

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

VOLUME 65 • NUMBERS 2 & 3

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History, Typology and Anticipation**

**Reflections on the Context and Character
of Martin Luther's Formula Missae**

East Prussia the First Lutheran State

**21st Century Challenges to the
Characteristics of Holy Scripture**

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The Story of Pastor A.V. Kuster

Never Confounded

Mission Work in the End Times

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LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

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Contents

LSQ Vol. 65, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2025)

The Scapegoat of the Great Day of Atonement: History, Typology and Anticipation	125
<i>Aaron J. Hamilton</i>	
Reflections on the Context and Character of Martin Luther's Formula Missae.....	153
<i>David Jay Webber</i>	
East Prussia the First Lutheran State	203
<i>Gaylin R. Schmeling</i>	
21st Century Challenges to the Characteristics of Holy Scripture..	229
<i>Thomas L. Rank</i>	
1700th Anniversary of the Nicene Creed.....	247
<i>Gaylin R. Schmeling</i>	
The Story of Pastor A.V. Kuster	253
<i>Thomas Kuster</i>	
Never Confounded.....	259
<i>Peter J. Faugstad</i>	
Mission Work in the End Times	279
<i>Timothy H. Buelow</i>	

Foreword

LSQ Vol. 65, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2025)

GOD'S JUSTICE AND MERCY CAN SEEM TO BE AT war with each other. For example, how can a perfectly just God simply forgive sinners? And, how can a perfectly merciful God punish sinners? Pastor Hamilton's article explains how the Day of Atonement is to be understood in the light of Christ's sacrifice on the altar of the cross which satisfied God's justice and mercy.

In 1523, Luther published the *Formula Missae*, which has been a guide for Lutheran worship for the past five centuries. Pastor Webber presents some reflections on the context and character of the *Formula Missae*.

Pres. Schmeling's article elucidates a little-known fact: East Prussia was the first to become a Lutheran state. This article is written to mark the 500th anniversary of this event.

The nature of God's Word is misunderstood even in Christian churches. Pastor Rank addresses the challenges to the characteristics of Holy Scripture in his article.

This issue also includes an article on the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed, a series of sermons from the Never Confounded retreat and a mission sermon from a pastoral conference.

Also included is a brief account of A.V. Kuster's transition from the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod to the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. It was given by his son, Thomas, at the 2024 Reformation Lectures and should have been included in Vol. 55, No. 1.

—TAH

The Scapegoat of the Great Day of Atonement: History, Typology and Anticipation

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LSQ Vol. 65, Nos. 2 & 3 (June & September 2025)

DAVID CHYTRAEUS BEGINS HIS TREATISE *ON Sacrifice* with the following words, in translation provided by John Warwick Montgomery:

The foundation of our salvation and of all religion, and the basis of the Christian faith, is the doctrine of the priesthood and sacrifice of God's Son, our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ, who was offered to God on our behalf on the altar of the Cross. This act alone earned for us the remission of sins, righteousness, and everlasting life; and on it alone can the faith and prayers of the pious and one's hope of eternal life safely and peacefully rely in the consciousness of God's wrath, in the anguish of repentance, in all perils, and in the agony of death.¹

In identifying the basis for Christian faith, Chytraeus has also pinpointed the lens through which we view all the divine promises, typological events, and ceremonial shadows of the Old Testament. In Christ, we have the key for interpreting all Scripture (Isa 22:22, Rev 3:7). We look backward on the elements of Old Testament faith and practice for insights into the reality of Christ, His person and work, and the gift of life in connection with Him. When we encounter anything that remains mysterious or obscure, we are at liberty to consider and study it in the confidence that even matters which are hard to understand (2 Pet 3:16)

¹ David Chytraeus, *On Sacrifice*, trans. John Warwick Montgomery (Malone: Repristination Press), 33.

or matters of differing interpretation need not obscure the fulfillment: “These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col 2:17, ESV). Chytraeus goes on to say, “Now the prime sources from which the doctrine of Christ’s sacrifice should be derived are God’s two supreme characteristics: His *justice* and His *mercy*.²

With those thoughts in mind, we can go on to consider that peculiar and abstruse rite which we find so central in the writings of Moses, at the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus: “[The high priest] shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering” (Lev 16:5, ESV). John Kleinig notes that Leviticus chapter sixteen “is indeed the central chapter of the book. This chapter stands at the heart of Leviticus, which in turn, is the central book of the Pentateuch.”³ This selection of Sacred Scripture—and the rule of worship it set forth for the people of God—is at the heart of the ancient understanding of the *priesthood* and *sacrifice* of the coming Christ, in connection with the *justice* and *mercy* of God in Christ.

The Beginning of the Gospel

St. John, recognized for his connection to the priesthood and for the great shadow that Hebraic priestcraft casts in his writings, stands out among the gospel writers also in his unique report of the preaching of John the Baptist at the inauguration of the great New Testament. It is John’s gospel that gives us the words of fulfillment that the Church has recognized from the earliest Christian centuries for their *incarnational*, *liturgical*, and *sacramental* implications: “Behold, the Lamb of God,⁴ who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, ESV).⁵

The gospels generally report John the Baptist’s fulfillment of Scripture, (Mark 1:2–3); his austerity (Matt 3:4); the sternness of his preaching (Luke 3:7–9); the meaningful locality of his appearing (Matt 3:1; John 1:28); and how he recognized the preparatory nature of his own work (Mark 1:7–8). The gospels all report how “John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4, ESV, cf. Matt 21:23, Luke 3:3).

² Chytraeus, 33.

³ John Kleinig, *Leviticus* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 335.

⁴ “The Lamb of God” connotes several different things: that Christ is innocent, that he is spotless, that he is pure, that he is sacrificed for human sin, that his death may bring about atonement, that his own atoning act is deeply connected to the Passover feast, and so on.” Oliver D. Crisp, *Approaching the Atonement: The Reconciling Work of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 24.

⁵ Compare the historic *Agnus Dei*, *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, p. 55.

As the final gospel writer, it fell uniquely to John the evangelist to report the consummation of John the Baptist's ministry, which he reports and repeats in his Gospel: 'And he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God!'" (John 1:36, ESV). The repetition of these words—both in the mouth of John and in the text of Scripture—lauds their significance.

While I was working with him on a certain Bible study project several years ago, a good friend gifted me with a paradigm-shifting difference for my understanding of Scripture. I had been used to approaching a text of Scripture with the question, "Where does this show up later?" He opened my eyes to a simple question with at least as much significance: "*Where have we seen this before?*" That question sends the inquisitor deep into the Scriptures with the promise of treasures old and new (Matt 13:52).

Bringing the question, "*Where have we seen this before?*" to the declaration of John the Baptist in St. John chapter one, I propose a connection to be made to *each of three crucial, constitutive events* for the people of God in the Old Testament. Chronologically, the first of these is the *Abrahamic Promise*. The second is the *Passover* which brings about the birth of the people of God in the world as a nation, in keeping with that promise. (This birth, so to speak, was later ratified with the blood of the first covenant, Ex. 24:8). The third event is the institution of the *Day of Atonement* which occurred at the death of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu. The *Day of Atonement* emerged in response to a crisis of desecration, yet it was intended as an ongoing institution for the people of God until the time of fulfillment, to guarantee the continuing relationship of beatitude between the Holy God and his sinful people. God will bless and sanctify His people, and receive their prayers, praise, and their priestly service for His mercy's sake, through the sacrificial rites and ceremonies of atonement.

John the Baptist's preaching encapsulates all this beautifully. He said: "Behold, the Lamb of God, [connecting Jesus to the sacrificial Paschal victim] who takes away... sin [connecting Jesus to the Scapegoat of Yom Kippur]"—namely—"the sin of the world [connecting Jesus to the fullest extent of the promise made to Abraham, for 'all the families of the earth,' Gen 12:3, ESV]" (John 1:29, ESV, compare the historic *Agnus Dei*).

Each of these three constitutive elements find their fulfillment and resolution in Christ. It is especially the third of these as it appears in history (the second reference which we overhear in John 1:29) which

concerns us here, and which leads us the question that concerns us in this paper: *How does Jesus Christ relate to the great Day of Atonement—and specifically, what is His relationship to the so-called Scapegoat and the mysterious rite that surrounds it?* How has that relationship been understood from antiquity? How is it understood among Christian expositors, and what insights might be provided by overhearing a Jewish, or a Jewish Christian, perspective? These and related questions I hope to explore in this paper. It begins with the simple thesis that location, typology, and history converge to prefigure Christ and, in some sense, *prepare for Him* and His once-for-all work of complete redemption. God willing, we will explore what is meant by these things in the pages to come.

Creation, Abrahamic Promise, and Passover as Contextual for the Day of Atonement

Before we leave this brief introduction, however, a few words about creation, and the two constitutive events for the people of God that come *prior to* the Day of Atonement are in order. First, the words of God to Adam in Eden before the fall were such that “God blessed them” (Gen 1:23, ESV). God spoke words of *blessing*. Chris Esgut asserts:

God made man for a specific purpose: to reflect His image and likeness, to be an embodiment of God’s goodness, and ultimately to enjoy communion with Him. True authenticity is embracing *our own givenness*, including the time and location where God has placed us and the gifts and limitations He has bestowed... We don’t need to create (or re-create) ourselves to find our authenticity.⁶ It is found in the One who is our Author.⁷

Mark Mattes likewise paraphrases the Catechism to show that:

Latent within the word “give”... is forensic justification. When Luther explains the First Article of the creed in the Small Catechism, he associates God’s creative work with giving. “I believe that God has *created* me together with all that exists. God has *given*

⁶ “On the search for authenticity, I become my own author when trying to determine what is authenticity or integrity for me, and thus this is the ultimate playing of God’s role. I may not worship myself, but I exercise the power to determine in what I put that Large-Catechism-First-Commandment ultimate trust.” —Robert Kolb, in private correspondence.

⁷ Christopher S. Esgut, *(Dis)ordered: Lies about Human Nature and the Truth that Sets Us Free* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2023), 26, emphasis added.

me and still preserves.” And this work of creation is tied to that of redemption: “All this is done out of pure, fatherly divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all!” That is, our creation (out of nothing) is not based on our ability to achieve merit through good works; instead, it comes entirely as a gift. Nor is it based on our worthiness.⁸

“And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Gen 1:27, ESV). The perfect life of Eden consisted in a sharing in the life of God, such that humanity lived in reflection of Divine glory back to God, *and in representation of God over His creation.*⁹ *Fruitful multiplying* and *dominion* comprise a vocational sharing in God’s creative and ordering work. “The author of Genesis describes Adam and Eve’s care for creation as a true act of grateful worship, making it a liturgical activity.”¹⁰ The relationship of God to man and man to God is grounded in *substitution* after the fall (Gen 3:15; Isa 9:6, 53:4–6, 10; *et al*)—since it is first *grace*. It also suitably derives from the *initial* relationship of God to man and man to God, with its related, prior concept of *representation*.

Through the fall into sin, “[Adam] failed in his exercise of his mediatorial position and Israel was elected as the new carrier of the promise of eternal redemption.”¹¹ “For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith” (Rom 4:13, ESV). St. Paul goes on to adduce this lesson from the age and barrenness of the holy family in Genesis chapter twelve:

In hope [Abraham] believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.”¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb.²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of

⁸ Mark C. Mattes, *Martin Luther’s Theology of Beauty: A Reappraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 130.

⁹ Such sharing in the life of God may be seen as a true and original Biblical *theosis*, which is grounded in vocation, and resides exclusively in the realm of gift.

¹⁰ Jack Kilcrease, “Creation’s Praise: A Short Liturgical Reading of Genesis 1–2 and the Book of Revelation,” *Pro Ecclesia* 21, no. 3 (2012): 316.

¹¹ Jack Kilcrease, *The Self-Donation of God: A Contemporary Lutheran Approach to Christ and His Benefits* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), 13.

God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised (Rom 4:18–21, ESV).

St. Paul explains Abraham's faith in Romans 4:17 as faith in "God... who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (ESV). Chad Bird writes: "Genesis 12 is Genesis 2 rebooted."¹² Johann Gerhard expresses the death of sin (Rom 4:17) in this way: "Adam, with all his descendants (the entire human race) is now a *seditionist* and *murderer* before God's judgment; that is, Adam not only placed himself in opposition to God his Lord, but by his transgression he also brought sin and death into the world. Therefore, he is the greatest murderer."¹³

In the rite for the Day of Atonement, "the term rendered 'rebellion' or 'transgression... is the term that characterizes the worst possible sin: open and wanton defiance of YHWH."¹⁴ Any rite that deals with this *death* and the *non-existence* (the absence, or lack) of righteousness must do so in terms of rebellion against the Creator in the extreme.

Passover, then, as already hinted at above, is not merely a piece of drama accidental to salvation history. It is indeed foundational and constitutive for the people of God, and was divinely intended never to be forgotten:

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done...

[He] redeemed them from the foe, when he performed his signs in Egypt and his marvels in the fields of Zoan. He turned their rivers to blood, so that they could not drink of their streams. He sent among them swarms of flies, which devoured them, and frogs, which destroyed them. He gave their crops to the destroying locust and the fruit of their labor to the locust. He destroyed their

¹² Chad Bird, *The Christ Key: Unlocking the Centrality of Christ in the Old Testament* (Irvine: 1517 Publishing, 2021), 119.

¹³ Johann Gerhard, *An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, trans. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger (Malone: Repristination Press, 1999), 216, emphasis added.

¹⁴ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004), 170.

vines with hail and their sycamores with frost. He gave over their cattle to the hail and their flocks to thunderbolts. He let loose on them his burning anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels. He made a path for his anger; he did not spare them from death but gave their lives over to the plague. He struck down every firstborn in Egypt, the firstfruits of their strength in the tents of Ham. Then he led out his people like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock (Ps 78:1–4, 42–52, ESV).

The classical enemies of our faith and salvation, spelled out in Luther's Small Catechism—the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh—take on graphic meaning and most dramatic significance when they are discovered and expounded in connection with the narrative of the Exodus: the devil is the true Pharaoh; the world is like the strange foreign land of Egypt; sin is our true bitter bondage. Not only that, but God is there to be understood and grasped by faith in terms of His condescending love and mighty deliverance: “Then the LORD said, ‘I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them’” (Exod 3:7–8a, ESV).

The themes of *representation* and *substitution* continue in the Exodus narrative in the appointment of the Paschal victim to stand in place of the firstborn. The Paschal Lamb's blood and flesh separated in death provided a baptismal warrant for escape on the doorposts and lintels of the houses, and nourishment for the journey to freedom and new life. We observe that that Law, added because of transgressions (Gal 3:19) was given at Sinai, where the priestly people of God trembled and pleaded for Moses to mediate for them. “Mediators were regularly appointed by YHWH when Israel failed in a significant way to be the true humanity.”¹⁵ The peoples' plea: “*You speak to us*,” is met with divine approval (Deut 18:17). Their need finds immediate answer in Moses, and in the still-somewhat dim future, *a prophet like Moses* who will be faithful in all God's house, and who knows God face-to-face. In the meantime, “the occasion of the election of the Levites as the priestly caste occurs during Moses' reestablishment of order after Israel's apostasy to the golden calf. The Levites (Moses's own tribe) rally to support him and zealously exact vengeance on those who have fallen away from YHWH.”¹⁶ As to Hahn's theory discussed in the footnote that attends

¹⁵ Kilcrease, *The Self-Donation of God*, 14.

¹⁶ Kilcrease, *The Self-Donation of God*, 24.

this quote, to wit, that the firstborn were the initial priests to the Lord prior to the incident with the Golden calf (a possible and intriguing theory, albeit beyond the scope of this paper) let us observe just these few assured things:

- It was the *Firstborn* that was/were consigned to death at the Passover.
- All those marked with the blood of the *Paschal Victim* were delivered.
- All those who were delivered were *set apart* for service to the Lord.

The juxtaposition of the themes: *Firstborn*, *Substitution*, *Death*, and *Service*, are striking. In light of the fulfillment, it is not to much to say that at the Exodus it is *God's Firstborn* who is both consigned to death, and guaranteed for enduring priestly service before God through His own blood. The Levites are given as placeholders for the *Firstborn* until the fullness of time: "You shall not delay to offer from the fullness of your harvest and from the outflow of your presses. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me" (Exod 22:29, ESV). "And you shall take the Levites for me—I am the LORD—instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the cattle of the people of Israel" (Num 3:41, ESV). So we have substitution layers deep: the Levites, for the firstborn, for the Lamb, for *the Firstborn*.

However these things may be interpreted, we find a striking unity in the most significant feasts and observations in Israel, and hidden in them, the most consistent, purposeful commentary on the Patriarchal promises.

Mediation and Sacrifice, so central to the establishment of the relationship between God and His people, are given for the maintenance of the relationship through the daily mediatorial acts and sacrifices, as well as through the annual reminder of sins (Hebrews 10:3). "And it shall be a statute to you forever that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. 30 For on this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the LORD from all your sins" (Lev 16:29–30).

Sources

Source materials for this project include rabbinical sources found in *Encyclopedia Judaica* and referenced from the Babylonian Talmud. Notable for his work in ancient near-eastern religions, we consult Jacob

Milgrom. René Girard and Marilyn McCord Adams are included for respective sociological understandings of the Christian doctrine of the atonement. For more recent sociological insights, we consult Charles Taylor. The classic commentary on Holy Scripture by Keil and Delitzsch is referenced for its Hebraic insights.

Notable contemporary Lutheran Christian theologians and authors are represented: Chad Bird, Daniel J. Brege, Jack D. Kilcrease, John W. Kleinig, Victor Pfitzner, and Daniel and Sarah Habben. Paul Kretzmann also provides an accessible popular commentary, with a nod to its centennial anniversary. We consult Jim Bishop's classic *The Day Christ Died*.

The most significant extra-Biblical source for this paper is Alfred Edersheim, whose notable works include *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, and (in evidence in this paper), *The Temple*. Edersheim was born to Jewish parents in Vienna, 1825. He converted to Christianity in his youth and studied theology at Edinburgh and Berlin. He was regarded already in his lifetime as an authority on Second Temple Judaism, and its continuance in the early Christian era.

Finally, we make a brief appeal to the principle of the *Analogy of Faith*, so named from Romans 12:6. We approach our topic with a careful Christian eye, convinced of two things: One, that these things in their institution were seen through glass darkly (and perhaps to some degree still are today); Two, that their intended meaning is finally and fully comprehended in Christ. This paper, then, is not intended to be a ground-breaking, yeoman's work. It is rather an interested inquiry into the mysteries of faith from of old, with an eye looking to find Christ, as it is written of Him and in His own words (John 5:39; Luke 24:46–4).

On the Rite

Writing from a sociological perspective, Charles Taylor asserts:

Sacred killing recurs because it offers a form of purification. The stronger we feel that we are somehow involved in evil, for instance, the more we feel overwhelmed by the chaos and evil of the world... the more tempting it is to reach for a mode of projection, in which the evil is concentrated outside of us, in a contrast case. This makes us the pure, and even more strikingly so if we are fighting manfully against the carriers of impurity and disorder. Moreover, since God is the source of purity, in so fighting, we identify with him; we are

on his side. This is the issue of what we might call the “scapegoat mechanism.”¹⁷

Taylor here demonstrates a great deal of thoughtfulness and depth. Approaching the Day of Atonement from outside the Jewish or Christian tradition, (or perhaps searching for an accounting for it outside of divine revelation), one might end up with such an opinion. Yet, there is objective tension that remains unresolved in such a take: We are met with the *particularities* and *peculiarities* of the rites and rituals associated with the Day of Atonement in ancient Israel. Besides this, far from the *manful fighter against evil* that Taylor mentions (and who wouldn’t gladly assume that role, if we could?) the entire rite makes of the participant—a *sinner* in need of *atonement*. That we find at the very heart of the Old Testament faith and practice.

Marilyn McCord Adams reminds us of that fact: “*Preeminent* among Israel’s purification sacrifices are the rites mandated for the Day of Atonement (*Leviticus 16*), which are supposed to cover all of Israel’s sins—corporate and individual, priestly or lay royal or common, willing as well as unwilling.”¹⁸

John Kleinig references St. Paul’s letter to Romans for its connection between the Day of Atonement, and Christ. Kleinig asserts the Day of Atonement is used by St. Paul “...to describe Jesus’ death. God appointed Jesus as the new ‘mercy seat,’ the place of atonement and God’s gracious presence.”¹⁹ The sinful offenses of the people pierce the veil and offend against the honor of God. God in His mercy from of old provided atonement, and in the fullness of time accomplished its perfect fulfillment and antitype, when He gave us His Son.

A Play in Three Acts: Act One, Leviticus 16:1–9

The Habbens conceive of the Day of Atonement as if it were a play in three acts: Leviticus 16:1–9 comprises the first act. It consists in the cleansing of the temple with the atoning blood of the sin offerings. A second act is comprehended in Leviticus 16:10–22, in which sin is removed through the ritual of the scapegoat. The third act is found at Leviticus 16:23–25, wherein Israel by way of the burnt offering is

¹⁷ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 686.

¹⁸ Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 225.

¹⁹ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 348.

rededicated to God.²⁰ We are concerned here mainly with the first two, because of their application in the letter to Hebrews, and because of the point of focus for this paper. Dr. Kleinig agrees regarding the significance of these first two parts: “The ritual for the Day of Atonement... purged the sanctuary from the classes of impurity mentioned in (Leviticus) chapters 11–15.”²¹ Not only is this so, but also the need of the burdened conscience is answered: “The ritual for the Day of Atonement cleansed the people from all the sins for which the normal sacrifices prescribed in chapters 1–7 did not atone.”²²

Much like the first Gospel Promise of Genesis was preceded by the tragic fall into sin, the Promise associated of the Day of Atonement was preceded by tragedy as well. As the Biblical report goes, the Lord established the priesthood among His chosen people, to minister before Him and to offer sacrifices. The first High Priest was Moses’ brother Aaron.

Aaron’s two eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, were ordained to serve as priests along with him. In Leviticus chapter 10, they got dressed in their tunics and sashes. They put fire in their censers and added incense and went to offer it. Then fire went out from the Lord and consumed them both, “their unauthorized act bringing down upon them the destroying wrath of God.”²³ They were still in their tunics when they were carried out. Scripture says: “They offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to His command.” What they offered was *common*, perhaps *profane*, in place of what’s *holy*. These events of Leviticus chapter ten veritably pass judgment on the religious impulses of all fallen humanity. Only the Word that comes from God is good enough. Only the Sacrifice that He has established is worthy and acceptable.

“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. 3 But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering” (Lev 16:2–3, ESV).

The backdrop for the Day of Atonement was the institution of the Aaronic priesthood, and the early tragedy that resulted from taking it lightly. “The death of Nadab and Abihu for approaching the Lord in

²⁰ Cf. Daniel and Sarah Habben, *The Bloodstained Path to God* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2012), 23.

²¹ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 335.

²² Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 335.

²³ Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: The Old Testament*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1923), 213.

the wrong way with unauthorized fire in 10:1–3 results in the legislation on how Aaron is to enter the Holy Place with fire from the altar to perform the rite of atonement for the defiled sanctuary.”²⁴ While I chose to follow the Habbens in their outline for this paper, it is worthy of note that John Kleinig points out an *inclusio* as a literary feature that showcases the scapegoat ritual: “A number of devices serve to structure the ritual legislation in 16:3–28. The resumptive repetition of 16:6 in 16:11a marks off the intervening section as a preparatory enactment before the performance of the main rite in 16:11–20...”²⁵ Viewing the same effect from a slightly different vantage point, this use of words (at the center of the book, at the center of the Torah) frames Leviticus 16:7–10, at the same time as it sets up 16:11–20.

As an interesting part of the ongoing observance of Yom Kippur, Edersheim reports the custom that the high priest was kept awake, hearing and expounding on the Scriptures, all night long (or he was otherwise occupied), so that he might not fall asleep.²⁶ Although this was a joyful day, it was marked with several somber instances of strange correspondence to the Gospels: “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.”²⁷

At midnight, the lot was cast for removing the ashes and preparing the altar; and to distinguish the Day of Atonement from all others, *four* instead of the usual three fires were arranged on the great altar of burnt offering... [At] dawn... the high priest put off his ordinary (layman’s) dress, bathed, put on his golden vestments, washed his hands and feet, and proceeded to perform all the principal parts of the ordinary morning service... Leviticus 16:24... shows that the *whole* of the burnt offering and the festive sin offering were brought [only] *after* the expiatory services.²⁸

“A... pattern may be seen in the ritual for the Day of Atonement. First, the high priest had to be pure before he was capable of administering the rite. In order to gain this purity, he was instructed to sacrifice a bull for himself and his household (Lev 16:6). Nevertheless, he must also be a sin bearer by placing his hands on the scapegoat and

²⁴ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 335.

²⁵ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 335–336.

²⁶ Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, up. ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 245.

²⁷ St. Matthew 26:38, ESV.

²⁸ Edersheim, 245–246.

confessing the sins of Israel over the animal (vv.20–22). In this the high priest unites both holiness and sin in his person.”²⁹

As the writer to the Hebrews teaches:

The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office... [having] need to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people... And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was... [The] first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness... A tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold... (Heb 7:23, 27; 5:4; 9:1–4, ESV).³⁰

“[Aaron, or, the High Priest] shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on” (Lev 16:4, ESV).

The high priest’s dress for the occasion was described in 16:4 and 16:30 as ‘the sacred vestments,’ and ‘sacred linen vestments.’ This dress contrasts sharply with the ornate robes and features of the attire that are ordinarily prescribed for the Israelite high priest. There is perhaps here a marked prefiguration of *humiliation*, and at the same time, paradoxically, an image of *holiness*, with the high priest “bearing in his official capacity the emblem of that perfect purity which was sought by the expiations of that day.”³¹ We might assert a dual function: the holiness was both sought, and typified.

“And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering” (Lev 16:5).

John Kleinig demonstrates that while Aaron was the central figure, playing the “main role” in the ritual for the Day, the people also played an

²⁹ Kilcrease, *The Self-Donation of God*, 36.

³⁰ Hebrews 7:23, 27; 5:4; 9:1–4, ESV. An interesting feature in the Epistle to the Hebrews is that the Writer places the Altar of Incense *beyond the curtain*, when in fact it stood outside the veil. It is as if the burning of incense is in the very presence of God, and perhaps serves to show the approach of the prayers of God’s people to His throne.

³¹ Edersheim, 243; Cf. Kleinig, *Leviticus*: “The vestments of the high priest starkly portrayed his equivocal status as the great mediator between the holy God of Israel and his sinful people,” 339.

important role. Yes, the high priest atoned, and he alone. Representatives of the congregation provided the goats for the sin offering and the ram for the burnt offering. “Whether they were present or not, they, along with all the foreigners who lived with them, participated in the ritual by fasting and abstaining from all kinds of work (16:29–31). The ritual for the day was therefore so inclusive that it was the only ritual occasion, apart from the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exod 12:19), which automatically included all resident aliens in its observance.”³² This *inclusive-ness* connects again to Genesis 12:3.

*“Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. Then he shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel.”*³³

Edersheim reports:

In the eastern part of the Court of Priests, that is, close to the worshippers, and on the north side of it, stood an urn, called *Calpi*, in which were two lots of the same shape, size and material—in the second temple they were of gold. The one bearing the inscription “la-[YHWH]”... the other “la-Azazel...” These two goats had been placed with their backs to the people and their faces toward the sanctuary (westwards). The high-priest now faced the people... he shook the urn, thrust his two hands into it, and at the same time drew the two lots, laying one on the head of each goat... the two goats must be altogether alike in look, size and value... so earnestly was it sought to carry out the idea that these two formed parts of *one and the same sacrifice.*³⁴

“And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering¹⁰ The goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.” (Lev 16:9–10, ESV). In Kretzmann’s estimation, both he-goats bore people’s sins, “the one through the act of sacrifice, the other by complete removal into the wilderness.”³⁵

³² Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 338.

³³ Leviticus 16:6–8, ESV.

³⁴ Edersheim, 248, emphasis added.

³⁵ Kretzmann, 218.

Act Two, Leviticus 16:10–22

“Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. 12 And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil 13 and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die” (Lev 16:11–13, ESV).

On the Great Day of Atonement, the High Priest was to enter three times into the Most Holy Place: once to burn incense, a second time with the blood of the bullock, and finally a third time, with the blood of the goat *for the LORD*.³⁶

Victor Pfitzner, in his commentary on Hebrews, writes: “On the Day of Atonement the high priest sacrificed an animal, then sprinkled the blood on and in front of the mercy seat to ‘atone for’ the sins of the people (Lev. 16:11–16). *The exalted High Priest, [Christ] through the application of His blood, provides continual cleansing from sin, and can do so because he lives forever.* The high priestly title is adduced... to introduce the two features of his present work: *cleansing from sin*, and *intercession for sinners*.³⁷

The Mercy Seat was the place of God’s presence. No one was permitted to enter in the Most Holy Place except the High Priest, and he only once a year, always protected by a cloud, and never without blood. Milgrom finds agreement between the Pharisees and Sadducees about the elements of the *cloud* and the *incense*. The cloud, he says, both manifests God’s presence and covers the Ark. The incense by way of contrast, was to set God’s wrath aside against the high priest for presumptuously entering into God’s presence.³⁸

Kretzmann writes, “The cloud of incense protected the high priest, a sinful human being as he was, from the angry glance of the holy God.”³⁹ This much is true: entry into the presence of God was always to be made in holy fear. The rite and observances highlight the fact the high priest is mortal, sinful, and temporary, and is holding place for Someone else. As Kretzmann also writes, “Christ is the true High Priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the

³⁶ Cf. Edersheim, 325.

³⁷ Victor C. Pfitzner, *Hebrews* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 69, emphases added.

³⁸ Cf. Milgrom, 170.

³⁹ Kretzmann, 214.

heavens, Heb 7:26. By His own blood He entered in once into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption for us, Heb 9:12.”⁴⁰

This is glimpsed in shadow: *“And he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat on the east side, and in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. ¹⁵ Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.”* (Lev 16:14–15, ESV). Keil and Delitzsch’s commentary recognizes the connection between the entrance with blood and the priestly sacrificial work of the coming Messiah: “The bringing in of the blood of atonement into the most holy place had a prophetic signification, and was a predictive sign that the curtain, which separated Israel from God, would one day be removed, and that with the entrance of the full and eternal atonement free access would be opened to the throne of the Lord.”⁴¹

Edersheim describes the scene thusly:

While the incense was offering in the Most Holy Place, the people withdrew from proximity to it, and worshipped in silence. At last the people saw the high-priest emerging from the sanctuary, and they knew that the service had been accepted. Rapidly he took from the attendant, who had kept it stirring, the blood of the bullock. Once more he entered into the holy place, and sprinkled with his finger once upwards, towards...the mercy-seat... and seven times downwards, counting as he did so... to prevent any mistake.⁴²

Once upward, seven downwards—hence, altogether, *eight*.

By... expiatory sprinklings the high-priest... cleansed *the sanctuary* in all its parts for the defilement of the priesthood and all its worshippers. The Most Holy Place, the veil, the Holy Place the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering were now clean alike, so far as the priesthood and as the people were concerned; *and in their relationship to the sanctuary* both priests and worshippers were atoned for.⁴³

⁴⁰ Kretzmann, 214.

⁴¹ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 “The Penateuch,” trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 402.

⁴² Edersheim, 251.

⁴³ Edersheim, 252–253, emphasis added.

“And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat” (Lev 16:20, ESV).

So now the High Priest turns to dealing with the peoples’ burden of a bad conscience, sin and guilt—to be removed from the people by means of a rite which Edersheim calls “the most mysterious and the most significant of all... The scapegoat, with the scarlet tongue, talking of the guilt it was to bear, had stood looking eastwards, confronting the people, and waiting for the terrible load which it was to carry away ‘unto a land not inhabited...’”⁴⁴

“The priest, when he has placed his hand on the goat’s head, confesses all the sins of the children of Israel and calls them down on the head of the victim.”⁴⁵ Edersheim describes the rite:

“Laying both his hands on the head of the goat, the high-priest now confessed and pleaded: ‘Ah, [LORD] they have committed iniquity; they have transgressed; they have sinned—Thy people, the house of Israel. O then [LORD]! Cover over... I entreat Thee, upon their iniquities, their transgressions, and their sins, which they have wickedly committed, transgressed, and sinned before Thee—Thy people, the house of Israel. As it is written in the law of Moses, Thy servant...’”⁴⁶

The congregation lay prostrate to worship at the name of the [LORD]. The high priest turned his face toward the people as he spoke the last words, a veritable absolution: “Ye shall be cleansed!”⁴⁷ At that point, the goat was led out through Solomon’s porch, and according to tradition, as Edersheim reports it,⁴⁸ taken through the Eastern gate, which opened up toward the Mount of Olives. The goat was taken down across the Kedron Valley, over the brook, and out over the Mount of Olives to be sent into the wilderness. That’s it. Scripture prescribes nothing further.

Girard writes, “Any community that has fallen prey to violence or has been stricken by some overwhelming catastrophe hurls itself blindly into the search for a scapegoat.”⁴⁹ Even a cursory consideration of the

⁴⁴ Edersheim, 253. Compare John 19:5.

⁴⁵ Chytraeus, 63.

⁴⁶ Edersheim, 254.

⁴⁷ Edersheim, 254.

⁴⁸ Edersheim, 254. Note, Edersheim adds: “Tradition enjoins that he shall be a stranger, a non-Israelite, as if to make still more striking the type of Him who was delivered over by Israel to the Gentiles.”

⁴⁹ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), 79.

details of the Biblical Scapegoat in Leviticus 16 should prove to any fair-minded inquirer: that shoe doesn't fit here. There is too much peculiarity, and too little occasion for retributive, memetic violence in the rubrics for the rite. "Although the highest of sin-offerings, it was neither sacrificed nor its blood sprinkled in the temple."⁵⁰ In a twist of irony, the scapegoat gets short shrift.⁵¹ Even though it is most mysterious, and even though it lies at the heart of the most central and sacred rites of the Old Testament, it is little noted, seldom mentioned, and quickly forgotten. I propose that it is worthwhile to ponder the mystery and profound *pregnancy* of it, perhaps using the good Lutheran question: *What does this mean?*

On the Pertinent Locations

Before considering the possibilities—the *what*—it seems it would be worthwhile in this connection to consider the *where*. From the ELS Synod Convention Essay, 2023:

Location is one of the blessings and benefits of this bodily life. Locations take on the significance of events that transpire there. With location come the gifts of *orientation* and *directionality*. This helps us. We can conceptualize heaven above us, and hell below. We understand impenitence and unbelief as *turning away* from the living God. Reverence and faith also find bodily expression: *O Come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker.* Repentance and welcome into His kingdom are described in terms of locality: "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest," and reversal of the Expulsion from Paradise: "Whosoever comes to me I will never cast out." We ourselves become the dwelling place of God: "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."⁵²

The Love of God—that is what brought about the establishment of a Holy Place for His name, among His people, for Him to dwell with them and bless them. As for the location of that Holy Place, there is a rich history to that setting. Moriah is the Mountain where Abraham

⁵⁰ Girard, 255.

⁵¹ Chad Bird in his work *the Christ Key* surprisingly makes no mention of the Scapegoat.

⁵² A.J. Hamilton, "We are Fearfully and Wonderfully Made" (Synod Report [of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod], 2023), 66.

once offered up Isaac his beloved, one-and-only-son, and figuratively speaking, received him back from death (Heb 11:19). Many years later, “One day, lifting up his eyes to the hills of Moriah... David saw an avenging angel with sword turned toward Jerusalem. He begged forgiveness for sin, bought Ornan’s rocky threshing floor in the hill of Moriah, and built an altar on the rock wherewith to offer sacrifice to God. It was David’s son Solomon who built the temple on Ornan’s rock.”⁵³ Other stories and promises may be associated with this location—but for now, let it suffice to recognize the familiar themes in these stories: Death and Resurrection; Mediation and Intercession; Sacrifice and Divine Favor.

Beyond the Holy Place was the Holiest of All, which housed the Ark of the Covenant of old. Better commentary cannot be given than that of the writer to the Hebrews:

These preparations (the Tent, the Temple with its furnishings) having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, 7 but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the *unintentional* sins of the people. 8 By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing 9 (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper, 10 but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation (Heb 9:6–10, ESV).

Outside the gate, through which the Scapegoat was led, was the Kedron Valley. A brook ran through it, over which there was in time past a stone bridge. That Valley was the destination of the abominations that defiled the Temple and seduced the people into idolatry. The rubble of the idols, Asherah poles and pagan altars was all discarded there (2 Kgs 23:4, 6, 12). Edersheim adds, with regard to the Temple services: “According to the different sacrifices, the blood was differently applied, and in different places. In all burnt-, trespass-, and peace-offerings the blood was thrown directly out of the vessel or vessels in which it had been caught, the priest going first to one corner of the altar and then the other, and throwing it on in the form of the Greek letter [gamma]...

⁵³ Jim Bishop, *The Day Christ Died*, reprint (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1957), 33.

Any blood left after these two ‘gifts,’ as they were called... was poured out at the base of the altar, whence it flowed *into the Kedron.*⁵⁴

The path of the Scapegoat took it through that valley, over the brook that tinged pink with the blood of the sacrifices, up over the Mount of Olives. This is the path that David took with tears during the rebellion of Absalom, his son. The significance of that path for our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is immediately apparent, *in the night in which He was betrayed.*

The Wilderness—the haunt of evil spirits (Luke 11:24) is the indication of the frustration of God’s original plan. “For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is God!), who formed the earth and made it—he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!” (Isa 45:18, ESV). “Adam and Eve, with their descendants, were gradually to Edomize the world, to expand the sanctuary of God until it eventually covered the entire earth.”⁵⁵

Now Christ, still dripping from His baptism, was driven into *the wilderness* to be tempted by the devil (Matt 4:1). His forty days *recapitulate* the forty years of wanderings of the people of Israel, and He brings holy innocence to the trackless wasteland, as our All-Israel-reduced-to-One.

We may also mention the Ash Heap as a vital location, since it served a typological purpose as well, which only becomes clear through the writer to the Hebrews, with his associations to Christ and his urgent appeal to *escape*. “For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured” (Heb 13:11–13).

In light of all these things, we take a moment to ponder the most oft-cited Psalm in the New Testament, Psalm 110. A Psalm of David. The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool” (Ps 110:1, ESV). As it says in another place, who may ascend to the hill of the Lord? No one was permitted to enter into God’s presence, not even in the earthly shadow of the heavenly realities—except the High Priest, once a year, hidden behind a cloud, never without blood, and never did he sit down. But this Lord enters in, as He is also pictured in Daniel, into the Presence of the Ancient of

⁵⁴ Edersheim, 83, emphasis added.

⁵⁵ Bird, *Christ Key*, 117–118.

Days.⁵⁶ He and He alone is seated at the Right Hand of God. Kingship and dominion are His:

“The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter. Rule in the midst of your enemies! 3 Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, in holy garments; from the womb of the morning, the dew of your youth will be yours” (Ps 110:2–3, ESV). And eternal Priesthood:

“The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4, ESV). The priesthood of Melchizedek—greater than that of Aaron—is the mediation of a *King of Righteousness* who is designated *King of Peace* (or Salem). It is outside the scope of this paper to consider all that the *Order of Melchizedek* might mean, and how many priests are in such an order after all. There are perhaps two. *There Is At Least One.*

“The Lord is at your right hand; he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath. 6 He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses; he will shatter chiefs over the wide earth” (Ps 110:5–6, ESV). In the Psalm we hear the distant future thundering of John the Baptist: “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Matt 3:12, ESV).

But like John himself perhaps took offense at Jesus’ patient longsuffering—although it was more likely his disciples who were unwilling to draw near to Him, Luke 7:20—the Psalm resolves in a strange and obscure manner.

“He will drink from the brook by the way; therefore he will lift up his head” (Ps 110:7, ESV). Christ in the gospels calls His sufferings both a *baptism* He was to undergo, Luke 12:50, and a *cup* set before Him to drink. The Psalm has Him drinking from the brook by the way—bitter with the abominations of the people he came to save, rancid with their sins, running pink with the blood of their preparatory sacrifices when only His body and blood parted in death can save. *Therefore he will lift up his head.* In His Words, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” (John 10:17–18, ESV). Somehow, this is what the Scapegoat rite is really all about.

⁵⁶ Dan 7:9.

On the Meaning of *Azazel*

Recall that we are looking for an interpretation of the Scapegoat rite that is at once textual, typological, and in some sense *anticipatory*—such that the observer may gather the intended meaning: this both pictures and prepares for the substance but does not contain the fullness of it. It is a promise, not yet the Reality. That suggests the question: is the rite purely symbolic, or does something *actually happen* with sins? And if something does happen, then what is it?

According to *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, “The goat which was dispatched to Azazel was *not a sacrifice* since it was not slaughtered. From the actual verses themselves it is not even certain whether the goat was killed; thus it seems that the two goats can be compared to the two birds used in the purification ritual of the leper. Just as there one of the birds is set free to fly over the field (Lev 14:4–7), so here too the goat of Azazel was sent into the wilderness. The goat was dispatched in order to carry the sins of Israel into the wilderness, i.e., to cleanse the people of their sins. This is also the reason why the ritual took place on the Day of Atonement.”⁵⁷ This view, that the scapegoat is *not a sacrifice*, is to be rejected. Nevertheless, Ahituv’s idea that the goat was literally dispatched *to carry sins away*—that is the real sense of the pertinent passages. Moshe David Herr agrees:

According to the Mishnah: “All the goats make atonement for the impurity of the Temple and its sancta.... For impurity that befalls the Temple and its sancta through wantonness, atonement is made by the goat whose blood is sprinkled within [the shrine, or Holy of Holies] and by the Day of Atonement; for all other transgressions specified in the Torah – minor or grave, wanton or inadvertent, conscious or unconscious, of commission or omission ... the scapegoat makes atonement. The atonement is alike for Israelites, priests, or the anointed [high] priest.”⁵⁸

Several theories on the designation *Azazel* (and what function it serves) have been suggested. John Kleinig names four main interpretations for *Azazel*.⁵⁹ First, *Azazel* may literally mean “a departing goat.”

⁵⁷ Shmuel Ahituv, “Azazel,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Sklnik, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 763.

⁵⁸ Moshe David Herr and S. David Sperling, “Day of Atonement,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Sklnik, 2nd ed., vol. 5 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 492.

⁵⁹ Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 330.

Second, some have suggested that it refers to a destination—a rocky precipice—in the wilderness. A third interpretation is that it is a proper name for a demon that inhabits the wilderness. A fourth interpretation has it refer to “a divine avenger.”

Edersheim asserts: “Both the interpretation which makes it a designation of the goat itself (as ‘scape goat’ in our Authorized Version), and that which would refer it to a certain locality in the wilderness, [is] on many grounds, wholly untenable.”⁶⁰ This much seems right: the *lamed* guarantees a designation for a *personal being*, to correspond to the goat-for-YHWH. Likewise, the *scapegoat* is properly the *goat-for-someone*.

So perhaps Azazel refers to a demon of the wilderness. Perhaps it refers to the devil himself. John Kleinig takes that position: “The scapegoat took over from the high priest and ‘bore all their iniquities’ away from God’s presence in the sanctuary (16:22) to the desert, the place of the demonic Azazel.”⁶¹ To his great credit, however Kleinig also notes that “in the OT, *except for the scapegoat* (Lev 16:22), the sacrificial victims do not ‘bear’ the sins and iniquities of the people who present them to God. That is done by the priests in their mediatory role as the representatives of the people.”⁶²

From *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Herr opines likewise regarding the identity of Azazel, in a deep dive into Jewish legend and para-Scriptural myth:

In the retelling of the story of the sons of God and daughters of men (Gen. 6:1–4) in the First Book of Enoch, Azazel (or Azael) is one of the leaders of the angels who desired the daughters of men (6:4), and it was he who taught human beings how to manufacture weapons and ornaments (8:1–2). The identification of this Azazel with the biblical Azazel is clear from the continuation of the story, as the angel Raphael is commanded to “bind the hands and feet of Azazel and cast him into the darkness. Make an opening to the wilderness which is in Dudael and cast him there. Put upon him hard sharp rocks” (10:4–5). Dudael is the Bet Hadudo (or Bet Harudo) which is mentioned in the Mishnah (Yoma 6:8) and the association is certainly with the cliff from which the goat was cast. The remnant of a *pesher* (commentary) on Azazel and the angels found in Cave 4 at Qumran resembles the account in the Book of

⁶⁰ Edersheim, 258.

⁶¹ Kleinig, 347.

⁶² Kleinig, *Hebrews* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 463, emphasis added.

Enoch. Although the remnant is deficient, it is possible to learn from it that the *pesher* is dealing with Azazel and the angels who lusted after the daughters of men so that they might bear them strong men, and that Azazel taught human beings how to deal wickedly.⁶³

Habben also writes about the cliff that Herr mentions: “The sins of the Israelites are transferred to [the] goat, which is led away into the desert and, according to Jewish tradition, thrown backward off a cliff so that there is no danger of their sins somehow returning to the camp.”⁶⁴ On the other hand, perhaps it is understood that these sins deserve death—but the death that is truly necessary is not yet understood! Edersheim weighs in on this development also: “The later Jewish practice of pushing the goat over a rocky precipice was undoubtedly an innovation, in no wise sanctioned by the Law of Moses, and not even introduced at the time the Septuagint translation was made, as its rendering of Leviticus 16:26 shows.”⁶⁵

Overall, the view that Azazel refers to some demonic persona seems to flirt with an exclusive *Christus Victor* motif relative to the doctrine of the Atonement. Gustaf Aulén asserts:

The most common view is that since the Fall the devil possesses an incontestable right over fallen man, and that therefore a regular and orderly settlement is necessary; but sometimes this view is traversed by another, which regards the devil as a usurper, and therefore as possessing no sort of right over men. Both forms of [the] teaching can, however speak of the devil as having been deceived by God or by Christ; this idea enjoyed great popularity (in antiquity), and seems to have met with little serious criticism.⁶⁶

We apply Gustaf Aulén’s words to the idea that Azazel refers to Satan: “This is the very favourite (sic) image of the Ransom. The price of the life (finally of) Christ, paid as ransom for men, is commonly regarded as paid to the devil, or to death; and this is the natural suggestion of the image.”⁶⁷ That image we will have to dismiss as strange, certainly to the Analogy of Faith.

⁶³ Herr, 764.

⁶⁴ Habben, 23.

⁶⁵ Edersheim, 259.

⁶⁶ Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1931), 48.

⁶⁷ Aulén, 49.

Among Lutheran commentators, I was eager to overhear Gerhard's interpretation:

God lays all this sin on Christ, who is made into sin and condemned to death. For the Law finds lying upon Him the sin of the whole world. That is why it condemns Him to death, but Adam and his descendants, as many among them who hold fast to this true faith, are set free. And thus is fulfilled what is pre-figured in Leviticus 16, where God commands that **the high priest should take two billy-goats and place them before the door of the hut [tent] and cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the live billy-goat. And the billy-goat over which the lot of exemption falls he should present alive to the Lord so that He appeases him and sends the exempted billy-goat into the wilderness.** This [type] is here fulfilled by Christ. He, as the true Lamb of God allows the sin of the world to be laid upon Him, and permits Himself to be condemned to death, so that He may offer Himself to His heavenly Father and so that we, on the other hand, may go forth exempted.⁶⁸

Gerhard's interpretations are magnificent as a rule, even when he strays a bit into allegory. Here, however, he apparently misses that sin is *actually imputed* to the scapegoat. It is not we who go forth—the goat does. And it is not the goat that is set free, we are.

Chad Bird in his devotional *Unveiling Mercy* interestingly sees a connection between the scapegoat and the descent into hell: "When Jesus, after his death, descended into hell, he was parading before the enemy in a victory march that beat the drum of forgiveness. After the final Yom Kippur of Calvary, Satan had no claim on us. It is finished."⁶⁹ That sounds a joyful note and captures the mood of the day, which was "marked by feasting, merriment, and the dancing of maidens in the vineyards."⁷⁰

At length, however, Alfred Edersheim has a different take which is at least worthy of our consideration. He asserts:

⁶⁸ Gerhard, 216. The editor provides this footnote: "Lev 16:7–10 is a difficult passage. Cf. alternate translations in the NIV and AAT. Note also the *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* (CPH, 1979), 96, in which the goat released into the wilderness is cited as the one vicariously bearing the iniquities of the people."

⁶⁹ Bird, *Unveiling Mercy: 365 Daily Devotions Based on Insights from Old Testament Hebrew* (Irvine: 1517 Publishing, 2020), 112.

⁷⁰ Milgrom, 163.

It is destructive of one and all of the received interpretations, that the sins of the people were confessed not on the goat which was killed, but on the one that which was “let go in the wilderness,” and that it was this goat—not the other—which ‘bore upon him all the iniquities of the people. So far as the conscience was concerned, this goat was the real and only sin offering “for the iniquities of the children of Israel and all their transgressions in all their sins, for upon it the high priest laid the sins of the people,” after he had by the blood of the bullock and of the other goat “made an end of reconciling the Holy Place, and the Tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar” (Lev 16:20).⁷¹

Again, we refer to Paul Kretzmann: “Although the ritual dealt with the two young goats in an entirely different manner, yet they both together constituted a *single sin-offering*.⁷² It is at least curious to find a *solitary offering*—a unity?—which is yet designated for *two distinct persons*, as if the goat “la-YHWH” were “to cleanse the House” for the Father and the goat “la-Azazel” were to set aside and keep in holding, a burden intended for the Son.

Kretzmann has another surprising comment on this mystery: “Azazel, as the Hebrew has it, [is] for the ‘Remover of sin.’⁷³ We are reminded of the paradox that *set apart for God* may mean consigned to wrath... or set apart for God’s service; or one or the other; or both!

Synthesis and Conclusion

Edersheim concludes his case: “The only meaning of which [all] this really seems capable, is that though confessed guilt was removed from the people to the head of the goat, as the symbolical substitute, yet as the goat was not killed, only sent away ‘into a land not inhabited,’ so, under the Old Covenant, sin was not really blotted out, only put away from the people, and put aside till Christ came, not only to take upon Himself the burden of transgression, but to ‘*blot it out and purge it away.*’⁷⁴

In such a view, the true High Priest is Jesus. The true Goat for YHWH, whose blood cleanses all things for service to the Father, is Jesus—as He said: “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev 21:5, ESV). The true Scapegoat, the Sin-Bearer is Jesus... yet also the One

⁷¹ Edersheim, 225–226.

⁷² Kretzmann, 213.

⁷³ Kretzmann, 213.

⁷⁴ Edersheim, 256.

the scapegoats served, through the ages, by holding His place, and bearing His appointed burden out to Him. LSQ

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Reflections on the Context and Character of Martin Luther's *Formula Missae*

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IT IS FITTING FOR US AS LUTHERANS, IN THE YEAR 2023, to commemorate Martin Luther's *Formula Missae*, titled fully (in English translation) "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," published 500 years ago, in 1523. In this essay I will not seek to present to you a broad and general historical and theological introduction to this first significant foray of the great Reformer into the field of *liturgical* reform. Such studies have been published by many scholars before me, more thoroughly and with greater acumen than what I would be able to produce. But as a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in twenty-first century America, I will offer what I hope are some timely reflections on Luther's liturgical proposals of five centuries ago, on when and why he made them, and on what significance they may have for us. And I will also explore some things that are of particular interest to me, regarding the significance of the *Formula Missae* in the larger context of Christian liturgical history.

We are living and working today within a world of ideas that is marked by much ignorance of, and even hostility to, the liturgical theology and inherited liturgical culture of Confessional Lutheranism. This ignorance and this hostility can be seen not only outside our church, among non-Lutheran secularists and sectarians, but also—and most troublingly—on the inside, among many Lutherans who, it would seem, do not know how much they do not know about the history and purpose of Lutheran liturgical worship. Lutherans in our time are absorbing ideas that have emerged and grown either in a hothouse of enthusiast liturgical iconoclasm, or in a hothouse of romantic liturgical

antiquarianism, without enough consideration of what they are actually importing into our church when they import elements from these foreign seed beds; and without enough reflection on what they are losing when they make room for these innovations by casting aside tried and true elements of our Lutheran liturgical patrimony.

Let us recall together John F. Kennedy's paraphrase of G. K. Chesterton: "Don't ever take a fence down until you know the reason why it was put up." And as we now deliberately set out to see what we might be able to learn from Luther in the area of worship and liturgy, let us also together consider the astute observations and sage counsel of Norman A. Madson:

May it not be that there has been too little study of Martin Luther in our seminaries of late, too little searching of that monument to the Christian faith, the Book of Concord? ... Yes, we hear ever so often, even within our Synodical Conference: "Let us forget the fathers, and get back to Scripture." Again that may sound very pious and praiseworthy. But what if Scripture, to which they appeal, has something to say about those fathers who have spoken unto us the word of God? Can we then do as we please about what they have spoken? Not unless we want to violate this injunction of the Word itself. And this is what Holy Writ enjoins upon us all: "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." Heb. 13, 7. ... Let us continue to ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein [Jer. 6, 16].¹

Non-Lutherans often think that Luther's many writings and opinions exercise more influence among Lutherans than they actually do, and are invested with more authority in the Lutheran Church than they actually have. It probably would have been better if our church as a whole had identified itself in the way that the Lutherans in eastern Europe and in the Slavic world have historically identified themselves: as the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, and not as the Evangelical Lutheran Church. But, while Luther can be and often is criticized for some of his opinions—especially his social and political opinions—his usually-sound biblical exegesis, and his usually-sound

¹ Norman A. Madson, "The Crying Need of our Beloved Conference" (sermon preached at the 75th Anniversary gathering of the Synodical Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, October 10, 1948), in *Preaching to Preachers* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1952), 203.

pastoral applications, are generally seen among us as worthy of acceptance and emulation. While Luther was certainly fallible and capable of failing, Lutherans tend to conclude, when they compare his theological writings to God's Word, that he usually did not fail in grasping the proper sense and meaning of things.

So, for this reason Luther is described by the Formula of Concord as "the foremost teacher of the Augsburg Confession."² Elsewhere in the Formula, we are introduced to a version of sacred historiography and eschatology according to which "in these last times our merciful God, by his special grace, has through the faithful ministry of that most outstanding man of God, Dr. Luther, once again brought to light out of the *horrible darkness of the papacy* the truth of his Word."³ The Concordists do not believe that there are "no enemies to the left," however, because in the Formula we also see an endorsement of "the teaching that Dr. Luther of blessed memory had thoroughly set forth in his writings, on the basis of God's Word, against the papacy *and other sects*."⁴

Yet among the teachings of Luther that are in this way endorsed, is his teaching that his own private writings, as well as the private writings of others, are not to be accepted uncritically, but are always to be judged and evaluated in the light of Holy Scripture. So, with respect to Luther's literary legacy, those who subscribe to the Formula of Concord declare—in the words of the Formula—that while they "intend to appeal to and rely on the detailed expositions of his teaching in his doctrinal and polemical writings," they will do so "in the manner and fashion in which he himself did in the Latin preface of his collected works with a necessary and Christian admonition. There he expressly made the distinction that God's Word alone ought to be and remain the only guiding principle and rule of all teaching and that no person's writing can be put on a par with it, but that everything must be totally subject to God's Word."⁵

We will remember this as we now review and evaluate Luther's *Formula Missae*. He is not, and will not be, above criticism. We will also remember that Luther often made use of the literary device of hyperbole or overstatement when making an important point. We may accordingly

² Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VII:34, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 598. Hereafter FC SD VII:34, KW, 598.

³ FC SD, Rule & Norm: 5, KW, 527. Emphasis added.

⁴ FC SD, Rule & Norm: 9, KW, 528. Emphasis added.

⁵ FC SD, Rule & Norm: 9, KW, 528–29.

take some of what he says with a grain of salt—as he would expect us to. And we will remember the historical and social context of this particular writing, in which Luther was not only looking over his right shoulder at the legalistic demands and requirements of Rome in matters of ritual and ceremony, but also over his left shoulder at Andreas Carlstadt and Gabriel Zwilling, whose influence in Wittenberg had led to liturgical and social chaos while Luther was away at the Wartburg Castle from May 1521 to March 1522.

Carlstadt's Chaos

Before his exile at the Wartburg, Luther had called for certain reforms and corrections in the area of public worship, most especially in regard to the teaching and practice of the sacrifice of the mass in the Lord's Supper, the distribution of the sacrament to the laity in only one kind, and the celebration of private masses without communicants chiefly for the benefit of the dead in purgatory. But Luther also wanted and expected such reforms to be carried out in an orderly way, with pastoral sensitivity and careful instruction. During Luther's exile, however, some of his erstwhile friends and followers in Wittenberg, whose zeal and passion far outweighed their good judgment, implemented these and other changes in a very different way and according to a very different spirit. Ernest G. Schwiebert recounts these events:

...the new movement suffered from the overenthusiasm of its followers who substituted vigorous action for their lack of understanding and levelheaded thinking. The men who now felt in duty bound to carry on the struggle in Luther's absence were not very clear on either Luther's objectives or the methods which as Christians they might employ. The result was a radicalism and mob rule, which often result from impulsive action not based on clear thinking.

...Carlstadt considered himself the interpreter and champion of the new Gospel movement. Through disputations, sermons, and the press he aroused the laity of Wittenberg. ...much of his preaching was in accord with the new movement, but he tried to introduce too drastic changes too rapidly. To a people still steeped in Catholic forms and doctrines he made such statements as: "Who partakes only of the bread, sins"; "Organs belong only to theatrical exhibitions and princes' palaces"; "Images in churches are wrong"; "Painted idols standing on altars are even more harmful and devilish." All of

these pronouncements he sought to prove by citations based largely on the Old Testament.

Another disciple who almost outdid Carlstadt in fiery zeal was the...monk Zwilling, whose enthusiasm for the cause earned for him the title of “the second Luther” from the citizens of Wittenberg. He proclaimed that no one should henceforth attend Masses, for they were an atrocious sin against the divine Majesty. As was to be expected, Carlstadt, Zwilling, and their cohorts joined forces to put their words into action. ...under Zwilling’s leadership, the monks destroyed the side altars of the old convent church, in which Luther had preached his first sermon, and burned the oil used for the Extreme Unction. All images were burned in their fanatical zeal. The Town Council feared similar unrestrained action at the Town Church under their control and in a joint meeting with the University passed *A Worthy Ordinance for the Princely City of Wittenberg*. In this ordinance a day was set upon which the images would be removed from the Town Church.

But Carlstadt and the clamoring mob could not be restrained. They visited the church, despoiling gravestones and destroying images inside and out.

The Castle Church was under the direct control of the Elector, but Carlstadt was Archdeacon. The Elector was already much disturbed by the service which Carlstadt had conducted on Christmas Eve, when he had officiated in the Holy Eucharist without Mass vestments and had encouraged the laity to help themselves to the bread and the wine directly from the altar. After this service there had occurred further demonstrations at both the Castle and Town Churches.⁶

Anthony C. Dodgers describes Carlstadt’s new model for celebrating Holy Communion in more detail, noting that Carlstadt argued

that all images, including crucifixes, should be removed, by force if necessary. He also addressed the Roman abuses of the Mass. On Christmas Day 1521, Carlstadt celebrated the Mass without vestments, in German, only speaking the Words of Institution. He omitted the sign of the cross at the consecration, and he distributed the Sacrament in both kinds. Those in attendance communed without prior confession or fasting, and took the chalice in their

⁶ E. G. Schiebert, *Luther and His Times* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 536, 538.

own hands. While some of these changes were in accordance with Christ's institution, we must realize what a radical departure this was from the centuries of the medieval church. What's more, mobs were stirred up by these dramatic changes and disturbed the "traditional" services, breaking lamps and yelling insults at the priests. When Luther heard about these disturbances he was shocked.⁷

Luther permanently returned to Wittenberg from the Wartburg not long after this, and during the season of Lent in 1522 preached his famous *Invocavit* Sermons against the misuse of Christian freedom and against the arrogance and lovelessness of what had been transpiring in Wittenberg. And then Luther began to pay attention to the question of what kind of liturgical reforms should now be instituted, and of how he might proceed in making positive recommendations for the continuation of some of what Carlstadt and the others had put in place (such as communion being received by the laity under both kinds), but for the reversal of some if not most of the radical departures from the familiar sights and sounds of the historic liturgy that Carlstadt had promoted, and that the town council had been pressured to endorse in its *Worthy Ordinance*. Luther considered Carlstadt, Zwilling, and the mob that had followed them in their destructive fanaticism, to be hypocrites. They had rejected the legalism of Rome only to replace it with their own version of biblicistic legalism, condemning as sin many innocent and helpful liturgical customs that had developed for good reasons over time, and trying to bind consciences in areas where God would instead want Christians to exercise their freedom, responsibly and in love both for God and for God's people.

Concerning the Order of Public Worship

Luther began his literary efforts, aimed toward an evangelical reform of the order of the mass, with the publication of a tract "Concerning the Order of Public Worship" in the first part of 1523. Ulrich S. Leupold describes what Luther was thinking and trying to accomplish:

Having rejected Karlstadt's violent reformation of the cultus, Luther could not simply return to the traditional order. He had to point the way which led between the Scylla of reaction and the Charybdis of revolution. In other words, he had to spell out the basic principles of

⁷ Anthony Dodgers, "Luther's *Invocavit* Sermons, Part I—From the Wartburg to St. Mary's Pulpit" (2017).

an evangelical reform of the liturgy and their practical application. This he did in *Concerning the Order of Public Worship*.⁸

This tract or pamphlet was in many ways an important prelude to, and preparation for, Luther's *Formula Missae*, published in December of that same year. At the very beginning of this earlier tract, Luther wrote that

The service now in common use everywhere goes back to genuine Christian beginnings, as does the office of preaching. But as the latter has been perverted by the spiritual tyrants, so the former has been corrupted by the hypocrites. As we do not on that account abolish the office of preaching, but aim to restore it again to its right and proper place, so it is not our intention to do away with the service, but to restore it again to its rightful use.

Luther then went on to list "Three serious abuses" that had "crept into the service": the silencing of God's Word, which is "the worst abuse"; the replacing of God's Word with "a host of unChristian fables and lies, in legends, hymns, and sermons"; and the errant teaching and belief that "such divine service was performed as a work whereby God's grace and salvation might be won," which resulted in the disappearance of true faith. Also in this tract, Luther made his famous and still-relevant statement that "a Christian congregation should never gather together without the preaching of God's Word and prayer, no matter how briefly, as Psalm 102 says, "When the kings and the people assemble to serve the Lord, they shall declare the name and the praise of God."⁹

A focus of this tract was on the institution of daily Matins and Vespers during the week, at which Scripture would be read and preached upon, as a replacement for the previous daily masses (already abolished by Carlstadt) which seldom included any communicants except for the celebrating priest. In a way that more directly laid out a "blueprint" for the *Formula Missae* that would be published in a few months' time, Luther said that "Besides these daily services for a smaller group, the whole congregation should come together on Sundays, and mass and Vespers be sung, as has been customary."¹⁰ In this respect, Luther also wrote:

⁸ Ulrich S. Leupold, Introduction to "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," *Luther's Works*, vol. 53 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 9.

⁹ Martin Luther, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," 11.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," 13.

Let the chants in the Sunday masses and Vespers be retained; they are quite good and are taken from Scripture. However, one may lessen or increase their number. But to select the chants and Psalms for the daily morning and evening service shall be the duty of the pastor and preacher. For every morning he shall appoint a fitting responsory or antiphon with a collect, likewise for the evening; this is to be read and chanted publicly after the lesson and exposition.¹¹

Luther understood that chanting is the church's natural and ordinary way of reading. These texts are to be "read *and* chanted," not read *or* chanted. Luther did not revise the *Venite* so as to make it say: "O come, let us read responsively to the Lord." Chanting is elevated speaking. It serves the *practical* purpose of making the text more audible; the *devotional* purpose of slowing down the reading of the text for better absorption and deeper comprehension on the part of listeners and worshipers; the *didactic* purpose of showing that what is happening in public worship, in the presence and fear of God, is different and more important than what transpires in the marketplace; and the *confessional* purpose—especially in the face of the kind of sectarianism that had been fomented by Carlstadt and Zwilling—of testifying to the catholic spirit of the genuine Reformation movement, and to the desire of Luther and his true followers to *reform* the church on the basis of the gospel, not to destroy it and recreate it in their own image.

In discussing the gatherings for worship that take place on the Lord's Day, Luther also articulated here what continued to be the consistent approach of the Lutheran Reformation regarding the frequency of the offering and reception of the Lord's Supper. He wrote that "If anyone desires to receive the sacrament at this time, let it be administered at a time convenient to all concerned." He also said that "if any should desire the sacrament during the week, let mass be held as inclination and time dictate; for in this matter one cannot make hard and fast rules."¹²

The regular and frequent availability of the sacrament, especially on Sundays, was simply assumed, "For properly speaking, the mass consists in using the Gospel and communing at the table of the Lord"—as Luther later expressed it in his *Formula Missae*.¹³ The actual celebration of the sacrament was determined by there being communicants who wished to receive it, and who were properly prepared to receive it. There

¹¹ Martin Luther, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," 13–14.

¹² Martin Luther, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship," 13.

¹³ Martin Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," *Luther's Works*, vol. 53, 25.

was no predetermined and arbitrarily-scheduled rotating sequence of “communion Sundays” and “non-communion Sundays.” If anyone in the parish desired to commune on a particular Sunday, that’s what made that Sunday to be a communion Sunday. If no communicants had announced their intention to receive the sacrament on a given Sunday, that’s what made that Sunday to be a non-communion Sunday. The only exception would be an occasion when there was no pastor available to serve as celebrant. Then, of course, there would be no communion. But otherwise, if there were communicants, then there was communion. A pastor today who would imply or say to a parishioner who wants to receive the sacrament on a so-called “non-communion Sunday” that he may not have it, or should not wish to have it, but must wait until the next pre-scheduled “communion Sunday” rolls around, has, in effect, made one of those “hard and fast rules” that Luther said cannot be made.

When the city of Nürnberg, through Lazarus Spengler, sought Luther’s guidance on these matters in 1528, he offered this response:

Should anyone request my counsel in this way, then I would give this advice: ... that you should celebrate one or two Masses in the two parish churches on Sundays or holy days, depending on whether there are few or many communicants. Should it be regarded as needful or good, you might do the same in the hospital too. ...you might celebrate Mass during the week on whichever days it would be needful, that is, if any communicants would be present and would ask for and request the Sacrament. This way we should compel no one to receive the Sacrament, and yet everyone would be adequately served in an orderly manner. If the Ministers of the Church would fall to griping at this point, maintaining that they were being placed under duress or complaining that they are unfitted to face such demands, then I would demonstrate to them that no merely human compulsion is at work here, but on the contrary they are being compelled by God Himself through His Call. For because they have the Office, they are already, in virtue of their Call and Office, obliged and compelled to administer the Sacrament whenever people request it of them, so that their excuses amount to nothing; just as they are under obligation to preach, comfort, absolve, help the poor, and visit the sick as often as people need or ask for these services.¹⁴

¹⁴ Martin Luther, Letter to Lazarus Spengler, August 15, 1528; quoted in John R. Stephenson, “The Holy Eucharist: At the Center or Periphery of the Church’s Life in Luther’s Thinking?”, in *A Lively Legacy: Essays in Honor of Robert Preus*, ed. Kurt E.

The Formula Missae: Introduction

Luther begins his introduction to the *Formula Missae* by noting two main problems that he hopes his proposed liturgical revision will correct. He speaks first of the people's "godless regard for ceremonial."¹⁵ Luther certainly would not have disagreed with the Augsburg Confession when it declared, six and a half years after this writing, that ceremonies—correctly understood and properly used—"serve the purpose of teaching the people what they need to know about Christ."¹⁶ What he is criticizing here is, rather, an improper fixation on ceremonies *as such*, according to their external form, and not according to their higher meaning as teaching tools for the sake of the gospel. This criticism is very similar to what the Augsburg Confession itself also criticizes in its reference to those teachers in the papacy who claimed that various humanly-instituted traditions, ceremonies, ordinances, holy days, and

Marquart, Stephenson, and Bjarne W. Teigen (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1985), 161–162.

Luther did recognize the possibility of the Lord's Supper being celebrated in some parishes only once in a month, but this would be because no one desired to commune on the other Sundays, and not because it had been decided beforehand that the sacrament would be unavailable to those who might wish to receive it. In the context of opposing the daily celebration of endowed masses, without communicants, he wrote: "I wish, and it ought to be so, that no mass at all would be celebrated except at such times as the people were present who really desired the sacrament and asked for it, and that this would be only once a week or once a month. For the sacrament should never be celebrated except at the instigation and request of hungry souls, never because of duty, endowment, custom, ordinance, or habit." Martin Luther, "Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament," *Luther's Works*, vol. 36 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 256–257).

I have no doubt that the First Martin would also agree with what the Second Martin wrote in this regard: "For the rule about when and how often one should go to Communion must be taken: I. From the teaching about the fruit and power of the Eucharist, namely, when and as often as we recognize that we have need of this power; II. From the teaching about selfexamination, lest we receive it unworthily. On this basis people are to be taught, admonished, and exhorted to more diligent and frequent use of the Eucharist. For because Christ says: 'As often as you do this,' it is wholly His will that those who are His disciples should do this frequently. Therefore those are not true and faithful ministers of Christ who in any manner whatever lead or frighten people away from more frequent use and reception of the Eucharist. There are beautiful examples of frequent use of the Eucharist from the true antiquity. Some had the custom of receiving the Eucharist daily, some twice a week, some on the Lord's day, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, some only on the Lord's Day." Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part II, trans. Fred Kramer (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), 330–331).

¹⁵ Martin Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," 19.

¹⁶ Augsburg Confession XXIV:3 [German], KW, 68. Hereafter AC.

fasts were works and acts of worship which are “necessary... for meriting grace,” and who “viciously terrified consciences if people omitted any of them.”¹⁷

The second major problem that had captured Luther’s pastoral concern and liturgiological attention was what he referred to as “the abomination which Satan set up in the holy place through the man of sin.”¹⁸ This, of course, is a reference to the sacrifice of the mass, together with its attendant errors regarding purgatory, the transfer of merit, and other papal departures from the true nature and purpose of the Sacrament of the Altar as Jesus had instituted it.

Luther had not wanted to be too hasty in implementing these reforms, however. He remained cautious even after his return from the Wartburg, when he had seen a need for undoing the damage that Carlstadt’s rash and unwise actions had caused, while also seeing a need to put Carlstadt’s valid reforms on a surer footing. Luther also did not want to put something in place without having thought it through very carefully, since he sensed that his example would likely be followed by other reform-minded church leaders in other places. And Luther did not want to risk sowing even more seeds of confusion and offense in a community that had recently endured some significant and unsettling liturgical upheavals. He wanted to teach the people before making necessary changes, and he wanted to avoid making unnecessary changes.

Luther was indeed going to be proposing something that would be significantly more conservative than what Carlstadt had implemented, before Luther put a stop to it. He was going to reverse much of what Carlstadt had done, and restore various church usages that Carlstadt had cast aside. We are not permanently stuck with the bad liturgical innovations of a predecessor. We can undo them, especially when the reasons for undoing them are clear and persuasive.

First, we can re-teach uninformed or misinformed people by explaining to them that historic symbols and ceremonies which testify to Christ, which underscore and accentuate the message of the gospel, and which maintain order and reverence in worship, are good and beneficial, even if the Roman Church has and employs similar symbols and ceremonies. Such useful traditions need not have been abandoned, and they can be reclaimed.

¹⁷ AC XXVI:2 [Latin], KW, 75.

¹⁸ Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” 19.

The biblical and Christ-centered content of the ancient western liturgy predates the medieval errors that were later introduced into the liturgy. Localized mostly in the canon of the mass, these errors occupy only a small percentage of the rite that was inherited by the generation of the Reformation era from the church of the middle ages. One need not throw out the entire banana just because a small portion of it has been bruised. One can cut out the bruised section, and eat what is left with enjoyment. So too, if scholastic theologians and avaricious Roman bishops introduced into the liturgy errors which contradicted the article on justification—even though the rest of the liturgy, when taken at face value, still taught and testified to the article on justification—the added-in part can be excised, and the good parts that were there before will still be there, to fulfill their original and proper purpose of guiding the worship of God's people in a God-pleasing way.

And second, we can re-teach uninformed or misinformed people by pointing out to them the dangers of imitating the practices of sectarian churches, since those sectarian practices are almost always inspired by sectarian doctrine, and are almost always imbued with the spirit of that sectarian doctrine. Carlstadt's introduction of an inadequate and irreverent sacramental service was accompanied by his introduction of an inadequate and irreverent sacramental theology.

Lutherans rightly mock Carlstadt's silly suggestion that when Jesus said, "This is my body," he was not referring to the bread that he was offering the disciples, but was referring (and pointing) to his physical body as it was seated at the table. Yet we can observe what seems to be an increasing trend on the part of many Lutheran pastors in our time—even professedly conservative ones—of imitating Carlstadt's sacramental practice, even while still rejecting his sacramental beliefs.

The Lord's Supper is celebrated by such pastors while they are wearing street clothes—often very casual street clothes—rather than ecclesiastical vestments. Lost on them are the sensibilities of Luther's friend and fellow-Reformer Johannes Brenz, who maintained that while "vestments, altar cloths, gold and silver vessels, candles, etc., are free, and do not at all affect faith and conscience," they are nevertheless—for the sake of order and reverence—"to be retained and used, *especially the vestments*, in order that the ministers may not be in their ordinary clothes, but may fitly minister to the congregation."¹⁹ And among such pastors

¹⁹ Edward T. Horn, "Liturgical Work of John Brenz," *The Lutheran Church Review* 1, no. 4 (1882), 280–281. Horn is here summarizing one of the provisions of the BrandenburgNürnberg Church Order of 1533. Emphasis in original.

today, inappropriate *garments on* the body are frequently accompanied by inappropriate *movements of* the body. They often bob, sway, and strut around the chancel with a demeanor that suggests a thoughtless lack of seriousness about where they are and what they are doing. Lost on them are the sensibilities of Paul H. D. Lang, who reminds us that

Communication is not limited to language. We express ourselves to others and we receive impressions from others and from God through signs and symbols. ... While this is true in ordinary life, it is particularly true in the church's worship. ... Therefore, the devaluation of signs and symbols in the Protestant churches and also, at least since the day of Rationalism, in the Lutheran church, and the almost exclusive reliance on words as the means of communication, seems to be a mistake. While we need to rely on language as the most important means of communication, we should perhaps reconsider our attitude toward the use of signs and symbols. ... The positions and actions of the body in worship are included in liturgical signs and symbols. ... Some are accompanied by words and verbal formulae and others are not. Some are gestures and actions of reverence, some of prayer, some of penitence, and others are sacramental. ...many convey more than one meaning when used under different circumstances.²⁰

Also, in Carlstadtian fashion, such pastors often omit those parts of the traditional communion liturgy that by design are intended to lead worshipers, step by step, up to the apex of the consecration. The services they conduct often jump immediately from the prayer of the church to the speaking of the Words of Institution. And, when such pastors speak those Words at a rushed pace and with inarticulate or slurred diction, without facing the bread and wine, or without at least noticeably gesturing toward the bread and wine, it is not at all reassuring to troubled observers who wonder if a real consecration has actually taken place.

The Preface and Proper Preface—or, depending on rite and local usage, the exhortation to communicants—are designed to prepare worshipers to be reverently attentive to the consecration when that does finally take place in the service. This ordered sequence of preparatory elements in the communion liturgy serves progressively to increase ever more deeply, and to sharpen ever more narrowly, the worshiper's

²⁰ Paul H. D. Lang, *Ceremony and Celebration: An Evangelical Guide for Christian Practice in Corporate Worship* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 64–65.

devotional focus on Christ and on his sacramental gifts and promises. But when a Carlstadtian approach is followed, with major amputations and omissions, it is as if worshipers are unexpectedly grabbed from behind and thrown into the deep section of a cold pond, rather than being allowed to wade in gradually and carefully.

In contrast, Luther—at least as far as the main Sunday service in the churches was concerned—wanted to avoid making more changes in the received rite than were absolutely necessary. He certainly did not intend to make any changes that might leave room for a frivolous or arrogant attitude on the part of either minister or people. When Luther concluded that the time had in fact come to make the necessary changes, thoughtfully and circumspectly, he implemented his conservative and evangelical liturgical principles in the stable and stabilizing order of service that he now recommended in the publication of the *Formula Missae*. And so he writes in the introduction to this work:

Therefore, I have used neither authority nor pressure. Nor did I make any innovations. For I have been hesitant and fearful, partly because of the weak in faith, who cannot suddenly exchange an old and accustomed order of worship for a new and unusual one, and more so because of the fickle and fastidious spirits who rush in like unclean swine without faith or reason, and who delight only in novelty and tire of it as quickly, when it has worn off. Such people are a nuisance even in other affairs, but in spiritual matters, they are absolutely unbearable. Nonetheless, at the risk of bursting with anger, I must bear with them, unless I want to let the gospel itself be denied to the people.

But since there is hope now that the hearts of many have been enlightened and strengthened by the grace of God, and since the cause of the kingdom of Christ demands that at long last offenses should be removed from it, we must dare something in the name of Christ. For it is right that we should provide at least for a few, lest by our desire to detach ourselves from the frivolous faddism of some people, we provide for nobody, or by our fear of ultimately offending others, we endorse their universally held abominations.

Therefore, ...we will deal with an evangelical form of saying mass (as it is called) and of administering communion. And we will so deal with it that we shall no longer rule hearts by teaching alone, but we will put our hand to it and put the revision into practice in the public administration of communion, not wishing, however, to

prejudice others against adopting and following a different order. Indeed, we heartily beg in the name of Christ that if in time something better should be revealed to them, they would tell us to be silent, so that by a common effort we may aid the common cause.

We therefore first assert: It is not now nor ever has been our intention to abolish the liturgical service of God completely, but rather to purify the one that is now in use from the wretched accretions which corrupt it and to point out an evangelical use.²¹

The Formula Missae: Its Place in Liturgical History Looking Back

Luther at this point in his introduction then sets forth a summary of his understanding of the historical development of the Christian communion rite, beginning with an acknowledgment of the divine institution of the sacrament by the Lord himself, and then stating that in earliest apostolic times it was observed “quite simply and evangelically,” while also acknowledging that over time many human additions were added to the liturgy, causing it no longer to be a simple rite. But unlike Carlstadt and Zwilling, and unlike the various restorationist movements of more recent times, this in itself was not seen by Luther as a bad or problematic thing, as long as the distinction between what is divinely mandated, and what sanctified human judgment has found useful and beneficial, is maintained.

So, after recounting the addition of various Psalm texts and the Kyrie, and the introduction of the reading of Epistles and Gospels—which he says is actually “necessary,” and should not be done “in a language the common people do not understand”—Luther goes on to describe the later shaping of Psalm texts into the Introit, and the introduction of the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the graduals, the alleluias, the Nicene Creed, the *Sanctus*, the *Agnus Dei*, and the *communio* (that is, songs that are chanted during the distribution of the sacrament). Modern historians of the liturgy might question some of Luther’s conclusions regarding when, where, and how the different components of the liturgy were added in. But Luther’s observations regarding the gradual development of the western rite are essentially sound and correct, as is his conclusion that

²¹ Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” 19–20.

all of these are unobjectionable, especially the ones that are sung *de tempore* or on Sundays. For these days by themselves testify to ancient purity, the canon excepted.²²

And this is where Luther begins to take aim at what he considered to be an abominable intrusion into what had been, from earlier and better times, an edifying and evangelical order of service. He attributes the introduction of the canon to “the tyranny of priestly greed and pride,” and compares its various objectionable elements to “those altars to the images of Baal and all gods in the Lord’s temple” that the wicked and idolatrous kings had profanely erected in Old Testament times.

²² Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” 21.

Luther also writes that it is not proper “to distinguish Lent, Holy Week, or Good Friday from other days, lest we seem to mock and ridicule Christ with half of a mass and the one part of the sacrament. For the Alleluia is the perpetual voice of the church, just as the memorial of His passion and victory is perpetual” (24). Luther is primarily criticizing two things here. *First*, he disagrees with the Roman custom of distributing pre-sanctified communion elements on Good Friday without a full communion service, and in particular without those distributed elements having been consecrated on that day and in that place. I agree with this criticism. Proper Lutheran practice calls for a consecration of whatever elements are to be distributed to communicants, to be performed in the presence of those communicants. This would pertain also to the communing of shut-ins (see FC SD VII:79–84). So, for Good Friday, it is a sound Lutheran practice to have a full communion service, with both a consecration and distribution. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many Lutheran congregations did this, and for those services Lutheran pastors re-purposed the black chasubles that previously had been used for requiem masses. It is also a sound Lutheran practice *not* to celebrate the Lord’s Supper on Good Friday, in view of the fact that members would have had an opportunity to commune on the previous day (Maundy Thursday) and would again have an opportunity to commune in one or two days’ time (at the Easter Vigil or on Easter Day). Also, if the Triduum, of which Good Friday is the central part, is seen as one continuous service, then the point could also be made that on the first and last days of this elongated service (Maundy Thursday and the Easter Vigil) the sacrament *is* celebrated, even if it is not celebrated on the middle day. *And second*, Luther here disagrees with the western rite custom of omitting the singing or speaking of the word “alleluia” during Lent. I disagree with this criticism. Important lessons about repentance and humility before God are taught and learned during Lent. Christians certainly do not repent of their sins only during Lent. The lessons about repentance and humility that they learn in that season are of benefit to them throughout the year and indeed throughout an entire lifetime. But those important lessons are especially taught and learned *during Lent*. The omission of the Alleluia during Lent contributes toward the teaching and learning of those lessons. In the same way, the special celebratory joy that is taught and learned in the lessons of Easter—with its multiple Alleluias!—is not just for the Easter season. This deep and abiding joy characterizes the faith of Christians at all times, as they always live within their Baptism in a daily dying to the sinful self through repentance, and in a daily rising with Christ through faith.

And Luther does not stop there. The canon is described as an “abominable concoction drawn from everyone’s sewer and cesspool,” which turned the mass into a sacrifice. Luther does not appreciate many of the later ceremonial and ritual elaborations in the rest of the liturgy either, which loaded it down with unnecessary and overly complicated distractions. He continues in his criticism:

...the mass began to be a priestly monopoly devouring the wealth of the whole world and engulfing it—as with an apocalyptic plague—with a host of rich, lazy, powerful, lascivious, and corrupt celibates. Thus came the masses for the departed, for journeys, for prosperity—but who can even name the causes for which the mass was made a sacrifice?²³

The transformation of the mass into a propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead—which conceptually put the mass into competition with the finished sacrifice of Christ on the cross, or at least caused the mass to be interpreted as supplementing that true and final sacrifice—was actually a more gradual process than Luther intimates. The early Christian liturgies, as a rule, placed the recitation of the Words of Institution within a eucharistic prayer, which often did, in various places, employ the terms “sacrifice,” “oblation,” and “offering.” But originally, this terminology was not used to indicate that the body and blood of Jesus in particular were being sacrificed anew. Rather, the entire prayer—and even the entire service—were seen as a sacrifice of thanksgiving, offered by God’s people in response to his sending of his Son Jesus Christ to be their Redeemer, as they gratefully recalled in the prayer all the important things that Jesus had done for their salvation. In its own unique way, the Lord’s institution of his Sacred Supper was one of those things. The terminology of oblation or offering was generally attached also to the bread and wine, as fruits of the earth which were now being placed before the Lord so that he could use them for his sacramental purposes. And the eucharistic prayer in which these various thoughts were expressed generally concluded with an epiclesis, asking God to send his Holy Spirit upon the people preparing to commune, or upon the bread and wine that were being offered so that they would become and be for the communicants the true body and blood of their Savior.

²³ Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” 21–22.

An early illustrative example of this kind of eucharistic prayer can be seen in the “Apostolic Tradition” of St. Hippolytus of Rome, which shows us how the Lord’s Supper was celebrated in the imperial capital around 215 A.D.:

The Lord be with you!
And with your spirit!
Let us lift up our hearts.
They are turned to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord!
It is right and just!

We give you thanks, O God, through your beloved Child Jesus Christ, whom you have sent us in the last days as Savior, Redeemer, and Messenger of your will. He is your Word, inseparable from you, through whom you have created everything and in whom you find your delight. You sent him from heaven into the womb of a Virgin. He was conceived and became flesh, he manifested himself as your Son, born of the Spirit and the Virgin. He did your will, and, to win for you a holy people, he stretched out his hands in suffering to rescue from suffering those who believe in you.

When he was about to surrender himself to voluntary suffering in order to destroy death, to break the devil’s chains, to tread hell underfoot, to pour out his light upon the just, to establish the covenant and manifest his resurrection, he took bread, he gave you thanks and said: “Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you.” In like manner for the cup, he said: “This is my blood which is poured out for you. When you do this, do (it) in memory of me.”

Remembering therefore your death and your resurrection, we offer you the bread and the wine, we thank you for having judged us worthy to stand before you and serve you. And we pray you to send your Holy Spirit on the offering of your holy Church, to bring together in unity all those who receive it. May they be filled with the Holy Spirit who strengthens their faith in the truth. May we be able thus to praise and glorify you through your Child Jesus Christ. Through him glory to you and honor, to the Father and the Son, with the Holy Spirit, in your holy Church, now and for ever and ever! Amen.²⁴

²⁴ “The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome,” trans. Matthew J. O’Connell, in *Springtime of the Liturgy: Liturgical Texts of the First Four Centuries*, ed. Lucien Deiss (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1979), 129–131.

This early form of the epiclesis does not specifically ask that the Holy Spirit would cause the bread and wine to become the body and blood of Christ. But just before the epiclesis, the prayer clearly states that it is only bread and wine, and not the body and blood of the Lord, that are being offered to God the Father. We can assume that Hippolytus believed that the Words of Christ were efficacious within and for the use or action of the Supper, so that the bread and wine that are offered to communicants will be the true body and blood of Jesus, as the Words of Jesus declare. But it also seems pretty clear that Hippolytus did not insist that the Words of Christ need to be understood as being *immediately effective*, causing his body and blood to be instantly united to the bread and wine as soon as those Words were quoted within the prayer. After this quoting of the instituting Words of Jesus—at least as far as the progression and structure of the prayer are concerned—the bread and wine are still understood to be only bread and wine, and are offered to God as bread and wine.

An interesting example of an ancient eucharistic prayer that includes a more conventional Epiclesis—invoking the Holy Spirit *upon the elements*—can be found in “The Ethiopian Anaphora of the Apostles.” The text of this Ethiopian rite is accessible to us by means of a fourteenth-century manuscript, but it likely dates to the late fourth or early fifth centuries. It is noteworthy that this rite calls for a higher level of participation on the part of the laity than what we usually see in the early communion orders. A typical Preface dialogue is followed by a lengthy and elaborate Preface, with many thanksgivings, commemorations, and petitions. The Preface is then followed by a version of the *Sanctus*, after which follows a multi-part prayer spoken by the priest or presbyter, punctuated as it goes by petitions, acclamations, and confessions from the people:

[*Priest:*] Truly heaven and earth are full of the holiness of your glory, through our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, your holy Son. He came and was born of a virgin, so that he might fulfill your will and make a people for yourself.

[*People:*] Remember us all in your kingdom; remember us, Lord, Master, in your kingdom; remember us, Lord, in your kingdom, you remembered the thief on the right hand when you were on the tree of the holy cross.

[*Priest:*] He stretched out his hands in the passion, suffering to save the sufferers that trust in him; he, who was delivered to the passion that he might destroy death, break the bonds of Satan, tread down hell, lead forth the saints, establish a covenant and make known his resurrection. In the same night that they betrayed him, he took bread in his holy, blessed, and spotless hands.

[*People:*] We believe that this is he, truly we believe.

[*Priest:*] He looked up to heaven toward you, his Father, gave thanks, blessed and broke. And he gave to his disciples and said unto them: Take, eat, this bread is truly my body which will be broken on your behalf for the remission of sin.

[*People:*] Amen. Amen. Amen. We believe and confess, we glorify you, O our Lord and our God; that this is he we truly believe.

[*Priest:*] And likewise also the cup giving thanks, blessing it, and hallowing it, he gave it to his disciples, and said unto them, take, drink; this cup is my blood which will be shed on your behalf as a propitiation for many.

[*People:*] Amen. Amen. Amen. We believe and confess, we glorify you, O our Lord and our God; that this is he we truly believe.

[*Priest:*] And as often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me.

[*People:*] We proclaim your death, Lord, and your holy resurrection; we believe in your ascension and your second advent. We glorify you, and confess you, we offer our prayer to you and supplicate you, our Lord and our God.

[*Priest:*] Now, Lord, we remember your death and your resurrection. We confess you and we offer to you this bread and this cup, giving thanks to you; and thereby you have made us worthy of the joy of standing before you and ministering to you. We pray and beseech you, O Lord, that you would send the Holy Spirit and power upon this bread and upon this cup. May he make them the body and blood of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, unto the ages of ages.

[*People:*] Amen. Lord pity us, Lord spare us, Lord have mercy on us.²⁵

Note the flow and sequence. The Words of Institution are “prayed” over the bread and wine. With a confession of faith in Christ, and a thankful remembrance of his saving work and sacramental institution, the bread and wine—as bread and wine—are offered to God the Father. And a prayerful request is then made to God the Father, that he would send his Holy Spirit down upon these elements, to make and cause them to be the body and blood of his Son.

Another example of an ancient eucharistic prayer, from around the year 350 A.D., can be found in the “Euchology” of Serapion, the bishop of Thmuis in Egypt. An unusual variation in this prayer is that the epiclesis invokes the *Logos* or *Word* to come upon the bread and wine, rather than the Holy Spirit. The Preface portion of the prayer contains assorted ascriptions of praise and thanksgiving to God, culminating in a version of the *Sanctus*. Following that, the prayer continues as follows:

Lord of the Powers, fill this sacrifice too with your power and your participation. For it is to you that we have offered this living sacrifice, this bloodless offering. It is to you that we have offered this bread, figure of the body of your onlybegotten Son. This bread is a figure of the holy body. For the Lord Jesus, the night when he was betrayed, took bread, broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying: “Take and eat, this is my body, which is broken for you for the forgiveness of sins.” For this reason, we too, celebrating the memorial of his death, have offered this bread, and we pray: Through this sacrifice, reconcile us all to yourself, be favorable to us, O God of truth. For just as this bread, once scattered upon the hills, has been brought together and become one, so too, deign to gather your Church from every people, from every land, from every town, village, and house, and make of her a single Church, living and catholic. We offer too the cup, figure of the blood. For the Lord Jesus, after the meal, took the cup and said to his disciples: “Take and drink, this is the New Testament, that is, my blood poured out for you, for the forgiveness

²⁵ “The Ethiopian Anaphora of the Apostles,” in *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, originally ed. R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, fourth edition ed. Paul E. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019), 129–130. Various rubrics regarding the priests’ gestures and actions while he prays are here omitted.

of sins." For this reason we too have offered the cup, a figure of the blood.

O God of truth, may your holy Word come down upon this bread, that it may become the body of the Word, and upon this cup, that it may become the blood of the Truth. Grant that all who communicate may receive a lifegiving remedy, that will heal every weakness in them and strengthen them for all progress and all virtue; let it not be a cause, O God of truth, of condemnation, confusion, or shame. For we call on you, O eternal (God), through your only-begotten Son, in the Holy Spirit: Take pity on this people, judge them worthy of progress. Send your Angels to this people, to help them triumph over the Evil One and to strengthen your Church.²⁶

The prayer goes on from here to offer petitions for the souls of the faithful departed, asking that they be sanctified by God and welcomed into his kingdom, followed by general petitions for God's blessing upon all people, and ending finally with a Trinitarian doxological conclusion. For our purposes, though, we take note of the fact that in the portion of the prayer that we have quoted, it is the bread *as bread* that is prayerfully offered to the Lord, together with the cup of wine, within the "living sacrifice" and "bloodless offering" of this prayerful act of praise and thanksgiving. To be sure, the offered bread is described as a "figure" or image of the body of Jesus, even as the cup of wine is described as a "figure" of the blood of Jesus. This anticipates a sacramental union that will soon take place, but that is not believed to have occurred yet. When and as these earthly elements are offered to God, within this ritual, they are not yet understood to be the body and blood of the Lord. It is only after this—and after the recitation of the pertinent part of the Lord's institution narrative over each element in turn—that the "holy Word" of God is further invoked upon these elements, so that they may "become the body of the Word" and "the blood of the Truth."

As the theology of the Lord's Supper became ever more freighted with sacrificial ideas, and as the liturgical forms employed for the celebration of the Lord's Supper became ever more freighted with sacrificial terminology, it also came to be firmly believed as dogma in many Christian circles—especially in the Latin West—that in the sacrament, the body and blood of Jesus are united to the bread and wine as soon as the Words of Institution are spoken or prayed over that bread and

²⁶ "The Euchology of Serapion of Thmuis," trans. Matthew J. O'Connell, in *Springtime of the Liturgy: Liturgical Texts of the First Four Centuries*, 194–196.

wine. And this became an especially important point of conviction in the middle ages, when the doctrine of transubstantiation emerged as the accepted explanation of the mystery of the Real Presence. So, the later Roman Rite dropped the epiclesis, since it was now believed that as soon as the Words of Institution were quoted in the eucharistic prayer, the bread and wine were already at that moment the body and blood of Christ. It would no longer make any sense to ask God to send the Holy Spirit onto bread and wine over which the Words of Jesus have already been spoken, to cause them to become the body and blood of Jesus, since they were now believed already to be the body and blood of Jesus.

What was not omitted from the later Roman Rite, however, was a reference to the offering up of the bread and wine to God the Father, after the place in the prayer when the Words of Institution were recited, and before the place in the prayer where the epiclesis used to be. But now, the meaning of that offering was very different from what it had been, in earlier times of liturgical history, when it was not believed that this bread and wine were already the body and blood of Jesus. Now, in the altered Roman Rite, when the bread and wine were offered to God the Father, it was the body and blood of the Lord specifically that were being offered.

The text of the canon of the mass in this newer Roman Rite, where these changes can be seen, is believed to have become fixed around the middle of the sixth century, but surviving manuscripts exist only from the eighth century. In this canon, following the section in which the Words of Institution are quoted, these petitions are spoken:

Therefore also, Lord, we your servants, but also your holy people, having in remembrance the blessed passion of your Son Christ our Lord, likewise his resurrection from the dead, and also his glorious ascension into heaven, do offer to your excellent majesty from your gifts and bounty a pure victim, a holy victim, an unblemished victim, the holy bread of eternal life and the cup of everlasting salvation. Vouchsafe to look upon them with a favorable and kindly countenance, and accept them as you vouchsafed to accept the gifts of your righteous servant Abel, and the sacrifice of our patriarch Abraham, and that which your high priest Melchizedek offered to you, a holy sacrifice, an unblemished victim. We humbly beseech you, almighty God, bid these things be borne by the hands of your angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty, that all of us who have received the most holy body and blood of your Son by

partaking at this altar may be filled with all heavenly blessing and grace; through Christ our Lord.²⁷

A trace of an older version of the prayer, in which an offering only of bread and wine had been understood to be taking place, can be seen in the now strange-sounding statement that something is being offered to God “from your gifts and bounty.” But then this echo of an ancient thank offering is overwhelmed by the new emphasis on a propitiatory sacrifice, when this offering is immediately described as “a pure victim, a holy victim, an unblemished victim.”

The Formula Missae: The Canon and the Verba

Luther’s reform of the sacramental rite could have followed a more conservative route, and could have removed from the canon all references to the offering up of Christ as victim, while retaining the older model of the eucharistic prayer with its references to the people’s eucharistic sacrifice of praise and prayer, and to the offering up of bread and wine. Theologically I think he personally could have lived with a revised eucharistic prayer that still included within it the quoting of the Words of Institution, and that also still included a petition that the bread and wine there present would become the body and blood of Christ for the communicants. Luther probably would have found Serapion’s prayer that God’s “holy Word” come down upon the bread and wine to be preferable to the more common epiclesis, which calls upon God to send the Holy Spirit to the elements.

In part I think this because Luther, in the *Formula Missae*, calls for the Words of Institution to be chanted aloud *as a part of the Preface*—which is a prayer!—and with the use of the tone that was otherwise used for chanting the Our Father, which is, of course, also a prayer. In part I think this also because Luther was willing to subscribe to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, which recognizes that it is proper and acceptable to speak of a eucharistic sacrifice or thank offering in conjunction with the communion liturgy—just not a *propitiatory* sacrifice of the body and blood of Jesus specifically, *within* the communion liturgy.²⁸ And in part I think this because of what Luther once wrote to Carlstadt regarding the “moment” of the sacramental union:

²⁷ “The Roman Rite,” in *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, 208.

²⁸ The Apology of the Augsburg Confession states that “the Mass...can be called an offering for the same reason it is called a Eucharist: here are offered prayers, thanksgiving, and the entire act of worship. ... The Greek canon also says a lot about an offering; but it clearly shows that it is not talking about the body and blood of the Lord

Why have you not taken note of this word of the Evangelist, “saying,” by which he clearly indicates that the bread was given as he [Christ] was speaking and adds what he said, “Take and eat, this is my body?” From this it is clear that the giving of the bread took place at the same time as and together with the speaking, that is, as the words of Christ were uttered and spoken: “This is my body”... The nature of the act and the account of the event strongly suggest... that the giving and speaking were simultaneous, so that at one and the same time he gave the bread and said, “This is my body.” ... Unless you would again bring up to us that miserable old question concerning the moment of the presence according to which, as the papists teach, Christ’s body is there at the last syllable [of the words of institution] and not before. We despise these thoughts and prescribe no certain moment or time for God, but we are satisfied simply to believe that what God has said certainly happens. ... Thus we also say here, that the bread is the body of Christ because Christ said, “This is my body.” We leave it to others, namely to those who quarrel over words, to fight about the moment and syllables. For we are commanded to believe that the Word of God is true; but we are not to investigate as to which moment or how they are true or fulfilled.²⁹

In his revision of the sacramental rite of the mass, however, Luther made the pastoral judgment that a more conservative approach would not suffice in removing the dangerous confusion regarding the directionality of the sacrament that had been created by the Roman Rite’s innovations in how the terms “sacrifice” and “offering” were used in the Roman canon. Luther concluded that it would be necessary to wipe the slate of the canon clean, and drop all references to any kind of sacrifice,

in particular, but about the entire service, about the prayers and thanksgivings. This is what it says: ‘And make us worthy to come to offer you entreaties and supplications and bloodless sacrifices for all the people.’ Properly understood, this is not offensive. It prays that we might be made worthy to offer prayers and supplications and bloodless sacrifices for the people. It calls even prayers ‘bloodless sacrifices.’ It also says this a little later: ‘We offer you this reasonable and bloodless service.’ It is a misinterpretation to translate this as a ‘reasonable victim’ and to apply it to the body of Christ itself. For the canon is talking about the entire service; and by ‘reasonable service’ [Rom. 12:1] Paul meant the service of the mind, fear, faith, prayer, thanksgiving, and the like...” (Apol. XXIV:87–88, KW, 273–274).

²⁹ Martin Luther, Letter to Andreas Carlstadt, 1528 (WA Br. IV, 366–388); quoted in Gaylin R. Schmeling, “The Theology of the Lord’s Supper,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (1988), 27–28.

so that the people would once again clearly understand that the direction of the sacrament is from God to us, and not from us to God.

And besides, Luther's seemingly radical excision of the entire post-*Sanctus* canon—beginning with the phrase “Te igitur, clementissime Pater” (To you therefore, most merciful Father)—together with the slight adjustments in other parts of the eucharistic liturgy that accompanied this excision, was perhaps not so radical after all, since only the clergy would have really noticed that the canon was gone. For the laity, this deletion did not represent a major, jarring change in what they would have heard and seen during the service, since the canon of the Roman Rite was whispered by the priest and not read aloud. And Luther was conservative in other respects, such as in his retention of the elevation—albeit in a different place in the communion rite—although this was done as a concession to the weak and not, it would seem, as something that Luther expected to be done in perpetuity in churches that had embraced his evangelical reforms. This is how Luther described his proposals for the revision of the canon and the reasons for some of those revisions:

I. After the Creed or after the sermon let bread and wine be made ready for blessing in the customary manner. ...

II. The bread and wine having been prepared, one may proceed as follows:

The Lord be with you. *Response:* And with thy spirit.

Lift up your hearts. *Response:* Let us lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks unto the Lord our God. *Response:* It is meet and right.

It is truly meet and right, just and salutary for us to give thanks to Thee always and everywhere, Holy Lord, Father Almighty, Eternal God, through Christ our Lord...

III. Then:

... Who the day before he suffered, took bread, and when he had given thanks, brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you. After the same manner also the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins; this do, as often as ye do it, in remembrance of me.

I wish these words of Christ—with a brief pause after the preface—to be recited in the same tone in which the Lord's Prayer

is chanted elsewhere in the canon so that those who are present may be able to hear them, although the evangelically minded should be free about all these things and may recite these words either silently or audibly.

IV. The blessing ended, let the choir sing the *Sanctus*. And while the *Benedictus* is being sung, let the bread and cup be elevated according to the customary rite for the benefit of the weak in faith who might be offended if such an obvious change in this rite of the mass were suddenly made. This concession can be made especially where through sermons in the vernacular they have been taught what the elevation means.

V. After this, the Lord's Prayer shall be read. Thus, let us pray: "Taught by thy saving precepts..." ...immediately after the Lord's Prayer shall be said, "The peace of the Lord," etc., which is, so to speak, a public absolution of the sins of the communicants, the true voice of the gospel announcing remission of sins, and therefore the one and most worthy preparation for the Lord's Table, if faith holds to these words as coming from the mouth of Christ himself. On this account I would like to have it pronounced facing the people, as the bishops are accustomed to do, which is the only custom of the ancient bishops that is left among our bishops.

VI. Then, while the *Agnus Dei* is sung, let him [the liturgist] communicate, first himself and then the people.³⁰

Luther's suggestion that "the evangelically minded" have the freedom to recite the Words of Institution "either silently or audibly" seems strange. This was a concession that Luther should not have made, and in later years he certainly would not have made it. In his Large Catechism, published six years after the appearance of the *Formula Missae*, Luther writes—concerning who it is who receives the benefits of Christ's Supper—that

It is the one who believes what the words say and what they give, for they are not spoken or preached to stone and wood but to those who hear them, those to whom he says, "Take and eat," etc. And because he offers and promises forgiveness of sins, it can be received in no other way than by faith. This faith he himself demands in

³⁰ Martin Luther, "An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg," 26–29.

the Word when he says, “given for you” and “shed for you,” as if he said, “This is why I give it and bid you eat and drink, that you may take it as your own and enjoy it.” All those who let these words be addressed to them and believe that they are true have what the words declare.³¹

None of this can be so, however, if the Words of the Lord in the sacrament are not audibly “spoken or preached” to communicants; if these Words are not “addressed to” communicants; or if communicants are not able to “hear them” in the celebration of the Supper. And of course, by the time we get to the Formula of Concord in 1577, this question is dogmatically and decisively settled for us. The Solid Declaration teaches that

in the administration of the Holy Supper the Words of Institution are to be clearly and plainly spoken or sung publicly in the congregation, and in no case are they to be omitted. This is done, first, so that Christ’s command, “Do this,” may be obeyed. Second, it is done so that Christ’s words will arouse, strengthen, and confirm the hearers’ faith in the nature and benefits of this sacrament... Third, it is done so that the elements of bread and wine are sanctified and consecrated in this holy practice, whereby Christ’s body and blood are offered to us to eat and to drink, as Paul says [1 Cor 10:16], “The cup of blessing that we bless...”³²

The Formula Missae: The Elevation

Regarding the elevation, Luther seems to sense that a ceremonial ritual which looks like a sacrifice to God on behalf of the people—since it would normally be performed by the pastor with his back to the congregation—would indeed require oft-repeated explanations that it no longer means what it used to mean; and that for Lutherans it does not actually mean what it would likely be taken to mean by most observers who witness it without the benefit of these explanations. The “sermons in the vernacular” through which people would be “taught what the elevation means” now, would need to state—in effect—what Luther himself later stated in his (*Brief*) *Confession concerning Christ’s Supper*:

³¹ Large Catechism V:33–35, KW, 470.

³² FC SD VII:7982, KW, 607.

This, too, would be a fine interpretation, if the priest would with the elevation of the sacrament do nothing other than illustrate the words, “This is my body,” as if he wished to express by means of his action: Look, dear Christians, this is the body which is given for you. Thus the elevation would not be a symbol of the sacrifice to God (as the papists foolishly imagine) but an admonition directed toward men, to provoke them to faith, particularly since he immediately elevates the bread right after speaking the words: “This is my body which is given for you.”³³

The Philippists, of course, never liked the elevation. But in time many orthodox Lutherans also seem to have concluded that the counterintuitive explanation that, in Lutheran churches, the elevation does not mean what it means in Romanist churches, was no longer worth the effort; and that the church’s belief in the Real Presence could be confessed and underscored through the use of other ceremonies which do not have the look and feel of an offering up of the body and blood of Jesus to God the Father. And so, Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae—whose credentials as orthodox Lutheran are unimpeachable—say this in their 1569 *Church Order for Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel*:

After the Exhortation, let the priest sing the Our Father and the Words of Institution of the Supper of Jesus Christ... And because the elevation has, for good and important reasons, been abolished in the neighboring Reformation churches of this and other lands, it shall therefore be discontinued in all places, so that the dissimilarity may not produce disputes.³⁴

We know that this directive did not arise from Calvinist influences, because Chemnitz and Andreae had also said in this church order that

³³ Martin Luther, “Confession concerning Christ’s Supper,” *Luther’s Works*, vol. 38 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 314.

Of course, if the elevation of the body and blood of Christ is taken to be a gesture that carries the thought, “Look, dear Christians, this is the body which is given for you,” then one would think that such a gesture could be carried out while the pastor is facing those “dear Christians”—perhaps during the *Pax Domini*—rather than while his back is to them. Since Luther in the *Formula Missae* moved the elevation from the time immediately after each part of the *Verba* has been recited to the time when the *Benedictus* is being sung, it would seem that he could have reversed the directional stance of the pastor for this ritual as well.

³⁴ Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae, *Church Order for Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel* (1569), trans. Jacob Corzine, Matthew C. Harrison, and Andrew Smith, in *Chemnitz’s Works*, vol. 9 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 91.

the pastors and ministers of the church who wish to celebrate Mass should, if communicants are present, approach the altar with all decency, and with deep devotion and invocation of the Son of God, and begin, celebrate, and complete the Office of the Mass not merely in their common clothing but also in their churchly vestments, such as alb, chasuble, and stole. The altar shall also be adorned and clothed with fair linens and other decorative cloths. Likewise, candles shall burn on the altar, because such is the observance in neighboring Reformation churches. And nevertheless the common people may be instructed that such things are unnecessary, as though a special service to God consisted in them or the sanctification of this Sacrament depended upon them. Rather, this practice may be observed as adiaphora without any superstition. And so that in all the churches of this principality the ceremonies in the Office of the Mass may henceforth be conducted in all points with decency, order, and uniformity, as much as ever is possible...³⁵

Returning to an analysis of Luther's reform of the communion rite in the *Formula Missae*, and of his preferred and recommended usage regarding the chanting of the Words of Institution, Frank C. Senn reminds us that

Luther deleted the offertory prayers (the “minor canon”) and reduced the *canon missae* to the preface, the words of institution (joined to the preface by a *qui*-clause in the style of a “proper” insertion), and the *Sanctus*. The purpose of the deletion was to clarify the “direction” of the sacrament as God’s gift of communion with Christ rather than the people’s offering to God. But Luther also wanted the words of Christ to be proclaimed aloud since they are “a summary of the gospel.” So he inserted the *Verba Christi* into the section of the canon [broadly speaking] that was traditionally sung aloud (the preface), instead of within the post-*Sanctus* prayers that were customarily recited silently by the priest. Luther’s deletion of the Canon [narrowly speaking] may strike us as an extreme measure. We need to remember, however, that the Canon was not the entire eucharistic prayer but only the prayers after the *Sanctus*, beginning with the *Te igitur*. Few lay worshipers would have noticed the omission of a silent prayer; but they would have noticed the omission of what was, for them, the high point of the mass—the elevation of

³⁵ Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae, *Church Order for Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel*, 81.

the host and chalice. By retaining the elevation of the host at the *Benedictus qui venit* (“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”), Luther managed to retain the most dramatic moment of the medieval mass while effecting the most radical surgery on the Canon.³⁶

The Formula Missae: Its Place in Liturgical History Looking Forward

The suggestions made by Luther in 1523, for how the service of the sacrament could be structured in an evangelical mass, did have an influence on some of the early Lutheran orders that appeared soon after the publication of the *Formula Missae*. Wittenberg itself—for which Luther had specifically prepared and recommended his order—did not adopt it exactly as Luther wrote it. But the order of service that was prepared by Johannes Bugenhagen in 1524 and that was for a time used in the churches of the city did follow the main contours of Luther’s proposals. In Bugenhagen’s slight revision of Luther’s major revision:

After the Sermon or Gospel, the priest at Wittenberg prepares the bread and wine for as many persons as have announced to him that they desire to come to the Holy Sacrament, and have declared to the pastor or priest why they wish to come to the Sacrament, and have received instruction from him. The priest may then pray thus with the people: “Allgracious Father, merciful God, help that this bread and wine may be to us the true Body and the innocent Blood of Thine allbeloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”

And when he has prepared the bread and wine, the priest begins immediately to sing the *Preface*, no *Offertory* or *Canon Minor* being used. He sings or reads in loud words in Latin: *The Lord be with you*. Answer of the choir: *And with thy spirit*. Then he sings: *Lift up your hearts to God*. Answer: *We have lifted up our hearts to God*. Then he sings: *Let us thank God our Lord*. Answer: *For it is just and right*. He further sings: *Yea, verily, it is just, right and salutary that we should in all places and at all times, give thanks to Thee, Holy Father, Almighty, everlasting God, through Christ our Lord*. Then the priest refrains a short time from singing or reading, until he have taken the bread in his hands. Then he sings or reads with a loud voice: “Who in

³⁶ Frank C. Senn, “The Reform of the Mass: Evangelical, but Still Catholic,” in *The Catholicity of the Reformation*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 39.

the night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said: Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Then he raises the sacrament and shows it to the people. Then he sings or reads: "After the same manner also, when he had supped, he took the cup, gave thanks and gave it to them saying: Drink ye all of this. This is the cup of the New Testament in my blood, which was shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." Then he raises the cup; and immediately the choir and people sing: "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabaoth. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Praise be to thee in the highest. Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord. Happiness and salvation in the highest."

While the *Sanctus* is being sung, the priest should wait, and do nothing; or he should meditate, or pray as he will, especially that unto the utmost ends of the whole world, as the Gospel is learned, faith may be given to the words of Christ, the sacrament and attestation of which he sees before him. After the *Sanctus*, the priest sings: Let us pray: "Our Father, which art in Heaven—And lead us not into temptation." Answer of the choir: "But deliver us from evil. Amen. May this be done through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost," etc. Then the priest at the altar turns to the people and says: "The peace of the Lord be with you alway." Answer: "And with thy spirit." Then the choir sings, and the priest speaks in words: "O Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us, etc., give us thy peace."

Then it would not be improper if the priest desire to give an admonition to the people, for him to speak of the Holy Sacrament or something consolatory from the Gospel.

Afterwards, before the reception of the Holy Sacrament, he should pray thus for the people: "O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou eternal word of the Father, Thou Saviour of the world, Thou only living God and man, deliver us by Thy holy Body and scarlet Blood from all sins; help us at all times to fulfil Thy commandments, and not to be separated from Thee in eternity. Amen." After this prayer the priest administers to himself, and then to the people.³⁷

³⁷ "Bugenhagen's Order of Service of 1524," *The Lutheran Church Review* 10, no. 4 (1891), 290–292.

Another important Lutheran order, which was significantly influenced by the *Formula Missae* in its structure, but also with some unique features and content, was Olavus Petri's *Swedish Mass* of 1531. Here is a relevant section:

Then the priest commences the Preface, saying thus:

The Lord be with you. *Response:* And with your spirit.

Lift up your hearts to God. *Response:* We lift up our hearts.

Let us give thanks unto our Lord God. *Response:* It is right and meet.

Truly it is meet, right and blessed that we should in all places give you thanks and praise, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, for all your benefits; and especially for that benefit which you gave us when by reason of sins we were all in so bad a case that nothing but damnation and eternal death awaited us, and no creature in heaven or earth could help us. Then you sent forth your only-begotten son Jesus Christ, who was of the same divine nature as yourself; you suffered him to become a man for our sake; you laid our sins upon him; and you suffered him to undergo death instead of our all dying eternally. And as he has overcome death and risen again and now is alive for evermore, so likewise shall all those who put their trust in him overcome sin and death and through him attain to everlasting life.

And for our admonition that we should bear in mind and never forget such a benefit, in the night that he was betrayed, he celebrated a supper, in which he took the bread in his holy hands, gave thanks to his heavenly Father, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said: Take and eat; this is my body which will be given for you; do this in remembrance of me. *Then the priest lifts it up, lays it down again, and takes the cup, saying:* Likewise also he took the cup in his holy hands, gave thanks to his heavenly Father, blessed it, and gave it to his disciples and said: Take and drink all from this; this is the cup of the new testament in my blood, which will be shed for you and for many for the remission of sins; as often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me. *Then he lifts it up and sets it down again.* *Then is read or sung:* Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. *Then the priest says:* Let us all now pray as our Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, saying, Our Father... *Then the priest turns to*

the people and says: The peace of the Lord be with you. *Response:* And also with your spirit.³⁸

The basic pattern of the communion rite that Luther set forth in the *Formula Missae* involves the Words of Institution being chanted according to a *prayer tone*, in the literary form of a remembrance *within a prayer*—that is, as a part of the Preface. This pattern did not, however, become normative in the Lutheran Church. Luther's own *Deutsche Messe* of 1526 called for the Words of Institution to be sung aloud as a self-standing narrative or declaration, according to the tone that was otherwise used for the chanting of the Gospel.³⁹ But this was not because Luther had come to think that it was an error to set forth the Words of Institution as a part of a prayer, and that he now needed to correct the mistake he had made by calling for this to be done in the *Formula Missae*. In his Preface to the *Deutsche Messe* Luther spoke of the

divine service or mass...in Latin which we published earlier under the title *Formula Missae*. It is not now my intention to abrogate or to change this service. It shall not be affected in the form which we have followed so far; but we shall continue to use it when or where we are pleased or prompted to do so. For in no wise would I want to discontinue the service in the Latin language...⁴⁰

Luther did believe that the Words of Institution are inherently evangelical, and that they are in themselves a special proclamation of the gospel from Christ to us. But he believed that this proclamation from Christ could be articulated liturgically from within the literary form of a prayer, as communicants in a sense “overhear” those words when the pastor speaks them to God at the altar, in reverent thanksgiving and in solemn remembrance.

In some ways this is like the *Protevangelion* that Adam and Eve heard, when the Lord spoke in the Garden of Eden concerning the Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head and thereby deliver humanity from Satan's deceptions. But this *Protevangelion* was not, strictly speaking, spoken to our first parents. It was spoken to the *devil* as a curse and a threat: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise

³⁸ Olavus Petri: The Swedish Mass 1531, in *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, 244–245.

³⁹ Martin Luther, “The German Mass and Order of Service,” *Luther's Works*, vol. 53, 80–81.

⁴⁰ Martin Luther, “The German Mass and Order of Service,” 62–63.

your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15, English Standard Version). Yet when Adam and Eve *overheard* this curse and threat, those words became *for them* a blessing and a promise, and were received by them as a comforting proclamation of the gospel.

The Formula Missae: Christian Freedom

At the conclusion of his comments regarding the conserving and reforming of various texts and rituals of the mass—some of the less significant aspects of which we pass over here—Luther offers an important summary statement, which we shall include in its entirety:

Thus we think about the mass. But in all these matters we will want to beware lest we make binding what should be free, or make sinners of those who may do some things differently or omit others. All that matters is that the Words of Institution should be kept intact and that everything should be done by faith. For these rites are supposed to be for Christians, i.e., children of the “free woman” [Gal 4:31], who observe them voluntarily and from the heart, but are free to change them how and when ever they may wish. Therefore, it is not in these matters that anyone should either seek or establish as law some indispensable form by which he might ensnare or harass consciences. Nor do we find any evidence for such an established rite, either in the early fathers or in the primitive church, but only in the Roman church. But even if they had decreed anything in this matter as a law, we would not have to observe it, because these things neither can nor should be bound by laws. Further, even if different people make use of different rites, let no one judge or despise the other, but every man be fully persuaded in his own mind [Rom 14:5]. Let us feel and think the same, even though we may act differently. And let us approve each other’s rites lest schisms and sects should result from this diversity in rites—as has happened in the Roman church. For external rites, even though we cannot do without them—just as we cannot do without food or drink—do not commend us to God, even as food does not commend us to him [I Cor 8:8]. Faith and love commend us to God. Wherefore here let the word of Paul hold sway, “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy

Ghost” [Rom 14:17]. So the kingdom of God is not any rite, but faith within you, etc.⁴¹

A few contextualizing comments are in order. In laying out these basic principles of Christian freedom, in its relation to God’s Word, Luther has two opponents in mind: not only the Roman Church, with its legalistic *requirements* regarding many matters of text and ritual in the liturgy, but also puritanical radicals such as Carlstadt and Zwilling, with their legalistic *prohibitions* of virtually everything that had been a part of the inherited legacy of worship in the western church.

In response to the papist liturgical tyranny that had previously weighed down consciences with human laws that often contradicted the gospel, Luther reminds everyone that in our studies of sacred history we do not “find any evidence for such an established rite, either in the early fathers or in the primitive church, but only in the Roman church.” The quotations from several ancient liturgical texts that I have included in this essay illustrate the kind of variety that existed across the span of the early church. But of course, this variety existed within the parameters set by God’s Word for the kind of solemnity and seriousness that are necessary, according to the First Commandment, for mortals who stand and kneel before almighty God. People today need to be explicitly reminded of things that both Luther and his opponents simply assumed and took for granted: that the church is to “offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:28–29, ESV).

In response to the kind of iconoclastic liturgical tyranny that had wreaked havoc in Wittenberg during Luther’s absence at the Wartburg, Luther reminded everyone that we cannot do without “external rites”—“just as we cannot do without food or drink.” And every religious body has external rites, whether they admit it or not. The question to be asked, then, is not whether there are external rites in a religious gathering, but whether decisions about the use of the rites and ceremonies that are in fact being followed, have been made after careful thought and with a knowledge of the history of such things, or whether such decisions have been made rashly, impetuously, and in ignorance of the church’s larger tradition. And another question to be asked, is what the rites and ceremonies that have been chosen for use are intended to teach, or even what they do actually teach or imply regardless of intention.

⁴¹ Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” 30–31.

Carlstadt's deliberate donning of secular attire for the celebration of Holy Communion, rather than ecclesiastical vestments, was not the absence of external rites, but was itself an external rite that taught and testified to something that Carlstadt definitely wanted to get across.

Today, a typical big-box “contemporary” church almost always follows a very predictable opening sequence of quick-paced, hand-clappy praise choruses to “warm up the crowd”; followed by the performance of a slower-speed song, often by a female singer crooning seductively; followed by a chatty welcome, a few announcements, and a prayer to “Father God” offered winsomely by a man bedecked in jeans and an untucked shirt. These, too, are “external rites,” which teach and testify to something. And we should not be overly cerebral in our conceptualization of what “teach” means in this context. A praise song set to an emotionally-manipulative Dionysian chord progression, with words that involve a mantra-like stringing-together of innocuous phrases from the Bible, may not teach much of anything in terms of creedal or dogmatic content. But such a praise song may very well be ingraining an enthusiast piety into misled Lutherans who have been enticed by these sectarian worship forms: freighted as they are with Arminian and revivalist assumptions; and deliberately shaped as they have been to implement an Arminian and revivalist purpose—even if they do not explicitly teach Arminian and revivalist doctrine.

As I have already noted, Luther's wise guiding principle in the *Formula Missae* was to avoid innovations as much as possible,

For I have been hesitant and fearful, partly because of the weak in faith, ...and more so because of the fickle and fastidious spirits who rush in like unclean swine without faith or reason, and who delight only in novelty and tire of it as quickly, when it has worn off. Such people are a nuisance even in other affairs, but in spiritual matters, they are absolutely unbearable.

Without being overly concerned with the ceremonial details, and while recognizing that those details may vary from place to place, Luther's own liturgical proposals nevertheless followed the judicious and conservative approach that was later endorsed in the Augsburg Confession and in its Apology:

...it can readily be judged that nothing contributes so much to the maintenance of dignity in public worship and the cultivation of

reverence and devotion among the people as the proper observance of ceremonies in the churches.⁴²

Ceremonies should be observed both so that people may learn the Scriptures and so that,

admonished by the Word, they might experience faith and fear and finally even pray. For these are the purposes of the ceremonies.⁴³

The Formula Missae: Vestments

In his summary, Luther then goes on to discuss vestments. Over against both Carlstadt and Rome, he states that

We permit them to be used in freedom, as long as people refrain from ostentation and pomp. For you are not more acceptable for consecrating in vestments. Nor are you less acceptable for consecrating without vestments.⁴⁴

Lutheran exemplars of the past, such as Brenz, Chemnitz, and Andreeae; and such as our own Norwegian Synod fathers, deeply appreciated the value of historic vestments as teaching tools regarding the office of the public ministry, and as contributors to an overall atmosphere of dignity and “specialness” in public worship. But they never thought that wearing them makes a pastor more acceptable to God. This is Luther’s point. It is in fact definitely *not* acceptable to God if a man adorns himself in a lacy surplice or in an ornate chasuble, in a spirit of proud and showy flamboyance, while looking down his nose at those who embrace a reverent yet simple “low church” piety. And it is likewise *not* acceptable to God if a man adorns himself in an academic robe, or in a neat suit and tie, in a spirit of proud and superior austerity, while looking down his nose at those who embrace a reverent and ceremonially-rich “high church” piety. There should be a mutual fraternal tolerance among the adherents of “high church” and “low church” pieties, even while each may respectfully make their case for what should or might be seen as “best practice.” In regard to the question of vestments, and in regard also

⁴² Augsburg Confession [Latin], Introduction of Part Two: 6, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 49.

⁴³ Apol. XXIV:3, KW, 258.

⁴⁴ Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” 31.

to so many other questions that arise in the church, there is no better advice to be had than that give by the apostle Paul:

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col 3:12-17, ESV).

But beyond the limits of the mutual respect that should exist among all who embrace a reverent *churchly* piety—whether “high church” or “low church”—would be those presumptuous clerics who foist an irreverent “no church” *impiety* onto God’s people, as they attempt to reshape the church into an image of the world: while catering to the obsessive craving of the flesh for entertainment; and while accommodating the old Adam’s arrogant disrespect for authority and for anything that is holy, out of its control, or beyond its experience. Such causes of division and offense need to hear *these* words from the apostle Paul:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned (Rom 12:2-3, ESV).

The Formula Missae: Pastoral Care and Preparation for Communion—Examination

The full name of the *Formula Missae* (in translation) is “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” And Luther sees a need in this document for a discussion of communion, not only in terms of the public ritual of offering and receiving it, but also in terms of

the personal, pastoral preparation of communicants. And so, in a special section entitled “The Communion of the People,” Luther sets forth a thorough guide for pastors, shaped by the gospel in general and by the Lord’s institution of his sacrament in particular. He directs that “the bishop”—who *oversees* both the public celebration of the sacrament, and the souls of those who would receive it—should

be informed of those who want to commune. They should request in person to receive the Lord’s Supper so that he may be able to know both their names and manner of life. And let him not admit the applicants unless they can give a reason for their faith and can answer questions about what the Lord’s Supper is, what its benefits are, and what they expect to derive from it.⁴⁵

This is the pastoral examination of communicants, which became in the Lutheran Church—for many generations to come—a definitive feature of a pastor’s stewardship of the Lord’s Supper and of his spiritual care of the communicant members of his congregation. Luther revisits this subject in his Large Catechism, where he says that we must speak about the Sacrament of the Altar

under three headings, stating what it is, what its benefits are, and who is to receive it. All this is established from the words Christ used to institute it. So everyone who wishes to be a Christian and to go to the sacrament should know them. *For we do not intend to admit to the sacrament, and administer it to, those who do not know what they seek or why they come.*⁴⁶

It is indeed the called pastors of the church who are entrusted with the responsibility of examining would-be communicants, and of either admitting them to the sacrament, or declining to admit them, based on their preparedness or their lack thereof as this would be determined by the pastor in the examination. The Danish Lutheran theologian Jesper Rasmussen Brochmand explained in the next century that “The only administrators of the Holy Communion are the ministers of the Word, who have been legitimately called, like Aaron, Heb. 5:4; also because those alone should administer this Sacrament who are able to examine

⁴⁵ Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” 321.

⁴⁶ LC V:1–2, KW, 467. Emphasis added.

the faith of the men using this Sacrament.”⁴⁷ And the Formula of Concord also incorporates into itself a statement that Luther had made in his capacity as a minister of Word and Sacrament—in his treatise on *The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests*—that the Lord’s Supper “is administered daily through our ministry or office.”⁴⁸

In contrast to Protestants in the tradition of Zwingli and Calvin—who deny that the body and blood of Christ are objectively present in the consecrated bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper—Confessional Lutherans have always been much more concerned and serious about the spiritual preparation of communicants. This is due to the Lutheran belief that

⁴⁷ Jesper Rasmussen [Caspar Erasmus] Brochmand; quoted in “Lay Celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar,” *Logia* 2, no. 1 (1993), 55.

More recently, John F. Brug has written that “The power of the sacraments is not dependent on ordination or on the person of the administrator, but the pastor is responsible for how the sacraments are administered. The administration of the Lord’s Supper involves spiritual judgment. Decisions commonly need to be made by the administrator about who is properly prepared to receive the Sacrament, both in public worship services and in the visitation of shutins. At times, there is a responsibility to exclude some from receiving the Sacrament. This requires a shepherd’s knowledge of the sheep, and it is definitely the work of spiritual oversight.” John Brug, *The Ministry of the Word* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), 118). Brug again: “It is clear that the Lord’s Supper should be administered by the pastor. It is not our practice to have a layman officiate at the Lord’s Supper. Even when congregations were quite isolated and some did not have a pastor present every Sunday, the Lord’s Supper was celebrated only when the pastor was present. Proper administration of the Lord’s Supper involves more than being able to read the right words. It involves pastoral responsibility for the souls of those who attend,” Brug, 221.

We leave aside here a detailed discussion of the historic debate within Lutheranism over the question of whether there are or may be certain unusual and extraordinary “emergency” circumstances that would call for an unordained layman or theological student to preside at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, in the absence of an ordained pastor. Most Lutheran theologians over the centuries have reached the casuistic judgment that the answer is No. Some have reached the casuistic judgment that the answer is Yes. See Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology*, trans. Christian C. Tiews (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 206–212.

⁴⁸ FC SD VII:77, KW, 607.

Elsewhere in the treatise from which that statement is taken, Luther further defined this “ministry or office” when he wrote that “God ordained” that the Lord’s Supper “should be administered to Christians through the *clerical office*.” And in that treatise Luther further described this “ministry or office” when he wrote that in “a true Christian mass according to the ordinance and institution of Christ, as well as according to the true intention of Christ and the church,” it is the “*pastor, bishop, or minister in the pastoral office, rightly and honorably and publicly called*,” who consecrates and distributes the sacrament. Martin Luther, “The Private Mass and the Consecration of Priests,” *Luther’s Works*, vol. 38 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 152, 208. Emphases added.

the body and blood of Christ are truly distributed even to the unworthy and that the unworthy truly receive the body and blood when the sacrament is conducted according to Christ's institution and command. But they receive it to judgment, as St. Paul says [1 Cor. 11:27–32], for they misuse the holy sacrament because they receive it without true repentance and without faith.⁴⁹

Because of their concern for souls, Lutherans want to be as sure as they are able to be, that all who commune in their churches will commune in a *worthy* manner, with true repentance, and with true faith in the Words and promise of Christ. And so Lutherans affirm that fully-trained *pastors* should be in charge of something as weighty as the examination of communicants, and the administration of the Lord's Supper to them, as those pastors thereby carry out for us an important aspect of their calling as our "spiritual fathers...who govern and guide us by the Word of God"⁵⁰—to quote from the Large Catechism.

The Lutheran Church does not believe that the rite of ordination confers upon a pastor any supernatural power to confer a sacrament which he does not already have by virtue of the fact that he—as a baptized Christian—already has the Word of God. But what an unordained lay Christian does *not* have is an *orderly divine call* to make use of that supernatural power in this very public and very important way. Ordination is a public affirmation and certification that a man has in fact been trained, tested, and called according to the order of the church, and it serves as a testimony of his fitness for the serious responsibilities of this sacred office.⁵¹ This is why Luther told Johann Sutel of Göttingen—who had been called as preacher in that city—that he should not preside at and administer the Lord's Supper until he had been ordained. According to Luther, when his ordination would take place, "then publicly before the altar, by the other ministers with prayer and laying on of hands, you shall receive the testimony and authority to handle the Supper."⁵²

⁴⁹ FC SD VII:16 (quoting the Wittenberg Concord), KW, 596.

⁵⁰ LC I:158, KW, 408.

⁵¹ The Evangelical Lutheran Synod formally declared in its 2005 doctrinal statement on *The Public Ministry of the Word* that "In the Lutheran Confessions ordination is understood as the rite by which the church confirms a man to be suitable for a call to the pastoral office (SA Part III, Art. X, Treatise 66–69). Historically the Lutheran church has reserved this rite for those entering the pastoral office."

⁵² Martin Luther, Letter to Johann Sutel, March 1, 1531; quoted in Hellmut Lieberg, *Office and Ordination in Luther and Melanchthon*, trans. Matthew Carver (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2020), 159.

In the next century, after the German Lutheran jurist Christoph Besold had converted to Roman Catholicism, he became an outspoken critic of Lutheranism. One of the things he claimed was that “the Lutherans often use as vicars certain scholars who are not yet ordained with the laying on of hands, permitting them to hear confession, feed the sick, and administer their [Lord’s] Supper.” The Lutheran theologian Johann Conrad Dannhauer responded to this by emphasizing the importance of ordination as a public “setting apart” of a man for the ministry of Word and Sacrament, which carried with it the “benefit, that the examined and unexamined teachers of the church can be distinguished.” Dannhauer adds:

Who, then, is the opponent of order who superciliously despises this rite? He is neither peaceful, because he goes against the church, nor conscientious, because he regards as worthless the means that serve to calm consciences; rather, he is headstrong.⁵³

In keeping with the historic good order of the church, if theological students are required to complete their studies and to be tested and ordained before they are allowed to carry out those important soul-care duties of the public ministry that require the most pastoral skill and competence, then complaints like those of Besold could no longer be made.

Many later Lutheran church orders stipulated that a person wanting to receive the Lord’s Supper should speak privately with the pastor prior to each occasion when he wished to commune. Luther’s counsel in the *Formul Missae*, however, called for a less rigorous approach:

But I think it enough for the applicants for communion to be examined or explored once a year. Indeed, a man may be so understanding that he needs to be questioned only once in his lifetime or not at all. For, by this practice, we want to guard lest the worthy and unworthy alike rush to the Lord’s Supper, as we have hitherto seen done in the Roman church.⁵⁴

⁵³ Johann Conrad Dannhauer, *Liber conscientiae apertus, sive theologiae conscientiarum* (Strassburg: Spoor, 1679), 1005–1006; quoted in Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, *The Church & the Office of the Ministry, Ministry*, trans. and ed. Matthew C. Harrison (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012), 260.

⁵⁴ Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” 33.

Yet even if the pastor does not require all communicants to speak with him each time they intend to partake of the sacrament, he does reserve the right to ask a guest or a parishioner to speak with him beforehand on any occasion when he judges that this needs to be done. Pastoral aptitude is required not only within such a private conversation, but also for determining whether such a private conversation should take place. In the *Formula Missae*, Luther describes the kind of things that may need to be taught, the kind of judgments that may need to be made, and the kind of admonitions and encouragements that may need to be given, in the context of such private conversations. He writes that a communicant

should be able to repeat the Words of Institution from memory and to explain that they are coming because they are troubled by the consciousness of their sin, the fear of death, or some other evil, such as temptation of the flesh, the world, or the devil, and now hunger and thirst to receive the word and sign of grace and salvation from the Lord himself through the ministry of the bishop, so that they may be consoled and comforted; this was Christ's purpose, when he in priceless love gave and instituted this Supper, and said, "Take and eat," etc. ... Those, therefore, who are not able to answer in the manner described above should be completely excluded and banished from the communion of the Supper, since they are without the wedding garment [Mt 22:11-12].

When the bishop has convinced himself that they understand all these things, he should also observe whether they prove their faith and understanding in their life and conduct. For Satan, too, understands and can talk about all these things. Thus if the pastor should see a fornicator, adulterer, drunkard, gambler, usurer, slanderer, or anyone else disgraced by a manifest vice, he should absolutely exclude such person from the Supper—unless he can give good evidence that his life has been changed. For the Supper need not be denied to those who sometimes fall and rise again, but grieve over their lapse. Indeed, we must realize that it was instituted just for such people so that they may be refreshed and strengthened. "For in many things we offend all" [Jas 3:2]. And we "bear one another's burdens" [Gal 6:2], since we are burdening one another.

But I was speaking of those arrogant people who sin brazenly and without fear while they boast glorious things about the gospel.⁵⁵

This level of pastoral care is beyond the ability of a lay elder or of an untried seminary student. But this level of pastoral care is a part of what is or should be expected of a man who has been authorized to serve as the steward of the sacrament of Christ's body and blood in any given time and place.

The Formula Missae: Pastoral Care and Preparation for Communion—Absolution

One of the primary ways in which Lutheran pastors have traditionally exercised this kind of specialized spiritual care for communicants is private confession and absolution, which was and is often been carried out in conjunction with the pre-communion examination. The Augsburg Confession states accordingly that “private absolution should be retained and not abolished,”⁵⁶ and that, in fact,

Confession has not been abolished by the preachers on our side. For the custom has been retained among us of not administering the sacrament to those who have not previously been examined and absolved.⁵⁷

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession reaffirms the Lutheran position on this and on related matters when it declares that we Lutherans

do not abolish the Mass but religiously retain and defend it. Among us the Mass is celebrated every Lord's day and on other festivals, when the sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake of it, *after they have been examined and absolved*. We also keep traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of readings, prayers, vestments, and other similar things.⁵⁸

In the Augsburg Confession it is recognized, however, that in confession “it is not necessary to enumerate all misdeeds and sins, since it is not possible to do so. Psalm 19[:12]: ‘But who can detect their errors?’”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” 32–33.

⁵⁶ AC XI:1 [German], KW, 44.

⁵⁷ AC XXV:1 [German], KW, 72.

⁵⁸ Apol. XXIV:1, KW, 258. Emphasis added.

⁵⁹ AC XI:2 [German], KW, 44.

And in the Large Catechism it is stated that Lutherans “have always taught” that the practice of going to the pastor for confession

should be voluntary and purged of the pope’s tyranny. We have been set free from his coercion and from the intolerable burden and weight he imposed upon the Christian community. Up to now, as we all know from experience, there has been no law quite so oppressive as that which forced everyone to make confession on pain of the gravest mortal sin.⁶⁰

And according to Luther, what cannot be required in general likewise cannot be required in the specific context of preparation for the Lord’s Supper. And so he says, in the *Formula Missae*:

Now concerning private confession before communion, I still think as I have held heretofore, namely, that it neither is necessary nor should be demanded. Nevertheless, it is useful and should not be despised; for the Lord did not even require the Supper itself as necessary or establish it by law, but left it free to everyone when he said, “As often as you do this,” etc. [I Cor 11:25–26].⁶¹

I must say that I find the seeming comparison between the freedom to go or not to go to private confession, and the freedom to go or not to go to communion, a bit odd. Luther’s point regarding private confession would appear to be that since it “is useful and should not be despised,” Christians therefore should at least occasionally make use of it. But there is no divine command for exactly when or how often they should do so. Likewise with respect to the Lord’s Supper, while there is a more definite command from Christ that it be received (“Do this”), precisely when and how often it is received is not a matter of divine prescription. Luther wants to remove *coercion* from both confession and communion, but he does not want to remove either confession or communion *themselves* from the life of the church and of the Christian.

And even if a church order might indicate that someone is ordinarily expected to go to private confession before receiving the Lord’s Supper (as was the case with some Lutheran church orders), that still does not mean that any specific sins need to be confessed. There is value and special comfort in receiving a personal and individualized

⁶⁰ LC, Confession: 1, KW, 476.

⁶¹ Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” 34.

absolution even if the confession that preceded it had been a general confession. Luther says:

To confess sin does not mean (as among the papists) to recite a long catalog of sins, but to desire absolution. This is in itself a sufficient confession, that is, acknowledging yourself guilty and confessing that you are a sinner. And no more should be demanded and required, no naming and recitation of all or some, many or a few sins, unless you of your own accord desire to indicate something that especially burdens your conscience and calls for instruction and advice or specific comfort, such as young, plain folk and also others often require.⁶²

In the Smalcald Articles we confess that “absolution or the power of the keys” is “a comfort and help against sin and a bad conscience and was instituted by Christ in the gospel,” and therefore that

confession, or absolution, should by no means be allowed to fall into disuse in the church—especially for the sake of weak consciences and for the wild young people, so that they may be examined and instructed in Christian teaching. However, the enumeration of sins ought to be a matter of choice for each individual... Because private absolution is derived from the office of the keys, we should not neglect it but value it highly, just as all the other offices of the Christian church.⁶³

So, even if private confession is not required, it should at least be encouraged, as Luther encouraged it in the *Formula Missae* when he said that it “is useful and should not be despised.” And people should be actively invited to it. If the invitation is regularly offered by the pastor, then it may at least occasionally be heeded by a communicant burdened with guilt who feels the need to confess something that is bothering him, and to discuss it with the pastor, before taking communion.

A Christian has the right to expect that the man who is going to administer the sacrament to him in the public service, will also be able to help him prepare for that administration in a *private* meeting before

⁶² Martin Luther, *Am Oster Dinstage. Evangelium Luc. xxiiii. Ein ander Predigt.* [On the Festival of Easter. The Gospel according to Luke 24. Another Sermon.] (1531) (*Crucigers Sommerpostille*, 1544) (WA 21:263); quoted in *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, vol. 1, ed. Ewald M. Plass (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 331.

⁶³ SA III, 8:1–2, KW, 321.

the public service. Here again is a reason why properly-trained and duly-called pastors are the ones who carry out these sacred duties in and for the church. More is involved here than a formulaic recitation of the words of absolution after someone has confessed a sin. Pastors know how to hear a confession. They know how to apply the gospel in response to a confession, how to counsel someone who has made a confession, and how to keep the confidences that are shared in a confession. Lay elders and untried seminary students are not ready for this kind of intense and deeply personal encounter with a troubled conscience.

The Formula Missae: Hymns in the Vernacular

The liturgical texts and canticles of the *Formula Missae*, as published in 1523, were in Latin. But Luther knew that over the long term, the exclusive use of Latin in public worship would not suffice, especially with respect to the uneducated who did not know Latin. Indeed, the Augsburg Confession, six and a half years later, is very explicit in saying that in “the Mass” as the Lutherans observe it—which they celebrate “with the greatest reverence”—

Almost all the customary ceremonies are also retained, except that German hymns, added for the instruction of the people, are interspersed here and there among the Latin ones. For ceremonies are especially needed in order to teach those who are ignorant. Paul advised [1 Cor 14:2,9] that in church a language that is understood by the people should be used.⁶⁴

In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Lutherans reject the Roman contention that it somehow “benefits hearers who are ignorant of the church’s faith to hear a Mass that they do not understand,” and they similarly reject the notion that “the mere act of hearing itself is a useful act of worship even where there is no understanding.”⁶⁵ And so it does not surprise us to hear Luther, in the *Formula Missae*, saying this:

I also wish that we had as many songs as possible in the vernacular which the people could sing during mass, immediately after the gradual and also after the *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei*. For who doubts that originally all the people sang these which now only the choir sings or responds to while the bishop is consecrating? The bishops may have these [congregational] hymns sung either after the Latin

⁶⁴ AC XXIV:1–4 [Latin], KW, 69.

⁶⁵ Apol. XXIV:2, KW, 258.

chants, or use the Latin on one [Sun]day and the vernacular on the next, until the time comes that the whole mass is sung in the vernacular.

Luther then bemoans the fact that “poets are wanting among us, or not yet known, who could compose evangelical and spiritual songs, as Paul calls them [Col 3:16], worthy to be used in the church of God.”⁶⁶ Yet even at the time of this writing, Luther himself had already begun to use his own poetic and musical gifts to write and compose hymns and tunes that were indeed “worthy to be used in the church of God,” and that are still used in the church of God today.

In the *Formula Missae* Luther sought “to encourage any German poets to compose evangelical hymns for us,”⁶⁷ and others did then follow Luther’s example, throughout the Lutheran lands of Europe, leaving us now with a broad and deep repertoire of didactic and devotional hymns that are rich in evangelical content and in literary and musical quality. Due credit must also be given to the gifted translators, beginning especially in the nineteenth century, who have for our benefit brought these masterworks of theological and doxological verbal artistry from the Lutheran mother tongues of Europe into the English language. Worthy additions to this repertoire are also produced in each generation, as the faith which inspired Luther, Speratus, Heermann, Nicolai, Gerhardt, Tranovsky, Kingo, and many others of the honored past, continues to inspire gifted individuals in our time whose texts and tunes also confess and carry this faith, and offer worship to the Almighty according to this faith.

Luther’s qualifying clause is, however, important for us to remember. What are welcome among us and in our worship are hymns both old and new that are “worthy to be used in the church of God.” But it is too often the case that modern-day Lutherans set aside the great chorales of their own church, and sing in their place the *unworthy* inane ditties of the heterodox. The problem that Paul E. Kretzmann observed almost a century ago is even worse in our time—much worse, in fact. He wrote:

We must take note also of a most deplorable tendency of our times, namely, that of preferring the shallow modern “Gospel anthem” to the classical hymns of our Church. The reference is both to the text

⁶⁶ Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” 36.

⁶⁷ Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” 37.

and to the tunes in use in many churches. On all sides the criticism is heard that the old Lutheran hymns are “too heavy, too doctrinal; that our age does not understand them.” Strange that the Lutherans of four centuries and of countless languages could understand and appreciate them, even as late as a generation ago! Is the present generation less intelligent or merely more frivolous?⁶⁸

From closer to home for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod are these words by the editors of *Lutheran Hymnary, Junior*, which should guide our practice and shape our standards also today:

The Lutheran Church is especially rich in songs and hymns of sound doctrine, high poetical value and fitting musical setting. They express the teachings and spirit of the Lutheran Church and help one to feel at home in this Church. Of course, there are songs of high merit and sound Biblical doctrine written by Christians in other denominations also, and some of these could and should find a place in a Lutheran song treasury. But the bulk of the songs in a Lutheran song book should be drawn from Lutheran sources. We should teach our children to remain in the Lutheran Church instead of to sing themselves into some Reformed sect.⁶⁹

Conclusion

After his discussion of the need for vernacular hymns, Luther wrote in the *Formula Missae*: “This is enough for now about the mass and communion.”⁷⁰ And as far as this essay is concerned, I think I can now also say that this is enough for now. 

⁶⁸ Paul E. Kretzmann, *Magazin für evangelisch-lutherische Homiletik und Pastoraltheologie* 53, no. 6 (1929), 216–217.

⁶⁹ Introduction, *Lutheran Hymnary, Junior* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1916).

⁷⁰ Martin Luther, “An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg,” 37.

East Prussia the First Lutheran State

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IT IS OFTEN ASSUMED THAT THE FIRST LUTHERAN state or territory was Electoral Saxony or another German state near Wittenberg. However, this is not the case. The first state to become officially Lutheran was East Prussia, a German land, far to the east near the Baltic states. This occurred in 1525, the five hundredth anniversary of which is remembered this year. The German language and a Lutheran service were used in Königsberg before they were introduced in Wittenberg.

If one searches a modern map for East Prussia, he will look in vain. It is not to be found. Before the Second World War, East Prussia's western border was along the Weichsel (Vistula) and Nogat rivers east of Danzig (Gdańsk). It had a long Baltic seacoast reaching its northern most town of Memel (Klaipėda). To the north and east, it was bordered by Lithuania and to the south lay Poland. Before the First World War, it was surround by Russia on three sides. At the end of the Second World War, the Allies decided that East Prussia should no longer exist. Its land was divided between Poland and the old Soviet Union.

Christianization and the Reformation

A number of unsuccessful attempts to Christianize East Prussia were made by Adalbert of Prague, Brun von Querfurt, and others. However, Christianity was first brought to East Prussia by the Teutonic Knights, a military order like the Knights Templar, who first served in the Holy Land and later were asked to help convert the pagan Prussians. In 1230 on the basis of the Golden Bull of Rimini, the Grand Master of

the Teutonic Knights, Hermann von Salza, with some Polish assistance, launched a crusade for the purpose of converting the pagan Prussians.¹ With the support of the Holy Roman Emperor, they made the Prussian lands their own. The Golden Bull of the emperor granted the Teutonic Knights any pagan land that they conquered, and many German settlers from the west were invited to this virgin land. The pagan Prussians were neither Germans nor Slavs but belonged to the Baltic-speaking Lett-Lithuanians. They were generally few in number and were either decimated in battle or assimilated into the German population. The original Prussian language slowly died out, and German became the language of the land.

The Teutonic Knights continued to expand their dominance in the area controlling Danzig and West Prussia (Royal Prussia) and even Livonia (Latvia). Major towns founded by the order included Thorn (Toruń), Kulm (Chełmno), Marienburg (Malbork) Allenstein (Olsztyn), Elbing (Elbląg), Memel (Klaipėda), and Königsberg (Kaliningrad), founded in 1255 in honor of King Ottakar II of Bohemia. The baptism of the Lithuanian Prince Jagiello in 1386, who was also King of Poland, began the conversion of Lithuania, the last European pagan state, and resulted in conflict with Teutonic Knights. Their power slowly declined so that by 1410 they were defeated in battle by the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom. The battle was fought near the two towns Grunwald and Tannenberg. The Poles called it the victory of Grunwald while the Germans referred to it as the defeat of Tannenberg by the hand of the Slavs. “Five centuries later, in August 1914, when a German army defeated a Russian one near the site, the Germans called this the second battle of Tannenberg, as if to wipe the 1410 Slav victory of Grunwald off the map.”²

The order was compelled by the Peace of Thorn in 1466 to give all of West or Royal Prussia to Poland which had not belonged to Poland before this. The knights retained East Prussia with its headquarters at Königsberg. Before this, their headquarters had been at Marienburg.

In 1511, Albrecht of Brandenburg-Ansbach (1490–1568, Hohenzollern) became Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights. Because he was the nephew of the King Sigismund of Poland, it was assumed this would provide better relations with Poland and give the order more support from the Hohenzollerns. Yet there was more conflict

¹ Eric Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades: The Baltic and the Catholic Frontier, 1100–1525* (Minneapolis: University Press, 1980), 79–80.

² Max Egremont, *Forgotten Land: Journeys Among the Ghosts of East Prussia* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 53.

with Poland which did not go well for Albrecht. Emperor Charles V arranged a truce in 1521 with the result that East Prussia would eventually be made a vassal of Poland and be given as a dukedom (*Herzogtum*) to Albrecht. What appeared to be a defeat actually freed Albrecht from the hierarchy of the Teutonic Knights making Reformation in East Prussia possible. It would also place the Lutherans here out of the reach of the empire.

Already in 1522, Albrecht attended a diet in Nürnberg hoping to receive support in his conflict with Sigismund, but none was to be had. While at this diet, he was converted to Lutheranism through the powerful sermons of Andreas Osiander, who at this time was a pastor in Nürnberg and disciple of Luther. Following the advice of friends, he shared privately with Luther his problems concerning the order in East Prussia. In November of 1523, Albrecht traveled to Wittenberg himself and had a meeting with Luther at which Melanchthon was also present.

When Albert asked Luther some questions about the *Rule* [of the order], Luther impulsively cried out that he should abandon his foolish and misleading *Rule*, take a wife, and make of Prussia a state, a principality, or duchy. Melanchthon expressed the same opinion. Albert laughed, but said nothing.³

Shortly after this, Luther wrote his *Exhortation to the Knights of the Teutonic Order*,⁴ in which he urged Albrecht to convert publicly and to turn his spiritual territory into a secular principality.

Meanwhile Lutheran teachings and preachers reached the eastern Baltic region. Luther with Albrecht's approval send Johannes Briesmann to Königsberg.⁵ He preached his first sermon in the city on September 27, 1523⁶ and soon won the support of Albrecht's friend, Georg von Polentz, bishop of Samland. The bishop, also a member of the Teutonic Order,⁷ preached his first evangelical sermon in the Königsberg's cathedral on Christmas Day 1523.⁸ In the following

³ Unless otherwise indicated, all English references to Luther's writings are based on Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Brown (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955–). References will be abbreviated LW. LW 45:137–138.

⁴ LW 45:141–158.

⁵ Briesmann later served in Riga and prepare a church order for Livonia.

⁶ LW 45:137.

⁷ H. W. Koch, *A History of Prussia* (New York: Dorest Press, 1978), 33.

⁸ Karl Krueger, "Psalms and Potatoes: The Congregations of the Polish-speaking Protestant Mazurians in East Prussia, Suwalki, Poland, and the United States" (PhD

months, he began to reform his diocese. The bishop directed the clergy of his diocese to begin a thorough study of the writings of Luther. Evangelical hymns in the German language were to be sung, and the Gospel of salvation alone in Christ the crucified was to be proclaimed. Towards the end of 1524, another bishop, Erhard von Queis accepted the Lutheran Reformation and began proclaiming evangelical sermons in Graudenz (Grudziadz). Like his fellow bishop Polentz, he encouraged Lutheran teaching throughout his Pomesanian diocese.⁹

While meeting with Luther, Albrecht met a young evangelical preacher by the name of Paul Speratus. He had been working in Vienna and then in Iglau, Moravia but was driven out by persecution and had come to stay in Wittenberg. Here he worked with Luther and assisted him in the preparation of the first Lutheran hymn-book, *Etlich Christlich Lider (Achtliederbuch)* with four hymns by Luther, three by Speratus, and one anonymous text. With Luther's approval, Albrecht sent Speratus to Königsberg to assist Briesmann, Polentz, and Queis in the Reformation.

Albrecht remained in close contact with Luther, Osiander, and other Wittenberg reformers. He was strengthened in the Lutheran faith and became more and more convinced that medieval monasticism, even in its military form, was contrary to the Holy Scriptures. As a result, he found a way out of his struggle with his Polish uncle. In 1525 Albrecht resigned his office as the head of the Teutonic Knights and secularized the order as Luther had urged. He changed East Prussia into a duchy to be ruled by him and his heirs as a vassal of his uncle Sigismund. This was confirmed by the Treaty of Krakow.¹⁰ Thus in May of 1525, East Prussia became the first Lutheran state.

Albrecht basically had done what Luther urged him to do in 1523, but he had still not taken a wife. This however would soon be remedied. He revoked his vow of chastity which was part of the secularization of the Teutonic Order in Prussia. On July 1, 1526, Albrecht married Dorothea, the daughter of King Frederick I of Denmark, founding the evangelical house of the Hohenzollern.¹¹

diss., University of Michigan, 1992), 1:47.

⁹ Iselin Gundermann, "Herzogtum Preußen," in *Die Territorien des Reichs im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung: Land und Konfession 1500–1650*, vol. 2, *Der Nordosten*, ed. Anton Schindling and Walter Ziegler (Münster: Aschendorff, 1990), 222.

¹⁰ Walther Hubatsch, *Geschichte der Evangelischen Kirche Ostpreußens* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 1:14.

¹¹ Bodo Nischan, *Lutherans and Calvinist in the Age of Confessionalism* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1999), V:10.

As the duke of Prussia, Albrecht enthusiastically promoted the Lutheran Reformation. A meeting of the clergy and estates was held to regulate church life. Luther was invited to participate in the gathering, but peasant unrest in Germany prevented him from leaving Saxony. By December of 1525 a territorial ordinance (*Landesordnung*) was approved that organized the Prussian Church.¹²

According to the legislation of December 15, the parish pastor in the Duchy would be selected by the parish patrons (wealthy land-owners), elected by the congregation, and then approved by the Bishop. For his services the pastor received four hufen (168 acres) and a yearly salary of fifty Prussian Marks that was collected from the taverns, free farmers, and landed gentry in the parish. Naturally, congregations in urban settings were expected to compensate for the unavailability of land with a larger salary. Church attendance on Sunday and holy days was mandatory. Absenteeism was a crime that came under the jurisdiction of the local landowner and was punishable with fines and whipping.¹³

Each parish was to follow the German translation of Luther's *Formulae missae* and a two-year lectionary including the entire Bible prepared for the divine service.

In order to be certain that the new territorial ordinance was being followed, at the directive of Albrecht, Polentz and Queis the bishops together with Briesmann, Speratus, and a newcomer, Johannes Poliander, began a visitation of the land. Polentz led the visitation in his diocese of Samland and Queis directed the visitation in Pomesania. As Queis conducted his visits, he contracted a disease known as the English Sweat and died of the disease. The vacant bishopric was filled with Paul Speratus. The visitors investigated the life, teaching, and theological knowledge of the pastors and teachers, and where necessary, corrected exiting abuses.

A German Lutheran hymnal was produced for East Prussia by 1527. Luther's works were disseminated throughout the land. Albrecht especially recommended Luther's *Kirchenpostille* as a pattern for preaching the Gospel, and caused a large number of copies to be distributed among the pastors. In addition, translations of Luther were made available in the languages of the Lithuanian and Masurian minorities.

¹² Gundermann, "Herzogtum Preußen," 223

¹³ Krueger, "Psalms and Potatoes," 1:52.

The Mission Outpost in the East and the Spread of Lutheranism

Königsberg as a port was a better center for spreading the new religion than inland Wittenberg.¹⁴ Ships left the port carrying the Gospel throughout the Baltic and beyond. As part of the Hanseatic League, trade came through the city from London to Moscow. Interestingly enough there was a Lutheran church in Moscow by 1576.¹⁵

The main impetus for the spreading of Lutheranism beyond the borders of Prussia was the establishment of the university in Königsberg. Albrecht was in many ways a Renaissance man. For example, being originally from southern Germany, he was a personal friend of Lucas Cranach and Albrecht Dürer. Thus, he founded at Königsberg a printing press, a library, and in 1544 the famous Albertina, or university. George Sabinus, a son-in-law of Melanchthon, was the school's first rector.¹⁶ It was popularly known as the "Wittenberg of the East."

Johannes (Hans) Luther, the eldest son of Luther, to whom Luther wrote an extant letter concerning the joys of heaven when Hans was only four years old, attended the Albertina in 1549.¹⁷ Here he was supported by Duke Albrecht himself until he returned home in 1551 at the request of his mother. Later, on a diplomatic mission for the Elector of Brandenburg in 1575, he died in Königsberg and was solemnly buried by the university.¹⁸ Many other important people attended this university, such as Abraham Calov, but probably the most famous of these was Immanuel Kant.

The original purpose of the university was to provide pastors for Albrecht's duchy, but slowly students arrived from Danzig and West Prussia as well as Poland and Lithuania. There were individuals in the major commercial cities of Poland and Posen who were interested in the doctrine of Luther. As a result, the Lutheran teaching of the Königsberg university aroused their curiosity. Since it was assumed in the Reformation that the Scriptures would be taught in the language of the people, the university soon established Polish and Lithuanian chairs within the theological faculty. Luther's writing and religion texts were

¹⁴ Alan Palmer, *The Baltic: A New History of the Region and its People* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2005), 81.

¹⁵ Matthew Heise, *The Gates of Hell: An Untold Story of Faith and Perseverance in the Early Soviet Union* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2022), 9.

¹⁶ Paul Stettiner, *Aus der Geschichte der Albertina, 1544–1894* (Königsberg: Hartungsche Verlagsdruckerei, 1894), 8.

¹⁷ LW 49: 321–324.

¹⁸ LW 49:152.

translated into the various languages use by the native population and by the lands surrounding East Prussia.

By establishing a school that prepared German-, Polish-, and Lithuanian-speaking pastors for careers in Prussia or their homeland, Albrecht transformed Prussia into an independent intellectual realm and his church into a self-sustaining evangelical territorial church. Königsberg, previously a quiet port on the Baltic, became a major center for Lutheran thought in Central Europe. Before the close of the sixteenth century its university instructed some 3,906 students from Prussia as well as Poland, Lithuania, Germany, Latvia, Croatia, Hungary, and Transylvania.¹⁹

Many men returned home from this Prussian university proclaiming that man is justified or declared righteous by nothing that he does or accomplishes, but alone on the basis of Christ's redemptive work which is brought to the individual through the means of grace, Word and Sacrament, and is received by faith in the Savior which faith is worked by those very means of grace. They taught as Luther did that salvation from beginning to end was the work of the gracious Triune God.

Besides founding a Lutheran university, Albrecht furthered the cause of the Lutheran Reformation by establishing Königsberg as a major printing center. Lutheran literature was produced in German, Polish, and Lithuanian. This literature was used at home and dispensed throughout Central and Eastern Europe. One of the first works printed in Polish was a translation of Luther's Small Catechism. Many other works were produced for Polish readers including Luther's home devotional, his *Hauspostille*. The first book to be printed in the Lithuanian language was a catechism, and it was printed not in Lithuania but in Königsberg.²⁰

Mörlin, Chemnitz, and the Osiandrian Controversy

Andreas Osiander the Elder (1498–1552) was born near Nürnberg and later as pastor of the Saint Lorenz church in that city, he became one of its early reformers.²¹ As noted above Albrecht was converted to Lutheranism through his preaching, and he considered Osiander to be his spiritual father. Through Albrecht, he was responsible for the origin of Lutheranism in East Prussia. Therefore, it was only natural that when

¹⁹ Krueger, "Psalms and Potatoes," 1:60.

²⁰ Egremont, *Forgotten Land*, 223.

²¹ His niece married Thomas Cranmer, one of the important reformers in England.

his life was endangered at the time of the Augsburg Interim he fled to Albrecht and East Prussia for safety. He became a professor at the university in Königsberg in 1549.

The Osiandrian Controversy centered around the doctrine of justification taught by Osiander. Reacting against what he regarded as over-emphasis on forensic justification, he taught that God does not declare the sinner just but makes him just. God does not impute Christ's obedience and righteousness to the sinner, but Christ's divine nature dwells within him which is his righteousness. One is righteous before God on the basis of Christ's divine, inherent righteousness dwelling within him. Many viewed the teachings of Osiander as a reversion to the Roman view of justification. The authors of the *Formula* categorically confessed the biblical doctrine of forensic justification, that mankind is declared righteous on the basis of obedience and righteousness gained by another, namely, Christ. Christ is man's righteousness, not according to the divine nature alone or according to the human nature alone, but according to both natures. The whole Christ accomplished the perfect obedience and righteousness which is counted as mankind's by faith in the Savior.²²

Now Christ, both God and man in one person, indeed dwells within the believer but this is not the basis of salvation, but the result of being saved by trusting alone in Christ's redemptive work. When an individual is brought to faith in the Savior, the entire Trinity makes its dwelling in him (John 14:22–24). This indwelling of the Holy Trinity is referred to as the mystical union (*unio mystica*). The mystical union is the union between God and justified man wherein the Holy Trinity dwells in the believer substantially and operates in the same by His gracious presence. Thus, the believer has union and communion with God, partaking in the divine (2 Peter 1:4). This union is effected by God Himself through the means of grace, Word and Sacrament, and assists in the believers sanctification. The Lutheran Confessions speak of this

²² For recent studies on the Osiandrian Controversy, see Timothy J. Wengert, *Defending Faith: Lutheran Responses to Andreas Osiander's Doctrine of Justification, 1551–1559*, vol. 65 in *Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation*, ed. Volker Leppin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); Olli-Pekka Vainio, *Justification and Participation in Christ: The Development of the Lutheran Doctrine of Justification from Luther to the Formula of Concord (1580)*, vol. 130 in *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions*, ed. Andrew Colin Gow (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

gracious indwelling of the Trinity by faith in the elect who have been justified through the imputation of Christ's righteousness.²³

Joachim Mörlin was called to the cathedral church in Kneiphof, a part of Königsberg, as the cathedral preacher in 1550.²⁴ He considered himself to be a student of Luther and Melanchthon and soon began to question Osiander's teaching on justification. Albrecht tried to mediate in the conflict, but it only created more division. In the midst of the controversy, Osiander died in 1552. However, this did not end the strife, for Osiander's cause was taken up by his son-in-law, Johann Funck, who was also Albrecht's court preacher. Funck encouraged the duke to dismiss Mörlin who left for Danzig and then the city of Braunschweig.

Martin Chemnitz, who was the librarian at the ducal library in Königsberg, sided with his mentor, Mörlin, in the Osiandrian Controversy.²⁵ The duke did not dismiss Chemnitz because he needed his expertise as an astrologer. Chemnitz, however, decided himself not to remain in the hostile atmosphere of Prussia, especially since his friend Joachim Mörlin had been banished by the duke. After Mörlin's

²³ See FC SD III.54 in *Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 933–935; Luther, WA 28:25–32,39–41.

²⁴ Joachim Mörlin (1514–1571) was born in Wittenberg when Luther was still a monk in the Augustinian cloister and later attended the university there, becoming an avid follower of Luther. He was one of the hardliners in the opposition against the imperial edict of the Augsburg Interim and the Leipzig Interim. He was also among the fiercest critics of Andreas Osiander and his doctrine of justification. Remember Osiander emphasized that the divine nature of Christ dwelling within us is salvific in contradistinction to the work of Christ outside of us. According to Scripture, the righteousness that avails before God for mankind is the righteousness accomplished through the active and passive obedience of the God-Man. We are not saved by the essential righteousness of the divine Christ dwelling in us through the mystical union. Therefore, Mörlin rejected such statements of Osiander: "For 1500 years the blood of Christ has been gone and for us it is good for nothing. It dried up in the garment of Christ (*Das Blut Christi sei seit 1500 Jahren dahin und sei uns nichts nütze, es sei in Christi Rock vertrocknet*)." Jürgen Diestelmann, *Joachim Mörlin* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 2003), 133. This controversy caused him to leave Königsberg and become superintendent in the city of Braunschweig in 1553 where Martin Chemnitz (1522–1586) later joined him. In 1567, he was installed as bishop of Samland at Königsberg. He was one of the important mentors of Chemnitz.

²⁵ When the Smalcald War disrupted the University of Wittenberg temporarily, Chemnitz (1522–1586) in 1547 sought the more peaceful atmosphere far to the north at Königsberg in East Prussia. As the rector of the city's Kneiphof school, he received his master's degree in 1548 at the newly established University of Königsberg. Later he attained the position of librarian at the ducal library of Königsberg. Here he had the opportunity to do a considerable amount of study which prepared him for his future as one of the greatest theologians of the age. Chemnitz was very much a self-taught doctor of the church.

flight from East Prussia, he was called as superintendent to the city of Braunschweig. At his urging, Chemnitz accepted the duties of preacher and coadjutor in Braunschweig.

The controversy continued on in East Prussia until 1567, when Albrecht asked Mörlin to return and help in the situation. Both he and Chemnitz came to assist the duke. They produced a new doctrinal statement and church order, known as *Corpus Doctrinae Prutenicum* which was officially accepted at the Synod of Königsberg and by the estates in 1567.²⁶ It endorsed the unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Small and Large Catechisms and the *Repetitio corporis doctrinae Christianae*, while rejecting the errors of the Osiandrians, Schwenckfeldians, and Calvinists.²⁷ The exorcism in Baptism which had earlier been omitted was restored as a confessional stand against Calvinists.

Albrecht called Mörlin to be the bishop of Samland, but Albrecht died before the installation could take place. Both Albrecht and his second wife, Anna Maria, died on the same day March 20, 1568. They were laid to rest in the Königsberg's cathedral with Mörlin preaching their funeral sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:1.²⁸ In September of 1568, Mörlin was installed as bishop by Albrecht's son, Albrecht Frederick.

Wigand and Hesshus

The two dioceses of East Prussia were Samland in the northern part of the land and Pomesania in the southwest. The first evangelical bishop of Samland was Georg von Polentz followed by Joachim Mörlin and then by Tilemann Hesshus. The first evangelical bishop of Pomesania was Erhard von Queis followed by Paul Speratus, Venediger, and Wigand.

Johann Wigand served in number of places and in various capacities throughout his life.²⁹ He accepted a call to teach in Königsberg in

²⁶ The *Corpus Doctrinae Prutenicum* bound the Ducal Prussians to the CA, Ap, SA, SC, LC, and the 1567 *Repetitio corporis doctrinae Christianae. Oder Widerholung der Summa und inhalt der rechten, allgemeynen, Christlichen Kirchen lehre*, written by Joachim Mörlin and Martin Chemnitz. See Robert Kolb, "The Braunschweig Resolution: The *Corpus Doctrinae Prutenicum* of Joachim Mörlin and Martin Chemnitz as an Interpretation of Wittenberg Theology," in *Confessionalization in Europe, 1555–1700: Essays in Honor of Bodo Nischan*, ed. John M. Headley, Hans J. Hillerbrand, and Anthony J. Papalas (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 67–89.

²⁷ Diestelmann, *Joachim Mörlin*, 308.

²⁸ Diestelmann, *Joachim Mörlin*, 325.

²⁹ Johann Wigand (1523–1587) was born in Mansfeld and educated at Wittenberg. He left Wittenberg to serve in his hometown of Mansfeld in 1545, where his duties

1573. Following Venediger, Wigand was elected the Lutheran bishop of Pomesania also in 1573, in which position he remained until his death in 1587. He played a major role in gaining the acceptance of the *Book of Concord* in East Prussia. He was the last Lutheran bishop in the eastern German lands. After his death there was a move to the consistorial form of church government.

At the same time (1573), Wigand's long-time friend and associate, Tilemann Heshus, succeeded Mörlin as bishop of Samland.³⁰ The

included instruction in dialectic and physics at the local school. From Mansfeld, he proceeded to Magdeburg at the time of its resistance to Charles V and the Augsburg Interim. Here he worked on *The Magdeburg Centuries* together with Flacius and Judex. He was part of that movement which came to be known as "Gnesio-Lutheranism," and he was a critic of the Philippists and all others who opposed the Gnesio-Lutherans' radical understanding of Luther's teaching. The fact that Wigand later split with Matthias Flacius over the definition of original sin did not make him less a member of the radical Lutheran party to which he, alongside Flacius, gave major leadership. He went to Jena in 1560 and was deposed in 1561. Robert Kolb, *Luther's Heirs Define His Legacy* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), XVI:95. By the year 1563, Wigand had served as pastor in Magdeburg, professor with Flacius in Jena, and superintendent of the church in Wismar in Mecklenberg. In 1568 he returned to Jena. It was during this stint at Jena that he was asked to give a *Gutachten* concerning the Saliger Controversy which concerned the time of the presence in the Lord's Supper. He was deposed again at Jena in 1573. He and Heshus were given four days to leave Thuringia. Wigand headed immediately for Braunschweig where he enjoyed the company of Chemnitz. In 1573 he was called to the University of Königsberg, and the same year he became bishop of Pomesania.

³⁰ Tilemann Heshusius or Heshus (1527–1588) was born at Wesel in Cleves. He studied under Melanchthon at Wittenberg and became a professor at Heidelberg where Elector Ottheinrich was advancing the Lutheran Reformation. When Frederick III began to move the Palatinate toward Calvinism, Heshus, who thwarted his efforts, was deposed in 1559 for refusing to subscribe to the *Variata*. He remained a leader among Gnesio-Lutherans for a quarter century. He spent a short time as superintendent in Bremen (exiled by Calvinist forces), as superintendent in Magdeburg (exiled by the city council in a conflict over church-state relationships), as court preacher in Zweibrücken, as professor in Jena (exiled by the Philippist Electoral Saxon government [1573]), in Prussia as bishop of Samland (exiled under the direction of his former close friend, Johannes Wigand [1577]), and in Helmstedt, as university professor in 1577. Robert Kolb, "Tileman Heßhus: His Doctrine of the Pastoral Office and Its Reception in the Missouri Synod," in *The Pieper Lectures*, ed. Chris Christophersen Boshoven, vol. 1, *The Office of the Ministry* (St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute, 1997), 114–115. Heshus battled Gnesio-Lutheran forces as well as Philippist opponents. He broke with Matthias Flacius over the Croatian's definition of original sin, and he criticized the ecclesiastical policy of the city council in Magdeburg, which had been the Gnesio-Lutheran "chancellery of God" at the time of the Interims (Kolb, "Tileman Heßhus," 115).

Later, he had a major conflict with Wigand, his long-time friend, over Christological issues, and Wigand expelled Heshus from Prussia, driving him to

two soon became involved in a bitter dispute concerning Christology. Hesshus held that in the discussion of the communication of majesty (genus maiestaticum), it can be maintained that one can not only say in the concrete that the man Christ is almighty, but it is also permitted in the abstract to say that the humanity of Christ is almighty.³¹

It was also said that Christ's human nature is to be worshiped in the abstract, that is, that it is worthy of divine reverence because it subsists in the Divine Logos and with Him constitutes one person.

Now Hesshus was probably simply trying to show how anti-Calvinist he could be, but this terminology did not sit well with the rest of the clergy. Proceedings were brought against Hesshus at which Wigand was asked to preside. Because Hesshus refused to modify his position, he was deposed in 1577. Wigand assumed the responsibility of the diocese of Samland and thus he became guilty of pluralism according to church law. The abstract-concrete controversy continued in the 1580s.

Johann Gerhard in the *Theological Commonplaces* interestingly mixes up Wigand and Hesshus and has Wigand maintain what Hesshus taught. However, Gerhard gives some valuable advice concerning this dispute. He says that the word abstract has been used in more than one way. At times the word abstract is used to mean that a thing is considered in itself and through itself, that is, formally. In this way, it should not be used of Christ's human nature for it would endanger the hypostatic union. The human nature of Christ is never alone but subsists in the divine.

Helmstedt, where he faithfully served Duke Julius for the last decade of his life. This was the Duke Julius who was filled with animosity towards Chemnitz (Kolb, "Tilemann Heßhus," 114-115).

Hesshus, with his colleagues at the University of Helmstedt, attacked the *Formula of Concord*, after its adoption, on the grounds that it taught the "wretched ubiquity," although he himself admitted that he had formerly taught this "wretched" doctrine. The main motivation for his protest was his political and personal concerns. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 2:203. In spite of all this, Hesshus was considered to be a voice of authority in the Old Missouri Synod.

³¹ Thilo Krüger, *Empfangene Allmacht: Die Christologie Tilemann Heshusens 1527-1588* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 185. Haec ergo communicatio est maiestatis, ita vt non solum in concreto liceat nobis dicere: Homo Christus est omnipotens: verum etiam in abstracto: Humanitas est omnipotens (Heshusius, *Adserio Santi Testamenti Jesu Christi contra blasphemam Calvinistarum Exgesin 75v* cited in Krüger, *Empfangene Allmacht*, 185n183). "This, then, is a communication of majesty, so that not only is it permitted for us to say in the concrete: The man Christ is omnipotent, but also in the abstract: Humanity is omnipotent."

But at other times when an abstract word is used, it means Christ's human nature considered not through itself and of itself but according to the grace of the union (namely, according as it subsists in the Word), of which union and because of which union a great addition took place. The flesh of Christ is not concrete when I consider it with the intimate embrace of the other nature and of the communicated hypostasis. But if I compare it with the entire person consisting of the two natures, it is concrete.³²

It seems that Hesshus was using this second definition of abstract when he made these statements.

Hymn Writers in East Prussia

Paul Speratus (1484–1551) was not only bishop of Pomesania, but he was also an important Lutheran hymn writer. As noted above before he came to East Prussia, he had already composed several hymns and helped Luther produce the first hymnal. Later he assisted Albrecht in preparing the liturgical sections of the *Kirchenordnung* for East Prussia. Beyond a doubt his most important hymn is “Salvation unto us has come.”³³ It one of the oldest and best-known Lutheran hymns. It clearly and simply presents the Law in all its severity and the Gospel in all its sweetness. It proclaims the heart of scriptural teaching in poetic form, a true confessional hymn of the Reformation.

Throughout his life Speratus, did not have the best health. Yet even with his weak constitution, he together with Albrecht, who always remained his close friend, outlived all the other first-generation reformers in Prussia. His life came to an end August 12, 1551 while serving as bishop. He was buried in the cathedral at Marienwerder (Kwidzyn), West Prussia.³⁴

Johann (Poliander) Gramann (1487–1541), was born in southern Germany as was the case with Speratus and Albrecht. He served as rector at the *Thomasschule* at Leipzig and espoused the cause of the Reformation through the Leipzig Debate in 1519. Luther recommended him for service in East Prussia, and he became the pastor of

³² Johann Gerhard, Theological *Commonplaces*, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes and Heath R. Curtis, trans. Richard J. Dina (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), 4:277 (Locus 4, para. 273).

³³ *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her*, in *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* [ELH] (St. Louis: Morning Star Music Publishers), 227.

³⁴ Paulus Cosack, *Paul Speratus: Leben und Lieder* (Braunschweig: C. A. Schwetsche und Sohn, 1861), 217.

the Alstadt church in Königsberg, remaining the rest of his life in the city. He was known for his writing in opposition to the Anabaptists and Schwenckfelders. His best-known hymn is “*My soul now bless thy Maker*” (ELH 456).

Simon Dach (1605–1659) was born in Memel (Klaipeda) which made him a native writer. He was educated in Königsberg and Wittenberg and later returned to teach at the university in East Prussia. He was a professor of poetry at the university and was the most important figure in the Königsberg circle of poets following Martin Opitz.³⁵ The young Dach spent most of his time writing secular poetry, but later in life he turned to religious poetry when he wrote most of his hymns. Two of his hymns are found in the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, “Through Jesus’ Blood and Merit” (ELH 414) and “O how blest are ye whose toils are ended” (ELH 526).

Nikolaus Decius (c.1485–c.1546), who wrote the *Gloria in Excelsis* hymn in Rite One of the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* and “Lamb of God pure and holy” (ELH 41), spent time in East Prussia as did other hymn writers. It appears that Decius died in Mühlhausen near Elbing in East Prussia. Another interesting question concerning hymn writers is who wrote the hymn “The will of God is always best” (ELH 477). Some assume that this hymn was written by Albrecht von Brandenburg (1522–1557), who was a soldier known as the “German Alcibiades.” Others believe that the hymn was written by Duke Albrecht himself.³⁶ The hymn shows the sincere faith of the reforming duke who established the first Lutheran state.

Hohenzollern family, Lutheranism and Calvinism

Albrecht Frederick, Anna, and Johann Sigismund

Albrecht’s son, Albrecht Frederick (1553–1618), was a rather unstable individual and some considered him to be insane. Sleep did not come easy for him, for he continually feared attacks by his enemies. He suspiciously assumed that the court preacher was trying to poison him. He nursed these fears to the point that he suspected that even the communion hosts had been poisoned.³⁷ He appears to have been very

³⁵ Günter Grass, *The Meeting at Telgte* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 138.

³⁶ Diestelmann, *Joachim Mörlin*, 123. *Lutherisches Gesangbuch* (Zwickau: Concordia Verlag, 2015), 330.

³⁷ H. C. Erik Midelfort, *Mad Princes of Renaissance Germany* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 73.

melancholy and paranoid. The situation with Albrecht Frederick so deteriorated that a regent was appointed. In early 1578, the regency was taken over by his cousin, George Frederick of Brandenburg-Kulmbach.

The estates, who gain considerable power during the Osiandrian conflict at the time of his father, obtained even more authority during his reign. This would be beneficial to Lutheranism when the Hohenzollern dukes moved towards Calvinism. The estates, who were solidly Lutheran, hindered the Prussian rulers from making changes in the East Prussian Lutheran church for a considerable length of time.

Albrecht Frederick was mentally weak but physically, he was relatively strong. His father had arranged a marriage for him with Marie Eleanore of Jülich-Cleves, who was heiress to the duchy of Jülich-Cleves which was a rich, economically progressive duchy in comparison to East Prussia. It was in western Germany near the Dutch border. From this marriage, two sons and two daughters were born, but the boys did not live past a year. This made the oldest daughter, Anna, heiress to both Jülich-Cleves and East Prussia at her father's death. She married Johann Sigismund, who would be the future elector of Brandenburg.

Johann Sigismund belonged to the line of Hohenzollerns living in Berlin who were the electors of Brandenburg. This branch of the Hohenzollern family, accepted the Reformation in 1539. Joachim II (1505–1571) became a Lutheran in a very conservative Reformation.³⁸ Very few of the medieval rites were changed. His son, Johann George (1525–1598), was one of the electors who signed the Formula of Concord. However, his grandson, Johann Sigismund (1572–1619), who spent time at the University of Heidelberg in the Palatinate, the center of German Reformed learning, was influenced by its theology. In addition to this, it was politically beneficial for him to be of the Reformed persuasion in order to obtain the land of Cleves in western Germany. Thus, it seems that Johann Sigismund wanted to leave the Lutheran Church for both political and religious reasons.

³⁸ The Prussian rulers and their ruling dates:

Joachim I (1499–1535), Joachim II (1535–1571), Johann George (1571–1598), Joachim Frederick (1598–1608), Johann Sigismund (1608–1619), George William (1619–1640), Friedrich William, the Great Elector (1640–1688), and Friedrich III (1685–1713). Friedrich III ruled as elector until 1701 when he obtained the title king in Prussia (1701–1713). He was followed by Friedrich William I, the Soldier King (1713–1740), Friedrich II, the Great (1740–1786), Friedrich William II (1786–1797), Friedrich William III (1797–1840), Friedrich William IV (1840–1861), William I (1861–1871) who in his reign became the German Emperor and ruled from 1871–1888 in that capacity, followed by Friedrich III in 1888, and then William (Wilhelm) II (1888–1918).

Johann Sigismund remained a secret Calvinist for some years but on Christmas Day in 1613 he had the Lord's Supper celebrated at his court in the Reformed manner. This horrified Anna who cherished her Lutheran faith. Sigismund assumed that his family and his people would follow him in embracing the Reformed faith as was the case in the Palatinate. However, his wife, Anna, his court preacher, Simon Gedike,³⁹ and most of his people resisted the Reformed faith and his plans for a Second Reformation in Prussia.

The two outward signs of the Second Reformation⁴⁰ were the rejection of exorcism⁴¹ in Baptism and the innovation of the *fractio panis*, the breaking of bread⁴² in the Lord's Supper. The Reformed attempt to change the baptismal liturgy touched the heart of the common people. "A butcher, determined to have his daughter baptized in the proper Lutheran manner, appeared in Dresden's Hofkirche armed with a meat cleaver. He positioned himself next to the baptismal font and threatened to split the minister's head if he dared to omit the exorcism from the baptismal formula."⁴³ Johann Sigismund believed in the main tenets

³⁹ Simon Gedike (1551–1631) was born in Wurzen and was called as court preacher in Halle where he was known for his anti-Calvinistic polemics. Later he became court preacher in Brandenburg–Prussia and was entrusted with the spiritual training of Johann Sigismund. After leaving Brandenburg–Prussia because of the Reformed tendencies of Johann Sigismund, he served in Meissen and later at Merseburg. In 1624, together with Höe von Höenegg, Johann Gerhard, Balthasar Meisner, and Friedrich Balduin, he attended the conference which produced the *Decisio Saxonica* in answer to the Crypto-Kenotic Controversy.

⁴⁰ The term "Second Reformation" is used to describe the situation in which a state that was Lutheran in confession was slowly converted to Calvinism. It is also referred to as Calvinization. The implication is that the Lutheran Reformation did not go far enough, and therefore the Second Reformation was required. This is the normal use of the term Second Reformation. However, it has also been used when a Lutheran or Calvinist state was converted to Catholicism and when a Reformed state was converted to Lutheranism.

⁴¹ Baptismal exorcism had taken on the significance of being a confessional stand against the Reformed. The Lutherans understood exorcism in Baptism as a confession of the scriptural doctrine of regenerational Baptism and the teaching that man was born dead in original sin. The exorcism consisted of this phrase in the baptismal liturgy: "I adjure you, you unclean spirit, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, that you come out and depart from this servant of Christ. Amen" (*Ich beschwöre dich, du unreiner Geist, bei dem Namen des Vaters, und des Sohnes, und des Heiligen Geistes, daß du ausfahrest und weichest von diesem Diener [dieser Dienerin] Jesu Christi. Amen.*).

⁴² The *fractio panis* came to mean that the sacrament was not the body and blood of Christ but only a picture of Christ's sacrifice.

⁴³ Nischan, *Lutherans and Calvinists*, III:39. There were also skirmishes concerning the use of pictures and images and concerning the adoration of the Supper. Concerning forms of outward adoration such as the elevation, the *ostensio*, and genuflecting, Gedike

of the Second Reformation. He assumed the Lutheran Reformation did not go far enough. Too many medieval customs and doctrines remained in the Lutheran Church. He wanted to “sweep the leftover papal dung completely out of the sheepfold of Christ.”⁴⁴ The attempts by the Reformed at a Second Reformation brought enmity and bitterness between the two church bodies.

Anna did everything possible to maintain her Lutheranism and the Lutheranism of her land. When her husband planned to have her oldest son, Georg Wilhelm, educated by Reformed teachers she protested vehemently. She knew her responsibilities as a Christian mother. She trusted in Jesus as her only Savior from sin, and she wanted her children to have the blessings of that Lutheran faith.⁴⁵ Later she obtained a Lutheran husband for her daughter in the person of Gustavus Adolphus, the king of Sweden. A Christian marriage was important to her.⁴⁶

To counteract the Reformed influence of the new pastors that her husband brought into the realm, she invited the well-known Lutheran theologian, Balthasar Meisner, to come to Berlin and preach at the palace chapel. Here Lutheran services continued to be conducted for the electress.⁴⁷ In this way, she encouraged the people of Brandenburg-Prussia to continue in their Lutheran faith.

The noblemen in the realm were inspired by Anna to resist the Calvinization of her husband. She understood the Bible directive that she ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). Anna respected her husband, but she knew that he was leading his people in a direction contrary to the Word of God. His new pastors were telling the people that the Lord’s Supper was not the body and blood of Christ, and that Baptism did not work faith in the heart of an infant. Anna treasured the comfort of her Baptism and the strengthening she received from the body and blood of the Lord. Therefore, she encouraged the people to make their stand on the Word of God.

Anna’s strong stand for confessional Lutheranism in Prussia bore fruit. As a result of her encouragement, the noblemen withstood the

explained, “We do this not because we adore the communion bread as if it had been transformed into the body of Christ, but rather...to remind ourselves that through this sacrament our faith is strengthened.” Bodo Nischan, *Prince, People and Confession: The Second Reformation in Brandenburg* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 140.

⁴⁴ Nischan, *Prince, People and Confession*, 117. ...die noch hinterbliebene Unsauberkeit deß Bapstums aus dem Schaffstall Christi vollend außzufegen.

⁴⁵ Nischan, *Prince, People, and Confession*, 107.

⁴⁶ Koch, *A History of Prussia*, 41.

⁴⁷ Nischan, *Prince, People, and Confession*, 167.

demands of John Sigismund to accept the Reformed faith. Finally, he had to consent to allowing the majority of his people to remain Lutherans while he and a few of his associates practiced the Reformed faith.

The Great Elector

Each Brandenburg-Prussian leader thereafter worked to modify the differences between the Reformed and Lutherans in their lands, as is seen in the conflicts at the time of Paul Gerhardt. When Gerhardt came to Berlin as pastor, the sovereign and the ruler of Brandenburg-Prussia was the Great Elector, Frederick William (1620–1688). He was the grandson of Johann Sigismund. While the vast majority of people in Brandenburg-Prussia remained Lutheran as in the time of Johann Sigismund, the ruling family, the Hohenzollerns, were Calvinists. The Great Elector was an excellent political leader for the land. He spent his life trying to restore the economy of Brandenburg-Prussia after the Thirty Years' War.⁴⁸ At the same time, his religious views were a detriment to the Lutheran Church. The Great Elector hoped to end the distinction between the Lutheran Church and the Reformed Church by blurring the distinctive biblical doctrines of the Lutheran Church, especially the doctrines of the person of Christ and the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Supper. All this he did in the name of tolerance, irenic relations and moderation between churches advocating many of the syncretistic ideas of Georg Calixtus.⁴⁹ Yet Brandenburg-

⁴⁸ The Great Elector invited many French Reformed (Huguenots) refugees and other religious refugees to settle in the land. Most of these people were middle class businessmen who stimulated the Prussian economy. Yet, their presence in the predominantly Lutheran land necessitated, as far as he was concerned, more tolerance for the Reformed. The French Reformed refugees began to flood the land after the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685 and the Elector offered them safe haven in the Edict of Potsdam of 1685. Christian Bunner, *Paul Gerhardt: Weg, Werk, Wirkung* (Berlin: Buchverlag Union, 1993), 84.

⁴⁹ The Great Elector Frederick William wanted to use Calixtus for the purpose of Calvinizing his Lutheran subjects. Georg Calixtus (1586–1656) hoped to unite Lutherans, Catholics, and the Reformed on the basis of the idea that the Apostles' Creed contained the summary of fundamental doctrines and was sufficient for external fellowship. Calixtus further advocated the *consensus antiquitatis* or the *consensus quinque-saecularis* as the proper explication of the Creed for theologians. King Ladislaus IV of Poland issued the call for the Colloquy of Thorn in 1645 hoping to unite the Lutherans, Romanists, and Reformed in his country. Calixtus publicized and promoted the colloquy. The Great Elector invited him to participate in the colloquy. However, Calov and Hülsemann barred him from representing the Lutherans. Therefore, he assisted the Reformed theologians. This colloquy clearly enunciated the proper biblical teaching

Prussia, with its two and a half million Lutherans and only around fifteen thousand Reformed, was not interested in union.⁵⁰ This was the general situation as Gerhardt wrote his hymns.⁵¹

Another issue centered around confession and absolution. The early Lutherans continued to practice private absolution. Before receiving Holy Communion, people would come to their pastor and confess their sins individually. If there were any particular sins that were bothering them, these sins were also confessed. Thereupon, the minister would lay his hands on them and pronounce the forgiveness. This rite usually occurred in the chancel of the church, outside of a normal worship service on Saturday. In the German language, it was called the *Beichtstuhl* because the pastor sat in a confessional chair. At the same time, there were churches that had public absolution in their divine service.⁵² This form of private absolution was still common at the time of Paul Gerhardt and the Great Elector, and the Brandenburg-Prussian leaders viewed it as a remnant of Romanism. They were influenced by those who accused the Lutherans of having four dumb idols: the font, the altar, the pulpit, and the confessional.⁵³ Paul Gerhardt, an orthodox Lutheran pastor, tried to preserve private absolution in Berlin.

As a result of Lutheran Pietistic influences and the Reformed pastors imported by the Elector, questions arose concerning confession and absolution. These individuals felt that it was improper to absolve parishioners in preparation for Holy Communion if their life did not emulate their repentance. The conflict continued after the death of the

of prayer fellowship because the true Lutherans would not pray with the Reformed, Catholics, and syncretistic Lutherans (*Der Lutheraner*, 64, no. 7 [April 7, 1908] 111; Adolf Hoenecke, *Ev. Luth. Dogmatik*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1909) 1:7. Later Electoral Saxony issued the *Consensus repetitus fidei vere Lutheranae* which was a confession against syncretism that reaffirmed the Augsburg Confession. See Timothy Schmeling, "Slaying the Syncretistic Chimera: A Study of the *Consensus Repetitus* in Light of Confessionalization Theory" (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, 2014).

⁵⁰ The conflict between the Lutheran and the Reformed in Brandenburg-Prussia was primarily religious. However, there were also political dimensions to the conflict. The Great Elector was striving for absolutism in his government in contradistinction to the rights of the local nobility. The local nobility used their Lutheranism as a method to resist the Reformed Elector's centralization of power. Bunner, *Paul Gerhardt*, 76.

⁵¹ See Gaylin R. Schmeling, "Paul Gerhardt: Pastor and Theologian," *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (March 2008), 18–26.

⁵² Luther Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1947), 257–259.

⁵³ F. Stoeffler, *German Pietism During The Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 180.

Great Elector. Even Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705) tried to mediate in the controversy. In 1698, Elector Frederick III, the son of the Great Elector (who would become King Frederick I in 1701) decreed that private confession and absolution was not mandatory before receiving the Sacrament. After the sermon in the divine service, there would be common confession and absolution and private confession and absolution would still be allowable for those that desired it. This brought an end to the controversy.

The Soldier King

Frederick William I (1688–1740), the Soldier King,⁵⁴ was married to Sophia Dorothea, the Lutheran daughter of George I of England. The Soldier King tends to get bad rap in secular history. He is known for being cruel to his son Frederick the Great, and for desiring to gather tall soldiers into his army. On a positive note, he enlarged and organized the Prussian army making Prussia a European power, and he put the economy of the nation on a firm footing. He provided his son the tools that made it possible to fight all the wars that he did.

Theologically, he aligned himself with Lutheran Pietism. Throughout his life he was an avid reader of the Lutheran devotional writer, Johann Arndt, and preferred to attend Lutheran pietistic services with his soldiers rather than attending the Reformed services of his court. He assumed that Lutheran Pietism in its Halle form could be a middle road between his Calvinist upbringing and Orthodox Lutheranism which was predominate in the land.⁵⁵ His father had already brought Spener, the founder Lutheran Pietism, to Prussia who helped establish Halle as the Pietist university. Frederick William I had a close association with August Francke, the leading professor at Halle and the organizer of the Halle institutions. The king encouraged the churches of Prussia to receive their pastors from Halle so that the congregations would be imbued with the spirit of Pietism, and lessen their distinctive denominational traditions and doctrines. Many of the early pastors that came to America such as Mühlenberg were products of Halle. While Lutheran Pietism in Prussia weakened many of the traditions of Lutheranism, it would not go as far as union with the Reformed.

⁵⁴ He was the son of Frederick I who became king in Prussia in 1701.

⁵⁵ Richard L. Gawthrop, *Pietism and the Making of Eighteenth-Century Prussia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 204.

Another way of promulgating Lutheran Pietism was through the Prussian Army Chaplaincy.⁵⁶ The king made sure that most of the positions in the chaplaincy were filled with Halle men. These pastors influenced the soldiers under their care with Halle views, which the young soldiers in turn took home to their family parishes. In this way, Lutheran Pietism worked like leaven throughout Prussia.

Many of the Prussian Kings settled religious refugees especially in their sparsely populated eastern lands. Most of these were Reformed refugees which added to the small Reformed population. An example of this were the two French Reformed churches in the center of Berlin. Frederick William I did the same, but one of the largest groups of refugees that he resettled was the Lutheran Salzburgers. Forcibly exiled in 1732 by the Catholic bishop, around fourteen thousand of them accepted the king's invitation and marched north to his domain, ten thousand of which settled in East Prussia.⁵⁷ Again, these Salzburger who were influenced by Pietism fit into king's theological agenda.

With its emphasis on personal experience and the subjective aspects of faith, Pietism undermined the objective truths of Scripture and left the church vulnerable to rationalism, which placed human reason above God's Word. After 1758, the floodgates were open to rationalism in Europe.⁵⁸ Rationalism rejected everything supernatural in the Bible. Christ's miracles, resurrection, and deity were attacked. Rationalist preachers filled the pulpits, starving the people to death with moralism. The truths of salvation were pushed aside as contrary to reason, and Christ became no more than a great teacher. "The pulpit descended to a purely 'practical' choice of subjects: 'The value of early rising'; 'the value of feeding cows in the stable during the winter' (this on Christmas Day); 'the value of vaccination against smallpox'; etc., etc."⁵⁹ Rationalism further weakened Orthodox Lutheranism in the Prussian lands.

The Prussian Union

Each Prussian leader continued to down play the differences between the Reformed and Lutherans in their lands, and strive for a

⁵⁶ Benjamin Marschke, *Absolutely Pietist: Patronage, Factionalism, and State-Building in the Early Eighteenth Century Prussian Army Chaplaincy* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2005), 28ff.

⁵⁷ Hubatsch, *Geschichte*, 1:188.

⁵⁸ Gaylin Schmeling, "Two Thousand Years of Grace," *Synod Report* [of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod] 83 (2000), 65.

⁵⁹ Carl S. Mundinger, *Government in the Missouri Synod* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 19.

union of the two faiths, climaxing on the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in 1817. Frederick William III, ruler of Prussia, issued a proclamation announcing that the Lutheran and Reformed churches in his lands be united into one church. The royal proclamation appeared on September 27 under the title “*Entstehung der preussischen Landeskirche*” (Formation of the Prussian State Church). The proclamation called for ministers and churches of both confessions to overcome their narrow views by joining in receiving the Lord’s Supper, and by uniting in a common church organization. For upper-class Prussians imbued with the rationalism of the period, the proclamation was a logical and acceptable solution to the religious divisiveness of the past era. One of the reasons that the king made this proclamation was that he, a Calvinist, had not been able to receive the Holy Supper with his Lutheran Queen, Louise of Mecklenberg.⁶⁰ This union was scandalous, based on compromise. Only in backwoods villages were the mysteries of God treasured, the Word taught in its truth and purity, and the Sacraments rightly administered.

In 1822, the King personally prepared a church agenda for his union church, commonly referred to as the Prussian Union. This agenda pleased neither the Lutherans nor the Reformed. The Reformed felt that the liturgy was too Lutheran, even Catholic, while the Lutherans saw Reformed elements within the book.⁶¹ The most objectionable elements in the agenda were the *fractio* and the distribution words.

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

⁶⁰ John Philipp Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod* (St. Cloud, Minnesota: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1970), 30.

⁶¹ As negative as this agenda was for confessionalism, “from the standpoint of form—based as it was on historic 16th-century models—it was not only a step in the right direction, but it also gave impulse to the movement of liturgical study and worship renewal.” Fred L. Precht, ed., *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 84.

bread and wine, and that union with Christ can only be had spiritually.⁶²

These distribution words allowed two doctrines of the Lord's Supper to stand side by side. The result was sinful unionism, contrary to the clear word of Scripture which tells us to avoid those who teach contrary to God's Word (Rom 16:17).

When Frederick William III of Prussia demanded a union between the Lutherans and Reformed in his lands in 1817, many in Prussia arose to defend true Lutheranism. Some worked to organize a free Lutheran Church in Germany which was accomplished after the death of Frederick William III. Others emigrated to America, Australia, South America, and South Africa, where they became the core of confessional Lutheranism in these areas.

The five hundredth anniversary of the first Lutheran land highlights the Lord's gracious preservation of His church. The infant church was protected from the attacks of the Roman powers. Assailed by heresies within, it made it stand on the life-giving Word and the blessed Sacraments, and it resisted the ecumenical enticements of Reformed that continued throughout its history. When the majority of the church capitulated to the allurements of the king and his Reformed minions, God raised up a remnant that carried the truth of Lutheranism to the four corners of the globe. The Prussian church was certainly a church under the cross, but the Lord used it to spread confessional Lutheranism. It is a humbling example of steadfastness for us as we proclaim the Gospel in these last days of sore distress. 

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⁶² David's Star Evangelical Lutheran Church, *125th Anniversary* (Jackson, Wisconsin, 1968), 4–5; Also see *Kirchen Agenda für die Hof- und Domkirche in Berlin* (Berlin: Gedruckt bei Dieterici, 1822), 23.

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21st Century Challenges to the Characteristics of Holy Scripture

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THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD STATES IN
“We Believe, Teach, and Confess”:

We confess that God reveals Himself to mankind, not only through creation and the human conscience, but also and especially through the Holy Scriptures, His written Word. The true way of salvation is revealed only through God’s Word, and any claims for revelation of the way of salvation through other means must be rejected. The main purpose of Holy Scripture is to reveal to us that Jesus Christ is our only Savior. See Rom 15:4 and 16:25–26, 2 Tim 3:15, Luke 24:25–27, John 20:31, Rom 10:14–17, Jer 23:25–29, John 14:6, Acts 4:12.¹

The importance of our confession of the nature of Holy Scripture is clear. Only through the Word is the way of salvation revealed. There is no other means of salvation: “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom 15:4).²

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: 9 If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, 10 let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by

¹ <https://els.org/beliefs/we-believe-teach-and-confess/>.

² All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the *New King James Version*.

the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. **11** This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ **12** Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12).

To study Scripture is to study God’s revelation to us, the truth that Christ alone is our salvation.

In the history of the Christian church many challenges to Scripture have arisen. Gnosticism challenged the revealed Scriptures of the apostles and prophets by claiming a secret revelation. Islam challenges the revealed Scriptures by claiming a more complete Scripture, the Koran, which openly rejects the truth that Christ (the Son of God) is the way of salvation. The Christological debates of the early church challenged the clarity of Scripture and compelled the church to confess precisely the Scriptural truth of the two natures of Christ and the holy Trinity. Pelagianism asserted the freedom of the human will to achieve perfection, while the Scholasticism of the Middle Ages tempered the Pelagianism only slightly by teaching *facere quod in se est*, “do what is in you.” Make a move toward God and He will supply the rest of the grace needed. The Enlightenment elevated human reason above any ‘relic’ of Scriptural revelation. Pietism eschewed creeds and focused on living a sanctified life with consequent de-emphasis on God’s salvation as mediated through Word and Sacrament. It is nothing new for the church to be pressed to defend her confession, the truth of Scripture. But every generation must deal with the different shapes false teaching takes.

13 These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. **14** But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. **15** But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. **16** For “who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:13–16).

God grant us continued growth in spiritual discernment, that we may faithfully believe, teach, and confess His truth, His Word.

While vestigial remains of all previous heresies and false teachings remain as challenges to the confession of the truth, there are two general

challenges to Scripture today: modernism and postmodernism. Each of these erodes the chief characteristics of Scripture (authority, clarity, efficacy, sufficiency).

In *The Hammer of God*, Bo Giertz captures well the modernist view of Scripture. He does so within the context of a conversation between Gunnar Schenstedt, a layman and friend of the protagonist (Torvik), and Pastor Bengtsson, who represents the orthodox Lutheran confession of Scripture. Schenstedt describes his understanding of God's Word:

"But I am sure Inger [Schenstedt's sister who has proceeded with an unscriptural divorce] is following God's will. She and Sten have never been compatible, and since she now loves William, it would have been cruel to stand in the way of her happiness. I feel this very strongly....

"I know very well," Schenstedt continued in the same affable tone, "that it might seem as if this divorce were contrary to Bible teaching, but I think you will both agree that *the Spirit is more than the letter, and that we must follow that which we have felt to be God's way*. In the last analysis, *the Bible is merely the contemporary clothing of an eternal content*, and one can both actualize it oneself and bear witness concerning it to others, even when one is *formally at variance with the letter*....

"I understand, Pastor, that you must view the matter in this light," said Schenstedt, with a toss of his head that reminded of his old ways. "That is your conviction, and you do right in following it. I, too, have a personal conviction and have the right to follow it. Each of us will therefore have to speak tonight according to his own experience and his own way of seeing things. One can do no more than follow one's conviction....

"*The Spirit will lead us into the whole truth. What was valid in Jesus's day is not necessarily valid today. Not even his own words are so unalterable that his Spirit cannot change them.*"³

Giertz wrote this novel in 1941. In 2009 the ELCA adopted a statement allowing the ordination of practicing homosexuals. The arguments set forth leading up to the 2009 decision (and the earlier adoption of the ordination of women) were anticipated by Giertz nearly seven decades earlier.

³ Bo Giertz, *Hammer of God*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 304–307, Kindle, emphasis added.

A study of the methodology used in the ELCA and other church bodies regarding both issues of women's and homosexuals' ordination reached this conclusion:

In making the case for women's ordination and for the ordination of homosexuals and the blessing of same-sex unions, biblical texts once taken as clear are argued to be unclear or dismissed as culturally conditioned and time bound.

Some assert that the contested texts relative to women in the pastoral office (1 Cor 14:33-38 and 1 Tim 2:11-14) and on homosexuality (Lev 18:22, 24; 20:13; Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:9-10) clearly reflect the theological worldview of the biblical writers, but that these teachings are culturally conditioned and hence open to reassessment. Typical are the arguments that the Bible represents a patriarchal and/or heterosexualist structure that may be abandoned without doing violence to the essential message of the Holy Scriptures. Others argue that the disputed texts are unclear and therefore incapable of providing a sure foundation for church practice.⁴

The gradual erosion of the authority and clarity of Scripture is a persistent disorder in the church, one which was evident in our own synod's history in 1917 as the Norwegian Synod agreed to two forms of election, and one which finally is rooted in Genesis 3: "did God really say?"

As prescient as Giertz was regarding the loss of Biblical authority due to modernism in the mid- and late-twentieth century, another error, perhaps even more damaging, confronts us: postmodernism. In some ways, as Dr. Gregory Schulz makes clear, this is not a new danger.⁵ But it is one which only in the past few decades has begun to be more clearly identified and addressed in our own context.

While modernism rejected the authority and clarity (and thereby also the efficacy and sufficiency) of the Biblical text, allowing for

⁴ John Pless, "The Ordination of Women and Ecclesial Endorsement of Homosexuality: Are They Related?" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 74 no. 3-4 (2010): 353.

⁵ "In support of the understanding that postmodernism is a perennial problem or shingles-like virus albeit identified with new verbiage, think of the works of Protagoras: 'Man is the measure of all things: of things which are, that they are and of things which are not, that they are not' (quoted by Plato in *Theatetus* 152a). Protagoras was a moral and cognitive relativist, the type of philosopher who would be called in our day 'postmodernist.'" Schulz, Gregory, "Nisi Per Verbum: A Disputation Concerning Postmodernism and the Pastoral Ministry," *Logia* 27, no. 4 (2018): 24.

different understandings of words, postmodernism rejects the very words of the text.

The reality is that postmodernists teach and promote the pre-emptive surrender of language, the essential feature of our humanity and the means by which God reveals himself to us. For the Scriptures are language. It is language that we use to preach and to pray, to confess and to absolve.⁶

The attack upon language itself, and therefore the attack on the revelation of God to us in human language, makes it incumbent upon us to continue steadfast and to grow in our understanding of Holy Scripture. Dr. Jack Kilcrease summarizes the challenge for us:

The secular culture of the West has continued its descent into moral chaos in the service of what Charles Taylor famously referred to as “expressive individualism.” Postmodernism has demonstrated that a rationality grounded in the autonomous knower is impossible, thereby opening up the possibility that the world itself is unknowable as anything more than the gray soup of Derrida’s *differance*.⁷

As Dr. Scott Murray succinctly states: “Post-modernism’s view is a biased opinion about a biased opinion.”⁸

This is the culture in which the Church today finds herself. How will we, those who are called by God to preach His Word purely and administer the sacraments as He instituted them, react? Our work is

⁶ Schulz, 24.

⁷ Jack Kilcrease, *Holy Scripture* (Fort Wayne: The Luther Academy, 2020), xiii. Regarding *differance*: “*Differance* is a French term coined by Jacques Derrida. Roughly speaking, the method of *differance* is a way to analyze how signs (words, symbols, metaphors, etc) come to have meanings. It suggests that meaning is not inherent in a sign but arises from its relationships with other signs, a continual process of contrasting with what comes before and later. That is, a sign acquires meaning by being different from other signs. The meaning of a sign changes over time, as new signs keep appearing and old signs keep disappearing.” From Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diff%C3%A9rance>, accessed May 12, 2025. For further reading on this topic see especially Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020). A more popularized version of this is in Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022).

⁸ Scott Murray, “Scriptural Authority and Interpretation in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod since the 1970s,” in *The Pieper Lectures*, vol. 9: “The Bible in the History of the Church” (St. Louis: Concordia Historical Institute, 2005), 107.

centered on proclaiming God's Word. When that Word is itself undermined by a philosophy of incoherence and nihilism, by a culture that rejects even the ability to distinguish between a biological man and a biological woman, what do we do? We pray that the Lord will keep us steadfast in His Word. An exhortation from Matthias Flacius is fitting for our day:

All good must be begged from God, especially this highest good, namely, understanding of the Word. For that reason, we may say with David, "*Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things from Your law... Hide not Your commandments from me!*" Therefore, proper understanding of the salutary and heavenly Scripture must be earnestly sought from God, through His Son. For to the one who seeks it will be shown, and to the one who knocks it will be opened, to the one who asks it will be given.⁹

To hold fast to that Word means, in part, that we devote ourselves to study, to meditation, to prayer, so that when the *tentatio* of our days seems overwhelming, we remain on the firm foundation of Truth, the Word Incarnate, and the Word given to us, the apostolic and prophetic Scriptures.

During the years of the "Battle for the Bible," the terms 'inerrant' and 'verbal inspiration,' were much discussed and precisely defined. Those terms continue to describe our confession of the Word of God.¹⁰ While inerrancy and divine inspiration are not listed as characteris-

⁹ Matthias Flacius Illyricus, *How to Understand the Sacred Scriptures: from Clavis Scripturae Sacrae*, trans. Wade R. Johnston (Saginaw: Magdeburg Press, 2011), 67.

¹⁰ In response to the critique of 'inerrancy' Dr. Marquart quotes an article by Dr. J. W. Montgomery in which he addresses the issue of inspiration and inerrancy and their rejection by modern theologians:

Dr. Montgomery has traced the philosophical basis and bias of the whole modern-theological enterprise:

metaphysical dualism, which in one form or other has always claimed that the Absolute cannot be fully manifested in the phenomenal world, From Plato's separation of the world of ideas from the world of things and the soul from the body, to the medieval "realists" with their split between universals and particulars, through the Reformation Calvinists' conviction that *finitum non est capax infiniti*, to the modern idealism of Kant and Hegel, we see this same conviction in various semantic garbs.

It is this idealistic philosophy, not any Biblical material, which forces the Scriptures into the Pro-crustean framework in which nothing concrete and historical, neither Christ nor His Scripture, can possess absolute, "once-for-all" finality and validity. How utterly foreign this Platonic-Kantian-Hegelian idealism is to that Biblical "incarnationalism" which Luther grasped so thoroughly! The modern "Biblical Theology," reared on such

tics of Scripture, nevertheless they are of fundamental importance in understanding Scripture. These terms witness the origin and reason for its authority and other characteristics. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16). As we explain in our explanation of Luther’s Small Catechism, the divine inspiration of Scripture gives us confidence that the Word revealed to us in the Bible is God’s Word and as such contains no errors. There were attempts to speak of the Bible as God’s Word while only allowing for a certain inerrancy in those parts which some would define as teaching theology, but not, for example, the historical events recorded in Scripture. Such a view of inerrancy cannot stand.

A partial inerrancy is no inerrancy. It is an illusion to think, for instance, that one may grant errors of fact in Scripture so long as one excludes errors of theology. The central Christian mystery of the Incarnation (1 Tim 3:16) will not allow such a scheme. If God truly became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14), then the historical and geographical particulars (Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1–3; 1 John 1:1–3) cannot in principle be dismissed as somehow falling beneath the dignity of a “theological” status. The miracle of God-made-Man means that the divinity and humanity, faith and facts, theology and history, are inextricably intertwined and cannot be divorced without rending asunder what God has joined together....For the faith and theology of the incarnate, crucified, and risen Son of God are all about the facts of the matter. The space-time realities do not merely run alongside the theology. Nothing would be left of the Apostles’ Creed or of the Bible if all the “facts” were “extracted.”¹¹

Inerrancy and verbal inspiration were not new teachings in the Church, discovered in the late nineteenth or twentieth centuries, though some tried to make that case. The Formula of Concord, Rule and Norm, had already, centuries earlier, clearly confessed the foundational role of Holy Scripture for the church and her pastors. “First, *we receive and embrace with our whole heart* are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel. They are

philosophical foundations, is anything but Biblical. The opposition to propositional revelation, to inerrancy, and to the normal “concept” of truth comes from philosophy, not from the Bible. Biblical language, not allowed to function authoritatively, is forced to serve as a fig-leaf! (Kurt Marquart, “Reformation Jubilee Lectures, Truth and/or Consequences” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 8, no. 2, (1967), 41–42.

¹¹ Kurt Marquart, *Truth, Salvatory and Churchly: Works of Kurt E. Marquart*, vol. 1: *The Saving Truth: Doctrine for Laypeople* (Fort Wayne: Luther Academy, 2016), 11.

the only true standard or norm by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged.”¹²

The properties or characteristics of Scripture are, as noted earlier: authority (*Sola Scriptura*), clarity (perspicuity), efficacy, and sufficiency. Dr. Francis Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics* states: “Since Holy Scripture is God’s Word by inspiration, it possesses, as a matter of course, also divine properties or attributes..., namely divine authority..., divine efficacy..., perfection..., and perspicuity.”¹³ Dr. Adolf Hoenecke provides theses on the characteristics of Scripture:

Thesis 1 Since Holy Scripture as the Word inspired by God is the only principle of knowledge, it also has divine esteem and divine authority, which means that from Scripture alone all theological truths must be derived and according to Scripture alone must all teachers and teachings be tested....

Thesis 2 Since Scripture contains everything necessary for faith and a godly life, thus for attaining salvation, Scripture has the characteristics of perfection and sufficiency.

Thesis 3 Since Scripture says of itself that it can impart to a person the knowledge necessary for salvation, we attribute to it the characteristic of clarity (perspicuity).¹⁴

Johann Gerhard devotes chapters to the authority, the perfection, and the clarity of Scripture. He offers this definition of Scripture:

We can provide a definition of Holy Scripture like this: Holy Scripture is the Word of God, which the prophets, evangelists, and apostles reduced to writing in accordance with his will, which complete and clearly explains the doctrine of the essence and will of God so from it people may become wise to eternal life. Preserve and sanctify us, O God, in your truth. “Your Word is truth” (John 17:17). Amen.¹⁵

What follows is a selection of specific statements on the various characteristics of Scripture. This selection is by no means exhaustive,

¹² Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 508.

¹³ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 307.

¹⁴ Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, trans. James Langebartels and Heinrich Vogel, vol 1 (Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), 451, 462, 477.

¹⁵ Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces: On the Nature of Theology and Scripture*, trans. Richard J. Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 502.

but it provides insight into how the confessional Lutheran church has historically defined these characteristics with witness from Scripture itself.¹⁶

Authority

Holy Scripture possesses divine authority, that is, in all that it says it is entitled to the same faith and obedience that is due God. We have seen that Christ and His Apostles took this position toward the Scripture of the Old Testament (Luke 24:25): “O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the Prophets have spoken.” (Luke 24:25–27; 44–47; John 10:35; 2 Tim 3:16–17; Matt 4:4–7). And Christ and His Apostles demand that we give the same obedience to their own Word in the New Testament (John 8:31–32 (KJV)): “If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed”; 1 Cor 14:37–38; Gal 1:8). He that rejects or even only criticizes Scripture, affronts

¹⁶ It is noteworthy that in many of the Lutheran writings on Scripture there is reference to the Sacrament of the Altar as a touchstone for the application of the characteristics of Scripture to this particular teaching. One example will suffice.

Every article of faith must be drawn from the cognitive source of theology, Scripture, and that through responsible and regenerate exegesis.

Nowhere does Luther’s insistence upon this issue come out more clearly than in his debate with Zwingli on the Lord’s Supper, Zwingli was a Gospel reductionist. There were two reasons why he could not believe in the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. First, he did not think it possible physically, and therefore thought it wiser to accept the words of institution in a tropical or figurative sense. Second, he held that it was not necessary to believe in the real presence because the Gospel of justification, accepted by him and Luther, did not demand it. To Luther this kind of exegesis, based upon a false understanding of the unity of Scripture and of doctrine, was an abomination. To him each article must be based upon the Scriptures of God and drawn from Scripture by sound exegesis. Against Zwingli and his opponents he says, “I for one cannot admit that such clear words present a problem. I do not ask how Christ can be God and man and how His natures could be united. For God is able to act far beyond our imagination. To the Word of God one must yield... I do not want to hear what reason says. I completely reject carnal or geometrical arguments, as e. g. that a large body could not fill a small space. God is above and beyond all mathematics, and His words are to be adored and observed with awe. God, however, commands: ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ I request, therefore, a valid proof from Holy Writ that these words do not mean what they say.” It is clear that Luther will get his doctrine of the real presence only from clear passages of Scripture, not from any reductionistic analogy with other articles of faith. Again in this context Luther challenges Zwingli, “I have a clear and powerful text. Do justice to the text. What I have been waiting for all the time is that you prove what you ought to prove.” Robert Preus, “How is the Lutheran Church to Interpret and Use the Old and New Testaments?” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, 14, no. 1, (1973): 16–17.

the very Majesty on High; he is committing a *crimen laesae maiestatis divinae* [treason!]. Hence Christ's warning: "The Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the Last Day" (John 12:48).¹⁷

The authority of these doctrines revealed or pronounced externally and by God, through which God above all wants to deal with man, to teach and convert him, must in every way be defended.¹⁸

Clarity (Perspicuity)

"According to Scripture, perspicuity of Scripture consists in this, that it presents, in language that can be understood by all, whatever men must know to be saved."¹⁹

Luther's criticism of Erasmus' rejection of the clarity of Scripture.

[Erasmus] believes in God, but he has not entirely lost his belief in man. He is fighting for the dignity of man who is not totally lost, who has retained his free will and can cooperate with the divine grace. He has never been able to understand the depth of human sin.

For the depth of human sin, the misery of fallen man who cannot be anything but a sinner and cannot be saved except by the salvation brought by Christ is not a truth of human reason. Philosophers may teach the bondage of the will in the sense of determinism as the Stoics did. But they will never be able, as philosophers, to understand Luther's doctrine *de servo arbitrio* because they cannot understand what original sin is, that deep corruption of human nature which no reason can know as Luther said, but which must be believed on the strength of God's Word. The Christian doctrine of sin is inseparably linked with the doctrine of Holy Scripture as the Word of God. For it is this book which not we judge, but which judges us.²⁰

¹⁷ Pieper, 307.

¹⁸ Flacius, 68.

¹⁹ Pieper, 320.

²⁰ Hermann Sasse, *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, trans. Matthew C. Harrison, vol 2, (1941–1976) (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 383–384, Kindle.

Compare also Luther's introduction to Psalm 51: "A knowledge of this psalm is necessary and useful in many ways. It contains instruction about the chief parts of our religion, about repentance, sin, grace, and justification, as well as about the worship we ought to render to God. These are divine and heavenly doctrines. Unless they are taught by the great Spirit, they cannot enter the heart of man. We see that our opponents have expended great effort and discussed this doctrine in many huge volumes. Yet none of

Efficacy

Matthew chapter 8:

3 Then Jesus put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go your way; and as you have believed, *so* let it be done for you.” And his servant was healed that same hour.

15 So He touched her hand, and the fever left her....

16 When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick

26 But He said to them, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm

31 So the demons begged Him, saying, “If You cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of swine.” **32** And He said to them, “Go.” So when they had come out, they went into the herd of swine. And suddenly the whole herd of swine ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and perished in the water.

“...since the Scriptures alone among all books of the world are God’s Word out and out, they alone have the *vis vere divina* outright.... Wherein does the divine efficacy of Holy Scripture consist? In its effecting in man such things as far exceed human power.... The Word of the Law....as it is revealed in Holy Scripture, has the inherent power to work such a knowledge of sin that man realizes his eternal damnation and despairs of all self-help.... The Word of the Gospel has the inherent power to work faith in the Gospel....”²¹

“When God speaks, things happen. In the beginning, when there was nothing, God spoke, and everything came into existence (Gen 1; John 1:1-3). At His Word a stormy sea turns calm (Mark 4:35-41), a few fish and loaves multiply to feed thousands

them really understands the nature of repentance, sin, or grace. These words are like a dream to them, which leaves some traces in the mind but itself has utterly disappeared from the mind and the eyes. The reason for this blindness and ignorance is that true knowledge of these doctrines does not depend upon the intelligence and wisdom of human reason, nor is it born, so to speak, in our home or our hearts. But it is revealed and given from heaven.” LW 12, 303.

²¹ Pieper, 315-316.

(John 6:1–13), a dead man walks out of his tomb alive (John 11), and the very demons flee in terror (Mark 5:1–13). And at the end of time all the dead will appear before His Judgment Seat at His summons (John 5:28–29). This is the living Word, not empty human talk.”²²

“In summary, if God were to bid you to pick up a straw or to pluck out a feather with the command, order, and promise that thereby you would have forgiveness of all sin, grace, and eternal life, should you not accept this joyfully and gratefully, and cherish, praise, prize, and esteem that straw and that feather as a higher and holier possession than heaven and earth? No matter how insignificant the straw and the feather may be, you would nonetheless acquire through them something more valuable than heaven and earth, indeed, than all the angels, are able to bestow on you. Why then are we such disgraceful people that we do not regard the water of baptism, the bread and wine, that is, Christ’s body and blood, the spoken word, and the laying on of man’s hands for the forgiveness of sin as such holy possessions, as we would the straw and feather, though in the former, as we hear and know, God himself wishes to be effective and wants them to be his water, word, hand, bread, and wine, by means of which he wishes to sanctify and save you in Christ, who acquired this for us and who gave us the Holy Spirit from the Father for this work?”²³

Sufficiency

“The sufficiency of Scripture according to its own definition consists in it teaching everything that men must know to obtain salvation.”²⁴

When we assert the perfection and sufficiency of Scripture, we are not asserting that everything that can be known about God, or every word spoken by the patriarchs, Christ, and the apostles is in Scripture. Rather, we are asserting that Scripture perfectly contains all that is necessary and useful for faith and a godly life, thus for salvation; that it perfectly contains all the governing principles, according to which the church

²² Marquart, 78.

²³ Martin Luther, in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 380, Kindle.

²⁴ Pieper, 317.

is capable of going the right way in all things left free to it, thus in ceremonies, ecclesiastical institutions, etc.²⁵

These characteristics of Scripture are used to describe the confessional Lutheran teaching on Scripture in contrast to other confessions. For example, the sufficiency of Scripture is used to distinguish the Lutheran commitment to God's Word in contrast to Roman Catholicism which confesses the need for distinguishing between the written Scriptures and the Word of God. While confessing Scripture as the Word of God, the Roman church confesses that Scripture alone is insufficient.

[Bellarmine]: Therefore the dispute between us and the heretics has two points. The first is that we claim that all the doctrine necessary is not distinctly contained in Scripture, whether concerning faith or morals, and consequently, in addition to the written Word of God there is also the need for the unwritten Word of God, i.e., the prophetic and apostolic traditions.²⁶

The teaching of the sufficiency of Scripture also serves to demarcate the Lutheran confession from all other forms of enthusiasm which believes that God will provide new insights (apart from Scripture) to guide our lives and teaching:

In short: enthusiasm clings to Adam and his children from the beginning to the end of the world—fed and spread among them as poison by the old dragon. It is the source, power, and might of all the heresies, even that of the papacy and Mohammed. [10] Therefore we should and must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament. Everything that boasts of being from the Spirit apart from such a Word and sacrament is of the devil.²⁷

Many other lines of attacks against the characteristics of Scripture can easily be found (other sources for authoritative teaching (e.g. Book of Mormon, Koran), efficacy (need to stimulate an emotional response to the proclamation of the Word in order that one might feel the working of the Spirit). As Nicolaus Selnecker confessed, "And ever is there something new / Devised to change Thy doctrine true...." (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* 511:6).

²⁵ Hoencke, 463.

²⁶ Hoencke, 464.

²⁷ SA III, 8, 9.

Enthusiasm, pietism, modernism (rationalism), postmodernism—all continue to besiege the teaching of Scripture. To confound the truth of Scripture (capital “T” Truth) is to target the certainty of salvation, the comfort of the saving Gospel, the power of God to salvation (Rom 1:6). It is incumbent upon the Church always to discern the spirits of the age, to heed Paul’s exhortation: “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col 2:8).

As noted at the beginning of this paper, postmodernism is an assault on the very words of Scripture. One could hold to a ‘verbal’ inspiration of Scripture and yet wreak havoc on the truth of words by creating doubt on any substantive meaning of a word. Perhaps a word is understood as no more than a series of letters (symbols) put together which are subject to individual interpretation, to erosion of meaning over centuries, or decades, or a few years, a few months, a few days. Are there any words whose meaning has changed in your lifetime so that your use of them has had to adapt? (E.g. “how gay is that?”) Or, how about new vocabulary? Consider this example from the “Gen Z Bible,” Psalm 1:1-3:

1. Happy is the person who doesn’t follow the advice of those who don’t care about God, or hang out with people who do bad stuff, or join in with those who make fun of others.
2. But he totally vibes with the law of the LORD; and he’s all about meditating on it day and night, no cap.
3. He’ll be like a dope tree, planted by the streams, always bringing in some sick fruit at the right time. His leaves won’t even wilt, and everything he does will be straight fire and successful.²⁸

The use of such vocabulary is so ‘contemporary’ that it will be outdated in months, if it is not already.²⁹

In response to this attack on language itself as the medium for substantive communication of truth, from God to us, the Church is called to be a guardian of language, a protector of Truth—Truth as revealed to us in words inspired by God, and therefore authoritative, and written in languages we can learn and understand. Consider these familiar verses:

²⁸ <https://genz.bible/Psalms/1>.

²⁹ Occasionally, just for fun, in class I’ll use a term I’ve heard from students, and their response is: ‘don’t.’

בראשית בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

Do these various lines and squiggles on a page mean anything? Does it matter if they really have no timeless, absolute, meaning and can rather mean whatever definition we decide, autonomously, subjectively, to provide? It does matter. At stake is Truth. Not 'my' truth or 'your' truth. Just Truth. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). This is what is at stake in our confession of the Scripture as the authoritative, clear, powerful, and sufficient Word of God. This touches all aspects of our work as pastors and theologians of the Lutheran Church: exegetical, historical, systematic, symbolic, pastoral. Without the Word, a certain and clear Scripture, our work fails. It fails because we lose the content of theology. This is the end to which postmodernism pulls us, if we let it.

The following counsel provides a good word with which we may conclude:

Without reasons, without reason, by sheer willfulness postmodernism denies the intentionality or aboutness of language. The church and her pastors are vulnerable to this postmodern theory of linguistic nihilism in part because of a pervasive biblical illiteracy and in part due to a penchant in hermeneutics and the pastor's exegesis for substituting theory for the reading of the text of Holy Scripture. I recommend setting aside theory in favor of reading the word....I commend to the pastor that he not distract himself with linguistic theorizing, but that he immerse himself regularly in the Psalms, "the little Bible," as Luther referred to this book, particularly Psalm 119 and its concrete précis, Psalm 19.³⁰

What does this mean? "*Hold fast the pattern of sound words* which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.¹⁴ That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us" (2 Tim. 1:13–14, emphasis added).

O Lord God, dear Father in heaven, I am indeed unworthy of the office and ministry in which I am to make known Your glory and to nurture and to serve this congregation. But since You have appointed me to be a pastor and teacher, and the people are in need

³⁰ Schulz, 31.

of the teaching and the instruction, be my helper and let Your holy angels attend to me....grant me, out of Your pure grace and mercy, a right understanding of Your Word and that I may also diligently perform it.... Amen (Luther's sacristy prayer)

Psalm 119

¶ ALEPH

1 Blessed *are* the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the Lord!
2 Blessed *are* those who keep His testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!
3 They also do no iniquity;
They walk in His ways.
4 You have commanded *us*
To keep Your precepts diligently.
5 Oh, that my ways were directed
To keep Your statutes!
6 Then I would not be ashamed,
When I look into all Your commandments.
7 I will praise You with uprightness of heart,
When I learn Your righteous judgments.
8 I will keep Your statutes;
Oh, do not forsake me utterly!

¶ TAU

169 Let my cry come before You, O Lord;
Give me understanding according to Your word.
170 Let my supplication come before You;
Deliver me according to Your word.
171 My lips shall utter praise,
For You teach me Your statutes.
172 My tongue shall speak of Your word,
For all Your commandments *are* righteousness.
173 Let Your hand become my help,
For I have chosen Your precepts.
174 I long for Your salvation, O Lord,
And Your law *is* my delight.

175 Let my soul live, and it shall praise You;
And let Your judgments help me.

176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep;
Seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments LSQ

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1700th Anniversary of the Nicene Creed

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ON JUNE 19 OF THIS YEAR, 2025, CHRISTIANS WILL remember an important event in the life of the church. They will commemorate the 1700th Anniversary of the day when the First Ecumenical Council formally accepted the Nicene Creed, the most important creed of Christendom which is common to all Christian churches throughout the world. As we confess the Nicene Creed at every celebration of the Lord's Supper, so it has been a part of the eucharistic celebration of every historic Christian church for many centuries. But how did this ecumenical creed come to be? What was its origin? In order to answer this question, one must consider the history of the creed and the significance of a man by the name of Constantine.

The Edict of Milan

In 312, Constantine (282–337),¹ who was proclaimed emperor by his troops, marched into Italy to remove Maxentius from his position of power in Rome. The two armies faced each other a few miles outside

¹ Constantine was the son and heir of the Roman co-emperor Constantius I Chlorus and Helena, a Christian woman who strongly influenced her son and was later given the title "Augusta" by him. His father was originally an Illyrian general in the Roman army, and Constantine was probably born in Naissus (Nis) in modern-day Serbia. He served with his father in Britain before arriving in Italy. He was a Christian much of his life, but was not baptized until his death in 337. His deathbed Baptism had more to do with an improper understanding of Baptism than a question of his Christianity. Many believed that Baptism only forgave the sins that were committed before one was baptized and not those after receiving the Sacrament. For more information concerning his life, see David Potter, *Constantine the Emperor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

the city at the Milvian Bridge. The day before the battle, Constantine is said to have seen the sign of a cross in the sky and above it the words *in hoc signo vinces* (in this sign you will conquer).² Constantine pledged that if he won the battle, he would become a Christian. The next day, October 28, his army won a complete victory. In February 313, the Edict of Milan was published, which gave the church freedom of worship. Now the church was able to worship the one true God, the Triune God, without fear or harassment. Churches and monasteries were built in many places. Mission work and evangelism increased so that the Gospel of salvation in the Savior Jesus Christ was heard in every part of the empire and beyond.

Constantine—First Christian Emperor

It is difficult to fully comprehend the impact that Constantine had on the church. Just a few years before, Christians had been hunted like animals. Now they were given freedom of religion and soon would have the most favored status in the empire. It was no wonder that Christians were filled with appreciation for Constantine and his mother, Helena, who had long been a Christian and strongly influenced her son. Sunday became an official day of rest for all in 321. Beautiful churches were built at government expense by Constantine and his mother. Among these were churches built on the sites of holy places in Palestine, such as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The basilica form of architecture, originating from public Roman buildings, was used in many of these churches. Christian clergy were shown great respect. They did not have to pay taxes and could travel at government expense. Constantine even built an entirely new capital, a Christian capital, Constantinople, which is modern-day Istanbul.

Before the time of Constantine, Christian worship had been fairly simple. Christians met in private homes and slowly developed house churches like the one found at Dura-Europos dating from around 250. But after Constantine's conversion, Christian worship began to be influenced by imperial protocol. Incense, which was used as a sign of respect for the emperor, began appearing in Christian churches. Officiating ministers, who until then had worn everyday clothes, began dressing in more formal garments. A number of gestures indicating respect, which were normally made before the emperor, now became part of Christian worship. For example, the processional from the imperial court now began the worship service. Choirs took a much greater

² For other versions of this account, Paul L. Maier, *Eusebius: The Church History* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1999), 340.

part in the service, and the congregation came to have a less active role in the liturgy.³

Instead of being tried by fire, the church was now tried by the favor of the emperor. The favor of the emperor made it socially acceptable to be a Christian. Thousands flocked to the church to curry the emperor's favor. If you wanted a good job or the right position, you had to be a Christian. Thus, the church was filled with many that had little interest or concern for the Christian faith or morals.

Many were enamored with Constantine, but none more than Eusebius of Caesarea (260–339) in Palestine. He wrote the *Life of Constantine*, a work which is filled with exaggerated flattery for Constantine. If that were his only work, he probably would not be remembered. But he wrote another vitally important work: his *Ecclesiastical History*, which is a major source of the history of the church from the Acts of the Apostles to the defeat of Licinius in 324. Without this book we would have little information about the early years of the church. He is known as the father of church history.

The Trinitarian Controversies or the Battle over the “I”

Constantine had hoped that Christianity would be a unifying factor for an empire that was coming apart at the seams. Yet this was not to be the case. A great controversy broke out concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. This was not the first struggle that developed concerning this doctrine, but it was by far the most devastating.⁴

An elder at Alexandria in Egypt, Arius (260–336)⁵ by name, taught that the Son was less than God the Father. He was like God,

³ J. González, *The Story of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 1984), 1:125.

⁴ In the Western Church, there was a tendency to emphasize the oneness of the divine essence in the Trinity while in the East there was a greater emphasis on the threeness of the persons and at times an improper subordination of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The two main early heresies were dynamic and modalistic monarchianism. Dynamic monarchianism refers to an attempt to defend the “monarchy” or unity of God by claiming that the divinity that was in Christ was an impersonal power proceeding from God but was not God Himself. It is called “dynamic” by reason of the Greek term *dynamis*, which means “power.” God was in Jesus as He was in Moses but only in a greater degree. Modalistic monarchianism did not deny the full divinity of Christ, but simply identified it with the Father. Because of that identification, which implied that the Father had suffered in Christ, this doctrine is sometimes called “Patrilinearism.” This form of the heresy assumed that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit merely represented three different forms or modes of appearance of the one God; or to put it more bluntly, God, like an actor, would wear different masks. Early in the third century it found its greatest expositor in Sabellius from whom it also has taken the name Sabellianism.

⁵ For a history of the life of Arius, see Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy & Tradition*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001).

but not God as the Father is God. The Father was without beginning while the Son had a beginning, the first and highest of created beings. With an excellent gift for propaganda, Arius composed hymns which were chanted in the streets of Alexandria and throughout the East re-enforcing, his major premise, “There was when the Son was not.” In this way, he rejected the true divinity of the Second Person.

The Council of Nicaea

When Constantine realized a new controversy was brewing, he called a universal church council, hoping to save the unity of the church which was to be the cement of the empire. The council met at Nicaea⁶ near Constantinople, beginning on May 20, 325. More than 300 bishops were in attendance. It was a sight to behold. Men who had been mutilated and who bore the marks of persecution in their flesh were now being brought together and housed in deluxe accommodations at government expense in one of the emperor’s palaces.

At the council, Constantine introduced the term *homoousios*, which he probably received from his spiritual advisor, Hosius of Cordova. It meant that the Son was of the same substance as the Father or that He was God as the Father was God. The council expressed belief in “one Lord, Jesus Christ … very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father, by whom all things were made.” This vital phase of the creed was accepted by the council on June 19, 325. The council also rejected those who teach that “there was when He was not,” or that the Son of God was created, or changeable, or of another substance than the Father. Anyone who believed these errors was anathematized (i.e., declared accursed). This is the origin of the Nicene Creed which is used in our communion liturgy.

Athanasius Against the World

Humanly speaking, the biblical doctrine of Nicaea would never have won the day had it not been for a young man who was also from Alexandria, Athanasius by name (ca. 296–377).⁷ He seems to have been a native Egyptian and not a Greek. This means he would have been dark-completed and small-framed. This would explain why this theological giant was mocked as the “black dwarf” by his opponents. He made a powerful defense of the *homoousios* at Nicaea. He knew that

⁶ This is the modern city of Iznik in Turkey.

⁷ For a history of the life of Athanasius, see Michael E. Molloy, *Champion of Truth: The Life of Saint Athanasius* (New York: Alba House, 2003).

only a divine Christ could be Savior, therefore the Son had to be of one substance with the Father. Only the one who created all could restore humanity and overcome the sharpness of death. God became man so that we might become as God sharing in His divine glory.⁸ In his important treatise *On the Incarnation*, he wrote:

He, the Mighty ... prepared ... this body in the virgin ... that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned back to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection. Thus, He would make death to disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire.⁹

When the bishops returned home from Nicaea there was a concerted effort by the Arian party to overthrow the doctrine of Nicaea. They maintained that the Son was not *homoousios* or of one substance with the Father. Rather they said the Son was *homoiousios* or of like substance as the Father. Because there was merely a letter difference between the two Greek terms, scoffers mocked saying that the whole controversy was over one “i.” Athanasius knew better. The *homoiousios* doctrine spoke of the Son as like but not of equal substance with the Father and therefore there was no divine Savior who could accomplish the redemption of men. The struggle continued on, and often it appeared that the whole world stood against Athanasius and Athanasius against the world (*Athanasius contra mundum et mundus contra Athansium*). Slowly, however, the Nicene doctrine prevailed.

The Cappadocians and the Council of Constantinople in 381

Three younger and influential theologians helped make Athanasius' victory complete. They were Basil of Caesarea (in Cappadocia [300–379]), his friend Gregory of Nazianzus (329–389), and his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa (330–395).¹⁰ Since all were from Cappadocia, in modern-day Turkey, they came to be known as the three great Cappadocians.

Many in the East feared that the “same substance” terminology of Athanasius was destroying the distinction between the persons of the Godhead. The Cappadocians clearly defined the terms “person” and

⁸ *St. Athanasius on the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi De*, trans. and ed. A Religious of CSMV (London: A. R. Mowbray and Co Ltd, 1975), 93.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰ For a short and concise history of the Cappadocians, see Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995).

“essence” confirming that there was no confusion of the persons. There were three distinct persons in the one divine being or essence. Gregory of Nazianzus properly explained the distinction between the persons: the Father is unbegotten, the Son begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son.¹¹ Nazianzus was also important in defining the two natures doctrine concerning our Lord’s person with his vital axiom, “What was not assumed was not redeemed,” which underscored the truth that the Savior had to be totally and completely God and totally and completely man in one person (*Quod Filius Dei non assumpsit, non redemit*).¹²

At the Council of Constantinople, the doctrine of Nicaea was reaffirmed. The battle of Athanasius, who had died in the meantime after enduring five exiles, had not been in vain. In addition, this council also condemned a heresy which rejected the deity of the Holy Spirit and added much of what our present Nicene Creed states concerning the Spirit.

Conclusion

The heart and core of the Nicene confession is belief in “one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father, by whom all things were made.” He is begotten not made. He was begotten of Father from all eternity; eternally generated by the Father (Ps 2:7; John 1:14). There never was when He was not. Being of one substance with the Father declared that He is absolutely equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, yet He also became true man for our salvation. Therefore, we have a divine Savior who could give His divine life and blood as a sufficient ransom price for all men and overcome the sharpness of death, opening the kingdom of heaven to all believers. We indeed worship the Holy and Blessed Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, the Triune God, Trinity in Person and unity in substance of majesty coequal. LSQ

¹¹ John A. McGuckin, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 290.

¹² Chemnitz said, “Moreover, the statement of Nazianzus is most significant, a statement which all antiquity accepted, namely, that that part of human nature ‘which was not assumed by Christ was not healed’ (τὸ ἀπρόσληπτον ἀθεράπευτον).” Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, trans. J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 60.

The Story of Pastor A.V. Kuster

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This story of Pastor A. V. Kuster was told by his son, the Rev. Thomas Kuster at the Bjarne Wollan Teigen Reformation Lectures on November 1, 2024.

THANK YOU DR. TIM SCHMELING,¹ AND ALL OF you for indulging me a few minutes to tell the story which I hope can add a different and additional perspective to what the discussion has been so far because I've had deep roots in all three of these synods [ELS, WELS, and LCMS]. In addition to that, I think this story will provide a perspective from a parish pastor's view. We've been talking understandably about the important and difficult decisions made by synodical leaders. But there are a lot of pastors who were involved and perhaps this story will add that dimension.

My family had deep roots in the Missouri Synod, especially on my mother's side. The relationship was filled with pastors, teachers, and professors. Professor Lorenz Wunderlich, who is one of those and stayed at DeMun when the Seminex walkout occurred, is my great uncle.² I'm related to President Behnken—my grandmother referred to him as "Cousin John."

I remember as a child, as a young man sitting in front of the black and white TV in our house and feeling great pride in watching *This Is*

¹ Dr. Timothy Schmeling was the moderator for this session of the conference.

² DeMun is the street address of the Concordia Seminary, which at the time was referred to by many with this name.

the Life—the Missouri Synod television series that proclaimed at the end of every production, the words of Jesus, “I have come so that you might have life and might have it more abundantly.” I felt great pride as I thought, that’s my church. I must say: that perhaps is one of the early impulses that prompted my career-long interest in using mass media to reach out with the gospel.

My dad, A. V. Kuster, graduated from the St. Louis seminary in 1935. There he began long acquaintances with the Norwegian Synod. He knew many of them on the list provided earlier by President Obenberger. Bjarne W. Teigen was in his graduating class, and in the graduation yearbook his picture appears right next to “Milton E. Twite” (*sic*). Those were admired and lifelong relationships. There was correspondence between him and these Norwegian men throughout his career. Even before that when he was at St John’s College in Winfield, Kansas, his debate partner was Clarence “Doc” Hansen (I mention names because some of the old-timers might know these men) and he was a Norwegian. His best man, at my Dad’s wedding, was Karl Rush who married Emma Anderson; a sister of the Andersons after whom our residence hall is named. His acquaintance with the Norwegians went way back, and it was always an admiring one.

Upon graduation from the seminary, my dad had already noticed the trends. He almost immediately began engaging in this struggle. At first it was tentative because his first calls were to mission congregations—first in Canada, where my brother Ted and I were born and then to a small town in Iowa, all under the mission board, and he felt vulnerable working under the mission board and carrying out this struggle. In 1944, he was eager to take his call to a two-congregation parish in northern Indiana. That not only got him out of mission status but closer to Chicago which became a center of conservative activity. He became active in what was called the Chicago Study Club, with names like Romoser, and A. T. Kretzmann, who I think spent his last years as a member of our synod. He was active on the editorial staff of *The Confessional Lutheran*, a conservative counterpart publication of *The American Lutheran*, of which we heard something yesterday. In fact, my Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Wisconsin examined the discourse of these two publications over a couple of decades as they, in their view at least, fought over the soul of the Missouri Synod.

In the late ’40s and early ’50s, my dad made frequent, actually weekly trips, to Chicago. I say “we” because I went along frequently. Like many families, the kids needed dental work—teeth, straightened. The only

way my dad could figure out how to afford that, was to take us to a dental school in Chicago. He'd drop us off at the dental school. While the students practiced on us, he'd run down to Oak Park, or wherever it was, to hob-knob with his confessional Lutheran compatriots down there. Those were weekly trips for many years.

My mother was Leona Warnke Kuster. Like many wives whose pastor husbands struggled to make ends meet while raising their kids—and fixing their teeth—along with organ playing, Sunday School organizing, Christmas pageants and such, she went to work first as our small town's public librarian, then as a public school teacher of German. There she not only helped pay our family bills, but found great personal fulfillment.

One of my dad's congregations was more supportive of his struggles against synodical trends than the other. I recall as a preteen family member, realizing somehow that when my dad went to a voters' meeting of his congregation, to which a synod official had been invited, he might not come home with a job. It was a realistic fear because our neighbor pastor, a few miles to the south (his name was Paul Koch), was also a conservative. He made a tactical error at the 1950 Missouri Synod convention in Milwaukee, when he went onto the synod floor and raised some specific direct accusations against synodical officials. It caused an uproar. He was severely censured for his procedure. The whole episode was considered a black eye to the conservative movement in the Missouri Synod at that point. He lost his congregation. It split. He felt an obligation to remain with a remnant. I recall visiting him at a time when he was physically laying bricks; building his new church with his own hands. His son became a physician. His name was also Paul and is a member of the ELS, and I think a frequent delegate to our convention.

My dad continued his work through the turmoil of the '50s living under the tension of this threat which our whole family felt. He sent his kids off to school. My sister Ruthann and my brother Ted came here to Bethany, and I went to Northwestern in Watertown [WELS]. I was there for six years from 1955–1961. Those were the turmoil years, weren't they? I felt no turmoil at Northwestern prep and college. I felt kind-of sheltered there. I suspect it was a deliberate decision by the faculty to keep us that way. There were no campus-wide briefings on inter-synodical relations. I recall no classroom discussions of it that anyone brought up. But we weren't oblivious. One of our classmates left in my senior year, 1960–61. But to us the tragedy of that was that he was the starting quarterback on the football team. He went to the CLC. I do remember

learning a new word, “abeyance.” The Wisconsin Synod did not want to say they were in fellowship. They didn’t want to say they were breaking fellowship. And so some genius, I think, came up with the phrase, we’re “holding fellowship in abeyance.” I thought that was wonderful. Two of our favorite professors on the campus made the “villains” list that was reported to us.³ Everybody wanted to take Greek from Richard Jungkuntz and Ralph Gehrke, whom I think by consensus, along with Dr. Elmer Kiessling, were among the best teachers on the campus. I think those two left shortly after President Kowalke was replaced by President Toppe.

Finally in 1961, my dad got a call from Our Saviour’s Lutheran congregation in Madison, Wisconsin, an ELS church. My sister Ruthann, at the time, was a student here at Bethany and her roommate happened to be a young woman from Our Saviour’s congregation in Madison. Her name was Judy Maginnis. Our Saviour’s was looking for a pastor and Judy learned from my sister about her father’s situation down in Indiana. She went back to Madison and talked to one of the elders and said there’s a Missouri Synod pastor down in Indiana who might be ready to leave the fight; check him out. They actually sent an elder down to listen to him preach. It must have been a good report because he got that call. I guess that’s how the Holy Spirit works. It’s also how God the Father works, because that young lady Judy Maginnis is my wife of fifty-seven years. So that’s how God the Father takes care of us as well.

He didn’t take that call immediately. He sent a letter to his more supportive congregation, and said that if you agree to leave the Missouri Synod with me, I will stay and continue to serve you. They were the smaller congregation in a two-congregation parish and could not afford to maintain a pastor on their own, so they declined. That’s how A.V. Kuster became a member of the ELS.

When he did that, I always admired and was amazed at how when he made that switch, he pretty much left the theology wars behind. Something that had been so consuming and really central to his identity as a pastor for so many years was just kind-of turned off like a light switch. Instead, when he entered the ELS, it was a renewal for him. He focused his energies, which were considerable, on foreign missions. I might say he did that with the help and assistance of his good secretary and parish worker Charlotte Edwards (whose daughter, Cheryl Heiliger, is here with us today). He helped the ELS launch their Peru mission.

³ In a conference presentation the day before.

All his papers from those years—twenty years in the Missouri Synod and all those struggles—are in the Concordia Historical Institute. I shipped them down there: six cartons full of papers. Before I left them there, I scanned them all. So I have copies of them all. I think that those are a valuable repository of one facet of all this history. I hope when the comprehensive history of all those days is written by someone, that those papers will be a useful resource.

Thank you for indulging me with this story. 

Never Confounded

Peter J. Faugstad
*Jerico, Saude, and Redeemer Lutheran Churches
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The ELS President's Pastoral Support Committee, chaired by Pastor Samuel Gullixson, conducted a retreat for ELS pastors in Houston, Texas, February 17–21, 2025 under the theme: "Never Confounded." Twenty-five ELS pastors from all experience levels and across the country took part in the retreat. It was an ambitious schedule of presentations designed to inform and encourage the pastors, which each masterfully achieved. The various topics hit upon challenges in the ministry, which we all experience as pastors. Definitely the preaching and worship services were among the highlights of the week. The retreat was a Gospel-centric strengthening experience, so when the convicting law in the presentations was heard, not only were the participants forgiven in the presentations, but the various sermons, offices and services spoke directly to their guilt and shame, abundantly granting forgiveness, life and salvation in Jesus' name at every turn. Without a doubt this retreat should have renewed and revived our pastors who attended. To give you a little taste of the festal table we had set before us, we commend to you these sermons preached at this event. May they be a blessing to you as they were for all the retreat participants. God be praised for giving us this an opportunity and we pray that such retreats might be repeated for others to experience in some form in the future.

— Rev. Glenn Obenberger, ELS President

On February 18–20, 2025, the ELS Pastoral Support Committee hosted the "Never Confounded" Pastoral Retreat at the Holy Name

Passionist Retreat Center in Houston, Texas. Pr. Peter Faugstad served as the chaplain for this retreat, preaching six sermons on February 18 and 19 during the office hours. Many of the retreat attendees noted in their post-retreat evaluations how encouraged and edified they were not only by the services, but especially by the preaching. The committee whole-heartedly agreed and we now submit them to you for your edification and encouragement.

Homily 1 on Psalm 22:1–5

February 18, 2025

Psalm 22:1–5 (NKJV)—*To the Chief Musician. Set to “The Deer of the Dawn.” A Psalm of David.*

My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning?

² O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; And in the night season, and am not silent.

³ But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel.

⁴ Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them.

⁵ They cried to You, and were delivered; They trusted in You, and were not [confounded].

Lord God, You have appointed me in the church as a pastor. You see how unfit I am to attend to such a great and difficult office, and if it had not been for Your help, I would long since have ruined everything. Therefore I call upon You. I earnestly desire to put my mouth and heart to use. I shall teach the people, and I myself shall learn and shall meditate diligently on Your Word. Use me as Your instrument. Only do not forsake me; for if I am alone, I shall easily destroy everything. Amen (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 5, p. 123).

D EAR BROTHERS IN CHRIST:

What brought you here this week? It took some effort. Booking your flight, getting the funds together, giving up the better part of a week not long before the start of Lent. Did you know you would attend right when the retreat was announced, or did it take encouragement from a brother pastor or the members of your congregation before you registered? Possibly you have been struggling with

whether or not you are in the right vocation. Or you are glad to be a pastor, but you want to be a better one.

Whatever brought you here, it's good to see you. It is always encouraging when God calls His people together to hear His Word and grow in His grace. It is especially encouraging when we pastors, who so often can feel alone and isolated in the parish, can join together for mutual conversation and consolation. This week was planned for no other reason than to support and encourage you in the work you have been given by God.

The theme for the week is "Never Confounded." It comes from the *Te Deum Laudamus*, a Christian hymn from perhaps the 300s. Our English follows the Latin: "*non confundar in æternum*"—"let me not be confounded for eternity," or "let me never be confounded." Confounded is an older word to us, used 47 times in the King James Version but only 12 times in the New King James. But according to Google, the use of this word is on the upswing after its low point in the 1980s.

Confounded has two primary meanings. It can mean to be confused and baffled, like when it describes the people on Pentecost (Acts 2:6), or Saul's confounding of the Jews by his Christian teaching in Damascus (Acts 9:22). The word can also mean to be disgraced, ashamed, disappointed. That is the meaning of the word in today's reading from Psalm 22: "Our fathers trusted in You; They trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; They trusted in You, and were not [confounded]"—they were not put to shame, not disappointed.

We pray that we are neither confused nor baffled in our work as pastors, and that we are not disgraced or put to shame. We pray in the words of the *Te Deum*, "O Lord, in You have I trusted; let me never be confounded." We say this prayer, not always in these exact words and sometimes only in our thoughts, because we recognize this about ourselves—that on our own, by our own strength and abilities, we most certainly will be confounded.

Martin Luther wrote in his "sacristy prayer": "if it had not been for Your help, I would long since have ruined everything." Have you had the thought as a pastor that you are ruining everything? Have you imagined that any other pastor in our fellowship would probably do a better job in your call than you are doing?

On the one hand, this is the devil in your ear trying to get you to take all the blame when things go badly, just as he wants you to take all the credit when things go well. But on the other hand, it is right to have a humble attitude about your work. You are not better or holier than the

people you serve. You are not less likely to fail than they are. You are a poor, miserable sinner who deserves temporal and eternal punishment from God.

So why should He answer your prayers? Why should He keep you from being confounded? He does it not because you have proven yourself worthy or have somehow earned His good favor. He does it because He is merciful toward you, because He loves you, because He forgives you all your sins.

In Psalm 22, we have the words of our suffering Savior. Jesus cried out from the cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” He was suffering hell for you and for every sinner who had ever lived or would live. Jesus knew exactly what was happening. He felt it to the very bottom of His soul. “Our fathers cried to You, and were delivered,” He said, “but You do not hear Me.” “They trusted in You, and were not [confounded]. But I am a worm, and no man” (Ps 22:5–6).

The wrath of God that you deserved for your sins, Jesus took in your place. All your failures as a pastor, as a Christian, as a man—Jesus suffered for each one. He was cursed, so you would be cleared. He was judged guilty, so you would be justified. He was confounded, so you would be covered in His righteousness and raised to new life in Him.

This is why you can pray, “never let me be confounded,” and know that your heavenly Father hears you. And not only that He hears you, but that He will forgive you, guide you, strengthen you. He will do this for you because He sent His perfect Son to redeem you by pouring out His blood for you.

Because Jesus won this salvation for you, you cannot lose. In Him, there is no disgrace, there is no shame, there is no disappointment. In Him, you cannot be confounded, because in Him, there is only righteousness, only victory, only life.

This is the confidence you have in your work, that it is not your Word you speak, not your gifts you share, not your church you serve, and not your glory you seek. These all belong to Him. It is His Word, His gifts, His church, His glory. You are the right person to do this work, not because you chose it, but because He “chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in [Jesus’] name He may give you” (John 15:16, NKJV).

And so we begin our retreat and carry out our callings with this prayer: “O Lord, in You have I trusted; let me never be confounded.” *Amen.*

Homily 2 on Isaiah 54:1–8**February 18, 2025**

Isaiah 54:1–8 (NKJV)—“Sing, O barren, You who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, You who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate Than the children of the married woman,” says the LORD. “Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; Do not spare; Lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited. / Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; neither be [confounded], for you will not be put to shame; For you will forget the shame of your youth, And will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. For your Maker is your husband, The LORD of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth. For the LORD has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, Like a youthful wife when you were refused,” Says your God. “For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,” Says the LORD, your Redeemer.

Almighty and everlasting Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we see and feel how your church is doing in this world. We see its status and how it is annoyed in so many ways by the world and the devil. So we pray to you for the sake of your only begotten Son. First, comfort and strengthen our hearts by your Holy Spirit, so that we may not be overwhelmed by so many dangers. Also we pray that you will not only halt the purposes and plans of the enemies but will truly and marvelously help prove to the whole world that you care for the church. Rule, protect, and deliver it, ever living and reigning eternal God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen. (*Luther's Prayers*, edited by Herbert F. Brokering, #117, p. 78)

DEAR HOLY MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BRIDE, THE Church:

Today's reading follows right after Isaiah 53, which is the clearest description of Christ's vicarious atonement in the Old Testament and probably in the whole Bible. “Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows.... He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.... He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth.... He bore the sin of many,

And made intercession for the transgressors.” This chapter describes the work of Jesus as Bridegroom, as Husband to His Church. He gave Himself for His Church, dying in her place for her sins, “that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27, NKJV).

The next chapter, Isaiah 54, is all about this holy and blemish-free Bride. First of all, she is described as the “barren one,” who had “not borne,” “not labored with child.” She was “desolate,” seemingly without hope. But now the LORD calls on her to sing. “Break forth into singing, and cry aloud,” for a new day has dawned! Hope appears on the horizon! The desolate woman will be barren no more!

This is because of the Gospel. The Gospel of Jesus sounds forth through the proclamation of His Word and the proper administration of His Sacraments. It pierces the dull ears and dark hearts of the spiritually barren and desolate and conceives in them a living faith, a faith which clings in love and devotion to the LORD of hosts, the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

The Gospel causes the Church to grow. It is always growing. Every day, more and more are baptized in the name of the living God. They are called “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9, NKJV). They join the great company of saints that is always expanding, always increasing. The LORD describes this in terms of a tent: “Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; Do not spare; Lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes.” This is necessary, He says, “For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited.”

It is a grand promise. But like Sarah who laughed at the prospect of bearing a child in her old age, the Church also has her doubts. “Look, O Lord, at the tribulations we face, how we are hated by all nations for Your name’s sake. Look at all the false prophets who deceive many. Look at how lawlessness abounds, how the love of many grows cold” (Mat. 24:9–12). We see how church attendance is decreasing across denominations in our country and in many of our churches. We watch the children and grandchildren of some of our most faithful members forsake the church.

This might make us think that instead of enlarging the tent, stretching out the curtains, and lengthening the cords, we must do the opposite—pull in, tighten up, put up more defenses. Our enemies

are increasing; our allies are becoming fewer. The LORD knows the difficulties the Church faces; after all, it is His Church. Jesus told us to expect these hardships: “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you” (John 15:18–19, NKJV).

The solution to these difficulties is not to try to win the favor of the world. Plenty of Christian churches have tried to do that. But in winning the world’s favor, they have lost the favor of God. The Church of Jesus never goes silent or compromises His Word, it never stops confessing the truth, it never stops singing His praises. Christ’s Church on earth always has a bright future because the Church is tied to Him. He is the Head of the Church; He is the Savior of the body (Eph 5:23).

He has compassion on the Church, as to the weaker vessel, like a husband has compassion on his wife (1 Pet 3:7). Jesus knows your weaknesses. He sees how you get discouraged, how you question both the power of His Word and your own fitness and effectiveness as a pastor. He sees how you are tempted to compromise His Word for your own gain or to spare yourself trouble. He sees how you worry about the future of the Church and the difficulties you may have to face. “Do not fear,” He says, “for you will not be ashamed; neither be [confounded], for you will not be put to shame.”

“You will never be confounded,” He says, “For your Maker is your husband, The LORD of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth.” Then He adds these comforting words, “For the LORD has called you.” It was His prerogative to choose you for His bride, to sanctify and cleanse you with the washing of water by the word, to present you holy and without blemish before Him. It was His prerogative to make you a pastor in His holy Church and bless the work of your mouth and your hands for the increase of His Church.

Even if in His wisdom, God must bring suffering and affliction upon His Church to increase her faithfulness and strength, He will continue to stand by her side and bear her up. As He chastised His people Israel in Old Testament times, so He does this for the good of the Church, His dear Israel, today. “For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,’ Says the LORD, your Redeemer.”

Thanks be to God. *Amen.*

Homily 3 on 1 Peter 2:1–8**February 18, 2025**

1 Peter 2:1–8 (NKJV)—Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. / Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “*Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be [confounded].*” Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “*The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,*” and “*A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.*” They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word;
Curb those who fain by craft and sword
Would wrest the kingdom from Thy Son
And set at naught all He hath done.

Lord Jesus Christ, Thy pow'r make known,
For Thou art Lord of lords alone;
Defend Thy Christendom that we
May evermore sing praise to Thee.

O Comforter of priceless worth,
Send peace and unity on earth.
Support us in our final strife
And lead us out of death to life. *Amen.*
(*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* #589)

DEAR CRANKY, FUSSY, IMPATIENT CHILDREN OF God, whom He gladly forgives, cheerfully loves, and constantly cares for:

“[A]s newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” If babies had a job description, it would be something like “passive recipient.” That’s why a baby is such a good picture for the whole Christian

life. We passively receive the gifts of God through His holy Word, like a little baby receiving milk from its mother. A Christian can never get too much from God's Word, and that is especially true for pastors.

Martin Luther spends some ink in his preface to the *Large Catechism* railing against the pastors and preachers, "these delicate and refined fellows," who after little study of the Word think they "know everything, and need nothing." But Luther, one of the most brilliant theologians the Church has seen, said this: "I act as a child who is being taught the catechism. Every morning—and whenever I have time—I read and say, word for word, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Psalms, and such. I must still read and study them daily. Yet I cannot master the catechism as I wish. But I must remain a child and pupil of the catechism, and am glad to remain so" (Preface to the Large Catechism, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 379).

This is the humble way Jesus taught His disciples: "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 18:3–4, NKJV). There is no greatness in the kingdom of heaven without humility. That is why the inspired apostle calls on every Christian to lay aside "all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking." These things come from prideful, stubborn hearts, as we know very well.

As often as we have been gentle infants gladly drinking from the Word, we have also been cranky infants who refuse to be pacified no matter what good things are given to us. Maybe we made a mess through our careless words or actions, but we passed the blame to others for putting us in the situation we were in. Or we were dealing with personal stresses and burdens, and we took it out on the people we are called to care for.

We have acted entitled at times: "Don't they know how hard this job is? Don't they see how hard I work? I'm not getting paid nearly what I am worth. If they are not going to pay me, couldn't they at least respect me?" Those thoughts set the stage perfectly for sins like bitterness, anger, self-pity, apathy, despair.

And as much as we might wonder if we are getting what we deserve, what if Jesus looked at us in that way? "I sent them to have compassion on My sheep. I sent them to call back the straying and seek the lost. I sent them to preach My Word in season and out of season. I sent them to be an example of a faithful Christian life." How much has Jesus gotten from His investment in us?

But our Lord does not operate this way. He is merciful toward us. He does not reject us for our weakness and sin. Rather *He* was rejected for *us*. He was “rejected indeed by men.” As John writes, “He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:10–11, NKJV). And from Isaiah, “He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:5, NKJV).

Yes, He was “rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious.” And so are you. Jesus redeemed you with His holy, precious blood, so you would be a child set apart, consecrated for His work. This began at your Baptism, when the Lord breathed His Word of life into the very center of your soul. The apostle Peter wrote about this rebirth just before today’s reading, that you “[have] been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Pet 1:23).

His living and abiding Word declared you forgiven, freed from your sin, rescued from eternal death. And that Word has not changed. It is still good! It still applies! His Word is still active to lead you to repentance and to the assurance that all your sins are forgiven, including your sins against the people you serve.

Just as babies grow more and more through the nourishment of their mothers’ milk, you grow more and more through your nourishment from God’s Word. He is accomplishing great things through you. You are not the easiest material to work with, but He is a master builder. You, as a living stone, along with your fellow believers, “are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood.”

And what is your purpose? “[T]o offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Notice that your spiritual sacrifices—all your work—is “acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” You are sanctified in Him. His righteousness counts for you. God does not reject you for your failures in your work. He sees you in Christ, chosen and precious, and calls you each new day to go forward with diligence and with joy.

In Christ, “the chief cornerstone,” you will “by no means be confounded.” But only in Him. On your own, trusting your own strength, plowing ahead by your own resources and reserves, Jesus would become an obstacle to you, “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense,” as the Scripture says. This is why Luther said with his last words scribbled on a piece of paper 479 years ago today, “We are all beggars. This is true.”

We need God's care and His strength every minute of every day. And that is what He promises to give! Dear fellow beggars, beloved children of God, desire and drink deeply "the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby," for "indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious."

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

Homily 4 on Psalm 40:9–17

February 19, 2025

Psalm 40:9–17 (NKJV)—

I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness in the great assembly; indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O LORD, You Yourself know.

¹⁰ I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great assembly.

¹¹ Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O LORD; let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me.

¹² For innumerable evils have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me.

¹³ Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me; O LORD, make haste to help me!

¹⁴ Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion who seek to destroy my life; let them be driven backward and brought to dishonor who wish me evil.

¹⁵ Let them be confounded because of their shame, who say to me, "Aha, aha!"

¹⁶ Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let such as love Your salvation say continually, "The LORD be magnified!"

¹⁷ But I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; Do not delay, O my God. (NKJV)

Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O LORD; Let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me.... Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me; O LORD, make haste to help me!... Do not delay, O my God. Amen.

DEAR FELLOW SAINTS AND SINNERS, WHOSE hope is only in the LORD's mercy,

In today's lection, David is struggling with a conflicted conscience. Publicly he had done and said what was right. Notice how twice in two verses, he mentions "the great assembly": "I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness in the great assembly; Indeed, I do not restrain my lips, O LORD, You Yourself know. I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth from the great assembly" (vv. 9-10). But privately, he felt as though he had failed in every way: "For innumerable evils have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart fails me."

I am sure, dear brothers, that you can relate. You have been called publicly to "[proclaim] the good news of righteousness in the great assembly," to proclaim the Lord's faithfulness and salvation. You preach this message whether to many or to few, whether they seem eager to hear it or not, whether or not it appears to bear obvious fruit. You point your parishioners to Jesus—His righteousness credited to them, His forgiveness for their sins, His death to redeem their life and His life to secure their salvation.

God bless you in this faithful preaching! You are privileged to dispense the holy gifts of God. Very few are called to this work, and you are one of those few. It was no mistake that God chose you. He knew you would be a pastor before you were born because He knows all things. And besides that, He promised that His Church will have under-shepherds to guide His people to the green pastures and still waters of His Word and Sacraments. This is your calling.

The calling and responsibilities are clear, but the carrying out of this work is a great challenge. It is a challenge because you are constantly struggling against the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh. First of all, the flesh. As far as your parishioners think about it, they assume you are the same everywhere as you are on Sunday morning—thoughtful, caring, friendly, confident. You know they think that about you, and you

want them to think that about you. And that is why you can very easily feel like a fraud.

You can have the utmost patience with a parishioner but no patience with your wife or children at home. You can guard your words carefully at church but can act like a totally different person around strangers. You can preach the Word boldly on Sunday, while being wracked with guilt and doubts the rest of the week. You can look like you have it all together, when you feel like everything is falling apart.

If your parishioners knew your struggles and the conflicts in your mind, they would be shocked. I've thought before how terrifying it would be if our forehead displayed what we were thinking like a scrolling digital sign. We would stop going out in public, or certainly not without our foreheads covered! Our sins are many, particularly the sins of our thoughts—all those impurities, those judgments, those hypocrisies. When David contemplated his many iniquities, he said, "They are more than the hairs of my head." And in fact, they are far, far more.

Then there is the devil and the world. If they are unable to destroy you from the inside by making a shipwreck of your faith, they put whatever obstacles they can manage against your work. This could happen by tempting your parishioners to such sin and guilt that they no longer feel like they belong at church and stop receiving your spiritual care. It could be through creating division in your congregation or turning parishioners against you, so that all you hear is criticism. David mentioned those who sought to destroy his life, who wished him evil, who took delight in his downfall.

But whether he spoke about what he had done right, what he had done badly, or what others had done to him, David kept coming back to the LORD's mercy toward him. After recounting his faithful proclamation of God's Word of truth, David prayed, "Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O LORD; let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me." Without the LORD's faithfulness toward him, he knew he would not remain faithful.

After acknowledging his many sins, he prayed, "Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me; O LORD, make haste to help me!" The LORD had to deliver him, or he was lost. Then he also prayed against his enemies. This was not a self-serving prayer; it was for the Church. "Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion who seek to destroy my life.... Let them be confounded because of their shame." And, "Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let such as love Your salvation say continually, 'The LORD be magnified!'"

Let them say continually, “The LORD be magnified.” That is the heart of it. When you are tempted to think you have done well as a pastor, or when you are tempted to think you have done nothing well—“The LORD be magnified.” When you think of your personal failings, what you wish you could go back and do over but can’t, how overwhelmed you are by your own sins—“The LORD be magnified.” When you think about the enemies arrayed against the Church who would threaten your life and livelihood—“The LORD be magnified.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ has already crushed the devil’s head. He has already overcome the world. He has already eliminated each and every one of your sins by His sacrifice. The gates of hell could not prevail against Him, so they cannot prevail against His Church. That means the gates of hell cannot prevail against you because you belong to Him. You are His own, a member of His holy body, covered in His righteousness. Yes, in your weak flesh, you are poor and needy. Yet the LORD thinks upon you. He is your help and your deliverer. *Amen.*

Homily 5 on Psalm 69:1–6

February 19, 2025

Psalm 69:1–6 (NKJV)—*To the Chief Musician. Set to “The Lilies.” A Psalm of David.*

Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck.

² I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.

³ I am weary with my crying; my throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God.

⁴ Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; they are mighty who would destroy me, being my enemies wrongfully; though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it.

⁵ O God, You know my foolishness; and my sins are not hidden from You.

⁶ Let not those who wait for You, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed because of me; let not those who seek You be confounded because of me, O God of Israel. (NKJV)

O God, You know my foolishness; and my sins are not hidden from You. Let not those who wait for You, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed because of me; let not those who seek You be confounded because of me, O God of Israel. *Amen.*

D EAR MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT, MADE sufficient by God,

When have you felt the most overwhelmed as a pastor? Was it when you didn't think you could handle another problem, and five new problems came to your desk all in the same week? The phone rang informing you of another hospitalization or another death when you already felt emotionally tapped? Church members demanded more and more of your time, when your family needed your attention? The members you thought you could lean on showed they were not reliable as you thought?

There are lots of things that can pile up and make you wonder how you will make it through the trial. You can feel utterly weak or stressed out, mentally ready to drop everything and leave, or to lash out at the people who should see your pain but don't. You can wonder why you ever became a pastor in the first place. This isn't what you pictured it would be like.

David had experiences like this. In today's Psalm he said, "Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." He felt hopeless, like a person in swirling flood waters struggling to keep his head above water. The source of his trouble was those who hated him without a cause. He said they were more than the hairs of his head, and that they were seeking to destroy him. Even though he had done nothing to deserve their opposition, they gathered their forces against him.

One of the things that weighs most on us as pastors is when we feel we are suffering unjustly. We faithfully warned a member about his sin, and then found ourselves on the receiving end of criticism from other members. We respectfully asked a visitor not to commune, and then had life-long members questioning our practice. We went above and beyond what is expected of us, and all we heard was blame for what wasn't going well.

When we do suffer unjustly, it is easy to have a self-righteous or defiant attitude, to see sin all around us but fail to see it in ourselves. We can dismiss our own bad behavior as justified because of how we have

been attacked. We can even to begin to look at the people we serve as enemies, instead of as the dearly bought sheep of the Good Shepherd that they are.

David recognized this temptation in himself. Right after detailing his unjust treatment by those who hated him, he took his eyes off them and looked at himself. “O God, You know my foolishness,” he wrote; “And my sins are not hidden from You.” That is the essential exercise for when you are feeling overwhelmed, or when you think you are being treated unfairly.

It is time to repent—repent for paying more attention to your pain than God’s promise, for wrapping up in the bitterness of your thoughts instead of the comfort of His Word, for forgetting that your work as a pastor is not yours, but His. How can you sink beneath the weight of your burdens, when He promises to bear them for you? How can you be overcome, when the Conqueror of sin, death, and devil contends for you?

It is the devil who wants you to feel as though you do your work all alone, that everything depends on you, that you have to soldier on even when you have nothing left to give. But you will never get anywhere drawing from your own reserves. Your reserves are finite and insufficient. God’s reserves are infinite and perfectly sufficient. St. Paul writes, “our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:5–6, NKJV).

God makes us sufficient as ministers. It is His power that holds us up. It is His strength that fills us. It is His work that causes souls to be healed and fed. He knows how little we can bear. That’s why He sent us a Savior—a Savior not just for the people you preach to, but a Savior for you.

If there was anyone who suffered unjustly, it was Him. Who could more rightly say, “Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; they are mighty who would destroy me, being my enemies wrongfully”? And then He added, “Though I have stolen nothing, I still must restore it.” How true! Jesus stole nothing from man but still had to suffer for the wages of man’s sin.

God the Father poured our countless sins over His Son, and His Son cried out, “Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters, Where the floods overflow me.” More than a description of David’s hardships or your hardships, this Psalm is a description of the suffering Jesus endured out of love for you. He was inundated by

your sins. He was consumed by the fires of hell for your sake. He was forsaken by His Father in your place.

He suffered alone, so you would never have to. He took the punishment for your sin, so you would “obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16). He poured out His precious blood, so that both the sins you have done and the sins others have done to you would be washed away.

You are free. In Christ, you are free. Day after day, He forgives your sins and covers you in His righteousness. In Him, you are not confounded. Each day, He sets the good works in front of you that He has prepared for you to walk in (Eph 2:10). He made you a pastor, and He will continue to support and strengthen you for the work.

As you do this work, you join David in his humble prayer, a prayer the LORD loves to hear and promises to answer: “Let not those who wait for You, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed because of me; Let not those who seek You be confounded because of me, O God of Israel.” To You alone be the glory, our Savior and our God. *Amen.*

Homily 6 on Isaiah 41:8–14

February 19, 2025

Isaiah 41:8–14 (NKJV)—“But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend. You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest regions, and said to you, ‘You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away: Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’ ‘Behold, all those who were incensed against you shall be ashamed and [confounded]; they shall be as nothing, and those who strive with you shall perish. You shall seek them and not find them—those who contended with you. Those who war against you shall be as nothing, as a nonexistent thing. For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you.’ ‘Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I will help you,’ says the LORD and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

You, my Lord Jesus, are my righteousness; I am Your sin.

You have taken from me what is mine and have given me what is Yours.

You became what You were not and made me to be what I was not. Amen (Martin Luther).

DEAR WORMS OF GOD, PROTECTED BY HIS power and upheld by His grace,

The text from Isaiah that we just heard is full of promises. They are not new promises. They are old promises dating back to the time of Jacob and even further back to the time of Abraham. The LORD promised the people of Israel His help because they were descendants of “Jacob whom I have chosen” and of “Abraham My friend.” Like His promise to make man and animal fruitful so they might multiply and fill the earth, and His promise never again to destroy the whole world with a flood, so His promise to Israel was likewise firm and in force, since God does not change His mind.

Israel existed in a seemingly perilous position. The nation was located in a natural corridor between the Great Sea on the west and a great desert on the east and powerful Asian and African nations to the north and south. Enemies closed in from all sides. But Israel had something its enemies did not; it had the LORD. He looked with mercy on His people and said, “You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away: Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

At the same time that He strengthened Israel, He also promised to weaken its enemies: “Behold, all those who were incensed against you shall be ashamed and [confounded]; they shall be as nothing, and those who strive with you shall perish. You shall seek them and not find them—those who contended with you. Those who war against you shall be as nothing, as a nonexistent thing.” The promises are so clear and certain that it hardly seems like a fair fight! How could Israel lose with the LORD on its side?

St. Paul came to the same conclusion in his inspired letter to the Romans. “If God is for us,” he wrote, “who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31, NKJV). And God is certainly for us. We know that because He “did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Rom 8:32). God did not send His Son into the flesh because He was bored and wanted to try something new. He sent His Son to redeem the world of sinners.

He sent His Son to suffer and die, so that both Jews and Gentiles would be rescued from the kingdom of darkness and transferred to His kingdom of light.

We believers are unquestionably on the side of strength. The LORD of all heaven and earth fights for us. He sends His powerful Word throughout the earth to destroy the efforts of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh and to conquer men's hearts. But like Peter who took his eyes off the LORD and saw the large waves coming his way, it is all too easy for us to look at the enemies around us and conclude that we are overmatched, that we cannot stand against their power, that we will perish.

That's why we need to hear the LORD's promises again and again. "Have I not chosen you?" He asks. "Am I not with you? When have I forsaken you? When have I taken back My righteous right hand from protecting you?" We know the answers to these questions. He has never abandoned us, never rejected us. Shortly before His ascension to the right hand of God, Jesus promised, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20, NKJV). He is with us in His Word and Sacraments. When we preach, when we proclaim the absolution, when we baptize, when we administer the Sacrament, when we bring His Word to homes and care centers and hospitals, He is present with His power to forgive and strengthen His people.

But as pastors, we often feel like our efforts fall short. We kept silent when we should have spoken, or we spoke when we should have kept silent. We let problems go unaddressed in the congregation hoping they would go away, but instead they got out of control. We wish we were better preachers and teachers. We wish we were better husbands and fathers. We wish our confidence in God's power matched the certainty of His promises. We are not unlike Israel, cowering in our doubts and weaknesses.

And the LORD speaks to you like a parent assuring his frightened child, "For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.' I will not leave you. I am right here with you." Fears come when you think you are responsible for all the successes and failures in the congregation, when you try to keep everything in your control, and when you constantly dwell on your inadequacies. That is when God seems very distant, or even very angry with you.

Three times in this section of Isaiah, the LORD says, "Fear not."—"Fear not, for I am with you." "Fear not, I will help you." And, "Fear not, you worm Jacob, You men of Israel! I will help you." Now it is not

the most flattering thing to be called a worm. But it puts the focus in exactly the right place. We are weak, but He is strong. We are helpless on our own, but His power upholds us. We would certainly fail, but He blesses our little efforts and gives them success.

And if our Lord Jesus should call Himself “a worm, and no man” (Ps 22:6, NKJV), then we will gladly wear that label. In His humiliation, Jesus became a worm to rescue you. He willingly suffered, so you would be saved. He died, so you would live. He does not reject you for your doubts and failures. He forgives them all and sends you forward to do His work.

Though enemies will surround you, threatening to squash you, you do not need to fear. They will all be confounded because the LORD stands against them. He is mighty in word and deed. He will not let them win. That was His promise to Israel, and it is His promise to you. By faith, you are descended from Abraham, the friend of God, and you have received exactly what he received—the righteousness and salvation of “your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.”

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen. 

Mission Work in the End Times

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Text: ¹ Then a measuring rod like a staff was given to me. He said, “Stand up and measure the incense altar and the temple of God and those who worship in it. ² Exclude the outer court of the temple and do not measure it, because it has been given to the heathen. They will trample the holy city for forty-two months. ³ I will commission my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” ⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that are standing before the Lord of the earth. ⁵ If anyone wants to harm them, fire is going to come out of their mouths and consume their enemies. If anyone should want to harm them, it is necessary that he be killed in this way. ⁶ These two have the authority to shut the sky so that no rain falls during the days when they are prophesying. They also have authority over the waters, to turn them into blood, and the authority to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want. ⁷ When they finish their testimony, the beast that comes up from the abyss will fight against them, conquer them, and kill them. ⁸ Their dead bodies will lie on the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. ⁹ Some from the peoples, tribes, languages, and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days and will not permit them to be placed in a tomb. ¹⁰ Those who dwell on the earth will also rejoice over them and celebrate by sending gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ After three and a half days the breath of life from God came into them. They stood on their feet, and a great fear fell on those who saw them. ¹² And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up

here.” They went up into heaven in a cloud, as their enemies watched them (Revelation 11:1–12, EHV).

DEAR BROTHERS IN THE MINISTRY OF THE Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Lamb upon the throne,

Imagine this beautiful church empty except for three people in the pews, an organist, a janitor and a pastor, crucifer and two deacons up front. Now imagine that this is the only church in town and 90% of the people in town belong to this church. About half of those members come if they have a child to have it baptized. Some couples get married, although most just live together. Some people come for concerts. The church can afford to stay open and well maintained because even though most people only come to church for their burial, those 90% have church taxes (3%) assessed by the tax authorities together with their income tax. Even those who go to the trouble of officially withdrawing from the church still pay a historic preservation tax to maintain the building against the ravages of time. Most people like having the beautiful old church building standing there because it’s pretty and it’s a quaint link to their cultural past when once upon a time their naïve grandparents believed in a primitive religion called Christianity.

I’m sure you all pray that scenario will never be true. So do I. But at the same time that picture is already true in some formerly Christian parts of the world. In fact, it is Sweden I was directly describing, rated as one of the most secular states in the modern world, just behind Czechia, which spent 35 years behind the iron curtain.¹ If it sounds creepy, it is. If it sounds like something straight out of the book of Revelation, it is.

Our text today depicts the ongoing work of proclaiming Law and Gospel throughout the New Testament era, including how it will be just before Jesus returns. Our text is talking about “Mission Work in the End Times” and I’ve chosen that theme because it describes the mission work being carried out in by our CELC sister churches in Europe, and increasingly right here in our country, as especially our pastors in the Northwest understand.

The Visible Church Today

Our text begins with a description of the church in the world.¹ *Then a measuring rod like a staff was given to me. He said, “Stand up and measure*

¹ <https://claphaminstitutet.se/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Clapham-Academic-1-Knox-swedishsecularity.pdf>.

the incense altar and the temple of God and those who worship in it.² Exclude the outer court of the temple and do not measure it, because it has been given to the heathen. They will trample the holy city for forty-two months.

In the Old Testament the temple consisted of two main areas—the inner courtyard, where only the Jews could enter, and the outer courtyard, the court of the Gentiles. John uses the image of the temple grounds with both its inner and outer courtyards as a figurative picture of the visible church, which includes both those who believe, and those who do not but are nevertheless outwardly attached to the visible church, like a high percentage of Europe's population. "They don't count!" John is told. "They're not part of my number!" God says.

There will always be unbelievers who are simply attached to the church. As the church spread in the world through the ages, sometimes that percentage has been greater, sometimes lower. When a German tribal leader ordered all his fellow warriors into a river to be baptized, did that suddenly Christianize his whole territory? *They will trample the holy city for forty-two months*, that is, there will always be people known as "cultural Christians," people who are attached to the church as long as it is the socially advantageous thing to do, but don't really trust in Christ for salvation.

There are also many who do have an interest in the church, but spend all their time praying to St. Mary, or trusting in their own good works for salvation, because they haven't really been taught or understood the Christian Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. That has sadly been true for all the church's 42 months, its 1260 days (the New Testament Era), but worse in some places and some eras. At this time in history, the Church is growing rapidly in some places, particularly in the southern hemisphere and in Asia, although how many are really learning about Jesus as their Substitute and Redeemer? God knows. Meanwhile, in the areas of Europe where the Gospel was most clearly and brilliantly proclaimed—the Lutheran countries, Germany and the Scandinavian countries—the church is but an empty shell. What few people do come, rarely hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but rather pro-Palestinian speeches, lectures on how to be nice people, why homosexuality is good and how hateful people are who don't agree.

The Two Witnesses

And yet there *are* still some who proclaim the truth, like a voice crying in the wilderness. John says it will always be so, until the very last of the last days.

³ “I will commission my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” Those two witnesses represent God’s two-fold message of Law and Gospel proclaimed by only a few. God tells people through His faithful witnesses that they are sinners in need of repentance, faith, and salvation. And God’s true witnesses proclaim the Good News of forgiveness in Jesus to comfort souls who are sick and wounded. That two-edged message is designed by God to lead people into His eternal kingdom and create faith in their hearts. But it can also lead people to further harden their hearts, as happened when Isaiah preached in Old Testament Judah. *Either way, God’s Word is accomplishing His purpose.* And the same is true of your faithful preaching of Law and Gospel. The Apostle Paul wrote: “Yes, we are the fragrance of Christ for God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To some we are the odor of death that is a prelude to death, to the others the fragrance of life that is a prelude to life....” (2 Cor 2:15–16, EHV).

The true witnesses God sends out faithfully testify throughout the 1260 days, throughout the whole New Testament era, until the end—or just about the end: Then, *Their dead bodies will lie on the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.* ⁹ *Some from the peoples, tribes, languages, and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days and will not permit them to be placed in a tomb.* ¹⁰ *Those who dwell on the earth will also rejoice over them and celebrate by sending gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.*

They lie dead in the streets of the great city—in the middle of what was once Christendom, just as Jesus was crucified in the middle of what was once Judaism. The message of Christianity will be subject to general ridicule as people rejoice that they no longer have to listen to those terrible voices calling for repentance and pointing to that ‘pathetic’ Savior on a cross. I watched that in real time when I served as a pastor and public school teacher in Sweden. And when that happens, John says, there is only a short time left before the end.

What about Your Ministry?

Has Europe come to that point? Only God knows. Will America soon be there? God only knows. What we *do* know is that there *are* still a few voices proclaiming God’s law and Gospel—not in the great cathedrals of the past, but in often smaller buildings, in publications like the *Lutheran Sentinel*, online on church websites and YouTube—through

whatever means God makes available. We also take comfort in the fact that there are also other churches where something of the Gospel is still proclaimed. There is even a small handful of pastors in mainline churches who still understand the Gospel.

Yet, like Europe, much of America is post-Christian. So many parents in our churches have watched children go off to schools that actively mock or even attack Christianity and the Holy Scriptures, and they have seen their children turned against the faith. Such a tragedy! Jesus once asked the haunting question *“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”* (Luke 18:8, EHV) It is vital that we continue to make the most of every opportunity while it is day—both here and abroad—before the night comes when no one can work, while looking forward to the FINAL VICTORY AND REWARD Christ has promised.

Final Victory and Reward

¹¹ *After three and a half days the breath of life from God came into them. They stood on their feet, and a great fear fell on those who saw them.* ¹² *And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” They went up into heaven in a cloud, as their enemies watched them.*

Those who faithfully witness await eternal life in heaven. The Lamb that was slain has atoned for all their sins. He has earned them a place in heaven. He called them His own in life. He first anointed each of His believers a priest through baptism. And in the case of His called witnesses who suffer to share the truth—you—He Himself has commissioned and sent you right out into the Book of Revelation with the promise of His recompense and eternal reward—treasure stored up for you above!

Jesus wins! That's the theme of this book. And because He wins, you and I win too! We need to hear that reminder as the battle rages around us. He will be with you, comfort you, strengthen you, and keep you, as you faithfully proclaim His Word. Amen. LSQ

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Prof. Mark DeGarmeaux,
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The Bondage of the Will

Dr. Keith Wessel,
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