simply to fix and fasten our hearts and thoughts on the words of the Creed, which says: "I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, dead, buried, and descended into hell," that is, in the entire person, God and man, with body and soul, undivided, "born of the Virgin, suffered, died, and buried"; *in like manner I must not divide it here either, but believe and say that the same Christ, God and man in one person, descended into hell*, but did not remain in it; as Ps. 16, 10 says of Him: "Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, nor suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." By the word "soul," He, in accordance with the language of the Scripture, does not mean, as we do, a being separated from the body, but the entire man, the Holy One of God, as He here calls Himself. But how it may have occurred that the man lies there in the grave, and yet descends into hell—that, indeed, we shall and must leave unexplained and uncomprehended.... Such, therefore is the plainest manner to speak of this article, that we may adhere to the words and cling to this main point, that for us, through Christ, hell has been torn to pieces and the devil's kingdom and power utterly destroyed, for which purpose He died, was buried, and descended,—so that it should no longer harm or overwhelm us, as He Himself says, Matt. 16, 18.²⁸

Here, Luther taught in accordance with the Scriptures that Christ, the God-man, in both body and soul, descended into hell as Victor over Satan and his kingdom, so that He has set us free from the Old Evil Foe.

²⁷ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Brown (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955–), 42:105.

²⁸ Martin Luther, St. L., 10:1128–29, quoted in Bente, *Historical*, 193.

This is where the testimony of Scripture leads us. The *sedes doctrinae* for Christ's descent into hell is 1 Peter 3:18–19, as referred to above in our ELS Catechism explanation. A close examination of this passage in its context reveals the timing, mode, and purpose of Christ's descent. 1 Peter 3:18–22 reads:

¹⁸ ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν, δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι· ¹⁹ ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν, ²⁰ ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ εἰς ἣν ὀλίγοι, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὀκτὼ ψυχαί, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος. ²¹ ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα, οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ῥύπου ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν, δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ²² ὃς ἔστιν ἐν δεξιᾷ [τοῦ] θεοῦ πορευθεὶς εἰς οὐρανὸν ὑποταγέντων αὐτῷ ἀγγέλων καὶ ἐξουσιῶν καὶ δυνάμεων.

¹⁸ *For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;* ¹⁹ *in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison,* ²⁰ *who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.* ²¹ *And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,* ²² *who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him (NASB).*

The Timing of Christ's Descent

Scaer notes that this passage in 1 Peter 3 “has all the marks of an ancient creed. Used in Rome, whence this epistle originates, it was probably already in use in the apostolic period in connection with Baptism, which is mentioned as the instrument of salvation in 1 Pt 3:21. The Petrine creed conveniently divides the life of Christ into His humiliation and exaltation.”²⁹ We find the division within verse 18.

Verse 18 begins by saying: “*Christ also died (ἀπέθανεν) for sins once for all ... having been put to death (θανατωθεὶς) in the flesh.*” There are two variants within Greek manuscripts: 1) ἀπέθανεν, “died” (NASB, NIV); and 2) ἔπαθεν from πάσχω, “suffered” (KJV, NKJV, ESV). Either variant would produce no significant change in thought. Πάσχω also carries

²⁹ Scaer, *Christology*, 84.

the sense “suffer death, be killed”³⁰ (Luke 22:15; Acts 1:3; 3:18; 17:3; Hebrews 9:26). Either aorist would indicate a completed action, along with the aorist passive participle θανατωθείς, “having been put to death.” Christ clearly suffered and died before He descended. This is the last step in His state of humiliation, reflected in the Apostles’ Creed when it states that He “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.”

Then verse 18 concludes with the words: “*But made alive (ζωοποιηθείς) in the spirit.*” He who had finished suffering and dying for sins, once and for all on the cross, was now vivified, made alive. This began His state of exaltation. It is in this glorified state that verse 19 reports: “*He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison*” (hell). Following that, verse 21 speaks of “*the resurrection of Jesus Christ*” (Easter). Then, verse 22 describes Him “*at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven*” (Ascension). These stages of Christ’s exaltation are reflected in the Apostles’ Creed when it states: “He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.”

On the proper ordering of events, Pieper quotes Quenstedt: “The exact time of the descent is according to the Petrine chain of events that moment which fell between the quickening and the resurrection of Christ strictly so-called” [the resurrection in the sense of appearance on earth].³¹

This excludes the false teaching that Christ’s “descent” was a merely figurative reference to suffering during His humiliation, particularly on the cross. Again, it would exclude the idea expressed by some that Christ’s descent to preach to the spirits in prison who were disobedient in the days of Noah (verse 20) refers to the pre-incarnate Christ in the time of Noah, or to the spirit of Christ in Noah as he preached.³²

The Mode of Christ’s Descent

Now we consider the mode of Christ’s descent. Here we focus on the words of verse 18: θανατωθείς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθείς δὲ πνεύματι, “*having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.*” The

³⁰ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, Wilbur F. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 634, 3.a.

³¹ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:314.

³² Matthew Zehmns, “The Descent of Christ into Hell” (WELS Northern Conference, Michigan District, September, 1972), 7; Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:318.

force of the datives *σαρκι* and *πνεύματι* has been the subject of much controversy. Some commentators take them as datives of means or instrument, while others take them as datives of reference.

Several versions translate *πνεύματι* with a capital "S"—"Spirit": "put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit" (NKJV, NIV). This understands that the body of Jesus, which had been lying in the grave, was made alive by the Holy Spirit (dative of means). This is problematic since, in order to be consistent, *σαρκι* would also have to be taken as a dative of means. However, Jesus was not put to death by means of His flesh.

Others translate *πνεύματι* with a small "s"—"spirit": "put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit" (ESV, NASB). This divides into different interpretations, whether "spirit" is taken to be a dative of means or dative of reference.

Lenski interprets both *σαρκι* and *πνεύματι* as a datives of means: "on the one hand, put to death by means of flesh, on the other hand, vivified by means of spirit." Thus, he says, "It was 'by means of flesh,' by having flesh, our human bodily nature, that men slew Christ." In the instant of death, Jesus deposited His human spirit into His Father's hands in Paradise (Luke 23:46). But then, Lenski explains: "The human spirit which went to heaven returned to the body that was lying in the tomb. Spirit and body, which had been separated in death, were reunited in the vivification."³³ Thus, Christ's body was vivified by means of His human spirit.

Some differentiate between the datives, interpreting *σαρκι* as a dative of reference and *πνεύματι* "spirit" as a dative of means. This includes many who have taken spirit" to refer to Christ's divine nature. Thus He was: "put to death with reference to the flesh, but made alive by means of the divine nature." Pieper notes: "The majority of the later Lutheran theologians take 'in the flesh' to mean 'according to the human nature' and 'in the spirit' to mean 'according to the divine nature.'"³⁴ Schaller explains: "after Christ had returned to bodily life in the tomb by virtue of his divine power (*πνεύματι*), he descended, in his glorified body..."³⁵ This view can be problematic, as it forces the parallel datives to be interpreted as different kinds of datives. Also, when we come to the following phrase in verse 19, "in which also He went and made proclamation," it

³³ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945), 154, 159.

³⁴ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:318.

³⁵ John Schaller, *Biblical Christology: A Study in Lutheran Dogmatics* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1981), 103.

leaves the door open to understanding that Christ's descent took place only according to His divine nature. But verse 18 says that Christ's flesh that had died was made alive, and thus He descended also according to His human nature.

Perhaps the best way to translate *σαρκι* and *πνεύματι* is to consider both as datives of reference: "He was put to death with respect to the flesh, and revived with respect to the spirit." Matthew Zehms quotes Professor Dau:

In the first place, we must know that the two datives are the same, having the same force in both cases; again, that they are not datives of instrument, but of reference. And secondly, *σαρκι* and *πνεύματι* cannot denote merely flesh and spirit, body and soul, not the two natures of the God-man as such, but they must denote the two modes of existence of the God-man, the former, His physical existence in a natural body, the latter, His spiritual mode of existence in a glorified body.³⁶

This was also the view of Luther. He understood "flesh" as it is used in Hebrews 5:7, where "*In the days of His flesh*" designates Christ's mode of subsistence during His earthly life (that is, His state of humiliation). In his commentary on 1 Peter 3, Luther says with reference to "*the flesh*":

Through His suffering Christ was taken from the life which is flesh and blood just like a human being on earth, who lives in flesh and blood, walks and stands, eats, drinks, sleeps, is awake, sees, hears, touches and feels, and in short, does what the body does. This is transitory. To it Christ died.³⁷

And with reference to "*the spirit*," Luther finds a parallel to 1 Corinthians 15:44–45, where Paul contrasts the natural body that is sown to the spiritual, glorified body that is raised:

To this life he has died, so that this life has ceased with Him, and He has now been transferred into another life, has been made alive according to the spirit, and has entered into a spiritual and supernatural life which embraces the whole life that Christ now has in body and soul. Consequently, He no longer has a physical body but has a body that is spiritual....

³⁶ Classroom lectures at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis quoted in Zehms, "The Descent," 2–3.

³⁷ Luther, *LW*, 30:111. See also Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:318–20.

But Christ is spiritual flesh and blood, not according to the external senses. He does not sleep and does not wake. Yet He knows everything and is everywhere. This is how we, too, shall be. He is the First Fruits, the Beginning, and the First-born of the spiritual life, as St. Paul says (1 Cor. 15:20, Col. 1:18); that is, He is the first who rose and entered into a spiritual life. Thus Christ now lives according to the spirit; that is, He is true man, but He has a spiritual body.³⁸

It was no mistake that Article IX of the Formula of Concord, "Christ's Descent into Hell," follows the discussion in Article VIII, "The Person of Christ." For there, the confessors have dealt at length with the communion of attributes between the divine and human natures in the person of Christ. Christ cannot be divided into two Persons, with His divine nature acting separately from His human nature. In Christ, all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form (Colossians 2:9). It is this undivided Christ who descended into hell. Scaer comments:

The descent to hell involves the concept of Jesus Christ as God's representative man who has overcome death. The second Adam conquered Satan in the place and for the benefit of the first Adam who succumbed to Satan and died. Lutheran Christology, with its doctrine of the communication of attributes, would be hard pressed to explain why at this point a disruption between the divine and human in Jesus was possible.³⁹

Kretzmann summarizes many of the points we have made:

Christ died, not according to His divine nature, although this was truly and inseparably united with His human nature also in death, but in the flesh, that is, in His fleshly, natural mode of existence, in which He lived and suffered in the days of humiliation. Thus the entire Christ, the God-man, was put to death in the flesh. This same Christ, so the apostle proceeds to tell us, after His death resumed life in the grave. He was quickened, made alive, in the sepulcher. This quickening was made in the spirit, or with respect to the Spirit, that is, in the new glorified state, in which Christ, in His transformed and glorified body, lived, acted, and moved about, came and went as a spirit. In this spirit, in this new spirit-life, glorified and exalted,

³⁸ Luther, *LW*, 30:111–12.

³⁹ Scaer, *Christology*, 85.

Christ, the God-man, according to His soul and body, retaining His flesh and blood in a glorified form, went forth, as our triumphant Champion, into the abode of the damned and of the devils.⁴⁰

The Purpose of Christ's Descent

Here we come to the purpose of Christ's descent. As we have seen, it was not to suffer for our sins. For already verse 18 has spoken of His finished work of suffering for our sins on the cross, prior to His vivification: "*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.*" Here we remember Christ's shout of victory from the cross, when His sacrifice for sin was complete: "*It is finished!*" (John 19:30)

The words of 1 Peter 3:19ff. shed more light on the purpose of Christ's descent. Verse 19 reads: ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν—"in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison." Φυλακῇ is a key word, defining the kind of place to which He descended. It means "the place of guarding, prison."⁴¹ It describes a place of punishment (Matthew 5:25; Luke 22:33). Here, it refers to hell, the place where the spirits of unbelievers go after death. In Revelation 20:7, it is the place where Satan is bound up to render him harmless in these last days, until he is released for a season.

Verse 20 describes the spirits in that place: ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ "*who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark.*" 2 Peter 2:4-5 identifies the place of the unbelievers who perished in the days of Noah as hell, the prison where the devil and his evil spirits are held for judgment: "*For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly*" (NKJV).

Therefore, Christ descended to hell, a prison of judgment and punishment for the spirits of the damned. Thus we reject the false teaching that His descent refers to His death or burial. Nor did He descend to a so-called *limbus patrum*, a falsely-taught realm of the dead in the underworld where Old Testament saints were said to have

⁴⁰ Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: The New Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), 533-34.

⁴¹ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek*, 867, 3.

waited for the Savior's coming to bring them to heaven. Scripture is clear that in the time of physical death, the souls of believers go immediately to heaven, while the souls of unbelievers immediately go to hell. In Luke 23:43, Jesus said to the repentant criminal: *"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."* In Luke 16:22–23, the unbelieving rich man died and was buried, and was in torment in hell.⁴²

Therefore, the purpose of Christ's descent to hell could not be to preach the Gospel to the spirits in prison in order to give them a second chance to be saved. Some have wrongly interpreted 1 Peter 4:6 this way, when it says: *"For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit"* (NKJV). But this passage does not refer to the same event as 1 Peter 3:19. Schaller explains:

In 3:19, Christ is the preacher, the spirits of those who believed not in the days of Noah are the hearers; the contents of the proclamation are not mentioned, nor is the purpose defined, or its effect noted. In 4:6, however, no preacher is named; the hearers are the dead, not of a special period, but of all past time; the contents of the preaching is the gospel, and its purpose is salvation.⁴³

1 Peter 4:6 refers to those who in this world heard the gospel and were brought out of unbelief and spiritual death and into saving faith and spiritual life in Christ. Thus, even if they have died in the flesh, they are alive in spirit with Christ in heaven.

When Christ preached (*ἐκήρυσεν*) to the spirits in prison, it was not a message of Gospel but of judgment. The verb *κηρύσσω* has the general meaning, "to proclaim publicly, to announce"—not necessarily good news. He proclaimed to those who had been disobedient in unbelief the fact that He had finished His work of salvation, which could have been theirs; however, because of their unbelief, they had forfeited that salvation and were eternally damned.

Certainly these unbelieving spirits in prison from Noah's day had many chances to hear God's Word through that *"preacher of righteousness"* (2 Peter 2:5), during the hundred and twenty years when the ark was being built (Genesis 6:3). The general context of 1 Peter 3:14–4:7

⁴² It is noteworthy that in the hymnal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, the Apostles' Creed reads: "he descended to the dead.*" When you follow the asterisk, it explains: *"*Or, 'he descended into hell,' another translation of this text in widespread use."* Cited from http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Apostles_Creed_Evangelical_Lutheran_Worship.pdf.

⁴³ Schaller, *Biblical Christology*, 102n1.

points to a proclamation of judgment. Peter is encouraging believers who are living in a world that is hostile to the Christian faith and are suffering persecution for the sake of righteousness, much like Noah. He is encouraging us to look beyond the wickedness of this world, as we live in full expectation of God's righteous judgment that is to come. For soon we will be delivered in heavenly glory, much as Noah and his family were delivered safely through the water of the Flood. Already, we stand delivered through the greater Flood of Baptism and faith in Christ, as 1 Peter 3:21 assures us: *"And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God"* (NASB). On the other hand, the generation that perished in the Flood of Noah's day is a type of every generation of unbelievers who will be damned in the Judgment when the Son of Man comes on the Last Day (Matthew 24:37–39; Luke 17:26–27).

Scripture also reveals that the purpose of Christ's descent was to proclaim His victory over Satan as our Savior from sin: *"having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it"* (Colossians 2:13–15, NKJV). In Genesis 3:15, when Satan had through temptation and sin caused Adam and all his descendents to fall and become subject to his dominion and death, God immediately promised the Savior who would conquer the Old Evil Foe and deliver us: *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel"* (NKJV). Now, through the substitutionary sacrifice of that promised Seed, through His once for all sacrifice on the cross to take away all our sin, Jesus has disarmed Satan. The Accuser has no more claim on us, now that our sins are forgiven, nailed to the cross. Therefore Christ, having won the victory for us on the cross, descended to hell to make a public spectacle of the devil and his kingdom. Kuschel explains the imagery in Colossians 2:15:

In the days of the apostles, the Roman emperor or senate often granted a victorious general a grand triumphal entry upon his return to Rome. There would be a procession through the streets of the city. The general, together with his legions, marched proudly, and the captives and spoils they had taken were displayed. In the

triumph of which the apostle speaks here, the defeated powers of hell are made to march as chained captives as a result of Christ's victory on the cross...

Here and in 1 Peter 3:18, 19, Scripture indicates that after Christ had achieved salvation, he descended into hell and publicly proclaimed his absolute, complete, and final victory over the devil and the hellish hosts. He publicly put them to shame.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Article IX of the Formula of Concord concludes:

We are not to concern ourselves with exalted and acute speculations about how this occurred. With our reason and five senses this article cannot be comprehended any more than the preceding one, how Christ has been made to sit at the right hand of the almighty power and majesty of God. We must only believe and cling to the Word. Then we shall retain the heart of this article and derive from it the comfort that neither hell nor the devil can take us or any believer in Christ captive or harm us.

When we confess in the Apostles' Creed, "He descended into hell," this article of faith is vitally tied to the next: "The third day He rose again from the dead." It is our creed of victory in Christ, as Scaer points out:

In a certain sense the Descent into hell and the resurrection appearances of Jesus are two sides of the same coin. The Descent into hell is the manifestation of God's victory in Jesus over Satan and his claim on mankind, just as the Resurrection appearances are the signs that man has been freed from the consequences of death. This understanding of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as God's victory over Satan is commonly called the *Christus Victor* view. Seeing the Descent as either a continuation or symbol of Christ's suffering or an explanation of His death deprives the Creed and the church of any specific article expressing victory over Satan....

The Descent into hell is the proclamation of victory in hell, just as the Resurrection is the declaration of that victory on earth.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Harlyn J. Kuschel, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 156.

⁴⁵ Scaer, *Christology*, 86, 88.

Truly, the article of Christ's descent into hell is for our comfort. We can derive its comfort only when we let Scripture teach us. As the historical controversy has shown, if we rely on human reason to speculate on the timing, mode, and purpose of Christ's descent, we lose comfort. By our reason and five senses, we cannot see beyond Jesus' suffering and death; we cannot see beyond the grave or speculations of the afterlife; we cannot see Satan defeated. But by Scripture alone, the Holy Spirit reveals to us that Christ has descended into hell as our exalted Savior, as our God and Brother, as our triumphant Champion; who by His death on the cross has completely finished winning our salvation from sin, death, and Satan; and who rose again on the third day, with all power and authority to bring us, body and soul, to live with Him in heaven's eternal glory. Therefore we sing with C. F. W. Walther:

He's risen, He's risen, Christ Jesus, the Lord;
 He opened death's prison, the Incarnate Word.
 Break forth, hosts of heaven, in jubilant song
 And earth, sea, and mountain the praises prolong.

The foe was triumphant when on Calvary
 The Lord of creation was nailed to the tree.
 In Satan's domain did the hosts shout and jeer,
 For Jesus was slain, whom the evil ones fear.

But short was their triumph, the Savior arose,
 And death, hell, and Satan He vanquished, His foes;
 The conquering Lord lifts His banner on high.
 He lives, yea, He lives, and will nevermore die.

O where is thy sting, death? We fear thee no more;
 Christ rose, and now open is fair Eden's door.
 For all our transgressions His blood does atone;
 Redeemed and forgiven, we now are His own.

Then sing your hosannas and raise your glad voice;
 Proclaim the blest tidings that all may rejoice.
 Laud, honor, and praise to the Lamb that was slain;
 Who sitteth in glory and ever shall reign.

(*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, Hymn 350) 

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A Confessional Lutheran Understanding of Christian Apologetics and its Practice

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PAUL REPLIED, “I AM NOT INSANE, MOST EXCELLENT Festus, but I am clearly speaking words that are true and sensible. Certainly the king to whom I am freely speaking knows about these things. Indeed, I cannot believe that any of these things has escaped his notice, because this has not been done in a corner...” Then Agrippa said to Paul, “In such a short time are you going to persuade me to become a Christian?” (from a dialogue in Caesarea that included Governor Festus, St. Paul, and King Agrippa; Acts 26:25–28, EHV).

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (St. Paul to Christians in Rome; Rom. 10:17, ESV).

You are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel (Paul writing to Christians in Philippi while imprisoned in Rome; Phil. 1:7b, CSB).

Apologetics on Record Yet Differences Remain

Confessional Lutherans have discussed, debated, encouraged, utilized, or in some way or another dealt with apologetics for a long time. Our Evangelical Lutheran Synod has given it attention, perhaps more than most. There have been Reformation Lectures printed in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* and *Sentinel*, courses at both the seminary and college, and numerous synod resolutions (e.g., 1985, 2012, 2013,

2014, 2015, 2018, and 2019). And there are statements, including the “Doctrine Committee Apologetics Study Document” (approved in 2012) that have been helpful and settling.¹

Yet in spite of statements and resolutions, confusion continues among us regarding what it is, its purpose, its importance, its usefulness, or how to go about it.

My aim is twofold. First, to establish a biblical and confessional Lutheran explanation of Christian apologetics by tackling head on two faulty or deficient understandings of apologetics (“two ditches” as I call them), including the one with which we confessional Lutherans (understandably) wrestle. Second, to encourage confidence in the proper use of apologetics among both pastors and laity.

I will be working with a simple definition that complements the 2012 “Study Document” explanation:

¹ The document reads in part:

The term “apologetics” refers to the defense of the Christian faith. Defending the Christian faith may include an explanation of the basic beliefs of Christianity. It may also include giving grounds or reasons for accepting the Christian gospel message as true or a refutation of criticisms of the faith, as well as exposing inadequacies in alternative religions and worldviews....

The heart of Christian confession and defense is the gospel itself—the revelation of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God made flesh and his sacrificial atonement by which God justifies the sinner. As we can see from the apostles’ activity in the book of Acts, when Christians are called upon to defend the Christian faith or the gospel itself, they will always confess the person of Jesus Christ and his work and give witness to the gospel (Acts 2, 4, 19, 22, 26 etc.)....

Human reason is a gift of God (First Article in Luther’s *Small Catechism*), even though it is corrupted by human sin. We distinguish between a ministerial and a magisterial use of reason. Reason is used ministerially—as a servant—when it is an instrument in presenting and apprehending the gospel, and when it is used to show the foolishness of unbelief. Reason is used magisterially—as a master—when it stands in judgment over Scripture and its teachings, or when it reinterprets or dismisses clear teachings of Scripture to agree with human reason and experience. We reject the magisterial or critical use of reason applied to the teachings of Holy Scripture....

The cause of conversion or regeneration is not to be sought in the human presentation of evidence and argument, as important as they are, but only in the inherent power of God’s word of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 2:8, 9; 2 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 1:23)....

The Christian confession and defense will always be done with the understanding that regeneration is only the work of the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace, word and sacrament, and is not aided or effected by man. The absolute predominance of *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *sola Scriptura* (*solus Christus*) will always be made clear in carrying out the apologetic task.... (<https://els.org/our-work-together/dc-2/apologeticsdoc/>).

Christian apologetics is in the business of making the case for—giving evidence for—the truth of Christianity, and in particular, the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the only Redeemer from sin, death, and the devil.

Reasons for Struggles and Disagreements: The Bondage of the Will and Efficient Causes

Most of the confusion and disagreement regarding apologetics centers on the teachings found in Article II of *The Formula of Concord*. In the *Epitome*, we read,

[W]hat kind of powers do human beings have after the fall of our first parents, before rebirth, on their own, in spiritual matters? Are they able, with their own powers, before they receive new birth through God's Spirit, to dispose themselves favorably toward God's grace and prepare themselves to accept the grace offered by the Holy Spirit in the Word and the holy sacraments, or not? ...

1. On this article it is our teaching, faith, and confession that human reason and understanding are blind in spiritual matters and understand nothing on the basis of their own powers, as it is written, "Those who are natural do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them and they are unable to understand them [1 Cor. 2:14] when they are asked about spiritual matters.

2. Likewise, we believe, teach, and confess that the unregenerated human will is not only turned away from God but has also become God's enemy, that it has only the desire and will to do evil and whatever is opposed to God, as it is written, "The inclination of the human heart is evil from youth [Gen. 8:21]." Likewise, "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed, it cannot [Rom. 8:7]. As little as a corpse can make itself alive for bodily, earthly life, so little can people who through sin are spiritually dead raise themselves up to spiritual life, as it is written, "When we were dead through our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ" [Eph. 2:5]... .

3. However, God the Holy Spirit does not effect conversion without means, but he uses the preaching and hearing of God's Word to accomplish it, as it is written (Rom. 1[:16]), the gospel is a "power of God" to save. Likewise, faith comes from hearing God's Word (Rom. 10[:17]) ... In this Word the Holy Spirit is present and opens hearts that they may, like Lydia in Acts 16[:14], listen

to it and thus be converted, solely through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, who alone accomplishes the conversion of the human being. For apart from his grace our “willing and exerting,” our planting, sowing, and watering, amount to nothing “if he does not give the growth” [Rom. 9:16; 1 Cor. 3:7]. As Christ says, “Apart from me, you can do nothing” [John 15:5]. With these brief words he denies the free will its power and ascribes everything to God’s grace, so that no one has grounds for boasting before God (1 Cor. [9:16])... .

Therefore, we reject and condemn all the following errors as contrary to the guiding principle of God’s Word: ...

2. We also reject the error of the Pelagians, who taught that human beings could convert themselves to God, believe the gospel ... out of their own powers apart from the grace of the Holy Spirit.

3. We also reject the error of the Semi-Pelagians, who teach that human beings can initiate their conversions by means of their own powers, but cannot complete it without the grace of the Holy Spirit.

4. Likewise, the teaching that, although human beings are too weak to initiate conversion with their own free will before rebirth, and thus convert themselves to God on the basis of their own natural powers ... nonetheless, once the Holy Spirit has made a beginning through the preaching of the Word and in it has offered his grace, the human will is able out of its own natural powers to a certain degree, even though small and feeble, to do something, to help and cooperate, to dispose and prepare itself for grace, to grasp this grace, to accept it, and to believe the gospel... .

Therefore, before the conversion of the human being there are only two efficient causes,² the Holy Spirit and God’s Word as the instrument of the Holy Spirit, through which he effects conversion; the human creature must hear this Word, but cannot believe or accept it on the basis of its own powers but only through the grace and action of God the Holy Spirit.³

² “*Causa efficiens* = the efficient cause: a philosophical term used in theology indicating the prime or absolute cause or reason for an action or condition; the instigating cause” (David P. Scaer, *A Latin Ecclesiastical Glossary for Francis Pieper’s Christian Dogmatics* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1978).

³ *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 491ff.

The Two Ditches to Avoid When Considering Apologetics In View of the Confessions

One ditch into which many fall when it comes to apologetics is simply to ignore the bondage of the will, fall into some form of Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, or synergism, and believe, teach, or act as if man *can* “by his own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ . . .” (*Small Catechism*). This is done by our evangelical neighbors, and done frequently. When one approaches the subjects of evangelism and conversion handicapped—where the bondage of the will is denied or not fully grasped and where the means of grace are therefore ignored—something else can easily be viewed as the efficient cause. Reason rises to the surface. In his book *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*,⁴ Nabeel Qureshi describes how he wrestled with the evidence for Christianity over against evidence for Islam. It is a fascinating and important read as he is brought from a deep and committed Islamic faith to a confession of truth of the person of Christ. It includes good and necessary apologetic material. However, an implicit and unfortunate teaching of the book is that one can “by his own reason” believe in Jesus Christ. I could not find any reference to the gospel as “the power of God for salvation” or that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 1:16; 10:17). Word and sacraments as the means of grace are not mentioned. One is left only with reason. Perhaps this is why little attention is given to sin and forgiveness in the book.⁵ The age-old battle of Lutherans and their forefathers against Pelagianism, semi-Pelagianism, and synergism is not over and never will be.

Another ditch, one that receives attention among us, is expressed in statements such as, “Apologetics is *merely* preaching the law. It is an application of truth and fact that impacts the conscience and drives one to repentance. It can reveal wrong thinking on behalf of those who contradict God’s Word. Apologetics does not change the heart, only the gospel can do that.” Or, “While it can have a preparatory function of clearing away obstacles which keep unbelievers from giving serious consideration to the claims of Scripture, apologetics does not in any way effect conversion. That is accomplished only by the power of the Holy

⁴ Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014, 2016, 2018). The latest edition, due to the premature death of Nabeel in 2017, was copyrighted in his wife’s name, Kathryn Michelle Qureshi.

⁵ There is only a portion of one chapter where the author writes about the great comfort of forgiveness he is finding in Christianity (ibid., 200–202).

Spirit through the Word of the Gospel. Apologetics *falls in the realm of the law...*⁶ The implication is if one does not accept the understanding of apologetics found or suggested in these statements, he has fallen or is about to fall into some Pelagian/synergistic ditch. This would be true, *but only if* the premise (“apologetics is *merely* law preaching”) is correct.

However, such statements, while seeking to be faithful to the biblical and Lutheran teachings on the bondage of the will, the limitations of reason, the means of grace, the word alone, etc., do not apply these teachings to apologetics as thoughtfully as they should, and therefore sometimes misapply them. There can be a forced application of *the proper distinction between the law and gospel* paradigm that is unnecessary and inappropriate. But most importantly, such statements fail to deal with the teachings and examples of apologetics found in Scripture.⁷ Apologetics and the treasured doctrines mentioned in Article II of the Formula of Concord, though paradoxical, are not contradictory.

For the record: There are two *efficient causes*, and two alone: “the Holy Spirit and God’s Word as the instrument of the Holy Spirit” (Article II, *Epitome*; see above). Second, reason never can be an efficient cause; it is limited, and, within natural man, is in a firmly established state of rebellion toward God. Finally, distinguishing between law and gospel is the bread and butter of any pastor worth his salt; this distinction always guides the called minister in preaching, teaching, mission work, evangelism, worship, confession of sin, and making the case for the truth of Christ (apologetics).

“My Reason and All My Senses”—We Cannot Not Use Them

Our senses and reason obviously work together: Information or evidence comes to our senses—we hear something (a train whistle, a

⁶ The first quotation is a combination of statements (somewhat paraphrased) made by good Lutheran pastors. The second quotation is from “A Statement on Apologetics” (Mankato: *Evangelical Lutheran Synod Report 1985*), 70, emphasis added. This statement was drawn up by our seminary faculty, acknowledged by the Doctrine Committee as a “clear and concise summar[y] of how confessional Lutherans view [this matter],” and adopted by the 1985 convention. I met with the Doctrine Committee regarding this statement and made the point that whereas the statement was not wrong, it missed an important aspect of apologetics and therefore was open to misunderstanding. There was no disagreement at the meeting. “The Doctrine Committee Apologetics Study Document” (quoted above and also approved by the synod, 2012) clears up some of the deficiency.

⁷ Besides these shortcomings among us Lutherans, I have also observed a too simple, unrealistic, and misapplied understanding of reason, leading to an unnecessary precaution against the use of apologetics.

classroom lecture, a directive from a police officer), we see something (a speed limit sign, daylight coming through a window, the Grand Teton, an article from a newspaper describing a court trial), we touch something (a hot forehead, a pulse on a wrist), we smell something, we taste something, *and then* reason generally kicks in. Specifically, it makes a judgment of some sort. It may not make a right or the best judgment, but it makes a judgment nonetheless: “a train is coming”, “my professor is wise,” “I better slow down,” “it’s morning,” “that’s beautiful,” “the man is guilty,” “she has a fever,” “he’s still alive,” etc. We conclude something is true or false, right or wrong, beautiful or ugly, a good idea or bad idea, better or worse, smart or stupid, opinion or fact, myth or real history, important or unimportant, binding or not ... or something in between these extremes. That’s the connection between our senses and our reason. That’s the way we are created. Some have keener senses than others. Some are better at reasoning than others. Children are developing the use of their senses and reason. The elderly begin to lose some of each. But typically, there is always this process. It’s built into us by nature; it’s unavoidable.

Reason is not pure evil. The eyes can look on a woman lustfully, but they can also admire the beauty of sunrise or see that it’s time to get up by looking at a clock. The mouth can curse God, but it can also request a glass of water because of thirst. Reason, as a gift from God, has legitimate and necessary functions that cannot be classified as sinful. Reason can add, assess, conclude, solve a riddle, comprehend calculus, and find a person guilty or not guilty based on the evidence. Reason does not reject everything Scripture teaches or puts forth as true or factual. Reason weighs evidence, including the evidence given for the truth of Christianity and Christ, and it can come to a conclusion. What reason cannot do and will not do, what it will always reject and rebel against, is the truth of the bondage of the will and the doctrine of God’s grace. Reason can accept some truths of Scripture, but it will reject all Scriptural teachings if it sees these teachings somehow supporting the real implications of the law and the gospel. The true understanding of the Old Adam and the true understanding of grace alone, Scripture alone, faith alone, and Christ alone—these sinful reason will not tolerate.

But this same reason can still weigh evidence, even biblical or extra-biblical evidence in behalf of the truth of Christianity and Christ—evidence that comes to the senses and upon which reason can make a judgment.

This is the way evidential apologetics works.⁸ There is evidence that comes to the senses. Then a judgment will or can be made. The healing of the blind man in John 9 is a classic example where evidence comes to the senses and reason attempts or struggles to make judgments or come to conclusions:⁹

- *The neighbors*: “The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, ‘Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?’ Some said, ‘It is he.’ Others said, ‘No, but he is like him’” (vv. 8–9).
- *The Pharisees*: “‘This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.’ But others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?’ And there was a division among them.” “The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight.” “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” “And they reviled him, saying, ‘You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses’” (vv. 16, 18, 24, 28).
- *The parents*: “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself” (vv. 20–21).
- *The man himself*: “So they said again to the blind man, ‘What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?’ He said, ‘He is a prophet.’” “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing” (vv. 17, 25, 30–33).
- Reason can choose to deny what the evidence clearly states because reason will be ruled by one’s will which is typically invested in one’s false belief system, religion, or worldview, not to mention what the fall has done to reason. Therefore, a judgment may be right, or it may be wrong. “Yet many of the people believed in him. They said, ‘When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?’” (John 7:31). “There was again a division among the Jews because of

⁸ That is evidential apologetics. Presuppositional apologetics is a different animal.

⁹ Verses quoted in this paper are from the ESV unless otherwise noted. *Emphasis* is mine.

these words [of Jesus claiming to be the good shepherd who would lay down his life and take it up again for the sheep]. Many of them said, ‘He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?’ Others said, ‘These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?’” (John 10:19–21). Reason can even make a right judgment intellectually, but there may be no ascent of the will to what is clearly true. Nicodemus: “Rabbi, *we know* that you are a teacher who has come from God, *for no one could perform these signs you do unless God were with him.*” Christ: “Truly I tell you ... *you do not accept our testimony*” (John 3:2, 11).¹⁰

In the cases cited above (and below), I am mostly dealing with a unique kind of information that comes to the senses: miracles. But whether the information is supernatural or natural (such as Jesus using simple logic or quoting from the Old Testament in defending the truth, as do Paul and others in the book of Acts and elsewhere), the process is still the same: the senses receive information—there is evidence—and reason generally makes some sort of judgment.

The Right Questions

The question is not whether there is evidence that comes to the senses. It clearly does and that is the nature of apologetics. Neither is the question whether reason is able to make a judgment. It certainly does, even if it is wrong. But when considering the different apologetic texts in Scripture, there is one question in particular I would call out-of-order: “Is this *evidence* for the truth of Christianity law preaching?” Asking that question of apologetics is like asking, “Is *artwork* depicting the crucifixion of Christ law preaching?” To make the point clearer, take the ultimate apology, the clearest evidence and defense for the truth of Christ, and try applying the same question there: “Are the appearances of the resurrected Christ law preaching?” This is not the right question. The question should be: “Are his resurrection appearances *used in the service of*¹¹ the law?” But we can’t stop there as we consider various Scriptural examples: “Are the appearances of the resurrected Christ ever somehow *used in the service of* the gospel?” And we go one more: “Are

¹⁰ We can argue about whether certain “believings” were real saving faith. But even if some were not, the point still stands that senses saw or heard, and reason made some sort of judgment regarding the person or work of Christ.

¹¹ By “in the service of,” I am including both intent (or purpose) and result. An apology presented may be *intended* to convict a person of sin and that also may be the *result*. An apology may be *intended* to lead a person to faith and that may somehow be the *result*. However, the intent does not always guarantee the result.

there cases where the visible-to-the-eyes resurrected Christ are used *in the service of both?*” We then need to apply these same questions to other apologies as well—all those pieces of evidence that come to the senses and upon which reason can make a judgment. But then follows this question, the answer to which is very important: “If apologetics is used in the service of the gospel, how so?” And this question leads to another that is begged by the statements on apologetics mentioned above: “Is it ever accurate to say that apologetics, somehow, is a *cause* of conversion?”¹²

There is a tightrope to walk here. But that walk must be guided by Scripture alone.

Apologetics In the Four Gospels

The following sections from the gospels deal with apologetics—evidence that comes to the senses and where judgments are or can be made. Is this evidence used in the service of the law, the gospel, or both? If it is used in the service of the gospel, how can this be without violating and throwing overboard the clear teachings on the bondage of the will and the two efficient causes? And can apologetics ever be classified as a cause *in some sense* so it is distinguished from an efficient cause?

What follows is a sampling of verses¹³ (*emphasis mine*) along with comments:

Matt. 9: ⁴But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? ⁵For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk?’ ⁶*But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins*”—he then said to the paralytic— “Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”

Comments: This is one of the clearest passages in which proof is offered by Jesus for something he has just done, as if Jesus is saying: “Yes, I, the Son of Man, have the authority to forgive sins, and here is the evidence.” Is this evidence that is visible to those present used in the

¹² The careful wording “efficient causes” by the confessors seems to raise the possibility of “non-efficient” causes. My conclusion and summary of this is found toward the end of this essay under the heading “Are There, Then, Non-Efficient Causes?”

¹³ In my research I found over two hundred sections (individual verses or multiple verses) in the Gospels, Acts, and epistles that touched upon apologetics in some way or another. I narrowed this list down to a hundred and thirty-six that I consider to be more clear or pertinent to this discussion. For this list, see Appendix A. Applying the questions mentioned above (“Is this used in the service of the law, the gospel?” etc.) to these verses is appropriate in most cases. I have attempted to be fair in my choice of passages, listing those that appear to speak for themselves, the conclusions being fairly obvious.

service of the law or the gospel or possibly both? We let the words of Scripture speak for themselves: it is used in some sense in the service of the gospel (“forgiveness of sins”). This does not, however, mean that forgiveness can or will be received by anyone simply because he can reason. Nor does this exclude this proof being used in the service of the law. The efficacy of the law or the gospel is not the question here. The proof for at least one of them—the gospel—is.

Matt. 11: ²Now when John *heard* in prison *about the deeds of the Christ*, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” ⁴And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John *what you hear and see*: ⁵*the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.*”

Comments: Jesus is telling John (and his disciples) to connect the dots—to reason and make a judgment: “I am performing these miracles predicted of the Messiah in the Scriptures and I am preaching the gospel to poor sinners, therefore, what is the reasonable conclusion? You asked me a question; I am pointing you to evidence; so figure it out.” Is this being used in the service of the law or the gospel? If one brings with him to the table a grasp of, for example, Isaiah 53 (which John undoubtedly did), then this is used in the service of the gospel. If there is no understanding of personal sin and the vicarious Suffering Servant, then the miracles referenced by Jesus could just as well be used in the service of the law.

Matt. 11: ²⁰Then he began to *denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.* ²¹“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For *if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago* in sackcloth and ashes. ²²But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

Comments: Here we have an instance where the miracles of Christ, according to his own words, should have brought about repentance. That is, they were used in the service of the law (intent). And the miracles of Christ would continue to be used in the service of the law for these unbelievers, now and in the future, as a reminder of their rejection of the Christ. This does not mean, however, that miracles can only be used

in the service of the law. One should not say, “Aha! A clear example of proof being used to convict people of sin. Therefore, this must be the case in all other places where proof is put forth.”

Matt. 12: ²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.”

²⁵ Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “*Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.* ²⁶ *And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?* ²⁷ *And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?* Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁸ *But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*

Comments: This section is interesting for several reasons. First, based on what the Pharisees observed, they judged Jesus to be in league with the prince of demons. They saw and dealt with the evidence, but came to a faulty conclusion *because* they could not free themselves from and needed to maintain their false religion. Second, Jesus uses simple logic to point out their irrationality, essentially saying, “You Pharisees have checked your brain at the door.” Jesus uses both reason and his miracles in the service of the law. The intent was to convict, even though that was not the result (as far as we know). But it must not go unnoticed that he also says, “if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, *then the kingdom of God has come.*” Which kingdom was he talking about? The kingdom of grace. Whether they believed it or not, whether they understood it or not, his exorcisms also pointed to grace, and in that way they are used in the service of the gospel.

Matt. 26: ⁷⁴ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.” And immediately the rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

Comments: Peter had heard the prediction by Christ earlier. Then when Peter denied him, heard the rooster, and remembered the words of Christ—seeing the prophecy fulfilled—he wept bitterly. Fulfillment of prophecy used in the service of the law.

Mark 16: ²⁰ And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and *confirmed the message* [τὸν λόγον] *by accompanying signs*.

Comments: What message or what word was confirmed? “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (16:16). Both the word of gospel and the law are confirmed (βεβαιουσῶντος: “established”, “secured”) by the evidence of the miraculous and observable signs of the apostles.

Luke 2: ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David *a Savior*, who is Christ the Lord.¹² And *this will be a sign for you*: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

Comments: Whereas the appearance of the angel of the Lord had just filled the shepherds with great fear (an observance that was used in the service of the law), the baby in a manger was a sign of a Savior who came to save people from sin (used in the service of the gospel).

Luke 5: ⁶ And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking.⁷ They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.⁸ But *when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees*, saying, “*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*”⁹ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken,¹⁰ ... And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.”

Comments: Information comes to Peter’s senses—proof that this Jesus is no ordinary man—and Peter rightly judges that he, a sinful man, dare not be the presence of this holy Whatever-He-Is sent from God. Observable and miraculous information is used in the service of the law, followed by the word of the gospel, “Do not be afraid.”

Luke 16: ²⁷ “He said, “Then I beg you, father, send [Lazarus] to my father’s home,²⁸ because I have five brothers—to warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.”²⁹ “Abraham said, ‘*They have Moses and the Prophets. Let them listen to them.*’³⁰ “No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘*but if someone from the dead goes to them,*

they will repent.'³¹ "Abraham replied to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Comments: This has become a *sedes doctrinae* for many when it comes to apologetics. And it *is* important for apologetics. It has great application. But it does not cover all the bases; it is not intended to answer any and all questions regarding the role of proof in evangelism and conversion. For starters, it should be kept in mind that the rich man would not have been thinking of repentance for his brothers in a Christian sense. The rich man, or any unbeliever, whether he be on earth or in hell, has no true understanding of the cross. It is foolishness or a stumbling block to him. The gospel would never enter into the salvation equation for him. The other difficulty of using this as the final and only word on apologetics is that it would then be in conflict with other clear examples and teachings where such observable evidence of a resurrection somehow accomplished what it would not accomplish with the rich man's brothers. See comments below on Luke 24 and John 20:19–29 where seeing and touching the resurrected Christ were used not merely in the service of the law.

So, what *do* we take away from this account? First, Jesus was not saying that evidence of a resurrection is unnecessary and would always do nothing. He *was* saying that no amount of evidence would convince those who refused to believe, something confirmed in Acts as the apostles presented resurrection evidence. People have no ability to accept Christ on their own, but they are very capable of rejecting him, in spite of the evidence. The other thing to learn is this: apologetics divorced from "Moses and the Prophets" (that is, divorced from *the Christ-focused and gospel-centered message of the Old Testament Scriptures*—Luke 24:27) is totally useless. "Moses and the Prophets" is ultimately and primarily about Christ. If all one hears is evidence for the existence of God, for Jesus of Nazareth as a real historical figure, for the superiority of a young earth over against any form of evolution, or even testimony of a man resurrected (all of which *are* important), I might just as well spend my time convincing him of the rules of arithmetic, and leave it at that. Math won't save him, and neither will believing that a man named Jesus walked this earth, if that's all he has. "Moses and the Prophets" teaches me that I am desperately wicked, that God is a God of justice, but, *above all*, the good news that this Messiah alone is my righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. What this text does *not* teach, however, is that

apologetics is unimportant or useless; it does not state that evidence cannot be used in the service of the gospel.

Luke 24: ³⁶As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” ³⁷But they were *startled and frightened* and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹*See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see.* For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰And when he had said this, *he showed them his hands and his feet.* ⁴¹And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “*Have you anything here to eat?*” ⁴²They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³and *he took it and ate before them.*

Comments: According to one understanding of apologetics (an incomplete one), these appearances—and the lengths to which Jesus went *to convince them* of his resurrection—were unnecessary. After all, if the disciples, just like us, could not by their own reason or strength believe in Jesus, all God really needed to do was send a prophet simply to *say*: “Jesus who was crucified for you has risen.” No appearances needed. Yet Jesus appeals to their senses and reason. He is directing the apostles and others present to use their senses and reason; he is asking them to look at and touch the specific marks that identified him as the one who really, truly was dead by crucifixion so they might believe and say, “It really is you, alive, risen!” and thereby alleviate their fears and doubts. When doubts continued regarding his identity (“maybe we’re seeing a ghost!”), he provided more evidence to confirm an obvious reality: “Watch me eat some of your food right in front of you.” It was important and essential that Jesus confirm the reality of his resurrection. What he did here and over the next 40 days was give them “many convincing [i.e., observable] proofs” (Acts 1:3, CSB) that begged for and demanded the only reasonable judgment. But it is important to note that such appearances and proofs could be and were used in the service of the law as well, even though being used in the gospel predominates.

John 2: ¹¹This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

John 2: ²³Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many *believed* in his name *when they saw the signs* that he was doing.

John 11: ⁴⁴The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus

said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”⁴⁵ Many of the Jews *therefore*, who had come with Mary *and had seen what he did*, believed in him.

Comments: A common feature in the Gospel of John is a miracle followed by believing: Evidence (for his person or work) followed by faith. It is possible that some time before believing, these miracles were used in the service of the law, to work contrition. But the context gives no evidence for this.¹⁴ One is not allowed to import something into the text unless it is confirmed by parallel accounts or it is a clear teaching from elsewhere in Scripture that demands such an interpretation. What we simply have in the passages above is evidence (a sign, a miracle) followed by faith. In other words, these accounts are saying evidence is being used in the service of the gospel. Again, this does not exclude miracles being used in the service of the law, but that is not found here.

John 6: ¹⁴ *When the people saw the sign that he had done*, they said, “*This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!*”¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself... .
²⁶ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, *you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.*”²⁷ Do not work for the *food that perishes*, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you... .²⁸ Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?”
²⁹ Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”³⁰ So they said to him, “Then *what sign do you do*, that we may see and believe you?... .³⁶ “But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe... .⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”⁴¹ So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.”⁴² They said, “*Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’*”⁴³ Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves.⁴⁴ *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...* .⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

¹⁴ This is not to suggest the law had not done its work prior to believing. Obviously it would have, necessarily.

⁵²The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “*How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*” ⁵³So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, *unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you...*” ⁶⁰When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “*This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?*” ... ⁶⁶After this *many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.* ⁶⁷So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, *to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,*” ⁶⁹and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

Comments: It is important to see how this account fits with previous and following sections of John. The discourse follows the feeding of the five thousand. A miracle was performed that confirmed a number of things, including Jesus as the bread of life sent from heaven. The crowd saw and partook of the miraculous food and was then determined to make him king by force, for they judged him to be the Prophet. How they understood “the Prophet” becomes clear in the latter verses. When they catch up to him the next day, they are still determined to make him king. However, they do not believe in Jesus as the true bread of life. One might conclude that the miracle, therefore, was not used in the service of the gospel because it did not produce within them such a faith. But the distinction needs to be made between purpose and result. I may intend one thing, but that may not be the result. The unfulfilled result does not negate the purpose or intent. God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. But that result does not happen. So, it can still be said that this miracle was used in the service of the gospel (“I am the bread of life”) even though no one there believed it. Like the Pharisees above, these unbelievers were so invested in their false worldview (a materialistic, heaven-on-earth, prosperity gospel) that they were blind to the intent of the miracle, interpreted it according to their false theology (“you can and will give us everything we need for the here and now”), and ended up just as firmly entrenched in their rejection of Christ as any Pharisee or Sadducee. But there is something else to note here. Support for the bondage of the will and the efficient causes is here: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

John 10: ²⁴So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us

plainly.”²⁵ Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. *The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me,*”²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.

John 10: ³⁷ If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; ³⁸ *but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.*”

John 12: ⁹ When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well,¹¹ *because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.*

John 14: ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, *or else believe on account of the works themselves.*

John 20: ³⁰ Now *Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;* ³¹ *but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Comments: See also the comments under John 2 and 11 above. One of the takeaways from these verses is that the observable evidence of miracles is a reason to believe in Jesus. Again, evidence is being used in the service of the gospel. I have always been confused by a broader interpretation of John 20:30–31, as if “these” (v. 31) is talking about something other than “signs” (v. 30).¹⁵ Whereas the broader teaching is true, viz., “*this gospel of John* is written that you might believe...,” it is quite difficult to conclude on the basis of the Greek that this is the primary meaning of these verses.¹⁶ I don’t mind this teaching at all, but

¹⁵ For example, the headings for these two verses in the ESV, EHV, and CSB say, “The Purpose of *This Gospel*” (emphasis added) or something similar. It is more accurate to say, “The Purpose of *These Signs*”.

¹⁶ Σημεῖα whenever it is used in John is always a reference to his miracles, miracles that confirm and point to—are a sign of—the reality of his divinity and his work. Luther (see Appendix B, #7) and J. Ylvisaker (*The Gospels, A Synoptic Harmony*, 790) agree that “these” is referring to “signs”. See also Michael K. Smith, “The Purpose of the Gospel of

we sell John short if we see it as the essential meaning here. The connection between ταῦτα and σημεῖα is right there, it's contextual, both within these two verses and in the broader context. We therefore partially miss John's apologetic thrust when we assume ταῦτα is something other than signs. The meaning is clear: "These signs, performed by Jesus in the presence of his disciples, are written down by an eyewitness so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

John 12: ³⁷Though he had done *so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him*, ³⁸so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

Comments: Though believing often follows the observable evidence of signs and miracles, that is not always the case. The intent of the signs is clear (believing in Jesus, thus serving the gospel), even when there is no such result. What such verses show us is that many will remain firmly entrenched in unbelief in spite of the evidence; no amount of proof will change a thing.

John 19: ³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that *he was already dead*, they did not break his legs. ³⁴But *one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water*.³⁵ *He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true*, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. ³⁶For *these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled*: "Not one of his bones will be broken."³⁷ And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

Comments: John is telling his readers they ought to believe Jesus died on the cross because he clearly observed it, verified by the piercing and the flow of blood and water. One is to believe that Jesus (earlier shown to be the Son of God by his words and deeds) was truly dead *on the basis of what John saw with his eyes*. It's a matter of historical record. To put it another way: the death of the crucified Christ is to be believed not merely because the apostle says so, but because of his reliable eyewitness testimony.

John According to John 20:30–31," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 56, 4 (December 2016): 296–304.

John 20: ¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."²⁰ When he had said this, *he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.* ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "*Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.*"²⁸ Thomas answered him, "*My Lord and my God!*"

Comments: Here are two points to add (or reemphasize) to what was said above regarding Luke 24: First, we see a close connection between the senses and reason working together on the one hand ("we saw and touched, therefore it is him!") and the proclaiming of the gospel on the other ("If you forgive ... they are forgiven"). That connection is real. The Office of the Keys would not be a reality without a resurrected Christ, a resurrection confirmed by his appearances which in turn confirms the Office of the Keys.¹⁷

I also see here an instance where apologetics—viz., the appearance of the resurrected Jesus—is used in the service of both the law and gospel. "Thomas, put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side and know that your pride, your stubbornness, your unbelief are all so clearly wrong." "Thomas, put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side and know that I, who died for you—for your pride,

¹⁷ This is similar to Rom. 1:1–4: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the *gospel* of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was *declared to be the Son of God* in power according to the Spirit of holiness *by his resurrection from the dead*, Jesus Christ our Lord."

your stubbornness, your unbelief, your sin—I am alive.” This explains Thomas’ confession of faith: “My Lord and my God.” Right then and there, the law and the gospel were effective. The appearance (evidence) served both.

Apologetics In the Book of Acts

The use of apologetics is just as extensive and clear in Acts.

First, Acts contains observable evidence upon which a judgment could or should be made:

“After he had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by *many convincing proofs*, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (1:3, CSB).

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, *a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know*” (2:22).

Acts 2: ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and *many wonders and signs* were being done through the apostles.

Acts 4: ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, *by what means this man has been healed*, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well.

Acts 9: ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly *a light from heaven shone around him*. ⁴ And falling to the ground, *he heard a voice* saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

Acts 9: ³⁴ And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.” And *immediately he rose*. ³⁵ And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

Acts 9: ⁴⁰ But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, “*Tabitha, arise*.” And *she opened her eyes*, and when she saw Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ And he gave her his hand and *raised her up*. Then, calling the saints and widows, he *presented her alive*.

Acts 10: ³⁶ As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ³⁷ *you*

yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

Acts 13: ¹¹“And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and *you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.*” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. ¹²Then the proconsul believed, when *he saw* what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Acts 16: ²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶and *suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened.*

Acts 14: ¹⁰Paul said in a loud voice, “*Stand upright on your feet.*” *And he sprang up and began walking.* ¹¹And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “*The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!*”¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. ¹⁴But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, ¹⁵“Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. ¹⁶In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷*Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.*” ¹⁸Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

Acts 26: ²⁵ But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and *rational* words. ²⁶ *For the king knows about these things*, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that *none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.*

Second, this evidence is used in the service of the law:

Acts 2: ³⁷ Now *when they heard this they were cut to the heart*, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Acts 9: ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*” ⁵ And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.*”

Acts 5: ²⁷ And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and *you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.*” ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, “*We must obey God rather than men.*” ³⁰ *The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.*”

Third, this observable evidence is also used in the service of the gospel:

Acts 4: ³³ The apostles continued to *testify about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ* with great power, and abundant grace was on all of them (EHV).

Acts 9: ³⁴ And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.” And immediately he rose. ³⁵ And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon *saw him, and they turned to the Lord.*

Acts 9: ⁴⁰ But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. ⁴² *And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.*

Acts 10: ³⁶ As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ³⁷ you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning

from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹And *we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem.* They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰but *God raised him on the third day and made him to appear,* ⁴¹not to all the people but *to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.* ⁴²And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³To him all the prophets *bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.* ⁴⁴*While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.*

Acts 13: ¹¹“And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. ¹²*Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred,* for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Acts 17: ²As usual, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days *reasoned with them from the Scriptures,* ³explaining and *proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and rise from the dead:* “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah.” ⁴*Some of them were persuaded* and joined Paul and Silas, including a large number of God-fearing Greeks, as well as a number of the leading women.

Acts 28: ²³When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, *testifying to the kingdom of God* and *trying to convince them about Jesus* both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. ²⁴*And some were convinced* by what he said, but others disbelieved.

The Verdict: Many Texts Are Used In the Service of the Gospel

Whereas most of the passages above are descriptions of what took place, they also confirm that observable evidence is being used *not only* in the service of the law *but also*, many times, in the service of the gospel. Consider these passages, some of which have already been quoted:

Mark 16: ²⁰ And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and *confirmed the message by accompanying signs*.

John 20: ³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but *these [signs] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*.

Acts 14: ³ So they stayed there a long time and spoke boldly for the Lord, *who testified to the message of his grace by enabling them to do signs and wonders* (CSB).

2 Cor. 12: ¹² The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

1 John 1: That which was from the beginning, *which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life*— ² the life was made manifest, and *we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life*, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— ³ that which *we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you*, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

2 Pet. 1: ¹⁶ For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but *we were eyewitnesses of his majesty*. ¹⁷ For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” ¹⁸ *we ourselves heard this very voice* borne from heaven, for *we were with him* on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ And *we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed*, to which you will do well to pay attention as to *a lamp shining in a dark place*, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

1 Cor. 15: ¹ Now I would remind you, brothers, of *the gospel I preached to you*, which you received, in which you stand,² and by which you are being *saved*, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ *died for our sins* in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he *was raised* on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and *that he appeared* to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ *Then he appeared* to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive,

though some have fallen asleep.⁷ *Then he appeared* to James, then to all the apostles.⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, *he appeared also to me.*

Heb. 2: ³ *This salvation* had its beginning when it was spoken of by the Lord, and it was *confirmed* to us *by those who heard him.*

⁴At the same time, God also *testified by signs and wonders, various miracles*

These and other sections:

- 1) All refer to evidence upon which a judgment can be made, and,
- 2) All claim that this evidence is somehow used in the service of the gospel. Specifically,

- Observable evidences (“signs”) “*confirmed* the message” of the apostles (Mark 16).
- Observable evidences (“signs”) are recorded “*so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name*” (John 20).
- Observable evidences (“signs and wonders”) “*testified* to the message *of his grace*” (Acts 14).
- Observable evidences (“signs and wonders and miracles”) are “*signs of a true apostle*” (2 Cor. 12).
- Observable evidence (the risen Christ) was “*heard . . . seen with our eyes . . . looked upon and . . . touched with our hands,*” . . . *so that you too may have fellowship with us and . . . with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ*” (1 John 1).
- Observable evidence (the transfigured Christ) means “*we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed*” (2 Pet. 1).¹⁸
- Observable evidences (numerous appearances of the resurrected Christ to different individuals and groups over 40 days) were part and parcel of what was “*delivered to you as of first importance,*” and linked with the gospel that saves and with the Christ who “*died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures*” (1 Cor. 15).
- Observable evidences (“signs and wonders, various miracles”) “*testified*” to “*this salvation*” (Heb. 2).

¹⁸ I am assuming one of two interpretations and understandings of these verses.

Answering the Paradox: Offering Evidence While Preserving the Bondage of the Will and Grace Alone

So here's the all-important question: How can apologetics (making the case for the truth that Jesus is the Christ by presenting evidence in which reason plays a role) be used in the service of the gospel without denying the bondage of the will and the efficient causes of the word and Holy Spirit?

We cannot unmake what we are. We have senses and our reason. And whether right or wrong reason can make a judgment. Reason, corrupted by the fall, cannot convince the will out of its hatred for God. It cannot grasp Christ and his forgiveness. It cannot be an instigating cause of faith. Nevertheless, we still have this reason that inevitably and naturally judges. We cannot avoid being creatures who will sense, reason, and make judgments, even if we wanted to.

So here is the way the paradox can be answered. It is a narrow path. But I believe it steers us correctly.

Apologetics is used in the service of the gospel *insofar* as it points to, implies, or confirms the truth of the gospel.

This is what is seen over and over again in numerous examples of Scripture, all the while upholding and acknowledging the precious means of grace. Reason can reason. But it cannot effect conversion. It can hear what is to be believed, but it cannot enable one to believe. It can see or hear the evidence in favor of the truth of the gospel, but it is not the power of God for salvation that creates faith. The gospel alone does that. But the evidence—that which reason cannot or should not ignore—can imply, point to, or confirm the word of the saving gospel which the Holy Spirit then uses to change the heart of stone within the rebellious sinner into a believing heart now reconciled to God because of the work of Christ.

This allows Scripture to stand and speak as it does when it comes to the purpose and/or result of apologetics (evidence used in the service of the law or the gospel or both) *and at the same time* the doctrine of sin and the doctrine of grace remain firm and true.

Appendix B includes quotations from Dr. Martin Luther where he recognizes that the Gospels contain proof, evidence, and eyewitness testimony used in the service of the gospel as explained above. For example: “For since He shows Himself to be alive and, moreover, offers them His hands and side for inspection, their eyes and reason are

convinced that He is certainly risen from the dead. And so the Word and the work agree with each other.” He even goes so far as to say these observable evidences and proofs bring certainty.¹⁹

Luther sees these proofs—that are observed by the senses and upon which reason can make a judgment—as working hand-in-glove with the Word, all the while teaching the bondage of the will and the total inability of reason to be an efficient cause.

But why would God do this? Why use reason in such a way? For several reasons. First, we are created by him with specific gifts and abilities he expects us to use, including reason. He does not ignore who we are; rather he uses this attribute unique to human beings to lead to faith or, in the case of believers, to strengthen faith. Second, reason is the only means given to us by which we can judge something to be true or false, right or wrong, keeping in mind its appropriate and ministerial role. Apologetics is used so one can say, “this is certainly true” (Luke 1:1–3),²⁰ or to say with Thomas, “My Lord and my God.” Third, it sets Christianity and Christ apart from all other religions, their false messiahs, and their utopias. False religions do not and cannot provide such evidence; not even close. Christianity is in a class by itself. Fourth, it is time in a culture where the Bible is readily dismissed as God’s word, a common ground that remains is reason.

But Where’s the Observable Evidence for Us? The Importance of Eyewitness Testimony

The miracles, fulfillment of prophecy, and the resurrection of Christ—proof for the truth of Christ—were events that took place within the time and space of 1st century A.D. Palestine. That evidence has come and gone. “Therefore,” someone might think, “believing for us is a matter of just hearing the word since there is no such evidence for our eyes to see or our hands to touch.”

It is true we cannot reproduce *that* evidence.²¹ But there are two things to keep in mind. First, the apostles and others who observed

¹⁹ Appendix B, # 5, 6, 8, 9.

²⁰ Luke 1:1–3: “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have *certainty* concerning the things you have been taught” (emphasis added).

²¹ People often fail to distinguish between *scientific proof* (dependent upon observation of repeatable events) and *historical proof* (normally associated with eyewitness accounts or careful investigation and research into past events in order to verify the

the evidence back then did not come to faith because the miracles and resurrection of Christ were the efficient causes. They also, like us, could not “by their own reason ... believe in Jesus Christ or come to him.” What’s good for the goose is good for the gander. If evidence plays no *such* role in our believing according to Scripture, then it played no such role in their believing either. Yet, as was shown above, evidence was used in the service of the gospel. And this remains as true for us today as it did for them back then.

That brings me to the second and very important point. The apostles were to bring the message of Christ “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). And how were they to do that? *Merely* by telling or writing to people that Jesus lived, died, rose, and ascended, and then proclaim forgiveness of sins, followed by an exhortation to repent and believe? Get rid of the “merely” and the statement is better, but still incomplete. So what did the apostles do beyond the *merely*? “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and *you will be my witnesses* in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, *and* to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8). “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. *You are witnesses* of these things” (Luke 24:46-48; see also John 15:27). The noun “witness” (μάρτυς) is used 35 times in the New Testament. In all of these, with two exceptions *possibly* (Rev. 2:13; 17:6), this noun always refers to one who saw, who heard, or who touched: “We were there.”²²

And what they saw, heard, and touched was put forth as evidence, as in a courtroom where jurors hear or see (and sometimes read) the evidence provided by witnesses. *Eyewitnesses* are always best. And if these witnesses all agree, that’s even better. And just like a courtroom where jurors are to hear the evidence, deliberate, and come with a verdict, so also the apostles were appealing to juror-like abilities of their hearers or readers to weigh their testimony and come to a conclusion. They were

events). Both are valid ways to prove something. But many, for some reason, think truth can only be established or confirmed by the scientific method, even though they do not live like this; in fact, no one does.

²² It is unfortunate that we often refer to Christians in general as “witnesses” who are to “witness” to their neighbor. We are not witnesses; not even close, at least in the NT sense. To call ourselves such actually waters down the import of this New Testament term, making it something other than what it is and detracting from its great apologetic value. (See also “Matthew 28:19 and the Mission of the WELS,” 44ff; report to the WELS Conference of Presidents, April 23, 2007).

seeking to persuade and convince them. This cannot be denied. Their role as apostle *and as witness* to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ could not be separated from one another. If he was an apostle, he was necessarily a witness (Acts 1:21–22; 1 John 1:1–3; John 15:27). This witness role was not used incidentally, or even occasionally. It was part and parcel to the apostles' message. It was not something the apostles appealed to just once in a while. In the evangelism sermons in Acts, the apostles almost always establish the factuality of the resurrection of Christ by referring to their eyewitness status (2:32; 3:15; 4:13; 5:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31). Paul also was obligated to let others know that he witnessed the risen Christ: "But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and *witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you*" (Acts 26:16; see also 22:15). There is no doubt that Paul in 1 Cor. 15:3–8 records six post-resurrection appearances to eyewitnesses, himself included, as evidence for the truth of the gospel of forgiveness.

Eyewitness testimony *is* evidence. Two will do. Three is even better. But more than five hundred, at different times, in different groups, sometimes individually, all saying the same thing?

Though the apostles spoke as if these events and the accompanying message of forgiveness were true, they did not *merely* say, "Jesus suffered, died, and rose for the forgiveness of your sins, therefore repent and believe." Nor did they *merely* say, "Believe this because of my apostolic authority." Instead, their preaching was often accompanied by the "signs of an apostle ... including signs and wonders and miracles" (2 Cor. 12:12). And, almost always, attached to the message of the gospel was the evidence of their eyes and ears, what they saw and heard: "we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem ... [we] ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (Acts 10:39, 41).

This has tremendous practical application for us today. I often ask a sceptic or unbeliever if he accepts certain historical events or persons to be factual, like the existence of Julius Caesar or specific ancient empires. If yes, why? I am opening a door to the reliability of eyewitness testimony or to the reliability of those who after careful research and investigation recorded the factual events and the words actually spoken. When we place the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles before the sceptic, the atheist, the agnostic, the Muslim, or the person who has not given his worldview or religion much critical thought, we are not simply having them read or listen to "the Word of God" (though it is that), we

are also having them weigh eyewitness testimony; we are having them read or listen to reliable historical records. And we can and ought to emphasize that. In most cases it would do no good to say, "Read this, it is the Word of God." They cannot relate to that; they do not share the same epistemology. They will not believe the Bible is the word of God simply because I say so; that understanding usually comes after conversion. Besides, this is not the approach of the apostles. Though they spoke authoritatively (at times) and corroborated their apostolic authority with miracles, the evidence they most often placed before others was, "We were there," or, "Here is testimony of witnesses," and therefore, "These are reliable and true records," something for which they were willing to die.²³

Luther recognized this understanding and use of the eyewitness testimony in the gospels:

Christ's resurrection is certified, first of all, by the testimony of His adversaries; then, by the testimony of His friends; third, by the testimony of the Lord Himself, by revealing Himself to be alive and by showing Himself; and fourth, by the testimony of the prophets and Holy Scripture. The guards, the governor Pilate, as well as the chief priests and the Jews confess that Christ is not in the tomb. Next, not only do Peter and John run to the tomb but also [Mary] Magdalene and all the other women and disciples, and they find things just as the angels had said. Then, the Lord Himself comes to them as well. He eats and drinks with them after His resurrection; talks with them; allows them to touch, feel, and clasp Him; and says: "See my hands and my feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" [Luke 24:39]. In short, during the forty days before His ascension into heaven, He so convinces them that none of them can deny, but all must confess, that the Lord has truly risen from the dead. Finally, Holy Scripture is also in agreement, and the testimony of the dear prophets. In this way, both friend and foe bear witness

²³ Again, it is hard to underestimate the proof-text of 1 John 1:1–3: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." See also 1 Cor. 15:30–32.

to the resurrection, and in addition to such testimony there is the event itself as well in Scripture.

Upon such testimonies every Christian should joyfully and confidently rely and should believe certainly and without any doubt that Christ rose from the dead on the third day... We should rely on these with certainty and not require any further special revelation. For myself, I am entirely satisfied by these witnesses, so that I would not even wish to have some kind of special revelation and see Christ in person. For even such a personal vision would not be as helpful as these testimonies. For because I have often read that the devil often disguises himself in the form of Christ, I would be unable to believe such revelations. But when Pilate and those who crucified Christ themselves confess that He rose from the dead; then, that His disciples bear witness to the same thing; and Christ Himself bears witness; and the writings of the prophets bear witness—that is more certain and convincing for me than any special revelations.²⁴

One of the best ways to evangelize apologetically is simply to put in the hands of an unbeliever one or more of these accurate historical accounts that were written by eyewitnesses or by those who had access to the eyewitnesses and did the research. And the great thing about this apologetic approach—placing in their hands the reliable words and accurate observations of witnesses—is the power of God for salvation is embedded throughout.²⁵

Rethinking Debating and Persuading

Whether we are talking about biblical or extra-biblical apologetics, eyewitness accounts, or natural law approaches, it is often said we cannot argue people into the kingdom of God for nothing good will come of

²⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Brown (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955–), 69:288–289. References will be abbreviated *LW*. For a longer quotation of this, see Appendix B, #8.

²⁵ One of my frustrations has been to find a small paperback edition of the Gospel of John that does not have some editor's introduction or conclusion that pushes decision theology or some version of the "Sinner's Prayer." Several years ago, we ended up cutting out about four pages of one version before we handed them out. Then I did find one that was "decision-free," but when we ordered more later, the decision theology had been put in. I have now found one that is better, though not perfect. It can be bought in bulk so the price is only \$1.35/John. It is ESV and does not list chapters and verses (which I like for evangelism purposes). Go to www.biblesbythecase.com and type in "ESV Gospel of John, LARGE PRINT Reader's Edition (Paperback - Case of 50)". The CSB will be coming out with the Gospel of John next summer, with no commentary.

it. This is based, to some degree, on the assumption that trying to argue people into the kingdom of God is relying on reason. Arguments and debates, the thinking goes, are merely attempts to persuade and convince someone's mind with rational arguments, therefore, the means of grace are pushed out of the picture.²⁶

But what is overlooked is Paul and even Christ himself. They took on their opponents. And in doing so their intent and result is evident. Consider Paul:

Acts 17: ² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he *reasoned* with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and *proving* that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ."⁴ And some of them were *persuaded* . . .

Acts 18:⁴ And he *reasoned* in the synagogue every Sabbath, and *tried to persuade* Jews and Greeks.

Acts 19:⁸ Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly over a period of three months, arguing and persuading them about the kingdom of God. (CSB)

Acts 19:²⁶ And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul *has persuaded* and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods.

Acts 26:²⁸ And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you *persuade* me to be a Christian?"²⁹ And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am . . ."

Acts 28:²³ When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and *trying to convince* them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.²⁴ And some were *convinced* by what he said, but others disbelieved.

Some would point out that these attempts of Paul to prove and persuade were "from the Scriptures," and therefore he was relying on the power of the Word and not on evidence or reason. No doubt Paul did argue from the Scripture, especially with the Jews and God-fearing

²⁶ Luke 16:31 is used in support of this where Jesus says, "If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be *persuaded* if someone rises from the dead." But, as stated earlier, this verse is not to be applied across the board as if it is the only one that has anything to say about the use of evidence.

Gentiles who accepted the Old Testament as inspired—they had a common epistemology. But we also know that Paul’s (and Peter’s) argumentation for the truth of Christ consisted of performing miracles (2 Cor. 12:12) and eyewitness testimony. And even if Paul’s attempts to persuade and convince were only “scriptural” (which they were not), the fact remains he was obviously appealing to the reasoning ability of the mind *of the unbeliever* in order to persuade and convince him that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The best way to explain this arguing or debating, this persuading and convincing, is found in what was said before regarding apologetics in general: Arguments are and can (and even should) be used in the service of the law, in the service of the gospel, and in the service of both; they can be used to lead people to faith in Christ insofar as they point to, imply, or confirm the truth of Christ and his gospel. The gospel is often embedded in the apology.²⁷

But there is one way in which we are not to argue: We want to win the argument with an unbeliever, but for his sake, not for the sake of me winning. Arguing *while disregarding* the admonitions of Paul (“Let your speech *always be gracious*, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” Col. 4:6), and the admonitions of Peter (“yet do it with *gentleness and respect*,” 1 Pet. 3:16), will only make enemies of the cross enemies who now have an even better reason to justify their unbelief. This is why St. Paul ruled out “quarreling” for God’s public servants (2 Tim. 2:24). His example, however, allows for and encourages reasonable and even intense debate.

We can and even ought to argue, debate, attempt to persuade and convince our unbelieving neighbor, all the while loving him unconditionally, just as we were first loved and still need to be loved every day by God.²⁸

²⁷ Martin Luther was “argued” into the kingdom of God. Though his conversion was instantaneous, there was in some sense a process taking place, and it was very argumentative both with God and himself. The *95 Theses* do not reveal a sinner saved by grace through faith alone. Some say that the concept of grace is not even found in *Heidelberg Disputation* of 1518. Dr. Cameron MacKenzie cites Luther’s 1545 account of the “Tower Experience” which Luther writes about in his preface to the Latin edition of his works. There Luther, according to MacKenzie, seems to be saying that this experience did not occur until as late as 1519. In other words, this was one long argument. (Cameron MacKenzie, “The History and Theology of Martin Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation,” radio interview, *Issues, Etc.*, September 6, 2019).

²⁸ There are many who have been “argued” into the kingdom of God. I remember having miniature debates, if you will, with fellow students at Bethany, my girlfriend, and a professor. None of them were heated, but there wouldn’t have been anything wrong

Extra-Biblical Apologetics

The focus so far has been mainly on biblical apologetics—those utilized by Jesus, the apostles, and others within the pages of Scripture. But what about apologies that come from outside of Scripture? Are they somehow different? Yes and no. What both have in common is the same process: information or evidence that comes to our attention, followed by the use of our reasoning faculties that can make a judgment. If we object to the use of extra-biblical apologetics on the grounds that there is an appeal to reason, we will also have to object to *biblical* apologetics as well. But this objection falls flat since Jesus and the apostles put forth evidence that is directed toward man's reasoning ability. The presence and utilization of human reasoning therefore is not justification for dismissing extra-biblical apologetics.

Within Scripture and the Confessions, extra-biblical evidence is at times used in support of Christian truths. The Lutheran Confessions put forth secular evidence a number of times to support biblical doctrine (e.g., “Concerning Monastic Vows” in both the Augsburg Confession and the Apology). Peter appeals to his hearers' memory of current events (“just as you yourselves know”) during his sermon in Acts 2 in making the case for Jesus as the Christ. Paul refers to the growing seasons, the abundance of food, and the satisfied hearts of his pagan listeners as a witness to the truth that there is one true providential God. He uses a pagan altar's inscription, “to an unknown god,” and a Greek poet to point to the biblical teaching that there is one God who created and still governs all things (Acts 17:22ff.). He appeals to King Agrippa's personal recollection of events, which were a matter of common knowledge (“for this has not been done in a corner,” Acts 26:26). The confessors and apostles do not *establish* doctrine on the basis of extra-biblical sources, but neither do they refrain from using such sources to support or point to scriptural truth. This is a proper application of the ministerial use of reason.

This is not to suggest that all apologies are equal (see below). But even the “less equal” apologies—as long as they are based on or point

with that necessarily. I would say three other things were found in this “process.” One was compassion and patience shown by these Christians I spoke with (or argued with). Another was the increasing pressure of the law. Finally, there was Christ on the cross, for me. Other examples of being argued into the kingdom would include: C. S. Lewis, John Warwick Montgomery, Craig Parton, Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, Nabeel Qureshi, Lee Strobel, and many others.

to truth—can be beneficial and testify, albeit indirectly, to the truth of Christianity and Christ.

Apologetical Approaches

Here are several ways to approach or understand Christian apologetics.

1. *Biblical and Extra-Biblical Apologetics*

Biblical apologetics: evidence or arguments found and utilized in the Bible.

Extra-biblical apologetics: evidence or arguments not specifically found in the Bible (nor are they contrary to it) but can be used to support some truth found in the Bible and/or can be used to refute or disprove some religion, worldview, theory, or teaching contrary to the truth or truths of biblical Christianity.

2. *Offensive and Defensive Apologetics*

Offensive apologetics: reasons or evidence for believing the Bible, the Christian worldview, and the truth of Christ himself.

Defensive apologetics: reasons or evidence given to reject what is false and therefore contrary to the Christian worldview, biblical teachings and events, and the truth of Christ. This often takes the form of answering objections.

3. *Classical Arguments (Classical Apologetics)*

This is a systematic way of describing apologetics, typically utilized in academia and taught in certain college, university, and even high school courses. Classical arguments include:²⁹

- *Evidential and Historical arguments: evidence for the resurrection of Christ and other miracles, prophetic evidence, evidence for the reliability of the New Testament texts, legal arguments, archeological evidence.*
- *Cosmological arguments: Contingency argument, Motion argument, Efficient Causality argument, Change argument, Time and Contingency argument.*

²⁹ This list of arguments describing Classical Apologetics is from Dr. Michael Berg's course, "Philosophy 202: Apologetics" (2018 Spring Semester) at Wisconsin Lutheran College.

- *Anthropological arguments*: Aesthetic arguments (beauty, the arts, love, emotions), Ethical argument, Truth argument, Conscience argument, Desire argument, Common Consent argument, Blessedness argument, Perception argument, Existential argument, Pascal's Wager argument.
- *Scientific and Teleological arguments*: Consciousness argument, the World as Interacting Whole argument, Design and Fine-Tuning argument.
- *Ontological arguments*: Degrees of Perfection argument, Origin of the Idea of God argument, Finitude of Man argument.

It is not common to find an unbeliever or sceptic familiar with the different categories of Classical Apologetics. More often, the unbeliever (and often the believer) has bought into a reason or reasons not to believe in the truth of Christianity and Christ and likely assumes there are good reasons to believe in something else. Plus, the unbeliever (and frequently the believer) has not thought much about the evidence for the truth of Christ. Therefore, practically speaking, the best and easiest way to use apologetics is the Offensive and Defensive approach. We see a good example of this in 1 Cor. 15 where Paul engages believers at the congregation who somehow had concluded there is no resurrection of the dead. He uses both offensive arguments (six separate eyewitnesses accounts of the risen Christ) and defensive arguments ("If Christ is not risen, then your Christianity is dead in the water"). He points to the defensive approach when he says, "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:5). Jesus spent a lot of time making the case for the truth of his person and work (offensive) and similar amount of time demolishing the false beliefs and worldviews of those opposed to him (defensive).

However, in today's climate not many think about or inquire about Christian apologetics or other important questions. It's not on their radar screen. They may never seriously consider questions such as, "Might there be something wrong with my worldview?" "Is it true that Christianity and other religions are social constructs?" "Does the scientific evidence really support evolution?" "Are the Gospels reliable documents that accurately record the events and teachings of Jesus?" "Might there be something fundamentally wrong with gender identity?" "Is it reasonable to believe that all religions are essentially the same?" "Is it true that all people are basically good or can become good?" "Can we be confident that there is nothing beyond the natural?" "Aren't religions, including Christianity, based on nothing more than blind faith?" "Is it

reasonable to assume that miracles do not and cannot happen?” “Why would we want to restrict marriage to a man and a woman?” “Can (supposed) contradictions in the Bible be shown not to be contradictions?” “If God is all powerful and all loving, how can there be so much evil in the world?” “Is atheism more reasonable than theism?” Most do not ask these questions, though they should.

And when these sorts of questions are asked, good answers are rarely provided. In fact, the false answers are zealously taught, especially to the younger generations. And they are taught before learners are even able to formulate questions.³⁰ Add to this that even though people yearn for truth, more and more are convinced there is no such thing. It’s not easy.

The answers to the above questions all are connected to the truth of Christianity and Christ, in some way or another. And the false answers provided are frequently the leaven that Jesus and Paul warn against (Matt. 16:ff.; 1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). What can help is to understand that the false answers to these questions typically have their source in one of several worldviews: modernism (naturalism, materialism, evolution), postmodernism (diversity, tolerance, constructionism, Gnosticism, same-sex marriage, gender identity, etc.), and spiritualism (some sort of pantheism or paganism).³¹ It is the second of these—postmodern constructionism and tribalism—which now holds much of culture captive, including trends in government, education, corporate businesses, media, and much of what goes by the name of Christianity.

I have proposed a project where we not only provide answers, but also the questions, such as those above (plus many more).³² By clarifying

³⁰ I am convinced that so many of our young people have bought into deceptive cultural trends partly because answers are introduced to them before their critical apparatus has kicked in or because critical thinking used to discern between right from wrong—used to ascertain truth—has been discouraged and stifled. Group think is easier and more fun (you get to socialize!), but is also very dangerous and will prove to be seeds for persecution—the “mob mentality”.

³¹ See David Thompson, *What In the World Is Going On: Identifying Hollow and Deceptive Worldviews* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2010).

³² This has been done, of course, by many, including conservative Lutherans. But it would be helpful to have a simplified and centralized resource, with answers limited to two pages at an eighth grade reading level. This could be accessible online or in print and used as a supplement for catechesis (for both young and old), Sunday School, parochial schools, home schools, studies at church and home, individual use, etc. I have begun the process by gathering a list of over three hundred questions that are asked or should be asked and answered. They are arranged by topic (Evidence for God; Science, Creation, Evolution; Religions and Worldviews; Moral, Social; Cosmic, Philosophical; the Bible; Jesus; The Uniqueness of the Confessional and Biblical Lutheran Church; Personal). Anyone interested in helping with this project is invited to contact me. There is also

the questions and offering sound answers, we encourage the use of critical thinking—reasoning—in the service of the truth. Not all answers to questions asked would point to, imply, or confirm the truth of Christ directly. But they can open a door for the gospel. They can be used in the service of the law or the service of the gospel. In doing so we better educate ourselves, our members, and our children, in order to be “ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15).

Not All Apologies and Apologetic Approaches Are Equal

The goal of Christian apologetics is always the same: to present evidence that can eventually lead to the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the only Redeemer. If apologetics is not utilized with this goal in mind, it is not *Christian* apologetics, or at least not *good* Christian apologetics. If I want to do nothing more than direct a social constructionist away from his worldview rather than lead him to Christ and the Christian worldview, it would be better to have him watch a video of Jordan Peterson who is more likely to convince him of the insanity of postmodernism. For us, it’s all about Christ. And to do this we engage their mind, their reason—that unique, though corrupted, attribute common to all human beings—that they may believe that Jesus is the Christ. We can relate to them and speak to them as if they have this human ability, for they do.³³

But not all apologies are equal. Some defenses for the truth of Christianity *directly* point to the gospel, whereas others can be used *indirectly*. Some apologies can be utilized in the service of the law and sin rather *pointedly*. Others *indirectly* imply a divine moral law. A sound answer to the problem of evil does not point directly to Christ, but in the end the ultimate answer *is* found in the cross of Christ. Another person may justify his unbelief on the basis of Darwinian evolution, which calls for a dismantling (2 Cor. 10:5) by means of sound creation science that indirectly points to the truth of Christianity by the process

the possibility of developing a confessional Lutheran apologetics study Bible with these questions and answers included.

³³ This would fall under Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor. 9:22: “I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some.” Even though Paul approaches different audiences differently (compare, e.g., how he approaches the Jews in Antioch, Acts 13, to how he speaks to the pagans at Lystra in Acts 14 and the Athenian philosophizers in Acts 17), he always approaches them as if they can think and reason, all the while knowing it is the gospel that “is the power of God for salvation” and “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 1:16; 10:17).

of elimination (“Okay, so what are the alternatives?” or, “What theory, then, best explains the evidence?”). Another may say, “All religions are basically the same,” or, “We all worship the same God,” which begs for a simple lesson in logic, thereby revealing his nonsensical and false belief, which can also lead to his next question, “But how do you know your Christianity is true?” To simply say to this and all such questions, “Because the Bible says so,” is to devalue him by ignoring his “reason and all his senses” given to him by his Creator and to deprive him of the evidence that God would want him to consider.

That being said, the case needs to be made for the *higher* apologies found and used in the Bible. There are some who act as if apologetics is mainly about putting forth evidence for a special creation or a young earth. There are others who focus on the philosophical arguments for the existence of God or natural law/knowledge apologetics. I am not criticizing the great value of these apologies. They are important and even necessary. But what I have observed is that the apologetics used by Jesus and the apostles can often get short shrift or ignored altogether, even by good Lutherans. The historical and evidential arguments used in the Gospels, the book of Acts, and the epistles end up becoming simply one among many rather than the best apologies.

There is a twofold reason these should be preeminent. First, both Jesus and the apostles used them. Second, they point to, imply, or confirm the truth of Christ more clearly than any other apologetic.

Paul in 1 Cor. 15 directly connects his gospel of forgiveness to observed bodily resurrection appearances. There are no less than nine appearances of Christ over forty days recorded in the historical records we call the New Testament. Most who witnessed these appearances (perhaps all!) had been of the mindset that Jesus would remain dead. And as Paul explains, these appearances confirm not only that Christ was resurrected, but the heart and center of the gospel as well: the forgiveness of sins, the message that can and does create and strengthen faith. The same is done with the miracles of Christ and the apostles³⁴ and fulfillment of prophecy.³⁵ And in all these cases, the eyewitness

³⁴ “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, pick up your bed and go home” (Matt. 9:6). “These [signs] are written that you maybe believe....” (John 20:31). “They ... spoke boldly for the Lord, who testified to the message of his grace by enabling them to do signs and wonders” (Acts 14:3).

³⁵ “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight

verification if not stated implicitly is indicated explicitly by the context and the manner in which these records are written.

The eyewitness testimony of the Apostles, the miracles of Christ, the fulfillment of prophecy, and, above all the resurrection find no equal among all the apologies. Arguments against evolution are essential in our day, but they do not *necessarily* point to Christ or the truth of the gospel. Biblical apologies are both necessary and invaluable. The Christian should seek to be proficient in explaining these evidences to his neighbor.³⁶ And if the Christian is not yet there or unable, he can always hand him the Gospel of John (see footnote 25). We should encourage each other to go to these apologies when we can and even as soon as we can (when appropriate). When we are asked to give a defense for the hope that we have, the resurrection is the Ultimate Defense for the truth of the Gospel.³⁷

Are There, Then, Non-Efficient Causes?

I go back to the question I raised earlier: Does the recognition of “efficient causes” in Article II of the Formula of Concord³⁸ imply there are non-efficient causes when it comes to conversion? Understanding how people answer certain questions will help. “Why are you a Christian?” or “What caused you to become a Christian?” or “What led you to faith in Christ?” When people hear such questions, their minds don’t necessarily or even usually think, “Oh, he’s asking me about an efficient cause.” They will typically assume something prior to or less than an efficient cause, including, evidence or circumstances or people

and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Matt. 11:3–5).

³⁶ What is also necessary these days is a familiarity of the reliability of the New Testament texts and manuscript evidence. It is often assumed that the Gospels are nothing more than legends or myths, developed over several centuries by well-meaning writers who lived in the second century or later; the New Testament, sceptics presume, could not have been written by eyewitnesses or those who walked and talked with the eyewitnesses. But the manuscript evidence says otherwise (see Appendix C: “Basic/General” and “Biblical Reliability”).

³⁷ Since the resurrection is true then every other argument and challenge to Christianity falls. However, this may not be realized right away by a Christian or applied consistently across the board, especially in the face of evidence that supposedly supports some other worldview or false belief. For that reason, other apologies against many false worldview assumptions can be very helpful and should be brought to bear. For if the false assumption remains unchallenged, it would easily come back to chip away at faith in the resurrected Christ.

³⁸ *The Book of Concord*, 494. See also footnote 2 and the quote from the *Epitome* above.

or events or experiences or burdens that might have pointed to, led to, or confirmed the truth that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God and resulted in faith. Some of these—people, events, evidence, etc.—could have been used in the service of the law, and some could have been used in the service of the gospel. But what we should not say is that these things are “law” or these things are “gospel.” That would be silly. The law is the law and the gospel is the gospel. But there is the platter on which one or the other or both can be served.

So in one sense a person can say, “I was brought to faith by my spouse,” or “Because of these circumstances in my life, I became believer,” or “I believe in Jesus as my Savior because of the evidence,” or “I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because of his miraculous signs.”

We have to be careful of limiting the word “cause” to only one meaning. It does not always mean “efficient cause.” Would we really say to a person who told us he was a Christian because of his spouse, “No you’re not. You are a Christian because of the power of the gospel.” We should not say that because actually both are true. Neither would we say that the spouse was “law preaching” or she “falls under the category of the law.” We could however say that the spouse was used in the service of the law or used in the service of the gospel. She was “used to convince me of my false worldview” (service of the law), and/or she was “used to point me to the amazing truth and comfort of forgiveness found in Christ alone” (service of the gospel).

This is how apologetics and evidence are used in the New Testament. It is safe to say that apologetics is a non-efficient cause. As seen in the examples of Jesus, the apostles, and the writers of the New Testament, apologetics points to, implies, or confirms both the truth the law and the truth of Christ and his gospel. And just as a believer can resist and say no to a spouse or friend who is trying to lead him to Christ, so also one can say no to the evidence that is seeking to lead him to Christ. If one comes to Christ, ultimately it is because of the efficient causes to which the spouse or the apology is pointing.

Apologetics is in a class by itself compared to other evangelism methods (like programs we come up with to attract people to the gospel message or to our church) because it approaches our neighbor on a ground we all have in common and because we find it used by the apostles and Christ himself. It has been and still ought to be a serving platter on which the gospel can be placed. In a world that continues to ask, perhaps more than ever, the age-old question, “What is truth?”, we

not only have the truth, we also have that which points to, implies, and confirms it.

Apologetics: The Handmaiden and Friend of the Gospel

Apologetics is not “merely law preaching”; neither is it simply “clearing away obstacles which keep unbelievers from giving serious consideration to the claims of Scripture” (though it can and does serve these purposes). Apologetics is also a serving platter on which the gospel can be placed. It is not as if we make the case against false belief, then make the case for the truth of Christianity, and then “step out of the way so the gospel can do its work” (as some claim). No. The gospel is or can be embedded in the apology. This, as I have shown, is what is seen time after time in the words or examples of Christ and the apostles.

Is there some sort of implicit danger within or in using apologetics? No more so than in the proper preaching of the law, or even the gospel. We know that when the law is preached, most will hear it only to justify themselves self-righteously like the Pharisee in Luke 18 (10ff.) rather than repent. When the pure gospel is preached, many will hear it in order to justify cheap grace (Rom. 6:15ff.). Just as the appropriate preaching of the law or gospel is not the problem or evil (Rom. 7:12–13; Gal. 3:21), so it can be said of sound apologetics. Though many misconstrued or ignored the evidence of miracles, that did not stop Jesus, Philip, Peter, and Paul from presenting the evidence (John 6, Acts 8, and 14).

Are there times not to use apologetics? Of course: when the senses and reason are not what they will be (as in the case of infants and children) or when they are no longer what they once were (among those afflicted with dementia or other mental challenges). It also does not have to be used where there is a common epistemology and the person asks, “What does God’s Word say?” and all that is possibly needed is the gospel undefended (but even here it is important to remember the apostles used apologetics with believers to confirm the truth and comfort of the gospel—1 Cor. 15:1–11; 2 Pet. 1:16–21; 1 John 1:1–3). At the same time, we *are not required* “to give a defense” if nobody asks us anything. We *are required*, however, when we *are* asked: “Always being prepared to make a defense to *anyone who asks you* for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). But even in non-asking settings, it is not inappropriate to “put a stone in his shoe” with the hope that maybe he will ask us why we believe what we believe. If we never engage our quiet and seemingly content neighbor, we will never know where he stands in the balance of eternity and he may never hear the gospel.

We should never avoid using apologetics because we think it is implicitly harmful or dangerous or because we are afraid the hearer will end up thinking he can by his “own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ.” The Holy Spirit will do his work when and where he pleases (John 3:8).

Still, we do need to guard against a misuse of apologetics in our preaching, teaching, and evangelism, for the sake of our hearts and those under our care, for the *opinio legis* is ever present. We do so by taking heed to the whole counsel of God, including the careful study and meditation of Holy Scripture and our Confessions. We also need to watch our practice carefully, making sure the pure gospel predominates and the sacrament is rightly and regularly administered (the more regular the better). This sends a message to and distinguishes us from the pro-apologetics but anti-sacramental churches (not to mention the benefit of offering every-Sunday communion for us and our members).

But we also have to guard against an underuse of apologetics. Here we can plead guilty. Here we have let non-Lutheran churches take the lead (and have been scared off by them at the same time). One of the reasons C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, Josh McDowell, Ravi Zacharias, Lee Strobel, Tim Keller and others have been read and listened to is because they have tapped into something that resonates with the nature of man: who and what God has created him to be. Man is an aesthetic, moral, rational, thoughtful, fulfillment-driven, eternity-longing creature. Though corrupted and unable to grasp how and in whom these God-given attributes will be truly satisfied, they still reside within man (Eccl. 3:11). We should not be surprised that the Creator somehow uses these unique human aptitudes to point us to his Son in whom they are and will be perfectly fulfilled.

Those who do not believe, teach, and confess the complete fall into sin and the pure means of grace will fall into and encourage the misuse of apologetics. But those who view apologetics merely as law preaching or as that which somehow only falls under the category of the law, will probably end up encouraging its non-use and fail to recognize this most valuable platter on which the gospel can be placed.

When I was moving my belongings into the dorm of Bethany Lutheran College as an agnostic freshman, one of the professors who watched me said to himself, “O boy, what do we have here!” Among the usual, I was also carrying the stuffed head of a collie (stolen from a house I had broken into) which I put on display in my room. It said something about me. I took a course from that same professor my first

semester called, “The Case for Christianity.” I was amazed by what was taught and my worldview was challenged. Could I be that off base? Could these strange students and professors be right who took the Bible at face value? I would discuss and even argue with students, my girlfriend, and professors. At the same time the law was pressing harder and harder upon me, for I had been enjoying and justifying a number of sins. I still remember being alone one evening when other students were at the midweek Lenten service. I was walking around what was then the football field for the Roman Catholic high school (now Bethany’s soccer field). I was thinking about the cross of Christ. Especially the cross for one wretched sinner in particular. I was brought back to my baptismal grace I had received as an infant. The cross alone did it. And yet I cannot deny what the evidence was pointing me to all along. ^{LSQ}

Appendix A: Apologetic Passages and Sections from the New Testament

The Gospels

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|--------------------|------------------|
| 1. Matt. 2:1–2 | 20. Mark 3:1–6 |
| 2. Matt. 2:9–10 | 21. Mark 4:39–40 |
| 3. Matt. 3:16–17 | 22. Mark 5:14–17 |
| 4. Matt. 8:32–34 | 23. Mark 6:1–3 |
| 5. Matt. 9:4–8 | 24. Mark 7:34–37 |
| 6. Matt. 9:32–34 | 25. Mark 14:15 |
| 7. Matt. 11:2–6 | 26. Mark 16:14 |
| 8. Matt. 11:20–24 | 27. Mark 16:20 |
| 9. Matt. 12:1–7 | 28. Luke 1:1–4 |
| 10. Matt. 12:9–14 | 29. Luke 2:9–17 |
| 11. Matt. 12:22–23 | 30. Luke 4:35–37 |
| 12. Matt. 12:24–29 | 31. Luke 5:6–10 |
| 13. Matt. 14:26–33 | 32. Luke 5:20–26 |
| 14. Matt. 15:30–31 | 33. Luke 7:11–17 |
| 15. Matt. 16:13–17 | 34. Luke 7:18–23 |
| 16. Matt. 26:74–75 | 35. Luke 7:37–48 |
| 17. Matt. 27:54 | 36. Luke 8:23–25 |
| 18. Matt. 28:1–10 | 37. Luke 9:1–9 |
| 19. Mark 2:6–12 | 38. Luke 9:18–20 |
| | 39. Luke 9:38–45 |

40. Luke 16:27-31
41. Luke 18:41-43
42. Luke 24:12
43. Luke 24:19-27
44. Luke 24:36-48
45. John 1:6-8
46. John 1:14
47. John 1:47-51
48. John 2:11
49. John 2:23
50. John 4:17-19
51. John 4:39-42
52. John 4:48
53. John 4:50-53
54. John 6:14
55. John 6:26-44, 51-53, 60, 65-69
56. John 7:2-5
57. John 8:28-30
58. John 9:3
59. John 9:8-12, 15-20, 24-38
60. John 10:19-21
61. John 10:24-26
62. John 10:37-38
63. John 11:14-15
64. John 11:41-48
65. John 12:9-11
66. John 12:17-19
67. John 12:37-42
68. John 14:8-11
69. John 15:24
70. John 15:27
71. John 17:4, 8, 17, 20
72. John 18:6
73. John 18:38; 19:4-6
74. John 19:33-37
75. John 20:6-9
76. John 20:18
77. John 20:19-23
78. John 20:24-29
79. John 20:30-31
80. John 21:6-7, 11
81. John 21:20-23
82. John 21:24-25

Acts

83. Acts 1:3
84. Acts 1:8
85. Acts 1:21-22
86. Acts 2:12-13
87. Acts 2:22-24, 29-32, 36-39
88. Acts 2:43
89. Acts 3:6-10
90. Acts 3:12-20
91. Acts 4:1-4
92. Acts 4:5-12
93. Acts 4:13-22
94. Acts 4:23-31
95. Acts 4:33
96. Acts 5:19, 21-32
97. Acts 8:5-8
98. Acts 8:12-13, 18-2
99. Acts 9:3-5
100. Acts 9:20-22
101. Acts 9:34-35
102. Acts 9:40-42
103. Acts 10:36-44
104. Acts 11:22-23
105. Acts 13:11-12
106. Acts 13:26-32
107. Acts 14:3
108. Acts 14:10-18
109. Acts 15:3
110. Acts 16:14
111. Acts 16:25-31
112. Acts 17:2-4
113. Acts 17:17
114. Acts 17:22-34
115. Acts 18:4
116. Acts 18:19
117. Acts 18:26-28
118. Acts 19:8
119. Acts 19:26
120. Acts 20:22-24
121. Acts 26:9-11
122. Acts 26:16
123. Acts 26:24-29
124. Acts 28:23-24

Epistles	131. Phil. 1:16
125. 1 Cor. 15:1–11	132. Col. 2:8
126. 1 Cor. 15:12–19	133. Col. 4:5–6
127. 1 Cor. 15:29–32	134. Heb. 2:3–4
128. 2 Cor. 10:4–5	135. 1 Pet. 3:14–16
129. 2 Cor. 12:12	136. 2 Pet. 1:16–21
130. Phil. 1:7	137. 1 John 1:1–3

Appendix B: Dr. Martin Luther on Proof, Evidence, Eyewitness Testimony in the Gospel of John

1. [On John 4:46ff.]

The nobleman comes to Christ and asks him to go with him and help his son. That was a kind of trust in the Lord Christ that he would help, but such a trust was still without the Word and rested entirely on the miracle, which the Lord had previously done in Galilee at the wedding. Undoubtedly, that's where he would have heard of Christ. From that event he gathered trust in the Lord Christ that he would also help him. Yet such is still not rightly believing, because as I said, the Word which faith listens to is not yet there. That's why Jesus comes at him somewhat harshly and says, "Unless you see signs and miracles, you do not believe." What he's saying is that faith should not rest on signs and miracles alone but rather on the Word. For signs and miracles can well be false and deceptive miracles and signs. Yet he who sticks to the Word cannot be deceived, because God's promise is certain and cannot lie. So although the Lord does signs and miracles to reveal himself and move the people to faith, his underlying intention is more that a person would look at the Word than at the signs, which only serve to bear testimony to the Word. Thus, it was not primarily his concern simply to help this or that sick person physically. His primary office was to point people to the Word and impress it on their hearts so that they would be saved by it.³⁹

2. [On John 14:11. *Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me; or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.*]

³⁹ Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. J. K. F. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1993), 52:516.16–34. I originally ran across a portion of this quotation in Ylvisaker, *The Gospels*, 158, which did not include a citation. Prof. Nicholas Proksch (Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, MN) was kind enough to research and locate the source, and then offer this English translation (2019).

Christ says: “If My preaching does not make you willing to believe that God dwells and is in Me and that I dwell and am in Him, then believe this because of the works you see before your eyes. These works, as no one can deny, are not human; they are divine. They prove and attest powerfully enough that He speaks and works in Me and through Me.” These are the works and the miracles which He performed publicly before all the world—giving sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, healing to all manner of sick, casting out devils, and raising the dead—solely by the Word. These are not only divine works, but they are also witnesses of God the Father. Therefore he who sees and hears these sees God the Father in them; and he is not only persuaded that God is in Christ and that Christ is in God, but from them he can also be comforted with the assurance of God’s fatherly love and grace toward us.⁴⁰

3. [On John 8:16]

Now Christ says: “We are two, I and the Father. I am an official Personage, as is borne out by John’s testimony. The miracles and My heavenly Father also attest to this. I refer you to them, for My miracles corroborate My claim.” All this tends to silence the Jews and to confirm and defend His office.⁴¹

4. [On John 1:14] *We have beheld His glory.*

What does this mean? The evangelist wants to say that Christ not only demonstrated His humanity with His actions, by dwelling among the people so that they could see Him, hear Him, speak with Him, and live near Him until His thirty-fourth year, by suffering cold, hunger, and thirst in this feeble and wretched human form and nature, but that He also displayed His glory and power in proof of His divinity. Of this He gave proof with His teaching, His preaching, His signs and wonders, convincing anyone of His Godhead who was not blinded and hardened by the devil, as the high priests and scribes were. By word and deed He proved that He was God by nature: He healed the sick and raised the dead; in short, He wrought more and greater miracles than any prophet before Him, in fact, than any other human being ever was able to do.

By way of illustration, as God brought forth heaven and earth through the Word, that is, through Him, even so He, too, performed all that He wished by uttering a word. For instance: “Little girl, I say to you, arise” (Mark 5:41); and: “Young man, I say to you, arise” (Luke 7:14); and: “Lazarus, come out!” (John 11:43); and to the paralytic: “Rise, take up your bed and go home, be delivered of your sickness” (Matt. 9:6); and to the lepers: “Be clean!” (Matt. 8:3; Luke 17:14). In a similar way He fed 5,000 men with five loaves of bread and two fish, prompting those who witnessed this miracle to say: “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world” (John 6:14). When a great storm arose on the sea and the Lord rebuked the winds and the sea, all those in His ship marveled, saying: “What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey

⁴⁰ Luther, *LW*, 24:73.

⁴¹ Luther, *LW*, 23:343.

Him?” (Matt. 8:27). With His words He also exorcised the evil spirits. All this He could accomplish with a single word.⁴²

5. [On John 19:38]

For among such people Christ’s death and burial is no more than any other man’s death and burial. For us, however, who know and feel how much depends on our faith that our Lord Jesus Christ was died and buried, so that our faith may have certain evidence and a firm, strong foundation, these words are neither excessive nor superfluous. All these words serve to ground and confirm the Christian faith with certain evidence and witness so that we may be certain of salvation. That is why these words cannot be excessive or superfluous.

St. John records the narrative of how the event took place with all of its circumstances. First, he describes the persons who buried Christ; second, he indicates the mode, measure, and manner in which they buried Him; third, the day and the hour when it happened; finally, the place and the location where they laid Him. All these things, even though they seem plain and simple, are not to be regarded as trivial but carefully noted. For, as mentioned, they all serve as evidence and proof for our faith concerning that article. If the history is lacking and forgotten, then faith is lacking and extinguished as well.⁴³

6. [On John 19:41–42]

In sum, everything [i.e., the details regarding Christ’s death and burial] had to serve to support and confirm our faith in this article [of faith that He was dead and buried] so that we might have certain proof and testimony that He is truly risen from the dead.⁴⁴

7. [On John 20:1]

For St. John did not write his Gospel for the sake of Christ (who has no need of it), nor for his own sake (for he played a part in it), but for our sakes, so that we too might believe and through faith obtain the power and fruit of the joyous resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus he himself says at the end of this chapter: “These signs are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that in Him you may have life in His name.”⁴⁵

8. [On John 20:1]

Thus now the resurrection of our dear Lord Jesus Christ from the dead is adequately circulated and attested even among the Lord’s adversaries... . All this happened for our benefit, so that it might serve to make us certain of this article [of the resurrection]... .

Christ’s resurrection is certified, first of all, by the testimony of His adversaries; then, by the testimony of His friends; third, by the testimony of the Lord Himself, by revealing Himself to be alive and by showing Himself; and fourth, by the testimony of the prophets and Holy Scripture. The guards, the governor Pilate, as well as the chief priests and the Jews confess that Christ

⁴² Luther, *LW*, 22:114.

⁴³ Luther, *LW*, 69:273–74.

⁴⁴ Luther, *LW*, 69:283.

⁴⁵ Luther, *LW*, 69:285.

is not in the tomb. Next, not only do Peter and John run to the tomb but also [Mary] Magdalene and all the other women and disciples, and they find things just as the angels had said. Then, the Lord Himself comes to them as well. He eats and drinks with them after His resurrection; talks with them; allows them to touch, feel, and clasp Him; and says: "See my hands and my feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" [Luke 24:39]. In short, during the forty days before His ascension into heaven, He so convinces them that none of them can deny, but all must confess, that the Lord has truly risen from the dead. Finally, Holy Scripture is also in agreement, and the testimony of the dear prophets. In this way, both friend and foe bear witness to the resurrection, and in addition to such testimony there is the event itself as well in Scripture.

Upon such testimonies every Christian should joyfully and confidently rely and should believe certainly and without any doubt that Christ rose from the dead on the third day. . . . We should rely on these with certainty and not require any further special revelation. For myself, I am entirely satisfied by these witnesses, so that I would not even wish to have some kind of special revelation and see Christ in person. For even such a personal vision would not be as helpful as these testimonies. For because I have often read that the devil often disguises himself in the form of Christ, I would be unable to believe such revelations. But when Pilate and those who crucified Christ themselves confess that He rose from the dead; then, that His disciples bear witness to the same thing; and Christ Himself bears witness; and the writings of the prophets bear witness—that is more certain and convincing for me than any special revelations.

A heart that holds this article of the resurrection of the dead as certain, however, is an especially rare bird on earth. For the world learns this article as if it were any other history or event. But that it should risk life and limb and everything it has on this—that will never result, for it is unsure of this article. About this article one should be utterly certain. For what makes a Christian is when someone holds this article to be the certain truth, so that he forsakes life and limb for it. That is why we preach this article, so that we may become certain of it and so that everyone may search his own heart and examine himself to see whether he, too, would die on account of this article. I am not going to talk about the fruit of Christ's resurrection now, for I have often preached about this on Easter: that the resurrection of the Lord Christ brings with it redemption from sin and death. At the present, however, I want to preach on the text with reference to [Christ] Himself so that we may become certain of the history and story, and each one may regard this preaching as certain and sure.

That is what St. John intends when he so carefully describes the history, for he would like to make it so certain so that we do not have any doubts about it.

He precisely describes the time, the persons, and the persons' actions, as befits a good historian.⁴⁶

9. [Sermon for Easter Tuesday Morning, John 20:19–23]

Now, on the evening of that Sabbath, the Lord Himself comes to the disciples through closed doors, stands in their midst, greets them kindly, and says, "Peace be with you," as if He wanted to say, "Through Mary Magdalene, I had a proclamation brought to you that I am risen from the dead and ascend to My God and Father, yet in such a way that I am not ashamed to call you [My] brothers. And I receive you as My co-heirs in all that is Mine, so that My God is your God, and My Father is your Father, and the heaven I possess is your heaven. Now, so that you may be certain of this proclamation, I Myself have come here in My own person, and I offer you happiness and salvation as your glory and inheritance. And so that you may have no doubt about My resurrection, I am showing you My hands and My side. Here you see that I am the very one who was nailed to the cross by His hands and feet and whose side was opened by a spear."

By showing them all this, Christ wanted, first of all, to strengthen their faith in this article. For since He shows Himself to be alive and, moreover, offers them His hands and side for inspection, their eyes and reason are convinced that He is certainly risen from the dead. And so the Word and the work agree with each other. The Word of Christ goes first, being proclaimed first through the angel, [then] through Mary Magdalene, and finally through the Lord Himself. Through this Word their hearts are inwardly enlightened, comforted, and strengthened through the power of the Holy Spirit. Next comes the work that Christ, in accordance with the Word, appears alive and by His appearing moves the disciples' eyes so that, since they are to be witnesses of His resurrection in all the world, they may not only hear of it but also see and experience it themselves. This is as Christ says to Nicodemus, *Quo vidimus testamur*, "We bear witness of what we have seen" [John 3:11]. Therefore, this appearance and revelation should be numbered with His other appearances and should establish and strengthen our faith in this article through the certain evidence and testimony of the Word and work.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Luther, *LW*, 69:288–89.

⁴⁷ Luther, *LW*, 69:351–52.

Appendix C: Resources⁴⁸

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⁴⁸ At least useful but not necessarily whole-heartedly endorsed.

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Foundational Principles in the Study of Liturgy from a Lutheran Perspective

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WORSHIP IS A FUNDAMENTAL PART OF EVERY Christian's life. Though people can argue about whether to emphasize the ritual and historical aspects of worship, or whether the cultural and social aspects should take prominence, everyone agrees that Christians must worship. It is a necessary byproduct of the Christian faith, articulated in God's Word, and put into practice by each particular group of Christians. Though different traditions and emphases emerge as different groups do the act of worship, worship itself is an ontological concept with several core foundational principles which must be understood before each group's practice can be fairly examined.

Buying a house can be used to illustrate this point. When buying a house, one hires an inspector to thoroughly evaluate the structure of the house to make sure it is suitable for habitation. When inspecting the house, the inspector is not concerned with the color of the paint on the walls or how the curtains coordinate with the carpet. The inspector is only concerned with the structural integrity of the building—the architecture which makes the structure either stand or fall. Different inspectors can have different opinions about the cosmetic aspects of a house, but all inspectors will agree on whether the structure of the house itself is safe or unsafe.

So it is in Christian worship. There are many external, cosmetic differences from one worship tradition to another. There are even

differences within the same denomination. But before those differences can be discussed one must first know the ontological structure of Christian worship by probing deeper into God's Word and the flow of history. Only then can a true picture of worship be uncovered.

This essay will explore these foundational principles of worship from a specifically Lutheran perspective, using the Bible itself as a primary source along with the historical examples of the early Church fathers, Martin Luther, and other modern experts in liturgical theology. The conclusion is that the liturgy as a living act of worship, ever bending to the needs of its cultural setting while remaining the stable vehicle through which God blesses his people through his Word and through which God's people respond to his gifts in thanks and praise. When this is understood, then the worship discussion can begin.

1. Liturgy is the Work of God and His People's Response

Toward the close of his life, Martin Luther (1483–1546) succinctly defined the holy Christian Church by saying that “God's word cannot be without God's people, and conversely, God's people cannot be without God's word.”¹ This definition not only serves as an excellent summary of the Christian Church in general, but of the Christian Church's worship specifically. God's Word is truly the center of any Christian's worship regardless of his particular denominational affiliation. And, theologically speaking, the universally acknowledged sacraments—Baptism and Eucharist—are extensions of the Word, even referred to as the “visible Word” since St. Augustine's (354–430) time.² Thus, all Christian liturgy must be centered on the Word and Sacraments together.

This Word-and-Sacrament emphasis of historic Christianity is commonly held among all the post-Reformation ecclesial traditions in varying degrees. Yet such an emphasis is hardly a post-Reformation concept. The New Testament's Word-and-Sacrament worship is merely the fulfillment of the Old Testament's Word-and-Sacrament worship. The common element is always God's Word. The musical settings may have changed from one generation to another, but the holy Trinity's Word and promise remain the same through them all, and that is

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: American Edition*, vol. 41, *Church and Ministry III*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 150.

² “Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 220. “Augustine put it well when he said that the sacrament is a ‘visible word,’ because the rite is received by the eyes and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word.”

why his people have always gathered together for such a liturgy. God works through the liturgy because the liturgy is composed of God's Word and Sacrament—the only means through which God creates and strengthens faith in people's hearts. The joyful response of this saving faith is to worship God using that same Word and Sacrament so that he can strengthen the faith he created through them.

This Word-and-Sacrament emphasis is a chief hallmark of Lutheran liturgiology. God's Word-and-Sacrament is the centerpiece of a Lutheran's encounter with God through the liturgy. As Arthur Just, a modern Lutheran theologian, wrote, "The essence of this worship is the response of the people of God to the presence of God, but the response is always dependent on the presence and on the blessings that proceed from that presence."³ Indeed, there can be no liturgy, worship, or salvation if Christ is not first present through Word and Sacrament.

But who is the primary actor in the liturgy? There are clearly two parties involved: God through Word-and-Sacrament, and the people in the pews. Critical reading of the sources indicates a slight difference of opinion on this question. Frank Senn, a widely published Lutheran liturgical scholar, seems to start with the people's activity within the liturgy and then moves to show how God sanctifies that activity for them. Notice the order he employs: "God works through these rites of word and sacrament, praise and prayer *to make them* means of grace. Liturgy is not *only* the assembly's public work or service to God (worship proper); it is *also* God's public work or service to the assembly."⁴ Notice how God "makes" a means of grace out of the liturgy—the-people-are-already-doing. Notice how the people are doing the public work of worship, but not "only" them—God is "also" working. Contrast this with Just's treatment of the same subject. "The liturgy is, first and foremost, the activity of God who is serving us with the gifts. But is it also the Christian assembly whose right and privilege it is to stand in God's presence and receive His gifts for the sake of the world."⁵ Here, while both God and people have roles, the roles are clearly defined and God is put on his proper pedestal as the source and center of the liturgy. The order is important.

Worship must start with God. As sinners, we are incapable of worship on our own strength. As St. Paul says, "You were dead in your

³ Arthur Just, *Heaven on Earth* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 17.

⁴ Frank Senn, *Introduction to Christian Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 5–6. Emphasis added.

⁵ Just, 23.

trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1).⁶ But he also says, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 3:4–5). This spiritual vivification produces a desire for worship and praise, as St. Peter says: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Proclaiming God’s excellencies is exactly what Christians do at worship after they have been called as holy priests through faith. This also gives the liturgy its rich symbolic meaning for the worshipper.⁷ Senn is right to say, “Liturgy is not done decently if its theological dimension is ignored.”⁸

In sixteenth century Germany, Martin Luther emphasized the connection between God’s Word and God’s people.⁹ This is why his preferred term for worship was *Gottesdienst*, by which he emphasized “God *serv*ing the world with His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation through Word and Sacrament.”¹⁰ For this reason, and with this emphasis, the term “divine service” is widely employed in Lutheran circles because we believe God is at work through his Word in the liturgy to strengthen us. Then, in loving response, we serve him with our prayers and praise.

2. Liturgy Affects Culture and is Effected by Culture

Christian liturgy is truly *Gottesdienst* in the sense that it is primarily the service of God to man through Word and Sacrament. Yet man still obviously plays a major role. Therefore, man’s culture necessarily affects the conduct of the liturgy. This was readily apparent in sixteenth century Germany in the milieu of theological reform started by Luther. A natural byproduct of Luther’s theoretical reforms was a number of practical changes. To the common man, among the most tangible of these changes would have been Luther’s liturgical reforms.

A strong cultural influence on Luther’s liturgical reforms was Johannes Gutenberg’s (1398–1468) introduction of moveable type, which not only revolutionized the printing industry in late Medieval

⁶ All Bible quotations taken from the *New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

⁷ Senn, 12–13.

⁸ Senn, 12.

⁹ Luther, *Church*, 150. “God’s word cannot be without God’s people, and conversely, God’s people cannot be without God’s word.”

¹⁰ Just, 23. Emphasis added.

Europe but aided Luther's reforms as well. Luther unabashedly used the power of the printing press to publicize his reforms. When called upon by his peers to enact his reforms on the liturgy, Luther acquiesced and produced two orders of service: *Formula missae et communionis pro ecclesia Vuittembergensi* (1523)¹¹ and *Deutsche Messe und Ordnung des Gottesdiensts* (1526),¹² Luther's "Latin Mass" and "German Mass" respectively. The ability to efficiently print these orders of service enabled the suggested reforms to take root among the Lutherans quite rapidly.¹³

In examining Luther's liturgical reforms, one finds a couple of strong emphases. First, Luther expunged the liturgy of gross theological errors, especially those which he perceived as promoting *works righteousness*, i.e. that people are made righteous by their own work of performing the rituals of the Mass.¹⁴ Second, Luther wanted to educate the laity to live their Christian faith. The former exercise was easily accomplished by printing purified forms of the service. The second point, however, was a more challenging task. It was inculturation. Ultimately, through his liturgical reforms, Luther sought to find an evangelical balance in bringing the people's culture into the liturgy so that the liturgy could provide a vehicle of worship within that culture.

This cultural balance is readily seen in Luther's liturgies. Though worship was largely conducted in the vernacular, many Latin elements were retained for the sake of teaching the Church's culture. For example, in his Latin Mass, he insisted on retaining the historic Latin liturgy as much as possible with the addition of German teaching.¹⁵ Also in his German Mass, he still retained several important Latin and Greek expressions for the sake of teaching the youth.¹⁶ For both, he also retained the regular liturgical cycle of festivals and propers.¹⁷

¹¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: America Edition*, vol. 53, *Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. Ulrich Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 19–40.

¹² Luther, *Liturgy*, 53:61–90.

¹³ Senn, 34.

¹⁴ Luther, *Liturgy*, 53:21.

¹⁵ Luther, *Liturgy*, 53:36. "I also wish that we had as many songs as possible in the vernacular which the people could sing during mass, immediately after the gradual and also after the Sanctus and Agnus Dei. For who doubts that originally all the people sang these which now only the choir sings or responds to while the bishop is consecrating?"

¹⁶ Luther, *Liturgy*, 53:63. "For in no wise would I want to discontinue the service in the Latin language, because the young are my chief concern. And if I could bring it to pass, and Greek and Hebrew were as familiar to us as the Latin and had as many fine melodies and songs, we would hold mass, sing, and read on successive Sundays in all four languages, German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. I do not at all agree with those who cling to one language and despise all others."

¹⁷ Luther, *Liturgy*, 53:22–23. "First, we approve and retain the introits for the Lord's days and the festivals of Christ, such as Easter, Pentecost, and the Nativity.... We

This is why Luther insisted he was only *reforming* the liturgy—not creating something new. He says, “We therefore first assert: It is not now nor ever has been our intention to abolish the liturgical service of God completely, but rather to purify the one that is now in use from the wretched accretions which corrupt it and to point out an evangelical use.”¹⁸ He affirms this again, “It is not our intention to do away with the service, but to restore it again to its rightful use.”¹⁹

Perhaps instinctively, Luther had a sense of the relation of culture to liturgy in his reforms. The relation of culture to liturgy is summarized by the *Lutheran World Federation* in their *Study of Worship and Culture*, articulating four categories of liturgical/cultural relations.²⁰ Luther’s sixteenth century reforms dovetail with these four categories even five centuries before they were published. For example, Luther’s insistence on not totally abandoning the historical languages for the sake of the vernacular shows his understanding of the *transcultural* nature of the liturgy. His insistence on teaching the people in the vernacular highlights the *contextual* nature of liturgy. In combining these two reforming thoughts through a balanced approach shows the *countercultural* and *cross-cultural* nature of liturgy. To worship God through the liturgy was not an activity to be conducted in German isolation, but together with every tribe and nation whom the Holy Spirit had gathered together as “one holy catholic and apostolic church.”²¹

3. Liturgy is Composed of Word and Sacrament Together

Christian liturgy is composed of two main parts. One is the service of the Word. The other is the service of the Sacrament. Both of these parts have roots in sacred Scripture itself, predating any historical innovations or interpretations. An understanding of the ontological reality of the liturgy can only be achieved after examining the historical roots of these two requisite parts of Christian liturgy.

In Old Testament times, the people’s worship was centered on the sacrificial system of their many festivals. To worship God certainly meant to think on his Word and live according to it, but the ritual was still intimately tied to the Jerusalem Temple. However, through the

regard the feasts of Purification and Annunciation as feasts of Christ, even as Epiphany and Circumcision.”

¹⁸ Luther, *Liturgy*, 53:20.

¹⁹ Luther, *Liturgy*, 53:11.

²⁰ Senn, 38.

²¹ English Language Liturgical Consultation, *Praying Together* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1988), 17.

course of many captivities and the Diaspora, this spread-out group of people could no longer regularly travel to Jerusalem for the Temple liturgies. This led to the rise of the Synagogue service, where thinking on God's Word and being encouraged to live according to it became the new ritual in a weekly setting rather than a semi-annual one.²² In this context, Jesus' Apostles continued to use the Synagogue's ritual to proclaim God's Word as they ministered throughout the world after Pentecost.²³ Here lies the obvious predecessor to the service of the Word as part of Christian liturgy today.

The service of the Lord's Supper also has Biblical roots predating Jesus' institution on Holy Thursday. Obviously, Jesus himself was in the context of the Passover ritual as he instituted his Holy Supper. The Passover ritual was multifaceted. The Temple liturgy for sacrificing the blameless lamb was surrounded by the home liturgy through which God's Word would be contemplated around the evening meal—the Seder Meal—leading to the Temple for the family's sacrifice.²⁴ It should be no surprise that as Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Passover Seder with his own New Testament Eucharistic meal, some of the old Passover rituals would continue on as part of the new ritual. Therefore the Old Testament roots of the liturgy of the Sacrament are found in the Passover Seder meal.

In this same vein, it should come as no surprise that the post-Apostolic church took these rituals of Synagogue and Seder and brought them into the worship of the New Testament church, keeping the same reverence on the proper preaching of the Word of God and the proper administration of his Sacraments. When one examines a sampling of the outlines of various historical Christian liturgies, one sees an illustration of the ever-present Word-and-Sacrament emphasis of Christian liturgy. Throughout all times and places, the liturgy always seems to show the connection between the Word and the Sacrament by including both Word and Sacrament elements in their orders.

The liturgy of the Sacrament itself, with its variations of Eucharistic Prayer, makes this connection not just with Christ's Words of Institution but with all the other Biblical allusions it employs.²⁵ In a manner of speaking, it is impossible to separate the Word from the Sacrament

²² Just, 68.

²³ The Apostles routinely started their missionary work by heading to a new city's Synagogue, cf. Acts 9:20, 13:5, 13:14, etc.

²⁴ Just, 57.

²⁵ Senn, 69–70. Notice the Sanctus and the references to Abel, Abraham, Melchizedek, etc.

using such a liturgy. They are intimately intertwined. This connection is enhanced when the liturgy of the Sacrament is preceded with a formal liturgy of the Word where God's Word can be connected to the Supper through the liturgical propers and preaching, and the Supper can be connected to the Word just the same.

The Reformation era provides an interesting look into the liturgical development of each blossoming denomination's own attitudes towards the liturgical connection of Word and Sacrament. The inclusion of both Word and Sacrament elements in the liturgy certainly predates Luther, but Luther saw errors in the liturgy which he felt needed correcting. There were many Masses being conducted in which there was no preaching, and in which no one beside the priest was present. In Luther's mind this eliminated the Word from the liturgy because without preaching and without an audience how can the Word be proclaimed?²⁶ Luther corrects this abuse by insisting on sermons in his two liturgies.²⁷

To be sure, the "sermon" or "homily" is included as a bullet point in many of the liturgical orders after Luther, but, to his point, a preaching element seemed to be conspicuously absent from major pre-Reformation liturgies like the *Roman Bishop's Mass in Ordo Romanus Primus* (ca. 700),²⁸ and from the Council of Trent's reform of the Mass in the *Missale Romanum* (1570)²⁹ after Luther. Though preaching would have occurred in other liturgies like the daily office, the chief service of Word and Sacrament apparently did not include a place for it. With this in mind, it is interesting to note how the reforms of Vatican II (1969) plainly state that preaching was a requirement at Mass.³⁰ Thus, the Roman Church, having essentially over-emphasized the Sacrament in its main Sunday liturgy, brought a better Word-and-Sacrament balance to their worship in the years after Vatican II.

This better Word-and-Sacrament balance was also achieved among many Lutheran and other Protestant bodies in the latter half of the twentieth century as they brought a new emphasis on the Sacrament to their worship by increasing its frequency. Thus, today the emphasis on the connection of Word and Sacrament in the liturgy is a nearly universal principle in Christendom and it is shown in the

²⁶ Luther, *Liturgy*, 53:11.

²⁷ Senn, 49–50.

²⁸ Senn, 47–49.

²⁹ Senn, 57.

³⁰ Senn, 59.

varied-yet-similar liturgical forms of Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and other Christian denominations.

4. Liturgy is a Daily Activity Starting At Home

Daily prayer is a necessary part of Christian life. The Bible speaks of praying “always” (1 Thessalonians 1:2), and “continually” (Acts 2:42), and “day by day” (Acts 2:46). The *Didache* describes this act of continual daily prayer as a thrice daily repetition of the Lord’s Prayer (Didache 8:3). Early Christian theologians (e.g., Clement of Alexandria) further regimented the daily flow of prayer by indicating specific hours of the day for prayer including morning, evening, and throughout the day. These times of daily prayer were exclusively home activities because in the pre-Constantinian era, no Christians were legally allowed to pray publicly.³¹ This emphasis on a Christian’s daily prayer continues throughout every generation of Christian writing because it is such a necessary part of Christian life.

The reason that a Christian’s daily prayer ritual eventually shaped itself into a morning-and-evening structure is entirely logical. The rhythm for daily prayer flows out of the progression of natural processes like time, darkness, brightness, etc. The daily setting of the sun and its morning rising have an eschatological symbolism relating to the creation of the world and the resurrection of the body.³² Themes of light and darkness are present throughout Holy Scriptures. Jesus himself is the “Light of men [who] shines in the darkness” (John 1:4–5). He says of himself, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life” (John 8:12). And by extension of that faith in him, he even designates his followers as lights shining in darkness in their own right (Matthew 5:14). Light and dark, evening and morning, are all important themes which remind us of death and resurrection.

In the era after Constantine, this private house prayer became public as church buildings were constructed to accommodate worship in a public setting. This led to more regimenting of the liturgy of daily prayer, and two major types of public daily prayer emerged. Senn refers to them as the monastic-type and the cathedral-type. The monastic order of daily prayer was an orderly sequence of multiple liturgies held throughout the day. Because the monastic community could easily devote their time to learning these liturgies within their secluded

³¹ Senn, 78.

³² Senn, 76.

context, these liturgies were not popularly accessible. The emphasis was on aggressive recitation of and meditation on the Word of God. They quickly learned the Psalter in this context, and sang it antiphonally. They read the Bible in the style of *lectio continua*, covering a lot of ground in so doing. They truly devoted much of their time to meditation on God's mysteries through his Word.

The cathedral order of daily worship was similar to the monastic order, but with some significant differences. The urban context of these offices could not support as regimented a structure, as the town's laypeople were busy with many secular activities throughout the day. This led to several practical innovations for the cathedral office—streamlined times for prayer, antiphons for ease of congregational singing, additional rites and ceremonies, etc.³³ Increasing lay participation in the context of a functioning worship space was the driving factor behind these practical additions. Eventually, however, these structural differences between monastic and cathedral daily prayer blended together as the monasteries moved into the cities and the prayer services were largely homogenized.³⁴

In the Reformation era, when many old Church customs were in question, the liturgies for daily prayer were generally discarded by Protestants with the exception of two major groups: Lutherans and Anglicans.³⁵ In reforming the liturgy, Luther made provisions for a congregation's daily prayer by simplifying the Matins, Vespers, and Compline liturgies and encouraged them to be used as daily worship orders for devotion on God's Word.³⁶ This retention remains to this day as Matins and Vespers are found in many Lutheran hymnals, with some including variations of Prime and Compline³⁷ and even Lutheran variations on Anglican-style Morning Prayer and Evensong.³⁸

Matins and Vespers are used quite profitably in the modern Lutheran church, which has gone through a much needed liturgical blossoming in the last half of the twentieth century. I, for example, was first introduced to Vespers in the early 1990s when my home congregation's new hymnals were put into use and the new liturgies were being

³³ Senn, 79–80.

³⁴ Senn, 81.

³⁵ Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, rev ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 392.

³⁶ Reed, 390.

³⁷ For example, the essayist's congregation uses the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (St. Louis: MorningStar, 1996) which provides orders for Prime (p. 108), Matins (pp. 109ff.), Vespers (pp. 120ff.), and Compline (p. 128).

³⁸ These variations are found most clearly in the *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 235, 243.

taught and learned. Prior to those new hymnals, the liturgical activity of that Lutheran congregation—and many others in that denomination—had employed the same basic setting of the liturgy since 1941.³⁹ This was my first exposure to the Daily Office and pastoral chant—a novelty in my branch of Lutheranism at the time. Since that time the liturgies of daily prayer have been a much greater part of Lutheran life.

But, though Matins, Vespers, and a host of other daily prayer traditions have resurfaced in congregations, the practice of daily prayer must still be primarily a home practice rather than a public service.⁴⁰ Practically speaking, there are few times at which a whole congregation could daily meet for such salutary devotion. Theoretically speaking, as these rites began in the home in the early Christian era, the home is still the foundational unit of all a congregation's activities today. Thus, daily prayer must begin by turning Christ, the Light of the World (John 8:12), on at home through devotion on God's Word. Then his beams will shine into the parish as His lights in the world (Matthew 5:14) shine brightly together in worship.

5. Liturgy's Calendar Reflects Its Cultural Setting

When looking at the present Western liturgical calendar, one finds a generally regimented series of Scripture readings and themes for each progressive season. Advent leads to Christmas. Lent leads to Easter. Easter leads to Pentecost, after which the readings and themes shift from a focus on Christ's life to the believer's life. In addition, this logical thematic progression is not unique to any peculiar denomination within the Western liturgical tradition but is shared by almost every church body employing a liturgy in the West.⁴¹

³⁹ That is the Common Service found in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 15.

⁴⁰ Senn, 95.

⁴¹ Frederick Webber, *Studies in Liturgy* (Erie, PA: Ashby Printing Co., 1938), 9–10. "The beginner will be amazed, and perhaps a little pained, when he first discovers that his cherished denominational property is so often the common property of all. We have thrown more than one group into a turmoil by showing them that the monks at Beuron, Buckfast and Downside, the Evangelicals at Köln, Stuttgart and Minden, and Anglo-Catholics of London, Norwich or York; the moderate churchmen at the Abbey and St. Paul's and the Lutherans of Germany, Norway, Sweden and Denmark each think of these things as their very own. Among these widely differing groups we find the same familiar Introits, Collects, Epistles, Graduals, Offertories, as well as the Sursum Corda, Prefaces, Sanctus and Agnus Dei. Often the musical settings are much the same."

With these universal principles in place, it is important to note that the structure of the Western liturgical calendar was not always so clear. Throughout the early centuries of Christendom, the liturgical year was taking shape to be sure, but the shape was unsurprisingly influenced by the cultures in which the liturgical calendar was developing. The High Feast of the Nativity of our Lord provides an example of how local culture impacted the liturgical calendar. The date of Christmas and many of the devotional traditions which have been incorporated into the Advent and Christmas seasons are the result of cultural influences.

First we will consider the date of Christmas. Cross-culturally speaking, the winter months have always been a time to hold celebrations because, especially in agrarian societies, there was less work to do in the winter. That Christmas was held between late December and early January is, therefore, a logical development. However, two dates emerged in this context, December 25 and January 6. Both carry cultural baggage. A popular theory on the December 25 celebration of Christ's birth is related to the pagan festivals already being celebrated in the Roman empire in the early Christian days. The Christians essentially sanctified the pagan holiday and adapted it for a salutary usage. Though this theory does not always hold up to critical scholarship⁴² it is still assumed by many.

Another theory to explain why December 25 has become the day to celebrate Christ's birth, has to do with his death and the related cultural assumptions of the Roman world. In the third century, many Christian connected March 25, near the Spring solstice, with the death of Jesus. This Spring solstice was also considered the time when God created the world. Furthermore, if he, an important historical figure, died on March 25, it was assumed that his death date was synonymous with the date of his conception. This connected the themes of creation and redemption in the minds of the faithful.⁴³ Logically, if Christ was conceived on March 25, he was born nine months later on December 25. "Whether this date was true or not didn't really matter to the early Christians. What mattered was the larger theological truth behind the practice. The incarnation and the atonement belong together."⁴⁴

Eastern Christianity celebrates Christ's birth on January 6, when the West celebrates the Epiphany of our Lord. This is in part due to the complications of converting a lunar calendar to a solar one, a process

⁴² Interestingly, Senn softly presents this view in his book, but expresses his skepticism in the accompanying end note (note 6) on p. 236.

⁴³ Just, 136.

⁴⁴ Just, 136.

which may put Christ's conception and death on April 6 with its corresponding birth date on January 6.⁴⁵ The fact that there is a marked difference between the observance of Christ's birth by both the Eastern and Western branches of Christianity readily shows the influence of culture on the liturgical year even to this day. In addition, the shifting theme of Epiphany also betrays cultural influence. Epiphany was originally a celebration of Christ's birth. Then it was his Baptism. Now, in the Western Church, it is the visit of the Magi.⁴⁶

The myriad devotional traditions, from Advent wreaths to Christmas trees, also show culture's influence on shaping the liturgical year. The liturgical season of Advent grew from the ancient observance of Ember days set aside at the changing of each season. As Autumn gave way to Winter, the church in various places set aside times and customs for spiritual renewal, and by the tenth century, these customs were relatively formalized into the season of Advent. Within the next few centuries, the European tradition of green candle-lit wreaths was adapted for devotional use as well.⁴⁷ Later, Christmas trees were introduced by sixteenth century German Lutherans⁴⁸ and were also popularized in the American tradition by their German Lutheran ancestors in nineteenth century Ohio.⁴⁹

Today, the culture is still having a significant impact on the liturgical year. A number of national holidays are unabashedly celebrated in Christian churches, like the national day of Thanksgiving, New Year's (divorced from the liturgical celebration of the Circumcision and Name of our Lord), Mother's Day and Father's Day, and patriotic observances in the summer months. Though nothing is wrong with asking the Lord's blessings on any of these special occasions, they come from present day national culture and not from the Church's liturgical treasure house. Though culture certainly can and must influence the liturgy, great care must always be taken that the influence is an improvement over what came before.

6. Liturgy Involves the Body and Senses

Worship is a sensual experience because humans are sensual creatures. As people gather together for worship, they do so with their

⁴⁵ Just, 137.

⁴⁶ Senn, 119–121.

⁴⁷ Senn, 110–111.

⁴⁸ Senn, 118.

⁴⁹ Kevin Vogts, "Henry Schwan's Christmas Tree," *The Lutheran Witness* 117, no. 12 (December 1998): 6–8.

bodies. These bodies have five senses—sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch; in addition to other senses like temperature, pain, balance, pressure, etc. Humans have physiological responses to sights and sounds, innately discerning the difference between the beautiful and the ugly, between the pleasant and the repulsive. Therefore, when St. Paul exhorts the Romans to “present [their] bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is [their] spiritual service of worship” (Romans 12:1), he is telling them that Christian worship must be a *de facto* sensual experience. The psalms certainly engage the senses, using sight,⁵⁰ hearing,⁵¹ taste,⁵² smell,⁵³ and touch⁵⁴ as instruments of worship.

To this end, the liturgy employs the senses, in varying degrees, across every denomination. “Whether it is in the grandeur or simplicity of nature or in the multitude of dazzlingly creative expressions made by human hands, God’s people delight in those things that bring pleasure to the senses and an awareness of deeper truths.”⁵⁵ To this end, the arts have been an integral part of Lutheran worship since the beginning and therein is the engagement of the human body and senses. Through the senses beauty is discerned. Such beauty is liturgically reflected in the interplay of the arts and sciences in creating a dignified worship space to accommodate the conduct of a reverent ceremonial. Thus, when Christianity began as a persecuted private religion, “the catacombs were designed to veil Christian truth from pagan eyes while conveying a cryptic symbolism to the initiated.”⁵⁶ But this simple cave art, meant to both teach and beautify, would soon grow into elaborate basilicas decorated with vivid paintings and filled with the most significant music of the era. Thus, the eyes and ears were involved in worship before the liturgy even began.

In addition to the human longing for beauty, one also cannot deny the pedagogical advantage of engaging the senses to aid memory and retention. Engaging the senses makes things more “real.” This is why

⁵⁰ Psalm 121:1, “I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; From where shall my help come?”

⁵¹ Psalm 85:8, “I will hear what God the Lord will say; For He will speak peace to His people, to His godly ones.”

⁵² Psalm 119:103, “How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

⁵³ Psalm 141:2, “May my prayer be counted as incense before You.”

⁵⁴ Psalm 63:4, “So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.”

⁵⁵ Timothy Maschke, *Gathered Guests*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 181.

⁵⁶ Reed, 13.

the ceremony of the liturgy is filled with rituals to involve the senses. In fact, this inclusion of ritual is not merely an aspect of Christian worship, but “ritual is involved in all aspects of personal, family, and social life, from toilet training of toddlers to family reunions to political rallies” etc.⁵⁷ Such rituals include the aforementioned passive activities of seeing and hearing, but in the liturgical setting they extend to the active rituals of standing, sitting, kneeling, gesturing, and the like. The more these sensual activities are used in worship, the more these activities themselves, connected with God’s Word, will remind the people of the object of worship—Christ the Savior.

A personal example can illustrate this point: When I was a boy in a Lutheran parish school, we would frequently be pulled from classes to sing for funerals. After one funeral in particular, I remember the ushers extinguishing the candles and, when the distinctive snuffed-candle smell wafted back to the balcony where my class was sitting, my friend Jesse said, “I love that smell.” I had never considered the smell before. Since that moment, whenever I smell that distinctive snuffed-candle odor, whether it be in the Church sanctuary or a birthday party, I am mentally transported to the balcony of my home parish, I am in sixth grade, and Jesse is pointing out a smell I had never noticed before. The memory associated with my sense of smell has, in a way, become part of my worship life.

This example shows how even in liturgical traditions where certain senses are not traditionally engaged, they can still be a part of worship. The Lutheran church in Midwestern America is historically a more passive church when it comes to engaging the senses in worship. Many German immigrants came to America with a very low liturgical identity because of their affiliation with the Prussian Union of Churches, where any distinctive Lutheran liturgical identity was thoroughly watered down. In addition, there was a fear of such rituals becoming superstition, as many of these German Lutherans perceived Roman Catholic practice to be. The result was generations of overly simplified liturgical worship among the Lutherans, which did not engage the bodies of the worshipers much beyond standing and sitting, speaking and listening. Despite the fact that there has been much liturgical improvement and revival in Lutheranism over the last 30 years,⁵⁸ there is still room for Lutheranism to increase the use of the senses in worship.

⁵⁷ Senn, 190.

⁵⁸ For example, more proper liturgical vestments have largely replaced the old black preaching robes; chanting has been largely reintroduced along with Matins,

It is good to consciously use the human body and senses in worship because, as Senn points out, “I don’t just have a body; I *am* a body, and all my relations so the world are bodily relations.”⁵⁹ This is why the Psalms and St. Paul encourage all Christians to worship God with their bodies, and thus with their senses. It is natural that every form of worship in every denomination engages the senses in varying degrees. The motivation for making the liturgy a sensual experience is clear: Christian worship strives for beauty in every form because the object of worship, God our Savior, is himself beautiful and he makes us beautiful through his saving work and Word.

Conclusion

Christians worship. The God they worship reveals himself to them through his Word and Sacraments. Thus, Luther’s description of the Church remains an excellent description of the Church’s worship as well: “God’s word cannot be without God’s people, and conversely, God’s people cannot be without God’s word.”⁶⁰ God’s Word, and his sacraments by extension, must be the centerpiece of worship because it is only through these means of grace that God plants a saving faith in the Christian’s heart. And yet, even though God’s Word is static, the form of the liturgy is certainly not. It changes with every new culture as it creates a suitable vehicle in which God’s people can worship with hearts, minds, voices, and other senses.

It is necessary to understand both the history and theology of these liturgical concepts as one approaches the study of liturgy today. Too often in denominational circles, people tend to argue from extreme positions—some emphasizing the ritual and historical aspects of worship, and others emphasizing the cultural and social aspects. This is certainly true in the various expressions of Lutheranism. But true, Biblical, liturgical worship incorporates a proper balance between both of these emphases, acknowledging and appreciating the rich tradition and Biblical roots of the liturgy, while also striving to make it relatable to today’s culture.

Many Lutheran hymnals produced in the last thirty years have sought to do this with careful updates to the wording and music of the liturgy along with thoughtful revisions to the hymn corpus. This

Vespers, Prime, and Compline from the Daily Office; and it is not uncommon for some Lutherans to make the sign of the cross or reverence the altar.

⁵⁹ Senn, 190. Emphasis original.

⁶⁰ Luther, *Church*, 150.

demonstrates a proper liturgical ethos which understands that, as in a home inspection, if the structural foundations of liturgy are in good repair, the only updating necessary is the window coverings. Thus, as a living act of worship, the liturgy cannot by nature stay the same. It must grow like people do. Then, without damaging the structure, God will always bless his people through his Word and his people will respond to his gifts in thanks and praise. LSQ

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How Are Old Testament Worship Practices Relevant to the New Testament Church?

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WHEN THE SUBJECT COMES UP IN BIBLE Studies, the way the Israelites worshipped is viewed as “interesting,” but not something anyone, pastor or people, is particularly motivated to put into practice. After all, as the epistle to the Hebrews says, “The fact is that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4), and Jesus’ perfect sacrifice has done away with all that Old Testament worship. So it’s all useless, right? On the other hand, if the Bible is all God’s Word, including the Old Testament, there *has* to be more to these Old Testament worship forms, right? Old Testament worship is relevant to New Testament Christians, but there are certain pitfalls to be avoided in how we define that relevance.

In 2018 there was a display at the Freeborn County Fairgrounds in Albert Lea, Minnesota, called “The Tabernacle Experience.” Its ostensible purpose is stated on the website: “The Tabernacle Experience is not a museum or a theatre production. It is an Encounter with the Living God!”¹ The aim, in other words, was to facilitate the worship of New Testament people in an Old Testament context. Fascinating and paradoxical as it may seem, there is a keen interest, in the camps of pop-American Evangelicalism at least, in reproducing the forms of Old Testament worship, albeit in an unbloody way. However, many aspects of this “Tabernacle Experience” rang hollow. Participants could walk

¹ The Tabernacle Experience, www.thetabernacleexperience.com (accessed September 8, 2019).

through the grounds alone or in pairs with a set of headphones (shared between up to two people), and listen to the prerecorded tour guide give instructions to the “worshippers” at each location. Each person could see other “worshippers” milling about, following instructions unheard by any other, carrying their coffee cups and pamphlets, wearing jeans and muddy boots and camouflage sweatshirts or Carhartt jackets, and the distinct impression was that each pair or individual was supposed to ignore what anyone else was doing for the benefit of a more personal “Encounter with the Living God,” a scheme which seems to emulate the mid-century existentialism that Rev. John Kleinig characterizes as *reducing* “the Christian faith to an individual’s encounter with God in a personal relationship with him.”²

There were other issues with “The Tabernacle Experience” that are beyond the scope of this paper, but it demonstrates both a specific underlying interest in the forms of Old Testament worship, and the first possible pitfall when theological assumptions are laid over the top of the witness of the Scriptures: that if we employ Old Testament worship forms we are thereby closer to God, that this is a *truer* form of worship than any other. The pitfall on the opposite side is that these worship forms are *only* context and background to the New Testament.

We ask the question, “How are Old Testament worship practices relevant to the New Testament Church?” Primarily, we can say, they are relevant because they are Christological. Growing out of this core, the practices of Old Testament worship teach us in the spheres of anthropology and ecclesiology, and they teach us to become, to alter a phrase from Rev. Kleinig, more “sensitive to holiness.”³ At the outset, though, notice that by our liturgical practices, even unconsciously, we already do assume that these former practices are relevant. Take our *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*. Even before the service begins, we are advised to pray: “I was glad when they said unto me: ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord’” (Psalm 122:1).⁴ The first part of the prayer (after the Invocation) is from a “Song of Ascents” among the Psalms, indicating that when we pray this, we are headed into the space of worship used by Old Testament believers: the Tabernacle or the Temple. “The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him” (Habakkuk 2:20). This passage from Habakkuk’s prophecies comes at a

² John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), xiv.

³ Cf. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, xiv.

⁴ *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (Mankato, MN: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1996), 40.

point where a sharp distinction is drawn between the true God and the idols, especially of the Chaldeans. The point, one is to see here, is that God is not a silent, dumb wooden idol, but the living God, and where he is found is in his Temple—but this has implications for “all the earth.” “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them. And they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Revelation 21:3). This passage is different in that it comes from the New Testament, but perhaps this makes it even more telling regarding the relevance of Old Testament worship practices for the New Testament church. In this and the final chapter of St. John’s Revelation, blissful eternity with God is depicted in terms of the *Tabernacle* and the *Temple*. This will be brought up again. The prayer concludes with the petition for God to “speak,” citing and paraphrasing passages from 1 Samuel 3:10 (when the boy Samuel heard God’s voice *in the Temple*), Psalm 119 (the great Psalm of the Word), John 6:68 (when St. Peter confessed that Jesus’ Words were life), and more. We see a throughline in these “Prayers Before Worship,” being that the worshippers should see themselves as entering the very Tabernacle or Temple of God, which while reflective of those Old Testament forms, is different now, for they find their full realities in Christ (the one who has the words of eternal life), and look forward to a complete and holistic eschatological fulfillment. This is what we imply about the relevance of Old Testament worship by our own worship (And we haven’t even looked at the way the Old Testament is used within the liturgy itself!).

We keep in mind that in the history of the Old Testament there are many forms of worship. They may be divided into three distinct “eras”: Centrally is the era of Tabernacle and Temple (we combine these believing that the concept of the Temple was to be the more permanent and stationary Tabernacle). But before this time was the era of the patriarchs, who worshipped in many ways similar to the worship of the Tabernacle, but in many ways different. Finally, after the fall of Jerusalem in ca. 586 BC, the worship of the Jewish people was primarily to be found in the synagogues.⁵ Any of these periods could be a fascinating

⁵ “No account of Israelite and Jewish worship could be complete without some discussion of this very remarkable institution, which came into being at some time during the Old Testament period and which set the pattern for Christian and Muslim worship, as well as the worship which survived the destruction of the Temple for Judaism. Bamberger calls it a revolutionary departure and such indeed it was. What makes it the more remarkable is that it is almost, if not quite, unmentioned in the Old Testament and that we have no account of its origin” (H. H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel: Its Forms and Meaning* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967], 213). While Rowley’s

study in itself, especially when comparing with the worship of the New Testament Christian Church. For our purposes in this limited space, we will concentrate on the central era, that of the Tabernacle and Temple, for here it is that the patriarchal worship became codified and reached its apex for a broader group of people (the entire nation of their descendants), and synagogal worship claims of itself to be a derivative of Tabernacle and Temple worship—as does, our prayers imply, the Christian Church’s worship, but in a decidedly different way. Each of these, therefore, must be viewed through the central structures in Jerusalem.

Another reason the Temple is of particular interest to the Christian perspective is because it is a central feature of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus attends the services at the Temple (Luke 2:46; Matthew 24:1), fulfills the Law at the Temple on a number of occasions (esp. his Purification, Luke 2:21ff.), and cleanses the Temple (Luke 19:45–46), but in each occasion, the glory of the Temple is dim in comparison to Christ, who

comment is true, that there is no solid historical account of the origin of the synagogue, it is certain that it grew in many ways out of the Temple worship and its forms. Cf. this comment by Bokser:

“When the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, the cult of sacrifices fell into the discard, but the essence of the service which had grown around it survived in other forms of worship which had flourished at the same time. The significance of each type of offering was transmuted into words, into melodies, and into certain dramatic enactments. The most graphic illustration of the latter is the Avodah Service on the Day of Atonement” (Ben Zion Bokser, trans. and ed., *The Prayer Book* [New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1967], x). What exactly “the essence” of Temple worship was, it being the worship instituted by God in the ceremonial laws, is a matter that is disputed between Jewish and Christian authorities. Dennis Praeger writes, “The animal sacrifices prescribed in the Torah were a concession on God’s part, since animal (and, alas, human) sacrifice was universal” (Dennis Praeger, *The Rational Bible: Exodus: God, Slavery, and Freedom* [Washington, DC: Regnery Faith, 2018], 388). Contrary to this, sacrifices were truly part of “the essence” of Temple worship, misconceptions of Hosea 6:6 notwithstanding. See Edersheim:

“Every unprejudiced reader of the Bible must feel that sacrifices constitute the centre of the Old Testament. Indeed, were this the place, we might argue from their universality that, along with the acknowledgment of a Divine power, the dim remembrance of a happy past, and the hope of a happier future, sacrifices belonged to the primeval traditions which mankind inherited from Paradise. To sacrifice seems as ‘natural’ to man as to pray; the one indicates what he feels about himself, the other what he feels about God. The one means a felt need of protection; the other a felt sense of dependence.”

“The fundamental idea of sacrifice in the Old Testament is that of substitution, which again seems to imply everything else—atonement and redemption, vicarious punishment and forgiveness” (Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ* [New York: Hodder & Stoughton, n.d.], 106–7).

is, after all, the new Temple.⁶ To understand this relevance and to have a fuller picture of Christ's connection to the forms of Old Testament worship, we begin with an outline of Temple/Tabernacle sacrifices and worship.

An Outline of Temple/Tabernacle Sacrifices and Worship

Gleaning the practices of worship from the book of Leviticus is no easy task. We will attempt to reconstruct a general picture of the way the Temple functioned on a day-to-day basis, acknowledging that some portions of this will be incomplete or imprecise. Nevertheless, the book of Leviticus is our primary source to understand these structures, because it “consists, by and large, of ritual legislation. By his Word God institutes the essential parts of the divine service for his interaction with his people at the sanctuary. In it he also indicates how their personal behavior and communal life were to harmonize with their involvement in the sacrificial ritual.”⁷

Even an outline of Leviticus will look imposing. The confusion will partially come from the fact that it doesn't begin where our Western minds would like it to begin, i.e., at the beginning. Instead, when God called Moses “from the tent of meeting” that had newly been constructed (Leviticus 1:1), he begins with an assumption: “When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD” (Leviticus 1:2). From the book of Exodus we learn that the regular burnt offering consisted of “two lambs a year old day by day regularly. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight” (Exodus 29:38–39), but for those of us unused to the bloody sacrifices of animals, we'd like to

⁶ Arthur A. Just, Jr.: “Jesus is the new temple (cf. Jn 1:14; 2:19–22). A prominent theme of Luke 1 is the relocation of God's presence to the infant in the womb of Mary. The presence of the Lord, who overshadowed Mary at Jesus' conception, now dwells in him. Jewish Christians and God-fearers familiar with the OT would be acquainted with the idea of the movement of God's presence. God led Israel out of Egypt as a pillar of cloud by day and as a pillar of fire by night (Ex 13:21–22). God's glory visibly came to dwell over the ark and the tabernacle to guide Israel in her travels (Ex 40:34–38; cf. also 25:22; 33:7–23). After the priests processed with the ark to the newly built Jerusalem temple, God took up residence there (1 Kings 8). Shortly before the first temple was destroyed, Ezekiel saw God's glory leave it (Ezekiel 10), and this same glory of God appeared to him in Babylon (Ezekiel 1). After the exile, the rebuilt second temple lacked the glory of the first temple (Ezra 6:13–18), but God promised one day to fill it with even greater glory (Haggai 2:1–9; Zechariah 8–9). *That promise comes to fulfillment here, when the 'King of glory' comes in (Ps 24:7–10), and the Lord himself comes to his temple (Mal 3:1)*” (Luke 1:1–9:50, ConcC [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996], 117, emphasis original).

⁷ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 20.

know first of all how often such things were to be made, on what occasions, for what purposes, etc. To get a fuller picture, we'll need to go out of order.

The Priesthood and Their Vestments

In chapter 8 of Leviticus, we find Moses consecrating Aaron and his sons for their service as priests in the Tabernacle. First they were washed with water (8:6), bringing them back to the baseline state of cleanness. Kleinig notes the significance that Aaron and his sons “in fact did very little in this ceremony. They were on the receiving end of the rite.”⁸ He says, “God is the most important agent [in this rite] because he ultimately is the one who ordained the priestly candidates. He gave the instructions that are carried out in the ordination rite. He authorized the priests to minister on his behalf to Israel, and to represent them before him.”⁹ God made the priesthood, therefore, to be the foundation of these Old Testament forms of worship. I mean that the rest of the book of Leviticus, with its ritual legislation, is meaningless without the priesthood. There was no corporate worship without the priest. We will see later what Edersheim says “need[s] scarcely be said, that everything connected with the priesthood was intended to be symbolical and typical.”¹⁰ It did not reach its fulfillment but pointed ahead to something greater. But it is important to notice now the indispensable nature of the priesthood to Old Testament worship, because

The fundamental design of Israel itself was to be unto Jehovah “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” This, however, could only be realised in “the fulness of time.” At the very outset there was the barrier of sin; and in order to gain admittance to the ranks of Israel, when “the sum of the children of Israel was taken after their number,” every man had to give the half-shekel ... as “a ransom (covering) for his soul unto Jehovah.” But even so Israel was sinful, and could only approach Jehovah in the way which Himself opened, and in the manner which He appointed.... The fundamental ideas which underlay all and connected it into a harmonious whole, were

⁸ Ibid., 197.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Edersheim, *The Temple*, 84.

reconciliation and *mediation*: the one expressed by typically atoning sacrifices, the other by a typically intervening priesthood.¹¹

As good Lutherans, we might object to the idea of true worship being based upon any individuals or indeed any office (the old scars of Roman Catholicism and their doctrine of indelible character start to itch), but the priesthood pointed *ahead*. That is what we must remember. The goal was, as Edersheim noted, “a kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:6), but that was not yet. Instead, the priests had to be a separate class who would mediate for the people and reconcile them to God by the administration of the sacrifices. Their role would be fulfilled in Christ.

But there are more details to notice about Aaron and his sons. After they were washed, the high priest (Aaron) received his vestments: “And [Moses] put the coat on him and tied the sash around his waist and clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him and tied the skillfully woven band of the ephod around him, binding it to him with the band. And he placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim. And he set the turban on his head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden plate, the holy crown” (Leviticus 8:7–9).¹² Then when the priests and altar were anointed with oil, Aaron’s sons received their vestments: “Moses brought Aaron’s sons and clothed them with coats and tied sashes around their waists and bound caps on them” (Leviticus 8:13).¹³ A sacrifice was made, blood was put on the priests and the altar, and the oil and blood also were sprinkled on the garments of the priests, consecrating them as well. With a ritual meal, the priests were ordained.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “The blue woolen robe was made with a single piece of cloth, with an opening for the neck like a surplice. It had bells and pomegranates around the fringes of its skirt. The ephod was shaped like a circular apron and worn over the robe. It was made with gold interwoven with blue, purple, and scarlet yarn mixed with fine linen. Straps attached it to the shoulders. It reached from the breast to the shoulders. The breast piece was worn over the ephod. It was attached to the shoulder of the ephod with gold cord on the top and the strap of the ephod on the bottom with blue cord. It was constructed as a pouch for the sacred lots and was made of the same material as the ephod. Four rows of three precious stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes were set in it. The holy diadem was a gold plate inscribed with the words ‘YHWH’s holiness.’ It stretched from ear to ear across the forehead and was attached to the turban with blue bands of cloth” (Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 198).

¹³ “Apart from the linen underskirt, each priest received three items of clothing: a white linen tunic; a sash made of embroidered linen with blue, purple, and scarlet yarn; and a linen cap, or, in the case of the high priest, a linen turban” (Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 197).

It is important to begin here, because when we examine the daily schedule of the Tabernacle and Temple, we find first the mention of the priests and their vestments. So we move backward to chapter 6.

The Daily Services

When the priest woke up in the morning, he “put on his linen garment and put his linen undergarment on his body” (Leviticus 6:10), getting dressed for his work. The vestments were the first part of his day. In these vestments, “he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar and put them beside the altar” (6:10). The burnt offering, we see, has been burning all night on the altar, until it leaves behind only ash. This is the first thing the priest would deal with each day. Removing these ashes from the altar, from the fire that God had lit, effectively renewed the day, preparing for the sacrifices that would come next.

A note about that fire is in order here, too. The theme of God’s moving presence is a central feature in comparing forms of worship between Old Testament and New, and even within the Old itself. After the age of the Patriarchs, when the descendants of Israel multiplied and grew in the nation of Egypt, we read that “the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew” (Exodus 2:23–25). God is depicted as distant and silent, maintaining that state for nearly three hundred years, but when he came to deliver them, we read next of his appearance: “The angel of the LORD appeared to [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush” (Exodus 3:2). At the Exodus itself, God led the people “in a pillar of cloud ... and in a pillar of fire” (Exodus 13:21).

The glory of God was thereafter frequently hidden behind a cloud: “They looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud” (Exodus 16:10); “Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it.... Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel” (Exodus 24:15–17). Finally, though, when the Tabernacle was finished, “the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.... For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was

in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys" (Exodus 40:34, 38).

This is the immediate context of the book of Leviticus. It is from this cloud and fire that the Lord speaks to Moses in the book until the ordination of Aaron and his sons. That rite culminated in a multifaceted inaugural sacrifice, and when the animals were presented before the altar, "fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces" (Leviticus 9:24). The significance of this event is described by Kleinig:

This unique, unrepeated fiery theophany, at the climax of the inaugural service, announced the Lord's acceptance of the service and so disclosed the significance of every service. Every service was a divine theophany. The place of the Lord's appearance was the altar. The time for his appearance was at the burning up of the daily burnt offering. The manner of his appearance was through the holy fire on the altar, a fire that was normally veiled and encased in a cloud of smoke.¹⁴

When we read the chapter immediately following that, concerning the death of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu, we can understand their judgment. They sought to bring "unauthorized fire before the LORD" (Leviticus 10:1). But the fire was not merely a practical affair, the thing that burned the sacrifices up. It was God's own presence. In Nadab and Abihu, these priests were seeking to seize more authority than they were given in the rites of the Tabernacle. So we see the significance of the fire on the altar. It represents where the presence of God had come to sanctify his people.

Now, back to the priest's morning. After taking the ashes and setting them beside the altar, the priest had to remove his sanctified vestments and "put on other garments and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place" (6:11). Because this act was performed outside the sanctuary, the vestments were not worn. They had been consecrated for use in God's presence.

In God's presence, then, the priest offered sacrifices of several classes. The first broad division is into *voluntary offerings* and *mandatory offerings*. The voluntary offerings are burnt offerings, grain offerings, and peace offerings, each of which serves a slightly different function, but all

¹⁴ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 218.

of which seem to be regularly taken from the tithes of the people.¹⁵ The mandatory offerings are divided into sin offerings and guilt offerings, on which Horace Hummel astutely comments, that they “are not easily distinguishable, but apparently the latter pertained more to ‘*criminal trespass*,’ to the political than to the ecclesiastical aspect of ancient Israel.¹⁶ Hence, monetary restitution was usually required, in addition to the animal sacrifice. The sin-offering was distinguished from all others, both by its prominent use of blood (varying with both offense and offender), and by the burning of the carcass outside the camp.”¹⁷

The voluntary offerings are presented initially over the first three chapters of Leviticus: Chapter 1 deals with the burnt offering; chapter 2 with the grain offering; and chapter 3 with the peace offering. Each of these is revisited later on in the book, but first we note significantly that, “Syntactically, we have a single sentence over these three chapters.”¹⁸ One effect of this is to unify all these sacrifices. Kleinig again notes: “The order of the listing ... shows that the burnt offering is the fundamental sacrifice. All the other sacrifices are placed on it and so are virtually incorporated into it.”¹⁹ That mess of ashes cleaned up by the priest in the morning, therefore, consisted of the remains of a stack of sacrifices. Imagine it like this:

On the bottom, the burnt offering consisted of a male bull without blemish or a male sheep or goat without blemish, every part of it, with the entrails and legs washed; or of turtledoves or pigeons with crop cast aside in the ash heap.

Atop that was the grain offering, consisting of flour mixed with oil and frankincense (but some left as the livelihood of the priests); or of unleavened loaves mixed with oil or wafers smeared with oil or cooked flour and oil (again with some left for the priests).

And as a cap over the grain, the peace offering was an unblemished male or female bull, but only its fat over the entrails and the kidneys and

¹⁵ “The material for these offerings is taken from the basic foodstuff produced by the ancient Israelites. It constituted their livelihood: the meat from their domesticated animals, the grain from their crops, the olive oil from their groves, and the syrup from their fruit trees. Generally speaking, the meat came from their firstborn male animals (cf. Deut 12:6, 17; 14:23; 15:19), while the grain, olive oil, and syrup came from the tithes of their agricultural produce (Lev 27:30; cf. Deut 12:6, 11, 17–18; 14:23)” (Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 40).

¹⁶ A slightly different perspective on this will be elucidated later.

¹⁷ Horace D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 80.

¹⁸ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 40.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

long lobe of the liver were burned; or an unblemished male or female lamb, only its fat, the kidneys, and the long lobe of the liver; or an unblemished male or female goat, only the fat covering the entrails, the kidneys, and the long lobe of the liver. The meat from these offerings were given to the priests as their livelihood.

At the inauguration of the Temple Service, following the ordination of Aaron and his sons, we see this order laid out: “And he presented the burnt offering and offered it according to the rule. And he presented the grain offering, took a handful of it, and burned it on the altar, besides the burnt offering of the morning. Then he killed the ox and the ram, the sacrifice of peace offerings for the people ... and he burned the fat pieces on the altar” (Leviticus 9:16–18, 20).

There are additional details to draw in, such as the fine points of difference between the private offerings and public offerings, and the way most of the private offerings were brought on festivals, especially Pentecost, but let this suffice to provide a general picture of what the daily sacrifices in the Temple were like. It should however be noted in closing on these daily sacrifices that most people would not appear in the sanctuary every day when these sacrifices were being offered,

But every morning when the Israelite went about his daily tasks, he knew that sacrifice was being made for him, and also every evening, when the day was drawing to a close, he was again aware that a lamb’s blood was being shed for him and the smoke of the burning sacrifice was ascending on high as a sweet savor to the Lord. Thus every day was opened and closed with a strong reminder of sin and the positive assurance of Jehovah’s pardoning grace.²⁰

Now we come to the mandatory offerings, as distinct from the voluntary. We have already said that these are of two kinds: 1) sin offerings; 2) guilt/reparation offerings.

Sin offerings could be either private/personal, or public/communal. “If anyone sins unintentionally” (Leviticus 4:2) the rules for this offering begins. But beneath that heading it also says, “if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people” (4:3), “If the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally” (4:13), “When a leader sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by the commandments of the LORD his God ought not to be done” (4:22), and finally, “If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally” (4:27). The specific

²⁰ William Moenkemoeller, *The Festivals and Sacrifices of Israel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932), 7.

varieties among the regulations for the sin offering might be helpfully demonstrated by the following chart:

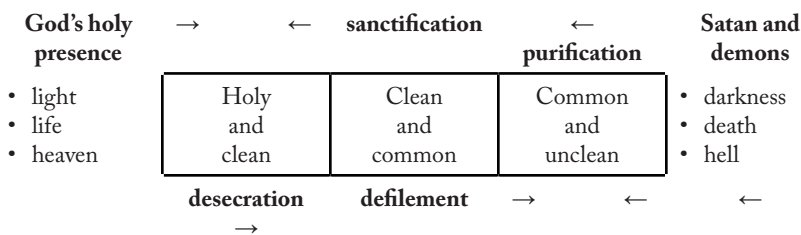
Person who sins	Offering	Details
The anointed priest	A bull without blemish	Priest lays his hand on the head of the bull; blood sprinkled before the veil, put on the horns of the altar of incense, poured out at the base of the altar of burnt offering; fat, kidneys, and liver lobe burned; the rest burned outside the camp
The whole congregation	A bull	Elders lay their hands on the head of the bull; same as above
A leader	A male goat without blemish	Leader lays his hand on the head of the goat; same as above; meat for priests
Anyone of the common people	A female goat or lamb without blemish	Lays his hand on the head of the animal; same as above; meat for priests
Special: Anyone who refuses to testify even though he is a witness; or Anyone who accidentally touches any uncleanness; or Anyone who speaks a rash oath	A female lamb or goat, or Two pigeons or turtledoves, or A tenth of an ephah (>2 liters) of fine flour <i>without oil or frankincense</i>	Lamb or goat presumably same as above; one bird's blood sprinkled on the side of the altar and poured out at its base, other bird offered as a burnt offering; one handful of the flour burned on the altar, the rest for the priests

Amid all those details, we can discover a central thread: Blood had to be paid. Atonement was the key purpose, explicitly stated numerous times. The animal whose blood was paid varied depending on the person's status in the community, but aside from the poorest of the people, it was essential to each person's offering.

A similar set of offering regulations, but with perhaps a slightly different emphasis, follows: the “guilt” offerings, or “reparation” offerings. Again these sacrifices deal with sins committed “unintentionally” (Leviticus 5:15), but in a specific sphere. Here the division is not in regard to the status of a person but in regard to the sin committed, as follows:

Sin Committed	Offering	Details
Unintentional desecration of something that is holy	A ram without blemish and payment in full, plus one fifth, for what was desecrated	The priest receives the money
Unintentional sin against a holy regulation	A ram without blemish, or its equivalent	
Dishonest gain from a neighbor accompanied by a false oath	A ram without blemish, or its equivalent	Restoration to the wronged party in full of what was stolen, plus one fifth

It is Kleinig who calls this a “reparation offering,” saying that it “was meant to compensate God for the loss, or abuse, of something holy. Unlike the sin offering, it did not deal with the consequences of defilement, but with the desecration of something that belonged to God, whether it was an offering or his holy name.”²¹ The difference between defilement and desecration is significant to the whole of the levitical laws and the system of Old Testament worship:²²



These terms simply describe the movement between categories. Things, places, and people are either holy or common, and either clean

²¹ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 137.

²² Table from Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 6.

or unclean. When a thing remains clean but becomes common after being holy, that is desecration, and when a thing becomes unclean while remaining common, that is defilement.

This concept is important in considering how we appreciate holiness. Before we leave the services of the temple, though, it is appropriate to take a brief survey of the festivals of Old Testament worship.

The Festivals

The Passover is unanimously understood to be the most important festival of the Old Testament worship. It is the commemoration of the Exodus, when God delivered his people from slavery. Something that distinguished this festival from others was the fact that it required no Temple or Tabernacle, no priest. True, every Israelite male had to appear before the Lord for this festival, but the celebration of the Passover was done among the family in the home—and it involved the shedding of the blood of a lamb “without blemish” (Exodus 12:5). This is the only regular festival instituted before the regulations were given for the Divine Service in the Tabernacle, and is therefore in many ways foundational to all the rest, in the same way the burnt offering is foundational for the rest of the day’s offerings. Edersheim says,

It was a sacrifice, and yet quite out of the order of all Levitical sacrifices. For it had been instituted and observed before Levitical sacrifices existed; before the Law was given; nay, before the Covenant was ratified by blood. In a sense, it may be said to have been the cause of all the later sacrifices of the Law, and of the Covenant itself. Lastly, it belonged neither to one nor to another class of sacrifices; it was neither exactly a sin-offering nor a peace-offering, but combined them both. And yet in many respects it quite differed from them. In short, just as the priesthood of Christ was a real Old Testament priesthood, yet not after the order of Aaron but after the earlier, prophetic, and royal order of Melchisedek, so the sacrifice also of Christ was a real Old Testament sacrifice, yet not after the order of Levitical sacrifices, but after that of the earlier prophetic Passover sacrifice, by which Israel had become a royal nation.²³

This is an important concept that we will return to.

The next festival was Pentecost, also called the Feast of Weeks. This festival occurred at “the season of the year when the other grain, especially wheat, would be ready for the sickle,” marking “the *close* of the

²³ Edersheim, *The Temple*, 233–34.

grain harvest,” as Passover occurred at its beginning.²⁴ Other features mark this festival as the conceptual conclusion of Passover.

It occurs, first of all, on the fiftieth day after Passover (hence the name Pentecost), which is seven weeks, or seven sevens, apart, but the fiftieth day also marks the *eighth* at the end of the seventh seven, pointing to eschatological fulfillment.

Second, the offerings on the Feast of Weeks were two loaves of bread, but leavened now, where Passover’s bread was unleavened; and several other animal sacrifices: as a burnt offering, seven lambs (compare the one lamb for Passover), one bull, and two rams; as a sin offering, one male goat; and as a peace offering, two male lambs. The regular daily voluntary sacrifices, you see, are amplified for this festival. It is described in Deuteronomy as a joyous festival: “And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 16:11), and it is connected to the Exodus and the Passover once again: “You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt” (16:12).

The third festival was the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. This occurred six months after Passover, involving the gathering of various branches, presentations of food offerings, and dwelling in booths for seven days. This last was meant to remind the people “that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 23:43). Again, all the worship is tied to Passover.

There are many lesser festivals we won’t spend any time on here, but one more needs consideration: The Day of Atonement. Again, the structure of Leviticus might throw off Western readers, because various purification laws are suddenly interrupted at chapter 16 with the description of this festival, which is also described chronologically as being spoken to Moses by God “after the death of the two sons of Aaron” (Leviticus 16:1), which occurred six chapters earlier. But the reason for the odd positioning here is so that the Day of Atonement takes up residence in a central location in the book. Although it is not one of the “big three” of Passover, Pentecost, and Booths, it is hugely significant for Old Testament worship. Part of the idea is that “the Day of Atonement cleansed the people from all the sins for which the normal sacrifices prescribed in chapters 1–7 did not atone.”²⁵ This festival was the one time a year that the high priest entered the *sanctum sanctorum*, the Holy of Holies behind the curtain, to be fully in the presence of God and his glory.

²⁴ Moenkemoeller, *The Festivals and Sacrifices of Israel*, 17.

²⁵ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 335.

Numerous sacrifices were combined in a complex but specific and meaningful way for this festival. First was a “bull as a sin offering for” the priest, in the vein of the usual sin offering, except that the blood is brought “inside the veil” (Leviticus 16:6, 12). Then two goats were set “before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting” (16:7), and one was designated “for the LORD and the other ... for Azazel” (16:8).²⁶ “Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil” (16:15), again, a normal sin offering for the people, but within the Most Holy Place. Some of the blood of each was also brought out to the altar in the outer area. All this is described as “atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar” (16:20). Interestingly, it was meant to make these sacred places sacred again.

But then another unique feature takes place: “Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and sent it away into the wilderness” (16:21). There is no doubt what this can mean: the sins (and iniquities and transgressions—notice the completeness by using the three terms) of all the people are carried away, so that they are not counted against them, but all is forgiven.

By this point, hopefully a relatively vivid picture is available of Old Testament worship. Now we will turn our attention to how these practices are relevant.

Holiness: Christology, Anthropology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology

When Jesus said of the Scriptures, “They testify about me” (John 5:39), he was referring to the worship practices, too, as part of the whole Old Testament. In another way, Jesus affirms the relevance of the Old Testament worship, because when

he appeared to his disciples on the first Easter Sunday, he used “the Law of Moses” to proclaim his death and resurrection as well as repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Lk 24:44–47). God’s revelation to Moses therefore finds fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus.... Leviticus proclaims the same Gospel that is enacted in the Divine Service of Word and Sacrament, the same Gospel that the

²⁶ I will not here take time to discuss the meaning of this obscure word, but it could serve a fascinating study in itself.

church is to proclaim to the world until the close of human history. This book, then, is most relevant to the life of the church because it proclaims the Gospel of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.²⁷

This familiar phrase, “the Lamb of God,” is dependent upon the Old Testament worship forms, for Jesus is the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice. The Lamb of Passover, as the foundation of all the sacrifices, typified Christ. The Lamb of burnt offering, as the foundation of the rest of the daily sacrifices, typified Christ. Calling Jesus “the Lamb of God” means that all the sacrifices of Tabernacle and Temple are incorporated into him.

But he is also the perfect priest and the perfect Temple. We read exactly this in the epistle to the Hebrews: “He holds his priesthood permanently” (7:24); “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (9:14); “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart” (10:19–22). Christologically, therefore, the Old Testament worship forms give us context, and actually communicated the gracious and forgiving presence of God to the believers of the old covenant. By the emphatic presence of blood in this worship, and by the theology of atonement, we may see that “the reality of sin as the fatal disturber of man’s peace and the certainty of abounding grace to wash him clean from all sin is the outstanding lesson proclaimed throughout the Church of God in all ages, both in the centuries before Christ and in those after Christ.”²⁸ It must be stated in no uncertain terms, the old covenant was one of grace, with its aim being to communicate holiness from God to his people, so that they could enter his presence and be united to him. In fact, God “declared, most emphatically, that he made [his people] holy ([Leviticus] 20:8), just as he also made the priests holy; since the Israelites could not make themselves holy enough to enter the divine realm, he came to them to share his own unique holiness with them.”²⁹ He did this through the sacrifices, through the priests, through the Temple. And he did this through Christ.

²⁷ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 1.

²⁸ Moenkemoeller, *The Festivals and Sacrifices of Israel*, 38.

²⁹ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 438.

Even the small details of Old Testament worship find fulfillment in Christ. Consider how the priesthood was inaugurated, when “Moses brought Aaron and his sons and washed them with water” (Leviticus 8:6). Jesus received the same: John even recognized this when he exclaimed: “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” (Matthew 3:14). It’s a curious thing when a priest—the designated consecrator—needs to be consecrated. But this is Jesus’ answer: “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15).

Thereafter Jesus served as a priest, preaching, and teaching God’s Word, until it came time to give the final Passover sacrifice. In that sacrifice, he wore the appropriate vestments. As the high priest wore the breastplate and the Urim and Thummim, carrying the names of the people of Israel on their persons before the Lord, Jesus “himself bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24). As “the high priest was ‘clothed’ with God’s holiness on his head (the holy diadem),” Jesus was crowned with thorns, the symbol of man’s sin.³⁰

But Jesus did not need to be sprinkled with the blood of anything else or given holiness from anything outside himself, because just as he was the perfect priest, once again, he was also the perfect sacrifice.

Sacramental theology permeates the priesthood—the purification rite, the sprinkling of blood, and the wearing of vestments. This all implies the spiritual benefit coming in physical means, much like the means of grace that are instituted for our own services in the New Testament. This unity of the physical and spiritual demonstrates “the holistic assumptions of Biblical theology: sin has corrupted the whole man, body as well as spirit, and the remedy must correspond.”³¹ This holistic healing comes in Christ, who in his first sermon preached on Isaiah 61: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19), declaring, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (4:21). This fulfillment is the Gospel itself, that “in Jesus all of creation has been freed from the bondage of its fallenness,”³² material and spiritual. Gnosticism has no place here. Jesus came in the flesh, not only to bring our souls to heaven but to bring about the

³⁰ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 198.

³¹ Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 80.

³² Just, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 193.

resurrection of our bodies. These Last-Day gifts are given through the physical means of grace, joined to the Word, which is Spirit.

Perhaps this is one of the most significant things that the forms of Old Testament worship can teach us. Beyond the vestments and the priesthood, look to the sacrifices. Every day in the Temple, a physical animal was sacrificed to make atonement for the people, and “something as physical as blood is necessary to effect expiation,” because “sin ... is not only mental and volitional, but a miasma, a negative ‘charge’ or force which invades all parts of the material world as well.”³³ Therefore St. Augustine looks forward to the eschaton as a result of his understanding of the Old Testament sacrifices: “For the animals selected as victims under the old law were required to be immaculate, and free from all blemish whatever, and symbolized holy men free from all sin, the only instance of which character was found in Christ,” but not only do they symbolize (we might say typify) Christ, but “after the judgment ... there shall then be in the body and soul of the saints the purity which was symbolized in the bodies of these victims.”³⁴ Unity to Christ is depicted by these sacrifices.

Consider the sin offering: when a bull was burned “outside the camp” (Leviticus 4:21). The writer to the Hebrews comments: “So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood” (Hebrews 13:12). The importance of this location should be clear: “The camp enclosed Israel; to be outside of it meant to be removed from Israel.”³⁵ This demonstrates on the one hand, therefore, the Great Exchange: Jesus separates himself from God’s people so that we might become the righteous people of God. But there is also unity to Christ in this, because the epistle writer continues: “Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured” (Hebrews 13:13). This is the Christian bearing his cross, which is following Christ.

Another, perhaps more significant, connection is found in another feature of the sacrifices for sin. One cannot help but notice that virtually every time an animal is offered, the person bringing the sacrifice, and sometimes the priest in his place, “shall lay his hand on the head of the” sacrifice (Leviticus 1:4). By this symbolical action, the sins of the individual or of the community were placed on the animal, so that it could pay for them vicariously. We are joined to the body of Christ,

³³ Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 85.

³⁴ Aurelius Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871), 2:402.

³⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistle of James* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 484.

because our sins are laid on him, and his righteousness is transferred to us. Thus Christology, anthropology, ecclesiology, and eschatology are all joined around the idea of the giving of holiness, how such a thing might come to be ours, and this is depicted clearly in the sacrifices. They point to Christ, who was made “to be sin ... so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

And at the same time they do more than “point to” Christ. Christ is their conclusion. It is in a sense true that “the priesthood of Christ was a real Old Testament priesthood” and “the sacrifice also of Christ was a real Old Testament sacrifice.”³⁶ This is true because Jesus did exactly what all the Old Testament high priests did, sacrificing his body as they sacrificed the lambs and bulls and goats, only he did it better and in a way that completed the need for any sacrifice ever to be offered again.

We can conclude with Gerhard that “it is easy to deduce the purpose of the ceremonial laws. The primary and chief purpose was to signify and foreshadow the benefits of Christ.”³⁷ This agrees with Francis Pieper:

These acts, in which by God’s command animals were offered as sin offerings, contained the same message which the words of the Prophets brought. They foretold the reconciliation of the world to God to be effected by Christ.... The blood of the sacrificed animals did not atone, not intrinsically; it did atone as a type, as a prefiguring of the sin offering brought by Christ. It was the divinely ordained means of grace by which the atonement to be accomplished by Christ was presented to the Israelites. The believing Israelite obtained forgiveness of sins through the right use of the sin offering.³⁸

The Old Testament worship was a ministry of Word and Sacrament similar to ours today, for the Levitical priests “not only sacrificed animals but also diligently taught Torah.”³⁹ At this point, the nuances of difference between Old Testament means of grace and New Testament means of grace could be discussed and debated at length. Suffice for now that forgiveness rippled back from Christ’s atonement through the sacrifices of Tabernacle/Temple worship, and is also offered fully

³⁶ Edersheim, *The Temple*, 234.

³⁷ Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces: On the Law of God, On the Ceremonial and Forensic Laws*, trans. Richard J. Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 277.

³⁸ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950–57), 2: 378–79.

³⁹ Roland Ziegler, “Priesthood and Office,” *Logia* 28, no. 1 (Epiphany 2019): 28.

and completely to us through the means of grace. Therefore the whole company of believers, Old and New Testaments, are united body and soul in the holiness of Christ, to inherit life everlasting.

Conclusion

There are many other avenues that would be interesting to examine in the vein of Old Testament worship. Even a study of times—the Sabbath, the festivals, etc.—could yield a series of research papers, and each one would offer exciting new insights into the story of our redemption.

That is ultimately the relevance of Old Testament worship practices for the New Testament Church. By investigating how God instituted the Divine Service for our spiritual forbearers, we see God's plan of salvation in its many facets, how rich and full a plan it is. The Lord did not abandon his people to struggle in the dark on their own, but carried them along by the provision of these sacrifices and regulations. As Luther writes, "Every Scripture passage is of infinite understanding."⁴⁰ We could spend our entire lives in study on only one feature of Old Testament and never plumb the depths of its meaning. While the Old Testament has passed away, replaced by its fulfillment, it is still "written for our instruction, that through the endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4), "that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17).

Understanding the context of the Old Testament, understanding the grace given by God through these forms of worship, we do have hope, certainty through Christ, because he was there in the Old Covenant, is here in the New, and will return at the Last Day, because "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). [LSQ](#)

⁴⁰ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Brown (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955–), 11:433.

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The Judgement of Solomon: Responding to The Gressmann Thesis

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A WIDE VARIETY OF BIBLICAL SCHOLARS AND historians dismiss the historical validity of the *Judgment of Solomon* in 1 Kings 3:16-28, often by referring the reader to Hugo Gressmann's 1907 presentation.¹ The idea Gressmann presented is that the tale of the Judgment of Solomon was likely a retelling of an ancient Indian legend about a previous incarnation of the Buddha recast by the Israelite historians to increase the reputation of Solomon among the Exiles returning from Babylon. Mordechai Cogan labeled

¹ Gressmann, Hugo, 1907 "Das salomonische Urteil", *Deutsche Rundschau* 130 (1907), pp. 212-8, <https://archive.org/stream/deutscherundsch130stutuoft#page/212/mode/2up>.

For example: James Montgomery's 1957 *The Book of Kings* ICC Edinburgh: T&T Clark, p. 108-110; John Gray's 1970 *I and II Kings: A Commentary*, 2nd ed. OTL, Philadelphia: Westminster, p. 114-116, 127-29; Kyung Sook Lee, 2012 "Books of Kings: Images of Women without Women's Realities" p 159-177 in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, edited by Luise Schottroff, Marie-Theres Wacker, Martin Rumscheidt, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans. <https://books.google.com/books?id=hylRZWDiKMEC&pg=PA176&ots=3KeuqwPhAF&dq=hugo%20gressmann%20salomonische%20urteil&pg=PA163#v=onepage&q=gressmann&f=false>; Alice Bach's 2013 *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, Routledge, p. 220f https://books.google.com/books?id=SQ7fAQAQBAJ&pg=PT220&ots=oyXgtZ3_3U&dq=hugo%20gressmann%20salomonische%20urteil&pg=PT210#v=onepage&q&f=false. Bach refers to Martin Noth's 1969 commentary *Könige 1*, (BKAT 9,1: Neukirchen Vlyun: Neukirchener.) as endorsing this position (Noth pp. 44-48).

Thank you to Seth Neyhart, Mark DeGarmeaux, Mary Abrahamson, and Phil Matzke for help tightening up this paper. The mistakes in this paper are mine.

this the *Gressmann Thesis*.² This article is an apologetic addressing the Gressmann Thesis.

Hugo Gressmann was a noted Old Testament scholar and a close associate of Herman Gunkel. Both were strong advocates of Form Criticism (*Gattungsgeschichte*): a secular method of historical criticism which aspired to date texts and parts of texts in the Old Testament by identifying the literary genre of a text. This would enable the critic to place the text taxonomically in the proper historical context as they created hypothetical reconstructions of the history of Israel and its religions.

It is interesting that so few of the scholars who rely on Gressmann seem to engage with his arguments or evidence. Here we will show the reader the nature of Gressmann's assumptions, arguments, and data to enable an informed response to his claims. Gressmann's claims are invalid, but they arise frequently.

For example, in his popular *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, James Crenshaw relies on Gressmann to say the following:

In all fairness, we must acknowledge that the basic story antedates Israel's king by quite some time and surfaces in many different cultures. As many as twenty-two variants of the story have been located, the earliest of which is thought to come from India. ... It follows that this story has been adapted by the Israelite narrator and secondarily applied to Solomon (Crenshaw 1981:48, and verbatim 1998:39).

There are three flaws in Gressmann's argument which authors like Crenshaw overlook or ignore. First, the purported origin date of Gressmann's earliest child-custody story is several centuries later than the biblical date for Solomon. Second, the earliest possible writing of this Buddhist story is even later than the dates given by the historical critical school regarding the composition of 1 Kings. Finally, Gressmann's data actually establish significantly fewer independent variations of these later than he claims.

First, Gressmann asserts that the "basic story antedates Israel's king by quite some time."³ He does this on the basis of an ancient Indian story about the wisdom of a previous incarnation of the Buddha found in the *Jataka*.

² Mordechai Cogan's 2001 *1 Kings* (Anchor Bible Commentary Series Vol 10) Doubleday, p. 196.

³ Gressmann, p. 213.

According to chronology derived from the Bible, Solomon reigned approximately 970 BC to 930 BC. The Buddha was born somewhere during the 5th to 4th centuries BC.⁴ Some parts of the *Jataka* may date back to the 4th or 3rd century BC. Obviously, if one accepts the biblical data, then Gressmann's thesis is impossible.

Second, Gressmann's assertion that the Indian legend is older than the Solomonic account depends upon an historical critical judgment that this chapter of 1 Kings was not composed until after the people of Israel returned from the Babylonian Exile, and possibly not until the period of the Maccabees.⁵

This assumption, however, is inconsistent with the dates for the composition of 1 Kings posited by most writers of the historical critical schools. According to the secular historical critical school, the composition of 1 Kings is tied together with the composition of what they call the Deuteronomistic History. The date typically given for the final version of Deuteronomy is the mid 6th century BC. The earliest written forms of the *Jataka* tales were written in the Pali language dating from AD 3rd century. Accordingly, the earliest probable time for the composition of the Buddha story, particularly this text, is still later than what the historical critics are willing to grant of 1 Kings.

Thus, if one were to follow the historical critical assumptions about when this part of 1 Kings were written there is still a serious problem. Gressmann assumes that the legend regarding the Buddha is earlier than the text of 1 Kings 3, but the early date he assigns to this legend is fundamentally inconsistent with the secular historical critical schools' dating of the composition of 1 Kings.

The only way around this dilemma would be to posit that the text of 1 Kings 3 must have been an interpolation added by a subsequent redactor at a later time.⁶ This, however, demonstrates the circularity of historical critical arguments regarding the redaction and textual history

⁴ UNESCO [United Nations Educational Scientific, and Cultural Organization] claims the Buddha was born in 623 BC. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/666/> More commonly the date of 563 BC is promoted. The date is quite widely debated. General scholarship around this issue tends toward a date in the early 5th century BC. The earliest biographies of the Buddha were not written until the 1st century AD. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gautama_Buddha#Biographical_sources

⁵ See the discussion pp. 67-69 by Heaton, E.W. *The Hebrew Kingdoms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1968.

⁶ Cogan asserts that the text is from the Deuteronomist, discounting a post-Deuteronomist source. He states that "Folkloristic parallels are not lacking, and one need not travel so far afield; Thenius [19th cent] brings a quote from Grotius [16th/17th cent], who quotes Diodorus [1st cent BC] with a classical parallel." (196f) None of

of this particular account, and for that matter, any other biblical account that is subjected to such treatment.

The third problem with appeals to Gressmann's data is the significant discrepancy between the wide numbers of variants of the story claimed and what Gressmann's data actually show. As we have seen, Crenshaw relies on Gressmann's data to say:

[The story] surfaces in many different cultures. As many as twenty-two variants of the story have been located, the earliest of which is thought to come from India. ... It follows that this story has been adapted by the Israelite narrator and secondarily applied to Solomon.

This might appear to be significant information if the variant were, in fact, wide spread in ancient times— particularly if it could be demonstrated that the tales were prior to the life of Solomon. But, alas, Crenshaw did not accurately represent Gressmann's study.

Gressmann listed 22 separate examples that he considered significant. These were arranged in four groupings.⁷

Grouping I consists of three Indian Buddhist texts regarding the wisdom of the Buddha and possible variants on that theme in later Buddhism. #1) The first text is from Indian Buddhist literature of *Jataka* the "Tale of the Son." These tales must date at the earliest some time after the birth of Buddha somewhere in the 5th to 4th century BC. This would place the tales after the life of Solomon in any event. The tales themselves are dated at the earliest to the 3rd century BC.⁸

#2) The second text is from a Tibetan Buddhist source called the *Dsanglun*. This is another tale demonstrating the Buddha's wisdom. Though the account is set in the 6th century BC the story itself could possibly have originated at the earliest the 4-5th century BC. However, the texts come from AD 7th century or later.⁹ And under this second example Gressmann lists two other Tibetan Buddhist variations from

Cogan's examples pre-date either the biblical dating of Solomon, nor even the historical critical date of the Deuteronomist.

⁷ I present all of Grassmann's bibliographic references in the footnotes and include links to those which I could find online.

⁸ The Tale of the Son from the *Jataka* can be found at https://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/j6/j6012.htm#fn_186

⁹ Isaak Jakob Schmidt, 1845 *Dsang-lun oder Der Weise und der Thor*. German <https://books.google.com/books?id=IttCAAAACAAJ&pg=PA344#v=onepage&q&f=false>. English <https://books.google.com/books?id=v5wpAAAAYAAJ&lpq=PR35&dq=dsanglun%20tibet%20buddhism&pg=PA121#v=onepage&q=mother&cf=false>

the Kangyur, an AD 12th to 13th century collection with some texts that might date back to the AD 6th century.

#3) Gressmann's third example is also a Tibetan Buddhist text, again dating at the earliest to AD 6th century.¹⁰ #4) The fourth and final example in Gressmann's first category is the Chinese play "Hoei-lan-ki" "The Chalk Circle" by Li Qianfu, Yuan dynasty (AD 1259–1368). A central part of this play has a scene very similar to the Judgment of Solomon.¹¹

Gressmann presented the first item in this grouping as a probable source, or earliest exemplar for the Judgment. Thus Gressmann's analysis is actually a single source theory for the Judgment of Solomon, which source, as we have already shown, is actually later than the latest composition date generally accepted for 1 Kings 3:16–28. The other examples under this group do show this tale's pervasiveness through Theravada Buddhism, but they are historically irrelevant to Gressmann's thesis per se.

Further, the theme of the lost or stolen child and a mother's love is doubtless part of every culture. And though Gressmann does not consider it, the possibility of multiple origins should certainly be entertained simply because problems involving lost or potentially stolen children and the legal issues that arise in resolving them are part of every culture, including our own.¹²

But to the point, there is no evidence that the origins of the Indian Buddhist text pre-dated Solomon. The foundations for claiming that these predate the Solomonic texts of the Bible are the materialist and naturalist assumptions of some historical critics and not the actual provenance of the texts.

¹⁰ A. Schiefner *Indische Erzählungen* [*Mélanges Asiatiques*, Vol. 8. St. Petersburg 1881] German https://books.google.com/books?id=83gyAQAAMAAJ&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0&dq=Schiefner%20Indische%20Erz%C3%A4hlungen&pg=PA525#v=onepage&q&cf=false

¹¹ <http://en.wikipedia.ru/wiki/Hoei-lan-ki>

¹² Wikipedia's article on the "Judgment of Solomon" notes that this text is classified in folklore as Aarne-Thompson tale type 926 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judgment_of_Solomon]. When someone reads the Wikipedia article the reader may be impressed thinking "Wow, they must know what they are talking about because this sounds all systematic, scientific and official!" But this classification system just gathers the above examples and one other later example together under one heading "Child Custody." [Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, Based on the System of Antii Aarne and Stith Thompson, I*, Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2004. The category at Pitts.edu <https://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0926.html>] The categorization adds no information of value to the discussion.

Grouping II in Gressmann's taxonomy includes five texts. The text of 1 Kings 3:16-28 is at the head of this grouping as #5. Gressmann stated that rest of the texts under this heading (#6-#9) are "parallels from modern times that correspond exactly to the 'Solomonic' judgment."¹³

These are: #6) A text from the *Vikramodaya*, an Indian collection originating at earliest in the 15th century AD,¹⁴ #7) An Arabic text attributed to Muhammad.¹⁵ #8) An Indian Tamil text *Kathamanjari*, by 15th century writer Kumara Vyasa.¹⁶ #9) A Telugu language Indian folktale collected by folklorists in the 19th century.¹⁷

Gressmann's choice to group 1 Kings 3:16-28 together with these "modern" [as he admits] versions is rather telling concerning his judgments regarding history. None of the examples #6-9 are of any historical relevance or value. All of them have a provenance more than 2,500 years later than Solomon. Unsurprisingly, Gressmann gives his longest explanation following 1 Kings and preceding #6.¹⁸

At the crux of his analysis, Gressmann posits the question "whether we can identify this judgment with the first recension" [Grouping I].

¹³ Gressmann, p. 218.

¹⁴ Nr. 14 Sergins v. Oldenburg, *Buddhistische Legenden* (Russian!). First Vol. Petersburg 1894 = Theodor Zachariae, "Indische Märchen aus den 'Lettres édifiantes et curieuses.'" in the *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*. Sechzehnter Jahrgang, 1906, P. 136. Available at: https://books.google.com/books?id=kyUSAAAAYAAJ&dlpg=RA2-PA128-IA4&cots=S1VC_D3cFN&dq=Indische%20Märchen%20%20Lettres%20edifiantes%20et%20curieuses&pg=RA2-PA136#v=onepage&q&cf=false. On the *Vikramodaya* and its post 15th century date see Moriz Winternitz 1909 *Geschichte der indischen Litteratur*, Vol 3, p. 341. <https://archive.org/details/geschichtederind03wintuoft/page/340/mode/2up/search/vikramodaya>

¹⁵ Bohri ed Krehl 11. Page 364, and Arnold, *Arabische Chrestomathie*. Page 23, Nr. 110. Following Grünbaums' analysis, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sagenkunde*. Leiden 1893. p. 190 Available at: <https://archive.org/details/neuebeitrgezur00gruoft/page/190/mode/2up>

¹⁶ *The Katha Manjari or Bouquet of Stones*. In Tamil and English ed. by J. Sugden. Bangalore (1850) 1852. Nr. 75.

¹⁷ G. R. Subramiah Pantulu, *Folk-Lore of the Telugus: A Collection of Forty-Two Highly Amusing and Instructive Tales* (Madras [Chennai]: G. A. Natesan and Company, [1910]), no. 17, pp. 40-41. <https://archive.org/stream/folkloreoftelugu00subr#page/40/mode/2up>. From Telugu folklore following *The Indian Antiquary*. Bd. XXVI. Bombay 1897. p. 111, Nr. 18

¹⁸ A short point of interest. Gressmann gave his own translation of the 1 Kings text, shortening it a bit for space. But in the closing verse he chose to translate מִשְׁפָּט לְעֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט כִּי־חֲכָמָת אֱלֹהִים בְּקִרְבּוֹ לְעֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט "Indeed the wisdom of God was in him to do justice" as "denn man sah, dass er göttliche Weisheit besaß, um Gerechtigkeit zu üben" "for one saw that he had divine wisdom to practice justice." This might seem a small thing, but it is a secularizing translation that removes the personal God from Gressmann's presentation of the text. p. 218.

Gressmann maintains that the differences between the two are “insignificant and may have developed so easily with the oral reproduction of history that it is not of great importance.”¹⁹ This is actually quite an odd thing to assert given that the very point of his comparison focuses upon the importance of the similarities between the stories. Gressmann, however, was working in an age when scholarship maintained a blind faith in the integrity of oral transmission of traditions, which allowed him to casually dismiss the intervening 2,500 years, multiple cultures, and thousands of miles with the remark: “A common place of origin and a transmission of the same material from one people to another is therefore very likely.”²⁰

At this point Gressmann asserts that the very purpose of a story like this is to have it “added to anyone whose wisdom you wanted to glorify, sometimes this wise man, now that king.”²¹ He then argues that since there are more examples from India, the story must have originated there. This claim is made without reference to time or size of population, the multiplexity of the cultures in that area during that extended time span, or variations in folk or religious movements which can differ strongly even within a culture.²² For Gressmann, then, it could not be simply that there were more writers borrowing stories throughout all of India’s existence, and into Southeast Asia, from 300 BC to the beginning of the 20th century than there were in Israel between 970 BC to 430 BC.²³ The fact of multiple (later) examples in India is, in and of itself, the dispositive evidence that the story must have originated in India.

Gressmann does admit that “[t]he assumption of a migration of this judgment from India to Palestine in such ancient times makes it difficult.”²⁴ So, even though he denies the possibility of a 10th century BC source in Israel with an actual Solomon who was wise, Gressmann argues that “it is not impossible if the land of Ophir, where Solomon’s ships went, is really identical to India, and if, as tradition reports, there were peacocks in his zoo.”²⁵

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*, see the discussion and criticisms of oral tradition by Whybray, R.N, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 1987, pp. 138-185, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press).

²¹ Gressmann, p. 218.

²² *ibid*

²³ Solomon to Malachi.

²⁴ Gressmann, p. 218.

²⁵ *ibid.*

Grouping III: Gressmann's third grouping of eight texts (#10–17) claims a third recension of the Judgment in Chinese folk literature, Arabic literature, and elsewhere. All of these examples are also of recent provenance.

#10) A Chinese folk tale “Lamp of the Dark House” in the chapter, “Mirror of judicial officials”.²⁶ #11) Is a modern Chinese story.²⁷ #12) Another example is found as part of the *Arabic Tales of a Thousand and One Nights*.²⁸

Reaching further afield with respect to content in this grouping, Gressmann enlists texts that “only touch on it with respect to the art of determining guilt.”²⁹ #13) is a modern Indian story reported October 2, 1714 by Jesuit Father Bouchet from Pondicherry.³⁰ #14) and #15) are modern variants on this story.³¹ #16) Is a modern Syrian version of this story.³² #17) Gressmann also lists a very tangentially related story from Islam, that “must be an imitation of the ‘Solomonic’ or similar court judgment. The story is taken from the unpublished travel diary of the doctor Vitaliano Donati from Padua (1759), whose manuscript is kept in the royal library in Turin.”³³

²⁶ Schott in “Magazin für die Literatur des Auslandes” Jahrgang 29, Nr. 36, S. 430.

reference is incorrect, it should be page 431, <https://books.google.com/books?id=OIADAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA431#v=onepage&q&f=false>

—The unnamed story in “Academy” is objectively identical to this, April 16, 1887. Nr 780 (Bd. XXXI, S. 275)

https://books.google.com/books?id=CsY2AQAAMAAJ&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0&q=academy%20april%2016%2C%201887%20-%22Sciences%22&pg=PA275#v=onepage&q&f=false

= “Christliche Welt” 1887. Bd. I, S. 272.

The term for the ruler in these stories is “Mandarin” which dates the settings of these stories to a range between the 7th to 16th centuries AD.

²⁷ R. B. Denny's *The Folklore of China*. London 1876, P. 139 <https://archive.org/details/folklorechinaan01denngoog/page/n156/mode/2up>

²⁸ According to Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabs*. Vol VI, P. 63 the Arabic text (unprinted) can only be found in a manuscript: *Übersetzungen beim Scott*, Vol VI, P. 152 and Burton, Vol XI, P. 51 —Here Gressmann argues that through the mediation of the Arabs, the Israelite Judgment also came to the Persians, see Francis Gladwin *The Persian Mimshee*2. London 1840, Vol. I, Page 132, story 1.

²⁹ Gressmann, p. 222

³⁰ *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*. Paris 1720. Vol XIV, P. 339ff

³¹ #14) 1, 2 from Zachariae, P. 135 (s. o. Anm. zu Nr. 6; #15) Nr. 15 from Zachariae, P. 137 (s. o. Anm. zu Nr. 6).

³² S. I. Enritz, *Ursemitische Religion*. Leipzig 1903. P. 52 f. —Gressmann notes that this story is also found in Persian: See Francis Gladwin *The Persian Moonshee*2. London 1840. P. 138

³³ Gressmann, p. 224; Giacomo Lumbroso, *Sul dipinto Pompeiano il giudizio di Salomone* (Archivio per le tradizioni popolari) Palermo, 1883, Vol II, P. 574

This third grouping, then, is also of historically recent texts, some of which are not even significantly similar to the biblical account of Solomon's Judgment. Thus, it has even less relevance than the first two groupings.

Grouping IV: The final grouping consists of five items (#18-22) from the Greco-Roman period. None of these are actually texts. They are all art objects, paintings and sculptures. These were included because their modern discoverers and modern interpreters believed the scenes might represent something akin to the Judgment of Solomon.

#18) A mural in Pompeii discovered June 21, 1882.³⁴ #19) An underground burial chamber *Columbarium* "discovered in the Villa Pamfili, which is located on the old Via Aurelia in front of the San Pancrazio gate to Rome," February 1838.³⁵ #20) An inscribed "gem from the estate of M. Cuccis Cahen in Bucharest" ... "partly of oriental, partly of gnostic origin."³⁶ #21) A painting of the Casa Tiberina (at Casa Farnesina).³⁷ And #22) a picture from a Nassonian tomb.³⁸

This final group is not textual. The link to the Judgment of Solomon is based upon modern art interpretation. Deriving genealogical folkloric connections is unwarranted and has nothing to do with the origins of 1 Kings 3:16-28.

Observations

But what did Gressmann actually demonstrate? Gressmann gives twenty-two examples culled from various locations and eras. Five of those examples (all of Group IV) are not texts but modern interpretations of ancient art. Eight of his examples (all of Group III) are modern stories and could not be the origin of Solomon's Judgment. At best it

³⁴ August Mau, *Pompeji in Leben und Kunst*. Leipzig 1900.

³⁵ Gressmann, p. 227; Otto Jahn, *Die Wandgemälde des Columbariums in der Villa Pamfili (Abhandlung der königlich bayrischen Akademie der Wissenschaften)*. Philosophisch-philologische Klasse. München 1858. Vol VIII). P. 249.

³⁶ Gressmann p. 227, Longpérier, *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. Comptes-rendus des séances de l'année 1880*. Drawing is on p. 275 https://www.persee.fr/doc/crai_0065-0536_1880_num_24_3_68644

³⁷ Kept at the Roman Museo delle Terme. Samter, *Arch. Anz.* 1898 P 50. See: http://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/img/?PID=PPN776863886_1898%7CLOG_0007

³⁸ "But the explanation is based on the assumption that Bartoldi's drawing, which we are familiar with, 'cracks a number of inaccuracies'. Under this condition, the eligibility of which I cannot verify, the picture, which until then could not be understood, was given a good meaning." Gressmann, 228) R. Englemann, *Ein neues Urteil Salomonis (Hermes, Vol XXXIX)*, 1904. P. 148-9. The drawing is on p. 149. <https://archive.org/details/hermeswies39wies/page/148/mode/2up>

could be argued that they were derived *from* 1 Kings. Four of the examples (Group II) are also of historically more recent origin. And of the four examples in Gressmann's Group I, only #1 could be argued to have originated in the era before Christ. But it is a Buddhist text and it, along with all the other texts about the Buddha cannot have originated before the Buddha's birth. This places all the examples given by Gressmann in a period after the Biblical historical date of Solomon (970–930 BC). Further, they also date later than the hypothetical reconstructions of the Deuteronomist offered by the secular historical critical scholars. The secular scholars generally attempt to date the text of 1 Kings and the content of 1 Kings 3:16–28 in the 5th century BC after the return from the Babylonian Exile (fifth century BC). But the textual histories of the examples given by Gressmann (including #1) place their composition after that date as well.

Kyung Sook Lee, Professor of Old Testament and Vice President of the Ewha Womans University in Seoul, Korea, defers to Gressmann regarding the Judgement of Solomon:

We have known for a long time that the story had nothing to do with Solomon (Gressmann 1907); it became associated with him for the sole purpose of showing how wise he was.³⁹

Lee is an example of how very few scholars actually engage Gressmann's paper. Scholars mostly treat Gressmann's work as settled science. But an examination of his paper demonstrates Gressmann made unwarranted conclusions drawn from speculation.

We should now be able to see more clearly regarding the third issue: the appeal made to the wide numbers of variants of the story and what Gressmann's data actually show. Remember, Crenshaw stated:

[The story] surfaces in many different cultures. As many as twenty-two variants of the story have been located, the earliest of which is thought to come from India. ... It follows that this story has been adapted by the Israelite narrator and secondarily applied to Solomon.

The fact is that Gressmann did not list twenty-two variants of the story. He listed sixteen. All of those variants date from after Solomon. Almost all of them date from the time of Charlemagne or later. And the conclusion drawn by Crenshaw and others on the basis of Gressmann certainly does not follow. [LSQ](#)

³⁹ Lee 2012, p. 163.

Concerning the Administration of the Sacrament of the Altar

*Doctrine Committee
Evangelical Lutheran Synod*

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SINCE CONCERNS AND QUESTIONS REGARDING some aspects of the administration of the Lord's Supper have been forwarded to the doctrine committee for discussion, the synod president has directed the doctrine committee to prepare guidance on these matters for the pastors and congregations of the synod.

1. Concerning the elements in the Lord's Supper

In cases of recovering alcoholics and those with gluten intolerance, or other such ailments, may substitutions for wine and bread be used?

See the ELS Lord's Supper Statement (1989): <https://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/>. The Christian Church has not been given authority to alter what our Lord has commanded and instituted. The supper is not based on the Passover, but on what Jesus has commanded. The word "bread" has a clear meaning, but since bread has been made of grains other than wheat (then and now), the use of other grains for the bread of the supper is not excluded. Neither is it required to be unleavened. The words of institution refer only to bread, not the baking method. The same is not the case with the other element of the Lord's Supper, the contents of the cup. While the New Testament accounts of the institution use "This cup," Jesus, in Matthew 26:29, referring to the contents of the cup, says "I will not drink of THIS fruit of the vine until that day...." "Fruit of the vine" states clearly that the content of the cup was grape wine (fermented), though it does not mandate its

color. On account of what Jesus says, we know that the cup contained “fruit of the vine” which can only be the fermented liquid from grapes. The ancient Christian church (with few exceptions, mostly gnostic) has held that the content of the cup is to be grape wine, the fruit of the vine. See Martin Chemnitz, *Enchiridion*, “to the essence of this Sacrament belongs the outward elements of bread and wine, for in the cup that Christ took there was the fruit of the vine, Matthew 26, 29” (p. 120). This view is repeated by Walther and others in concluding from Matthew 26:29 that “fruit of the vine” in the cup is grape wine. While they knew that the Jewish celebration of Passover in Jesus day strictly adhered to the use of grape wine in the Supper Jesus instituted, they depended only on Jesus’ word. J. T. Mueller, “*Christian Dogmatics*, 525 says: “That he used wine is proved by the expression ‘this fruit of the vine’,” without further explanation. (See also Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, 354f., footnote 94; Chemnitz, *Lord’s Supper*, 98f.); Augsburg Confession X; Smalcald Articles III, 6; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII, 14; all of which simply take it for granted that the content of the cup was wine.)

2. Are the elements consecrated by the Distribution Formula?

When St. Paul writes “the cup of blessing which we bless” (1 Corinthians 10:16) he speaks of a blessing or consecration. This blessing is included in the “Do this” found in the four accounts of the institution of the Supper. The words commonly spoken in the distribution cannot be considered the consecration since they say “This is the true body of Christ,” and not “This is my body.” The confessions of our church (Book of Concord) uphold this understanding of the words of institution (*Verba*): that the speaking of the *Verba* belongs to Jesus’ “Do This” and that Jesus’ words, not our adaptations, are the blessing.

Concerning the consecration, the ELS *Lord’s Supper Theses* quote The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, §75–77:

For wherever we observe his institution and speak his words over the bread and cup and distribute the blessed [*consecrated, gesegnete, benedictum*], bread and cup, Christ himself is still active through the spoken words by virtue of the first institution, which he wants to be repeated ... No human being, but only Christ himself who was crucified for us, can make of the bread and wine set before us the body and blood of Christ. The words are spoken by the mouth of the priest, but by God’s power and grace through the words that he

speaks, “this is my body,” the elements set before us in the supper are blessed.’ ... “This his command and institution can and does bring it about that we do not distribute and receive ordinary bread and wine but his body and blood, as his words read, “this is my body,” etc., “this is my blood,” etc. Thus it is not our work or speaking but the command and ordinance of Christ that, from the beginning of the first Communion until the end of the world, make the bread the body and the wine the blood that are daily distributed through our ministry and office.

Thus we hold that if the elements are not “blessed,” (i.e., consecrated) with Jesus’ own words, they are not to be distributed as the body and blood of Christ. The words by which the elements are blessed or consecrated are not the priest’s words but Christ’s, for only Christ can say, “This is *my* body.”

So that “This is my body” etc. retain their true meaning, they are kept in the context of the narratives of the supper from the sacred accounts of the evangelists and St. Paul and we refer to the entire context as the Words of Institution, which emphasizes that they are the Word of God, not the word of men.

It is customary in our churches to use a distribution formula though that is not required by the “This do”—some early Lutheran liturgies (e.g., the church of Norway and Denmark prior to 1685); in some places the distribution was silent. The statement often used in the distribution, “This is the true blood of Christ,” or a longer form “This is the true body of Christ given for you for the remission of sins” is not the same as “Drink of it all of you, this cup is the New Testament of *my blood* which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.” It should be noted the what we say in the distribution is our confession of faith concerning the elements, but they are not the words of Jesus consecrating or blessing the elements.

3. Is it necessary to repeat the consecration when additional elements are brought to the altar to complete the distribution?

Many Lutheran Church Altar Books have required that if additional elements not present when the elements were consecrated are later brought to the altar, they must be consecrated by the portion of the Words of Institution that applies to them. Arguments about whether or not God’s Word can pass through the wall between the sacristy and the chancel are akin to arguments about a mouse eating the wafers.

The “this” of “This is my body” refers to the elements which have been prepared for the particular celebration and are on the altar before the communicants, not in the sacristy or in the parsonage. In this matter too, “This” means “this,” referring to what is before the communicants. The statement quoted before also holds: “For wherever we observe his institution and speak his words over the bread and cup and distribute the blessed bread and cup...” Note that the distributed bread and cup are those which have been “blessed” i.e., “consecrated.”

In a letter to Georg of Anhalt, Martin Luther wrote (Monday after St. John’s day 1542), that “if not enough of the hosts or wine were consecrated and more must be consecrated, we do not elevate again as is done in the papacy.” (*Martin Luthers Samtliche Schriften*, old Walch edition, 1746, vol. XIX, columns 1632–33).

The *Lutheran Hymnary* used in the ELS from 1918 until the publication of *The Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* in 1996 included the following rubric in the service of the Lord’s Supper as printed in the full edition: “If the consecrated bread or wine be spent before all have communed, the Minister shall consecrate more, saying aloud so much of the words of institution as pertaineth to the elements to be consecrated (*The Lutheran Hymnary*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1913 and 1935; p. 32). In order to avoid such a situation, *Danmarks og Norges Kirke-Ritual of 1685* (Christiania, 1863 edition, 71): “The pastor must diligently see to it that he knows the number of those to be communed, so that he does not have to repeat the words of the prescribed consecration; for neither the bread nor the wine should be distributed before they are consecrated by the Word.” ^{LSQ}

Three Sad Lutheran Christmases

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“THREE SAD CHRISTMASSES,” THIS IS A STRANGE title. The Christmas season is usually viewed as a joyous time. Our communities are filled with Merry Christmas and our forefathers greeted each other with *Fröhliche Weihnachten* or *God Jul*. There are celebrations everywhere and rightly so.

In the miracle of the incarnation, the mystery of God made flesh (John 1:14), Jesus took our form to show us His love. The Almighty God who sits enthroned between the cherubim (Psalm 99:1), who rides the thunder clouds of heaven became flesh, our human brother, so that we could feel the loving countenance of His face. We can only know God and His love by beholding the Christ-Child as Luther taught. He said, “He did not know or worship any God except him who was made man; nor did he want to have another God besides him. And besides him there was no other God who could save us.”¹ “Therefore, a Christian should know that he is to seek and find God nowhere else but on the Virgin’s lap and on the cross, or however and wherever Christ reveals Himself in the Word.”² Luther is saying, “I want to know no God or Son of God but the one of whom the Christian creed tells. If

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Brown (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Publishing House, 1955–), 38:46; Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. J. K. F. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1993), WA 30 III:132.

² LW 69:67 (WA 28:136). See also LW 16:55 (WA 25:107), LW 26:29.

He is not man born of Mary, I want no part of Him.” To meet God outside of the flesh will utterly destroy us, but in the manger and at the cross, He is made known to us. Thus, St. Paul writes, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).³ The “God incarnate” (*deus incarnatus*) is the “revealed God” (*deus revelatus*). This is the great miracle of Christmas, incarnational theology.

Jesus became poor and lowly to raise us to His divine glory, eternal life in heaven (2 Corinthians 8:9). In the incarnation, Christ took upon Himself our dying flesh so that through unity with His divinity, He might conquer sin, death, and all our foes in that flesh and make us partakers in His divine nature as the sons of God with an eternal existence (Galatians 4:5; 2 Peter 1:4). All that the first Adam lost in the fall, the second Adam, Jesus Christ, restored for us in Himself—paradise regained and more, divine life in heaven (Romans 5:19). He partook in our suffering, death, and hell so that we may partake in His glory, life, and heaven—“the wonderful exchange” (*der fröhliche Wechsel*). Luther can even say, “Through faith we become gods and partake in the divine nature and name” (*Ja, durch den Glauben werden wir Götter, und theilhaftig göttlicher Natur und Namen*).⁴ Here Luther alludes to the *theosis* or deification theme of the Ancient Church. This is the great purpose of the Incarnation—He took our flesh so that we might share in His divine life.

The miracle of the incarnation, however, does not end here. It has continual significance for the Christian in the here and now. The all-powerful Word, who on the first Christmas came from heaven and became flesh in the Virgin Mary’s womb, is now incarnate for us in Holy Word and Blessed Sacraments. Whenever the Word is proclaimed and the Sacraments administered, the miracle of the incarnation, God-with-us, is present for us. Lutherans stress the mystery of the incarnation and our incarnational theology. As wonderful as the Christmas event is, the Lutheran Church is known for its three sad Christmases.

Christmas 1604 in Fraustadt

The first sad Christmas occurred in Fraustadt, Posen.⁵ The pastor of the Fraustadt church was Valerius Herberger (1562–1627). Herberger

³ See also LW 31:53.

⁴ Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luther's sämtliche Werke*, Erlangen Ausgabe, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main and Erlangen: Heyder & Zimmer, 1862–85), 11:54.

⁵ This is Wschowa, Poland, today.

was born in Fraustadt on April 21, 1562. He studied at Frankfurt an der Oder and at Leipzig. He returned to his hometown, where he served as a teacher first and then the pastor. Herberger was one of the most outstanding preachers of his day. Because of his evangelical sermons, he was called “the Jesus preacher” (*Jesusprediger*). The Romanists nicknamed him “the little Luther.” His sermons remind one of the lively comforting style of Luther. His sermons and devotional books were well loved. His devotional literature (*Erbauungsliteratur*) was intended to nourish and strengthen believers through the Gospel, encouraging repentance, spiritual renewal, and formation. One of the predominant themes of this Lutheran spirituality is union and communion with God through the life-giving Word and blessed Sacraments. One of his hymns is to be found in the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, “Farewell I Gladly Bid Thee” (*Valet will ich dir geben*), which is an acrostic on his given name.

In 1604 Valerius Herberger’s congregation at Fraustadt was compelled to leave its beautiful large church by King Sigismund III of Poland to make room for a small group of Roman Catholics. By Christmastime, he had obtained another place of worship, and appropriately called this house of worship “the little manger of Christ” (*Krippelein Christi*),⁶ and Herberger became known as the “preacher at the little manger of Christ” (*Prediger am Krippelein Christi*). Herberger and his parish suffered many trials and tribulations in the Thirty Years’ War and as a result of various epidemics of the time. However, his devotional literature strengthened them in their trials and gave them the true joy of the holy nativity.

Christmas 1613 in Berlin

The second sad Christmas occurred in 1613 in Berlin. The Hohenzollern family, the ruling family of Brandenburg-Prussia, accepted the Reformation in 1539. Joachim II (1505–71) became a Lutheran in a very conservative Reformation. Very few of the medieval rites were changed. His son, Johann George (1525–98), was one of the electors who signed the Formula of Concord. However, his grandson, Johann Sigismund (1572–1619), who spent time at the University of Heidelberg, the center of German Reformed learning, was influenced by its theology. In addition to this, it was politically beneficial for him to be of the Reformed persuasion in order to obtain the land of Cleves

⁶ There was a WELS church in Iron Ridge, Wisconsin, which bore this name, Zum Krippelein Christi. Many of the founders of this congregation were originally from the Fraustadt parish.

in western Germany. Thus it seems that Johann Sigismund left the Lutheran Church for both political and religious reasons.

On Christmas Day in 1613, Johann Sigismund openly embraced the Reformed faith in the first Reformed Communion service in the Berlin Cathedral. The Lord's Supper was celebrated in the Reformed manner with leavened bread and the fraction. While he became Reformed, his wife Anna⁷ remained an ardent Lutheran, and the same was true of most of his people. His court preacher, Simon Gedicke (1551–1631),⁸ was totally opposed to the Reformed faith. In this way Prussia differed from the Palatinate, where the people were forced to follow the religion of their princes. Still each Prussian king endeavored to erase the distinguishing qualities of the Lutheran church because they desired to unite the Lutheran and Reformed in their land. This set the stage for the struggle in Prussia between the Lutherans and Reformed which climaxed in the Prussian Union of 1817 bringing many confessional Lutherans to America.

The two outward signs of the Second Reformation⁹ were the rejection of exorcism in Baptism¹⁰ and the innovation of the “breaking of the bread” (*fractio panis*), the breaking of bread in the Lord's Supper. The

⁷ See Gaylin R. Schmeling, “Anna of Prussia,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (March 2008): 177–80.

⁸ Simon Gedicke was born in Wurzen and was called as court preacher in Halle where he was known for his anti-Calvinistic polemics. Later he became court preacher in Brandenburg–Prussia and was entrusted with the spiritual training of Johann Sigismund. After leaving Brandenburg–Prussia because of the Reformed tendencies of Johann Sigismund, he served in Meissen and later at Merseburg. In 1624, together with Matthias Hoë von Hoënegg (1580–1645), Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), Balthasar Meisner (1587–1626), and Friedrich Balduin (1575–1627), he attended the conference which produced the *Decisio Saxonica* in answer to the Crypto-Kenotic Controversy.

⁹ The term “Second Reformation” is used to describe the situation in which a state that was Lutheran in confession was slowly converted to Calvinism. It is also referred to as Calvinization. The implication is that the Lutheran Reformation did not go far enough and therefore the Second Reformation was required. This is the normal use of the term Second Reformation. However, it has also been used when a Lutheran or Calvinist state was converted to Catholicism and when a Reformed state was converted to Lutheranism.

¹⁰ Baptismal exorcism had taken on the significance of being a confessional stand against the Reformed. The Lutherans understood exorcism in Baptism as a confession of the scriptural doctrine of regenerative Baptism and the teaching that man was born dead in original sin. The exorcism consisted of this phrase in the baptismal liturgy: “I adjure you, you unclean spirit, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, that you come out and depart from this servant of Christ. Amen” (*Ich beschwöre dich, du unreiner Geist, bei dem Namen des Vaters, und des Sohnes, und des Heiligen Geistes, daß du ausfahrest und weichest von diesem Diener [dieser Dienerin] Jesu Christi. Amen*).

Reformed attempt to change the baptismal liturgy touched the heart of the common people. "A butcher, determined to have his daughter baptized in the proper Lutheran manner, appeared in Dresden's Hofkirche armed with a meat cleaver. He positioned himself next to the baptismal font and threatened to split the minister's head if he dared to omit the exorcism from the baptismal formula."¹¹ The *fractio panis* was the breaking of the communion bread. As the words were recited which spoke of Jesus breaking the bread in the Last Supper, the pastor was to break the bread. The Reformed considered this to be an essential element in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It came to be understood as a rejection of the real presence in the Sacrament, and therefore highly objectionable to the Lutherans.¹²

Johann Sigismund believed in the main tenets of the Second Reformation. He assumed the Lutheran Reformation did not go far enough. Too many medieval customs and doctrines remained in the Lutheran Church. He wanted to "sweep the leftover papal dung completely out of the sheepfold of Christ."¹³ The attempts by the Reformed at a Second Reformation brought enmity and bitterness between the two church bodies.

Christmas 1834 in Hönigern

The third sad Christmas occurred in 1834 in Hönigern,¹⁴ Silesia, not far from Breslau. For many years the Prussian kings had been striving to effect a union between the Reformed minority and the Lutheran majority in their lands as noted above. Already in 1613, the Hohenzollern dynasty, under John Sigismund, had accepted the Reformed faith in a Reformed Christmas communion service, while his wife Anna and the majority of his people stood firm in the Lutheran faith. Each Prussian leader thereafter worked to modify the differ-

¹¹ Bodo Nischan, *Lutherans and Calvinists in the age of Confessionalism* (Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Variorum, 1993), III:39. There were also skirmishes concerning the use of pictures and images and concerning the adoration of the Supper. Concerning forms of outward adoration such as the elevation, the *ostensio*, and genuflecting, Gedicke explained, "We do this not because we adore the communion bread as if it had been transformed into the body of Christ, but rather ... to remind ourselves that through this sacrament our faith is strengthened" (Bodo Nischan, *Prince, People and Confession: The Second Reformation in Brandenburg* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994], 140).

¹² Nischan, *Prince, People and Confession*, 138–39.

¹³ Nischan, *Prince, People and Confession*, 117. ... *die noch hinterbliebene Unsauberkeit deß Bapstums aus dem Schaffstall Christi vollend aufzufegen.*

¹⁴ This Miodary, Poland, today.

ences between the Reformed and Lutherans in their lands, as is seen in the conflicts at the time of Paul Gerhardt.¹⁵ On the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in 1817, Friedrich Wilhelm III, ruler of Prussia, issued a proclamation announcing that the Lutheran and Reformed churches in his lands be united into one church. The royal proclamation appeared on September 27 under the title “Foundation of the Prussian State Church” (*Entstehung der preussischen Landeskirche*). The proclamation called for ministers and churches of both confessions to overcome their narrow views and join in receiving the Lord’s Supper and in church organization. For upper-class Prussians imbued with the rationalism of the period, the proclamation was a logical and acceptable solution to the religious divisiveness of the past era. One of the reasons that he made this proclamation was that he, as a Calvinist, had not been able to receive the Holy Supper with his Lutheran Queen Louise of Mecklenberg.¹⁶ This was a scandalous union based on compromise. Only in back-wood villages were the mysteries of God treasured, the Word taught in its truth and purity, and the Sacraments rightly administered.

In 1822, the King personally prepared a church agenda¹⁷ for his union church, commonly referred to as the Prussian Union. This agenda pleased neither the Lutherans or the Reformed. The Reformed felt that the liturgy was too Lutheran, even Catholic, while the Lutherans saw Reformed elements within the book. The most objectionable elements in the agenda were the *fractio panis* and the distribution words.

The pastors were ordered to use during the distribution of the Sacrament of the Altar this formula, “Christ says: This is my body; Christ says: This is My blood.” When Lutheran and Reformed people attended Communion at the same altar, the king reasoned, the Lutherans could still believe that in, with, and under the bread and wine in Holy Communion they do receive the true body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, invisible, but nevertheless real; while the Reformed could hold according to the unscriptural teachings of

¹⁵ See Gaylin R. Schmeling, “Paul Gerhardt: Pastor and Theologian,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (March 2008): 18–26.

¹⁶ John Philipp Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod* (St. Cloud, Minnesota: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1970), 30.

¹⁷ As negative as this agenda was for confessionalism, “from the standpoint of form—based as it was on historic 16th-century models—it was not only a step in the right direction, but it also gave impulse to the movement of liturgical study and worship renewal” (Fred L. Precht, ed., *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993], 84).

Zwingli and Calvin, that in the Lord's Supper one receives merely bread and wine, and that union with Christ can only be had spiritually.¹⁸

These distribution words allowed two doctrines of the Lord's Supper to stand side by side. The result was sinful unionism contrary to the clear word of Scripture which tells us to avoid those who teach contrary to God's Word (Romans 16:17). It was much like the poem ascribed to Elizabeth I of England:

It was the Lord that spake it;
He took the bread and brake it;
And what the Word did make it,
That I believe and take it.¹⁹

Many opposed the king's forced union. Among the early leaders in Silesia were Johann Gottfried Scheibel (1783–1843) and Eduard Huschke (1801–86), professors at Breslau. Many Silesian pastors followed their example and resistance to the union spread to Erfurt and Magdeburg in Saxony, and also to different parts of Pommerania.

As the Prussian Union was being enforced, one of the congregations that resisted was the village parish of Hönigern in the district of Namslau. The pastor of the congregation was Eduard Gustav Kellner (1802–78). On September 11, 1843, the pastor and congregation were given a hearing concerning their refusal to conform to the Prussian agenda. Around two thousand people appeared for the meeting. Kellner was jailed, but the authorities could do little about the two thousand protesting lay people and thus left the village in peace for a time.

Officers and five hundred troops sent from the royal consistory of Breslau, however, appeared again in the village of Hönigern on December 23. The officers came to break the obstinate resistance which the young, confessional Pastor Kellner had mounted against the introduction of the Prussian Agenda. Around 5:00 a.m. on December 24, the parish members standing guard tried to protect their church but were driven back by the troops. The soldiers advanced in close ranks, and pushed away the people, and with the butt-ends of their guns broke open the door and rushed in. The confessional Lutheran congregation

¹⁸ David's Star Evangelical Lutheran Church, *125th Anniversary* (Jackson, Wisconsin, 1968), 4–5.

¹⁹ Quoted in E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 70.

was forced out of its building on Christmas Eve Day, by five hundred soldiers and two cannons. A union pastor took the pulpit of the church on Christmas Day.²⁰

Conclusion

The three sad Lutheran Christmases certainly bring a somber note to the Christmas season. They brought devastation to the cradle of Lutheranism in the land of the Reformation. Still the Lord caused blessings to result from these sad times. There was a renewal among Lutherans in Europe and the establishment of free Lutheran churches in Germany. Other confessional Lutherans emigrated to America, Australia, South America, and South Africa where they became the core of confessional Lutheranism in these areas.

In this season of the church year, we meditate on the mysteries of the incarnation. We treasure the great truths of Christ's person and work, drawn from Holy Scripture, preserved in the Lutheran church. He became poor and lowly to raise us to His divine glory. The gates of hell will not prevail against these truths.

He serves that I a lord may be;
A great exchange indeed!
Could Jesus' love do more for me
To help me in my need,
To help me in my need?

For us He opens wide the door
Of paradise today;
The angel guards the gate no more.
To God our thanks we pay,
To God our thanks we pay. (ELH 148:7–8) LSQ

²⁰Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, *By the Grace of God* (Freistadt, 1964), 2:10–11. See also Hermann Sasse, "The Century of the Prussian Church: In Commemoration of Christmas 1834 in Hönigern," in *The Lonely Way*, trans and ed. Matthew C. Harrison et al. (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 1:159ff; Gottfried Heyn, "Auf der Suche nach einer Kirche," *Lutherische Kirche* 40, no. 12 (December 2009): 14–16.

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