

# LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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VOLUME 63 • NUMBERS 2 & 3  
JUNE & SEPTEMBER 2023

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**The Image of God in Lutheran Anthropology**

**The First and Highest Work of Love: St. Timothy  
Lutheran Church Evangelism Study**

**Antinomianism**

**Sermon on James 5:14–16**

**Mount Olive Lutheran School  
Commencement Address**

**Book Reviews**

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*The journal of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary*

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# Foreword

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*LSQ* Vol. 63, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2023)

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**T**HE BIBLE IS CLEAR THAT ADAM AND EVE WERE created in God's image and likeness. It is not so clear as to what that means and Christians has reached many different conclusions of what the imago dei consists. The first paper in this issue explores this topic. Dr. Schmeling presents the Biblical parameters to this term and also the practical applications of the proper understanding of the image of God.

As His image-bearers, Christians are in the world to show forth the glory of God to others and thereby connect them to Him. Pastor Thompson shares some ideas and experiences with regards to reaching the people of the world who don't know Christ and therefore do not bear God's image by faith.

Pastors are also concerned with bearing the image of God and passing that image on to their hearers when they preach. What they say and how they say it is a direct reflection of the God on whose behalf they speak. The third paper in this issue, by Pastor Gullixson, presents a historical overview of the Antinomian controversy. The uses of God's law have divided Lutherans and have direct application to how pastors are to preach today.

Also included in this issue are a sermon that was preached in Trinity Chapel (Bethany Lutheran College) May, 11, 2023, a graduation address for Mt. Olive Lutheran School, Class of 2023, and two book reviews.

—TAH



# The Image of God in Lutheran Anthropology

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**M**ARTIN LUTHER ONCE WROTE, “IN THE remaining creatures [animals] God is recognized as by his footprints; but in the human being, especially in Adam, He is truly recognized, because in him there is such wisdom, justice, and knowledge of all things that he may rightly be called a world in miniature. He has understanding of heaven, earth, and the entire creation.”<sup>1</sup> This study contends that a Biblical understanding of the image of God (*imago dei*) is not only vital for a sound theology, but it will help the church better address vocation, missiology, anthropological (i.e., doctrine of the human being) pitfalls, and the social ills plaguing the world today.

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A version of this essay was presented at the General Pastoral Conference, Bloomington, MN held on October 5–7, 2022.

<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Brown (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955–), 1:68.



## Image of God in Biblical Theology<sup>2</sup>

### Overview of Anthropology

Genesis 1 and 2 demonstrate the unique status of human beings in a number of ways. Genesis 1 introduces a new expression: “Let us make,” to show God carefully deliberated over the creation of mankind. The divine activity of בָּרָא is used three times in Genesis 1:27 for the creation of human beings. There is only one “kind” (מִינִי) of human just as there is only one God. God created both males and females “in our image, according to our likeness” (בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ) (Gen 1:26–27; 5:1–2). They were both enabled not only to have royal mastery and rule of creation but also to do so (Gen 1:26, 28. Cf. Wis 9:2; Sir 17:2). Genesis 2 further spells out mankind’s special relationship with the Lord. The creation of the human being was a twofold process of forming and inspiring or filling with life. The Lord God took great care to form (יָצַר) the human of the dust from the ground or a rib. He then breathed into the human being the breath of life (Gen 2:7, 21–22. Cf. Job 33:4; Ps 104:30). Unlike the more common word for “breath,” רוּחַ, the word נְשָׁמָה used in Genesis 2:7 is only used of God and man, except perhaps in Genesis 7:22. The Lord created human beings not only with the ability to live in a dependent faith-based or trust-based relationship with him but also to do so (Gen 2:16–17; 3:17).<sup>3</sup> Unlike animals that are driven by instinct, human beings were created with personhood, self-awareness, self-reflectiveness, and the freedom to choose between various good things (Gen 2:9, 16) rather than license as indicated by the law of forbidden fruit (Gen 2:17).<sup>4</sup>

The Garden in Eden and the “Tree of Life” (עֵץ הַחַיִּים) serve as a sort of Edenic temple and Torah-filled ark. The later temporary tabernacle/temples, not to mention the eschatological (i.e., already but not yet) new temple, all echo this original Edenic temple. Ezekiel and John both situate the new temple in a new Eden or the new heavens and the

<sup>2</sup> The Image of God in Biblical Theology section of this study is adapted from Timothy R. Schmeling, “The Glory of the LORD Whose Likeness Is as the Appearance of a Human Being/Adam: A Study of Ezekiel’s Son of Man/Adam Anthropology” (Th.M. thesis, Saint John’s University, 2021), 36–50.

<sup>3</sup> See also Walter Brueggemann on primal trust in his *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 466.

<sup>4</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 224; Kenneth A. Mathews, *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 210–11.

new earth (Gen 1:1; 2:8. Cf. Ezek 36:35; Ezek 40–48; Rev 21:1, 22). The later temporary tabernacle/temples are where the Lord would dwell with his people and impart his life-sustaining temple presence to his people by means of a sort of tree of life; namely, the Torah-filled ark of the covenant (Gen 2:9, 16–17, 3:8. Cf. Exod 3:1–22; 25:8, 22, 31–40; Lev 26:12; Deut 23:15; 2 Sam 7:6–7; Prov 3:18–20; Ezek 28:14; John 14:6; 1 Cor 1:24; Col 2:3; 2 Tim 3:15; Rev 2:7; 21:3, 22; 22:2, 14; 19). While no atonement was necessary before the fall into sin, Adam was created as an Adamic priestly prophet to mediate God's Edenic temple presence (Gen 2:9, 16–17, 20) to Eve and their descendants, the other members of this royal priesthood (Gen 1:26–28; 2:18–25; Exod 19:6; 20:7. Cf. 1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), which maintained them all in the image of God and a faith-relationship with him. Since cherubim will assume the role of human beings after the fall, Ezekiel 28:11–19 may indirectly depict Adam in high priestly attire. The rest of this kingdom of priests were to assist Adam in the priestly duties of mediating temple presence, offering the Eucharistic sacrifices (i.e., thank offerings of “cultivating/serving” [עֲבָד] and “keeping/guarding” [שָׁמַר] of Eden [Gen 2:15. Cf. Num 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14; Rom 12:1; 1 Pet 2:5]), and reflecting the divine image and making God's name holy among each other through their helping (Gen 2:20). They further assisted Adam in the royal duties of mastery and rule of creation (Gen 1:26, 28). Cherubim assumed this role of temple guards after the fall (Gen 3:22–24. Cf. Exod 25:18–22; Ezek 1:5; 10:4). Eden seems to have a tripartite structure (Eden, garden, and world) like the temple (holy of holies, holy place, and courtyard). Eden faced east just like Ezekiel's new temple (Gen 3:24. Cf. Ezek 28:14–16; 40:6; 43:4). The temporary tabernacle/temples were to face east and were later situated on a mount just like Ezekiel's temple (Num 2:2–3; 3:38. Cf. Ezek 40:2). They had furnishings (Cf. Exod 35:31), carvings (Cf. 1 Kgs 6:18, 29, 32, 35; 7:18–20), and gold and onyx that were reminiscent of the garden (Gen 2:11–12. Cf. Exod 25:7, 11, 17, 31). A river flowed out from Eden just like the new temple (Gen 2:10. Cf. Ezek 47:1–12; Rev 22:1–2). This river became four, one of which was named “Gihon” (גִּיחוֹן) (Gen 2:13. Cf. 2 Chr 32:30; 1 Kgs 1:33, 38, 45; 2 Chr 33:14). Creation concluded with the sanctification of Sabbath to signify the gracious relationship and rest that God created for all. The tabernacle also concluded with rest (Gen 2:2–3. Cf. Exod 31:12–17; Ezek 20:12–13).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Jon Levenson, “The Temple and World,” *The Journal of Religion* 64, no. 3 (1984): 275–98; Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,”

Before concluding his creating work, the Lord states that it is not “good” (טוֹב) for the human beings to be “alone” (בַּד). Since the human was created as a finite, social, and trust-based being who needs a “helper” (עֵזֶר) “corresponding to him” (כְּנֶגְדּוֹ),<sup>6</sup> the Lord provides the man with a woman to remedy human social and procreative needs (Gen 1:28; 2:18–25; 3:17). The fact that God sometimes served as a “helper” of mankind (Gen 49:25; Exod 18:4; Ps 10:14; 54:6, etc.) excludes any innate notion of inequality or inferiority in the word “helper.” The fact that God sometimes served as a “helper” of mankind also shows that it is not just husbands that need helpers. All human beings need helpers corresponding to them.<sup>7</sup> Said differently, Edenic human equality does not preclude complementarity (i.e., a difference of [even hierarchal] role) (Gen 2:18; 1 Cor 11:7).<sup>8</sup> At the same time, Genesis 2:18 does not preclude social mobility, although some roles like husband and wife are fixed until the resurrection (Matt 22:30). In sum, differences of role are a necessity of any functional society (Rom 12:3–5; 1 Cor 12:12–31) including Edenic ones because human beings are finite, social, trust-based creatures by design who have different gifts (Rom 12:6–8, 1 Cor 12:1–11, 28–30; Eph 4:11) and interests. Differences in role are not the result of the fall; human inequality and the asocial desire to eliminate roles altogether in the name of autonomy is the result of the fall.

### *Image of God*

Many conceptions have arisen about what the image and likeness of God in the strict sense consists of, but they are all flawed in one way or another. Even though the image and likeness of God is not explicitly defined by Genesis 1:26–27, there are some indirect clues as

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*Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 9 (1986): 19–25; G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 617–21; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 65; Marvin A. Sweeney, *Reading Ezekiel: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Reading the Old Testament Commentary Series (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2013), 31, 36, 43. Daniel I. Block raises some criticisms of this idea in “Eden: A Temple? A Reassessment of the Biblical Evidence,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis: Essays in Honor of G. K. Beale*, eds. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2013): 3–30.

<sup>6</sup> *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [HALOT], 3rd ed., s.v., “עֵזֶר.” *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* [DCH], s.v., “עֵזֶר.”

<sup>7</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 227.

<sup>8</sup> Mathews, *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1–11:26*, 213–14.

to its meaning. In contrast to the LXX's insertion of the conjunction "and" (κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν) between "in our image" and "according to our likeness" (בְּצִלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ), both Hebrew terms represent a single concept. First of all, both "image" and "likeness" are used without the other to refer to a single concept (Gen 1:27; 5:1). Second, the Hebrew preposition כִּי governs "image" in Genesis 1:26. כִּי governs "image" in Genesis 5:3. The same two prepositions govern "likeness" in these same two instances, but in reversed order. Third, the LXX uses εἰκών and ὁμοίωσις to translate צֶלֶם and דְּמוּת in Genesis 1:26 respectively. It uses εἰκών and ἰδέα to translate these same two words in Genesis 5:3. But it uses εἰκών to translate both Hebrew words in Genesis 1:27 and 5:1. That said, צֶלֶם later came to be associated with idols in Ezekiel, whereas דְּמוּת is used to allude to the image of God.

Some have suggested that Genesis 1:26 uses the כִּי of essence as found in Exodus 6:3 and 18:4.<sup>9</sup> Others have suggested it uses the כִּי of manner/norm as found in Exodus 25:40.<sup>10</sup> The latter seems more plausible: First, Exodus 25:40 is a closer parallel to Genesis 1:27. Second, "image" is used with both the כִּי and כִּי prepositions as noted above. There is no evidence for a כִּי of essence. The כִּי of essence normally indicates the property of the verb's subject, not the object of the verb.<sup>11</sup> Third, the image and likeness in the strict sense are lost (Gen 5:3. Cf. Wis 2:23–24; 1 Cor 15:49), though human beings do not cease to be human (Gen 3:22. Cf. Ps 8:5–9; 139:14–16). Fourth, substance ontology certainly has limits for conveying the ideas of the Bible. Still, the way Christ "is the image of God" (ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ) (Wis 7:26; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3) is different than the way that human beings have the image of God (cf. also Exo 25:40; Heb 8:1–6; 10:1). To capture this distinction, it can be said that only Christ is the essential image of God, whereas humans are in some sense the analogical, derived, normed, copied, or patterned image of God.

<sup>9</sup> Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar [BHRG2]*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), §39.6f; David J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *Tyndale Bulletin* (1968): 53–103, esp. 75–78.

<sup>10</sup> E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, eds., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar [GKC]*, trans. A. E. Cowley, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), §119h; Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax [IBHS]* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §11.2.9b.

<sup>11</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 136–37; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 3, 28–20.

Since the perfect human mastery and rule of creation in the name and stead of God is a consequence of the image and likeness of God but not the substance of it,<sup>12</sup> the image and likeness facilitate this mastery and rule, but the mastery and rule cannot be equated with the image and likeness. The perfect human helping of others (Gen 2:18) and human procreation (including headship) (Gen 1:28; 2:18; 1 Cor 11:7) are likewise the result of the divine image. This human mastery and rule should be understood as the kingdom of priests' stewardship of creation, not an exploitation of it. As God's creatures, the creation remains God's possession just as much as human beings remain his possession. As image bearers, human beings represent God to the creation in their dominion over it (Gen 1:26, 28. Cf. Lev 25:23–24; Deut 17:14–20; 1 Kgs 5:4; Ps 8:6–9; 72:1–20; Wis 9:2; Sir 17:2). While other ancient Near East cultures applied the divine image and divine sonship only to kings,<sup>13</sup> Genesis 1:26–30 indicates all human beings (males and females alike) are royal rulers and are therefore fully equal. Exodus 19:5–6's claim that Israel "shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (תְּהִי־לְךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל מְמַלְכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ) is part of the eschatological recapitulation of the original universal holy dominion by God's image bearers which 1 Peter 2:5, 9 says is exercised by a "royal priesthood" (βασιλειον ιεράτευμα).

The image and likeness of God in the strict sense cannot be equated with the human spiritual, psychological, and physical faculties (much less a physical resemblance to God). After the image is lost (Gen 5:3. Cf. Wis 2:23–24; 1 Cor 15:49), these faculties remain, though they are fallen, deformed, disordered, and incapable of functioning properly. What is more, a dependent faith-relationship with the Creator God (Gen 2:16–17) presupposes that humans were created with a *divine/passive gift* to be capable of trusting. Following the fall and the loss of the image of God, human beings in and of themselves (i.e., via fallen *human/active love*) trust in a whole host of false gods (self, idols, etc.) but are unable to self-generate trust in God (Gen 3:17; 6:5; 8:21). Without God's *divine/passive gift*, there can be no human trust in God. Furthermore, the royal mastery and rule of creation (Gen 1:26, 28) also presuppose that humans were created with a *divine/passive gift*. Otherwise human beings would not have been able to make full graced use of these human faculties necessary for expressing their unfallen *human/active love* in properly-ordered free and responsible service to God and others. Following the fall and the loss of the image of God,

<sup>12</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* [TDOT], s.v., "צֶלֶם."

<sup>13</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 153.

human beings in and of themselves (i.e., via fallen *human/active love*) lack this capability as well (Gen 3:16–19; 9:2). Without God's *divine/passive gift*, fallen *human/active love* will never come alive again.

All of this is why later biblical texts maintained the image and likeness of God in the strict sense consisted of uprightness, immortality, holiness, righteousness, strength, and knowledge. Granted these are always understood to be a divinely-derived and analogical characteristics of the image of God. For only God was understood to be, for lack of a better word, *essentially* upright, immortal, holy, righteous, strong, and knowledgeable (Gen 1:1; 18:14; Exod 3:14; 15:11; Lev 20:26; Num 23:19; Deut 32:4; 1 Sam 2:2; Job 42:2; Ps 139:1–6; Isa 14:27; 45:21; 46:9–11; Jer 32:17, 27; Zeph 3:5; Rom 3:10; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:16; Rev 15:4). Ecclesiastes 7:29 says, “God made man upright” (יָשָׁר). Wisdom 1:13; 2:23; 9:2–3 says, “God did not make death ... God created the human being to be immortal/incorruptible,<sup>14</sup> and he made him to be an image of his own eternity” (ὁ θεὸς ἔκτισεν τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐπ’ ἀφθαρσίᾳ καὶ εἰκόνα τῆς ἰδίας ἀϊδιότητος ἐποίησεν αὐτόν) ... “to administer the world in holiness and righteousness, and pronounce judgement in uprightness of soul” (διέπη τὸν κόσμον ἐν ὁσιότητι καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ἐν εὐθύτητι ψυχῆς κρίσιν κρίνη). Sirach 17:2–3, 7 also includes with the image “strength like [the Lord’s] own” (καθ’ ἑαυτὸν ἐνέδυσεν αὐτοὺς ἰσχὺν) and “understanding” (ἐπιστήμη).

Genesis 1:31; 3:17; 5:3; 6:5; and 8:21 support the association of uprightness, righteousness, and holiness with the image. Genesis 1:31 indicates that the creation of the human being in the image of God made the whole creation “very good” (טוֹב מְאֹד). This phrase is retracted after human disobedience to God’s command caused a sinful rupture in God’s creation (Gen 3:17; 5:3; 6:5; 8:21).

Genesis 2:16–17; 3:19; 5:3; and 5:5ff substantiate the association of immortality and strength with the image. Genesis 2:16–17 states that human beings would only die if they broke their faith-relationship with God by defying his commandment.<sup>15</sup> “For in the day that you eat of [the tree of the knowledge good and evil] you will surely die (מָוֶת מְמֹת)”

<sup>14</sup> *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint [LEH]*, 3rd ed., s.v., “ἀφθαρσία;” *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint [GELS]*, s.v., “ἀφθαρσία.”

<sup>15</sup> See also Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 64–65, 69; Walter R. Roehrs and Martin Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 19; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 67–68, 83; Andrew Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 72.

(Gen 2:17). There are five main objections to the notion that human beings were created immortal. The first objection maintains that human beings were created mortal and designed to die because eternal life in communion with God had not yet developed in Hebrew thought.<sup>16</sup> This not only goes against the clearest passage of the text, Genesis 2:17, it also presupposes the fallen theology and anthropology so prevalent in the myths and worldviews of the nations that Genesis and the rest of the Bible are striving to combat. If humans really were created to die, then why were they not also created immoral, unholy, unrighteous, weak, and ignorant too? This is no less “natural” to the fallen human being not to mention the myths and worldview of the surrounding nations. The second objection recognizes that human beings were not created to die, but refrains from calling them immortal because only God is essentially immortal (1 Tim 6:16).<sup>17</sup> Moreover, human beings (be they created, fallen, recreated, damned, or glorified) are always reliant on one or more of God’s various presences (e.g., gracious sacramental presence [Gen 2:9, 16–17; Exod 25:22; 29:43; 40:34–35; John 14:23; 15:4–5], providential presence [Gen 6:3; Jer 23:23–24; Ps 139:7–12; Acts 17:28], wrathful presence [Gen 3:22–24; Ps 139:7–12; Rev 14:10], and glorious presence [Rev 21:3–4; 22:5]). This study is very sympathetic to this objection because human immortality could suggest that human beings were created autonomous from God. Still this study refers to it as a divinely-derived and analogical immortality because Genesis only claims humans would die if they ate from the forbidden fruit. Genesis never calls pre-fall human beings mortal. The rest of the Bible calls re/created life “immortality” (Wis 2:23; Rom 2:7; 1 Cor 15:53–54; 2 Tim 1:10). The third objection is that humans had to eat from the tree of life to turn on their immortality.<sup>18</sup> But Genesis never says this. It only says that eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil turned immortality off. Since they were permitted to eat of tree of life before the fall,<sup>19</sup> the tree of life appears to have sacramentally sustained

<sup>16</sup> John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, International Critical Commentary 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1910), 84; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 223–25; 266–65.

<sup>17</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*, 64–65; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, 173; Mathews, *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1–11*:26, 211–12.

<sup>18</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary Genesis*, JPS Tanakh Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 21; John A. Goldingay, *Genesis*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Pentateuch (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 61–62, 82.

<sup>19</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. John H. Marks, rev. ed., Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), 81–82; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 79.

human life in a dependent faith-relationship with God before the fall (Gen 2:9, 16–17). It is only after the fall that humans were no longer permitted to eat from the tree of life lest they enter into an irreversible state of permanent (עולם) autonomy from God (i.e., permanent death) (Gen 3:22–24). The fourth objection is that God retracted the penalty for eating the forbidden fruit in Genesis 2:17 because humans did not immediately die.<sup>20</sup> After the fall, human beings really were condemned to die. In point of fact, the consequences of the fall, spelled out in Genesis 3:16–19, reach their literary crescendo with Genesis 3:19b. Broken faith, lack of the divine image, mortality,<sup>21</sup> and expulsion from Eden (i.e., spiritual death) were the immediate “already” dimension of death which also included eventually physical death (i.e., temporal death) (Gen 2:16–17; 3:17; 19; 5:3; 5:5ff. Cf. Matt 8:22; Luke 9:60; Rom 6:1–4, 6–14; Eph 2:1). Permanent autonomy from God (i.e., permanent death) was its “but not yet” for all who persisted in unrepentant sin (Gen 3:22–24. Cf. Isa 59:1–2; Dan 12:2; Matt 25:46; John 8:51; 11:25–26; Rom 5:12–19; 6:5, 23; Rev 20:6, 10, 14–15; 21:8).<sup>22</sup> However, God’s expulsion of mankind from Eden was ultimately an act of mercy insofar as it made recreation a possibility. The fifth objection is that the mention of “dust” in Genesis 3:19 and in Genesis 2:7 is supposed to signal that human beings were really meant to die all along.<sup>23</sup> However, the far more significant literary allusion is Genesis 3:17’s clear reference (“which I commanded you, saying, ‘you shall not eat of it’” [לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ] to Genesis 2:17 (“you shall not eat from it” [לֹא תֹאכַל] מִמֶּנּוּ] for in that day that you eat of it you will surely die”). In fact, the (Genesis 3:17) curse’s reference to Genesis 2:17 expects the reader to recall the rest of the Genesis 2:17 quotation which explicitly links death only to eating the forbidden fruit. The omission of the “breath of life” in Genesis 3:19 conversely does just as much to undermine the literary connection between Genesis 3:19 and 2:7 as the mention of “dust” does

<sup>20</sup> David J. A. Clines, “Themes in Genesis 1–11,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38 (1976): 490; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, 172–74, 203–4, Goldingay, *Genesis*, 62.

<sup>21</sup> Concerning the meaning of מוֹת in Gen 2:17; 3:3–4, see *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* [HALOT], 3rd ed., s.v., “מוֹת,” *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* [DCH], s.v., “מוֹת.”

<sup>22</sup> Kidner, *Genesis*, 69, 72; Roehrs and Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study*, 20. Gunkel too recognizes that God is acting to keep humans from achieving an irreversible permanent state (i.e., “immortality”) in Gen 3:22–24. However, Hermann Gunkel thinks God was trying to keep a humanity that was always destined to die from becoming gods. See his *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 23–24.

<sup>23</sup> Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 83.



in both passages to promote it.<sup>24</sup> If the tree of life would have never sustained ongoing life in the first place, why would human beings now need to be barred from it (Gen 3:22–24)?

Genesis 3:22 and 5:3 support the connection between the image and authentic understanding and knowledge. Granted, human beings were created to grow in experiential knowledge, Christ himself grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52). But Genesis never states Adam and Eve lacked knowledge and understanding. They were after all created with moral responsibility (Gen 2:16–17). What is more, Genesis 3:1 explicitly makes the point that it was the craftiness of the serpent that baited them into rebelling against God (Gen 3:5). But after the fall, God makes this seemingly hyperbolic statement: “Behold, the human being has become like one of us in knowing good and evil (לִדְעַת טוֹב ורָע)” (Gen 3:22; 5:3). Human beings really did become like God not in the sense that they gained an elevated sort of knowledge but in the sense that they became autonomous knowers. Von Rad states, “The guiding principle of [human] life is no longer obedience but his autonomous knowing and willing, and thus he has really ceased to understand himself as creature.”<sup>25</sup> When human beings tried to steal Godlike autonomy and knowledge, they traded the authentic understanding and knowledge of the divine image for a fallen manmade understanding and knowledge. Since they were not created to be autonomous, it only obscured their minds with the lens of sin. After the fall, the phrase “good and evil” could refer to growth in experiential discernment but only by those regenerated who did so properly (Lev 27:12, 14; Num 24:13; Deut 1:39; 2 Sam 14:17; 19:36; 1 Kgs 3:9; Eccl 12:14; Isa 7:15–16); namely, by a faithful use of divine revelation (Prov 3:13; 8:10–11; 30:1–6).

The New Testament concurs with this understanding of the image of God. Romans 5:12; 8:10; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 53–55; and Revelation 21:4 attribute death to the sinful fall of Adam. Ephesians 4:23–24 explains the restoration of the divine image and likeness in terms of being “renewed in the spirit of your mind and putting on the new man, which according to [the likeness of] God has been created in true righteousness and holiness” (ἀνανεοῦσθαι δὲ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ νοῦς ὑμῶν καὶ ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν κατὰ θεὸν κτισθέντα ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ὁσιότητι τῆς ἀληθείας). Luke 1:74–75 agrees, while Colossians 3:10 adds “the new [man]” ... “is being renewed in

<sup>24</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 83.

<sup>25</sup> Von Rad, *Genesis*, 97; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, 165–66, Steinmann, *Genesis*, 66.

knowledge according to the image of the one who created him” (τὸν νέον τὸν ἀνακαινούμενον εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν κατ’ εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν). Some New Testament texts simply equate the image and likeness of God that is being renewed in believers or at least its glorified version with Christ himself (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49). Note also that none of these or other recreation texts of the Bible ever suggest that man was recreated only to be immoral, mortal, unholy, unrighteous, weak, and ignorant.

When human beings tried to achieve autonomy from God and deify themselves (Gen 3:1–8), their misuse of free will dehumanized themselves. The idea that this represents an evolutionary emancipation and self-actualization of humankind rather than a fall (2 Esd 7:118) goes against the whole thrust of Genesis’s creation theology and anthropology. There is not even the smallest hint of modernity’s notion that mankind’s fall and expulsion from Eden brought about anything positive for mankind (Gen 3:16–19, 22–24).<sup>26</sup> Human beings only forfeited their freedom by choosing autonomy (Gen 6:5; 8:21). Authentic human knowledge and self-realization via a properly-ordered divine/human enculturation was abandoned too. Moreover, Genesis creation theology and the rest of the Bible not only maintain that those humans with the image of God (be it created man, recreated man, or glorious man) are dependent on God, but even those deformed humans without it (be it fallen man or damned man) never become so autonomous that they can exist without at least one or more of God’s various presences.

The fall broke the human beings’ faith-relationship with God (Gen 3:16) and cost them the image and likeness of God in the strict sense. Adam’s descendants were now fathered in his sinful mortal image rather than God’s holy immortal image (Gen 5:3. Cf. Wis 2:23–24; 1 Cor 15:49). Consequently, human beings not only brought pain into the world (Gen 3:17), they brought death into it as well (Gen 2:16–17; 3:19. Cf. Rom 5:12; 8:10; 1 Cor 15:21–22, 53–55; Rev 21:4). The physical death of each of their descendants is only one aspect of this death (Gen 5:5, 8, 11, etc). Henceforth human beings are only autonomous knowers of a fallen manmade knowledge (Gen 3:22). They also now suffer from an evil intention or inclination from youth (Gen 6:5; 8:21. Cf. Ps 51:7; 143:2; Isa 6:5; Jer 17:9; Rom 14:23; Heb 11:6). As a result, power struggles would occur between husbands and wives, not to mention between all humans and their helpers (Gen 3:16). If it were not enough that human beings objectified themselves, they tried to demote (or better, undeify) and depersonalize the Lord and personalizer

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<sup>26</sup> See also Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, 210–12.

(Gen 3:6, 12–13, 16–17). Human mastery and rule as stewards of creation was problematized. They corrupted the creation and turned it against them. Nature would defy humans, and the animals came to fear them following the flood (Gen 3:17–19; 9:2. Cf. Sir 17:4).

The book of Ezekiel illustrates how the rebellious Israelites had become the antithesis of those who were called to reflect God's image and make his name holy among the nations. Interestingly enough, the book tells about the recreation of Ezekiel in the divine image to serve as an Edenic priestly prophet and second Adam of new eschatological temple in anticipation of Jesus Christ, the royal priestly prophet, second Adam *par excellence*, and eschatological temple.

In the wake of the fall, the Bible only speaks about the fact that human beings were created in the divine image in the strict sense or about the image of God in the wide sense (Gen 5:1–2; 9:6. Cf. Wis 1:13; 2:23–24; 9:2–3; Sir 17:2–3, 7; 1 Cor 11:7; Jam 3:9). The exception to this is when the image and likeness of God in the strict sense is being renewed in a human being via God's creative or justifying Word (Luke 1:74–75; Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). The wide sense refers to the retention of the human faculties (albeit deformed and non-graced) (Ps 8:4–5), which when coupled with law and providence (Gen 8:22; Matt 5:45; Acts 17:28; Col 1:17; Heb 1:3) makes some measure of civil righteousness (Gen 2:18; Rom 2:14–15; 14:23; Heb 11:6), procreation (including headship) (Gen 1:28; 2:18; 9:1; 1 Cor 11:7), and dominion (Gen 1:26, 28; 3:17–19; 9:2; Ps 8:6–8; Wis 9:2–3; Sir 17:2–3, 7) still possible.

Granted the human beings that God had formed (יֵצֶר) remain his good human creation and have not become essentially evil to speak in substance ontology terms (Gen 3:22. Cf. Ps 8:5–9; 139:14–16). God does not make evil (albeit he does make calamity [Isa 45:7]). Still they have become deformed human beings and are only innately capable of civil righteousness or external moral conformity (Rom 2:14–15; Rom 14:23; Heb 11:6). Even after the flood decreation and recreation (Gen 6–7; 8:17; 9:1), the original full Edenic human capabilities have been lost, as God himself declares: "Every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (וְכָל-יֵצֶר מַחְשְׁבַת לְבוֹ רָק רָע בְּלִ-הַיּוֹם) and this already "from his youth" (מִנְעֻרָיו) (Gen 6:5; 8:21. Cf. Ps 51:7; Jer 17:9). Put otherwise, this evil "intention" (יֵצֶר) to seek the false humanism of autonomy and license remains even in the regenerate human being until the full restoration of the image of God. After the flood when all that was left was favored Noah and his family, God declared once

again that human beings, Noah and his family included, possessed this evil intention from youth (Gen 6:8; 8:21. Cf. 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:23–24; Col 3:10). Thus, the diluvian purge and recreation did not remove this evil intention (Cf. 1 Pet 3:20–21). Still Genesis clearly rejects the notion that human beings were divinely determined to be evil and holds them morally responsible for their *willful* sins (Gen 3:16–19; 4:6–7, 11–12; 6:5–7).

## Image of God in Systematic Theology

### *Overview of Anthropology*

Human beings are neither immortal spirits or sparks of the divine trapped in a body (Gen 1:1–3; 2 Macc 7:28; Rom 4:17; Heb 11:2–3) nor are they purely material organisms or machines.<sup>27</sup> They consist of a created immaterial soul and material body (i.e., dichotomy) (Gen 2:7; Eccl 11:5; 12:7; Isa 42:5; Jer 38:16). On the basis of 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrew 4:12, some theologians (including Lutherans)<sup>28</sup> have distinguished between the body, soul, and spirit (i.e., trichotomy), sometimes for Pelagianizing ends. While the animal soul and human spirit distinction may be philosophically helpful in distinguishing human beings from sentient animals, the Sacred Scriptures ascribe the same characteristics to both and only distinguish between them to demarcate two different aspects of the same soul.<sup>29</sup> The traducian explication of the propagation of the soul (i.e., body and soul are both produced from the parents) has generally been favored in Lutheranism over against the creationist view (i.e., God creates a new soul once procreation begins). The former better accounts for the transfer of original sin from parent to the whole person of their child.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Johann Michael Reu, *Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Dubuque: Wartburg Theological Seminary, 1963), 81–86; Jerrold A. Eickmann, Jerald C. Joersz, Thomas E. Manteufel, Daniel L. Mattson, and Joel Okamoto, “Anthropology,” in *Confessing the Faith: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology*, ed. Samuel H. Nafzger, John F. Johnson, David A. Lumppp, and Howard W. Tepker (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 1:272–75.

<sup>28</sup> A. F. C. Vilmar, *Dogmatik: Akademische Vorlesungen*, ed. K. W. Piderit (Gütersloh: C Bertelsmann, 1874), 1:333–36.

<sup>29</sup> Adolph Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, trans. James Langebartels, Heinrich Vogel, Richard A. Krause, Joel Fredrich, Paul Prange, and Bill Tackmier (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999–2009), 2:301–4

<sup>30</sup> *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:

The human being has been defined in all sort of ways, but none of these gets to the real crux of the matter as Martin Luther recognized it. In response to the mystics' anthropology, Luther defines the human being as *homo spiritualis nititur fides* or the "spiritual man who relies on faith."<sup>31</sup> Luther writes in his later *Disputation concerning Man* (1536): "Paul in Romans 3[:28], 'We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works,' briefly sums up the definition of man, saying, 'Man is justified by faith.'"<sup>32</sup> For Adam and Eve were created after all in the image of God (i.e., spoken into being passively righteous) (Gen 1:31; 3:17; 5:3; 6:5; 8:21; Eph 4:24) and called into a faith-relationship with him (Gen 2:16–17; 3:17). Since it took a divine act of אָרַךְ to do all this, any human attempt to merit an alternative manmade relationship with God via the active righteousness (i.e., good works) of obedience to the subsequent law of the forbidden fruit makes little sense (Gen 2:16–17).<sup>33</sup> Lest one think that Luther only spoke of righteousness and faith (i.e., trust) in God after the fall, he writes in his *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–45):

Therefore the root and source of sin is unbelief and turning away from God, just as, on the other hand, the source and root of righteousness is faith. Satan first draws away from faith to unbelief. When he achieved this—that Eve did not believe the command which God had given—it was easy to bring this about also, that she rushed to the tree, plucked the fruit, and ate it.<sup>34</sup>

The Formula of Concord concurs, "Since unbelief is a root and fount of all sins worthy of condemnation, the law also condemns unbelief."<sup>35</sup>

Fortress Press, 2000), 533, 536 (FC SD I, 7, 30). See also Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:309–313.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. J. K. F. Knaake et al. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1993), 9:103–4.

<sup>32</sup> *LW* 34:139.

<sup>33</sup> In his Genesis lectures, Martin Luther provides this helpful summary of how the two kinds of righteousness function in the regenerate image bearer: "And indeed, we are reborn not only for life but also for righteousness, because faith acquires Christ's merit and knows that through Christ's death we have been set free [i.e., passive righteousness]. From this source our other [i.e., active] righteousness has its origin, namely, that newness of life through which we are zealous to obey God as we are taught by the Word and aided by the Holy Spirit. But this righteousness has merely its beginning in this life, and it cannot attain perfection in this flesh. Nevertheless, it pleases God, not as though it were a perfect righteousness or a payment for sin but because it comes from the heart and depends on its trust in the mercy of God through Christ." *LW* 1:64.

<sup>34</sup> *LW* 1:162; etc.

<sup>35</sup> FC SD V, 17 (KW 584). Robert Kolb adds, "Trust in the creator holds life together." Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith: A Lutheran Exposition* (St. Louis: Concordia

Human beings were created to be dependent (i.e., finite, social, and faith-based) creatures who are maintained in a righteous relationship with the divine via God's life-giving Word and the sacrament of the tree of life. Luther writes again in the Genesis lectures:

So, then, this tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or the place where trees of this kind were planted in large number, would have been the church at which Adam, together with his decedents, would have gathered on the Sabbath day. And after refreshing themselves from the tree of life he would have praised God and lauded Him for the dominion over all the creatures on the earth.... Adam would have extolled the greatest gift, namely, that he, together with his descendants, was created according to the likeness of God. He would have admonished his descendants to live a holy and sinless life, to work faithfully in the garden, to watch it carefully, and to beware with the greatest care of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This outward place, ceremonial, word, and worship man would have had; and later on he would have returned to his working and guarding until a predetermined time had been fulfilled, when he would have been translated to heaven with the utmost pleasure.<sup>36</sup>

Contra Immanuel Kant and German Liberalism, Adam and Eve were indeed created as perfect human beings, though they could fall. The fall was not a positive step from animality towards human rationality, freedom, and moral consciousness.<sup>37</sup> This does not mean that higher development and growth in garden were unable to be attained. Christ himself grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52). The apostles knew more about divine revelation than Adam and Eve because they witnessed the unfolding of it. Still, with respect to the perfect and complete knowledge

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Publishing House, 1993), 55–56.

<sup>36</sup> LW 1:105–106. See also Abraham Calov, *Theologia Positiva ... Ceu Compendium Systematicus Theologici* (Frankfurt and Wittenberg: Johann Ludolph Quenstedt, 1690), 274–75.

<sup>37</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology, History, and Education*, trans. Mary Gregor et al., The Cambridge edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 164–69 (AA 8:110–15); Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, trans. Terrence N. Tice, Catherine L. Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 1:435–39 (Par. 72.2). See also Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991–93), 2:202–231.

of all things useful to mankind, Adam and Eve excelled all other human beings who are not yet in heaven.<sup>38</sup>

In contrast to notions of a state of pure nature and human autonomy, mankind's faculties of memory, intellect, and will were only created to function properly with passive righteousness and faith. Before the fall, human beings had the will power to choose freedom or condemn themselves to license (Gen 3:6). After the fall, human faculties no longer have their full graced powers and only willfully choose civil righteousness and license (Gen 6:5; 8:21; Ps 51:7; Rom 2:14–15; Rom 14:2; Heb 11:6). This is why Luther concludes that reasoning apart from grace and faith is intellectual fornication in the *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518):

29. He who wishes to philosophize by using Aristotle without danger to his soul must first become thoroughly foolish in Christ.  
 30. Just as a person does not use the evil of passion well unless he is a married man, so no person philosophizes well unless he is a fool, that is, a Christian. ... Just as lust is the perverse desire for pleasure, so philosophy is the perverse love of knowing unless the grace of Christ is present.... To philosophize outside of Christ is the same as fornicating outside of marriage....<sup>39</sup>

Human beings were fashioned with the image of God so that they could realize their individual identity and freedom first and foremost in trust-based dependent relationship with God and secondarily in trust-based dependent relationships with their neighbors. The limits of human freedom were defined by the goal posts of the law and the needs of the neighbor (Gen 2:16–18, 20; 3:17; 4:6–7; 9:6; Sir 17:11; Rom 1:20; 2:14–15). Luther states against the Antinomians in the Genesis lectures:

But I also stated above why Adam had need of this command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, namely, that there should be an outward form of worship and an outward work of obedience toward God. The angel Gabriel, too, is without sin, a very pure and guiltless creature. And yet he accepts from God the command to instruct Daniel about very important matters

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<sup>38</sup> Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:326–30. See also *LW* 1:110, 113, 113; Johann Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica, Sive Systema Theologicum ... Divisum* (Leipzig: Thomas Fritsch, 1702), 2:6.

<sup>39</sup> *WA* 1:355; 59:410. The first two numbered theses are translated in *LW* 31:41. The last two unnumbered points come from the untranslated proofs to the philosophical theses found in *WA* 59:410.

(Dan. 8:16) and to announce to Mary that she will be the mother of Christ, who had been promised to the fathers (Luke 1:26). These are in truth commands which were addressed to a guiltless being. ... But Paul is speaking of another Law; for he clearly states that he is speaking about the Law which was not given to the just but to the unjust. Who, then, is either so ignorant or so deranged as to conclude from this that no Law was given to Adam when he hears it stated that Adam was righteous? For nothing else follows from this than that the Law given to the unrighteous is not the same Law that was given to righteous Adam. Moreover, when a Law is given to righteous Adam, it follows that this is a different Law from the one which later was given to the unrighteous.<sup>40</sup>

At the same time, the law (as demonstrated above) was never intended to be a means of meriting eternal life in bliss as it is in Reformed covenant theology's covenant of works.<sup>41</sup> Luther put it this way in the *Freedom of the Christian* (1520):

We should think of the works of a Christian who is justified and saved by faith because of the pure and free mercy of God, just as we would think of the works which Adam and Eve did in Paradise, and all their children would have done if they had not sinned. We read in Gen. 2[:15] that "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." Now Adam was created righteous and upright and without sin by God so that he had no need of being justified and made upright through his tilling and keeping the garden; but, that he might not be idle, the Lord

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<sup>40</sup> LW 1:109. The Formula of Concord agrees, "For our first parents did not live without the law even before the fall. This law of God was written into the heart, for they were created in the image of God." FC Ep VI, 2 (KW 502). See also Calov, *Theologia Positiva*, 270–74.

<sup>41</sup> Dudley Fenner, *Sacra Theologica ... Pietam*, 2nd ed. (n.p.: Eustathium Vignon, 1586), 39; Johannes Cocceius, *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*, trans. Casey Carmichael (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Book, 2016), esp. 27–57; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipburg: P&R Publishing, 1992–97), 1:574–78; Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Book, 2018–), 3:369–403; Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 281–300; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1872–73), 2:117–22; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–8), 2:563–76. See also the *Irish Articles* (1615) XXI; the *Westminster Confession* (1647) XIX; *Helvetic Consensus Formula* (1675) VIII in *Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche*, ed. E. F. K. Müller (Waltrop: Hartmut Spinner, 1999), 2:528; 2:581; 2:864.



gave him a task to do, to cultivate and protect the garden. This task would truly have been the freest of works, done only to please God and not to obtain righteousness, which Adam already had in full measure and which would have been the birthright of us all. The works of a believer are like this. Through his faith he has been restored to Paradise and created anew, has no need of works that he may become or be righteous; but that he may not be idle and may provide for and keep his body, he must do such works freely only to please God. Since, however, we are not wholly recreated, and our faith and love are not yet perfect, these are to be increased, not by external works, however, but of themselves.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, since passively righteous human beings are necessarily social creatures, created types of the uncreated archetype, and not God; they cannot help but reflect the divine image and make God's name holy via their actively righteous royal priestly acts and in accord with their vocations (Gen 1:28; 2:15, 18; 3:16–19; Rom 13:1–7; 1 Cor 11:7; 12:28–30; Eph 4:11; 5:21–6:9) and gifts (Rom 12:1–8; 1 Cor 12:1–11). Accordingly, differences in roles that complement one another is neither inequality nor the result of the fall (Gen 2:18; Rom 12:3–5; 1 Cor 11:7; 12:12–31). Social mobility likewise would have existed in the Edenic world. Rather an asocial desire to eliminate roles altogether in the name of autonomy (Gen 3:1–8) caused the fall, the degradation of God, the dehumanization of human beings (Gen 5:1–3; 6:5; 8:21; 9:6; Ezek 16:1–63; 19:3, 6; 22:25, 27; 23:1–49; 34:16, 20–21), and disorder in the rest of creation (Gen 3:17–19; 9:2; Sir 17:4).

### *Image of God*

Luther remains very cautious when he defines the image of God. This is not because Scripture lacks some clear statements about its nature and purpose. Instead he is cautious because the human faculties of memory, intellect, and will are so corrupted by the fall that they cannot properly conceive of the divine image. Since the image of God is eschatologically (i.e., already but not yet) restored in justification, believers also will not really comprehend the image of God until it is fully restored when they are translated into eternal life. This fact explains in Luther's mind why so many well-meaning theologians have

<sup>42</sup> LW 31:360. See also Calov, *Theologia Positiva*, 274–75.

produced so many unfounded and dangerous speculations about the image of God.<sup>43</sup>

To facilitate talk about the image of God, it is important to distinguish between the four Augustinian states of man as spelled out in the *Book of Concord*: “before the fall,” “before ... conversion,” “after they have been reborn,” and “when they arise from the dead.”<sup>44</sup> Abraham Calov rightly adds to these a fifth state of eternal condemnation for unbelievers in hell. However, Calov rejects a sixth state of human beings called the “state of pure nature.”<sup>45</sup>

After Irenaeus of Lyon,<sup>46</sup> many of the church fathers,<sup>47</sup> medieval theologians,<sup>48</sup> and Roman Catholics distinguished between the image and the likeness of God in various ways.<sup>49</sup> Augustine of Hippo’s take on the matter represents an influential understanding of this distinction. The image, which remains after the fall, is deemed substantial or necessary to being human. It refers to three faculties of the human person corresponding to the Trinity, namely memory (Father), intellect (Son), and will (Spirit). The likeness, which was lost in the fall and only regained in regeneration, conversely, is accidental or contingent to being human. It refers to the graces of God, that is, hope, faith, and love which empower the memory, intellect, and will respectively.<sup>50</sup> However, a close read of Genesis 1:26–27 and 5:3 has already demonstrated that there is no intended semantic difference between “image” and “likeness.” The terms are used interchangeably. Thus, likeness merely explicates image.

<sup>43</sup> *LW* 1:60–65.

<sup>44</sup> FC SD II, 2 (KW 543).

<sup>45</sup> Abraham Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum ... exhibens* (Wittenberg: Andreas Hartmann, Johann Röhner, Michael Wendt, Christian Schroedter, and Johann Wilcke, 1655–77), 4:385–88.

<sup>46</sup> *The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325: Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 1:531–32, 544 (*Against the Heresies* 5.6; 5.16).

<sup>47</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Writings*, trans Frederic H. Chase, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of American Press, 1958), 234–235 (*Orthodox Faith* 2.12)

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), 1:477 (Pt. 1, Q. 93, Art. 9).

<sup>49</sup> Robert Bellarmine, *Omnia Opera*, ed. Justinus Fèvre (Paris: Vives, 1870–74), 2:382; 5:169–207; 7:685–94. The first reference is translated in *Robert Bellarmine, De Controversiis: Tome III On the Church*, trans. Ryan Grant (Post Falls: Mediatrix Press, 2017), 405–6.

<sup>50</sup> Augustine, *The Works of St. Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle and Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1990–), 1/5:289–291; 337–407 (*The Trinity* 7.4; 9–11).

If there is no distinction between image and likeness, can memory, intellect, and will constitute the divine image in the strict sense? Luther points out that this cannot be case. “If these powers are the image of God, it will also follow that Satan was created according to the image of God, since he surely has these natural endowments, such as memory and a very superior intellect and a most determined will, to a far higher degree than we have them.”<sup>51</sup> If man lost the image of God in the strict sense (Gen 5:3; Wis 2:23–24; 1 Cor 15:49), how could man still possess an albeit corrupted memory, intellect, and will?

Some has tried to argue that physical resemblance to God constitutes the divine image. To be sure, human beings are called to reflect the divine image to others (Gen 1:26–30; 2:16–18; 1 Cor 11:7). Image was not only part of the soul but also the body because the human was created for immortality (Gen 2:16–17; 3:19; 5:3; 5:5ff; Wis 1:13; 2:23; 9:2–3; Sir 17:2–3; Rom 5:12; 8:10; 1 Cor 15:21–22, 53–55; Rev 21:4).<sup>52</sup> However, the Triune God (except the person of Christ) has no material form to reflect. For example, God the Father has possibly revealed himself in a physical manifestation twice in Scripture (Gen 18:1–33; Dan 7:9–14). Still, God the Father, like the Holy Spirit, has no material body. Others have tried to argue that man’s dominion as God’s representative constitutes the divine image. However, this is the effect or result of the divine image. Still others like Karl Barth proposed the ability to enter into a confrontational I-Thou dialogue and relationship with God constituted the image. This too is problematic, but it will be discussed later in this study.

Nathan Jastram has raised concerns about the way Lutherans have typically spoken about the divine image in the strict sense and wide sense. He rightly maintains that Lutherans are using the distinction differently than the way that they do when they speak of gospel in strict/narrow and wide sense. The divine image in the wide sense does not include the strict sense like it does for gospel. Instead he proposes that divine image in the wide sense be defined as “to be like God.” He then proposes two different kinds of narrow senses. His narrow sense 1. (i.e., former strict sense) refers to “godlike spiritual attributes lost in the fall, regained in Christ.” His narrow sense 2. (i.e., former wide sense) refers to godlike natural attributes retained after the fall.” There is a great deal

<sup>51</sup> LW 1:61–62.

<sup>52</sup> Johann Gerhard, *On Creation and Angels, On Providence, On Election and Reprobation, On the Image of God in Man Before the Fall*, trans. Richard Dinda, Theological Commonplaces (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 300 (Locus 11, Par. 104).

to commend in Jastram's work. Nevertheless, he thinks this definition too would lead to confusion and does not adequately account for the comparative difference (e.g., the difference between "Christ's complete, essential likeness to our partial likeness").<sup>53</sup> His ultimate aim to adhere to comprehensive definition (i.e., to be like God) at the expense of even his own two narrow definitions weakens the hermeneutical usefulness of his effort.<sup>54</sup>

The Scriptures define the image of (the Triune) God in the strict sense as perfect righteousness holiness, uprightness (Gen 1:31; 3:17; 5:3; 6:5; 8:21; Eccl 7:29; Eph 4:23–24; Luke 1:74–75), understanding, knowledge (Gen 3:22; 5:3; Sir 17:7; Col 3:10), immortality, and strength (Gen 2:16–17; 3:19; 5:3; 5:5ff; Wis 1:13; 2:23; 9:2–3; Sir 17:2–3; Rom 5:12; 8:10; 1 Cor 15:21–22, 53–55; Rev 21:4), with which human beings, both males and females, were created (i.e., spoken into being and formed) (Gen 1:26–27; 2:7, 18, 20, 22). Whereas Christ possesses the divine image essentially (Wis 7:26; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3), believers possess it analogically or accidentally.<sup>55</sup> The latter possess it fully before the fall and after the resurrection but eschatologically after justification. The divine image in the strict sense is also concomitant

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<sup>53</sup> Nathan Jastram, "Man as Male and Female: Created in the Image of God," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68, no.1 (January 2004): 56.

<sup>54</sup> Jastram, "Man as Male," 57–58 lays out his preferred definition: "The definition of the image of God as being like God is a definition that affirms *all* that the Bible teaches about the image of God, in a unified way. It does not ignore passages that are 'inconvenient,' but integrates them into the definition. For instance, understanding that the image of God is to be like God helps to explain how the Bible can affirm and deny that the same groups of people are the image of God in different contexts. Both Christians and non-Christians are like God in having intellects that distinguish them from animals, but only Christians are like God in having true knowledge of God. Both Christians and non-Christians are like God in being able to make moral choices, but only Christians are like God in having righteousness and holiness. Men and women together are like God in having dominion over the earth, but only men are like God in being the head of the family. If a Christian woman is married to a non-Christian man, the husband is like God with respect to having authority over his wife, but the wife is like God with respect to knowing God and being righteous and holy. Both Christians on earth and Christians in heaven are like God spiritually, but only Christians in heaven are as much like God as is possible for human beings. Both Christians and Christ are like God in many ways, but only Christ is like him in such a way that He is true God Himself. *Any definition of the image of God that cannot resolve these apparent contradictions by acknowledging such unities and distinctions is not a comprehensive definition based on all the biblical evidence.*"

<sup>55</sup> Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, 2:2–3; David Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroaticum Vniuersam Theologiam Thetico-Polemiam Complectens*, ed. Romanus Tellerus (Leipzig: B. C. Breitkopf, 1763), 462.

with a faith-relationship with the Triune God (Gen 2:16–17). Both the divine image and faith-relationship, moreover, were originally maintained and grown through God's Life-giving Word and the sacrament of the tree of life (Gen 2:9, 16–17), just as the image and faith are maintained and grown through the means of grace in the regenerate today. The Apology to the Augsburg Confession accordingly defines the image of God as follows:

Thus original righteousness was intended to include not only a balanced physical constitution, but these gifts as well: a more certain knowledge of God, fear of God, and confidence in God, or at least the uprightness and power needed to do these things. And Scripture affirms this when it says [Gen. 1:27] that humankind was formed in the image and likeness of God. What else does this mean except that a wisdom and righteousness that would grasp God and reflect God was implanted in humankind, that is, humankind received gifts like the knowledge of God, fear of God, trust in God, and the like? This is how Irenaeus interpreted the likeness of God. After having discussed many other things related to this topic, Ambrose then says, "That soul is not in the image of God in which God is not always present." And in Ephesians [5:19] and Colossians [3:10] Paul shows that the image of God is the knowledge of God, righteousness, and truth. Even Peter Lombard is not afraid to say that original righteousness is the very likeness of God, which was implanted in the human creature by God. The statements of the ancients that we cited do not contradict Augustine's interpretation concerning the image of God.<sup>56</sup>

Luther and the Lutheran Fathers affirmed this definition of the image of God in the strict sense.<sup>57</sup> Since they recognize that image of God is most fundamentally passive righteousness, they often summarize the image of God with the term "original righteousness." Heinrich Schmid's compendium of Classical Lutheran theology makes the same observation: "These spiritual and moral excellences, thus described, are the true reason why man is called the image of God. They are also summed up in the expression "original righteousness."<sup>58</sup> This is not only

<sup>56</sup> Ap II.17–22 (KW 114–15).

<sup>57</sup> *LW* 1:62–63; Martin Chemnitz, *Chemnitz's Works*, trans. Fred Kramer, Luther Poellet, Georg Williams, J. A. O. Preus, Matthew Harrison, Jacob Corzine, and Andrew Smith (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008–15), 7:321.

<sup>58</sup> Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication

evident in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession's definition of the divine image cited above but also in the Formula of Concord's remarks about original sin: "Second, that original sin is a complete absence or "lack of the original righteousness acquired in paradise" [Ap II, 15] or of the image of God, according to which the human being was originally created in truth, holiness, and righteousness."<sup>59</sup> Calov so recognized that human beings were spoken passively into being in a faith relationship with God that he spoke of "justification in the state of integrity" (*justificatione in statu integritatis*).<sup>60</sup> Of course, Calov did not mean that man had to be redeemed from sin before the fall.

The way pre-fallen image-bearing human beings had perception of God, perception of the whole creation, complete righteousness, true holiness, free will, immortality, and dominion is different as Nikolaus Hunnius points out from the way God is essentially such things.<sup>61</sup> Only God is omniscient (1 Cor 2:11), perfectly righteous (Deut 32:4), totally holy (1 Sam 2:2), completely free (Psa 115:3; 135:6), immortal (1 Tim 6:16), and completely sovereign (Psa 24:1; 33:9). For this reason, it is proper to say that pre-fallen human beings have these divine image characteristics in a derived and analogical manner to use substance ontology.

In ancient, medieval, and early modern times, the image of God was normally articulated with the help of substance ontology. For all its strengths, the Formulators of the *Formula of Concord* and Orthodox Lutherans were rightly hesitant about trying to convey Biblical anthropology with Aristotelian metaphysical categories. If the image of God or original righteousness could be lost, it cannot be a "substance" (*substantia*, i.e., something self-subsistent).<sup>62</sup> Likewise, if original sin was substantial, then God is the origin of evil, and Christ would have had to assume original sin to save mankind.<sup>63</sup> Now Luther sometimes speaks of the "image of the devil" being stamped on mankind after the fall.<sup>64</sup> At other times, Luther said that sin was the nature of human beings and calls original sin "nature-sin" or "essential sin." However, Luther does not

Society, 1899), 219, 226.

<sup>59</sup> FC SD I.10 (KW 533).

<sup>60</sup> Calov, *Theologia Positiva*, 268, 274–75.

<sup>61</sup> Nikolaus Hunnius, *Epitome Credendorum*, trans. Paul Edward Gottheil (Nuremberg: U. E. Sebald, 1847), 48–50.

<sup>62</sup> Ap II, 15–23 (KW 114–15); FC SC I, 10–12 (KW 533–34); Chemnitz, *Chemnitz's Works*, 7:510; Gerhard, *On Creation*, 293–95 (Locus 11, Par. 98).

<sup>63</sup> FC SD I, 30–34 (KW 536–37); FC SD I, 43–44 (KW 539). See also FC SD II, 81 (KW 559–60).

<sup>64</sup> *LW* 1:63.

mean that human “nature” in the sense of “substance” has been altered by the fall, only that human “nature” in the sense of “disposition” has been corrupted.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the only other alternative in substance ontology was to call the image of God and original sin an “accident” (*accidens*, i.e., something contingent). While the Formulators and Orthodox Lutherans did end up calling them an accident,<sup>66</sup> they recognized the limits of substance ontology for capturing the full significance of the divine image and original sin.<sup>67</sup> In fact, they will warn that original sin is not a mere accident contra synergism and semi-pelagianism. Chemnitz writes, “There are many who so weaken the doctrine of original sin that they imagine that it is only a corruption consisting of accidents.”<sup>68</sup>

The pitfall with calling the image of God, original righteousness, and original sin “accidents” is that it suggests there is “state of pure nature” (*status purorum naturalium*) underlying all these accidents in the human being. On the one hand, a state of pure nature could suggest that the image of God or original righteousness was necessarily added after creation as “superadded gift” (*donum superadditum*) to bridle the conflict between the lower sensual and higher spiritual human nature.<sup>69</sup> Roman Catholics maintained this position to free themselves from the specter of Pelagianism, but it raised questions about whether God had really created a good creation. On the other hand, a state of pure nature could also suggest that human beings innately had the power to be moral. Thus, it also raised the specter of Pelagianism. Early Modern and Modern Thomism were the first to explicitly articulate a state of pure nature. Lutheran Syncretism then tried to introduce it into Lutheranism.<sup>70</sup> Next, Prussian philosopher Kant argued that human autonomy was precondition for human morality.<sup>71</sup> Finally, modernity could use the combination of human autonomy and a state of pure nature to make a

<sup>65</sup> FC SD I, 51, 53 (KW 540).

<sup>66</sup> FC SD I, 55–57, 61–62 (KW 541–42); Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, 2:2–3, 17–23, 62; Hollaz, *Examen Theologicvm Acroamaticvm*, 462

<sup>67</sup> FC SD, I, 50, 54, 60 (KW 540–42).

<sup>68</sup> Chemnitz, *Chemnitz's Works*, 7:579. See also Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, 2:62.

<sup>69</sup> Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, 2:12–15, 38–43; Reu, *Lutheran Dogmatics*, 87–88.

<sup>70</sup> Francisco Suarez, *Omnia Opera* (Paris: Vivès, 1856–61), 7:179; Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, trans. M. Timothea Doyle (Rockford: TAN Books, 1947–48), 1:288; Georg Calixt, *Werke in Auswahl*, ed. Inge Mager (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970–), 2:154.

<sup>71</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary Gregor, The Cambridge edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge: University Press, 1996), 166ff (AA 5:33ff).

potent justification for privatizing religion (e.g., grace and faith), if not bracketing it out of human life altogether, and still dismiss the Christian claim that this would end up dehumanizing human life. All of this was why Matthias Flacius wanted to make the problematic argument that original sin was a “formal (i.e., not a material) substance.”<sup>72</sup> It is also why Calov and other Lutherans rejected a state of pure nature: “The Papists err, who invent still another state, which they call purely natural (*purorum naturalium*), which is nothing more than a pure figment of the Scholastics; since, indeed, a man never did exist, nor could exist, with the simple negation both of integrity and grace and of sin and misery, who was neither just nor unjust, and who neither pleased nor offended God.”<sup>73</sup> It is further why the Formula of Concord calls the divine image and original righteousness “concreted” (*concreata*) and not a superadded gift.<sup>74</sup> Calov explains further:

... [B]y this term [righteousness] ... is now meant, according to the use of theological writers, that universal and exceedingly delightful agreement, *συμφωνία*, in the first man, of mind, will, and heart, with the intellect, will, and heart of God. ... Righteousness is called original because it was first of all in man and because from the beginning he possessed the same after the manner of a concreted habit (*habitus concreati*); also, in order that the righteousness of man's first and original state may be distinguished from moral, imputed, and beginning righteousness, from what is perfected in another life, and from every other whatsoever; and finally, because it needs to be transmitted to posterity by generation ... just as now in the state of sin, original sin is propagated....<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup> KW 531–32n21.

<sup>73</sup> Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum*, 4:386–87. See also Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum*, 482–84; E. Hove, *Christian Doctrine* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1930), 131–32. Similarly, Hunnius adds, “Man has not been created in the state of sin and misery, nor as being subject to death, as he now actually appears to us.” Hunnius, *Epitome Credendorum*, 47.

<sup>74</sup> *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche*, ed. Irene Dingel, Bastian Basse, Marion Bechtold-Mayer, Klaus Breuer, Johannes Hund, Robert Kolb, Rafael Kuhnert, Volker Leppin, Christian Peters, Adolf Martin Ritter, and Hans-Otto Schneider, 1st ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 1325, 1331 (FC, SD, I, 10, 27 [KW 533, 536]).

<sup>75</sup> Calov, *Systema Locorum Theologicorum*, 4:598. See also Gerhard, *On Creation*, 273 (Locus 11, Par. 57); Johannes Rudbeckius, *Loci Theologici: Föreläsningar vid Uppsala universitet 1611–1613*, ed. (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001), 107–8; Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, 2:9; Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. John Theodore Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950–57), 1:520. Similarly,



The “binary” limitations of substance ontology for capturing the divine image, original righteousness, and original sin was just one more reason for why modern theologians sought to find alternative categories to convey theology. As a result, many modern theologians drawing on Luther’s thought began using existential or personalist language to articulate the image of God. For all of strengthens of this approach, the Lutheran theologian should be cognizant about its pitfalls as well. In his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth provides a famous existential definition of the divine image, namely, the ability to enter into an I-Thou dialogue and relationship with God.

[God-likeness] is not a quality of man. Hence there is no point in asking in which of man’s peculiar attributes and attitudes it consists. It does not consist in anything that man is or does. It consists as man himself consists as the creature of God. He would not be man if he were not the image of God. He is the image of God in the fact that he is a man. For the meaning and purpose of God at his creation were as follows. He willed the existence of a being which in all its non-deity and therefore its differentiation can be a real partner; which is capable of action and responsibility in relation to Him; to which his own divine form of life is not alien; which in a creaturely repetition, as a copy and imitation, can be a bearer of this form of life. ... Thus the *tertium comparationis*, the analogy between God and man is simply the existence of the I and Thou in confrontation. This is first constitutive of God for God, and then for man created by God. To remove it is tantamount to removing the divine from God as well as the human from man.<sup>76</sup>

Barth’s definition has long since been taken up and modified by other theologians.<sup>77</sup> Its stress on mankind’s dependence on and relationship

Heinrich Schmid calls all the excellences associated with the image of God “*natural* to man in his original state, not indeed in the sense that if he lost them he would no longer be the same being; but yet in in this sense, that they were created along with him, and that they cannot be separated from him without having making his whole condition different from what it formally was. This expressed in the statement, that the image of God is a natural perfection, and not an external, supernatural, and supplementary gift.” Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology*, 219.

<sup>76</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 3/1:185–85.

<sup>77</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–82), 1:146–47; Gerhard Ebeling, *Dogmatik des christliche Glaubens*, 4th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 1:376–414; Robert Jensen, *Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997–99), 2:58ff; Eberhard

with God over against autonomy is highly commendable. But by trying to avoid all qualities and attributes, Barth's relational ontology is unable to account for the qualities and attributes that the Sacred Scriptures specifically uses to define the divine image, namely, perfect righteousness, holiness, uprightness, understanding, knowledge, immortality, and strength. With such a conception of the divine image, Barth also came to reject the Reformation teaching that image of God was lost. Barth's mixed law-gospel further problematizes his conception of the divine image.

Three additional questions are typically asked about the image of God in the strict sense. Were women or wives also created in the image of God and to have dominion? Genesis 1:27 says they were in no uncertain terms. However, 1 Corinthians 11:7 says, "For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man." Commentating on the context of this verse, Nikolaus Hunnius explains that wives have the image and dominion too but in way that complements the headship of their husbands, "... [A]s God governs the world, so also is the husband (*Mann*) to rule the house. In this sense, again the term is applicable but to husbands (*Ehemännern*); and in no way to females, children, unmarried persons or widows etc."<sup>78</sup> Do angels have the divine image? Since the good angels share the characteristics that the Scripture uses to define the divine image in the strict sense, some Lutherans have thought that angels have it too. Chemnitz states, "All the angels were created in truth, John 8:44; in holiness, because they were called the holy angels; in righteousness and in the image of God, which had to be restored in man, Eph 4:34."<sup>79</sup> But Hollaz points out that Scriptures do not clearly affirm or deny whether angels have the image or not.<sup>80</sup> That said, God only explicitly says that mankind was created with it. Moreover, only human beings are called to carry out all the purposes or effects of the divine image (i.e., faith, active righteousness, procreation [Matt 22:30], and dominion [Heb 1:4]) as articulated below. Is the image of God the same thing as the indwelling the Holy Trinity? There are a number of different unions mentioned in the Bible; namely, the hypostatic union, sacramental union, mystical

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Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, trans. J. B. Webster (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clack, 1989), 124–53; Wilfried Härle, *Outline of Christian Dogmatics: An Evangelical Dogmatics*, trans. Ruth Yule and Nicholas Sagovsky (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 368–71.

<sup>78</sup> Nikolaus Hunnius, *Epitome Credendorum ... wort verfasst* (Wittenberg: Paul Helwig, 1628), 135; Hunnius, *Epitome Credendorum*, 47–48.

<sup>79</sup> Chemnitz, *Chemnitz's Works*, 7:301.

<sup>80</sup> Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum*, 469–70.

union, general union, etc. This question refers to the mystical union. While the Scriptures do not explicitly address this, it does say that the Triune God is present in believers (Exod 25:22; 29:43; 40:34–35; John 14:23; 15:4–5; 2 Pet 1:4). God’s providential general union with all things conversely is different from the mystical union. Nevertheless, it persists even in those who have lost the image of God (Gen 6:3; Ps 139:7–12; Jer 23:23–24; Acts 17:28).

The image of God in the strict sense is a type called into being to reflect an archetype. In other words, the divine image’s purpose is to foster a recognition that human beings (i.e., type) have a responsibility to God (i.e., archetype) and to other human beings (as fellow types).<sup>81</sup> Thus, the call of grace drives human image-bearers to freely respond with faith, active righteousness (i.e., good works), procreation (including headship), and dominion towards God (Gen 2:16–17), other humans (Gen 2:18), their spouses (Gen 1:28; 2:18; 1 Cor 11:7), and creation (Gen 1:26–30) respectively as defined by the framework of law (disclosed in revelation, human consciousness, human society, and nature) and the needs of the neighbor. In other words, human beings long to reflect the divine image and make God’s name holy via their royal priesthood. God, moreover, perpetuates his providence and grace through the vocations and eucharistic (i.e., thank) offerings of these very same image bearers.

Traditionally, Roman Catholics have said that likeness of God was lost in the fall but that the image of God survived. As they were permitted greater “freedom” in exegesis with *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (September 30, 1943), they came to recognize the exegetical problems with this direction. Thus, Vatican II restated its position, suggesting the likeness (*similitudinem*) was only deformed (*deformatam*) in the fall.<sup>82</sup> However, the Sacred Scriptures clearly say that Adam’s progeny (i.e., Seth) was created in Adam’s image and likeness after the fall (Gen 5:3). Likewise, St. Paul says, “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust [i.e., old Adam], we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven [i.e., new Adam]” (1 Cor 15:49). If Jesus Christ, the glory of

<sup>81</sup> See also Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, trans. Carl J. Schindler (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 23–29.

<sup>82</sup> “[Christ] who is ‘the image of the invisible God’ (Col 1, 15), is the perfect human being who has restored to the offspring of Adam the divine likeness (*similitudinem*) which had been deformed (*deformatam*) since the first sin.” *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. N. P. Tanner, G. Albergio, J. A. Dossetti, P.– P. Joannou, C. Leonardi, P. Prodi, and H. Jedin (London and Washington: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:1081–82.

the Lord and the essential image of God, came so that the fallen would be “conformed” (συμμόρφους), “bear” (φορέσομεν), “be transformed” (μεταμορφούμεθα), and “put on” (ἐνδύσασθαι) Christ’s image because they only have the fallen image of Adam (Luke 1:74–75; Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), then the image of God in the strict sense must have been lost in the fall.<sup>83</sup> Mankind does indeed retain the faculties of memory, intellect, and will. In the aftermath of the fall, human beings have acquired the very antithesis of the divine image; namely, an “evil inclination” or original sin (Gen 6:5; 8:21; Ps 51:7; 143:2; Isa 6:5; Jer 17:9; Rom 5:12–21; 14:23; Heb 11:6), after which Adam and his progeny can only pass original sin to their descendants (Ps 51:7; Rom 5:12–21). In point of fact, human beings are now only autonomous knowers of a fallen manmade knowledge (Gen 3:22). They experience death (Gen 2:16–17; 3:19; Gen 5:5ff; Wis 2:23–24; Rom 5:12; 8:10; 1 Cor 15:21–22, 53–55; Rev 21:4). Finally, mankind has lost created faith (Gen 3:17), and lack full dominion (Gen 3:17–19; 9:2; Sir 17:4). For this reason, the Lutheran Confessions and the Lutheran fathers conclude that the divine image has been lost.

3. That not only is original sin (in human nature) such a complete lack of all good in spiritual, divine matters, but also that at the same time it replaces the lost image of God in the human being with a deep-seated, evil, horrible, bottomless, unfathomable, and indescribable corruption of the entire human nature and of all its powers, particularly of the highest, most important powers of the soul, in mind, heart, and will.<sup>84</sup>

While all the Lutheran Fathers agree that there is something that remains in fallen human beings that distinguishes them as human from the rest of creation, some never address whether or not this should be called the divine image in the wide sense, others affirm that it should

<sup>83</sup> LW 1:339–40; Chemnitz, *Chemnitz’s Works*, 7:515.

<sup>84</sup> FC SD I, 10–11 (KW 533–34). Luther adds, “Even this small part of the divine image we have lost, so much so that we do not even have insight into the fullness of joy and bliss which Adam derived from his contemplation of all the animal creatures. ... Thus, even if the image has been almost completely lost, there is still a great difference between the human being and the rest of the animals... What we achieve in life, however, is brought about, not by the dominion of which Adam had but through industry and skill.” LW 1:65–67. See also Chemnitz, *Chemnitz’s Works*, 7:509–10.

indeed be called such,<sup>85</sup> still others reject that it should be called such.<sup>86</sup> Those that affirm a divine image in the wide sense typically call it the “remnant” of the divine image (e.g., Gerhard, Hollaz, Bengel, Meyer, and Giese), the “lesser principal or secondary conformity” (e.g., Gerhard), the divine image in the “improper sense” (e.g., König, Quenstedt, and Linsenmann), the “image of God in the wide (general) sense” (e.g., Wigand, Baier-Walther, Löber, Luthardt, Rohnert, Jacobs, Hoenecke, Lindberg, Dau, Lenski, and Mueller), the “*character indelebilis*” even after the fall (e.g., Keil, Delitzsch), “certain external characteristics” of the likeness (e.g., Kretzmann), or the “shell of God’s image” (e.g., Deutschlander). When they do supply Scriptural support, they typically cite Genesis 9:6, Romans 1–2, and James 3:9. Some also note that the wide sense is really what the church fathers meant by the substantial divine image as opposed to the accidental divine likeness. Even modern Lutheran exegetes maintain that while Genesis 9:6 could be understood

<sup>85</sup> The following theologians taught the image of God in the wide sense: Johann Wigand, *SYNTAGMA, Seu Corpus Doctrinae ... ueteri Testamento ... cinnatum* (Basel: Johann Oporinus, 1564), 402; Gerhard, *On Creation*, 326 (Locus 11, Par. 137); Johann Gerhard, *Confessio Catholica* (Frankfurt: Christian Genshius, 1679), 1371 (Bk. II, Pt. III, Art. 20, Chap 2); Johann Friedrich König, *Theologia positivae acroamaticae* (Rostock 1664), ed. Andreas Stegmann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 120 (Pt. II, Par. 8); Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica*, 2:3; Johann Wilhelm Baier and C. F. W. Walther, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae Adjectis Notis Amplioribus ... Confirmatur* (St. Louis: Luth. Concordia Verlag, 1879), 2:147–48; Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum*, 478; Christian Löber *Evangelisch-Lutherische Dogmatik* (St. Louis: Fr. Dette, 1872), 346; Chr. Ernst Luthardt, *Kompendium der Dogmatik*, 10th ed. (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1900), 161; W. Linsenmann, *Die Dogmatik der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche* (Saginaw: Saginaw Publishing House, 1901–2), 1:251–54; W. Rohnert, *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Braunschweig: Hellmuth Wollermann, 1902), 197; Henry Eyster Jacobs, *A Summary of the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publishing House, 1905) 96, 99; Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, 2:320, 322, 328–29; C. E. Lindberg, *Christian Dogmatics* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1928), 156–57; W. H. T. Dau, *Doctrinal Theology* (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), 1:150–52; Steven P. Mueller, ed., *Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess: An Introduction to Doctrinal Theology* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 132; Daniel M. Deutschlander, *Grace Abounds: The Splendor of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2015), 197, 199. See also Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, 23–29; Kolb, *The Christian Faith*, 55–57; Jerrold A. Eickmann, “Anthropology,” 1:272–81. Note footnote 87 as well.

<sup>86</sup> The following theologians rejected the image of God in the wide sense: Friedrich Adolf Philippi, *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Samuel Gottlieb Liesching, 1854–82), 2:371ff; Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:518–19; John P. Meyer, “The Image of God, Genesis 1,” in *Our Great Heritage*, ed. Lyle W. Lange (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), 2:189–91; Hove, *Christian Doctrine*, 125–26; Lyle W. Lange, *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), 190–91.

as man only had been created in the image of God, James 3:9 indicates that in some sense man still possesses the image of God.<sup>87</sup> In addition, the unbeliever still possesses the corrupted human faculties necessary to actualize the image of God in the strict sense. Besides natural knowledge of God (Sir 17:7; Rom 1:20; 2:15), the unbeliever also carries out to a certain degree some of the purposes of the image of God in the strict sense like procreation (Gen 9:1), headship (1 Cor 11:7), and dominion (Gen 3:17–19; 9:2; Ps 8:6–8; Wis 9:2–3; Sir 17:2–3, 7). Thus, there is warrant for the teaching of the divine image in the wide sense.

The image of God in the wide sense refers to the memory, intellect, and will that survive the fall, albeit corrupted, dehumanized, and void of grace (Gen 5:1–2; 9:6; Wis 1:13; 2:23–24; 9:2–3; Sir 17:2–3, 7; 1 Cor 11:7; Jam 3:9). What maintains and fuels the fallen memory, intellect, and will in the unbeliever is law (disclosed in human consciousness, human society, and nature) and providence (Gen 8:22; Matt 5:45; Acts 17:28; Col 1:17; Heb 1:3). The divine image in the wide sense too is a type meant to reflect an archetype. In other words, it (i.e., type) fosters a recognition that human beings have a responsibility to the god/s (archetype) and other human beings (as fellow types). The demands of the law and providence is what makes some measure of civil righteousness (Gen 2:18; Rom 2:14–15; 14:23; Heb 11:6), procreation (including headship) (Gen 1:28; 2:18; 9:1; 1 Cor 11:7), and dominion (Gen 1:26, 28; 3:17–19; 9:2; Ps 8:6–8; Wis 9:2–3; Sir 17:2–3, 7) still possible. When unbelievers do these things, they are on some level always trying to justify themselves before the demands of the law, themselves, the god/s, and their neighbor. Nevertheless, God still perpetuates his providence through the professions and works of unbelievers.

Not unlike the divine image in the wide sense, some Lutheran theologians also speak of vestiges of the Trinity in creation as well. Hollaz says, “An image manifestly represents that of which it is an image: a vestige obscurely points to that of which it is a vestige. In all creatures

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<sup>87</sup> Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Gnomen of the New Testament*, trans. Andrew R. Fausset (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1863), 5:27; H. A. W. Meyer, *Commentary on the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), 10:118; R. C. H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistles to James* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 611; Paul Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: The New Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 2:507–8; Curtis Giese, *James*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2021), 312. See also Keil, C. F., and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 1:287 on Gen 9:6.

are seen the vestiges of the divine, power, wisdom, and goodness, but in pre-fall man the image of God shone forth with full splendor.”<sup>88</sup>

In order to accomplish a divine act of recreation, the glory of the Lord, Jesus Christ, assumed a perfect human nature so that though his salvific work, man could receive the image of the new Adam, the essential image of God (Luke 1:74–75; Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). Martin Chemnitz captures Christ’s recreative work this way:

... [God] poured into [man’s] soul divine light, wisdom, and righteousness, etc., in order that man might be the image and likeness of God. Christ also, as He undertook to restore in man the image of God, used the process of breathing in or upon, as when he breathed upon the apostles and gave them the Holy Spirit, John 20:22. And there is no doubt that he intended to lead us to thoughts of that first inbreathing.<sup>89</sup>

In justification, Christ eschatologically (i.e., already but not yet) recreates the image, only to await its final consummation on the last day. Until that day, the regenerate remain “at the same time saint and sinner” (*simul iustus et peccator*) (Gen 8:21; Rom 7:15–25; Gal 5:16–17). Here Luther expresses the “already” and the “saint” aspects of justification

But now the Gospel has brought about the restoration of that image (*Hoc autem nunc per Euangelium agitur, ut imago illa reparetur*). Intellect and will indeed have remained, but both very much impaired. And so the Gospel brings it about that we are formed once more according to the familiar and indeed better image, because we are born again into eternal life, or rather into the hope of eternal life by faith, that we may live in God and with God and be one with Him as Christ says (John 17:21).<sup>90</sup>

Luther conversely captures the “but not yet” and “at the same time sinner” aspects here.

In this manner this image of the new creature begins to be restored by the Gospel in this life, but it will not be finished in this life. But when it is finished in the kingdom of the Father, then the will will be truly free and good, the mind truly enlightened, and the memory

<sup>88</sup> Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum*, 462. See also *LW* 1:68.

<sup>89</sup> Chemnitz, *Chemnitz’s Works*, 7:282.

<sup>90</sup> *WA* 42:48; *LW* 1:64.

persistent. Then it will also happen that all the other creatures will be under our rule to a greater degree than they were in Adam's Paradise.<sup>91</sup>

### Some Implications for Practical Theology

An often-overlooked aspect of the image of God is that it inspires vocation and mission. Human beings were created to be types of an archetype. They are not only inherently dependent on their archetypes, their purpose (*fnis*) is to reflect that archetype to others. The sons and daughters of God reflect God and make his name holy via royal priestly vocation and mission. Paul put it this way: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph 5:1–2). Human beings are to become Christ to all they meet, to see Christ in all they serve. Jesus says, "And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me'" (Matt 25:40). Lest one think this is some kind of theology of glory, the Christ that Christians are called to imitate is the Crucified Christ. "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (1 Pet 2:21). Does not even Paul state, "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal 6:17)? If man becomes like the crucified Christ in this life, he will become like the glorified Christ in the next (1 John 3:2).

Modern anthropology was built on the state of pure nature and human autonomy. These ideas have so reshaped the western mind that to say with the Scriptures that faith and passive righteousness (i.e., divine image in strict sense) are necessary for the person to be fully human sounds like crazy talk. There is even a concerted effort to have the most inclusive definition of the image of God possible, lest the divine image in strict sense be used to privilege believers. But that is exactly the point! Biblically speaking, to be human is to be Christian.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>91</sup> *LW* 1:65. See also FC SD, XI.49 (KW 648).

<sup>92</sup> Gustaf Wingren explains further, "Man was created in the beginning by the creative Word, and destined to live by that which comes from the mouth of God. Men understand themselves alright and receive true human life in the hearing of God's Word. The Word reaches the objective for which it was sent out only when it effects an entrance into men. Man reaches the spring out of which he can draw human life only when the Word of the Creator comes to him. ... What is given in faith signifies the deliverance of man from his unnatural condition, his restoration to the estate in which he was created. For Luther, unbelief is *demonic*. It is not 'human' to doubt and 'paradoxical' to believe; on the contrary, where doubt arises, it is diabolical powers that



To be sure, the Bible still calls the unbeliever human, but they are corrupted and deformed humans. Ezekiel shows again and again how Israel, who was supposed to bear the image of God to the nations, perverted the divine image among the nations and dehumanized each other in animal-like ways.<sup>93</sup> In contrast, Biblical anthropology teaches a humanizing anthropology built on Creator/creature distinction, two words of God (distinction between law and gospel), two kinds of righteousness (passive and active), no state of pure nature, concreated image of God, faith as trust, freedom, complementarity, same time saint and sinner, vocation, and two kingdoms. Non-Biblical anthropologies teach a dehumanizing anthropology built on different combinations of human as counterfeit creator, one word of God (mixed law-gospel), one kind of righteousness (active), a covenant of works, a state of pure nature, a superadded image of God, faith as obedience, legalism, non-complementarity, no same time saint and sinner, vocation shoring up salvation in some form, and no two kingdoms. If the latter anthropology were true, then humans really could evolve through education and trying to do better. Economics and politics really could create a utopian world where everyone was a king (or better, a counterfeit god) and there would be no need for complementary vocations. In truth, Biblical anthropology shows that regenerated image bearers (i.e., Christians) not only have the sole means of salvation, they also have the sole means of humanization. Alternative humanisms inevitably end up dehumanizing and tyrannizing in their quest for autonomy and self-deification (e.g., Secular Humanism, Nazism, Marxism, etc.). Only Christ in God's proclaimed Word, written Word, and sacramental Word can mend the human condition. At best, unbelieving image bearers in the wide sense can only curb evil, do civil righteousness, and serve as conduits of providence. As that astute observer of the human condition, Augustine of Hippo, once noted: "Our heart is unquiet until it rests in you [Lord]."<sup>94</sup>

All of this might suggest that Lutherans should favor an integralist conception of church and state. Integralism refers to the integration of religious authority and political power. In fact, Roman Catholic integralist like Edmund Waldstein, Patrick J. Deneen, Gladden Pappin, and Adrian Vermeule have risen in prominence because they have argued that Classical Liberalism is unsustainable. However, Lutherans have

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strive for mastery in human life." Gustaf Wingren, *The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church*, trans. Victor C. Pogue (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 75.

<sup>93</sup> Schmeling, "The Glory of the LORD," 101–5 esp.

<sup>94</sup> Augustine, *The Works*, I/1:39 (*Confessions* 1.1).

historically assumed neither the “Christ above culture” position of the Roman Catholics nor the “Christ the transformer of culture” position of the Reformed as H. Reinhold Niebuhr would put it. Instead, Niebuhr argues that Lutherans have taken the “Christ and culture in paradox” position, though some of Niebuhr’s conclusions are problematic (e.g., antinomianism and conservative stagnation).<sup>95</sup> Lutherans have generally taken this position because the distinction between law and gospel, the two kinds of righteousness, as well as the two kingdoms have disabused them of the other options. God reigns through the gospel in his right-hand kingdom and through the law in his left-hand kingdom. The Christian who is *simul iustus et peccator*, moreover, is uniquely subject to both realms. When the left-hand kingdom tries to rule via the gospel, the left-hand kingdom become antinomian (if not tyrannical) and unable to curb evil in the world. When the right-hand kingdom ties to rule via the law, the right-hand kingdom becomes legalistic (if not tyrannical) and unable to proclaim the gospel in the world (not to mention foster gospel-motivated vocation). Only in heaven can this paradox be undone. Thus, the biblical conception of the image of God does not lead to integralism. LSQ

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<sup>95</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1951).



# The First and Highest Work of Love: St. Timothy Lutheran Church Evangelism Study

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**W**HAT FOLLOWS ARE THOUGHTS I HAVE ACCUMULATED over time in thinking about, reading about, and engaging in evangelism<sup>1</sup>: what it is, how it should be done, how it could be best be done, how it should not be done, what is and what is not effective, what we have done or are doing that perhaps strays from sound Lutheran theology, where we have missed the boat, etc. Everything here has been shared at several pastoral study groups and many individual pastors. It has been favorably received. But there may still be a number of appropriate suggestions and constructive criticisms.

## **An Evangelism Mindset**

It is important to remind ourselves and our hearers of two things: “... the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many” (Matt. 7:13). And, “God so loved the world” (John 3:16). In other words, we and our members need to be

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<sup>1</sup> I am generally using the word evangelism in a narrow sense—presenting the good news of the person and work of Christ for sinners, as distinct from opportunities that allow for evangelism.

instructed regularly that hell is very real for our neighbor, and that Christ was given over to death for our neighbor. “Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest” (John 4:35). We need to carry this with us when we walk out the doors of the church, have coffee with our church-less parent, watch a sports game with our neighbor, or find ourselves in a conversation with a complete stranger.

I start out with a word on the Public Ministry and the Universal Priesthood. After that, I have divided this into two parts: what has hindered evangelism and what will or might help. In putting this together, I have tried to keep in mind doctrines that are directly or indirectly connected to evangelism.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Public Ministry and the Priesthood of All Believers**

(see 1 Pet. 2:9)

Sometimes there is tension regarding who is to be involved in evangelism, to what degree, in which situations, and with what authority. The pastor has no choice; he is “to do the work of the evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5). At the same time all Christians will be put in various situations and have several vocations in life where either they *can* and sometimes *should* evangelize (it may not be a matter of “if” they should communicate the gospel, but “how”). See Acts 8:1–5; Rom. 10:14–15; 2 Tim. 4:5; Luke 10:16; 1 Pet. 3:15; Col. 4:4–6.

Martin Luther has some straightforward words on evangelism and the Universal Priesthood.<sup>3</sup>

We have no other reason for living on earth than to be of help to others. If this were not the case, it would be best for God to kill us and let us die as soon as we are baptized and have begun to believe. But he permits us to live here in order that we may bring others to faith, just as he brought us.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Historical Fall, Man’s Depravity, The Person and Work of Christ, Justification, The Work of The Holy Spirit, The Means of Grace, Law & Gospel, The Theology of The Cross (vs. The Theology of Glory), The Priesthood of All Believers, The Public Ministry, Apologetics, The Sufficiency, Inspiration, Inerrancy, & Efficacy of The Word, Vocation, Adiaphora, Natural Knowledge of God, Natural Law, Truth. Also AC IV, V, XII, XIII, XIV, XVIII; FC II, and others.

<sup>3</sup> These quotes come from a class taught by Prof. Erling Teigen at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, maybe in 1981.

<sup>4</sup> LW 30:11.

Therefore when St. Peter says here: “You are a royal priesthood,” this is tantamount to saying: “You are Christians.” If you want to know what kind of title and what kind of power and praise Christians have, you see here that they are kings and priests and a chosen race. But what is the priestly office? The answer follows: “That you may declare...” A priest must be God’s messenger and must have a command from God to proclaim his word. You must, says Peter, exercise the chief function of a priest, that is to proclaim the wonderful deed God has performed for you to bring you out of darkness into the light. And your preaching should be done in such a way that one brother proclaims the mighty deed of God to the other, how you have been delivered through him from sin, hell, death, and all misfortune, and have been called to eternal life. Thus you should also teach other people how they too, come into such light.<sup>5</sup>

The first and highest work of love a Christian ought to do when he has become a believer, is to bring others also to believe in the way he himself came to believe. And here you notice that Christ begins and institutes the office of the ministry of the external Word in every Christian; for he himself came with this office and the external Word ... In this way, the Lord desires to say: you have now received enough from me, peace and joy, and all you should have. ... Hence I send you into the world as my Father hath sent me; namely that every Christian should instruct and teach his neighbor, that he may also come to Christ. By this no power is delegated exclusively to popes and bishops, but all Christians are commanded to profess their faith publicly and also to lead others to believe.<sup>6</sup>

## **I. Challenges, Shortcomings, Roadblocks, Errors, Misunderstandings, and Failures**

Some of the following apply specifically (or more so) to the called and ordained servant of the Word (pastors and missionaries), but most apply to the Priesthood of All Believers. I will try to clarify this distinction along the way.

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<sup>5</sup> LW 30:64ff.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Church Postil*, John Nicholas Lenker, trans. (Minneapolis: Lutherans in All Lands Co., 1906), 11: 359.

**“Church Growth” Can Be Satanic.** Of course, we want our congregations to grow, or at least continue to survive. But we are to have this godly goal for one reason only: that we and others can abide in Jesus’ word and thus be his disciples, know the truth, and be set free (John 8:31f.); that we and our neighbor can be sanctified by the truth, his Word (John 17:17). But what is hard for us to swallow is that the effectiveness of the Word upon the heart has nothing to do with us. We are simply called upon to be faithful in preserving and proclaiming the Word (1 Cor. 3:6). And if after being faithful our congregations do not grow, we miserably linger on, or we even die and go out of existence, so be it. God forbid this would happen to us, but “not my will, but yours, be done.” (Luke 22:42). Jesus said this.

A common problem is when church growth is divorced from or overshadowed by something other than this goal of saving people, or when we believe that one’s conversion to Christianity and preservation in the faith depends on something other than the Holy Spirit working through the Word. For example, if the goal of growing the church is even slightly budgetary, or appearance, or even mere continued existence, then we have missed the boat and are not being guided by the biblical understanding for evangelism. Or if the reason to grow *is* to save souls, but the *effective* means (that is, what ultimately and really causes or creates a faith that saves) includes or is assumed to be something other than the Word (like some program, event, personality, reasoning, activity—see several of the topics below), we, again, are guilty of a faulty church growth mentality. We are not in this for glory or success or prestige or looks or comfort—congregational or personal. The history of the church *is* one of growth—millions and millions coming to faith here, there, and everywhere. But it is also a history where “steeple are falling; crumbled have spires in every land” (ELH 211:1), where a land that once basked in the comfort of the gospel, now goes through a famine of hearing God’s words (Amos 8:11). “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” “*Jesus, you are not supposed to suffer and die.*” “*Peter, where did you get this idea?*” “Get behind me, Satan!” (Matt. 16:22–23).

I am not trying to be gloomy about evangelism (and it will get better). But my point is even good, sound, confessional Lutheran churches, laymen, and pastors can easily fall prey to bad church growth thinking. In fact, I think we all do. No, I know we all do. It’s all around us in American evangelicalism, and it’s in us by virtue of our inherent self-righteousness.

**Fear of Man and Lack of Love for the Lost.** This is a sanctification issue that affects both pastor and layman. As long as we are in this world, as long as Satan exists, and as long we are stuck with our flesh, this will be an issue. It is harshly rebuked by Christ (Matt. 10:26–33). The thing to be aware of is not only the existence of this failure, but also whether we excuse or justify it, or repent of it (as poor Peter eventually did after the courtyard fiasco).

**Barely on the Radar Screen.** The realization that one's next-door neighbor or co-worker or even good friend or family member is living without Christ and heading toward hell does not seem to be of concern at times, or even understood. I am perhaps being sinfully judgmental here, but it is hard to avoid this assessment as I observe others (and myself, if I am in an honest mood). Even among us good conservative Lutherans, I get the sense there is greater concern regarding the numerical growth of a congregation than a concern that our lost neighbor is lost and needs to repent and come to faith in the Son of God.

**I Don't Know What to Say.** Join the club. At the same time this can be used as an excuse to avoid saying what could be said or should be said. If we can say the Apostles Creed, if we can quote John 3:16, if we can read Romans 3 out loud (or other sections of the Bible), if we can say "your sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ", if we can explain who Christ is along with a basic outline of what happened to him and what this all means; if we can hand them the Gospel of John, a Bible, a tract, or a good Christian book, we can evangelize. Further preparing ourselves and members to evangelize will help and increase confidence, but when we unnecessarily excuse ourselves by saying something like, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent... I am slow of speech and of tongue" (Ex. 3:10), there's nothing like an honest confession of sin followed by absolution. It is also helpful to know that saying something (even if it is not totally accurate) is probably almost always better than saying nothing at all.

One more thing: my personal experience, but an experience well grounded. I try to remember to pray as I am discussing Christianity with an unbeliever or sceptic: "Lord, help me to know what to think and what to say." I am sometimes amazed at what I end up sharing. This, of course, is not divorced from study of God's Word. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." (2 Tim. 2:15). By God's grace, meditation and prayer work very well together.



**Not Wanting to Pull the Trigger.** I can be somewhat good at undermining false worldviews, explaining the person and work of Christ, objective and subjective justification, defending true doctrines against false doctrines, and using apologetics. But, for whatever reason, “repent and be baptized” or “repent and believe the gospel” seems to be beyond my level of comfort at times. Maybe it’s my confidence in the power of the gospel, or maybe it’s my objection to decision theology, or maybe it’s my fear of man. Maybe others don’t have this problem, but I do at times. It seems a number of non-Lutheran churches and preachers are not as afraid to pull this trigger, telling the sinner to repent, even though they may do it with a poor theology in the background. I am kind of jealous.

**Operating Under a Definition of Evangelism That Is Too Broad.**

There are certain activities that are called evangelism, but at best are indirectly connected to evangelism or can create a situation where evangelism can occur. I think this is an important distinction to keep in mind. Congregations that sponsor events, activities, and programs such as preschool, carnivals, picnics, a moms’ group, food banks, clothing drives, or even invites to church (via mailings, social media, door-to-door flyers, etc.) are not doing evangelism *per se*. The hope, of course, is that evangelism and/or catechesis occur at some point. But my concern is that actual evangelism can become equated with these things rather than sharing and confronting our neighbor with the heart of God—the sending of his Son who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, was buried, and rose *for us and our salvation*. Again, the distinction is important. Too many denominations and theologies associate evangelism and mission work with some sort of community engagement or social/temporal assistance (a *social* gospel), rather than salvation from sin, death, and hell. Real evangelism can be risky. Endeavors by a church that deal with temporal things, though perhaps worthy, charitable, and require a good amount of congregational time and effort, are usually pretty “safe”. They will hardly be seen as offensive to anyone. The danger is that such efforts may unintentionally sooth the conscience, giving the impression that these things are the mission of the church when in fact her mission is to proclaim an unpopular and offensive message. No one will be hated for feeding the poor or establishing a preschool. Preaching and sharing Christ crucified on the other hand can be dangerous (1 Cor. 1:22–23). We can, and maybe should, do the former, while never forgetting our primary mission, no matter what the cost (look the Luther quotes above).

**Gimmick, Bait & Switch, and 1st Article Outreach.** Here's the situation as I see it: Gimmick outreach is using entertainment or fun things in order to get people to come to the church and eventually join. Bait & Switch is luring them to church by offering them something they might want or like, but the real motive is to get them to become members. The two are pretty much the same thing. As you can tell by my name calling, I am greatly cynical. There is something wrong here.

On the other hand, I cannot and should not automatically condemn these activities. There is something I call 1st Article outreach. Basically, this is where a congregation seeks to meet neighbors' needs as described in Luther's explanation to the 1st Article and the 4th Petition to the Lord's Prayer.<sup>7</sup> It might be food, shelter, clothing. It could be childcare or basic education. It could be protecting the life of the unborn (unwed mother counseling, providing maternity clothes, etc.). And it could be something that satisfies the aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, or even "fun" needs and desires that are a part of us as human beings who are created in the image of God (using the broad sense of "image of God").

What is the difference between Gimmick/Bait & Switch and 1st Article outreach? I would say that Gimmick and Bait & Switch outreach can easily cheapen or water down the true gospel *and* calls into question the integrity of a congregation and its members. 1st Article outreach could easily become Gimmick or Bait & Switch. So here is what might help. First, a church should make sure they understand that any 1st Article activities in which it engages, are not evangelism *per se* (see above), even though they may result in evangelism. Second, any such activities must be able to "stand alone"; they should not be viewed *merely* as a means to an end. That is, they are done simply because such activities are of value and benefit to our neighbors, regardless of what becomes of them. We love heathens even though they wish to continue down the path to hell and show no interest in the true Jesus. After they use us, we may have to offer them the other cheek, give them our cloak, and walk another mile with them (Matt. 5:38–42), all the while hoping and praying that God will lead them to repentance and faith. God himself sends rain on the unrighteous, simply because he loves them regardless of their final destiny (Matt. 5:45).

**Magical Incantation Approach.** When actual evangelism does take place, there can be a misconception on how and when the Holy Spirit works. Simply quoting Bible verses can be seen as sufficient or all that is needed because of the power of the Word, almost making

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<sup>7</sup> "...everything needed for this life."

Bible passages magical. There is a truth here, of course, for sometimes one simple exposure to the gospel is all that is needed. But I believe what can be overlooked is how and how long the Holy Spirit chooses to work. The same can occur with evangelism “outlines” when used.

**Hit and Run Approach/First Impressions.** Along with the above point, there can be a lack of appreciation and awareness of the long-term commitment that may be required when working with the unchurched and unbelievers. I kind of like the “hit and run” approach, but this is not good. For as Paul taught, “love is patient ... and endures all things”, and then he goes on to demonstrate this by going from house to house (1 Cor. 13, Acts 20:20f.). The same can be said with an overemphasis on first impressions. We often hear, “Your church was so friendly,” which is wonderful (though we sometimes hear the opposite, justly or unjustly). It can be somewhat natural to be friendly and welcoming upon first acquaintance and to visitors when they walk into a church. But we have to keep in mind people of any religious persuasion can do this as well. First impressions are very important, but they are not to be the primary and clearly not the only thing. Merely being welcoming would make it too easy, and we could falsely pat ourselves on the back when they say to us, “You are such a friendly church!” There is and has to be much more to loving our unbelieving neighbor with the gospel.

Two books bring this point out well. One is *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, which describes the conversion of a die-hard Muslim in part because a Christian friend remained a friend over time while engaging him in meaningful discussion and debates. The other is *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, an amazing book by a former radical lesbian professor who became a Christian due to the patience and persistence of a Reformed pastor and his wife who, like the friend in the book above, challenged her while loving her unconditionally, for more than a day, week, and month. We cannot expect the unchurched, heathens, and unbelievers to listen to the ultimate and undying message of Love if the messengers hardly demonstrate such love themselves. Pastor Larry Wentzlaff demonstrated a simple and persistent love while in Arizona. He regularly would call (weekly, monthly, or every 6 months) a list of unchurched he had some sort of connection with. This was an eye-opener to me. Simple, and persistent.

**Church Doors as Evangelism.** “If we can just get them through our church doors.” This is not wrong and is actually very commendable. There is much merit to this and no one should be deterred from encouraging this. But what can be forgotten is: “We need to get them

through our *home* doors” (or us into *their home* doors) where love can be more readily demonstrated in our other important and daily vocations.<sup>8</sup> In other words, loving our neighbor who is not a Christian or is a Christian who is searching may require love and words beyond the church building. We understand this, but we need to understand this better. Some are more gifted than others at doing this (Rom. 12:6–8). But the hospitality directive is given to all Christians (Rom. 12:13), as is the command to feed our enemy (Rom. 12:20).

**Worship Services as Evangelism.** Wherever the gospel is found, there also is the Holy Spirit. He can and does work when and where he pleases (John 3:8). And, hopefully, there is no clearer and no more predominant presentation of the gospel than in a worship service. So bring 'em in. However, the worship service is first and foremost designed for worshippers, i.e. Christians. It assumes certain things, things only they may understand. 1 Cor. 14:(6–38) is perhaps the best commentary on this. There Paul says, for the sake of both the believer and the “unbeliever” or the “outsider” (vv. 16, 22), clarity, orderliness, decency, and the created order are to be observed. But no matter how well all these are done, there remain teachings and practices that will be difficult for the outsider to grasp (like church furniture, dress, gestures, certain words, absolution, closed communion, music, etc.). And that's okay. For what is part and parcel to most of these is they reflect we are entering into a different realm. We are entering into the presence of the almighty God, Maker of heaven and earth, in a manner that the eye cannot see and the mind cannot conceive (1 Cor. 2:9ff).

Again, this is a great opportunity for evangelism. But it should not be considered the only or even the primary setting of evangelizing. There are just too many foreign things that are left unexplained and there are usually limited opportunities to ask and answer questions (assuming questions would even be asked). Plus, there are those things like closed communion that are easily misunderstood and misinterpreted, not to mention that the gospel itself is offensive. The point is this: we should not count on the worship service to do the job that may best be done in other settings. Worship is worship. It is not the setting where we have the opportunity to “become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Cor. 9:22).

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<sup>8</sup> In Lutheran theology and history, *home vocations* include most of those outside of the church, such as neighbor, parent, sister, plumber, friend, doctor, student, teacher, etc.

At the same time, worship gives both the pastor and members the occasion to step up to the plate and offer explanations (e.g., a worship explanation handout) or sit near guests for assistance, if wanted.

**“Evangelism Is the Pastor’s Job.”** When the Priesthood of All Believers is not grasped, when it is ignored or not taught as it should be, there can be tremendous pressure upon the pastor, and guilt. This is especially true if evangelism is viewed merely as activities, events, and programs that could be sponsored by a congregation, and not the message of Law and Gospel, sin and grace, and truth at odds with the world and culture: “Pastor, why aren’t we doing a community VBS, mailings, canvassing, etc. to get people to come and join our church?” Again, such things are not wrong and may be wise to do. But they can also distract from and should never be done at the expense of what is truly evangelism and a layman’s vocational opportunities.

**“Don’t Let Them Know We Are Confessional Lutherans Until They Get to Know Us.”** I know of some Baptist churches that have utilized this principle with success (i.e., they experienced growth in membership by removing “Baptist” from their church name). Again, there is something here that makes sense and ought to be implemented, somehow. But removing “Lutheran” from the sign out front and from other places where it normally would be found is not a good idea. It verges on dishonesty and the Bait & Switch approach mentioned earlier. We should carefully consider questions such as: What is the downside of removing or hiding the word Lutheran? What would or what might we end up losing or compromising? Are we revealing an embarrassment of our Lutheran (and, therefore, biblical) heritage? What is happening to “Here I stand”? Would our members and prospects be given the impression that by which we have identified ourselves for centuries is no longer important? That we value timidity over courage, or deception over being forthright? I find it a bit ironic that this is being done around the time we celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation.

We would be rightly upset with a cult that would hide its name from members of ours to try to proselytize them. We would even think the same of a Baptist, Catholic, or Pentecostal group if they were purposely hiding their identity to the same end.

No one should be hit over the head with the Lutheran Confessions when he walks into a congregation. But I believe there is a difference between honestly identifying ourselves in our church name (and other public venues) on the one hand, and explaining to an individual certain

biblical truths based upon where he is at on the other hand. With the latter, the word “Lutheran” does not have to be a part of the discussion. “All things to all men” is very important. But so is a public confession before the world. The name “Lutheran” may scare off some and in a sense hinder outreach and evangelism. But the answer is not hiding our confession in the manner of non-denominational churches and even some Lutheran churches.

**One Size Fits All.** 1 Cor. 9:19–23. This is important. I can get stuck in an apologetics mode. But my visits to a food court mall where I was wearing my clerical collar with a sign on my laptop that invites people to have seat, show me that each situation is quite unique. Some require apologetics, but there are some where I simply absolve in the name of Jesus Christ.

**“Who Am I to Judge?”** This is the new cultural mantra that applies to just about everything. But it is a common tactic of Satan. I know of situations where Christians make the case for salvation in Christ, but then snatch it away from and deny its truth to an unbeliever by implying that Jesus may not be the only way, saying something like, “But only God can judge.” The word “judge” is usually mentioned, and the impression is either given or taken that it would be wrong for us to tell someone that, without Jesus, he is going to hell. These days we are so afraid to offend, to suggest or imply that what the non-Christian believes is false, condemned, and really bad. But that, of course, would put us at odds with John the Baptist, Paul, Peter, and Jesus himself. They clearly would not have appreciated today’s “enlightened” non-offensive approach and mindset.

**What Has Truth Gotta Do with It?** We live in world of anti-truth; there is no real truth, only personal or social construction of truth. Postmodernism has cemented this into the thinking of many. And it has trickled down into the churches and lives of Christians. Even though no one *lives* as if there is no transcendent truth, many *think* that it is true that there is no truth. As a result, all religions and beliefs and lifestyles are viewed as equals, and anyone who says otherwise is quickly labeled a bigot, etc.

But it is my sense that a door is wide open here, for even though by nature we rebel against the truth, we are designed to need it, long for it (Eccl. 3:11), and (by grace alone) grasp it. This is especially true because we have been bombarded by a relativism (the belief there is no real and transcendent truth) that is driving many crazy; they long for a truth because they are being inundated or besieged by something that

is so clearly false and despairing and futile. Jesus, especially in John's Gospel, cannot say enough about the essentiality of truth, he himself being the truth (John 14:6). We cannot truly evangelize without saying (albeit with love and tact), "Where you are coming from and what you believe is false, but this *Jesus* really existed and what is taught about him is historically reliable and the inspired records are really true—true for you, true for me, and true the entire world, for all ages."

What can and does often happen when the importance and essentiality of *truth* is ignored is that we end up trying to show people that Christianity or our congregation is merely *relevant* for a particular culture, or only rewarding for the here and now, or simply emotionally satisfying. We end up being viewed as a church that primarily brings individual or family fulfillment, providing programs that help people connect to one another. Again, such things are not wrong in and of themselves; some of them may be wise to do, and some are the expected result of gathering together as God's people. But I am talking about priorities, emphasizing the heart of Christianity, making sure we don't put the cart before the horse, and that we avoid a prosperity gospel and a theology of glory that says if you join here or become a Christian you will experience a glorious life here and now. But coming to faith in Christ and being a Christian is not about being directed to earthly pleasures here and now. It's about *truth* that first smashes us down and then lifts us up. When these other things, no matter how good or even necessary they may be, crowd out or overshadow truth, where truth is avoided or looked upon merely as one of many things a congregation has to offer, something is very wrong. Look at Jesus, the Son of God, during his ministry. There are plenty of conferences and workshops out there (even within our own fellowship?) that are intended to encourage evangelism or increase membership, but is *truth* rightly explained, emphasized, and encouraged? Is truth defended? Are we encouraged to share the truth so people begin to understand that it is in conflict with what they believe, with culture, and with false religions? Maybe it is. But I am not sure.

**Downplaying or Ignoring the Impact of the Law, Sin, Affliction, and Death.** There can be no conversion without a man being confronted by and realizing the effects of the fall upon him personally. The convert will never say of his conversion, "Oh, that was easy." The law is a hammer. There is nothing pleasant about being rescued from sin and hell. It is a death followed by life that comes by faith alone. I am not talking about

some emotional thing (though that will be there),<sup>9</sup> but a reality based in the hostile and spiritually dead nature of man and the amazing and monergistic (God-alone) work of God. In other words, we should not expect our neighbor to have a nice, comfortable, easy jaunt from the Kingdom of Darkness into the Kingdom of Light.

**“We Will Take Transfers, But to Hell with Real-Live Heathens.”**

I was one time told by a member at a previous church, “We don’t want those kinds of people here” (referring to poor, non-whites). Transfers (or conservative and confessional Lutherans who move into the area) are easy, and should be welcomed! But remaining in this comfort zone can be used to ignore going out to “the highways and hedges” mentioned by Jesus (Luke 14:23) or the mindset he commanded when he said, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.” (Luke 14:12–14). You might call this fault a subtle racism or discrimination.

**The Inerrancy Assumption Approach.** We no longer have the luxury of a common cultural epistemology as was the case a number of decades ago and more, both here and in Europe. In other words, we no longer live in a society where the Bible is a recognized authority, in some ways, as it once was. Our era is more like the 1st and 2nd century Roman empire where Christianity was the minority view, where Scripture had no recognizable authority in culture, and where apologetics was a common and necessary approach. When someone asks us, “How do you know what you say about Jesus is true?”, it is not a good idea to say something like, “Because it says so in the Bible and the Bible is the Word of God.” Beginning with or bringing into our discussion the belief that the Word is inspired and inerrant, does nothing for the one who does not hold such a belief. Saying “Because the Bible says so” is no different than saying “Because I say so” or “My pastor says so” or any other authority to which we might appeal. What *can* do something is engaging them where they’re at (not where they are not at), being prepared to give a defense to anyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have, and presenting the good news of Christ crucified and risen—the power of God for salvation (which happens to be found in the inerrant and inspired Word).

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<sup>9</sup> See our Lutheran Confessions, *The Formula of Concord*, “The Solid Declaration,” II:54 & 70.



To put it another way, we do not begin with “the Bible is true”, but with the truths of the Bible (and evidence for those truths) needed to bring one to true faith. Hopefully they will at some point believe in both Christ and in the inspiration of the Bible.

**Apologetics Misused.** In the book *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, Nabeel Qureshi (who passed away of cancer in the summer of 2017 at the age of 34) describes his intense inner battle regarding which religion is true. Apologetics played a major role, and in the end he could not deny the clearly superior evidence for Christianity over against Islam. However, this book also demonstrates the faulty use of reason—what is called the magisterial use of reason. He comes to faith in Jesus Christ, so the book implies, by his own reason, strength, and decision. In the book there is a curious avoidance of being dead in trespasses and sins and it fails to acknowledge a sinful nature that is hostile to God. His sincerity and reason appear to win him over. Faith is not presented as a gift, and the gospel itself, all alone, is not taught as the power of God for salvation, at least not as it should be.

The temptation for us Lutherans might be to throw the baby out with the bathwater—not using apologetics or evidence at all. But that is not scriptural. What is needed is a sound Lutheran understanding and use of apologetics (see below).

Also, this book gives the impression that unless one is highly intelligent and can make good use of his reasoning abilities, he can never grasp Christianity as true, which means the comfort of the gospel would not be secured by such a person as well. It assumes that everyone can be and should be reasoned into the faith by the use of apologetics. So much for infants and children and the senile and the comatose and those with lower IQs. “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:25–34) was the question of the jailor. God prepared him by the fear of death, not reason. Apologetics is clearly there in Scripture, but it must be used scripturally.

### *An Important Lesson from All This*

All these shortcomings described above, to the degree they are accurate, are simply revealing why we are and need to be Christians. The devil, the world, and our flesh are there daily, weekly, annually; they are there plaguing us as individuals, as a congregation, a synod, and the universal church militant; they are there in our vocations; they afflict the pastoral office and the entire Priesthood of All Believers. But the blood that was shed for sins was and is timeless and unconditional and

all-encompassing and no respecter of persons, for it was and is the blood of the eternal Son of God. Here is where we rest.

## II. What Is Needed and What We Ought To Do Or Can Do

**Nothing, Kind Of.** In one sense, this is a good Lutheran answer: we plant, water, and then sit back to see what growth God all by himself brings about. Grace alone and faith alone, apart from works or any human effort of any kind. See also John 1:12–13.

**Back to the Bible and the Confessions.** Here are the doctrines that pastors and theologians (laymen can join in also) need to bring into a discussion and a correct understanding of evangelism: The historical fall, man's depravity, law (revealed and natural), sin, affliction, and death; the claims by Christ, along with his sinless life, miracles, teachings, crucifixion and resurrection; justification; the sufficiency, inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, and efficacy of the Word; Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone; the proper use of apologetics; and more.

Some of the things we try today can be attributed to the development of new technologies and sanctified common sense. But whatever our endeavors, they must be guided by the doctrines mentioned above (see also footnote 2). We should be asking questions about our evangelism efforts, such as: Are there any historical Lutheran and Christian precedents for or against what we are doing? Where, in our longer history, has something like this been tried before? Does this effort or approach interfere with or distract from any of these doctrines, or leave the impression with members or prospects that doctrines are less than what they really are? Is the something we are doing—the program, event, marketing, etc.—being given more attention, time, hype, or emphasis than the gospel message itself that we want people to hear?

Here's an example. At my previous congregation, there was (and is) an LED sign out front. We sometimes wrestled with what should be out there, but we realize it is a tool, a wonderful tool. But there was a time when we kind of thought, "This will bring people in!" (rather than the message of Christ somehow communicated personally by pastor or layman). There is also a temptation to have flashy stuff up there, which would easily cheapen our church and its message and make us look more like the business down the road that has something to sell.

**Evangelism Is Simple and Hard.** The message is straightforward and simple. It can be said or communicated in a multitude of ways. It's about Jesus: who he is, what he did, why he did what he did, and what that means for the sinner. But it is hard in several ways. First,

there will be some who want or require answers to difficult questions. We ought to oblige them, as much as we can and within reason. Plus, loving one's neighbor can take a lot of work and sacrifice, especially if we have to keep at it over the long haul. Again, "love endures all things" (1 Cor. 3:17). And then there is the hardship of possible persecution and even martyrdom. So we turn to Jesus for our comfort, encouragement, and example. See Matt. 10:24–25, 28–33.

**Developing an Evangelism Mindset.** This is how we started out this study, and it is worth repeating: It is important to remind ourselves 1) "... the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many" (Matt. 7:13). And, 2) "God so loved the world" (John 3:16). In other words, we and our members need to be instructed regularly that hell is very real for our neighbor, and that Christ was given over to death for our neighbor. "Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest" (John 4:35). We need to carry this with us when we walk out the doors of the church and be ready.

**The Priesthood of All Believers and Vocation—Where We Can Best Love Our Neighbor.** There are studies that show when people join a church it does not have a whole lot to do with the pastor, but almost always with a connection they have with church members who know these people outside of the church. This perhaps confirms what we read, to some degree, in Acts 8:1 and 4. Pastors need to tell their members how valuable they are in this work and remind them of what Peter (1 Pet. 2:9) and Luther teach (see Luther quotes above).

**Convince Him That He Is Not a Christian.** It may not necessarily be wrong to assume the person we are talking to is a Christian. But it may be. We should not automatically give him the benefit of the doubt. I have done this only to find out that he has no concept of real Christianity. Add to this that the person himself may assume he is a Christian, when in fact he is not. And so, if a conversation proceeds with the notion that he is a Christian, when he is not, it will not go where it needs to go. The inability or unwillingness to say, "No, you are not a Christian," or, at least, "Whether you are a true Christian or not, I do not know," can prevent the evangelist from saying what he needs to say and the unbeliever from hearing what he needs to hear. Truth, including harsh truth, needs to take precedent over the feelings of others or the false and prevalent idea "we all worship the same God." To put it another way, real love needs to be the priority (see Mark 10:18–21). If we assume someone is a Christian without warrant, that could sooth

our conscience when we don't say something, but it would be a false soothing.

**Always Be Prepared to Make a Defense to Your Neighbor Who Asks You, But Not to the One Who Does Not Ask You.** The apostle Peter wrote, "...in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, *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, emphasis added). In other words, I do not have to go across the street, knock on the door of my neighbor, and say, "Let me tell you about Jesus so you don't go to hell." We do not have to do *that*. We have not sinned by not sharing the gospel with them. On the other hand, if that same neighbor or someone at work or school or wherever were to say to us, "Why do you believe what you believe?" or "I just found out I have terminal cancer and I'm scared", then we are obligated somehow to answer and somehow to point them to the truth and Christ.

But even if our neighbor across the street never asks us anything about religion, 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. There are times to remain guilt-free, and plenty of times to own guilt because we have not done what we could have done when the situation has presented itself. We have the great example in the "little girl" who served Naaman's wife (2 Kings 5:1ff.). See also Col. 4:5-6.

**If You Cannot Speak Like Angels, If You Cannot Preach Like Paul (ELH 191).** We need to give laity a break. We pastors are not to impose upon anyone more than Scripture does. If they can't do the intense stuff, they "can lead the little children to the Savior's waiting arms", or they "can be like faithful Aaron, holding up the prophet's hands" (ELH 191:2-3). We should not demand more from the mother who teaches and prays with her children at home. We are to commend all godly vocations (especially the less impressive ones) and all the good works performed within them, no matter how menial. And we should not elevate "church work" and outreach over changing diapers. What should be encouraged is an evangelism *mindset*, so when the opportunity comes knocking, we and our members are willing to direct them to the narrow gate. Again, Col. 4:5-6 and 1 Pet. 3:15.

**The Power and Sufficiency of the Word.** I think we who evangelize or we who want our church to do more evangelism can forget this more than we realize. "If I can just convince him" or "if I can show him that

creation is not contrary to science” or “if my pastor were more personal” or “if we would sing more uplifting songs” or “if we could get rid of closed communion” or “if we would just try this method or program” or “if our pastor was younger” or “if we would do more marketing” or ... There is some truth here. Yes, apologetics is about proof and convincing (see below). And 1 Cor. 9:20ff. speaks to an appropriate and evangelical accommodation and self-denial (“I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some”). And, unfortunately, we can interfere with the Word by doing things we ought not to do and by not doing things we ought to do. David’s adultery gave his enemies cause to speak against the truth with his adultery and murder (2 Sam. 11–12). The Christian who loves little misses the opportunity to point to, testify to, the truth of the Word and let his light shine (Matt. 5:16).

And yet we rest in and are comforted with the teaching that the Word alone is the efficient cause (that which actually effects or creates faith). Whew! This relieves pastors of much unnecessary guilt imposed upon them by certain members (and often themselves) who expect pastors always to do more or in a different way or insist we do a specific program, marketing strategy, etc. But laymen can also feel this pressing and humanly-invented guilt, so they, too, need to be reminded of this key doctrine. Rom. 10:14–17.

**The Sort of People Our Radar Ought to Detect.** C.S. Lewis wrote, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”<sup>10</sup> We should especially be alert to the one who asks us something about our hope in Christ, the one who is weary and heavy laden, the one who feels the pressing load of sin, the one who is being pounded down and undergoing more than the usual afflictions, and the one who is facing death. These are the ones God is uniquely preparing to hear the Good News.

**Biblical Apologetics: Limited and What Is Not Off Limits.** Apologetics—the defense for the truth of Christianity—can be misused. But so can the Law, and we don’t therefore throw it out. There are limits to apologetics. But there are some non-limits as well. We should not be afraid of using apologetics in the way the Bible does. What do I mean? Apologetics has two sides to it. One is to undermine and demolish that which is false (consider how often Jesus and the apostles did this; also 2 Cor. 10:5). The other aspect of apologetics is to offer proof for the truth or Christianity, and even for the work and person of Christ himself. This

<sup>10</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 91.

idea of proof is where we get uncomfortable. But to say that there is proof for the truth of Christianity is not to say that the proof is what actually creates faith (the *efficient* cause, in theological terms). God has given man reason. It is limited, and it is fallen. But he still has it. And God uses it. The fulfillment of Old Testament messianic prophecies, the hundreds of miracles by Christ, the grand miracle of his resurrection, and the abundance of eyewitness testimony all serve as proof. It as if we are in a court of law. Apologetics testifies to, supports, and points to the truth of the gospel, and it is this gospel alone that converts the dead man. Like beautiful Christian artwork and music, apologetics is a God-ordained platter on which the gospel and the Bread of Live is served.

Apologetics can be used in the service of the law (to prove the other to be wrong in his unbelief or misbelief). And it can be used in the service of the gospel (John 2:11, 23; 20:30f.). In this sense, apologetics is neither law nor gospel, but can be of service to one or the other or both. One of the best examples of this is Thomas (John 20) where, when his senses were confronted with the physical reality of the risen Christ, he was both convicted and assured. Talk about proof. People can choose to and will ignore the evidence (John 12:37), just as they choose to ignore the Word (Luke 16:31). But we should not be bothered about offering proof (Acts 1:3), just as we should not be concerned about preaching the law. Both can be and will be misused and misapplied. We can't help that. But what we can do is preach the whole counsel of God in which it is taught that neither our reason nor our works cause faith or bring us salvation.

**Tell Him the Truth, about Sin and Jesus, and Love Him.** Peter tells us to defend, but to do so with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15). To put it another way, think of Jesus—brutally honest and at the same time brutally slain for us: loving us as no matter what, no matter who we are, no matter where we are at.

**For Pastors: Sit at a Food Court.** This is my only specific outreach suggestion to pastors. Two or three times a month for about three hours each time, I sat in the North Star Mall food court in San Antonio with my clerical collar on and a sign on my laptop that said, "Have a seat. Prayer requests. Questions Welcomed." People would come to me. I didn't have to go knocking on doors asking people if they want to talk about religion. I almost always had at least one person sit down to talk. Once I had a waiting line. Sometimes they want to engage in a bit of a debate, which is great. But most often they are afflicted in some way

and are willing to at least listen to the good news about Jesus. I could write a book about the afflictions and ideas and beliefs these people brought with them to talk about. I only wish it had been closer to the church. This did not result in any members, and only four visited the church (two of them came to our home for a meal and conversation). Some lived far away (an hour or more), and in many cases, they were faithful members of a church somewhere in or near San Antonio. So, no new members. But, so what? The bottom line, the important thing (Luke 10:42), is many of them left our time together having heard, and sometimes received, the comfort of the gospel. And just maybe, that little struggling congregation will be blessed with numerical growth.

There are undoubtedly other settings that would work. I tried coffeeshops and McDonald's, with limited "success." I thought about trying a bar that had an outside eating area. But I would say that the clerical collar by itself has started many conversations. One time while waiting for my car to be fixed, I was studying in a gas station food mart that had four small tables (my invite sign was *not* on my laptop, but I was wearing my clerical collar). I was focused on my reading when I sensed someone's presence: a middle-aged man was standing *right* next to me with tears in his eyes, his 10-year-old son at his side. I instinctively told him to sit down. He was Catholic and his family situation was very sad. I talked gospel, and when I found out he was faithful in going to Mass, I told him to remember what he would be receiving in the Eucharist on the coming Sunday and what that meant. It was perhaps the best I could do, especially considering I was quite a way from the church.

I would almost always hand out a business card and invite them to call me day or night. Sometimes I would get his or her name and contact information. Occasionally I would give them a book. I usually have in my backpack the *Gospel of John*, the *Small Catechism*, *We Believe Teach and Confess*, *What in the World Is Going On?*, *The Spirituality of the Cross*, and *Mere Christianity*.

**Create a Tag Team (or realize that it may already exist).** I meet people who have real needs that I am not equipped to help or for whom I don't have time. It may be a young lady who poured out her heart to me at the mall or someone who needs a ride to church every Sunday, etc. I am not superman, I am not omnipresent, and I have a flock to care for. There are some situations I should avoid (e.g., meeting a woman in a regular or private setting). There are some people I talk with who would easily consume much of my time. I need help. I need to pass the baton. I need other wrestlers whom I can tag to continue the match, and who

could likely do it much better. I know there are quite a few members who understand this and are willing. And there are likely many others who would be willing if they knew. And then there are others who need to come to this understanding and learn to be willing. At the same time, it needs to be kept in mind that gifts differ from member to member. See Rom. 12:6–8.

**The God Factor.** Our outreach coordinator, when he worked for our church in San Antonio, left flyers or cards at 1,000 homes. Nothing came of it. No one visited the church on Sunday morning. He made other similar attempts with the same result. Then, lo and behold, visitors would show up at the church. But it had nothing to do with anything he did or I did. We called this the God Factor. They just showed up. This is good for the soul. It does not justify doing nothing. But it is a good reminder that his ways are not necessarily ours. I would sure like a lot of attention, recognition, and praise from others for all my evangelism efforts and their visible results. He likes to humble us, and necessarily so.

**Pray.** Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” (Luke 10:2). Paul said, “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.” (Col. 2:2–4). This is followed by these verses: “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” (5–6). In other words, we are not only to pray for evangelists and pastors, but as we pray we are asking that our speech, our words, be wise, gracious, tasty (salted) when we respond to those who have questions or objections about true Christianity. I am amazed at how effective my prayers are, all by God’s grace.

**Revamp Our Catechisms and Our Catechesis for Young and Old.** Answers to unasked questions are being dumped into the minds of our young people all the time, and they don’t even know it, nor do many of their parents (and it is happening to them as well). Our present *Small Catechism & Explanation* attempts to deal with some worldviews and religions that are in conflict with the truth, but many false ideas and teachings are not given any attention. Young people are being bombarded by them left and right. And most often they do not know



they are being given answers to extremely important questions that contradict their most important beliefs. We adults and parents often do not know this is going on. The most recent LCMS Small Catechism has made an attempt to include more worldview and apologetics information, but much more could have been done. Our synod has begun the process of rewriting our *Small Catechism & Explanation*, and it should be done with this in mind: be prepared to answer (1 Pet. 3:15).

**Final Thoughts.** There will be results according God's good timing and choice and location, and praise will also come. As Paul said in 1 Cor. 3:5–9:

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

Much more could be said and there may be a number of things that I have simply overlooked or not said as well as I should have. But this is enough for now. It should produce plenty of thought and discussion.

Finally, I do not practice what I preach nearly as much as I should. God have mercy. And he does. [LSQ](#)

# Antinomianism

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**G**OD'S LAW HAS EXPERIENCED MANY misapplications throughout Church history. The Pharisees used the Law to enforce purity and devotion to God, promising heaven to those who kept it. The Pietists used the Law to require a remorse of sin that supposedly led to purity of body and soul. The Antinomians rejected a use of the Law on the premise that the Gospel alone was "*the power of God for salvation to everyone who believed*" (Romans 1:16). In honoring the Gospel by denying the Law's use, they ended up destroying the Gospel.

One form of antinomianism (Agricola) rejected using the Law to bring about repentance. However, without a correct knowledge of sin, people could not understand their broken relationship with God, nor repent of their sins, nor see a need to believe in Jesus' work of salvation. Another form of antinomianism (Philippists) rejected speaking the Law to believers. However, without a knowledge of God's perfect will and His will that they love their neighbor, Christians could not know what works pleased God. In the history of the Lutheran Reformation, this second form of antinomianism is directly connected with and opposed to teaching a Third Use of the Law.

The problem with preaching the Third Use of the Law is that one must also avoid falling into moralism, legalism, and/or pietism. One can avoid this conundrum by antinomianism—that is, not preaching the law at all. However, one does not “save” the Gospel message this way.

Many learned theologians have fallen on the sword of dealing with Law and Gospel by failing to make and use proper definitions and distinctions. Understanding distinctions was one of the great gifts that God gave to Dr. Martin Luther. Scripture abounds in paradoxes and extra-human logic, so that if one strays from Scriptural language and words, one will often fail to speak the truth.

Speaking of paradoxes, what is the primary **basis** for one’s relationship with God? Is it “the law,” where God’s justice must be satisfied (Melanchthon)? Or is our relationship based on God’s “grace,” where God satisfies sinners with His love, mercy, atonement, forgiveness, and eternal life (Luther)? With regards to sinful mankind, the paradoxical answer is both—with distinctions. Timothy Wengert deals with this basis: “Unlike Melanchthon, who discussed the cross primarily in the context of sanctification of the believer, Agricola delighted in portraying it as the basis of Christian freedom.”<sup>1</sup>

On the one hand, no one enters heaven except when God’s justice is satisfied in regards to His Law, which means keeping the Law perfectly and paying the punishment for any infractions. But even if God’s justice is accomplished (and it has been in the work and merits of Christ Jesus—salvation won), this accomplishment would still not bring anyone into a relationship with God. So, on the other hand, only by the grace of God given through Word and Sacraments does God establish a relationship with sinful people (salvation distributed). In addition, only through the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit can believers remain in that divine relationship and do good works in their daily lives (Sanctification—narrow sense). And yet, believers are urged in Scripture to “*make their calling and election sure*” by their Christian life. The tensions, paradoxes, and distinctions evident in that discussion are the impetus for many arguments in the Church.

## Definitions

The more one studies this topic, the more one realizes how vital and important correct definitions and distinctions are in the discussion of antinomianism—indeed, of any doctrine of Scripture as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, *Law and Gospel: Philip Melanchthon’s Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over Poenitentia* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 33.

A failure to make proper scriptural distinctions lies at the root of many false teachings. The fact that so many distinctions need to be made in the biblical and theological use of words, phrases, and doctrines should be attributed both to God's nature (His thoughts are higher than ours) and to man's perverse Old Adam, which rejects the truths that God has revealed about Law and Gospel and seeks to find salvation by some human works.

Legalism fails to distinguish between the powers that Law and Gospel have and what man is able or not able to do. The Law cannot motivate sinners to do anything, only the Gospel can motivate. Since the Law cannot be obeyed, it cannot give eternal life. It is false to cry "legalism" when the Law is used to inform Christians how to live godly lives.

Pietism used the Law to increase holiness and devotion among Christians. Pietists did not trust the power of the Gospel, but trusted in a person's emotions to give the assurance of forgiveness. Emotions were deemed to be more authentic than the Word.

Gnosticism is discussed because of its presence in the prevailing culture today. The emphasis is on people seeking enlightenment through rituals and secret texts. By defining knowledge (*gnosis*) as good and material things as evil, they made a false distinction. For if Jesus' body is evil (as all bodies are according to Gnosticism) then He cannot be our Savior. If knowledge (*gnosis*) becomes more true and real than facts, then Scripture cannot state objective truths.

Law and Gospel must be carefully distinguished as to their content, their power, the purpose of their messages, etc. Law and Gospel must be kept separated when discussing justification by faith. Concerning both contrition/repentance and sanctification/the Christian life, Law and Gospel must work together, but still be distinguished between their purposes, achievements, and results. Just as theologians have distinguished between Old Testament laws—civil, religious, and moral; they also have made distinctions in the uses/functions of the Law (that is, the Ten Commandments and other *mandatum dei*) between the civil, pedagogical, and didactic uses. Each use can function in a different way for different purposes. Furthermore, the Third use of the Law (*usus didacticus*) is also distinguished between the negative use of beating down the old Adam and the positive use of instructing Christians as to what works please God.

The term "antinomianism" also needs to be distinguished over two false concepts: 1) that " 'strictly speaking,' the Gospel is not only

a proclamation of grace but also at the same time a proclamation of repentance, which rebukes the greatest sin, unbelief” (FC, SD, V:2). The second antinomian concept is that “...the regenerated do not learn the new obedience ... from the law” (FX, SD, VI:2).

Making distinctions in theology is vital to understanding the truths of God’s Word. The problem is that Satan also loves to make false distinctions in order to hide the truth of the God’s Word. Therefore, the Roman Catholic Church created a distinction between mortal and venial sins, between *meritum condigne* and *meritum de congrue*. Dispensationalists make false distinctions about how people are saved in different epochs of history. Other false distinctions are defining Law as “unbelief” instead of violating God’s Law and rejecting God’s specific New Testament commands as legalism.

Another false distinction relates to a Reformed use of the term “antinomianism.” Since the Reformed churches mix Law and Gospel with regard to justification, their understanding of antinomianism is also skewed. In an article “The Antinomians are Coming,” an unknown author wrote: “If you think that’s bad, then neglecting and even discouraging hungry folks from knowing about God’s ‘conditions’ to His blessed gift of salvation has got to be worse! That’s exactly why Antinomianism is one of the worst and most dangerous heresies going. God’s ‘conditions’ concerning salvation are more than just ‘believing’ and ‘accepting’ Christ.”<sup>2</sup> The author confuses justification and sanctification and so declares that preaching “Christ alone” and “faith alone” is antinomian! This is precisely one of the attacks that the Roman pontiffs made against Luther.

### Bible Passages on Antinomianism

Antinomians quote several Bible passages to support their position regarding the Law. St. Paul writes, “*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes*” (Romans 10:4). Here they conclude that the “end of the Law” means that the Law has nothing to say to Christians about their life. This is re-enforced by St. Paul’s words: “*He [Christ] has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace*” (Ephesians 2:15).

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<sup>2</sup> Unknown author, “The Antinomians are Coming!” <https://www.bereanpublishers.com/the-antinomians-are-coming/> Accessed Feb. 11, 2020.

If Christ has abolished the Law, then it should not be proclaimed to Christians. St. Paul said the same thing to Timothy: “*knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,*” (1 Tim 1:9). Here St. Paul plainly states that the Law has nothing to do with the righteous believer. Therefore the Law always accuses—to show sinners their sins. Again, St. Paul rejects that the Law has any power over him: “*All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any*” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Furthermore, Colossians 1:9–10 teaches that Christians are to be filled with the Gospel, not the Law: “*to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.*” Notice how those who are filled with knowledge of God’s will in the Gospel are also be fruitful in every good work. Christians are not bound to the letter of the Law, as St. Paul wrote: “*But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter*” (Romans 7:6).

Taken by themselves, these Bible passages above seem to indicate a complete freedom from God’s Law because of the work of Christ. The Gospel of salvation in Jesus fulfills the Law. Antinomians state that bringing the Law back into the Christian life violates the Gospel message of freedom from the Law. The Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to motivate Christians to freely do God’s will.

Doctors Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon explained these passages during their disputations and in their writings. The above passages clearly state that Christ has set them free from having to keep God’s Law in order to enter heaven. The antinomians fail to distinguish Luther’s paradox about the Christian, *simul justus et peccator*. If believers were totally the new man in Christ, they would not need the Law, for they would willingly do God’s will without any instruction (cf. FC, SD, VI:6). However, baptism does not wash away the old Adam. Therefore the Law is needed to convict people of sin and, as the *paidagogos*, drive them to Christ. While the Law leads people away from Christ by working wrath, it prepares hearts to listen to the Gospel, which alone has the power of God to create faith. And because the old Adam is a good swimmer, the Law is needed to repress it and to teach believers what works please God. Again, the Law has no power to motivate works

of sanctification, only the Holy Spirit working with the Gospel in Word and Sacrament moves God's children to do His holy will.

Concerning 1 Timothy 1:9, the *Formula of Concord* stated that the passage cannot mean that the just should live without the Law, since the Law is written in their hearts. Instead, St. Paul is stating that the Law "cannot impose a curse on the righteous ... nor torture the regenerated with its coercion" (FC, SD, VI:5). The *Formula of Concord* adds, "It is the Holy Spirit, who is not given and received through the law but through the preaching of the Gospel (Gal. 3:2,14), who renews the heart. Thus he employs the law to instruct the regenerate out of it and to show and indicate to them in the Ten Commandments what the acceptable will of God is (Rom. 12:2) and in what good works, which God has prepared beforehand, they should walk (Eph. 2:10)" (FC, SD, VI:11–12).

### St. Augustine on Law and Gospel

*"Grace makes us lovers of the law; but the law itself, without grace, makes us nothing but breakers of the law."* —St. Augustine

Since Melancthon coined the term "the third use of the law," St. Augustine could not have used it. However, the concept of Christians needing the law was important to Augustine in his letters against the Pelagians and Manichians. Augustine often used the phrase "faith which worketh by love" as St. Paul used it in Galatians 5:6 [ἀλλὰ πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη]. The Pelagians and Roman twisted his concept to "love which worketh by faith."

Augustine also had to deal with the twin issues that were later described in the *Formula of Concord*, Articles V and VI, that is, the Gospel alone makes Christians and Christians do not need the Law because they have the Gospel. The Pelagians taught that man's free will had the ability to decide to believe the Gospel. The Manicheans believed that man's spirit was reality, while the body was sinful and therefore could do whatever it desired because it was not "saved."

In a letter against the Pelagians, St. Augustine wrote: "Assuredly no one will doubt that that law of God was necessary not alone for that people at that time, but also is now necessary for us for the right ordering of our life."<sup>3</sup> He adds,

For who can say that Christians ought not to be observant to serve the one God with religious obedience, not to worship an idol, not

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, "A Treatise Against Two Letters of the Pelagians", in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series* 5:406.

to take the name of the Lord in vain, to honour one's parents, not to commit adulteries, murders, thefts, false witness, not to covet another man's wife, or anything at all that belongs to another man? Who is so impious as to say that he does not keep those precepts of the law because he is a Christian, and is established not under the law, but under grace?<sup>4</sup>

This idea is reinforced in Augustine's letter to Valentinus, when he comments on Proverbs 4:26–27 ("*turn not aside to the right hand nor to the left, but turn your foot away from the evil way*"):

Wherefore, most dearly beloved, whosoever says, "My will suffices for me to perform good works," declines to the right. But, on the other hand, they who think that a good way of life should be forsaken, when they hear God's grace so preached as to lead to the supposition and believe that it of itself makes men's wills from evil to good, and it even of itself keeps them what it has made them; and who, as the result of this opinion, go on to say, "Let us do evil than good may come" [Rom. 3:8] —these persons decline to the left. . . . For what more useful gift does the grace of God confer upon us, in this present evil world, than our dying unto sin? Hence he shows himself ungrateful to grace itself who chooses to live in sin by reason of that whereby we die unto sin.<sup>5</sup>

Quoting Ephesians 2:8–9, Augustine writes in "On Grace and Free Will":

Not that he [St. Paul] denied good works, or emptied them of their value, when he says that God renders to every man according to his works; [Rom. 2:6] but because works proceed from faith, and not faith from works. Therefore it is from Him that we have works of righteousness, from whom comes also faith itself, concerning which it is written, "The just shall live by faith." [Habak. 2:4]<sup>6</sup>

### Dr. Martin Luther and the Law

When Martin Luther posted his "Ninety-Five Theses," he started a dispute with the papacy over indulgences and repentance. The Ninety-Five Theses also became involved in a later dispute on antinomianism.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, "A Treatise Against Two Letters of the Pelagians," 406.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, "Letter of Augustine to Valentinus," in *NPNF1* 5:440.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, "On Grace and Free Will," in *NPNF1* 5:451.



The papacy accused Luther of rejecting good works altogether. Muntzer taught that the Christian society must drive out all evil works and pietistically demanded other works to be done. Luther and Melanchthon had to tread a narrow path between the two competing groups. It was not an easy task, as the years 1517 to 1583 were to prove.

The first four Theses demonstrate a part of the issue/problem:

1. By saying "*Poenitentiam agite*" [Matt. 4:17], our Lord Jesus Christ wanted the entire life of the faithful to be *poenitentia*.
2. For the word cannot be understood concerning sacramental *poenitentia* (that is, confession and satisfaction which is administered by the ministry of priests).
3. But neither did he intend interior *poenitentia* alone; indeed, such interior *poenitentia* is nothing unless it produces various mortifications of the flesh.
4. Therefore *poena* [punishment for sin] remains as long as hatred of self (that is, true inner *poenitentia*) remains, right up to the coming of the kingdom of heaven.<sup>7</sup>

The Vulgate translation of μετανοείτε by "*poenitentiam agite*" or "do penance," supported the idea of doing something to make up for one's sins. Following the meaning of the Greek word, Luther understood the term as meaning "repentance," or a change of mind. In 1517, Luther had not yet clearly worked out the relationship between salvation by faith alone, how one acquires faith, and how does faith manifest itself in the life of a Christian.

There were many questions regarding Law and Gospel that needed to be addressed. First, what motivated the "entire life of the faithful to be repentance," Law or Gospel? Second, what relationship do Law and Gospel have in "sacramental repentance"? Third, how do "mortifications of the flesh" fit in with salvation by faith alone through Christ alone? Fourth, in what order does Law and Gospel operate on the unbeliever who is brought to repentance of sin and faith in Christ? Fifth, is the Law eternal, or did it only come into existence after the Fall?

We might not feel the tensions that exist in the four theses and in the above questions, since we have studied the answers in the *Formula*

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<sup>7</sup> Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 15. In a footnote, Prof. Wengert dealt with the translation of "*poenitentia*": "Because the word *poenitentia* and its German equivalent Buße, may be translated 'repent,' 'repentance,' or 'penance' (and the phrase 'poenitentiam agite' [tut Buße] translated 'repent,' 'be penitent,' or 'do penance'), we will leave it untranslated throughout this work. Its meaning is key to the dispute studied here."

of Concord, Articles V and VI. Luther and Melanchthon did experience tension in these teachings because it was so easy to fall into the Romanism they had been taught—doing the good wherein one is rewarded by *meritum de congrue*, the prevenient grace that leads one to believe. With such grace and faith, the believer can then do *meritum condigne*, with the reward of eternal life. The next step was to push good works as so necessary that there could be no salvation without them, thus turning people away from the merits of Jesus Christ (see *Formula of Concord*, SD, Article IV: On Good Works).

Luther and Melanchthon had to develop a vocabulary that would clearly state the scriptural truths and avoid the errors of Rome, Calvin, the Anabaptists and the Antinomians. They also had to recognize and verbalize the distinctions between Law and Gospel and between the usages of the Law in order to avoid those false teachings. This took time and much study in Scripture and the Church Fathers. Edward Engelbrecht states that as early as 1522 in a sermon on Galatians 3:23–29, Luther spoke of “three attitudes toward the Law,” noting that “The third class observe it both externally and with the heart.” He states that Luther’s “*dreyerley brauch des Gesetzes*” [three-fold use of the Law] is equivalent to Nicholas of Lyra’s “*triplicem legis utilitatem*.”<sup>8</sup>

Luther’s paradox, *simul justis et peccator*, describes Christians as totally saints (where the Law is fulfilled by Christ) and totally sinners (where the Law continues a call to repentance and to cast off sin, which the Gospel motivates the Christian to do). However, Luther developed another paradox regarding the Christian life: The Christian is viewed as victorious and militant at the same time. Nathan Rinnes describes this paradox: “...the Christian actively runs back to Christ to receive not only perpetual pardon, or justification, but also the corresponding gift of power (the Holy Spirit) to fight the constant dangers posed by the world, devil, and flesh.”<sup>9</sup>

Prof. Wengert states:

Luther never saw a need to increase the uses of the law above two and thus create a separate use for believers. ... For Luther, the human being encountered the law in the two realms of human existence

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<sup>8</sup> Edward A. Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law: Luther’s Use of the Law for the Christian Life* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 80.

<sup>9</sup> Nathan Rinne, “Paradise Regained: Placing Nicholas Hopman’s *Lex Aeterna* Back in Luther’s Frame,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 82, no. 1–2 (January/April 2018): 77–78.

*coram Deo* [before God] and *coram hominibus*. Thus, there was never any need for more than two uses of the law. In his theology the law never had an independent existence that demanded definition, but it was always a part of the human encounter with God.<sup>10</sup>

Prof. Armin Schuetze stated, “Repeatedly [Luther] says that the law serves two functions and discusses them at length. Nowhere, however, does he speak directly of three uses of the law.”<sup>11</sup> Many other people have reached this same conclusion in order to support their form of antinomianism.

Edward Engelbrecht states: “The doctrine of the threefold use of the Law entered the Reformation theology through Luther’s teaching—not Melancthon’s, though Luther did not regularize or systematize the threefold use of the Law....”<sup>12</sup> And while Luther did not explicitly use third-use terminology, Engelbrecht’s table below shows how Luther taught the concept in 1522:

#### **Divine and Human Uses of the Law (1522)**

Divine use one:	To preserve discipline among us
Divine use two:	To know yourself and be humbled
Human (mis)use one:	Bold opposition by a dissolute life
Human (mis)use two:	Outward keeping of the law, being kept by the Law
Human use three:	Keeping the Law both outwardly and inwardly <sup>13</sup>

However, because of John Agricola’s antinomianism, in 1537 Martin Luther was brought into the antinomian discussion, where he stated that the Law is to be applied to believers, even if he did not use the term “Third-Use.”

<sup>10</sup> Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 192–193.

<sup>11</sup> Armin W. Schuetze, “On the Third Use of the Law, Luther’s Position in the Antinomian Debate (FC VI),” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (October 1979): 283

<sup>12</sup> Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law*, 125.

<sup>13</sup> Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law*, 82.

## A Short History of Antinomianism [See Appendix I—Timeline]

*“Grace makes us lovers of the law; but the law itself, without grace, makes us nothing but breakers of the law.”* —St. Augustin<sup>14</sup>

Johann Agricola first came to Wittenberg in 1516 and became a strong follower of Martin Luther. Agricola accompanied Luther to the Leipzig Debate and was one of the recorders of the debate. Luther considered him a friend and a scholar. Agricola became a teacher at the Latin School in Eislaben from 1526–1536. Luther urged Agricola to write a catechism for the young people. By 1528, Agricola published “130 Questions For Young Children.” His catechetical format was later adopted by Luther. However, Agricola placed the Ten Commandments at the end of the Catechism. By 1527, he was already teaching that the Law did not convert, only the Gospel of the Cross both convicted of sin and brought people to faith. Luther, Melanchthon, and Agricola met at Torgau on November 26, 1527, where Luther brought about an agreement by distinguishing between a general faith in God as judge that could precede repentance, but that justifying faith in God’s mercy must be preceded by repentance.

The controversy became more public when Philipp Melanchthon published his “Instructions to the Visitors of the Churches of Saxony” for use in parish evaluation and instruction. In this work, Melanchthon instructed Lutheran pastors to first preach the law in order to produce repentance (contrition). Agricola strongly objected to Melanchthon’s “Romanizing.” Luther sided with Melanchthon and a revised “Visitation Articles” were published and used.

At first, Martin Luther thought that his friends were fighting over words. But when Agricola returned to the Wittenberg faculty in 1535 and continued teaching against the Law being used to produce contrition, Luther wrote up six sets of Antinomian theses for debate. Agricola was present at the Second Antinomian Disputation and stated that he agreed with Luther’s presentation. During this time, in the third edition of his *Scholia*, Melanchthon coined the term *usus tertius lex* (Third Use of the Law) to identify a use of the Law that applied only to believers, since Agricola had started saying that Christians did not need to hear

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<sup>14</sup> Augustine, “On Grace and Free Will,” 459.

the law either.<sup>15</sup> Martin Luther first coined the term “antinomer” as a descriptor of Johann Agricola.<sup>16</sup>

By 1540, the Elector of Saxony instituted a formal trial against Agricola. Johann secretly accepted a call from Joachim II of Prussia and moved to Berlin for the rest of his life. However, in 1547, Agricola helped Pflug and Sidonius to prepare the Augsburg Interim and worked to enforce it in Brandenburg. Agricola died on September 22, 1566.

A second form of antinomianism arose after Luther’s death from Andrew Poach, Anton Otto, Andrew Musculus, and Michael Neander. While opposing George Major and synergism, these pastors ended up denying (for a time) the Third Use of the Law for Christians. One statement by the followers of Otto reads: “14. The Holy Spirit does not work according to the norm or rule of the Law, but by Himself, without the assistance of the Law.”<sup>17</sup> They were opposed by Moerlin, Falacius, Wigand, and Westphal.<sup>18</sup>

Both controversies were carefully described and settled in Articles V and VI in the *Formula of Concord*. The authors made the proper and necessary distinctions to uphold the uses of the Law to convict sinners and to teach believers what are good works, while maintaining that the Law has no power to do those works, something that the Gospel alone has.

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<sup>15</sup> John Agricola stated that repentance came through the Gospel and after faith, apart from the Law. On the basis of Scripture, Melancthon and Luther rejected this. However, it could be said that after one comes to faith and believes in the terrible price Jesus paid for sin, that a repentant person (wide sense) realizes even more how abominable were his or her evil deeds. The penitential psalms of King David were written after his encounter with the prophet Nathan. Yet, Nathan first had to show David his sin by the parable of the Law (second use), which led to repentance; upon which Nathan declared God’s free forgiveness of David’s sin. Subsequently, the prophesied and actual death of his son was not further punishment (which would be second use), but—for David—the third use of the Law, to flee from the Old Adam. God’s other purpose in that child’s death was to curb sin among David’s subjects (first use).

<sup>16</sup> Ronald Ziegler, “What Happens When the Third Use of the Law is Rejected,” in *The Necessary Distinction*, Albert C. Collver III, James Arne Nestingen, and John T. Pless, eds. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 310.

<sup>17</sup> F. Bente, *Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 171.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 17; Bente, *Historical Introductions; Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church*, F. Bente and W.H.T. Dau, eds. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921); and *LW* 47:101–106.

## The Formula of Concord

The distinctions between Law and Gospel and their interactions with sinful human beings have caused many discussions within the Christian Church for over 2000 years. The importance of those discussions is highlighted in the fact that the first six articles of the Formula of Concord deal with controversies concerning Law and Gospel.

The Law is addressed in Article I: Original Sin, stating that after the Fall the inherited sin “has corrupted our entire nature” (FC, SD, I:5). This truth has important consequences for the Gospel: 1) Jesus is fully human and yet sinless, and 2) “Because of this corruption the law accuses and condemns man’s entire corrupted nature unless the sin is forgiven for Christ’s sake” (FC, SD, I:31).

Article II: Free Will addresses the question, “Can man prepare himself for such grace, accept it and give his assent to it?” (FC, SD, II:2). Because of original sin, article II answers “no.” Then Law and Gospel are brought into the answer: “Through this means (namely, the preaching and hearing of his Word) God is active, breaks our hearts, and draws man, so that through the preaching of the Law man learns to know his sins and the wrath of God and experiences genuine terror, contrition, and sorrow in his heart, and through the preaching of and meditation upon the holy Gospel of the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ there is kindled in him a spark of faith which accepts the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake and comforts itself with the promise of the Gospel” (FC, SD, II:54). Note here that the Law brings knowledge of sin (contrary to Agricola) and that the Gospel alone creates faith. Against the modern Antinomians, article II states: “Hence the unregenerated man resists God entirely and is completely the servant of sin. But the regenerated man delighted in the law of God according to the inmost self, though he also sees in his members the law of sin at war with the law of his mind” (FC, SD, II:85). This paradox will be revisited in articles V and VI.

“The Righteousness of Faith Before God” is the title of Article III in the *Formula of Concord*. Is a person righteous because of Christ’s essential righteousness or because of Christ’s work of salvation? The authors warn “that we do not mingle or insert that which precedes faith or follows faith into the article of justification” (FC, SD, III:24). The article makes this important distinction: “Accordingly in justification before God faith trusts neither in contrition nor in love nor in other virtues, but solely in Christ and (in him) in his perfect obedience with which he fulfilled the law of God in our stead and which is reckoned

to the believers as righteousness. Neither is contrition nor love nor any other virtues the means and instrument with and through which we could receive and accept the grace of God, the merit of Christ, and the forgiveness of sins offered to us in the promise of the Gospel, but only faith” (FC, SD, III:30–31).

The discussion of Christ’s righteousness also leads to Article IV: Good Works—are they necessary to salvation, detrimental to salvation, or necessary for other reasons? Anticipating Article VI, the authors declare: “It is God’s will, ordinance, and command that believers walk in good works; that only those are truly good works which God Himself prescribes and commands in his Word” (FC, SD, IV:7). Again, “The person must first be pleasing to God—and that alone for Christ’s sake—before that person’s works are pleasing” (FC, SD, IV:8).

These four articles of the Formula of Concord lay the foundation for dealing with the errors in the next two anti-antinomian articles: “Law and Gospel,” and “Third Use of the Law.” In all six articles, the Gospel message is at risk.

### *The Formula of Concord V: Law and Gospel*

In the opening paragraph of Article V, the authors of the *Formula of Concord* describe what is most important: “The distinction between law and Gospel is an especially brilliant light which serves the purpose that the Word of God may be rightly divided and the writings of the holy prophets and apostles may be explained and understood correctly...lest we confuse the two doctrines and change the Gospel into law.” (FC, SD, V:1). Agricola’s antinomianism is defined as “...the Gospel is not only a proclamation of grace but also at the same time a proclamation of repentance, which rebukes the greatest sin, unbelief” (FC, SD, V:2). The authors opposed this definition by writing: “...strictly speaking, the Gospel is not a proclamation of repentance or reproof” (FC, SD, V:2).

Since the Bible uses “Gospel” and “repentance” with more than one meaning, it is important to state what the Law and Gospel can and cannot do. “The mere preaching of the law without Christ either produces presumptuous people ... or drives man utterly to despair” (FC, SD, V:10). Again, “Thus both doctrines are always together, and both of them have to be urged side by side, but in proper order and with the correct distinction” (FC, SD, V:15). Everything that rebukes sin—including unbelief—is done by the law (V:17); while the Gospel alone teaches about saving faith in Christ (V:19).

The Formula of Concord stressed the importance of maintaining the above distinctions: “Such a confusion would easily darken the merits and benefits of Christ, once more make the Gospel a teaching of law ... and thus rob Christians of the true comfort which they have in the Gospel against the terror of the law...” (FC, SD, V:27).

### *The Formula of Concord VI: Third Use of the Law*

Three uses of the Law are defined in the opening sentence of Article VI—first, to maintain discipline; second, to give people a knowledge of sin; and third, “those who have been born anew through the Holy Spirit, who have been converted to the Lord and from whom the veil of Moses has been taken away, learn from the law to live and walk in the law” (FC, SD, VI:1). One side held that Christians are free from the law so that they spontaneously do what God requires of them. The other side affirmed that believers are motivated by the Holy Spirit to do good works and that He uses the law to instruct them about what works please God (FC, SD, VI:2–3).

Referring to 1 Timothy 1:9, a passage much used by the antinomians, the *Formula of Concord* states that while “the law is not laid down for the just,” the law of God is written in their hearts. St. Paul intends “that the law cannot impose its curse upon” believers “nor may it torture the regenerated with its coercion” (FC, SD, VI:5). If the elect were totally free from sin, they would need no law (FC, SD, VI:6). However, since the Old Adam remains in the believer, the “reborn children of God require in this life not only the daily teaching and admonition, warning and threatening of the law, but frequently the punishment of the law as well...” (FC, SD, VI:9).

The problem with the law is that “it does not give the power and ability to begin it or to do it” (FC, SD, VI:11). The believer “... does everything from a free and merry spirit. These works are, strictly speaking, not works of the law but works and fruits of the Spirit...” (FC, SD, VI:17). Thus, believers are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:14, 8:2) [FC, SD, VI:17]. And when believers enter heaven, “...through God’s indwelling Spirit they will do his will spontaneously, without coercion, unhindered, perfectly, completely, and with sheer joy, and will rejoice therein forever” (FC, SD, VI:25).

### *The Formula of Concord—modern critique*

Modern scholarship attempts to drive a wedge between Luther and the *Formula of Concord*. Steven Paulson wrote: “But by introducing



the category of ‘the righteousness of Christ’s human performance,’ Chemnitz ‘did not clearly develop Luther’s emphasis on the necessity of death for sinners, rather than the necessity of satisfying an eternally existing law.’”<sup>19</sup> Paulson here turns both/and concepts into an either/or distinction, because he rejects Christ’s vicarious atonement in respect to God’s law and sin.

Piotr Małysz declares that the *Formula of Concord* “loses sight of this dynamic character of the Christian’s existence as *similar iustus et peccator*, each totally.” Concerning sin, the Formula “...cannot but view sin as an inexplicable corruption, a debilitating flaw inherent in the material out of which God created the human...” Therefore, “The Formula thus juxtaposes not belief with unbelief, faith with sin, but rather creaturely makeup with sin, seeing the first as essential and the second as mysteriously privative.”<sup>20</sup>

Małysz states that the Formula of Concord in Article VI is “an accommodation, though stripped of the notion of a second, final justification.”<sup>21</sup> He adds, “Where Luther believes that the law’s accusation and the proclamation of the gospel and its sacramental economy suffice, the Formula resorts to another use of the law to repair human nature.”<sup>22</sup>

By emphasizing a freedom from the Law, Steven Hultren criticized the Formula writers:

But it tries to reconcile the very different views given: the justified need the Law to combat the flesh; the justified live with a spiritual freedom that needs no Law; *and yet* the justified live with an inner freedom that is to be normed by an external Law. The result of the compromise is that the Law can hardly be anything but coercive in the end, no matter how much the Formula insists on the Christian doing the will of God as comprehended in the Law from a “free and merry spirit.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Steven Paulson, “The Law–Gospel Distinction in Lutheran Theology and Ministry,” in *God’s Two Words: Law and Gospel in the Lutheran and Reformed Tradition*, Jonathan A. Linebaugh, ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 109.

<sup>20</sup> Piotr J. Małysz, “The Law in the Reformed Tradition,” in *God’s Two Words*, 41.

<sup>21</sup> Małysz, “The Law in the Reformed Tradition,” 42.

<sup>22</sup> Małysz, “The Law in the Reformed Tradition,” 43.

<sup>23</sup> Steven Hultren, “The Problem of Freedom Today and the Third Use of the Law: Biblical and Theological Considerations,” in *The Necessary Distinction*, 222.

These authors seek to blunt the clear confession in the *Formula of Concord* regarding the paradoxes on Law and Gospel found in Scripture. This will become clearer in the next section concerning “Soft-Antinomianism.”

### Modern Antinomianism

Faith to the cross of Christ doth cling  
And rests in Him securely;  
And forth from it good works must spring  
As fruits and tokens surely;  
Still faith doth justify alone,  
Works serve thy neighbor and make known  
The faith that lives within thee.  
ELH 227:10 “Salvation Unto Us Is Come”

One would think that after the statements in Articles V and VI in the *Formula of Concord* of 1580, there would be no more troubles over antinomianism, especially among Lutherans. However, Satan has not stopped his attacks on the truth. He continues to work towards destroying the Gospel by attacking the Law (rejecting the third use); just as he seeks to destroy the Gospel by attacking the person and work of Jesus (the search for the historical Jesus), and sowing distrust of both Law and Gospel by his attacks on the inspiration of Scripture (Higher Critical studies). He has even moved modern Lutheran theologians to attack Articles V and VI in the *Formula of Concord* as being compromises or stating that its writers did not understand Luther.

#### *European Lutheran’s Soft-Antinomianism*

The Higher Critical theories of the 1850’s wreaked havoc on upholding the inspiration of Scripture. Immanuel Kant’s “moral imperative” and use of reason unglued Christian ethical studies. In the early twentieth century, some German theologians tried to recapture some message of the Bible, such as Kierkegaard’s existential philosophy and Bultmann’s demythologizing.<sup>24</sup> Prof. Mark Surburg summarized Scott R. Murray’s thoughts in his book regarding twentieth-century thought:

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<sup>24</sup> Other attempts are described in Scott R. Murray’s book, *Law, Life and the Living God: The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism* (Concordia Publishing House, 2002).

Karl Barth's 1935 *Evangelium und Gesetz* (*Gospel and Law*) prompted European Lutherans to begin discussing the Law prior to World War II (pg 26). After the war, Werner Elert in 1948 published his *In Zwischen Gnade und Ungnade: Gesetz und Evangelium* (*Law and Gospel*) in which he argued that Luther did not teach the concept of the third use of the Law and that it should not be used in Lutheran theology (pg. 27). Gerhard Ebeling built upon this position with his 1950 *Zur Lehre von triplex usus legis* ("On the Doctrine of the *Triplex Usus Legis* in the Theology of the Reformation").<sup>25</sup>

Prof. Surburg stated that Werner Elert and Gerhard Ebeling influenced many theologians to assume that Luther did not teach the third use of the Law. He noted, "American Lutheran theologians went to German universities after World War II in large numbers and many studied at Erlangen and Heidelberg. The result was that they learned this new approach and brought it back to the American Lutheran scene." What developed in the LCMS, he wrote, led to a functional denial of the third use of the law in preaching.<sup>26</sup>

Dr. Eugene Klug added this note: "Elert mistakenly conceives the Christian's freedom from the Law ... to include freedom 'to live without the law,' as though the Law no longer needed to inform regenerate Christians what to do." Elert saw only a twofold function for the Law: 1) to expose sin and 2) to hold evil doers in check. Thus the regenerate man does not need the Law to teach him what is right or godly.<sup>27</sup>

Werner Elert and Gerhard Ebeling operated under two basic (and false) assumptions: 1) the Law **always** accuses (Apology IV:38—*lex enim semper accusat conscientias et perterrefacit*), and 2) Luther **never** spoke of more than two uses of the Law. In his book "Law and Gospel," Elert referred to the report at the end of the second Antinomian Disputation, where Luther is quoted as saying: "Thirdly, the law is to be retained so that the saints may know which works God requires." Elert declared that this sentence/section was a "forgery ... copied almost verbatim from an edition of Melanchthon's *Loci*..."<sup>28</sup> Dr. Engelbrecht has shown that this judgment was not correct.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Mark Surburg, "What is Soft Antinomianism?" August 9, 2015. <http://surburg.blogspot.com/2015/08/marks-thoughts-what-is-soft.html>

<sup>26</sup> Surburg, "What is Soft Antinomianism?"

<sup>27</sup> Eugene Klug, "The Third Use of the Law" in *A Contemporary Look at the Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 201.

<sup>28</sup> Werner Elert, *Law and Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 38–39.

<sup>29</sup> Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law*, 81–82. See also *LW* 73:21–25, where in the introduction, Jeffrey G. Silcock and Christopher Boyd Brown agree with Engelbrecht's

Matthew Becker wrote, “This sharp distinction between the law and the Gospel is the organizing principle of Elert’s entire dogmatic presentation.”<sup>30</sup> Becker’s summary of Elert’s ethics states that “...the person of faith is summoned to a life of service, not by compulsion but by grace. Such summoning involves what Elert called ‘grace imperatives.’ Against Calvin’s ‘first use of the law’ (law as a rule for Christian life), Elert stressed the power of the Holy Spirit to make a new creature out of the old one. This new creature is marked by repentance and faith and obedience to the summons to live a life worthy of the gospel, no longer under the law but under grace.”<sup>31</sup> Becker quotes Elert as saying, “When the law speaks, then the gospel is silent; when the gospel speaks, the law must be mute.” Elert added, “For the person of faith Christ silences the law and abolishes it (Eph 2:15).”<sup>32</sup> According to Becker, “Thus FC VI is to be interpreted in light of Luther’s theology, which only admitted two uses of the law.” The *Formula of Concord* just deals with the law’s validity, not a special function of the law. Thus, “the good works that the Christian does, ‘are strictly speaking, not works of the law but works and fruits of the Spirit’ (FC VI, 566, 17).”<sup>33</sup>

Ronald Ziegler notes that Elert was strongly anti-Calvinist: “For Elert, there is no Law that neutrally informs.”<sup>34</sup> Again, “The new man, according to Elert, is not only freed from the curse of the Law, but also from the coercion of the Law. He is at the center of his person, one with the will of the Lawgiver. Therefore, he needs no instruction. On the other hand, the old man needs not only the instruction of the Law, but also the sanction of the Law.”<sup>35</sup> The *usus didacticus legis* as purely informative is a pure abstraction. Thus, he notes, “one cannot derive from the Ten Commandments what one concretely has to do.”<sup>36</sup>

Gerhard Ebeling also distinguished Law and Gospel: the Law heralds death, the Gospel offers the promise of eternal life. Mark Menacher stated, “Following Luther, Ebeling considers the fundamental

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assessment contra Elert.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew Becker, “Werner Elert (1885–1954),” in *Twentieth-Century Lutheran Theologians*, Mark C. Mattes, ed. (Gottingen: Vandenhock & Ruprecht, 2013), 119.

<sup>31</sup> Becker, “Elert,” 123.

<sup>32</sup> Becker, “Elert,” 131.

<sup>33</sup> Becker, “Elert,” 133.

<sup>34</sup> Ziegler, “What Happens When the Third Use of the Law is Rejected,” 315.

<sup>35</sup> Ziegler, “What Happens When the Third Use of the Law is Rejected,” 315.

<sup>36</sup> Ziegler, “What Happens When the Third Use of the Law is Rejected,” 317.

sin of the human being to be unbelief (*Unglaube*), whether understood as *peccatum radicale*, *peccatum personale*, or *peccatum naturale*.”<sup>37</sup>

Paul Althaus, another German scholar, tried to soften Elert’s attack on the third use of the law by distinguishing between the Law and command, *Gesetz und Gebot*, so that “command” is an element of the Gospel itself.<sup>38</sup>

Gerhard Ebeling insisted on a two-fold use of the law in regards to Luther’s understanding of the Law.<sup>39</sup> While it is true that Luther does not use the terminology “third use of the law” even after Melancthon initiated it in 1537, it is also true that Dr. Luther insisted in the *Large Catechism* and throughout his writings that Christians need to study the Ten Commandments to know what works God calls “good.” In the *Large Catechism*, Luther essentially treats the Ten Commandments as Third-Use topics, since only believers can “fear, love and trust in God above all things.” The “Table of Duties” that Luther attached to the *Small Catechism* is essentially his promotion of the Third Use of the Law. Neither did Luther reject Melancthon’s development of the “third use of the law” terminology.

After World War II, the theological influence from Europe greatly impacted American Lutherans. One influence came through American students attending lectures in Germany. Another influence came during the years 1948 through 1954 when members of the ELC, ALC, ULC, and LCMS attended the Bad Boll Conferences in Württemberg, Germany. These Conferences were described as to “build theological bridges” connecting our Church [LCMS] with European Lutheran Churches.<sup>40</sup>

One important Bad Boll Conference paper was presented on the Third Use of the Law: *Gottes Gebote und Gottes Gnade im Wort vom Kreuz*, by Ernst Kinder.<sup>41</sup> In his review, Prof. Meyer repeated Werner Elert’s

<sup>37</sup> Mark D. Menacher, “Gerhardt Ebeling (1912–2001),” in *Twentieth-Century Lutheran Theologians*, 325.

<sup>38</sup> Klug, “The Third Use of the Law,” 201.

<sup>39</sup> Klug, “The Third Use of the Law,” 202.

<sup>40</sup> Essayists who represented the National Lutheran Council at the conferences in Bad Boll in 1949 were: Dr. Conrad Bergendoff, Dr. Julius Bodensieck, Dr. T. A. Kantonen, Dr. Herman A. Preus, and Professor R. R. Syre. Doctors John W. Benken and Lawrence Meyer represented the LCMS at these conferences. Bretcher names a great number of attendees and lists the themes and subthemes for each conference. (Paul M. Bretscher, “Review of the ‘Bad Boll Conferences,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 25, no. 11 (November 1954): 838–839.)

<sup>41</sup> (“God’s Commandments and God’s Grace in the Word of the Cross”) “Verlag des Evangelischen Pressverbandes fuer Baiern in Muenchen.” (No.7 of the

contention that Luther never used the term *usus tertius*, that the Law always accuses, and that the Law is never informative, it only condemns. He noted that Professors Elert and Kinder were opposed to Calvin's making the Third Use the primary use of the Law. Summarizing Kinder, Prof. Meyer wrote: "The third use of the Law is not for the new man in the Christian, but for the old man who has rather peculiar notions as to the nature of truly God-pleasing works. The *usus normativus* may be said to be a negative factor in the Christian's new obedience...."<sup>42</sup>

In his more critical report on the Bad Boll Conferences, Prof. Paul Bretscher stated: "There has been a great deal of discussion in European theology regarding the so-called 'third use of the Law' (cf., Article VI of the Formula of Concord). In general, so it appeared, Lutherans in Germany question, or even reject, this use of the Law and insist on finding support for their position in Paul and in Luther (cf., Wilfried Joest, *Gesetz und Freiheit [Law and Freedom]*; also Werner Elert, *Das christliche Ethos*)."<sup>43</sup>

Along with students in European schools and the Bad Boll Conferences, there were likely many other points of contact between the German and American scholars in the years 1945 and 1960 that negatively influenced theological studies in America.

### *Gerhard Forde's Soft-Antinomianism*

Let us ever walk with Jesus, Follow His example pure,  
 Flee the world, which would deceive us And to sin our souls allure.  
 Ever in His footsteps treading, Body here, yet soul above,  
 Fun of faith and hope and love, Let us do the Father's bidding,  
 Faithful Lord, abide with me; Savior, lead, I follow Thee.  
 ELH 236:1 "Let Us Ever Walk With Jesus"

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*Kirchlich-theologische Helte.*). Lic. Ernst Kinder was an instructor of Systematic Theology at the *Augustana-Hochschule* in Neuendettelsau, editor of the *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* and an essayist at the Bad Boll Free Conferences in 1948 and 1949.

<sup>42</sup> F.E. Meyer, "The Function of the Law in Christian Preaching," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 21, no. 2 (February 1950), 127.

<sup>43</sup> Bretscher reported that 1,800 European Lutherans attended the "Bad Boll" Conferences between 1948 to 1954. He concluded: "We believe that the Bad Boll conferences have left an abiding impression on European Lutheranism, an impression which will in the course of time express itself in a rededication to, and a reaffirmation of, all the principles of confessional Lutheranism." ("Review of 'Bad Boll' Conferences," 848.)

Given the influence of Werner Elert and others, it should not surprise anyone that a denial of the third use of the law persists today. One important theologian who has influenced many in American Lutheranism is Prof. Gerhard Forde (1927–2005). In 1987, around the formation of the ELCA, Forde wrote an article in the first issue of the *Lutheran Quarterly* titled, “Radical Lutheranism.” John Hoyum states that Forde’s “objective was to articulate the priority of God’s justification of sinners apart from the law as the commitment that would shape the ELCA’s identity as a church body.” His objective failed; however his writings have influenced many people.<sup>44</sup>

The Braaten/Jensen dogmatic book included Forde’s writing, “The Work of Christ” (1984). In his book “Law-Gospel Debate” (1969), Forde rejected most atonement “theories” such as penal substitution, substitutionary atonement, Abelard’s “moral influence,” and Aulen’s *Christus Victor* theory. Dr. Kilcrease describes Forde’s criticism: “Substitutionary atonement fits the work of Christ into a legal framework, which obscures the actual event of the cross and domesticates the radicalism of God’s revelation.”<sup>45</sup> Kilcrease summarizes Forde’s view about atonement: “Christ’s work of reconciliation should be understood primarily as God’s response to humanity’s bondage to the power of unbelief. . . . Put succinctly: Forde holds that God overcomes human bondage to unbelief by way of the grand existential gesture of the cross and the empty tomb.”<sup>46</sup>

Forde understood the Law as “a general term for the manner in which the will of God impinges on Man.”<sup>47</sup> He declared that God’s mercy does not need a sacrifice to end His wrath. He is love, and as love, God forgives unconditionally.

These ideas against Christ’s atonement must also impact what Forde thinks about sin and the Law. In “A Lutheran View of Sanctification,” he writes, “Sanctification is thus simply the art of getting used to justification. It is not something added to justification.” Quoting Hebrews 10:10, he writes, “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Again he writes, “Sanctification appears in Scripture to be roughly equivalent to other words for the salvation

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<sup>44</sup> John W. Hoyum, “On ‘Radical Lutheranism,’” July 23, 2020. <https://thejaggedword.com/2020/07/23/on-radical-lutheranism>.

<sup>45</sup> Jack Kilcrease, “Gerhard Forde’s Theology of Atonement and Justification: A Confessional Lutheran Response,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 76, no. 3–4 (July/October 2012): 271–272.

<sup>46</sup> Kilcrease, “Forde,” 277.

<sup>47</sup> Kilcrease, “Forde,” 278.

wrought by God in Christ....” He mocks those who insist on talking about sanctification as works: “Must not justification be safeguarded so it will not be abused? So sanctification enters the picture supposedly to rescue the good ship Salvation from shipwreck on the rocks of Grace Alone. Sanctification, it seems, is our part of the bargain.”

Regarding a Christian’s progress in sanctification, Forde says, “But if we see that sin is the total state of standing against the unconditional grace and goodness of God, if sin is our very incredulity, unbelief, mistrust, our insistence on falling back on our self and maintaining control, then it is only through the total grace of God that sin comes under attack, and only through faith in that total grace that sin is defeated.”<sup>48</sup> When Forde defines sin as “unbelief,” he must deny that Law is eternal and he also weakens the natural knowledge of the law and God’s Law revealed at Mt. Sinai.

Forde’s words are un-Lutheran weasel-words. They fail to make the biblical distinctions that are found in the *Formula of Concord*. As Luther noted with John Agricola, Scripture uses words such as “repentance,” “gospel,” and “sanctification,” in different ways. The Gospel “sanctifies” people when they are given faith, because God pronounces them “holy, without guilt” for the sake of Christ’s holy life and innocent death. Scripture also uses the word “sanctification” to describe the Christian’s life, “*For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality*” (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

Prof. Forde distanced himself from the antinomianism of John Agricola—that the Gospel, not the Law, brings about repentance. John Hoyum also stated that Forde did not deny that the Ten Commandments are normative for Christians or that law is to be used on the old creature still captive to sin.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See Gerhard Forde, “A Lutheran View of Sanctification,” published by Pastor Matt Richard ([pastormattrichard.webs.com/Forde\\_Sanctification.pdf](http://pastormattrichard.webs.com/Forde_Sanctification.pdf))

<sup>49</sup> Hoyum, “Radical Lutheranism.” Forde questioned the following teachings in his redefinition of the western tradition:

1. The Law as an eternal standard according to which salvation is measured (*Christian Dogmatics* 2:403)
2. Justification by grace as a way of satisfying or fulfilling the Law (*Christian Dogmatics* 2:407)
3. Descriptions of the Law in terms of functions (*Christian Dogmatics* 2:415)
4. Law as an eternal, ontological structure (*Christian Dogmatics* 2:416)
5. The forensic model of describing justification (*Christian Dogmatics* 2:428)
6. The traditional model of the order of salvation (*Christian Dogmatics* 2:427)
7. The use of natural law as the structural model of the theological system (*Christian Dogmatics* 2:447)



Prof. David Scaer has this warning:

Recognized as the progenitor of the 'theology of the cross' is the late professor Gerhard Forde. His cause has been taken up by Steven D. Paulson, James Nestigen, Virgil Thompson, Jason Lane and Nicholas Hoffman among others and it has become the controlling theme in the '1517' movement headquartered in Irvine, California.... As mentioned, its the first recognizable theme of the 'theology of the cross' in that the law is alien to who God is and so it is not a standard for Christian living. More basic is that the salvific moment is found not in Golgotha in Christ offering himself as atonement, but in the moment one hears he is forgiven. A variant of this view is that the salvific moment is located in a congregation's corporate act of confession.<sup>50</sup>

Prof. Scaer adds that in Forde's "theology of the cross" "...justification means no more than God speaking a word of absolution, without Christ's atonement for sin." Prof. Scaer warns against isolating one Scriptural doctrine from other doctrines, as if they are less important. "Law not binding on how Christians live is also not binding on God and left unanswered is where the law originated, if not with God."<sup>51</sup>

Prof. Scaer mentioned Steven Paulson as supporting Dr. Forde's views. His "Ten Theses on How to Stop Making Gospel into Law" is listed in the footnote.<sup>52</sup> Another voice referred by Prof. Scaer above is Chad Bird, a member of "1517." He avoids speaking any

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8. Distinctions between moral, ceremonial, and civil laws (*Christian Dogmatics* 2:447)

9. The idea that a Christian as a new man can use the law (*Christian Dogmatics* 2:449)

(Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law*, 235.)

<sup>50</sup> David Scaer, "The Trinity of the Amoral God," presented at Association of Confessional Lutherans (May 9, 2019), 4.

<sup>51</sup> Scaer, "Trinity," 8. Robert Baker adds to Dr. Scaer's critique of studying doctrines in isolation: "...in this line of thinking the third use of the law is not an isolated teaching. It certainly pertains to the Law, but it also relates to justification. Indeed, it relates to the doctrine presented by Holy Scripture. As such, any change or difference in teaching about the law's third use serves as a red flag indicating a change in theological framework!" (Robert C. Baker, "The third use of the law debate is a red herring," Nov. 2, 2017. <https://lutheranorthodoxy.wordpress.com/2017/11/02/the-third-use-of-the-law-debate-is-a-red-herring/>.)

<sup>52</sup> Prof. Steven Paulson wrote "*Ten Theses on How to Stop Making Gospel into Law*" as follows:

1. God gave the law to creatures, but God is not the law.

third-use-of-the-Law language. He declares that for a preacher to exhort Christians to do good works is Gospel Phobia.<sup>53</sup>

At best, the people who speak this way use problematic language. Dr. Mark Surburg defines this theological approach as “soft-antinomianism,” a necessary label that distinguishes the “hard” antinomianism of Agricola from the modern “soft” version. He states that, “soft antinomianism remains the dominant perspective in American Lutheranism today.”<sup>54</sup>

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2. The law has two “uses,” both used by God, one that fosters and preserves life in the old world, and the other that makes a person run from God’s threat/wrath to the mercy of God’s promise.
  3. The law always accuses, in both its uses, which is the essential or constant voice of the law.
  4. Christ alone fulfills the law, and so is the point, the “thing” that law wants, needs, and demands—and which sinners cannot give.
  5. But Christ did not take a reward from the law (even to give to sinners later), but rather bore the complete accusation of the law. He who knew no sin became sin—that is, the curse of God (Gal. 3:13 and 2 Cor. 5). The law attacked and killed him as the one and only sinner of the cosmos.
  6. Thus, the law came to an end, *telos* (Rom. 10:4), and is not only fulfilled, where and when Christ is.
  7. The law’s demand is for Christ to be present and give eternal life to Adam and Eve (speaking forgiveness for sinners); the Father is not satisfied until this happens.
  8. The end of law is only in Christ—not in part, but wholly, present with all he has (human and divine in complete interpenetration in himself), and conveyed to his sinners by preaching, that is, by the Holy Spirit.
  9. When this happens—Christ and faith—the law is quiescent, evacuated (*lex vacua*), and stops accusing only so far as it says nothing at all (especially uttering no happy command, guide to the faithful, form or plan for sanctification, joyful obedience, or any other description of an imaginary “third” use of the law).
  10. Such is Christian freedom, lived in love, given by and as the Holy Spirit, doing what the law demands and more—without the law. Look, Mom! No law!

(Paulson, “The Law Gospel Distinction in Lutheran Theology and Ministry,” 128.)

<sup>53</sup> Mark Surburg, “Mark’s Thoughts: A Response to Chad Bird’s ‘Gospel Phobia.’” December 4, 2016. <https://www://surburg.blogspot.com/2016/12/marks-thoughts-response-to-chad-birds.html>. Bird writes, “Gospel phobia hears any talk of Christ-centered, grace-rich, justification-proclaiming news as borderline suspicious or possibly antinomian. One wonders how Paul escapes such criticisms when he ‘determined to know nothing among [the Christians] except Jesus Christ and him crucified,’ (1 Cor 2:2).”

<sup>54</sup> Prof. Surburg defines “soft-antinomianism” with this list:

- 1) “An inability and even a refusal to preach about new obedience and good works.”
- 2) It “ardently rejects the two kinds of antinomianism that arose in the sixteenth century.”

## *A Response to Soft Antinomianism*

Yea, Lord, 'twas Thy rich bounty gave. My body, soul, and all I have  
In this poor life of labor.

Lord, grant that I in ev'ry place May glorify Thy lavish grace  
And serve and help my neighbor.

Let no false doctrine me begile; Let Satan not my soul defile.  
Give strength and patience unto me. To bear my cross and follow Thee.

Lord Jesus Christ, My God and Lord, my God and Lord,  
In death Thy comfort still afford.

ELH 406:2 "Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart"

Gerhard Forde taught that the Gospel is **not** Christ's vicarious, substitutionary sacrifice to fulfill the law; but just a proclamation of God's mercy. Since God is wrong to have wrath (because God is always love) therefore faith is trusting in God's mercy. For, they say, God's wrath ends actually when we believe God to have mercy unconditionally. T. R. Halvorson describes Forde's atonement view: "Justification happens because we keep that law when we trust, not because Jesus shed his blood." Halvorson quotes Hebrews 9:22b, "*Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission,*" for "because the cross actually reconciles, therefore the gospel is the 'word of reconciliation.'" Again Halvorson wrote, "The antinomian part is the disregard of the Law aside from 'Thou shall trust mercy.' The legalistic part is that our fulfilling the law that commands trust justifies."<sup>55</sup>

Forde makes a false distinction between living either under the Law or in Christ, stating that the Law stops when Christ conquers it. Robert C. Baker comments on this distinction: "While our Savior fulfilled the Law for us through His perfect life, God still desires that we keep His commandments and takes great joy in our doing so. Why?"

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3) A central tenant is that "the Law always accuses" (*lex semper accusat*) [which the Apology also states (Ap. IV:38)], but it **only** does this.

4) The sermon has only two goals: a) address sharp law that will convict hearers of their sins and prompt repentance, and b) deliver the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ, the main goal.

5) To believe that the Law in any way assists Christians to live godly lives is legalism

(Mark Surberg, "What is Soft Antinomianism?")

<sup>55</sup> <https://steadfastlutherans.org/2017/02/>

the-cracked-foundation-of-fordes-radical-luthran/comment-page-1.

Because our commandment-keeping is His Spirit's work through our God-given faith in His Son."<sup>56</sup>

Forde and theologians before him plucked the statement "The law always accuses us" (*Alioqui lex semper accusat nos*, Apology, III: 46) from an argument on "Of Love and the Fulfilling of the Law." The German version may explain what the Latin version means, "The law keeps accusing us of not being able to keep it perfectly" [*des Gesetz klagt und ohne Unterlaß an*]. Melancthon is describing how the Law cannot be satisfied by any work of man. It will keep accusing people of their sins and their imperfect keeping of it. It is disingenuous to use this statement as if Melancthon were saying, "The law **only** accuses" and so deny that the Law could have a positive role under the Third Use of the Law.

If *lex semper accusat*, were a correct understanding about all Law, then the Law cannot be eternal. This means that there was no Law before the Fall nor will there be Law after the Last Day. Dr. Kilcrease states what Theodosius Harnack (1817–1889) discussed: "Luther made a distinction between the 'office' and 'essence' (*Amt und Wesen*) of the law. Though in the present age of sin and death it is the office of the Law to accuse and condemn sinners through the medium of God's created masks, the law is nevertheless also a positive good, which expresses the eternal will of God for human beings."<sup>57</sup>

Forde declares that Adam and Eve "could never possess the law as a positive demand" since the Law "can only command in a situation

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<sup>56</sup> Robert C. Baker, "Walther vs. Forde on the Law in the Life of the Believer," Oct. 16, 2017. <https://lutheranorthodoxy.wordpress.com/category/sanctification>. C. F. W. Walther wrote in "Restoration of the Divine Image of Christ," sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity, 1846: "Exactly thus, Christ not only wants to forgive all men their sins, but also to free them from their sins. He not only wants to declare them righteous by grace, but He also wants to make them truly righteous. He not only came to comfort and soothe their hearts, but also to cleanse and sanctify them. He came not only to reconcile them with God, but also to reunite them with God, not only to make them acceptable to God, but to make them like God. In short, He came to restore the entire lost image of God in them. He came to lead them back into the state of innocence, to make them perfectly healthy in body and soul, and thus finally to bring them to the blessed goal for which God destined them from eternity and called them into existence."

<sup>57</sup> Kilcrease, "Forde," 155. See also Rinne, where he quotes Luther about office and essence: "Not on account of the law in itself. For the law is good and holy, but on account of the office it carries out in our hearts. Thus, when Paul speaks about the law in this way [i.e., as a tyrant and disciplinarian, Gal. 4], we are to understand this concerning the office it carries out, and not concerning its essence." (Nathan Rinne, "Paradise Regained: Placing Nicholas Hopman's *Lex Aeterna* Back in Luther's Frame," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 81:1–2 (January–April 2018): 69.

of sin.” Dr. Kilcrease responds that “the law represents God’s original intention and relationship to the created order.”<sup>58</sup> The *Formula of Concord* already stated, “...strictly speaking, the law is a divine doctrine which reveals the righteousness and immutable will of God, shows how man ought to be disposed in his nature, thoughts, words, and deeds in order to be pleasing and acceptable to God, and threatens the transgressors of the law with God’s wrath and temporal and eternal punishment. (FC, SD, V:17)” By God’s grace, Adam and Eve knew of and kept God’s holy will/law perfectly for a time. That Law did not change when they sinned, but mankind’s relation to the Law changed—from knowledge to ignorance, from perfection to corruption and slavery, from life to death.

The Fall radically changed Adam and Eve’s relationship with God and His holy Law, so that what Adam once delighted in—serving God by holy living—became an intolerable burden and put him under the sentence of death. Because Christ has fulfilled the Law, both by obeying it and by paying its punishment, Jesus has again changed the Christian’s relationship to God’s Law. The believer is both *peccator et sanctor*. On the one hand, “*Christ is the end of the law to those who believe*” because He has fulfilled its requirements so that the Law no longer accuses the Christian, since his or her sins are forgiven. On the other hand, because the Christian is also *peccator* according to the flesh, the Law must continue to accuse the Old Adam, correct, drive one to Christ, and instruct how to live a Christian life pleasing to God. However, the Law has no power to make changes in the Christian. Only by means of the power and motivation of the Gospel does the Christian desire to love and thank Jesus by living according to God’s will as “a living sacrifice, acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1).

Prof. Engelbrecht lists the ways the righteous person uses the Law: “A) the Holy Spirit is working through the righteous man to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in keeping with the Law, B) the righteous man takes up the Law and uses it willingly, C) the righteous man uses the Law ‘without constraint’ in active obedience, and D) keeping the Law by grace through faith actually pleases God....”<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Kilcrease, “Forde,” 160.

<sup>59</sup> Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law*, 105–106. Another problem identified by Prof. Engelbrecht is that Forde limited his use of Scripture to five chapters: Romans 3, Romans 6–8, and Galatians 3, and he avoids dealing with Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus. Engelbrecht stated, “Forde wanted to drive a wedge between them [grace and faith] as part of the rejection of his characterization of the western system (*Christian Dogmatics* 2:407) so he stayed away from Ephesians 2[:10].”

Dr. Kilcrease summarizes Forde's problematic teaching of Law: 1) He undermines realism by "law as dread" and not as God's objective immutable will. 2) He undermines the positive use of the law in the Christian's life. 3) He implies a conflation of creation and the fall. 4) He undermines the teaching of Scripture and its interpretation of the Lutheran Confessions.<sup>60</sup> Kilcrease states that Forde rejected antinomianism. Yet, he adds, that ironically Forde's position on antinomianism "brings him uncomfortably close to the pastoral practice" of Johann Agricola since absolution is to bring repentance, not the Law.<sup>61</sup>

Forde redefined the term "theology of the cross" to describe God's love through Jesus' death, while denying that His death accomplished anything for man's salvation in respect to the Law. Luther's *Theologia Crucis* viewed the cross of Jesus Christ as the only source of righteousness for sinners that Jesus earned by His sacrificial death—both in fulfilling the Ten Commandment's requirements and in paying the punishment of death that sinners owed for every sin under God's justice.

### *The Problem of Soft Antinomianism*

All are redeemed, both far and wide,  
Since Thou, O Lord, for all hast died.  
Oh, teach us, whatsoe'er betide, To love them all in Thee!

In sickness, sorrow, want, or care,  
Whate'er it be, 'tis ours to share;  
May we, where help is needed, there. Give help as unto Thee!  
TLH 439:4-5 "O God of Mercy, God of Might"

The "Third Use of the Law" is a term that Melanchthon developed in 1535 to deal with the antinomianism of John Agricola. For Melanchthon, the Law did not have only a negative message of condemnation for sinners. He also recognized a "positive" use, one that instructed believers in how they should conduct their sanctified lives in their vocation of God's children. This positive use was also stated in the *Formula of Concord*, Article VI: "It is the Holy Spirit, who is not given and received through the law but through the preaching of the Gospel (Gal. 3:2,14), who renews the heart. Then he employs the law to

Also, Forde does not focus on repentance as part of the Christian's life. Instead, he said, Christians quietly serve their neighbor by civil use of the Law. (237, 240)

<sup>60</sup> Kilcrease, "Forde," 162.

<sup>61</sup> Kilcrease, "Forde," 166.

instruct them in the Ten Commandments what the acceptable will of God is (Rom. 12:2) and in what good works, which God has prepared beforehand, they should walk (Eph. 2:10)” (FC, SD, VI:11).<sup>62</sup>

Both Luther and Melancthon had to wrestle with the paradox: The Law has nothing to say in regards to Jesus’ work of justification or in the Gospel message of the sinner’s personal justification. The Law has no power to motivate Christians to do anything pleasing to God. On the other hand, Christians, inspired by love for Jesus and His salvation, must still use God’s Law to 1) repress and put to death the influence of the Old Man, and 2) to be guided or informed about what human works are pleasing to God. However, if the Third Use of the Law does not exist, how shall the Christian know which deeds please God? The evangelicals’ answer is WWJD—What Would Jesus Do? (a form of legalism). The admonition of “obedience to the summons to live a life worthy of the gospel” gives no specifics on how Christians are to live.

The writers of the *Formula of Concord* did not misunderstand Luther’s teachings on antinomianism. Several of them were students of Luther. Luther understood that Antinomianism is an attack on the Gospel. In his work, “Against the Antinomians,” he wrote:

Whoever abolishes the law must simultaneously abolish sin. If he permits sin to stand, he must most certainly permit the law to stand; for according to Romans 5[:13], where there is no law there is no sin. And if there is no sin, then Christ is nothing. Why should he die if there were no sin or law for which he must die? It is apparent from this that the devil’s purpose in this fanaticism is not to remove the law but to remove Christ, the fulfiller of the law.<sup>63</sup>

God’s Law works on the **unbeliever** to restrain sin (first use) and to cause him to recognize sin and its punishment (second use), leading to contrition/repentance (narrow sense). For the **Christian**, the Law works to recognize sin (second use) leading to self-examination, contrition/repentance (narrow sense); and, after faith in Jesus is given through the Gospel, the Law rebukes the old Adam and informs Christians what God considers good works (third use).

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<sup>62</sup> See also Hultgren, “The Problem of Freedom Today,” 186–192, where he declares, “Article VI [in the Formula of Concord] is a compromise statement, reflecting the intense debates of the so-called second antinomian controversy leading up to the Formula of Concord, which in large part explains its ambiguities.”

<sup>63</sup> LW 47:110.

The issue about the Third Use of the Law should not just be concerned with whether or not Martin Luther wrote about a *usus tertius legis*, but whether or not the category “Third Use of the Law” is used in the Bible. In King Solomon’s book of Proverbs, he describes the evils of the wicked (second use) and the opposite paths of the believer (third use). His book of Ecclesiastes is full of third-use instructions, “*A good name is better than precious ointment*” (7:1).

Jesus’ parable about the persistent neighbor asking for bread includes a command and a promise: “*So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you*” (Luke 11:9). Jesus is speaking to His disciples and so this command, connected with a promise, is intended as third-use law.

St. Paul’s letter to Philemon, begging him “*for love’s sake*” to forgive Onesimus, should be classified as law—third-use—as Paul has “*confidence in your obedience*” (verse 21).

In St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, Paul uses the Law in chapters 2 and 3 as an intended second-use—to show sin and demonstrate that “*by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin*” (Rom. 3:20). After proclaiming the Gospel message in chapters 4–8, Paul again addresses the law to Christians: “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*” (12:1). In chapters 12–16, St. Paul is writing directly to Christians and describing what kind of life they should live. His purpose is not the second use (to accuse), but the third use of the law (to inform). Yet, it is by means of “the mercies of God” that Christians desire to be “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.”

St. Paul has the same basic outline in his letters to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians. In his instructions to Titus, Paul teaches Titus what to preach to Christians about living as God’s children: “*Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works*” (Titus 2:14). Again Paul writes, “*Those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men*” (Titus 3:8). We might wonder if St. Paul’s message to Titus was a mixing of Law and Gospel. But notice how St. Paul presents the Gospel so that believers are moved to listen to God’s good and gracious will in His Law, and then do it out of love for Jesus.



Hear Dean M. Otto on preaching Sanctification:

In all the Epistles that he writes to the congregations that he has established, the Apostle Paul encourages those young Christians to strive for sanctification of life. But whether we apply this to the young Christians to whom Paul was writing then, or to the Christians to whom these words apply today, we note that he always encourages the Christians to strive for that sanctification of life on the basis of the work of Christ—on the basis of the justification that Christ has provided for his Christians.<sup>64</sup>

Now, Mark Surburg adds a caveat to our discussion of the uses of the Law:

However biblical and Lutheran preaching also seeks to prompt hearers to live in new obedience and good works in response to the Gospel. This is not the chief goal. But if preaching is to be biblical and Lutheran it must be a goal. ... How then can this be done? For starters, we must acknowledge that we cannot control how the Spirit uses the Law (you can't 'choose to do third use'). The Spirit may in fact do more than one use at once. However, as communication, the preacher will have something he is seeking to accomplish. Pity the hearer if he doesn't.<sup>65</sup>

Paul Althaus distinguished between Law and command (*Gesetz und Gebot*) to maintain some form of ethics for believers. Some have used the term "gospel imperative" to replace "Third Use of the Law," thus denying a role of God's Law for Christians. However, this is a misuse of the term. Dr. Pieper states, "God's demand, or command, that the sinner believe proves how earnestly God's Gospel offer of grace is meant. ... The Gospel imperative: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,' breathes faith into the heart."<sup>66</sup> The Gospel imperative is to be distinguished from other imperatives that are Third-Use imperatives: "*Ask, and it will be given to you*" (Luke 11:9), "*This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you*" (John 15:12), and "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15). These Third-Use

<sup>64</sup> Dean Milton Otto, "The Preaching of Sanctification," essay delivered in a Summer Institute at Parkland Lutheran Church, (August 8–12, 1983), 3. [from the files of Rev. Jerry Dakle]

<sup>65</sup> Surburg, "Mark's Thoughts: A Response to Chad Bird's 'Gospel Phobia.'"

<sup>66</sup> Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 3:229.

imperatives are God's will, but they do not offer or give God's grace when they are obeyed.

My contention is that while the Holy Spirit can, will, and does use the Law in any way He chooses to accomplish what He sent it to do, we as preachers need to make intentional distinctions in how God's Law is presented in the sermon. The chief purpose of the Law for the preacher is to convict the hearers of sin—not to make them better people. The latter is the error of pietism, legalism, Rome, Calvin, and holiness groups. Convicting hearers of their sinfulness (by their sinful nature, their evil actions and failures) prepares the hearers for gratefully hearing the Gospel that Jesus has fulfilled the Law and suffered the Law's punishment in their place. Then the preacher proclaims the Gospel message that sins against the Law are forgiven through the work and merits of Jesus Christ. The preacher will also proclaim Gospel and Law to encourage and exhort their hearers to cast off the works of darkness and "put on the new man."

Scripture teaches regarding "sanctification" that the Holy Spirit moves/empowers the Christian to "*will and do for His good pleasure*" (Philippians 2:13) and that the Christian also cooperates with this work of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16). May we not also say that the Gospel and the third use of the Law work together—the one to motivate Christians out of love for Christ and the other to inform them what good works they willingly do? Again St. Paul, "*Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ ... with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*" (Philippians 1:27).

An important follow-up question is: how much is a lack of preaching on third-use issues responsible for a lack of understanding about Christian life in the parish? Are members fighting against the urge to write angry or hateful words on social media? Are their consciences bothering them when they see violence, profanity, pornography, and sinful lifestyles portrayed in movies, TV shows, and on the internet? Did a lack of speaking about God's promises to hear prayer lead to members having a greater fear of COVID than necessary? Are Christian marriages falling apart because spouses don't hear about practicing forgiveness, absolution, contentment, and trust in God in their homes? Are members failing to attend worship service because they have not been told about Hebrews 10:25—"*not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*"?

The above is not suggesting that a greater preaching of the Law in its "third use" will reform America or straighten out the members

of the congregation. The point is that third-use-of-the-Law preaching (connected with the Gospel motivation) will inform God's children about the need to drown the Old Adam each day and about the duties God asks His baptized children to carry out in their various vocations. But only the Gospel message has the power to transform lives and motivate God's people to do His holy will.

And here again is the paradox: Third-use-of-the-Law messages have no strength to change lives; only the Gospel proclamation of Christ's free salvation and grace has the power to accomplish any change in believers—repentance (wide sense) and sanctified living. Conversely, proclaiming only the Gospel without the second or third use of the Law will eventually produce “Christians” who live “lawlessly.”

We live in a changing society that needs to hear both the Law (all three uses) and the pure Gospel. Rome and the Reformed/Evangelicals teach that the Law is able to reform people and society. Some Evangelicals have also brought politics into their messages with the goal to stop evil and to reform society. They can tempt us to do the same. But our proclamation needs to be reserved for preaching *poenitentia*, *evangelium*, and *sanctificatio*: contrition/repentance, forgiveness-for-Christ's-sake, and newness-of-life—with the Gospel predominating.

So while the Gospel about Christ is all-encompassing, all-decisive, all-salvific, all-about-Jesus, neither is the Gospel used all-alone, apart from the second and third use of God's holy Law.

## Conclusion

“Only he who has, in some measure, himself felt the agony of the first garden, can understand that *of the second garden*.”<sup>67</sup>

The proper distinction about the role and use of Law and Gospel in the Church was the major point of contention between the Papacy and Dr. Martin Luther. This distinction permeated the Ninety-Five Theses, the Leipzig and Heidelberg Debates, Luther's “Babylonian Captivity” and “Bondage of the Will” writings, the *Large and Small Catechisms*, and his six sets of theses on the Antinomian debates. For if the Law cannot be used to initiate contrition and repentance, then the Gospel has nothing to say about any cure. And if the Law cannot be used to tell Christians how they are to live, then the Gospel will be a message that leads to “*using liberty as an opportunity for the flesh*” (Galatians 5:13).

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<sup>67</sup> Alfred Eidersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 2:168. Eidersheim was commenting on John 8, formatting is his.

Whether or not one uses the term “Third Use of the Law” may be adaphora; although our confessional subscription binds us to the term, its teaching, and its use. Because of that subscription, one is not free to omit using God’s Law with unbelievers or Christians. One is not free to teach that “the Gospel produces contrition” or that “the Law only accuses.” One is not free to over-emphasize the Gospel at the expense of denying the uses of the Law. And one is not free to change the definitions of terms that occur in the *Book of Concord*.

The Rev. Alvin E. Wagner states: “On the other hand, if there is in our life no evidence of sanctification, no striving after godliness, no attempt to add to our faith, no purging ourselves from the old sins, no love of God and the Savior, no desire for His Word, only a cold lip service, and no effort to keep separate from the world—we can be sure that any claim we make to the certainty of being saved is a delusion.”<sup>68</sup>

Wagner’s colleague adds this: “Often we hear the criticism that in the preaching in our Church there is too much justification or Gospel and not enough Law and thunder. The people are said to have gone to sleep. Where this criticism is in place, the fault is not too much Gospel, but it is a sign that neither the Law nor the Gospel has been presented in the right manner, in the right relation to each other.”<sup>69</sup>

The history of antinomian thought teaches us that defending one biblical truth (the Gospel) should not be done at the expense of other truths (the Law in all its functions/uses). It teaches us that denying the work of the Law in any of its uses also results in perverting the Gospel. It teaches us that the settlements in the *Formula of Concord* regarding both forms of antinomianism (V-no Law for repentance and VI-no Law for Christian obedience) do not prevent antinomian ideas from regaining a following among the unwary. And such a history teaches that faithful Lutheran pastors need to be aware of and use proper definitions, distinctions, and paradoxes—where they exist in Scripture and in theology—so that people may believe in “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” for salvation.

Preaching and practicing the Law in its three uses/functions, proclaiming the Gospel about Jesus in all its sweet fullness, and “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20) are daunting tasks. Only with the help of the Holy Spirit can pastors fulfill

<sup>68</sup> A.E. Wagner, “The Certainty of Salvation,” in *The Abiding Word: An Anthology of Doctrinal Essays*, Theodore Laetsch, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946), 1:237. In this essay, Rev. Wagner also wrote about the certainty of salvation that comes through the Word and Sacraments.

<sup>69</sup> Walter Geihlsler, “The Law and the Gospel,” in *The Abiding Word*, 1:121.

those tasks. Through continued prayer and Bible study we can remain faithful to the Word. Through applying the message of Christ's redemption to ourselves and to our hearers, both will be blessed. May the Lord God help us remain steadfast in the revealed truths of His Word. LSQ

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## Appendix I—Timeline

### I. Johann Agricola's Early Years

- 1515–1516—Agricola studies at Wittenberg, becomes close friend and supporter of Luther.
- 1518—Melanchthon arrives at Wittenberg. Agricola becomes his friend.
- 1519—Agricola accompanies Luther and Melanchthon to the Leipzig Debate with Eck.

### II. Agricola's Turns

- 1525—Agricola become teacher of the Latin school and, though never ordained, the Pastor of the church in Eisleben. Here he begins to spread his antinomian views. In his *Annotations to the Gospel of St. Luke*, he wrote: "The Decalog belongs in the courthouse, not in the pulpit. All those who are occupied with Moses are bound to the devil. To the gallows with Moses."
- 1526—The new theological professorship is given to Melanchthon, not Agricola, who feels slighted and bitter.
- 1527—Agricola publicly criticizes Melanchthon's *Instructions to the Visitors of the Churches of Saxony* where Melanchthon urges pastors to first preach the Law to the callous people in order to produce repentance, and thus prepare them for saving faith in the Gospel. Agricola considered such teachings to be Romanizing and he published *130 Questions for Young Children*, in which he stressed that genuine repentance is worked, not by the Law, but by the Gospel alone.
- Nov. 28, 1527—Meeting at Torgau: Agricola and Melanchthon openly discussed their differences before Luther and Bugenhagen. The issue: Does faith presuppose contrition? Luther brought about agreement by differentiating between general faith and justifying faith.

**1536**—Luther uses his influence to have Agricola receive a teaching appointment at Wittenberg. Agricola uses his new position to attack Melanchthon and Luther as well.

### III. Agricola increases his antinomian actions, Luther's response

**1537**—Agricola secretly circulates propositions directed against Luther and Melanchthon, urging all to resist them in order to preserve pure doctrine.

**Dec. 1, 1537**—Luther publishes the theses of Agricola together with *Other Antinomian Articles*, condemning the theses. Luther also announced a number of disputations against antinomianism. The first disputation was held on Dec. 18, 1537, in which Luther maintained that contrition is worked by the preaching of the Law. Agricola did not attend, but continued to anonymously oppose Luther.

**Jan. 12, 1528**—the second disputation. Luther further taught that the Law must not be thrown out of the church. The Law's chief purpose is to reveal the guilt of sin. The Law also must be taught to maintain outward discipline, to reveal sin, and to show what good works are pleasing to God.

**April 23, 1538**—Agricola recants his antinomian teachings and declares his agreement with Luther. Agricola was again permitted to preach and teach. On account of this retraction, Luther does not proceed with holding a third and fourth disputation on two other sets of theses he wrote.

**Sept. 23, 1538**—Agricola continues to spread his antinomian views. Luther holds another disputation on a fifth set of theses. Here Luther describes how the antinomians lull their hearers into carnal security. Luther defends himself against previous attacks, stating that Agricola had quoted him out of context.

**Jan. 1539**—Agricola fears of losing his position at Wittenberg and submits to Luther. He asks Luther to write a retraction, which he published as *Against the Antinomians*.

**1529**—Agricola continues to secretly teach antinomian doctrines. He receives encouragement from Jacob Schenk (dismissed as pastor in Friberg [1538] and deposed from his professorship in Leipzig [1540]).

**March 1540**—Agricola lodges a complaint with the Elector, complaining that Luther falsely accused him.

**April 1540**—Luther answers Agricola's charges in a Report to Doctor Brueck *Concerning Magister John Eisleben's Doctrine and Intrigues*.

**June 1540**—Count Albrecht of Mansfeld denounces Agricola. The Elector opens a formal legal proceeding against Agricola. Agricola escapes by accepting a call from Joachim II of Prussia to be court preacher and superintendent in Berlin.

**Sept. 10, 1540**—Luther holds a final disputation on a sixth set of theses against Antinomianism.

**1541**—Elector Joachim II insists that negotiations take place between Luther and Agricola. An agreement was made in which Agricola was required to send a revocation of his false teachings to the preachers, the council, and the congregation at Eisleben. Agricola complained, but continued his false ways. In this year, he published an enlarged edition of his 1527 catechism, that repeats his antinomian errors.

#### IV. Intermediate times and moderate antinomians

**Andrew Poach**—born in 1516 and studied under Luther. He served several parishes before being deposed in 1572 for his antinomian tendencies. He signed the *Book of Concord*.

**Anton Otto**—born in 1505 and studied under Luther. He served in Graefenthal and finally in Nordhausen where he was deposed in 1568 for his Flacian tendencies. He was rejected by Flacian after Otto rejected the third use of the Law.

**Andrew Musculus**—born 1514. After 1538, he studied at Wittenberg and became a zealous adherent to Luther. From 1540 to his death in 1581, he served as professor, pastor and later as General Superintendent in Frankfort. At times he made some extreme statements, but later worked on the *Formula of Concord*.

**Michael Neander**—a friend of Otto. He denied a relationship between the Law and the regenerate Christian.

The moderate antinomians were not so extreme as to deny the Law, as Agricola did. They questioned the third use of the Law and whether the Law was intended to be of use for Christians after regeneration.

#### V. Philippist Antinomians

**1548**—In the disputation over which Melanchthon presided, he was criticized by Flacius for citing the Gospel was the preaching of repentance. Melanchthon cites the term “Gospel” is used in its wider sense, meaning the whole word of God.

**1556**—Disputation conducted by Melanchthon, at which he now adds: “that the Ministry of the Gospel rebukes the other sins which the Law shows, as well as the saddest of sins which is revealed by the Gospel.”

**1571**—Wittenberg Phillipists promote Melanchthon’s improper statements to the point that Paul Crell writes a disputation against John Wigand. Other Philippists wrote works defending Melanchthon: *Propositions Concerning the Chief Controversies of These Times* (main author was Pezel).

**1571**—Wigand, Flacius, and Amsdorf label Wittenberg Philippists “antinomian” and attack the Wittenberg *Propositions*. Wigand authors

book opposing the Wittenberg Philippists entitled: *Concerning Antinomianism, Old and New*. Pezel answers with his *Apology of the True Doctrine on the Definition of the Gospel* (1571). Paul Crell answered him with *Spongia, or 150 Propositions Concerning the Definition of the Gospel, Opposed to the Stupid Accusation of John Wigand* (1571).

Ultimately, the teaching of the Philippists was formulated by Paul Crell as follows: “Since this greatest and chief sin (unbelief) is revealed, rebuked, and condemned by the Gospel alone, therefore also the Gospel alone is expressly and particularly, truly and properly, a preaching and a voice of repentance or conversion in its true and proper sense.” This false teaching of the Philippist antinomians was rejected in Article V of the *Formula of Concord*.<sup>70</sup>

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## Appendix II—Definitions

**Legalism**—means requiring people to obtain a right relationship with God through the Law: doing good works, avoiding evil deeds, demanding actions on the pain of losing one’s salvation. The Pharisees, the Roman Catholic Church, the pietists, the Pentecostals, and 7th Day Adventists were/are all legalists. Legalism also condemns practices and lifestyles as unholly or sinful which are not commanded nor prohibited in the Bible.

**Pietism**—“Men like Grossgebauer felt that the doctrine of justification had been stressed in a one-sided way, at the expense of sanctification, so that the fruits of faith were often not apparent and the congregational life was characterized by a dead formalism.” “Pietism sponsored chiefly three fundamental errors: 1. The concept *piety* is separated from the means of grace.... 2. The concept *orthodoxy* is misunderstood and misapplied, so that indifferentism with regard to normative information from Holy Writ is underestimated; 3. There is erroneous teachings on the concepts *spirit* and *letter, spirit* and *flesh*.” Thus desires and emotions were placed before pure doctrine.<sup>71</sup>

**Moralism**—Morality is the differentiation of intentions, decisions and actions between right and wrong. Moralism defines which intentions and actions please God so that the sinner can win a right relationship with God.

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<sup>70</sup> This timeline was part of a paper by Rev. Glenn Obenberger. It was located in the files of the late Rev. Jerry Dalke. Some items were edited by the essayist.

<sup>71</sup> Erwin I. Lueker, ed., *Lutheran Cyclopedia* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), 818–819.



**Anti-nomianism**—The word comes from two Greek words: *ἀντί* and *νόμος*. The first means “over against” and “opposed to.” The second word means “law or standard” and “rule of life.” Taken together “antinomian” means “opposed to laws.” The word *ἀνομος* occurs 25 times in the Bible, often translated as “without law” or “lawless.” For examples, see Matt.13:41; Matt. 24:12; 2 Cor. 6:14; 2 Thess. 2:7; and Titus 2:14.<sup>72</sup> There were two classes of antinomian teachings: 1) stating that God’s Law does not bring people to repentance, and 2) that God’s Law is not to be used to show Christians how they are to live as God’s children. There is a current strain that does not reject the Law as much as ignore its use.

**Gnosticism**—A Greek word *γνώστικος* meaning “having knowledge.” The Gnostic heresy began in the late First Century AD, emphasizing personal spiritual knowledge. “The basic idea of gnosticism was redemption, first, from the material world (matter considered evil) and then escape into a world of freedom, thus achieving the liberty implied in the human spirit.”<sup>73</sup> “Gnostics considered the principal element of salvation to be direct knowledge of the supreme divinity in the form of mystical or esoteric insight. Many Gnostic texts deal not in concepts of sin and repentance, but with illusion and enlightenment.”<sup>74</sup> “In the Gnostic Christian tradition, Christ is seen as a divine being which has taken human form in order to lead humanity back to the Light.”<sup>75</sup>

**Gospel**—“The term *Gospel* is not always used and understood in one and the same sense. It is used in two ways in the Holy Scriptures and also by ancient and modern Church teachers. Sometimes it is used to mean the entire doctrine of Christ, our Lord, which He proclaimed in His ministry on earth and commanded to be proclaimed in the New Testament. .... In its proper sense, *Gospel* does not mean the preaching of repentance, but only the preaching of God’s grace” (FC, SD, V:3–4).

- The word “gospel” involves more uses than this, as Everard Hinrichs quotes from Websters’ dictionary: “1. The teachings of Jesus and the apostles. 2. The history of the life and teachings of Jesus and the apostles. 3. Any of the first four books of the New Testament.... 4. An excerpt from any of these books read in a religions service. 5. A belief or body of beliefs proclaimed as absolutely true. 6. Any doctrine or rule of conduct widely maintained.”<sup>76</sup>
- “Since the promise can only be received by faith, the Gospel (which is properly the promise of forgiveness of sins and of justification

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.bereanpublishers.com/the-antinomians-are-coming>.

<sup>73</sup> Lueker, ed., *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, 417.

<sup>74</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House), xx

<sup>75</sup> Jerome Friedman, *Michael Servetus: A Case Study in Total Heresy*, (Geneva: Droz, 1978), 142.

<sup>76</sup> Everard Hinrichs, “Are We Preaching a Gospel Free from Law?” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 29, no. 6 (June 1958), 402.

for Christ's sake) proclaims the righteousness of faith in Christ" (Apology, IV:43).

- *Formula of Concord* defines it: "The Gospel is properly such a doctrine as teaches what man, who has not observed the Law and therefore is condemned by it, is to believe, namely, that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins, and has obtained and acquired for him without any merit of his, forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life" (FC, Epitome, V, 4–5).

**Law**—The "Law" is eternal, therefore its primary definition is: the Law is God's holiness, righteousness and perfection. Before the Fall, the Law was written in Adam's heart so that Adam delighted in doing God's holy will. After the Fall, one distinguishes between the natural moral law and "... by Law we mean the Ten Commandments, wherever they are read in the Scriptures" (Apology, IV:6). "The Law is properly a divine doctrine, which teaches what is right and pleasing to God and reproves everything that is sin and contrary to God's will" (FC, Epitome, V:3). God's Law in Old Testament is distinguished by the concepts of civil, ceremonial, and moral law. Prof. Hoenecke also distinguishes the "purpose" of the law between its *original purpose* of life (and it remains a purpose of the law in itself) [see Leviticus 18:5, Ezekiel 20:11, Romans 7:10, and Galatians 3:12] and the *resulting purpose* that replaces the first purpose after the fall and speaks to those under the law (Romans 3:19–20). He adds a third characteristic of the Law—the impossibility of fulfillment.<sup>77</sup>

- **First Use of the Law**— *Usus civilis*—"...serves 1) to maintain external discipline and decency against dissolute and disobedient people" (FC,SD, VI:1). This "political" use of the Law serves to preserve human society and to further its natural development as God's creation (1 Timothy 1:9). It upholds external order by threats and rewards through state laws and natural law.
- **Second Use of the Law**— *Usus theologicus* or *paedagogicus*—serves "(2) to bring people to a knowledge of their sin through the law" (FC,SD, VI:1) in order to be driven to Christ. Theologians also distinguish a *usus elencticus*, or condemning use, by which people know what actions and thoughts are sinful and are convicted of sin by the law (Romans 3:20).
- **Third Use of the Law**— *Usus didacticus*—" (3) those who have been born anew through the Holy Spirit... learn from the law to live and walk in the law" (FC,SD, VI:1) See Titus 2:7–8. Prof. David Scaer defines the Third Use of the Law as: "... how God's goodness expresses in the lives of Christians." He adds, "In Luther's trio of fear, love and trust, love is the one thing that God is and of which, according to Jesus, we are capable. God loves us and we love God and we are to love one

<sup>77</sup> Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*. Joel Fredrich, Paul Prange, and Bill Tackmier, trans. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1999), 4:33–34.

another and loving one another is what the third use of the law is all about.” Again, “...if a Christian is *peccator*, a sinner, he is also *justus*, justified and in this forgiven state the only use of the law is the third. ... The third use of the law is where the divine intersects with the human.”<sup>78</sup>

**Repentance**—“Now strictly speaking, repentance consists of two parts. One part is contrition, that is, terrors striking the conscience through the knowledge of sin. The other part is faith, which is born of the Gospel [Romans 10:17] or the Absolution and believes that for Christ’s sake, sins are forgiven” (AC, XII:3–5). Under repentance, Thomas Aquinas also distinguished between three words:

**Attrition**—sorrow for sin out of fear of punishment, and

**Contrition**—sorrow for sin out of love for God. Luther wrote: “where contrition proceeds properly through God’s grace, there a person is transformed ... and it implies a new life.”<sup>79</sup>

**Sanctification**—in the wide sense, sanctification includes the call, conversion, regeneration, illumination, justification, the renewing of the image of God in man. In the narrow sense, it refers to the spiritual growth that follows justification. It is the work of the Holy Spirit only on the Christian. After conversion, the believer becomes a co-worker with the Holy Spirit.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Scaer, “Trinity.” Quenstedt wrote about a four-fold use of the law: political, condemnatory, pedagogical, and didactic.

<sup>79</sup> Wengert, *Law and Gospel*, 17.

<sup>80</sup> Lueker, ed., *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, 943.

# Sermon on James 5:14–16

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**Text:** *Is anyone among you sick? He should call the elders of the church, and they should pray over him, anointing him with the oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will save the sick person and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. So confess your sins to one another and pray for one another in order that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is able to do much because it is effective. (James 5:14–16, EHV)*

**I**N JESUS THE CHRIST, DEAR FELLOW REDEEMED:

In a 1999 interview with *Playboy*, the then-governor of Minnesota, Jesse Ventura, made the statement that organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people. You can imagine that got quite a few people upset here in Minnesota and around the country. There were Christians that were furious at him for saying that. I've wondered if they were furious at him for saying organized religion is a sham or if it was more that it's a crutch for weak-minded people. Is Christianity a religion for weak-minded people? Is it a religion for the weak? I propose to you that it is.

There are times in our lives when we are so weak-minded that we can't make sense of what's going on. We recognize that so many things are out of our control, that there are forces involved that we cannot comprehend. We are helpless. We are desperate. We are weak.

James in our text holds before us one of those times when we really feel our weakness and our helplessness. He says if anyone is sick, he

should call the elders. I don't know, in my pastoral experience, if there has been any other event in a person's life that has caused them to grab on to the promise that God has given us in prayer more than sickness. When one's very existence here on this earth is in question and there is nothing that can be done, that person is brought to face to face, not just with their mortality, but with their helplessness and their need for divine intervention.

James gives the advice that the elders should be called and that the elders should anoint the person with oil in the name of the Lord and pray. The catholic church obviously reads this and interprets this as last rites and as a sacrament. But it's interesting: when you look at the Greek word that's used for anointing, it's not the common one used for anointing prophets and so forth. It's a different verb. In a sense, it's saying oil them with oil.

Oil, in ancient times, was used as medicine. If you were to read the account of the Good Samaritan, it says that when he came upon the man who was beaten up and left half dead, he bandaged his wounds and poured oil and wine on his wounds. Oil was a medicine. It is also recorded by Josephus, a historian for the Romans, that when Herod the Great was near death, he had a bath in oil for the purpose of healing.

So, if we were to put this into our modern-day terms, we would probably say James is saying, "Call the elders, give the person medicine, and pray." That's what we do today! Pastors and family members stand beside the hospital beds of their sick loved ones and friends, the doctors administer the medicine, and what do they do? They pray in the name of the Lord.

James tells us that the person will be healed because of their prayer. Now James isn't making a bold statement that everyone for whom one prays will be healed. Because every Christian prayer is offered trusting that God will work everything out in accordance to his good and gracious will, there are times that it is better for that person to die. Not just for them getting to go to heaven, but for the good that God will work through their death. Yeah, it hurts. We maybe can't see all that God is doing, but remember we're the weak-minded. God promises to always work graciously for our good, even when we don't understand what he is doing.

Every prayer offered in the name of the Lord will be heard and God will answer for our good. There are a number of Bible verses that teach us this. In the Psalms, God says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble" (Psalm 50:15). And he doesn't say, "I might deliver you" or "I

could deliver you.” He says, “I *will* deliver you.” So, no matter what our prayer is, God is always working for our deliverance and, in the words of our text, our rescue—even when we don’t understand it. Jesus said, “Whatever you ask in my name, the Father *will* give you.” That’s a promise. Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened.” Again, notice the certainty with which he speaks. God will do these things for you, because he has promised to do so.

James goes on and he talks about confessing our sins, and that a person’s sins will be forgiven. Why would he raise that point in connection with prayer? Well, what inhibits your confidence with regards to your prayers? If there was no barrier between you and God, if you were confident that you had a perfect relationship with God, would you have any fears about approaching him? And would you have any doubts about how he’s going to answer? No, if you were in perfect relationship with God, you would be bold. You would be confident. You would be at his throne saying, “Hey, this is what I need.” And you would expect him to give it to you.

What breaks that? It’s sin. When we face difficulties and trials, often the first thought that goes through our head is “What did I do to deserve this?” Our prayers then are directly impacted by our sense of guilt. Maybe there’s even specific sins in our minds as we’re dealing with something. Is God punishing me for this? James tells us, confess your sins. Speak them out loud to another Christian. And be forgiven.

Jesus has given this special authority to Christians to be able to forgive sins, to be able to assure and restore the relationship between that individual and God. Since we trust that our sins are forgiven through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus then the doorway to God the Father’s throne is open wide and we will be at his throne petitioning him boldly and confidently for what we need. Trusting that he loved us so much to forgive our sins and therefore he will answer our prayer for our good—our temporal and eternal good.

James says at the end, “The prayer of a righteous person is effective.” Now we could read that and think, “Yeah, if I live a good life, if I’m righteous, then God’s going to listen to me.” That’s not the righteousness we possess. Our righteousness can only come through faith in Christ; through *his* perfect life and *his* innocent death on our behalf. The person trusting in Jesus, his prayer is effective.

God hears you. He hears when you cry out to him in your distress. He hears when you cry out to him in the middle of the night. He hears

when you feel weak-minded and weak in body. He hears and he answers because he loves you. May God bless you by the power of his spirit with a bold faith. A faith that is constantly at the throne of our Father of grace, petitioning him for all that you need. For Jesus' sake, he will grant it. LSQ

# Mount Olive Lutheran School Commencement Address

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**Class Verse:** *Now may the God of hope fill you with complete joy and peace as you continue to believe, so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13; EHV)*

**F**IRST OF ALL I WANT TO SAY CONGRATULATIONS to all you graduates. What a milestone day this is in your life—graduating grade school and soon to be in high school. What a blessing this is! William [son], I am proud of you and of the whole eighth grade class.

Your school verse for this year has been Romans 15:13, where Paul says to the Roman believers, “Now may the God of hope fill you with complete joy and peace as you continue to believe, so that you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Notice that he says, “**as you continue to believe.**” Your faith does not come to an end, but rather your faith in Christ is to be ongoing. And that is my encouragement to you this evening, that your faith would continue into high school so that you continue to have that joy and peace that only comes from Christ.

My schooling in Australia was a little different. Grade school was to seventh grade and high school was from grades eight to twelve. I went to public school as there were few Christian options. At the time only 2% of Australians would be in church of a Sunday. Most students in Australia grow up without knowledge of God’s word or Jesus Christ as the Savior.



When I was in eighth grade, in my friend group there was a young man named Bill. Bill was a big guy. He had muscles in eighth grade. He was also very friendly and very smart. Now there was another boy who let his sinful nature get the better of him and decided he didn't like Bill. Bill put up with his insults until one day this other boy sinfully decided to fight Bill. He got Bill in a headlock and tried punching him. I'll never forget what happened next. Bill put one arm over his head and the other under his calves, picked him up, flipped him over and threw him on the ground. Fight over. We were all thinking, "Wow, Bill is strong!" and I made a mental note to myself, "Never make Bill angry."

Even though I went to a secular, public school, in those days they let a Bible society come in each year and give out Bibles to the eighth graders. Bill started reading his Bible. In fact, he got right into it and became very enthusiastic about the Bible. Bill became a Christian. He would carry his Bible everywhere and read it between classes. Often he would point out a part that he found interesting and tell everyone around him, "Look at what Jesus says here!" Everyone listened, after all it was Bill—they didn't want to make him angry. His attitude was infectious. Tonight, I encourage you to be like Bill. Let your hope in Christ overflow to others. Let your light shine in the future!

I eventually wanted to become a pastor. This was because of an ELS missionary who had come to Australia. Pastor Mack was a great help to me during my teenage years and he suggested to me that I should become a pastor, as did other members of the congregation. After a few years, I decided that's what I wanted to do. So I left Queensland, Australia, and came to the U.S. to Mankato, Minnesota, because there were no good schools to study to be a pastor (called seminaries) in Australia. I was amazed at all the Christians here! I can remember the first time I worshipped here at Mt. Olive. There were two or three hundred people in the service, singing. I had never heard the hymns sung like that! Then I learned that Mt. Olive had a Christian school—a Lutheran school. And there was Lutheran high school nearby and a Lutheran college. How amazing! What a blessing! What a treasure!

Many of you have grown up with this, but I had to travel halfway around the world to find this wonderful place. Sadly though, I started to hear examples of young people who didn't see the blessing. Some who left the church or rejected it, thinking some aspect of the sinful world was preferable. Like a rich kid growing up in a mansion and not appreciating it, but taking it for granted. Don't take it for granted! Satan will try to get you to think that way.

When I was a young boy, my family lived in an older styled Australian house which was called a “Queenslander.” Queensland is a tropical climate and most homes did not have air conditioning. A “Queenslander” was a wooden house built up on stilts to let the air circulate underneath. There were outside staircases to get into the house. One afternoon my older brother and sister were returning from grade school and walking up the back stairs. As they reached the top a Yellow Belly Brown snake slithered up the staircase, over my brother’s foot as he was opening the door and the snake went into the house! We had a highly venomous Yellow Belly Brown snake on the loose in our living room. What do you do in that scenario? Well, my dad got the .22 rifle and shot the snake. I remember because after that event we always had a little hole in the middle of the living room! You could see through the carpet to underneath the house!

There is an even more dangerous snake of which you need to be aware. That ancient serpent Satan will try to sneak his way into your life and heart. He will try to convince you that what you have learned here at Mt. Olive is not important. He will try to turn you away from the Lord.

How do you defeat Satan in this scenario? I’ve never compared Jesus and his word to a .22 rifle before, but there is a similarity in this way: They are both good at destroying snakes. Jesus never gave into temptation, but overcame Satan’s temptation in the wilderness by quoting God’s word, “It is written.” Unlike us, Jesus was perfect.

Even though he was innocent, Jesus took our sin and guilt, suffered for it and died on the cross.

The proof that Jesus won the victory is in his resurrection! It is proof that the Father was satisfied with his payment for sin on Good Friday. Jesus defeated Satan, sin, death and hell. Your sins are forgiven and everyone who believes in Jesus will one day rise to eternal life.

You are going to face many challenges in high school and your later teenage years. Satan, the Accuser, is going to come to you and tell you that you sin is too big for God, that your guilt is too much and that God doesn’t love you and can’t forgive you. But you can point to Jesus who took away your sin and guilt! Jesus has rendered Satan’s attacks useless! That is the joy and peace that you can always have, “as you continue to believe”!

I encourage you to continue to know the God of hope. Stay in God’s word throughout your life, attending church and doing devotions. Use

the means of grace, the word and sacraments, and the Holy Spirit will strengthen and guide you.

Well, once again, congratulations to you graduates! May the Lord's richest blessings be with you! In Jesus' Name. Amen. [LSQ](#)

# Book Reviews

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## **Book Review: From Egypt to Sinai: A Devotional Commentary on Exodus**

Paul S. Meitner. *From Egypt to Sinai: A Devotional Commentary on Exodus*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2022. 302 pages. Price: \$27.99.

The author, the Rev. Paul Meitner, has produced this volume as a continuation of the book *From Eden to Egypt* by the Rev. George O. Lillegard. Pastor Lillegard was a missionary in China and later taught at Bethany Lutheran College and Seminary in Mankato, Minnesota. His book was based on exegetical sermons he preached while he was pastor of Harvard Street Lutheran Church, Cambridge, Massachusetts. His purpose was to provide a readable commentary on the foundational

book of Genesis for the members of Lutheran congregations. Pastor Meitner aims to follow in this tradition and definitely succeeds in doing so.

The author gives a running commentary on the book of Exodus, showing how the Lord God liberated His people in Egypt and prepared them to enter the promised land. A proper distinction between Law and Gospel is found throughout the book and the book is filled with real life application for Christians today with an abundance of illustrative material. This devotional commentary has opening prayers related to the main theme of each chapter which assist the reader in connecting the spiritual truths of Exodus to his personal life. A rich selection of Lutheran hymnody is found throughout the chapters. In a land that is increasingly hostile to the Christian faith, this book helps Christians face the burdens and troubles of this present

wilderness, strengthened through the life-giving Word of the Lord.

For the author, Christ is found in the Old Testament and in Exodus in particular. In this, he is absolutely correct. Many today see little connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Often the Old Testament is taught in isolation from New Testament fulfillment; one in Hebrew and the other in Greek and ne'er the twain shall meet! Therefore, it is not surprising that many people are quite content with the "Gideon Canon" of the New Testament and Psalms. However, Exodus, and the whole Old Testament for that matter, is a book of Christ. Christ is to be found in Exodus. The Exodus theme is an overarching principle spanning the testaments, uniting them in its emphasis on liberation and redemption. The author notes that the Passover Lamb points both to Christ's redemptive sacrifice and to the Holy Supper. Concerning Exodus 12, he writes: "Is there a more glorious and important chapter in the Old Testament than this? Not only is this the great foreshadowing of Christ Jesus' atoning sacrifice on Calvary, but it is also a prefiguring of the Lord's Supper, the life-giving meal that gives us freedom from bondage and a glimpse of heaven" (81). Jesus is the rock from which they drank in the wilderness. He is the true water of life from whom a man may drink and not die but live forever (132). The Sabbath points to the rest that believers have in Christ. "The Sabbath was a brief glimpse and foretaste of heaven that the Lord provides in Christ to the believer through faith" (183). Christ

is the true tabernacle, the mercy seat, and the fulfillment and recapitulation of the entire Exodus-event.

The Lord Jesus is our tabernacle. He is our Great High Priest. He is our Paschal victim. He is God made manifest among us. He is the Light of the world. He is the Bread of Life. He is the fragrant offering in the nostrils of God. He is the mercy seat. The glory of God fills him. There, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus shines like the sun. There the cloud descends and envelops. There Moses talks with Jesus about his coming exodus, the greater exodus of which Israel's exodus only was a shadow. This exodus would not be the mere release from physical bondage of slavery but freedom from the tyranny of Satan, sin, and death (300).

In accord with 1 Corinthians 10, the crossing of the Red Sea is seen as a picture of Baptism. As God's people passed through the Red Sea so we became God's people passing through the Red Sea of Baptism. As Israel was liberated from slavery in the waters of the Red Sea, so we were delivered from the bondage of sin, death, and the devil in the waters of Baptism. Here trust in the Savior was worked in our heart and all our sins were washed away (110). In Exodus 24, Moses speaks of the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made. Then Moses and the elders went up on the mountain and saw God and ate and drank. The author confirms the connection with the meal of the new covenant. He states:

As impressive as this meal was, it was nowhere near as powerful or efficacious as the meal of the new covenant: the Lord's Supper! Here is the true body and blood! ... It is the gospel in the most beautiful form. For in it we partake of a meal where the Lord is both the host and the guest for the strengthening of our faith in him as our Savior and the grace to live a God-pleasing life (201).

As can be seen above, the author does not fear the use of typology. Types are Old Testament shadows which direct us to the New Testament concrete realities. God preordained certain persons, events, and institutions in the Old Testament to prefigure corresponding persons, events, and institutions in the New Testament. Typology has its origin in God's foreknowledge of history. So much of the deep meaning and beauty of the Old Testament is lost when typology is ignored.

This devotional commentary contains many interesting quotations. There are a number of quotes from the early church father such as Tertullian (138), Cyprian (87), and John of Damascus (106). Numerous quotations from the Lutheran Confessions and Luther are offered including his Flood Prayer (103) and his picture of the Gospel as a gentile passing rain (249—250). C. F. W. Walther, the father of confessional Lutheranism in this country is also mentioned (58). Chesterton speaks from his *Orthodoxy* (104) and there are a number of citations from Spurgeon (113, 166, 246).

Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be happy to see the excerpts from George Lillegard (1), S. C. Ylvisaker (129—130), and Norman Madson (279—280). The book contains interesting correspondence between Theodore Aaberg and Oscar Naumann, presidents of the ELS and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, respectively. After both synods left the Synodical Conference in 1963, a brotherly motion from the WELS convention urged the ELS to merge with the WELS. This motion was declined by the ELS and Aaberg feared that this might harm relations with the WELS. Responding to Aaberg's fears, Naumann wrote that he need not be concerned about a negative reaction by WELS. It had once also declined to be absorbed by another church body, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. He then went on to speak of the benefits of two synods standing together in fellowship mutually encouraging and strengthening one another (144—145).

Pastor Meitner notes that the Old Testament sacrifices did not save in and of themselves. They pointed to Christ's once and for all sacrifice on the cross which is indeed true (226, 238). At the same time, these sacrifices worked as channels which bought the blessing of Christ's sacrifice to the individual. "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"

(F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:378—379). These sacrifices had no power to forgive in themselves but they offered that forgiveness achieved by Christ's sacrifice. They functioned as means of grace.

Pastor Meitner has produced a splendid, readable devotional commentary on the book of Exodus. Because it was prepared for congregational use, it would have been better if it had been published in hard cover form. As an outstanding example of devotional literature, it speaks to the heart of the reader and is filled with comfort, giving needed consolation. Many typological and devotional themes are employed which are often lacking in modern literature. The commentary illustrates that a book of Exodus and the whole Old Testament for that matter is the book of Christ. It is an excellent addition to the Lutheran devotional literature available in English, and Pastor Meitner is to be thanked for his diligent labors. This book would be a valuable resource for any pastor preparing a sermon on Exodus and would be beneficial devotional material for both pastor and congregation alike. *From Egypt to Sinai* is edifying devotional literature for every need.

– Gaylin R. Schmeling

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## Book Review: Nonverts: The Making of Ex-Christian America

*Nonverts: The Making of Ex-Christian America.* By Stephen Bullivant. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. Hardcover. 257 + ix pages. \$29.95.

There is no shortage of media accounts covering the decline of institutional religion in the United States. Polls record this, and many pastors see this playing out in their pews. As scholars, pastors, and others attempt to make sense of this trend, Stephen Bullivant offers a witty and poignant study of “nones,” or the religiously non-affiliated. Bullivant is a British sociologist who has written previous studies on Catholic disaffiliation in the United States and Britain and on atheism in general. Using interviews gained through extensive fieldwork in the United States as well as analysis of GSS (General Social Survey) data, Bullivant dispatches the notion that “nones” are a monolithic group, identifies attitudinal diversity with American secularism, and offers a provocative historical explanation for the sudden surge in religious disaffiliation in the United States.

Bullivant's primary contribution is his argument that not all “nones” are alike. He distinguishes between two categories: “nonverts” and “cradle nones.” Concerning “nonverts,” Bullivant writes, “think ‘converts,’ but going *from* a religion to having none” (6). In other words, “nones” are not cookie-cutter secular materialists. They have a background. They had a religion. Many of them were

“true believers” (203). However, for a variety of reasons, these believers rejected the faith in which they were raised. They are converts to being “nones” (hence, “nonverts”). Based on GSS data, Bullivant claims that there are approximately 41 million “nonverts” in America, 2 million of whom are ex-Lutheran (9).

Since the backgrounds of “nonverts” are diverse, then their individual versions of secularism or irreligion are diverse, too. For example, the irreligious life of an ex-Mormon looks different than that of an ex-Evangelical. Background matters. Bullivant uses interviews and personal stories gathered through his fieldwork to make this point. From his interviews, he notes that many “nonverts” maintain a “dual citizenship” with their previous religion (37). For instance, Bullivant interviewed one ex-Mormon who rejected all of his prior religion’s truth claims, and yet he still refrains from drinking coffee or alcohol. “Nonverts” often creatively maintain aspects of their previous religious identity even while they reject truth claims and other elements of their religious culture.

Interestingly, Bullivant finds that “nones” or “nonverts” cannot be equated with secular materialists or atheists. According to GSS data, only one-third of “nones” are self-identified atheists or agnostics. The rest, even if they have doubts or have beliefs that fall well outside of orthodoxy, claim at least some belief in a god or higher power. Based on his analysis, Bullivant claims that

the vast majority of nones do not fit easily into the popular one-size-fits-all image of a rationalist and materialist Atheist-with-a-capital-A. Not only are the majority of nones not atheists at all—a consistent finding going back to at least the 1960s—but even many of those who actually are atheists are not *that kind* of atheist. Not believing in a God, gods, or even a kindly “Something” does not itself preclude believing in all kinds of other supernatural, spiritual, and/or paranormal phenomena. (69)

This explains while polls consistently show high beliefs in angels, ghosts, and UFOs regardless of the decline of institutional religion. Therefore, despite their lack of religious affiliation, let alone orthodoxy, many “nonverts” retain a belief in the existence of the supernatural.

However, “nonverts” differ from “cradle nones,” the second category Bullivant introduces. Whereas “nonverts” grew up in a religion, “cradles nones” did not. They “are notably more nonbelieving than are nonverts” (65). They are more likely to reject the existence of a god or higher power. They tend to be younger than “nonverts,” since they are likely the children or grandchildren of “nonverts.” Bullivant argues that they represent the future of irreligion in America. While “nonverts” currently make up two-thirds to three-quarters of “nones,” this will change as older generations pass away. While previous generations of “nones” might have returned to a church in order to raise



a family or become civically engaged (a trend which has largely disappeared), the “cradle nones” will not return to church because they never had a church in the first place. This will change the religious dynamics of America in the coming decades.

Bullivant notes that the rise of the “nones” caught many by surprise, since the decline of church attendance in the United States lagged significantly behind that in Europe, Canada, or Australia. He attaches the rise of the “nones” to changes in American social attitudes following the end of the Cold War. Echoing the work of other historians, Bullivant contends that atheism was uniquely perceived as negative in the United States due to two factors. First, during the Cold War, communism was equated with atheism. Therefore, to be a patriotic, “real” American meant to be religious in some form. Interestingly, Bullivant writes that “the religious angle was never a feature of British Cold War rhetoric” (105). Second, in comparison to Europe, there was a lack of well-known, socially acceptable atheists. While Europe had Jean-Paul Sartre and Bertrand Russell, America had Madalyn Murray O’Hair, the notorious founder of the American Atheists who dubbed herself “the Most Hated Woman in America” (106).

However, during and following the 1960s, the culture moved away from the positions held by most Christian churches on many social issues. Accordingly, as the Cold War dissipated in the 1990s, there was an irreparable divide between the church and larger American society

concerning sexuality and “family values.” This weakened the connection between being a “good American” and being religious. Additionally, the popularity of the internet and the advent of social media allowed skeptics to discover they were not alone, thus making irreligion more socially acceptable. Also, within the context of the War on Terror, the rise of Islamic extremism made religious fundamentalism the new enemy of American ideals, thus further clouding the positive reputation of religion in general.

Bullivant’s historical analysis is provocative, but it’s also open to debate. The author is correct to note the connection between American patriotism and religion during the Cold War, as well as the difference between the American and European contexts. However, one wonders if the bonding of religion and nationalism during the Cold War was unique. Ample historical studies have been published concerning the longstanding connection between Protestant Christianity and American political culture, including the American Revolution, Manifest Destiny, the expulsion of Native Americans, the connection between the Social Gospel and the Progressive movement, and muscular Christianity’s influence on foreign policy in the early twentieth century. In other words, what is unique about the Cold War’s rhetorical claim that a good American is a religious American?

Additionally, did Americans’ attitudes concerning religion in general become more negative due to the War on Terror in the early twentieth

century? Certainly the War on Terror and the threat of Islamic extremism influenced the works of the “New Atheists,” such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, and gave them fodder to expose the perceived evils of religion, but there is little evidence that their ideas percolated in wider culture. Bullivant’s claims concerning the historical and cultural roots of today’s rise of the “nones” are thought-provoking, but they aren’t convincing.

Bullivant is a sociologist, not a church growth advisor. Therefore, he does not explicitly advise churches concerning how to react to changing circumstances. However, he does provide cautionary tales of what does not work. While he doesn’t recommend against liberalizing one’s positions, Bullivant provides example after example of how that does not reverse declining membership. Mainline Protestants (whom Bullivant cheekily terms “flatline Protestants”) are case-in-point. One of his interview subjects describes his relationship with his mainline Protestant background thus: “It isn’t love, it isn’t hate. It’s just indifference.” Bullivant remarks that “he just dropped [his mainline Presbyterianism], as one might a gym membership, when he found other, more pressing things to be doing” (75). Mainline Protestant churches reacted to societal changes by seeking to reimagine Christianity along with it. However, “rather than being America’s moral leaders ... they’re now constantly left playing catch-up to the evolving cultural consensus” (89). Therefore, as mainline Protestants have retreated from

any significant truth claims, they’ve simultaneously retreated from any reason for why fence-sitting members should remain members. As Bullivant writes, “If a church doesn’t inculcate in its members the feeling that what they have is something that’s worth sharing with others—or at least trying to—then it sends the message that perhaps it’s not so essential for *me* either” (92). Therefore, liberalizing one’s church does not arrest the exodus.

However, Bullivant’s analysis doesn’t leave conservative churches unscathed. Being conservative is not enough to retain members. Bullivant points to Mormons, Catholics, and Evangelicals who spurn their prior religion precisely because they felt it was too conservative on social or doctrinal issues. Conservative religion has its own weak points. A simple Google search on the internet allows a young church member to find ample material which might lead them to doubt or reject their church’s truth claim. Additionally, high moral standards breed accusations of hypocrisy. Pointing to Jimmy Swaggart, Ravi Zacharias, and others, Bullivant writes that

[I]n an era when “traditional family values” are viewed as unrealistic, if not outright oppressive, the conspicuous failures of some of their most vocal spokespeople—namely, evangelical pastors with a national platform—are naturally taken as “proof if proof were needed” of their moral and intellectual bankruptcy: if not even the people who *pretend* to believe in

them actually do, how can anyone else take them seriously? (144)

While scholars and pastors might quibble with aspects of Bullivant's arguments, the stories and analysis in this book are useful for us to read. From a pastoral perspective, Bullivant describes the people we are evangelizing. To that end, this book is essential reading for those seeking to preach the gospel to both "nonverts" and "cradle nones," the latter of whom will particularly be our target for evangelization in the years to come. These future generations will have little or no exposure to Christianity, and that reality necessarily will impact our evangelism and catechesis. Optimistically, the "cradle nones" might be more open and less hostile to Christianity, Bullivant argues, because they never rejected it in the first place (171).

Bullivant takes a balanced, realistic approach, attempting to be an objective sociologist while noting the strengths and weaknesses of liberal and conservative religious groups. Importantly, Bullivant does not take "the sky is falling for Christianity"

approach that one frequently reads in media accounts of the rise of the "nones." He does not believe that Christianity is in "some terminal death spiral" (205). He admits that "normal America" will have little overlap with "Christian America," but he's not convinced that is a negative. Borrowing the language of Stanley Hauerwas, Christians will live as "resident aliens" in American society. Being different is not bad. Indeed, pointing to Catholics in particular, those who stay will likely do so because they want to be different. Therefore, they will likely be more conservative theologically as well.

Bullivant's sociological work reminds pastors that the field is ripe for the harvest. Even as religious demographics shift, the need for the gospel remains constant. As God's Word is preached, it will not return empty. Souls will be converted. Though he doesn't mention it, Bullivant's own life story is proof of this. He converted from atheism to Roman Catholicism in 2008.

– Adam S. Brasich

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