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# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

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## *Table of Contents*

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<b>ELCA Journeys: Personal Reflections on the Last Forty Years</b> Michael C. D. McDaniel .....	99
<b><i>Homo Factus Est</i> as the Revelation of God</b> David P. Scaer .....	111
<b>Law and Gospel and the Doctrine of God: Missouri in the 1960s and 1970s</b> Scott R. Murray .....	127
<b>Redeeming Time: Deuteronomy 8:11-18</b> Dean O. Wenthe .....	157
<b>A Letter on Pastoral Assistance</b> Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary .....	161
<b>An Overture of the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in Convention</b> Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary .....	167

<b>Theological Observer</b> .....	169
On Language and Morology: A Plea for the Language of the Church .....	Daniel L. Gard
<i>Ex Oriente Lux</i> —Light from the East .....	Kurt E. Marquart
<b>Book Reviews</b> .....	178
<i>Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular     Christianity in America.</i> By John H. Wigger .....	Lawrence R. Rast Jr.
<i>The Encyclopedia of Christianity, Volume 1 (A-D).</i> Edited by Erwin Fahlbusch, and others. .....	Lawrence R. Rast Jr.
<i>Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays     Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His     Sixtieth Birthday.</i> Edited by Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson. .....	Cameron A. MacKenzie
<i>Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements.</i> Edited by Richard A. Landes. .....	Lawrence R. Rast Jr.
<i>God in Russia: The Challenge of Freedom.</i> Edited by Sharon Linzey and Ken Kaisch. .....	Timothy C. J. Quill
<i>Medieval Exegesis. Volume 1: The Four Senses of Scripture.</i> By Henri de Lubac. .....	Cameron MacKenzie
<i>Culturally-Conscious Worship.</i> By Kathy Black. .....	William P. McDonald
<i>The Oracles of God: The Old Testament Canon.</i> By Andrew E. Steinmann .....	Chad L. Bird
<i>Psalms 119: The Exaltation of Torah</i> By David Noel Freedman .....	Chad L. Bird

# ELCA Journeys: Personal Reflections on the Last Forty Years

Michael C. D. McDaniel

Throughout my ministry, I have sought to inspire a passionate devotion to and teach a clear understanding of the pure word of God, informed in that understanding solely by the Confessions of the Lutheran Church. I have given much time and energy toward building stronger ties between our church and yours.

The topic suggested to me was “ELCA Journeys: Personal Reflections on the Last Forty Years.” Considering the present state of the ELCA, I considered giving my paper a subtitle, taken from Suetonius’ account of the homage given to Caesar by the gladiators: *Ave, Caesar, nos morituri te salutamus*. However, that does not quite fit the case, since the gladiators were, at that point, still very much alive, crying out “we who are about to die salute you.” So, in casting about in my mind for a more proper parallel, I thought of Ebenezer Scrooge and Marley’s Ghost. Perhaps I should view my assignment as similar to that of Marley, who was, as Dickens assures us, “dead as a doornail.” Marley tells Scrooge, “I am here to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate.”

Certainly, such a caveat is a prominent element in my thinking. Other important elements in my reflections are the great love I have had for the church, the many wonderful moments I have experienced in its fellowship, and thus, my urgent plea for prayer for the members of the ELCA.

I was ordained in 1954 in one of the cradles of Lutheranism in America. The North Carolina Synod is the oldest synod in continuous existence in the Western Hemisphere, since the venerable “ministeriums” of Pennsylvania and New York have been subdivided and no longer exist in their original form. Lutheranism in North Carolina not only goes back to the early 1700s, but it was the North Carolina Synod that first specified the Augsburg Confession as its basis. Loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions has been fiercely defended in North Carolina and, thank God, by many people, it still is.

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Dr. Edward T. Horn, writing in the 1893 volume on *The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States*, made this interesting observation: "The ministers in the South have meagre salaries and cannot buy many books. As a consequence, they study those they have thoroughly. And there are few parsonages in which will not be found the *Book of Concord* and Schmid's *Dogmatics*, both filled with markers and carefully annotated."<sup>1</sup>

My journey as a Lutheran thus began in the bosom of a large extended family, in which, I was given to understand, it was unthinkable not to be a Lutheran. Although I explored other denominations at the state university, such explorations served to strengthen my loyalty to my Lutheran heritage.

Convinced that I had a call from God to the holy ministry, I eagerly entered the seminary at Hamma Divinity School at Wittenberg in Springfield, Ohio. There, I benefitted by a sound course in the Confessions under Professor Willard Dow Allbeck and an exciting course in dogmatics taught by T. A. Kantonen, among other fine experiences.

Prompted by early training, I never spent my time reading anything without first inquiring from those whom I thought would know, "is this sound?" I was very much concerned for purity of doctrine, and I was by no means alone in that passion among my fellow seminarians and, later, fellow pastors.

After a few years of parish experience, I was called to the office of evangelism of the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA), where my tasks included preparing literature for evangelism and teaching evangelism to groups of pastors in the northeastern United States and eastern Canada. In these years, there was a strong feeling among the leaders of our church that, partly because of the manifest widespread devotion to the Confessions among us, great strides in Lutheran unity lay just ahead.

It was very exciting to attend the national conventions of the ULCA and, later, Lutheran Church in America (LCA), because these were

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<sup>1</sup>Edward T. Horn, "The United Synod in the South," in *The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Lutheran Publication Society, 1893), 173-174.

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always inspiring and informative events – so much so that we scrimped and saved in order to go, long before there was any possibility of my being elected a delegate. There the best theologians spoke, often on the floor of the convention, the best preachers preached, and the finest music lifted our minds and hearts to God. In those days, there was not a more enthusiastic, wholehearted member of any church anywhere than I was, and I threw myself unreservedly into every aspect of the gospel ministry, working to be a faithful steward of those mysteries committed to my care.

To further refine such gifts as I had, I enrolled part-time in graduate studies, even while serving as pastor of a 2200-member congregation in Chicago. After a time, I applied for and received a fellowship to study abroad, and we went to Germany where I studied in Hamburg with Helmut Thielicke, Carl Friedrich von Weizacker, and others.

Upon our return from Germany and the completion of my doctoral studies, I sought a teaching position in a Lutheran seminary. However, there were no vacant chairs in systematic theology at that time; so, I accepted the gracious offer of a position at Lenoir-Rhyne College in Hickory, North Carolina.

During those next eleven years, the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Book of Concord was celebrated, and the North Carolina Synod asked me to prepare literature and give lectures across the Synod on the Book of Concord. That experience may have prompted people to vote for me to become the bishop at the Synod convention in 1982. At any rate, the synod knew it was electing a professor, and I was glad for that affirmation of the centrality of the word and its teaching.

In the nine years during which I served as bishop, my whole world was turned upside down. These were the years in which the ELCA was being cobbled together by people chosen on the basis of various arbitrary quotas – a principle of organization that I did my best to defeat. It was during these years that some of us realized, with growing disbelief and dismay, what was happening to the church. We had the illusion that we could stop, or at least impede, some of the fearful trends we saw, because the Commission for a New Lutheran Church (CNLC) annually sent a booklet containing new articles for the proposed constitution, with questions for each synod to answer. However, it soon became apparent that clever minds were at work devising these booklets, because the questions were all framed so as to force answers congenial to the CNLC.

One year the North Carolina Synod answered all the Commission's questions, and then by large majorities passed resolutions stating our vigorous objections to various aspects of the proposals. I recall, for example, we were appalled that chapter 2 of the then-proposed constitution, the section on "The Confession of Faith," was a graveyard of once-living words and phrases, lying inert and cold, dry as the autumn leaves. There was no mention of the moisture that could give them life: baptism or the Lord's Supper; and the paragraph on the Bible stated that "God's Spirit speaks to us through the Scriptures to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship *for service in the world.*" A memorial from our synod asking that this hideously reductionist line be removed was simply ignored. The CNLC was apparently incapable of understanding the Rauschenbushian triumph implicit in these words.

This was only one of many ominous signs that quite early warned of fatal flaws in the structure of the ELCA. However, most people—pastors and laity alike—were unable to perceive such signs because no one wants even to entertain the possibility that the church itself is falling victim to relativism and apostasy.

Not surprisingly, for a church whose constitution can point no higher than "service in the world" as its *raison d'être*, within a short time, programs were being pressed upon synods and congregations bearing the sanctimonious humbug of "peace, justice, and the care of the environment." Under this pious Jolly Roger, congregations were urged toward the absurdly presumptuous goal of "meeting the world's needs," by lobbying and advocacy instead of such ministries to word and sacrament as would define the world's real needs. Thus the ELCA emerged as subservient to relevancy in the kingdoms of this world, but indifferent to revelation from the kingdom of heaven.

My first year as bishop, 1982, was the year when the LCA voted to create a new church with the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Congregations (AELC). It was also the year in which the sensational ecumenical document, "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry" was published, and thus ecumenism was very much in the air.<sup>2</sup> In his sermon at my installation, Bishop Crumley

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<sup>2</sup>*Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order paper, number 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).



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declared that the wider the scope of one's ministry, the greater one's responsibility for working toward Christian unity.

I found that a heady notion, and so, just a little more than two years later, it was with great joy that I had the privilege of welcoming the 1985 convention of the Southeastern District of the LCMS when it met in Charlotte. As I was preparing my remarks in the motel room the night before, I became quite excited by the prospect that a closer relationship with our brothers in Missouri could not only enhance our common witness to Christ, but also help the ELCA to turn the tide away from the abyss of liberalism yawning before us.

Therefore, in the large convention hall of a Holiday Inn in Charlotte, North Carolina on that April day, I said (after some three pages of preamble),

I want to issue an invitation to the Southeastern District to consider theological dialogues with the North Carolina Synod of the LCA. Before smiling at the thought of such activity at the lowly level of a district or synod, think how Luther snorted to be told that "little Wittenberg" had no business thinking! If not now, when? If not here, where? It is wonderful how God bypassed Rome and even Jerusalem in favor of a cowshed in Bethlehem. Might He not also use a Holiday Inn?

By the grace of God, the Southeastern District overwhelmingly endorsed my proposal, and a few weeks later, so did the North Carolina Synod of the LCA. Very soon, each body had appointed representatives, and with the Rev. Jerald Joersz looking on from the LCMS national offices, we began regular meetings. The first fruit of those meetings was a thrilling "Lutheran Family Gathering," held in Winston-Salem, at which various presentations sought to introduce all of us more fully to our separate traditions. Also, C. F. W. Walther's *Law and Gospel* was adopted as the common study book for all Lutheran pastors in North Carolina, and the Synod Council authorized the purchase of a copy of the book for every pastor, regardless of whether or not he already owned one. This fine relationship flourished for the next six years, until I left office to take up my new work at Lenoir-Rhyne College.

In those halcyon days, it was still possible to hope that mischievous caricatures were responsible for most, if not all, of the apparent differences between our two churches. "What is it that we fear?" I asked.

"You fear that the LCA is lax, free-wheeling, bordering upon heresy, flirting with the reckless enthusiasm of *die Schwärmer*. Certainly, ample justification can be found for such fears, for we have our share of loud and disturbing voices. But we continue to pray that all that is just part of our growing pains." Unfortunately, we would soon find that the pains had nothing to do with growth.

At the beginning of the ELCA, I was able to observe much that happened at close hand. The ELCA is divided into nine regions and sixty-five synods. One synod bishop from each region sits on the ELCA Council that governs the church between national assemblies, and I was the first bishop chosen from the southeastern region. My colleagues then elected me to be chairman of the nine consulting bishops. In that capacity, I found myself in frequent clashes with other members of the Council and the national staff. These encounters added to the extreme frustrations I was already experiencing in attempting to be the same faithful, enthusiastic servant of the ELCA that I had been in the LCA and ULCA. Although I had a great passion for ecumenism at the beginning, I began to perceive that, however glorious unity might be, one dare not cavalierly sacrifice the word of God for chumminess.

In the fall of 1990, with the convention at which my term would end coming up the following spring, Lenoir-Rhyne College asked me to decline to stand for reelection, and return to the college as "theologian in residence." My call would be to teach half-time, and spend the rest of my time creating opportunities for continuing education for pastors and laity in a new "Center for Theology." I agonized over this decision until April of 1991, when I finally concluded that this was a genuine, new call, and not just a welcome opportunity to leave an increasingly untenable position. The proposed "Center" would give me an opportunity to spend my energies in efforts for biblical and confessional renewal. The purpose of the new center runs as follows:

to foster clarity in understanding and passion in proclaiming the Gospel, centered upon the evangelical dogma of justification by grace alone through faith alone, according to the classic, orthodox theology of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, and thus to assist in shaping the future of the Church in faithfulness to the Word of God.

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While these years back in academia have been richly rewarding, this last decade has certainly been a distressing time for all who would be faithful to our Lord's command: "If you continue in my Word, you will be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). Most people seem to think that it is possible to search out the truth on the basis of uncommitted reason, and many even parrot the last of Jesus' words—"the truth will make you free"—as license for trying to tear apart every precious heritage we have received. However, it is not possible to know the truth, let alone taste freedom, without first being in bondage to the word of God. "Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free"!

The year 1997 was especially tumultuous. It was in that year that the Philadelphia Convention of the ELCA sold our birthright for a mess of pottage by entering into unbelievably shocking relationships with Calvinistic and Zwinglian organizations. However, a bright, if somewhat faint, new fire was struck that year when the Spirit of God called six pastors together to create a very simple basis on paper for a ministerium that would bolster pastors and support them in faithfulness to the word and the Confessions. In the three years since, chapters of this new society, called "The Society of the Holy Trinity," have been formed from the state of Washington to New England, and many people are working and praying that God will use this effort—and whatever other means the Holy Spirit may choose—to bring about renewal and reformation within Lutheranism.

That fall, 1997, I offered a course on the Book of Concord to any and all who might wish to take it—free. Ninety-seven people (pastors and laity) enrolled for this class, which met for three hours every Monday night, from August to December. There is now considerable pressure on me to offer a similar course again this fall, and, given health and strength, by God's grace I will.

You are surely aware that the ELCA has been taken over by the very people our parents warned us not to play with when we were little. It is only now that the majority of our members are beginning, slowly and reluctantly, to realize that the persons writing our literature and directing our programs are hijackers, and that this church, once so dear, so wonderful, so shining with grace and glory, is way off course. As more and more people awaken to this fact, there are increasing distresses and demands that the leaders faithfully lead.

It is often pointed out that the ELCA and the LCMS are on divergent courses. People in high places in the ELCA have expressed their regret—but done nothing about it. Instead, there has been a rush by the ELCA leadership to consort with various Reformed churches, Moravians, Roman Catholics, and Episcopalians. The prayer of Jesus in John 17 that we might be one “as He and the Father are one” is not a mandate for mindless coziness. However “good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity,” we must not sacrifice God’s truth on an altar of unity.

In these recent unionistic negotiations, two structural flaws and abuses in the ELCA have become painfully evident: 1) the ideological principle of “diversity” or “inclusivity,” which rapidly became a greater force in decision-making than either the law or the gospel; and 2) the operational principle of coercive power—for example, the notorious quota system.

A dramatic result of this tampering with Scripture occurred when the Denver assembly of the ELCA voted to commit our church to an Anglican episcopacy. The assembly consisted of 60 percent laity, chosen because they fulfilled categories. They had neither a proper call to exercise theological leadership, nor any theological training. Yet, this aggregate was given authority to alter the doctrines of the church—and they did so! This is clearly a perversion of the concept of the priesthood of all believers and a mockery of Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession.

Further abuses were incorporated into the structure of the ELCA—a disparagement or even denigration of authority (biblical, confessional, ministerial, and liturgical) appearing in various forms. When the constitution of the ELCA was being written, it was proposed to state in chapter 17 that “the Nominating Committee shall strive to ensure that all persons nominated for any position possess the necessary competence and experience for the position.” The North Carolina Synod urged that this be amended to read, “The Nominating Committee shall nominate *only* such persons for any position who possess the necessary competence and experience.” The amendment was refused, and the ELCA was launched with the tacit affirmation that factional concerns are more important than competence. That is apostasy.

It is not just confessional laxity that troubles most of us. Repentance and contrition are rarely lifted up, and personal discipleship in prayer,

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Bible reading, and obedience to the Commandments receive insufficient attention when they are not openly scorned.

The reopening of fundamental moral questions, especially in areas of sexuality, constitutes a direct attack on Christian morality and invalidates the efforts of Christian people faithfully to keep the Commandments of God. That the reopening of such questions has been led by members of the hierarchy and program staff of the church only deepens the offense. The capitulation of church leadership to the relativism of the late twentieth century has scandalized the church.

To put human sexual gratification above the Commandments of God and the clear teaching of Scripture is simply unthinkable; yet, without any ELCA leader to say a clear "no," there is a continuing push for the ordination of homosexuals and the blessing of homosexual liaisons as if they were marriages. Furthermore, as long as the ELCA health insurance program covers abortions, a percentage of each Sunday's offering presented before the altar of the Lord is going to finance murder.

In view of these and other matters in which the ELCA bows to the paganizing of the church, we must ask whether this ELCA that we are so benevolently offering to share with other denominations any longer qualifies as bona fide Lutheranism. Indeed, is it a Christian church?

What on earth went wrong? What was the culprit when, so full of hope and joy, we gathered a larger body together in this new church? Was the culprit "quotas"? The denigration of authority? Faithless leaders?

The culprit, of course, is Satan, for still today he is sarcastically asking, as he did in the Garden, "did God say . . . ?" Undermining God's word is his primary line of attack, and succumbing to such temptation our gravest sin. For when we begin to waver in our trust of the word, we forget to worship Him. And there, cold and dead, our hearts stop, and no longer leap up with joy and thanksgiving.

At the heart of every difficulty in the ELCA, at the heart of all the differences between the ELCA and the LCMS, is the question of the authority and reliability of the Word of God. Do we believe the precious words of the Catechism: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord"? (Why, here is purest Chalcedonian dogma, without a single technical term!) Let us cling to Jesus, and let us continue in His word, for

therein alone will we be His disciples, and therein alone know the truth that sets us free from sin, death, and hell.

Brothers and sisters of Missouri, thank you for your faithfulness to the word. In the January 2001 issue of *The Lutheran Witness*, President Barry wrote, "one of the fantastic blessings God has given to our church body is faithfulness to the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions." May that always be true of the LCMS, and may it come to be true of all this lost and weary world. The word alone is to be the sole source and norm for what we believe, preach, and confess — the sole standard by which we judge the church and its ministry, a source and standard not to be compromised by some human construct such as "quotas" or the worthless fiction of an "historic episcopate."

In the study of God's word, the Pandora's Box of the higher-critical method (as Professor Lawrence Rast has called it) must be firmly shut and thrown away. Much ink has been spilled over whether or not the problem is the method itself or those who have used it. But, in any case, let us avoid it. For, as the saying goes in the mountains of North Carolina, "if you lie down with dogs, you'll get up with fleas." I have dedicated the remainder of my life to attempting to open the eyes of my brothers and sisters in the ELCA to the liberating, glorious truth of the infallible, inerrant word of God.

It is my prayer that, very soon, faithful Christians in the ELCA and in the LCMS will seek each other out for true communication — not useless talk about misguided notions, but fervent seeking for the will of God. The Society of the Holy Trinity presents such an opportunity, and I urge all of you to give consideration to becoming a member.

To close, I want to share words from two great translators of the Bible, Jerome and Martin Luther. The passage from Jerome appeared as a reading for Thursday of the week of Advent Two in Volume I of *For All The Saints: A Prayer Book for and By the Church*.<sup>3</sup> You will recognize the line from Luther as the beginning of one of his greatest hymns.

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<sup>3</sup>Frederick J. Schumacher, compiler and editor, with Dorothy A. Zelenko, *For All The Saints: A Prayer Book for and By the Church, I: Year 1, Advent to the Day of Pentecost* (Delhi, New York: The American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 1994), 52.

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I beg of you, my dear brother, to live among these books [of Scripture], to meditate upon them, to know nothing else, to seek nothing else. Does not such a life seem to you a foretaste of heaven here on earth? Let not the simplicity of the Scripture or the poorness of its vocabulary offend you; for these are due either to the faults of translators or else to God's deliberate purpose: for in this way Scripture is better fitted for the instruction of an ordinary congregation. . . . I am not so dull or so bold as to profess that I myself know it, or that I can pluck upon the earth the fruit which has its root in heaven, but I confess that I am hungry to do so. . . . "Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:8). Let us learn upon earth that knowledge which will continue with us in heaven.

- Jerome, *Letter to Saint Paulinus of Nola*

Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy word!

- Martin Luther





# *Homo Factus Est* as the Revelation of God

David P. Scaer

"Tam extra Iesum quaerere deum est diabolus, ibi desperatio sequitur, si accedat angustia conscientiae, praesumptio, si accedat vana religio" (WA 40 III:337). [Now, to seek God apart from Jesus is a thing of the devil. If anxieties of conscience come, despair will follow; if empty religion comes, it will lead to pride.]

Because the churches shaped by the Reformation accepted the historic creeds, the doctrine of God (theology, classical theism) was given short shrift during seminary days (1955-60).<sup>1</sup> Some churches had their fair share of liberal preachers, but on paper all were Trinitarian. Since then we cannot assume a common understanding of God. Process theology and feminism offer gods unknown a half-century ago. Perhaps we should not have assumed that even traditional churches had the same doctrine of God. Real differences in matters such as the sacraments were only symptomatic of basic, differing teachings on God (theologies).

Fully aware that theological axioms cannot by themselves explain a particular theology's total content, our proposal is that Christology is the foundational principle of theology. Lutheran theology is not determined only by its success in garnering adequate biblical support, but, more important, by showing that its center is Christ Himself. Whether we are discussing sanctification, church, or sacraments, we are, in effect, doing Christology. Doctrine that is not thoroughly christological is inherently deficient. But we want to take the christological axiom one step further. Jesus, especially in the humiliation of His cross, is not only the center, but is the entire content of "theology," including that of God. Hence the title, "*Homo Factus Est* as the Revelation of God."

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<sup>1</sup>Today the Reformed are more likely to call this category "theism," which means "the concept of God." See, for example, David Wells, "Classical Theism and the State of the Evangelical Movement," *Modern Reformation* 9 (July/August 2000): 10-12.

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### 1. Abstract Theological Phrases

Abstract phrases can lead to misinterpretations. The Epistle of James suffered at Luther's hands because he concluded that the Lord's brother had offered a plan of salvation by works that was at odds with Paul's (by faith alone without works). In the sixteenth century, Lutherans debated whether good works were detrimental or beneficial to salvation.<sup>2</sup> What will you have, antinomianism or Pelagianism? Past and often futile debates are no excuse for not discussing the role of good works in salvation. False axioms and true axioms falsely defined result in false theologies; nevertheless, newly coined phrases often provide for clearer definitions. A christologically defined theology offers the opportunity to refine definitions.

### 2. Grammatical Analysis

In grammatically deciphering an intransitive sentence, the predicate nominative describes the subject. Thus in the sentence, "The dog is brown," "brown" tells us something about "dog," and distinguishes it from dogs of other colors. So in the sentence, "Theology is Christology (or christological)," knowledge about God (theology) is the subject, and Christology (or christological) is the predicate nominative. The "given" distinguishes one particular theology from others. In the sentence, "theology" has two meanings: "the doctrine or concepts about God (theology)" and "the detailed study of a church faith (confession)." "Christological" applies to both God and the detailed study of a church's faith. Christology deals with Jesus' person, work, and teachings. Reversing the sentence, so that it reads, "Christology is theology," alters the meaning: what we know about God informs us about what we know about Jesus. Problematic is how and what we know about God. Answers have been taken from philosophy, science, raw biblical data, and one's own experience. By beginning the task of theology with God, we appear to be giving Him the glory, though we are, in fact, beginning with ourselves.

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<sup>2</sup>Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, IV, 1. The opposing phrases were "Good works are necessary for salvation," and "It is impossible to be saved without good works."

### 3. All Theology Is Axiomatic (or Should Be)

Apart from how axioms (basic principles) are acquired, they provide theologies with their unity and explain differences among Christians. The Augsburg Confession is not a collection of detached doctrinal statements, but a treatise revolving around justification. For Arminianism (historic Methodism, Wesleyanism, Holiness bodies) sanctification is axiomatic, and accordingly, Christology and justification are subordinated. Anthropology with an attendant synergism replaces theology in importance, and doctrinal differences are tolerable. By beginning with theology, the Reformed allow philosophy a role in defining God. This *modus* permeates their method(s). For historic Fundamentalism and Neo-Evangelicalism *sola scriptura* is axiomatic, but rarely does this principle produce a unified theology because it does not distinguish between the authority of the Old and New Testaments, and it gives equal weight to each biblical citation. Thus they have no reason to stand for the reading of the gospel—even if they have one. With this approach the Bible becomes a book of how to please God (law).<sup>3</sup> Contemporary theologies have their own axioms. An environmentalist theology posits that human beings are no more significant than animals, and the cardinal sin is “species-ism.” Feminism wants parity for its mother-god and rejects the exclusive Father-Son definition of the Trinity.<sup>4</sup> Proponents of women’s ordination may be unaware that the fruit of a feministic axiom sees God as mother, a view that the prophets judged to be pagan. Arguments against women’s ordination that are content with the biblical prohibitions may have unwittingly fallen into a kind of legalism, because they do not recognize the theological structure on which the prohibitions are based.

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<sup>3</sup>Paul R. Hinlicky (“The Lutheran Dilemma,” *Pro Ecclesia* 8 [Fall 1999]: 391-422) makes a pitch for the restoration of the historic episcopate as a unifying principle for theology and church. This follows from the recent ELCA alliance with the Episcopal Church. Lutherans are required to accept the episcopate, but Episcopalians do not have to give justification the same place of importance in their theology that Lutherans do. A sub-heading in his essay, “Sola Scriptura Self-Destructs” (394-396), provides a dismissal historical overview of the failure of systems that operate only from the Scriptures without paying attention to how they were understood in the church. He argues that the historical-critical method is one result.

<sup>4</sup>Attention must be drawn to a book like Rebecca B. Prichard’s *Sensing the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Feminist Perspective* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 1999). Keys to understanding the third person of the Trinity are the five senses, said to be more keenly developed in the gentler sex.

Identifying axioms is a theological task and it may prove disastrous not to recognizing them.

#### 4. Divine Attributes as Theological Axioms

Axioms for theological systems are often selected divine attributes to which the other attributes are subordinated. Different controlling axioms produce conflicting religions and often different deities, as in the case of feminism.<sup>5</sup> Marcion took his definition of God from the New Testament and concluded that another deity was active in the Old Testament, a still-popular conclusion for biblical scholars. The Reformed defer to divine sovereignty as the premier axiom, and thus their idea of covenant colors their systems.<sup>6</sup> In any theological system infinity can be so defined as to make incarnation impossible—or at least difficult to explain. The Reformed solve the problem by predicating divine attributes to Christ's person, but not to His human nature as Lutherans do with the three genera.<sup>7</sup> This has also been problematic for Lutherans. Divine attributes are assigned differently to the human nature.<sup>8</sup> Such a *sic et non* approach is eating your cake and still having your incarnation.

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<sup>5</sup>Michael Horton refers to some later Puritans for whom "'God' had become someone other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Trinity was not as prominent as a single, unitary being of blinding glory and power." "Is the *New News* Good News?" *Modern Reformation* 8 (September/October 1999): 12.

<sup>6</sup>So Horton, "Is the New News. . .": This is an important warning for some who seem to regard God's sovereignty as the center of the Christian message" (18). For a recent discussion of what is involved in Reformed ideas of "covenant," see S. M. Baugh, "Covenant Theology Illustrated: Romans 5 on the Federal Headship of Christ and Adam," *Modern Reformation* 9 (July/August 2000): 17-23.

<sup>7</sup>The *genus maiestaticum*, *genus idiomaticum*, and *genus apotelesmaticum*.

<sup>8</sup>Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 Volumes (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1950-1957), 2:242: "Quenstedt sums up the truths on this point in full agreement with Scripture as follows: 'It is correctly said that *all* divine attributes are communicated to the human nature, likewise, that *certain* are not, and that *none* are communicated. All are communicated with regard to the indwelling and possession, but certain ones as regards predication and definite statement, as the operative which have state and action, among which we may name omnipotence, omniscience, etc. But this does not hold true of the quiescent attributes, as eternity, infinity, and the like. No attributes are communicated by way of transfusion from substance into another" (emphasis in original).

Beginning the theological task with a definition of God (theology) requires pitting one attribute against another, and gives the theologian the final word in ranking them. After the identifying and classifying of attributes – a task that defies agreement among theologians – they must be coordinated to avoid contradictions or conclusions that are unacceptable or at least detrimental to other parts of the system.<sup>9</sup> Consider this often heard theological statement: “I cannot believe in a God who sends anyone to hell.” Even before the discussion begins, the conclusions are determined. What are the alternatives to a God who sends anyone to hell – a God who sends everyone to heaven? Is the Seventh-Day Adventist God who annihilates some to spare them of hell worthy of belief? A third option is that divine nonexistence is preferable to the survival of a capricious God who holds his rational creatures to some standards. Deriving theology from attributes, as theism does, resembles Darwin’s survival of the fittest.<sup>10</sup> Defining God (theology) by first sifting the attributes also runs the risk of equivocation, since biblical terms are susceptible to philosophical meanings.<sup>11</sup> For example, divine love becomes synonymous with tolerance and leads to universalism.<sup>12</sup> Transcendence does not mesh with incarnation.

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<sup>9</sup>Michael Horton understands that an isolated attribute of divine sovereignty can lead to doubt and despair, and so balances it with the gospel promises. Thus he suggests that “We must eliminate both the idol of a loving but weak god, and the idol of a strong but graceless god. For neither is great enough to capture the hearts and minds of our disenchanting age, especially in the face of evil, oppression, violence, and death.” “Is the *New News Good News?*” 18.

<sup>10</sup>Horton, “Is the *New News Good News?*” 11-14.

<sup>11</sup>Francis Pieper also wrestles with the divine attributes: “No classification of the divine attributes is fully adequate. It, therefore, is of no theological consequence which classification is adopted, so long as the various attributes are defined according to Scripture alone” (*Christian Dogmatics*, 1:436). He then references Hoenecke, who says that none of the divisions are fully acceptable or objectionable. This frustration may suggest that the method of sorting through the attributes should be abandoned.

<sup>12</sup>For a treatment of this issue in contemporary theology, see Paul R. Hinlicky, “The Future of Tolerance,” in *All Theology is Christology*, Dean O. Wenthe and others, editors (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Press, 2000), 375-389. For example: “[Love] is not some all-condoning leniency, which is indifferent to sin, and righteousness, but a costly grace. It is neither lenient nor permissive, but merciful to sinners” (388).

While wrongly defined axioms lead to a faulty theology, it is equally true that any axiomatic definition of God by itself and apart from the person of Jesus carries a potential for error. An idolatry of stone and wood is replaced by one of abstractions masquerading behind biblical terms.<sup>13</sup> In a theology of abstract axioms (attributes), anything can go wrong and probably will. Love leads to universalism. Wrath leaves sinners at the sporadic, occasional, and hence undependable mercy of an otherwise angry and capricious God. Infinite freedom allows God an indefinite future, including His own nonexistence and perhaps ours as well.<sup>14</sup> Internal self-perfection raises the questions of why God created in the first place and why He bothered to rescue disloyal creatures. These philosophical questions find their way into the theological enterprise, where they do not belong. A theology derived from divine attributes makes God's trinitarian character an afterthought. This is the impression – if not the confirmed results – of those dogmatics that first treat at length the doctrine of God (theology) and only then proceed to discuss the Trinity. This stricture applies to any approach that weighs the attributes in defining God. Nontrinitarian theistic *loci* could easily pass as conservative Unitarianism.

##### 5. "All Theology is Christology" – All That Glitters Is Not Gold

Certainly no one thought that a christological theology meant that a seminary education would consist of one course and that all others would be sentenced to the recycling bin, but it is worth entertaining. A course of study focusing on the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth would assure the christological character of preaching and have advantages over mainline denominational curricula where students rarely get beyond stewardship, feminism, multiculturalism, world religions, and ecology – topics that have the aroma of a synergism that sidelines the deity's involvement in human affairs. Some may fear that a second person Unitarianism – a "Jesus religion" – is in view. Christomonism did surface

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<sup>13</sup>Horton uses similar language: "We must eliminate both the idol of a loving but weak god, and the idol of a strong but graceless god," (see note 10 above).

<sup>14</sup>This view has been discussed in Paul Helm's "Openness Theology and God's 'Project' for the Future," *Modern Reformation* 8 (November-December, 1999): 46-50. This review of John Sanders' *The God Who Risks* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998) points out that the other side of this argument for "a God whose future is at risk" is Arminianism, where man has the final word.

in medieval mysticism, in which the soul merged with Jesus, and later in Pietism, as is evidenced in "Jesus only" hymns.

A serious christological theology was offered by Karl Barth to counter the God-with-culture theology spawned in the Enlightenment and nurtured by Schleiermacher. If Christ is the only revelation of God, as Barth held, then there is no natural knowledge of God.<sup>15</sup> With only Christ as "the Word of God," scriptures became the word of God in the existential moment. Christ was also the only sacrament and so no salvific role was assigned to baptism and the Lord's Supper was not even worthy of comment. Barth was a Zwinglian at heart.<sup>16</sup> His christological axiom led him to place gospel before law and so law was subsumed into gospel.

"Gospel reductionism," which disrupted the LCMS in the 1970s, is another example of a christological theology gone awry. It correctly saw justification as the Augsburg Confession's controlling axiom, but also saw its other articles as secondary and expendable, a method reminiscent of Barth.<sup>17</sup> Its Christology, like Barth's, was not anchored in a required historical definition of the person of Jesus. This opened the way for Bultmann's demythologizing, which left the historical Jesus to be

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<sup>15</sup>Barth's christological bent was a reaction against Enlightenment Rationalists, Immanuel Kant and F. D. E. Schleiermacher. Rationalists derived knowledge of God from reason interpreting nature. Kant knew God from the moral imperative. Schleiermacher's God emerged from consciousness. In spite of their diversities, these forerunners of classical liberalism promoted theologies where Jesus no longer played an exclusive role in revealing God. Theology soon was replaced by *Religionsgeschichte*, which treated all religions as purely historical phenomena. More anthropological than theological, these approaches studied human quests for God and, in some cases, the human situation without reference to God. God-less religion existed long before He was declared dead. Even in some church-related colleges and universities, religion often assumes a place as another academic discipline among the arts and sciences, no longer entitled to a separate department. The value of theology-now-metamorphosed-into-religion was measured by its moral and cultural usefulness for society.

<sup>16</sup>David P. Scaer, *Baptism*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics Volume 11, John Stephenson, editor (Saint Louis: Luther Academy, 1999), 167-189, especially 170.

<sup>17</sup>With its recent alliance with the Episcopal Church, the ELCA has placed a great deal of importance on Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession, "On the Power of the Bishops." In effect the ELCA may have sacrificed Article 4, "Concerning Justification," in its agreement with Rome, and its agreement to eventually put in place bishops with apostolic success shifted the weight to Article 28. At this writing this issue has proved to be the most disruptive. See note 3.

dismantled by the historical-critical scholars. In addition, “gospel reductionism” took over Bultmann’s definitions of faith and forgiveness as “psychological release” and “a finding of the self.” With this definition of the gospel, all other historically distinctive Lutheran *loci* were expendable. These “gospel reductionists” amounted to a minuscule fraction of world Lutherans, yet this group was the catalyst for the formation of the ELCA. Their gospel definition became the basis for ELCA alliances with the Reformed and Episcopal communions.<sup>18</sup> With a loosely-defined doctrine of justification as the theological axiom, Lutheran distinctives became adiaphora and could be negotiated away in ecumenical discussion—and were.<sup>19</sup> Without a historically rooted Christology, justification becomes a barren pronouncement of forgiveness, a road down which much of contemporary Lutheranism has gone.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>See Department of Systematic Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary, “*Joint Lutheran/Roman Catholic Declaration on Justification: A Response*” and “*A Formula of Agreement: A Theological Assessment*,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 62 (April 1998): 83-106; 107-124.

<sup>19</sup>No groups, including conscientiously confessional Lutherans, are immune from defining theology around improperly or incompletely defined axioms that produce results at odds with other elements in the theological system. Defining “the means of grace” as the “word of God,” with preaching, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper as subcategories, has at least a superficial resemblance to Barth’s principle. This may have accounted for its popularity among certain LCMS theologians. Such a “word of God” super-category allows one to give equal value to preaching, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. Since the benefits of each are nearly identical, one who has heard the preached word will not be worse off if he abstains from Holy Communion. This dilemma of abstaining from another one of the “means” is often resolved by a threat, which makes the law God’s final word, an approach which is hardly appropriate to a “means of grace” theology.

<sup>20</sup>The gospel that served as the unifying principle of the ELCA also served the same purpose in that church’s recent alliances with the Reformed, Episcopalians, and Moravians. However, how much of its integrity has remained intact is another question, especially in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* with Rome.

Michael Root does address this question in regard to the Roman practice of indulgences in “The Jubilee Indulgence and the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*,” *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (Fall 2000): 460-75, especially 464-74. Strangely, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, the bull establishing special indulgences, enunciates a christological principle that could lay the groundwork for Lutheran agreement with Rome: “The Incarnation of the Son of God and salvation which he has accomplished by his Death and Resurrection are therefore the true criterion for evaluating all that



Conscientiously christological theological constructions, which include our position, do not assure a properly ordered theology, as we have shown, but theological systems do need a central principle to prevent them from disintegrating into strands of unrelated topics (*loci*). By not recognizing characteristic axioms in other systems, especially in faultily framed christological schemes, Lutherans have inhaled inherently destructive theological principles and paid the consequences. Divisions among Christians ultimately result from conflicting axioms at the base of theological foundations.<sup>21</sup>

### 6. Christology at the Periphery

Some theological methods are deficient, not for their absence of Christology, but because they introduce it only after the doctrine of God (theology) has been defined. Thus, Christology is adjusted to fit the contours of a predetermined theology. (It should be the other way around.) Christology provides an ameliorating principle from an otherwise harsh and unacceptable God (theology). Benevolent characteristics that do not fit our idea of a stern God (classical theism) can be assigned to Christ. Shades of Marcion! Or, Jesus involves Himself in the human situation in a way that God by nature cannot. So He bridges the unbridgeable. Shades of Arius! By keeping Christology out of theological definition, our ideas of God are kept intact, and redemption becomes the afterthought of a deity who had the options of either non-redemption or redemption by other means. Christology becomes tangential, or at least secondary, to our definition of God (theology). Thus we are left with two different *loci*, theology and Christology, without a necessary relationship between them.

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happens in time and every effort to make life more human" (464). Of course, if this principle were applied to sins committed in time, indulgences and purgatory would be abolished. Lutherans agree with Rome on the christological principle of theology, but make it the content of the doctrine of justification in a way that Rome does not. Christology provides Lutherans a common ground with Rome, a luxury they do not share with the Reformed.

<sup>21</sup>Our annual symposia not only reaffirm our commitment to the Lutheran Confessions, but are also intended to analyze our and others' methods.

## 7. Can a Christological Theology Be Trinitarian?

Attention must be given to whether a christological theology is preferred to or really different from a trinitarian one in which each divine person is interchangeable in shaping our theology, that is, our doctrine of God and the whole of theology. If we derive our doctrine of God from Jesus, can we begin our theology with either the Father or the Spirit? The answer is no. Essential to our orthodox faith is that one person of the Trinity exists in others and the external work of all is one.<sup>22</sup> Christianity is conveniently, but wrongly, divided into "First Article, Second Article, and Third Article Christianity," as if a theology of each article was possible. In confessing God as Father, the First Article anticipates and requires belief in the Son. The Second Article's confession that Jesus is the Father's Son conceived by the Spirit draws the First and Third Articles into itself and assumes each. The *credo* of the First Article covers the other two. John Keble explains the primacy of the Second Article: "So, also the whole of the creed has reference to the one article, 'He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried.' And the whole history of our Lord's life in the Gospel is the preparation for that one awful moment in which he breathed out his soul upon the cross."<sup>23</sup> Theology begins and ends with Jesus of Nazareth. Hence a christologically defined theology begins not with an abstract attribute or axiom (for example, love, sovereignty, and sanctification, among others) but with the historical person of Jesus and His self-definition. From His self-assertions and the evangelists' editorial references everywhere in the Gospels, we learn that He is God according to His own definitions. He is not a gnostic revealer of dark mysteries, but He completely envelops God, because God has completely enveloped Him. This Christology shapes the form and content of our doctrine of God (theology). The order of John 14:9, "He who has seen me has seen the Father," cannot be reversed so that in seeing the Father we see Jesus. When the doctrine of God (theology in the narrow sense) precedes Christology, the result is a provisional Unitarianism.

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<sup>22</sup>Even apart from the economic Trinity [*Opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*], each divine person exists in relation to the others [*perichoresis*]. Compare John 14:11: "I am in the Father and the Father in me."

<sup>23</sup>"Old Testaments Types of the Cross," *Pro Ecclesia* 9 (Fall 2000): 432.

8. *Homo Factus Est* as the Revelation of God

By claiming that in Jesus the fulness of the godhead dwells bodily, Paul focuses not on Jesus' divine but human nature, that is, Jesus of Nazareth (Colossians 2:9). Asserting that God dwells in Jesus' divine nature is tautological and as unproductive as saying "God is God."<sup>24</sup> A christologically defined theology holds that Jesus' human nature reveals God and then goes one step further in locating the divine revelation in the humiliation (*homo factus est*). His crucifixion is the one, chief, historic moment of trinitarian self-revelation on which all divine revelatory moments depend. In the lowliness of His cross Jesus draws sinners into the inner recesses of God, where the Father and Son share an equal knowledge of each other (Matthew 11:25-30).<sup>25</sup> So the Spirit must also be understood christologically. He is defined by the cross.<sup>26</sup> Without this definition the Spirit becomes a *Weltgeist*, who makes God accessible without Jesus, and universalism results.<sup>27</sup> Matthew introduces his trinitarian theology (28:19)—the most complete one in the New Testament—only after his Christology, culminating in the cross, has been put in place. This Christology raises two questions. 1) Can God really be found in the self-abasement of Jesus (*homo factus est*)? 2) Is this self-abasement essentially the picture of who (what) God really is? In other words, is humiliation appropriate to God? A positive answer would

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<sup>24</sup>Lutheran Christology, in holding that the human nature receives all the divine attributes (*genus maiestaticum*) and that the deity is operative only through the human nature (*genus apotelesmaticum*), parts company with the Reformed.

<sup>25</sup>The Johannine equivalents are in 6:44 and 12:32. Also see Martin Luther's "Heidelberg Disputation," especially thesis 21: "God can be found only in suffering and the cross . . ." *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 volumes, edited by J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-1986), 31:53. This, of course, leads Luther to make personal suffering a qualification for being a theologian (31:40).

<sup>26</sup>See David P. Scaer, "Cum Patre et Filio Adoratur: The Spirit Understood Christologically," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 61 (January-April 1997): 93-112.

<sup>27</sup>The Pentecost of Acts 2 concludes the giving of the Spirit who received His form in Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:10; John 1:32), life (Matthew 4:1), death (Matthew 27:50; John 19:30), and resurrection (John 20:22). The Spirit who proceeds from the Son (*filioque*) has been shaped by Jesus' death and resurrection, so that the Spirit of God becomes the Spirit of Jesus (Jn 16:13-14). *Incarnatus est de spiritu sancti* begins to open the door to a trinitarian understanding of God and thus renders other theological attempts by themselves inadequate.

mean that *homo factus est* and not *incarnatus est* becomes the one controlling theological moment and the cross determines the character of Christian theology.<sup>28</sup> Our discussion now goes beyond the Lutheran-Reformed controversy over whether the human nature is capable of receiving the divine nature (*finitum [non] capax infiniti*). At issue is whether the humiliation (*homo factus est*) tells us something about God that we would not otherwise know. It does. By beginning with the cross, theology is no longer obligated to answer the philosophical questions asked of the incarnation, a practice that arose in the patristic period and remains operative in any method that defines God (theology) first.<sup>29</sup> God gives us the perfect revelation of who He is in the agony of the Crucified, who is the face of God. In the dying of Jesus we see God's glory. Crucifixion is not merely the door to the divine reality, but is the event in which that reality is now present and hidden. The inscrutable God is accessible in the crucified Jesus in a way that surpasses all other ways. In the cross the Father and His intentions for us are known. The cross is both God's humiliation and exaltation. In it Jesus honors and glorifies God and God honors and glorifies Jesus, and the Spirit's mission is defined.<sup>30</sup> The cross is without contradiction, both humiliation and exaltation. Christology, defined in the cross, may conflict with a philosophically

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<sup>28</sup>Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 46: "The profoundest points of New Testament Christology occur when the inclusion of the exalted Christ in the divine identity entails the inclusion of the crucified Christ in the divine identity, and when the christological pattern of humiliation and exaltation is recognized as revelatory of God, indeed as the definitive revelation of who God is." See also 56-61, and in particular, "The identity of God — who God is — is revealed as much in self-abasement and service as it is in exaltation and rule. The God who is high can also be low, because God is God not in seeking his own advantage but in self-giving. Only the Servant can also be the Lord" (61). Much of Bauckham's material is found in his "The Worship of Jesus in Philippians 2:9-11," in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, edited by Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 128-139.

<sup>29</sup>Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 60: "The question is not: how can the infinite become a finite creature, how can the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God take on human limitations?" Bauckham suggests the real contrast is not between the divine and human natures, but between the image of God as the exalted emperor and the servant (61-62).

<sup>30</sup>Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 66: "Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39).

defined doctrine of God to the point of scandal and embarrassment for even believers (John 6:60-61, 66-67), but here Israel's Redeemer has taken on flesh in Jesus as Emmanuel, "God with us." The human Jesus receives divine honor and glory.<sup>31</sup> Divine uniqueness is not compromised, but expressed by incarnation and crucifixion (Philippians 2:6-11).<sup>32</sup> "Jesus, the New Testament writers are saying, belongs inherently to *who God is*."<sup>33</sup> The crucified Christ belongs to the divine identity.<sup>34</sup> "This radical self-renunciation was [Christ's] way of expressing and enacting his equality with God, and *therefore* ([Philippians 2] verse 9) it qualified him to exercise the unique divine sovereignty over all things."<sup>35</sup> Humiliation, no less than exaltation, belongs to the identity of God.<sup>36</sup> The cross is the glorification of both the Father and the Son (John 17:1). Jesus' going to the Father then embraces both the cross's humiliation and His assuming His place at God's right hand (John 14:12; 16:17; 20:17).<sup>37</sup> In an act of self-giving the Father begets the Son and gives procession to the Spirit, and from this self-giving He creates, redeems, and sanctifies. The God who gives of Himself in begetting the Son also gives of Himself in creating and in sacrificial redemption, and in all these eternal and temporal acts, glorifies Himself. Christ's giving of Himself is an extension both of His eternally giving Himself as the Son to the Father, and the Father's eternal giving of Himself in begetting the Son. God's love for the world flows from His love for Jesus before the world was made (John 3:16; 17:24). God's love, out of which He begets the Son, is love's purest form, and out of this love He sends the Son for our redemption (John 3:15). God not only loves, but *is* love (1 John 4:16), and so the Trinity is love in its highest and original form. Thus the sending of the Son is not the act of a

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<sup>31</sup>In Matthew's nativity account the Magi worship the child (2:11) and in his resurrection account the Eleven worship Jesus (28:16-17).

<sup>32</sup>Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 4, 28.

<sup>33</sup>Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 47.

<sup>34</sup>Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 48.

<sup>35</sup>Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 58.

<sup>36</sup>Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 61. Also, "Jesus' self-humiliation actually is exaltation by God" (67).

<sup>37</sup>I suspect that some Lutherans use "S.D.G.," *Soli Deo Gloria*, synergistically, to give God some credit for their accomplishments. It might carry the ideas of the self-contentment and the absence of pain in God and in us. Consider the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647): "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever." More basic to defining God's glory might be self-giving.

sovereign God arbitrarily choosing among options, but is motivated by His eternal love for the Son (John 3:35). As R. Scott Clark has said, "In this case, we know that the Trinity we worship is no static deity, but rather there are dynamic relations among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It is out of that dynamic, loving fellowship that both creation and redemption have emerged."<sup>38</sup> In begetting the Son, the Father gives of Himself and in this self-giving He knows Himself and is known to the Son as Father. The Son responds to the Father not out of resentful obligation or duty, but out of the love He receives from the Father. This love gives Him life as the Son (John 5:26). The inter-trinitarian relationship is necessarily marked with a self-giving of supernatural pathos. In sacrificing His Son by crucifixion (*homo factus est*), God is not doing something inexplicably alien to His being (though it might be to our view of God), but accomplishes what intrinsically belongs to who He is.

Theology and Christology are coordinates, with the latter informing the former. So joined, they now shape faith and ethics. Commands to love God and the neighbor (Matthew 22:27-39; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27) are not arbitrary regulations (law) of a sovereign deity, but necessary extensions of the Father's eternal love in begetting the Son, a love seen in offering Him as a sacrifice (John 15:9-17). This divine love calls upon His creatures to respond in kind (1 John 4:19-21) and is the content of the Old Testament (Matthew 22:32-40). The true image of the Old Testament God and the prototype of the trinitarian and christological revelation is Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. Faith as trust in God includes loving God with all that we have so that no room is allowed for self-love. The command to love God is not an abstract ethical axiom (law), but first describes Jesus giving Himself over by death to God in love for us. God is the despised Samaritan, who in loving His enemies fulfills His own command to love them (objective justification) and reveals who He really is. Our loving the otherwise unlovable neighbor in place of ourselves emerges from the mysteries of the *homo factus est*, then the *incarnatus est*, and finally the Trinity itself. In sacrificing themselves for others, Christians are not only doing the Christ-like thing but the God-like thing. Thus Peter's death glorifies God (John 21:19) because his death resembles

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<sup>38</sup>"The Splendor of the Three-in-One God," *Modern Reformation* 8 (September-October 1999): 38.

and shares in Christ's death, in which God's glory is quintessentially revealed (John 17:1). A christological theology embraces the commands to love God and the neighbor. Behind these images are not rules (law), but divine self-sacrifice that binds together that enterprise we call theology. The self-sacrificial character of the trinitarian nature does not leave us at the whim of an arbitrary God. Rather He rescues, will rescue, and must rescue those who cannot rescue themselves. He loves those who without Him can only love themselves. Understanding God as self-giving may seem to contradict a theology which identifies, selects, and coordinates attributes. God's self-giving within His trinitarian life (*genitum non factum*) and in Christ (*homo factus est*) is not an abstract axiom, but is an accessible reality in the cross (*crucifixus*). The cross reflects, contains, and embodies the trinitarian mystery of the eternal self-giving Father who begets the Son and gives procession to the Spirit. Christology shares in the reality of who God is (theology) and reveals it:

At that time Jesus declared, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. *All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*" (Matthew 11:25-30).

A christological theology does not detract from our doctrine of God (theology), but opens it up to the fuller reality that God's intentions are inherent in His essence. In other words, God does what He does because of who He is. A christologically defined theology does not replace justification as the description of sinners' relation to God, but provides it with the necessary christological foundation and content. William C. Weinrich writes about his "conviction that the Man, Jesus [is] the Revelation of the Father and the Bearer of the Holy Spirit, so that to speak theologically [is] to speak Christologically."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>"The Face of Christ as the Hope of the World: Missiology as Making Christ Present," *All Theology is Christology* (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Press, 2000), 215-227. Weinrich also notes Bauckham's contribution to this discussion (219).

N. T. Wright provides a fitting conclusion:

The real humiliation of the incarnation and the cross is that one who was himself God, and who never during the whole process stopped being God, could embrace such a vocation. The real theological emphasis of the hymn [Philippians 2], therefore, is not simply a new view of Jesus. *It is a new understanding of God.* Against the age-old attempts of human beings to make God in their own (arrogant, self-glorifying image) image, God reveals the truth about what it meant to be God. Underneath this is the conclusion, all-important in present christological debate: incarnation and even crucifixion are to be seen as *appropriate* vehicles for the dynamic self-revelation of God.<sup>40</sup>

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A difference in Christology's role in theology is reflected in varying interpretations of Philippians 2. For recent treatments of the stakes in the argument see the essays in *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, edited by Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). The *New International Version* in translating 2:6 as "did not grasp at equality with God" favors the traditional Reformed view that is not fully comfortable in ascribing God-like qualities to Christ's human nature (*genus maiestaticum*), which is the Lutheran position. Strangely, the *NIV* serves as the official LCMS worship Bible. For a discussion of the exegetical options, see Gerald F. Hawthorne, "In the Form of God and Equal with God (Philippians 2:6)," *Where Christology Began*, 99-110.

<sup>40</sup>Quoted from Hawthorne, "In the Form of God," 104 and following. Original found in N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 83-84. [The first italics are this author's; the second is in the original].



# Law and Gospel and the Doctrine of God: Missouri in the 1960s and 1970s

Scott R. Murray

The christological character of the divine word has not always been adequately recognized in the Missouri Synod. In “the battle for the Bible” that raged during the 1960s and 1970s the lines were drawn between “Bible believers” on the one hand and the “Bible doubters” on the other. Sometimes these two parties approached theological issues with the single-minded narrowness characteristic of political battles, rather than of adequately nuanced systematic theology. The fight was ham fisted and imprecise. The right noses were not always bloodied and theological hobby horses were ridden into the ground.

One of the notorious theological hot spots of this time was the third use of the law.<sup>1</sup> This issue demonstrates, perhaps better than any other, the laser-like narrowness of the theological method in vogue in the Missouri Synod in the 1960s and 1970s. It also demonstrates the deep interconnectedness of the points of theology. One cannot practice theology with a narrow concern, sometimes an unecumenical concern, ruling all the points of theology.

Certainly, Christian theology has to have a center that holds and that center is none other than the article of justification. But the center is not to be a mere mathematical point. The center of theology has some breadth and that breadth ultimately draws in the whole counsel of God, the doctrine and all its articles.<sup>2</sup> Without that breadth supporting justification,

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<sup>1</sup>This article is a condensation of a chapter in Dr. Murray’s upcoming book, *Law, Life, and the Living God* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001) to be released later this year. The third use of the law is no longer a theological lightning rod. For example, at the request of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), President A. L. Barry removed from the docket of requested opinions an assignment on the relationship of the third use of the law and freedom of conscience that dated from 1973 and had been placed on the CTCR’s assignment docket by then President, J.A.O. Preus. The President of Synod no longer saw a need for a CTCR opinion.

<sup>2</sup>FCSD X:31 in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, edited by Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959). Hereafter cited as

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the christological mystery can be made peripheral, undoing the work of the Chalcedonian fathers.

### Valparaiso Theologians

In the 1960s and 1970s The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) was racked by a war between two basic schools of thought on the third use of the law. One was made up of theologians whom we might call “old” Missourians,<sup>3</sup> and one consisted of the theologians connected with Valparaiso University, the so-called “Valparaiso theologians.”<sup>4</sup> We will review the teaching of the two LCMS parties and assess the impact that their views on law and gospel had on the doctrine of God.

The teachings of the Valparaiso theologians of this period can be summarized under the following three headings: (1) gospel reductionism; (2) Decalogue, law, and *parenesis*; and (3) doctrine, church authority, and law. Each of these points highlights a crucial aspect of their teaching that affects or is affected by the third use of the law.

#### *Gospel Reductionism*

“Gospel reductionism” was a term coined in the Missouri Synod during the 1960s.<sup>5</sup> The term had its birth in the battle over the normative nature and extent of the law-gospel principle implicit in Lutheran theology. In the 1960s the Valparaiso theologians began to invoke law-gospel as the ruling or the only hermeneutical presupposition in Lutheran theology. They adopted this hermeneutic as a replacement for the old inspiration doctrine, which they decisively abandoned in this period. The adoption of this method by the Valparaiso theologians spurred a critical response by John Warwick Montgomery, Ralph Bohlmann, and Robert Preus.<sup>6</sup>

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Tappert.

<sup>3</sup>“Old” only in the sense that they were defenders of the traditional Lutheran doctrine of the third use of the law as taught by the Formula of Concord.

<sup>4</sup>For the purposes of this study the significant Valparaiso theologians of this period were Edward H. Schroeder, Robert W. Bertram, Walter J. Bartling, Robert J. Hoyer, Paul G. Bretscher, Walter R. Bouman, and Robert C. Schultz. Of these, Schroeder, Hoyer, Bretscher, and Schultz taught at Valparaiso University during their careers.

<sup>5</sup>Edward H. Schroeder specifically called the term a “neologism.” Edward H. Schroeder, “Law-Gospel Reductionism in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43 (April 1972): 233.

<sup>6</sup>Bohlmann and Preus were both members of the faculty minority at Concordia

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Montgomery toured the synod during the spring and fall of 1966 delivering papers opposing the doctrinal aberration that he called "Law/Gospel reductionism" among others.<sup>7</sup> Montgomery published his essays in book and pamphlet form and disseminated them widely in the LCMS and beyond. In time "Law/Gospel reductionism" became known by the more compact moniker, "gospel reductionism." Edward Schroeder responded to Montgomery's charges against "gospel reductionism" in his 1972 article, "Law-Gospel Reductionism in the History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod." It was universally agreed that gospel reductionism could make a major impact on the doctrinal basis for the very existence of the LCMS.<sup>8</sup> For Schroeder, gospel reductionism became more than just a way of denominating the Lutheran habit of judging doctrine based on meta-theological themes, such as justification, which is the obverse of the law and gospel coin.<sup>9</sup> Law and gospel was *the* biblical hermeneutic of the Lutheran Church for Schroeder. This approach generated a firestorm of opposition.

How could such an apparently Lutheran approach to theology generate such significant opposition? The principle of gospel reductionism itself was not the problem. The problem of gospel reductionism revolved around its meaning, extent, and relationship to other points of Lutheran theology. The Valparaiso theologians used gospel reductionism as a

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Seminary, Saint Louis.

<sup>7</sup>Schroeder, "Law-Gospel Reductionism," 232. The essays presented at this time were collected into *Crisis in Lutheran Theology*, edited by John W. Montgomery, 2 volumes, second edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967; reprint, Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973).

<sup>8</sup>In 1975 Paul Bretscher wrote, "Theologians who claimed to derive the authority of the Scriptures from the authority of the Gospel were suspected of 'Gospel reductionism,' and of trying to change the doctrinal basis on which the Synod had stood for 125 years." Paul G. Bretscher, *After the Purifying* (River Forest: Lutheran Education Association, 1975), 7. Schroeder summarized the important contributions made to Lutheran theology by C. F. W. Walther and Werner Elert. However, Schroeder went beyond what Walther and Elert had taught about law and gospel. Schroeder also astutely pointed out that the distinction between law and gospel was ignored in the Reformation studies of both Karl Holl and Ernst Troeltsch and that Werner Elert set out to remedy that lack of attention. Schroeder, "Law-Gospel Reductionism," 233.

<sup>9</sup>For more on this meta-theological import of law and gospel see Scott Murray, "Law and Gospel: The Lutheran Ethic," *Logia* 4 (July 1995): 15-24.

principle of biblical interpretation, indeed, as the only Lutheran hermeneutic.

Schroeder's form of gospel reductionism was criticized because it functioned as a hermeneutical presupposition rather than strictly as a theological principle. For Schroeder law and gospel had become "the hermeneutical touchstone" of the Confessions.<sup>10</sup> Schroeder even defended his position as consistent with a *quia* subscription to the Lutheran Confessions.<sup>11</sup> "Thus anyone concerned with his *quia* subscription to the Lutheran Symbols could hardly take umbrage at anyone using the centrality of the Gospel, even 'reducing' issues to Gospel or not-the-Gospel, as his Lutheran hermeneutical key for interpreting the Bible."<sup>12</sup> Schroeder believed that the theologians who wrote the classic confessional documents of Lutheran Reformation had actually functioned with just such a hermeneutical key to Scripture.

The distinction between law and gospel is the operating yardstick whereby the confessors practiced their gospel reductionism. That distinction gave them a theological Occam's razor to keep from multiplying gospels (or from expanding the gospel to include more

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<sup>10</sup>Schroeder, "Law-Gospel Reductionism," 235; emphasis original. Schroeder said precisely the same of the hermeneutic of Luther. Schroeder commended Luther for what Lindsay Dewar called Luther's "one-sided" interpretation of the Scriptures. Dewar excoriated Luther for the defect of interpreting the Bible from the standpoint of justification by faith. Lindsay Dewar, *The Holy Spirit and Modern Thought* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 125. Schroeder suggested that this was the correct standpoint for interpreting the Bible. Edward H. Schroeder, "Is there a Lutheran Hermeneutics?" in *The Lively Function of the Gospel*, edited by Robert W. Bertram (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 81.

<sup>11</sup>The *quia* subscription simply means that Lutherans pledge themselves to the content of the Lutheran confessions because they are true and correct expositions of the word of God. The opposite position is that the confessions could be subscribed to in a *quatenus* fashion, that is, in so far as they reflect the Bible's own teaching. This is ultimately no subscription at all. For more on the historic meaning of *quia* confessional subscription, see C. F. W. Walther, "Why Should Our Pastors, Teachers and Professors Subscribe Unconditionally to the Symbolical Writings of Our Church," translated and condensed by Alexander W. C. Guebert, *Concordia Theological Monthly* 18 (April 1947): 241-253; Robert D. Preus, "Confessional Subscription," in *Evangelical Directions for the Lutheran Church*, edited by Erich Kiehl and Waldo J. Werning (Chicago: Lutheran Congress, 1970), 43-52.

<sup>12</sup>Schroeder, "Law-Gospel Reductionism," 235.

and more things that one *must* believe) and to perceive when something was gospel and when something was not. Thus, the distinction is not a doctrine itself. But it is a procedure practiced as an auxiliary theological tool in theology and proclamation to keep the gospel "gospel."<sup>13</sup>

The problem with this characterization of the function of law and gospel in Lutheran theology is that, though it was a basis, it certainly was not the only basis for the confessors' principled rejection of the work righteousness of the Roman Catholics.<sup>14</sup> For example, when Luther and Melancthon were confronted with the need to support their views, they repaired to a grammatical-historical exegesis of the essential biblical texts. Ralph Bohlmann, who inductively drew the hermeneutical principles employed by the Lutheran confessors from the Lutheran confessional documents, has shown this.<sup>15</sup> Thus Schroeder's argument fails to convince because there is no evidence that the Lutheran confessors used the gospel alone as their biblical hermeneutic.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, a serious contention remained over whether or not law and gospel was a *hermeneutical* principle at all.<sup>17</sup> The law-gospel principle

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<sup>13</sup>Schroeder, "Law-Gospel Reductionism," 235; emphasis original.

<sup>14</sup>Robert C. Schultz pointed out that law and gospel are systematic signposts intended to defend the doctrine of justification at the outset of a 1961 journal article. "The distinction between Law and Gospel is one of the clearest systematic expressions of the doctrine of justification through faith without works formulated by the Lutheran Reformation." Robert C. Schultz, "The Distinction Between Law and Gospel," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 32 (October 1961): 591.

<sup>15</sup>Ralph A. Bohlmann, "Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions," in *Crisis in Lutheran Theology*, 2:145-158, 161. See also Ralph A. Bohlmann, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions*, revised edition (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983). Holsten Fagerberg pointed out that "the Confessions actually proceed to the interpretation of Scripture, but without telling us which principle is being employed in the process." Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, translated by Gene A. Lund (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 35.

<sup>16</sup>Robert C. Schultz, one of the Valparaiso theologians, considered law and gospel to be a hermeneutical principle of the Lutheran reformers. However, he did not argue that they were their only hermeneutic. See Robert C. Schultz, "The Distinction Between Law and Gospel," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 32 (October 1961): 596.

<sup>17</sup>Here hermeneutical principle is being used to refer to a rule applied by an interpreter to the text in order to discover its meaning. Bohlmann, "Principles," 160.

functioned as a principle of theology in the writings of the Lutheran Reformation, but it was not a hermeneutical presupposition in the sense that Schroeder used.<sup>18</sup> Law and gospel was a principle that led the Lutheran reformers to reject certain teachings and practices because they were opposed to the gospel or in conflict with the gospel. For example, in the Augsburg Confession Melancthon used the gospel to reject the imposition of human traditions upon the practice of the church.<sup>19</sup> The practice of the church was to be normed by the gospel, so the practices that contradicted it could not be tolerated when they implied that forgiveness of sins was merited by their observance. This principle was drawn from Scripture. It was not a presupposition used in the interpretation of Scripture or imposed upon Scripture. Strictly speaking, it was not a biblical hermeneutic.<sup>20</sup>

Holsten Fagerberg, whom Schroeder criticized, pointed this out for the doctrine of justification in the Lutheran Confessions. "But this doctrine is not a general key to the Scriptures. Instead of being the sole principle for the interpretation of the Scriptures, it provides the basic rule which clarifies the Scriptural view concerning the relation between faith and good works."<sup>21</sup> The same can be said of the law-gospel theme in the

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<sup>18</sup>The position defended by Schroeder had support in the work of a number of European Lutherans, the best example of which was Edmund Schlink. However, even Schlink did not give the one-sided interpretation to the law and gospel hermeneutic that Schroeder did. "This intense concern with the Gospel suggests that the Gospel is the norm in Scripture and Scripture is the norm for the sake of the Gospel." Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, translated by Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 6. Note that Schlink does not say that the gospel is the norm of Scripture, but rather in Scripture. He also balances this idea with "Scripture as the norm for the sake of the Gospel."

<sup>19</sup>AC 15, 3-4 in Tappert; *Die Bekenntnis-schriften der evangelischen-lutherischen Kirche*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 69-70. Hereafter cited as BS.

<sup>20</sup>Kurt Marquart noted that LCMS moderates defend a false either/or in that, like Schroeder, they pitted the gospel against Scripture. "The 'formal principle' (or Scripture-principle), then, is not something additional, above, and beyond the Gospel and forced onto it from without. It is rather the Gospel's own authority-dimension, the criterion by which the Gospel distinguishes itself from false gospels (Galatians 1:8, 9; Ephesians 2:20)." Kurt Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, Concordia Seminary Monograph Series, number 3 (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1977), 130.

<sup>21</sup>Fagerberg, *A New Look*, 36.

Lutheran Confessions.<sup>22</sup> The law-gospel theme had extensive significance in Lutheran theology, but was itself normed by the text of Scripture.<sup>23</sup> Fagerberg stated precisely, "the confessional statements on Law and Gospel do not contain any general orientation for the interpretation of the Bible."<sup>24</sup> Kurt Marquart provided a more nuanced criticism of the gospel reductionistic program to use the gospel as the sole norming authority.

Of course justification, or the Gospel in its strictest sense, is the heart and soul of, and therefore the key to, the entire Scripture. And just *because* the Gospel permeates the entire Scripture (always presupposing the Law), the Scripture-principle is Gospel-authority. Hence it is always and only actual Bible texts, that is the "certain and clear passages of Scripture," and not some "Law and Gospel" floating above them, which constitute the "*rule*" for interpretation!<sup>25</sup>

The gospel or Scripture choice reflected a false either/or. Therefore, Schroeder's claim that the gospel reductionistic hermeneutic was the hermeneutic of the Lutheran Reformation was gravely flawed.<sup>26</sup>

The use of gospel reductionism as a hermeneutical tool had significant effects upon the approach to the third use of the law. This result can be seen in the essays of Robert Hoyer in *The Cresset*, the magazine of Valparaiso University. Hoyer stated that law and gospel interprets Scripture, as well as norming preaching and teaching in the church.<sup>27</sup> For Hoyer law and gospel are to be used to elicit meaning from the biblical text. The distinction was not just a theological filter, but a biblical hermeneutic.

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<sup>22</sup>See also Robert C. Schultz, "An Alternative to the Formula of Concord?" review of *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, by Holsten Fagerberg, in *The Cresset* 36 (March, 1973): 13.

<sup>23</sup>For more detail on this debate, see Fagerberg, *A New Look*, 36, note 7.

<sup>24</sup>Fagerberg, *A New Look*, 63.

<sup>25</sup>Marquart, *Anatomy*, 131; emphasis original.

<sup>26</sup>"The law and the gospel cannot be looked upon as providing the hermeneutical key to every pericope in the Bible." David P. Scaer, "Law and Gospel in Lutheran Theology," *Grace Theological Journal* 12 (Fall 1991): 176. Robert Preus pointed out that the law and gospel function as a theological hermeneutic to rule out legalism. Robert D. Preus, "The Hermeneutics of the Formula of Concord," in *No Other Gospel*, edited by Arnold J. Koelpin (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1980).

<sup>27</sup>Robert J. Hoyer, "On Law and Gospel," *The Cresset* 29 (February 1966): 8. Hoyer was a long time member of the LCMS Board of Parish Education.

Gospel reductionism reduced authentication of points of Lutheran doctrine to whether they were "Gospel or not-the-Gospel." With such a sharp single-edged razor of discernment, the third use of the law is ripe for excision. The law immediately comes under scrutiny as "sub-Gospel,"<sup>28</sup> and thus, becomes sub-Christian. Schroeder definitely was leading to a decisive break from the Lutheran doctrine of the third use of the law. This use of the law-gospel hermeneutic was set into sharp relief by the writings of Hoyer. The law could only judge and condemn and no more. The law "can not [*sic*] really tell man what to do leading to a proper relationship with God."<sup>29</sup> There could be no ethical use of the law whatsoever. In fact, to use it as an ethical tool is rebellion against the law itself. "The ethical use of the law *is* that rebellion."<sup>30</sup> Basing his argument on Romans 1, Hoyer asserted that the only ethical causation attributable to the law is rebellion against God.<sup>31</sup> The law's only purpose is condemnation.<sup>32</sup> For Hoyer, not even civil or social righteousness remains for the law. In a short 1968 article, Hoyer advocated anarchy. "Yes, anarchy is what I propose. The proposal may be folly because of human

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<sup>28</sup>Schroeder, "Law-Gospel Reductionism," 235. Schroeder suggested that George Stöckhardt already critiqued the third use of the law using the razor of gospel reductionism in 1887. See Karl George Stöckhardt, *Law and Gospel According to their Several Effects*, translated by Walter H. Bouman, Valparaiso Pamphlet Series, number 9 (Valparaiso: Valparaiso University, Association, 1946), 5, 6, 27. In this article, Stöckhardt attempts to show that he is not supporting law and gospel as a biblical hermeneutic. A great deal of significance was given to the opinions of the "fathers" in the practice of theology in the LCMS in this period. The fathers were the venerated theological professors of the LCMS of previous generations. The primary fathers were Walther, Francis Pieper, and Stöckhardt. Even today it is difficult to criticize the work of these men in LCMS circles.

<sup>29</sup>Hoyer, "On Law and Gospel," 8.

<sup>30</sup>Hoyer, "On Law and Gospel," 8; emphasis original.

<sup>31</sup>Hoyer, "On Law and Gospel," 8.

<sup>32</sup>Hoyer was by no means unique in his views. John S. Damm denied that the law can be a guide for the Christian ethic. "Thirdly, the law cannot be a *guide* for this ethic. If the law is God's it can only expose our lack of love. And if the *love* is God's then the law is too minimal to serve as any sort of guide. It becomes superfluous for the exercise of love. This is by no means a full discussion of the subject. It is not even an outline. The point here is simply that a third use of the law as a guide for Christian life is impossible." John S. Damm, "Criteria for Evaluating Educational Materials," *The Teaching of Religion* (River Forest: Lutheran Education Association, 1965): 42; emphasis original.



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weakness. Grace is the solution to human weakness."<sup>33</sup> The third use of the law has absolutely no place in this program. Not even the first use of the law survives these presuppositions.

The simplicity of the principle of gospel reductionism leads to abuse. Because of its simplicity, theologians can easily use it to criticize central Christian teachings, such as the validity of the law in the life of the Christian, not to mention the permanence of the christological mystery itself. There is a serious threat of a severe reduction of Christian doctrine to a bare gospel, which is no gospel at all.<sup>34</sup> A further difficulty implied by the simplicity of the principle is the danger that it can be radically interpreted so as to rule out significant and central Christian doctrines. The lack of an anchoring certainty troubled the critics of the gospel reductionistic techniques of the Valparaiso theologians. For Schroeder, this principle functions without being anchored in authoritative texts, and even functions to judge the meaning and applicability of the text of Scripture. Ironically "law-gospel reductionism" functioned to rule out the third use of the law. Thus, in the end, Schroeder had reduced law-gospel reductionism to be truly only gospel reductionism, and that based on an extremely narrow definition of gospel. This narrow gospel was defined at the expense of other articles of the faith, so that it became a mere "good news for a bad situation."

#### *Decalogue, Law, and Parenthesis*

The Valparaiso theologians exhibited various approaches to the significance of the Ten Commandments in the life of the Christian. The Lutheran Confessions force theologians to take account of the Ten Commandments. Luther makes the Ten Commandments the first of the six chief parts in his catechism. Stephen Schmidt contended that the commandments are not guides to Lutheran morality. "Lutheran morality, then, could be no code of ethical responses to given rules or new

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<sup>33</sup>Robert J. Hoyer, "On Second Thought" *The Cresset* 32 (November 1968): 17.

<sup>34</sup>The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the LCMS defined gospel reductionism as: "use of the Gospel as the norm of theology in such a way as to suggest that considerable freedom should be allowed within the church in matters that are not an explicit part of the Gospel." *Gospel and Scripture: The Interrelationship of the Material and Formal Principles in Lutheran Theology*, by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (Saint Louis: Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1972), 4.

stipulations. The Ten Commandments can serve as no guide for Lutheran morality. The law does not serve a gospel function; it can only accuse."<sup>35</sup> Schmidt accepted uncritically the Elertian position that if the law always accuses, it only accuses. While Schmidt was interested in social ethics, he made a sharp division between theological ethics and social ethics. "Christians are under the law in every sense by virtue of their creatureliness and their citizenship. Such ethical instruction is not the focus of theological instruction. In theological terms, the law serves only to accuse."<sup>36</sup>

More troubling, however, is the tendency in those who denied the third use of the law to attribute a norming or exhortative function in the Christian to the gospel ethical life. Schmidt stated indirectly that the gospel is a "guide" to ethical action. Schmidt confused law and gospel by suggesting that it is the task of the gospel to guide the Christian in ethical action. The third use of the law becomes subsumed under the effects of the gospel. At best, this is a confusion of law and gospel.

Robert Hoyer went far beyond the position espoused by Schmidt. He denied any place for civil righteousness or social ethics. The Ten Commandments are an absolute standard, but in this one sense only, that the law's condemnation of the sinner is absolute. "In this sense only it is an absolute standard – not an ethical standard of what we must do, but a judgmental standard of what we are."<sup>37</sup> Ultimately the law cannot bring validity to any ethical standard, but functions only to destroy any ethical pattern in the human relationship with God.<sup>38</sup> Martin Marty also held that

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<sup>35</sup>Stephen Schmidt, "Law-Gospel: Toward a Model of Moral Education," *Religious Education* 65 (November-December 1970): 478.

<sup>36</sup>Schmidt made a sharp division between social and theological ethics. Could an argument be made that theological ethics would make no impact upon society, family, or government, or even that theological ethics are not social ethics as well? A short tour through Martin Luther's "Table of Duties" answers the question decisively in favor of the strong relationship between social and theological ethics in Lutheran theology. There is no other plane on which Christian or theological morality can be played out except the social context into which God places the Christian by reason of his vocation. Schmidt, "Law-Gospel," 478-479.

<sup>37</sup>Hoyer, "On Law and Gospel," 8.

<sup>38</sup>Hoyer, "On Law and Gospel," 9. Edward H. Schroeder held that law was not immutable only in a functional sense. The law continues to demand and threaten as an expression of God's judging power. Edward H. Schroeder, "A Statement" *A Mistatement* [sic] (Saint Louis: Evangelical Lutherans in Mission, 1972), 2.

the external code of the Ten Commandments has little validity in the context of Christian ethics. While discussing the prohibition of coveting at the end of his section on the Decalogue, he points out the importance of the involvement of the forgiven heart. "The hidden character of the Christian ethic is made evident where action is not involved. The character of the forgiven heart is called into question; the external code is unimportant by comparison."<sup>39</sup> While it is true that where there is a heart not made new in Christ, the external code is quite useless, it also remains true that the specific prohibition of coveting clarifies the character of the forgiven heart for the Christian. Marty seems to accept a false either/or that there must be law or freedom. For him, that freedom will not seek to be normed by any external authority, indeed such authority is useless. Gwen Saylor exhibited this attitude toward the law. She denied that the law can provide a norm for holiness. "The Law serves unceasingly to convict the new person of sinfulness and to drive the person back to Christ. Good works are done by the new person on the basis of faith; there are no objective criteria for goodness."<sup>40</sup> Saylor reflects the strong Elertian bias of the Valparaiso theologians, and draws a radically existentialistic conclusion from the *semper* when she denies that there are any "objective criteria for goodness."<sup>41</sup>

While the Valparaiso theologians accepted only a narrow theological field upon which the law could work, that is, as an accuser, they still had to account for the existence of New Testament ethical instruction, especially in the Pauline epistles. For them New Testament *parenesis* replaces the third use of the law. Ethical direction in the life of the Christian begged for a term, simply because there seemed to be such an abundance of ethical instruction in the New Testament. New Testament ethical instruction was denominated by a term taken from the New Testament, namely, *parenesis*. *Parenesis* is "a form in which general hortatory moral maxims are loosely strung together."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Martin E. Marty, *The Hidden Discipline* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 32.

<sup>40</sup>Gwen Saylor, "Werner Elert and the Law/Gospel Dialectic," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 2 (February 1975): 42.

<sup>41</sup>See also Schultz, "An Alternative?": 13.

<sup>42</sup>Walter J. Bartling, "Hermeneutics and Pauline Parenesis," in *A Project in Biblical Hermeneutics*, edited by Richard Jungkuntz (Saint Louis: The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1969), 77.

Walter J. Bartling argued that Pauline *parenesis* required reinterpretation based on leading themes or motifs of Pauline theology. The Pauline agape ethic could be used to interpret the meaning of Pauline *parenesis*. An agape ethic consistently applied to specific ethical instructions would have a major impact on the meaning of Pauline *parenesis*.<sup>43</sup> The same could be said of the freedom granted by the Spirit. Thus, actual exhortations are only paradigmatic, and certainly not universally binding. For Bartling this is an essential component in the resolution of the problem suggested by Pauline *parenesis*.<sup>44</sup> For him the dilemma boils down to striking an appropriate balance between the prescriptive force of Pauline *parenesis* and the kerygmatic motifs of Pauline theology, namely, agape and freedom in the Spirit. How is *parenesis* to be understood and used in the church if indeed, "*parenesis* is

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<sup>43</sup>"The absolutizing of the law of love in a remorselessly situational ethic has a ring of modernity about it, but it is little more than commentary on Augustine's oft-quoted dictum: *ama et fac quod vis*. The original text for both the modern and the Augustinian elaboration of the theme is Romans 13:10: 'Therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law.' The question, 'What should I do?' the argument runs, is not only impossible to answer in the complexities of actual situations but is in principle needless. From moment to moment love must actualize itself within the demands of the given situation." Bartling, "Hermeneutics and Pauline Parenesis," 60.

<sup>44</sup>Closely related to the relationship of *parenesis* and eschatology was the view of Albert Schweitzer that through *parenesis* Paul was taking into account the disjunction between the real and the ideal in his theology. The indicatives represent the ideal and the imperatives the real. This does not satisfactorily consider the fact that for Paul there is no disjunction between the indicatives showing forth the mercy of God and reality. The indicatives are real. The imperatives are more than "merely accommodation to practical necessity," as Bartling contended. Bartling, "Hermeneutics and Pauline Parenesis," 61. See Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, translated by William Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 293-333. A further attempt to deal with the Pauline *parenesis* is based on the changing situation in the early church's life. The church needed to deal with the fact that the apparently imminent return of Christ had been unexpectedly delayed. What was to be done in the interim? This was the impelling force behind the construction of *parenesis*. *Parenesis* was an "in-between times" ethic. However, this explanation did not account for what Bartling called the "double emphasis" of Pauline eschatology, that it is both a realized and a waiting eschatology; it lives in time awaiting the parousia. Nor did it account for the fact that even the earliest Pauline literature includes an abundance of parenetic material. Thus even before the apparent realization of a delayed return of Christ there was strong ethical instruction included in the New Testament.

not an ungainly addendum but is as central as the cross itself"? Ultimately, the gospel itself serves to shape the interpreter's understanding of the parenetic material. "The Gospel is the norm for every interpretation of *parenesis* and for any contemporary translation."<sup>45</sup> This is a variation on the gospel-as-hermeneutic theme championed by Schroeder, Schultz, and others, and attacked by Montgomery. The gospel certainly causes results in the life of the Christian but to call it a "norm" is to risk a confusion of law and gospel.<sup>46</sup> Here again there is gospel reductionism.<sup>47</sup>

Bartling was willing to point out "evidence on the level of vocabulary usage and the indicative/imperative structure of Pauline *parenesis*." This evidence led him to see parallels between *paraklesis* and gospel, so that law and *paraklesis* mirror the coordination of law and gospel. "*parenesis* is *paraklesis*, and *paraklesis* is *usus practicus evangelii*."<sup>48</sup> Bartling confused law and gospel by making exhortation parallel to gospel.<sup>49</sup> Thus Bartling has no problem with the phrase "*usus practicus evangelii*" to describe *paraklesis*. If gospel includes an "*usus practicus evangelii*" then this is perilously close to Calvin's primacy of the didactic use of the law. But for Bartling this didactic use is still called "gospel," rather than "law" as it

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<sup>45</sup>Bartling, "Hermeneutics and Pauline Parenesis," 63, 75.

<sup>46</sup>Among the responses of the members of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations this comment was made: "It isn't that the Gospel doesn't create a new ethos of its own, over and above what we might be demanded by the Law. It does indeed. And the shortest summary of that new ethos is, as Bartling says, *agape*. The negative converse of this *agape* in Romans—especially if you read the end of the epistle (chapters 14 and 15) as the paracletic reply to its beginning (chapter 2)—is the new power which the justified have: no longer to pass judgment (14:13). But is that new power available to them merely as a 'norm,' especially if that suggests one more criterion by which their lives are again criticized (*krinein*), evaluated? That the Gospel is not, and the Law is." Bartling, "Hermeneutics and Pauline Parenesis," 79-80.

<sup>47</sup>Although Bartling claims that he intends to avoid the debate about the third use of the law, he cannot avoid the implications for the third use brought to the surface by his study. He is correct that the third use of the law is primarily a problem of systematic theology. "This is rather a historic and systematic problem than a strictly exegetical one." However, if systematic theology is to be biblical, one has to search for biblical or exegetical roots for the third use of the law. Bartling, "Hermeneutics and Pauline Parenesis," 74.

<sup>48</sup>Bartling, "Hermeneutics and Pauline Parenesis," 75.

<sup>49</sup>Bartling, like Schmidt, adds an exhortative element to the gospel. See above, 124-126.

was by Calvin. Bartling's "gospel" has ultimately become law with a norming force! Where there is a diminishment of the law by rejection of a third use the gospel inevitably is infected by law elements such as *parenesis* or exhortation.<sup>50</sup> The very theologians who charged that the third use of the law was a Calvinistic Trojan horse in the deepest of all ironies taught a most Calvinistic approach by adopting a "*usus practicus evangelii*."<sup>51</sup> This is a reintroduction of Calvin's didactic use of the law, but worse yet, as part of the gospel! Karl Barth had taught that "the Law is the necessary form of the Gospel whose content is grace." Barth cast a long shadow in the Missouri Synod during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>52</sup>

Bartling also relegated the Decalogue to an inferior position by arguing that New Testament *parenesis* has no apparent relationship to the Decalogue. If gospel leads only to *paraklesis* and *Gebot* (command), and not to the Decalogue, then the law is relegated to a sub-Christian status. If there is no Christian purpose to the Decalogue, in principle there can be no third use of the law.

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<sup>50</sup>For another example of this tendency in the LCMS, see Adalbert R. A. Kretzmann, *Law and Gospel* (Saint Louis: Faith Forward Executive Committee, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, n.d.), 17-19.

<sup>51</sup>Scott Ickert perpetuates the myth that the Lutheran doctrine of the third use of the law is basically taken from Calvin, who provides the classic case. "But it is in Calvin's *Institutes* (II. vii. 6-12) that we discover what may be considered the *locus classicus* for the definition of the third use of the law." Scott Ickert, "The Uses of the Law," *Lutheran Forum* 25 (February 1991): 20. A similar point of view was evinced by Hans Schwarz, who quoted Calvin's opinion on the third use of the law and then claimed that "a similar line of thought was pursued by Philip Melanchthon." Hans Schwarz, "The Word," in *Christian Dogmatics*, edited by Carl F. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 275. Schwarz more strongly connected Calvin's opinion with Melanchthon's: "This was also the line of thinking taken by Melanchthon, the Lutheran *Book of Concord*, and the theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy." Hans Schwarz, *Responsible Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986). The editors of *Christian Dogmatics* appear to have edited out the stronger statement, which Schwarz added to his later work.

<sup>52</sup>Perhaps Barth still casts a shadow in the Missouri Synod. For example, the infamous Personal Information Forms (PIF) employed by Missouri Synod District Presidents include a section rating a pastor on a continuum from legalistic to evangelical. This kind of thinking is inspired more by Barth than the Lutheran confession.

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*Doctrine, Church Authority, and Law*

The Valparaiso theologians were deeply suspicious of church authority, especially when that authority enforced doctrinal standards. Often the rigid application of the "Occam's razor"<sup>53</sup> of gospel reductionism accompanied or was even occasioned by the rejection of any doctrinal discipline imposed by church authorities.<sup>54</sup> Edward Schroeder perfected his exposition of "gospel reductionism" in 1972, but as early as 1966 he had championed the view that Melancthon himself had taught that when the hermeneutic of the gospel is applied to Scripture it would "add" things to Scripture. Ultimately this hermeneutic would adjust and correct those texts of Scripture which were themselves law. "So in an exegetical situation which without reference to faith in Christ calls for man to do good works and to please God, faith in the righteousness of Christ *must be added* to the Bible passage *because the Bible demands it.*"<sup>55</sup> Here is a clear description of a hermeneutic that is over the text, rather than interpreting the text. The point of this audacious hermeneutic is to modify the meaning and significance of the law in the Bible. Law ceases to be law under such a method. The law is simply swamped by the radical claims of gospel reductionism upon the text of Scripture.

In the end, having correct teaching or pure doctrine becomes unimportant under this hermeneutical assault on the text of Scripture. Scripture cannot serve to provide an objective witness to inform Christians of the truth. Schroeder ridiculed the catechesis of the church. "The purpose is not that they will have the right answer for the great final examination but rather that they can have that answer happening in their own lives."<sup>56</sup> True teaching is not as important as the existential experience of making the truth happen. Schroeder is following the pattern set by his American mentor, Richard Caemmerer, who taught this in the previous decade and in whose *festschrift* this viewpoint found such clear expression.<sup>57</sup> Schroeder was convinced that because the gospel was

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<sup>53</sup>Schroeder, "Law-Gospel Reductionism," 235.

<sup>54</sup>For example, Richard E. Koenig scorned the LCMS tradition of strict doctrinal discipline as rigid and unfeeling. Richard E. Koenig, "What's Behind the Showdown in the LCMS? Church and Tradition in Collision," *Lutheran Forum* (November 1972): 19.

<sup>55</sup>Schroeder, "Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?" 95; emphasis original.

<sup>56</sup>Schroeder, "Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?" 96.

<sup>57</sup>For more on Richard Caemmerer's role in this debate see Murray, *Law, Life, and*

“promise” in Lutheran theology, the divine word could not be information. He gives a classic expression of this position using terms borrowed from Martin Buber.<sup>58</sup> “Viewing the Gospel as a promise moves it away from the ‘I-it’ relationship, as though it were a ‘thing’ – information, rules, reports, even *divine* information, *divine* rules, *divine* reports – and defines it in terms of an ‘I-Thou’ relationship.”<sup>59</sup> Promise was a personal relationship, rather than information.<sup>60</sup> Schroeder accepted completely the relational or existential character of truth. This viewpoint led to a view of lawful church authority that was low indeed. For in principle there could be no church authority apart from the existential character of truth, itself a slippery notion. An existentialistic gospel is not an idea that is susceptible to codification in doctrinal standards or enforcement of those standards. Thus doctrinal orthodoxy is not a piety to be pursued in faithful service to the Lord of the church, but a positive evil to be avoided at almost any cost.

Paul Bretscher commented that because Jesus accepted sinners in the kingdom that He was unconcerned about law. “Jesus must have looked like a ‘liberal,’ quite careless of law and discipline.”<sup>61</sup> Bretscher argued that the gospel should keep Christian teachers from undergoing doctrinal discipline. Such discipline smacked of rationalism and unfaith.<sup>62</sup>

The ultimate conclusion for Schroeder was that the gospel as defined above did not, indeed could not, forbid the use of the modern, higher critical interpretive tools. He adds this at the end of his 1966 article for the

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*the Living God.*

<sup>58</sup>Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner, 1937).

<sup>59</sup>Schroeder, “Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?” 92.

<sup>60</sup>Holsten Fagerberg identified at least two different ways in which the word “gospel” was used in the Lutheran Confessions. It is untenable that the gospel is only promise in Lutheran theology. One of these usages directly contradicts Schroeder’s contention. Fagerberg pointed out that for the Lutheran Confessions, the gospel can be New Testament Scripture and its content. Fagerberg, *A New Look*, 87-96. As one example, the Formula of Concord speaks of the gospel as a doctrine which teaches and therefore has objective content. FC 5, 20 in Tappert. See also LC 4, 29 in Tappert; BS 696.

<sup>61</sup>Paul G. Bretscher, “The Log in Your Own Eye,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43 (November 1972): 645.

<sup>62</sup>Bretscher, “The Log in Your Own Eye,” 680.



Caemmerer *festschrift*. After championing the hermeneutic of Luther and Melancthon he argues that such modern interpretive tools should be permitted.

Perhaps there are other operating procedures for exegesis in our time which are not identical with those the Reformers utilize. There are no *a priori* reasons why one could not use the tools of source criticism and *Formgeschichte* and still be interpreting the Scriptures in keeping with these Lutheran hermeneutic [*sic*] principles.<sup>63</sup>

This acceptance of these other operating procedures, for which he has not argued anywhere in the article, is out of place, especially since he has argued so strenuously for the unity of Lutheranism's hermeneutic, the gospel. Now suddenly, like a hermeneutical *deus ex machina*, he posits that the new hermeneutical methods of critical scholarship should not be rejected. Any hermeneutical tool that does not contradict his narrow gospel in its results is acceptable to Schroeder. Any point of theology deemed to be outside this narrow gospel suffers a swift death.

The Valparaiso theologians clashed with church authorities over this point. The law no longer set standards for method or results, because there was no third use of the law.<sup>64</sup> Therefore there was no objective standpoint from which church authorities could criticize the methods or results of the Valparaiso theologians. If there is no third use of the law with standards for Christian faith and practice, there could be no scrutiny of doctrine within the church or the church practice that emanates from doctrine. For example, Paul Bretscher argued that the gospel itself was the norm for faith and practice and that law had no place here norming the practice of a gospel-centered church. He complained of the abuse of the synod's constitution, which enjoined unity in faith and practice in Article II.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Schroeder, "Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?" 97.

<sup>64</sup>Kurt Marquart aptly pointed out the ultimate end of this process is to banish law and gospel from the theological process by putting it at the mercy of the so-called assured results of higher critical interpretive tools. "The first and foremost point to be made is that any 'Law and Gospel' separated from strict biblical authority hang in the air and, far from 'controlling' higher criticism, are in fact totally at its mercy," Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, 124.

<sup>65</sup>Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, "Constitution of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," in *Handbook of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (Saint

As for the terms "faith and practice" in Article II, "faith" now has to do with holding faithfully to the doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible apart from and larger in scope than the gospel. "Practice," in turn, has to do not only with a life of faith, hope, and love through Christ our Lord, but in particular now with methods and exegetical persuasions in biblical study.<sup>66</sup>

The gospel alone was the norm here. The law no longer had any norming authority for the church's practice. No theological space was left to the third use of the law.<sup>67</sup>

A denial of the third use of the law thwarted efforts toward doctrinal unity within the LCMS. The choices were set out in stark contrast: gospel or unfaith, absolute freedom or choking discipline, realistic and loving concern or unloving perfectionism, and gospel normed action or legalistic church practice.<sup>68</sup> For the Valparaiso theologians this was portrayed in the simple terms of an either/or.<sup>69</sup> Paul Bretscher was typical in this regard, setting out an either doctrine or authentic faith choice in his *After the Purifying*. "Is the truth and purity of God's Word fixed in a body of doctrine to be taught? Or is our structure of doctrine itself subject to continual purging and renewal through whatever testings the Lord might

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Louis: Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1995), 9.

<sup>66</sup>Bretscher, *After the Purifying*, 17.

<sup>67</sup>Bretscher, though a writer of extraordinary beauty, was not always consistent in his presentation. While he at one point advocated a "gospel only" method of determining what was the word of God and what was not, farther along in the presentation he described the word of God as being a law-gospel "Word of God," rather than a gospel only word of God. To further complicate this he adds that this law-gospel word of God must be normed by the gospel. Bretscher, *After the Purifying*, 19.

<sup>68</sup>See for example Robert C. Schultz, "Reflections on the Current Controversy in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod: An Attempt to Express Pastoral Concern" *The Cresset* 35 (October 1972): 10 *et passim*; Edward H. Schroeder, "Current Implications of the 'We Condemn' Statements in the Lutheran Confessions," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 2 (February 1975): 5-9; and H. Armin Moellering, "A Rejoinder with Repristinating Notes," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 2 (February 1975): 10-18.

<sup>69</sup>Paul Bretscher accounted for the past acceptance of the both/and of Scripture and gospel. "Everybody still agreed that the 'true treasure' of Lutheranism was *both* the holy inspired Scriptures *and* 'the most holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God.' No one thought of himself as having to 'choose' between these two. . . . It was a matter of 'both. . .and,' not of 'either. . .or.'" Bretscher, *After the Purifying*, 99.

choose to lay upon any or all of His people?"<sup>70</sup> Could it not be that God's word gives a norm by which we are always being renewed? In any case, doctrinal norms, like any other legal norms, did not fare well at the hands of the Valparaiso theologians.

### *Summary Analysis and Evaluation*

The Valparaiso theologians evinced a new approach to biblical hermeneutics by championing their gospel reductionistic hermeneutic. However, it was an attempt to clear the LCMS hermeneutical field for the freedom to operate with historical critical hermeneutics. This generated a firestorm of opposition among the Missourians. The Valparaiso theologians were not correct in arguing that law and gospel was the biblical hermeneutic in traditional Lutheran exegetical practice. The method had drastic results for the third use of the law by relegating it to a sub-Christian status. The gospel of the Valparaiso theologians simply excluded it from Christian theology as "not-the-gospel." Indeed any objective doctrinal content was given the same *coup de grace*, because it was less than "happening."

With the Occam's razor of the gospel wielded in this way, the Valparaiso theologians had to find theological space for the application of Christian ethics. The approach that Paul Althaus suggested found expression as *parenesis* in the work of Walter Bartling.<sup>71</sup> Others took a more radical approach and advocated what could be taken for moral and theological anarchy. In either case doctrinal standards were lowered in the name of the gospel and discipline was considered a sign of unfaith.

Finally, in varying degrees the defenders of the Valparaiso theology were prone to attribute parenetic purposes to the gospel, so that the law's work was now subsumed under the gospel. The denial of the third use of the law led to a redefinition of the gospel to include legal concepts. The gospel was no longer the gratuitous promises of God to the anxious sinner, but a Calvinistic melange of law and gospel, which was no gospel at all.

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<sup>70</sup>Bretscher, *After the Purifying*, 5.

<sup>71</sup>Paul Althaus, "Gebot und Gesetz Zum Gesetz und Evangelium," *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie*, volume 46, edited by Paul Althaus and Joachim Jeremias (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1952); available in English translation as *The Divine Command*, translated by Franklin Sherman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966).

### The Missouriians

During the 1960s and 1970s the Missouriians fought to establish the continuing validity of the third use of the law. This and character was a central issue in the theological and political wars that accompanied the conflict over control of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis and the LCMS itself.<sup>72</sup> The Missouriians held that there was a major dichotomy of doctrine in the law and gospel dialectic. However, they dealt with the tension between law and gospel by focusing on anthropology rather than eschatology. While Gerhard Forde made the old age-new age dichotomy govern the balance of law and gospel,<sup>73</sup> the Missouriians made old Adam-new Adam a ruling theological principle. The Missouriians tried to take the *simul justus et peccator* seriously.

*David P. Scaer*

David Scaer sharply criticized the gospel reductionism shown by the Valparaiso theologians. Scaer argued that epistemological concerns were at the root of the disagreement between Missouriians and the Valparaiso theologians. Does the theologian begin with the gospel that leads to Scripture, or does he begin with Scripture that leads to the gospel? The Valparaiso theologians defended the former, the Missouriians the latter.<sup>74</sup>

In contrast to the Missouriian position, which began with Scripture and worked toward theology, the Valparaiso theologians began with gospel and worked back toward Scripture. The Valparaiso theologians began with the commitment to the gospel and subjected Scripture to its

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<sup>72</sup>For two representative but opposing views on the ecclesiastical battle in the LCMS see Frederick W. Danker, *No Room in the Brotherhood* (Saint Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1977); and Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion*.

<sup>73</sup>Gerhard Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969).

<sup>74</sup>Scaer cited the position of J. A. O. Preus as representative of the Missouriian view and the position of Paul Bretscher as representative of the Valparaiso view. Scaer summarized the Preus position. "Scriptures, written, spoken, preached or paraphrased, tell me about sin (Law) and lead me to faith in Christ (Gospel). Dr. Preus certainly would not deny but obviously believes that faith leads one back to Scripture in accord with the command of Christ as Dr. Bretscher also holds by pointing to Luke 24:36-45." David P. Scaer, "The Law Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod," *Springfielder* 36 (December 1972): 159.

scrutiny.<sup>75</sup> The Valparaiso theologians began with *solum evangelium*. The result was that the gospel functioned as a limit for the *sola Scriptura* principle of Lutheran theology.

This approach deemed that whatever was outside the gospel became an *adiaphoron*, that is, a matter of theological indifference.<sup>76</sup> In the judgment of Scaer, everything becomes a matter of theological indifference to the Valparaiso theologians. "In practice, as experience shows, nothing is found contrary to the Gospel."<sup>77</sup> Thus the first principle in the Valparaiso approach is the gospel, so that the focus is not what Scripture teaches but what the gospel allows.<sup>78</sup> Scaer argued that the

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<sup>75</sup>"The position of Dr. Preus is that the Scriptures are the cognitive principle in theology, for example, they tell us about Christ. Therefore everything taught in the church must be derived from the Scriptures and ultimately serve Jesus Christ. The position of Drs. Bretscher, Schroeder, and Schultz is that the gospel is the basis of theology and whatever is not contrary to the gospel is permissible in the church. The firsts [*sic*] position has been labeled legalistic and Calvinistic and the second, gospel reductionism," Scaer, "The Law Gospel Debate," 159. For an example, Paul E. Schuessler charged that the LCMS had two competing influences in her theology one Lutheran, the other Reformed. "Like two birch trees growing along side one another, evangelical Lutheranism and evangelical Reformed theology have competed with one another in the Missouri Synod. Since 1969 the evangelical Reformed has gained the ascendancy." Paul E. Schuessler, "Using the Law," *Lutheran Forum* (May 1978): 23.

<sup>76</sup>The Missourians took into account the distinction between a phenomenological approach to theology and a systematic approach. Systematic theology remains second order thinking or reflection on the faith. Thus, systematic theology does not follow the pattern of personal conversion or of apologetic uses. "The theological task, not to be confused with the missionary task of the church, is begun by everyone, orthodox or otherwise, with apriori [*sic*] opinion of what the Bible is or is not." Scaer, "The Law Gospel Debate," 161. Law and gospel was set in the framework provided by Scripture as a whole. Scripture had priority. Law and gospel was derived from it, not vice versa.

<sup>77</sup>Scaer cites an essay by Horace Hummel, then a member of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), illustrating this point. "The LCA is a perfect example of what happens when one abandons all possible thought of discipline, refuses to state what is being *rejected* as well, and appeals to the 'adequacy of the historic Confessions' or simply to 'Gospel': these become code words for *anything* goes; in *practice* anything contrary to the Gospel simply *will* never be found." Horace Hummel, "Law and Gospel in the Old Testament," Mimeographed conference essay, 4; quoted in Scaer, "The Law Gospel Debate," 159; emphasis original.

<sup>78</sup>Scaer, "The Law Gospel Debate," 159.

choice between the gospel and Scripture offered by the Valparaiso theologians is a false either/or.<sup>79</sup>

Scaer and the Missourians were uniformly concerned about the tendency of the Valparaiso theologians to place into the category of adiaphora all theology outside their narrow definition of the gospel. For example, Scaer chided Schroeder for championing the ordination of women, because in Schroeder's opinion it was opposed to the gospel not to ordain women to the office. Once again the law simply disappears from consideration. This is truly gospel reductionism.

Scaer charged that the law is dissolved by the gospel in the gospel reductionistic scheme of the Valparaiso theologians.<sup>80</sup> For Scaer the nexus between law and gospel is the person and work of Christ, who fulfills the law and pays the penalty for the sin of the world in His vicarious suffering and death. The law is not merely set aside by the gospel, but in Christ, the gospel confirms God's righteousness and holiness in the law.<sup>81</sup> When the nexus between law and gospel is actually dissolved, the person and work of Christ disappears from the theological radar, replaced instead by the politically correct pap of culturally normed religion.

When the third use of the law is denied, gospel is turned into law. The gospel becomes the ethical regulating principle in the life of the Christian. Robert Schultz argued that murder is sin not because it infringes on the fifth commandment, but because it contradicts the gospel.<sup>82</sup> The law no longer has any power to condemn, but rather the gospel itself has taken over the condemnatory function of the law. Ultimately this is a denial not only of the third use of the law, but also of the second use. Schultz's position also leads Scaer to wonder if the law is binding on non-Christians. If Christians are not under judgment for breaking the law,

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<sup>79</sup>"This offer of a choice between Christ and the Bible is not only misleading—it is downright deceptive. It is certainly not suggested by the Scriptures themselves. . . . No real choice can ever be made between Christ and the Bible, simply because the Bible centers in Christ and he submits himself totally to it. Christ is the chief content of the Bible and also the only key to its interpretation." David P. Scaer, "Christ or the Bible?" *Christianity Today* (November 10, 1967), 113.

<sup>80</sup>Scaer, "The Law Gospel Debate," 166.

<sup>81</sup>Scaer, "The Law Gospel Debate," 166.

<sup>82</sup>Robert C. Schultz, "Missouri Synod History and Doctrine: Variant Readings," *The Cresset* 35 (October 1972): 32.

what status can the law have for non-Christians?<sup>83</sup> Gospel as defined by the Valparaiso theologians becomes “a *carte blanche* for moral and doctrinal freedom.”<sup>84</sup> Doctrinal and moral anarchy were, according to the Missourians, the real result of the Valparaiso theologians’ denial of the third use of the law. Present carping about the doctrinal dissolution of the ELCA in the pages of *Lutheran Forum* and even *First Things* testifies to the prescience of such predictions.

Scaer also charged that when the gospel is treated as the “regulating principle” in the Christian life it has become “little more than spiritualized pragmatism.”<sup>85</sup> The “gospel” had become the basis for all manner of doctrinal deviation.<sup>86</sup> The third use of the law could not be applied to doctrine. In other words there were no legally based doctrinal norms in the public teaching of the church.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Scaer, “The Law Gospel Debate,” 166. Richard Klann summarized this issue: “The Christian no longer lives *under* the Law (legalism), nor *above* the Law (antinomianism), but *in* the Law. ‘To live *in* the law’ is the equivalent of asserting the congruence of the *will* of the Christian with the *will* of God in sanctification. The Christian never asserts any kind of moral or ethical autonomy. Christian discipleship is obedience to God’s will.” Richard Klann, “Reflections on Disputes Regarding the Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel,” *Concordia Journal* 1 (January 1975): 35.

<sup>84</sup>Scaer, “The Law Gospel Debate,” 167.

<sup>85</sup>Scaer, “The Law Gospel Debate,” 167.

<sup>86</sup>See also Moellering, “A Rejoinder,” 12-13. Moellering defends the importance and validity of doctrinal discipline as not incompatible with love. The Valparaiso theologians commonly contended that doctrinal discipline was unloving and thus incompatible with the gospel. For example, see Edward H. Schroeder, “Current Implications,” 5-9; and Waldemar W. Wehmeier, “Missouri and Public Doctrine,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 2 (February 1975): 23-34; see also Hermann Diem, “Is Doctrinal Discipline Possible?” *Lutheran Forum* (February 1971): 11-15; Walter Künneht, “Responsibility for Doctrine Today,” *Lutheran Forum* (February 1971): 8-10.

<sup>87</sup>Horace Hummel, who at the time was professor of Old Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, pleaded for the importance of doctrinal discipline in American Lutheranism in a seminal and much-read article in *Lutheran Forum* in 1969. “The problem of how to take a firm stand against breakdown of discipline and dogmatic aberrations without stifling theological creativity and genuine ecumenical engagement is anything but new. It is, however, especially acute today, especially among those whose concepts of ‘freedom’ are apparently more informed by certain modern ideologies than by the gospel, and for whom, as a result, the very notion of doctrinal discipline is offensive and to whom virtually any authority represents ‘authoritarianism.’ The possibilities of miscarriages of church discipline are great (how liberalism loves to highlight them!) and, obviously, everything should be done

Scaer was critical of what he saw as a misappropriation of the law and gospel dialectic. He argued that law and gospel is not a "doctrine" in the same sense as the other articles of the faith, but it is a way of looking at the articles of the faith. Law and gospel is a filter for the articles of the faith. In this way law and gospel does not function independently of the articles of the faith. Law and gospel cannot function to change the meaning or the content of the church's kerygma. The acts of God may be perceived through the filter of law and gospel, but they are not in and of themselves law or gospel.<sup>88</sup> Any divine act might be law or gospel depending on how it is preached.<sup>89</sup> The acts of God in the scriptural revelation cannot be mitigated or changed by the law gospel dialectic. The kerygmatic acts of God in the scriptural revelation stand on their own and only become law or gospel in their being preached, whether by the apostolic authorities in the scriptural record or by their successors *viva voce* in the church. For Scaer, acts of God in Christ *become* gospel when the apostolic authorities inform the world that God has acted *pro me*.

Scaer also argues for the continuing validity of the law as inherent in God's creation. Generally, Lutherans have usually been suspicious of the Barthian rejection of natural theology, once again because it sets the word of the law outside the realm of reality. While Lutherans might struggle with the precise content of the natural law, they do argue that the creating God firmly grounds the Ten Commandments in the reality of

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to prevent them. But I submit that most recent Protestant history better illustrates the sad results of its absence than its excesses. Any organization maintains some sort of discipline consonant with its *raison d'être*, and if doctrine ceases to be a significant part of the church's discipline, then obviously only factors really extrinsic to the essence of the church are externally holding it together." Horace Hummel, "No Other Gospel!" *Lutheran Forum* (October 1969): 4.

<sup>88</sup>The Formula of Concord quotes Luther, who pointed out that the cross may be a preaching of law or gospel. FC SD V:12-13; BS 955-956.

<sup>89</sup>The practical emphasis on preaching is central to C. F. W. Walther's doctrine of the law and gospel. "Law and Gospel deal with *how* God's creative and redemptive acts are related to God's people in preaching. A bare act of God is not Law or Gospel of itself. God's preaching or explaining his acts is Law and Gospel. The Gospel is the report of the act. Of course Christians recognized the apostolic preaching as the divinely sanctioned explanation of divine actions against which no other explanation in the church is to be tolerated. (*Sola Scriptura!*)" Scaer, "The Law Gospel Debate," 167-168.



creation.<sup>90</sup> A denial of the enduring validity of the law is tantamount to a denial of reality for Scaer. Law is not only a *lex aeterna* situated in God, but it is also *lex naturalis*.

The Missourians perceived the Valparaiso theologians' view of law and gospel as an attack on the objective content of the faith. "The *for us* in theology rests on the fact *that* God *did something*. If 'Lutheran Barthianism' gains the field, the *for us* will also be lost."<sup>91</sup> A rejection of an objective law implied a rejection of the gospel and its results. The third use of the law must remain where the gospel with a propositional content is to be properly defended.

*John W. Montgomery*

John Warwick Montgomery was critical of the Valparaiso theologians' method of using law and gospel as an overarching hermeneutical theme. Montgomery himself coined the term "gospel reductionism." He argued that by denying eternally valid categories of thought the Valparaiso theologians were jeopardizing the whole substance of the faith. He warned about the tendency of the Valparaiso theologians to boil down all biblical interpretive issues to law-gospel.<sup>92</sup> Law and gospel was an extra-biblical *norma normans* now applied not only to theology but also to the text of Scripture.

Montgomery traced the influence of existentialism upon Christian theology and its disastrous results. He argued that existentialistic ethics necessarily leads to ethical relativism. The Protestant existentialist can

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<sup>90</sup>"The law, reflecting God's own essence, is the regulatory principle for all of creation and is present in the creation simply because of God's creating activity. Man's abrogation of the law puts him under God's condemnation *ipso facto*. Natural law alerts man that he has stepped outside the boundaries and the law given verbally by special revelation reflects this law negatively to man's sinful nature." Scaer, "The Law Gospel Debate," 168.

<sup>91</sup>Scaer, "The Law Gospel Debate," 170; emphasis original.

<sup>92</sup>"Law-gospel comes to function as an independent philosophical principle (like those of nineteenth century [*sic*] German idealism) by which Scripture is judged; and the Bible takes on the role of a book of illustrations for the principle. Not so the Reformers' view of law-gospel; for them, it derived *from* Scripture, and, like all theological truths, it could only be affirmed on the ground of the total reliability of God's Word." John W. Montgomery, "Current Theological Trends in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod," in *Crisis in Lutheran Theology*, 1:121.

never appeal to absolute law; he can only say, "You're free, choose to love." But what does this mean in concrete terms? Theoretically it can mean "anything goes" – an antinomianism indeed – for each existential decision is unique and without precedent.<sup>93</sup> Once again the fear of ethical anarchy drove the discussion of the third use of the law by the Missourians. Sanctification in the traditional sense is rendered impossible where there is no absolute ethical standard.

The third use of the law is an essential doctrine for two reasons, according to Montgomery. First, love does not give content to ethical action. In other words, it provides motivation and power to ethical action, but it cannot provide the "what." Only the objective word of God in the law can provide that content.<sup>94</sup> Second, the third use of the law preserves the doctrine of sanctification. Because of the new birth in Christ, the Christian's relation to the law has changed. The Christian now delights in the law of the Lord.<sup>95</sup> "Only by taking the Third Use of the Law – the 'law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2) – seriously do we take regeneration seriously; and only when we come to love God's revealed Law has sanctification become a reality in our lives."<sup>96</sup> The nomological situation of the Christian changes because of the gospel. Montgomery readily concedes that law still accuses the Christian. However, the Christian will also see the biblical law in another light; "as the manifestation of God's loving will."<sup>97</sup>

#### *Kurt E. Marquart*

Kurt Marquart was highly critical of the attempt to claim that law and gospel could provide objective controls for the application of higher critical tools of interpretation. As we have seen above, the Valparaíso theologians treated law and gospel as a norming authority for biblical studies. This was unacceptable to Marquart on at least three grounds.

First, like Scaer, Marquart insists on the historical facticity of Bible texts. Marquart considers invalid the method of theology that places the law and gospel dialectic over the text of the Bible as a ruling or controlling

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<sup>93</sup>John W. Montgomery, "The Law's Third Use: Sanctification," in *Crisis in Lutheran Theology*, 1:125.

<sup>94</sup>Montgomery, "The Law's Third Use," 126.

<sup>95</sup>Psalm 119; Psalm 1.

<sup>96</sup>Montgomery, "The Law's Third Use," 127.

<sup>97</sup>Montgomery, "The Law's Third Use," 127.

principle. The "Lutheran-Barthian" approach that separates the Bible's own story from its grounding in history, so that law-gospel controls it, fails because it leaves the Bible at the mercy of historical critical canons of interpretation. Marquart identifies this with a Bultmannian theological approach where the historical content of Scripture is judged by a law-gospel distinction, without any reference to its facticity.<sup>98</sup> Thus the Valparaiso theologians champion the gospel content of Scripture above its authoritative character as the word of God. The rejection of the authority of Scripture is a defense of the gospel for the Valparaiso theologians. Marquart suggests that this a false dichotomy; that the principle of Scripture authority is intended to defend the gospel itself. He employs this homey illustration to make his point.

The Scripture-principle, then, is the gospel's own authority-principle and not something separate on the side! To put it very crudely, the "formal principle" or "Scripture-principle" (that is, Scripture as sole authority, *sola Scriptura*) is simply the door of the gospel's hen-house. The door is not there for its own sake but precisely to protect the whole house. If it is gone, it would be foolish to say smugly, "O [sic] well, that was only the door — the rest of the hen-house is still safe!" Once the door is gone, the historical critical fox is free to take whatever he pleases. The hen-house will be quite empty eventually, even if not after the first two or three visits.<sup>99</sup>

The principle of Scripture authority is essential to defend not only the gospel but all the teachings of the faith. According to the Missourians, when the hen-house is unguarded, anything goes, including a rejection of the third use of the law. Doctrinal and moral anarchy is the natural outcome of this approach. This line of reasoning demonstrates the close relationship between a traditional, biblical inspiration doctrine and the third use of the law in LCMS theology.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, 124.

<sup>99</sup>Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, 125.

<sup>100</sup>Marquart also maintains that there is a distinction between systematic theology and apologetics. Systematic theology, for the Missourians, remains an enterprise of faith, that is, it is begun and carried out only with the presupposition of belief. "The fallacy is to assume that because books on doctrine usually begin, very sensibly, with biblical inspiration as the basis and authority for all doctrine and practice, therefore the intention is to 'prove' inspiration in order then to 'reason' oneself or others into faith in Christ. This is arrant nonsense. Detailed manuals on Christian doctrine are

Marquart is deeply suspicious of a sharp division between doctrine and the gospel. He argued that in modern Lutheran usage the terms "law and gospel" have been assigned a functional meaning alien to their original intent. "'Law and Gospel' also have been turned into 'a lifeless speculation.' In *chic* Lutheran usage, 'evangelical' means tolerant, and the 'Gospel' is identified with a kind of secular permissiveness."<sup>101</sup> In Marquart's analysis law loses its content and gospel is turned into a kind of new law, which provides only permission based on secularized canons of propriety. In such thinking being law oriented is the opposite of the being gospel oriented. Law and gospel are no longer seen in tension with each other, but one simply neutralizing the other, as they do in the LCMS District Presidents' PIF sliding scale of legalistic/inflexible on the one hand and evangelical/flexible on the other. A "gospel" orientation extinguishes any hope of a third use of the law, because the third use of the law is a doctrine hopelessly inured in legalism. Such a view receives a pointed reprimand from Marquart who sees it as an accommodation to secular values.

### *Summary Analysis*

The Missouriians believed that to reject the third use of the law would be to risk antinomianism. Characteristically they warned that by denying the third use of the law there was a risk of falling into a denial of the law

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normally written to instruct future public teachers of the church in the church's biblical faith. The standpoint of faith and of theology, therefore, can and must be presupposed. The Lordship of Christ is already a certainty from the outset and determines the whole treatment of the Bible; faith in Christ is not something still to be established in the middle or towards the end of the volume or set!" Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, 129. Systematic theology primarily is the faithful teaching the faith to the faithful. Thus a systematic theologian could correctly begin with the faith-normed presuppositions about the Bible as the starting point of systematic theology. The missionary or apologetic approach is quite different. In mission work the proclamation of law and gospel is the priority. In apologetics putative barriers to the faith are dealt with apart from the presupposition of faith (128). Francis Pieper, often the whipping boy of the Valparaiso theologians, pointedly rejects that an unbeliever must be convinced of the inspiration of Scripture before he can be brought to faith in the salvation won by Jesus Christ. Franz Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, 3 volumes (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1917-1924), 1:157-58. Faith is *a priori* to systematic theology, systematic expression of doctrine is *a posteriori* to faith.

<sup>101</sup>Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, 137-138.

altogether. Antinomianism threatened both doctrine and life, by risking a dissolution of order. As the 1960s advanced, the theme of the importance of moral and doctrinal order became increasingly significant for the Missourians, who saw themselves fighting a battle for the life of their church body, not to mention Lutheran doctrine itself. The concept of doctrinal discipline was important to that battle and thus the defense of the third use of the law loomed large. Any disregard for the third use of the law smacked of secularism and ethical permissiveness. Doctrinal discipline remained an issue that created fierce contention within the Missouri Synod throughout this period and still does to this day.

The Valparaiso theologians suggested that there was an inherent weakness in the Missourian acceptance of the principle of Scripture authority. They thought it an attempt to coordinate two different principles of authority in Lutheran theology, law and gospel on the one hand, and Scripture authority on the other. Thus the Missourians defended the importance of the principle of Scripture-authority by clarifying the distinction between systematic theology and mission endeavors. The approach to proclamation needed to be different from the approach to systematic theology. They refused to let the gospel dissolve the tight doctrinal relationship among the articles of faith, as they thought the Valparaiso theologians had. For the Missourians every doctrine was intimately related to the gospel. This doctrine or that could not simply be relegated to the position of *adiaphora*. The deeply christological character of the divine word was central to the thinking of the Missourians.

### Summary and Conclusions

The Valparaiso theologians employed an existentialistic approach to theology. This approach ruled out the third use of the law as a sub-Christian or as a Calvinistic intrusion into Lutheran theology which entered through Melancthon's influence and the Formula of Concord and was supported by Melancthon's students in the period of orthodoxy. Just a whiff of Calvinism was enough to taint the third use of the law as un-Lutheran and un-evangelical among Valparaiso theologians.

The approach to the third use of the law in this period also shows that a denial of the third use of the law inevitably entails an inclusion of the law's content in the gospel. This legal intrusion in the gospel gets a variety of denominations: gospel imperatives, *paraklesis*, *parenesis*,

encouragement, *Gebot*, etc. However, it remains a confusion of law and gospel. The Occam's razor of law and gospel, which led to a wholesale rejection of the law's purposes in the church, failed to account for the way in which theological dichotomies actually cut in different directions across the *corpus* of Lutheran theology. For example, the anthropological dimension of the Christian's life as *simul justus et peccator* can never be left out of the doctrinal equation. The *justus et peccator* dichotomy also cuts across Lutheran theology. The Missourians came down in favor of keeping the *simul* as a constant part of the debate, attempting to emphasize the unitive nature of Christian anthropology, indeed Christian theology as a whole. Ironically, in this period, the defenders of orthodoxy in American Lutheranism approached the question of the place of the law with anthropological concerns at the forefront.

The gospel reductionism of the Valparaiso theologians had a devastating effect on the Christian use of the law. They rejected the third use of the law and in more radical cases rejected any use of the law in the church. The more radical treatments of the law by the Valparaiso theologians might well have been a theological overreaction calculated to shock and irritate the stodgy orthodoxy of the Missourians. As the two groups faced off over momentous issues, the political situation required swift responses, often fraught with too much passion and too little deliberation. The Missourians rejected the hermeneutical implications of the Valparaiso position for methodological reasons, but they could also see the impact gospel reductionism would have on any number of Christian doctrines. Finally, to borrow from a quote by the American patriot, Benjamin Franklin, the points of theology must hang together, or they will assuredly all hang separately. Gospel reductionism was a narrow and unecumenical principle, ruling all the points of theology, and thereby ruling out many points of theology. Here the theological richness of the Christological mystery became peripheral, undoing the work of the Chalcedonian fathers. And so just maybe classic Missouriianism's fussiness about purity of doctrine might have its benefits after all.

## Redeeming Time: Deuteronomy 8:11-18

### *Dedication of Crucifixes*

Dean O. Wenthe

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with each of you. Amen.

There are three pivotal words which run like a steady stream through Deuteronomy: שָׁמַעְתִּיםּוּ—to hear, שָׁמַרְתִּיםּוּ—to keep, and זָכַרְתִּיםּוּ—to remember. All three verbs map the relationship of God to His chosen people and are intimately intertwined. One cannot, from the perspective of Moses, do one of these and not the other two.

The lesson just read underscores the constant need for God's people "to remember the Lord your God." "Remember," how crucial it is for God's people *then* and *now*. It is *crucial*, yes *critical*, for you and for me. Why? Because we live in an epoch that has elevated amnesia to an art form: how practiced we are at forgetting! We forget the history of human cruelty and failures. We forget that every human endeavor, every empire, has fallen into the dust. We forget the reality that time will discard the rich, the famous, and the powerful as swiftly as the unknown. An old popular ballad laments: "Time, time, time . . . look what's become of me as I look around at my possibilities . . ."

One of your great callings, dear seminarians, is to redeem "time" for our age—to declare its meaning and significance. In a time like ours, the masses live as if there were only the present. So those marriage vows, they're gone—after all, he and she are both different now than they were then. So too, those promises to friends, to children, they're gone. And dare we confess, many confirmation vows for life hardly last weeks. The subliminal and public signal over and over is "here today, gone tomorrow"; *carpe diem*, "seize the day, the now," for that is all there is. And in such thought, human beings are reduced to the immediate and impulsive, to the deceitful and the destructive.

No, you are called to announce a different view of time. You are called to say "the soul that sinneth, it will die." The Lenten season places before each of us that truth: "the soul that sinneth, it shall die"; "dust thou art, and to dust you will return!" And in this confession we are located in time, God's time. We are taken to Eden where our past is expounded. We are taken to our own birth from Adam and Eve's seed. Here is our

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past truthfully and fully placed before us. The lies are gone. Lent lays before us the truth of our decaying epoch shrouded in death.

Genesis 5 and 11 speak to us the litanies of death that have marked every generation after the fall. "And he died" envelopes the Bill Gates as well as the unknown with complete impartiality because of that primeval rebellion. Lent lays this before us directly and forcefully. We need to hear this past.

But as you survey the book of Deuteronomy, the verbs "*listen, keep, remember*" are deeply embedded in another history—the past written by God's mercy and gracious presence with His people. The first four chapters relate, in detail, how God had come and chosen and redeemed His people. Indeed, just before our text is that brilliant passage describing God's love for a sinful and fallen people:

The Lord has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession. The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery from the power of Pharaoh King of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 7:6b-8)

This is what Israel was called *to remember*: the gracious character of their God. How much more shouldn't *we remember*? To remember the living God involves the past, present, and future. To remember the character of the true God is to announce His saving deeds. And as our feet turn toward Jerusalem, heavy with the weight of our sin, our souls are captive to the mystery and depth and wonder and cost of God's love. Here is the woman's seed, Abraham's seed, David's seed, God's own Son, the Paschal Lamb bearing the sin and death and lies and rebellion of all time in His body. The floods of our baptismal water delivered us from a master more tyrannical than Pharaoh. The words that we have heard, "thy sins be forgiven thee"; the meal that we have received, "this is My body, this is My blood"; we *remember* gladly and gratefully, for these are our very life. Without them our time is emptied of meaning, but *in Him* we live now and forever.

And, if there is an image that summarizes our past, present, and future, it is the crucifix. Under Pontius Pilate, a fully human and fully divine



Jesus of Nazareth was crucified for all and, for all time, has filled our time with God's gracious presence. How fitting for us to ponder and to pray and to teach and live under this image: God's Son sacrificed for us.

As we dedicate these crucifixes for our classrooms, may we hear, may we keep, but especially may we remember the height and depth and breadth of God's love for us in Christ, the Crucified Paschal Lamb.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



# A Letter on Pastoral Assistance

The Secretary of the Faculty,  
Concordia Theological Seminary,  
Fort Wayne, Indiana,  
15 February 2001.

The Special Task Force to Study the Need  
for Pastoral Assistance Where Full-Time  
Ministry Cannot be Maintained,  
The Board for Higher Education,  
The International Center of The  
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod,  
Saint Louis, Missouri.

Dear Sirs:

The faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary received from you quite recently a draft of a "Convention Memorial to Establish the Position of 'Assistant Pastor' Where Full-Time Pastoral Ministry Cannot be Maintained" which was dated 12 January 2001. The members of the faculty have studied your proposal carefully, and a complete meeting was dedicated to its discussion on 13 February 2001. The faculty appreciates very much the opportunity to respond to the proposal although, of course, the date by which you required a reaction has necessarily precluded any response more elaborate than the one which I am sending you herewith.

It is, then, in the first place, my responsibility, as the secretary of the faculty, to inform you of its adoption of the following resolution, with no dissenting vote or voice, in its most recent meeting:

Following careful study of the "Convention Memorial to Establish the Position of 'Assistant Pastor' Where Full-Time Pastoral Ministry Cannot Be Maintained" drafted by the "Task Force to Study the Need for Pastoral Assistance Where Full-Time Ministry Cannot be Maintained" on 12 January 2001, the faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary is obliged to oppose the proposal on the following grounds:

- (1.) The position of "assistant pastors" of the nature proposed is something unknown in the previous history of the synod or of the Lutheran Church as a whole or, indeed, of the Christian Church in general. The introduction of such a drastic

innovation would clearly require, at the very least, careful study by the theological faculties of the synod. An appropriate respect for the doctrine and practice of all preceding generations of the synod necessarily precludes the submission of such a proposal to the convention which is to be held within six months.

(2.) The alterations which the proposal would require to the constitution and bylaws of the synod would be numerous and extreme. Although some of the places in which amendments would be necessary have been intimated in the proposal, others remain unidentified. Since, moreover, in every case the precise language of the suggested revision is as yet to be determined, the task force will clearly agree that the faculty has as yet had no opportunity to respond to its proposals in precise terms. Nor is such a response possible until such time as the faculty learns the exact nature of the alterations which the task force desires to make to the constitution and bylaws of the synod.

(3.) The seminary, in cooperation with the synod, has already addressed precisely those problems which the task force in its proposal has identified as confronting the church today. For it was specifically the needs of people who would otherwise lack pastor care which lead the synod and seminary to establish the program known as DELTO. It now requires only the support of the various districts of the synod to make this program operative anywhere in the synod where a given district feels the aforesaid needs.

I have, in addition, been commissioned by the faculty to express its consensus on several other points which are at the same time integrally related to those stated in its formal resolution. I am, in consequence, relaying to you those reactions on which there was complete concord in the faculty. Some of the impediments to the proposal in question are the same as those which the faculty has discerned in previous proposals to alter the ministerium of the synod. I refer, above all, to the "Response to an 'Overture to Establish an Ordained Diaconate'" which, following its submission to your task force, was published as the official opinion of the faculty in the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (63: 3 [July 1999], pages 205-220). We gratefully recognize that some of the objections which we raised to the "ordained diaconate" are inapplicable to the proposal which is now

before us. At the same time, however, some of objections which we raised then still obtain now. The consensus of the faculty, then, is that the proposal in question, while evincing the good intentions of the task force, is unwarranted and counterproductive for various reasons which include the following:

(1.) The supposed needs which would require such drastic innovation as you propose have never been demonstrated in any impartial manner on the basis of verifiable statistical evidence. Members of the faculty and staff of this seminary who are particularly involved in the recruiting and calling of pastors have, as you are aware, previously demonstrated (a.) that the numbers of pastoral vacancies cited by some outside the seminary are misleading and (b.) that the extrapolations made from these numbers (that the seminaries are incapable of meeting the needs) are unjustifiable. There is, in fact, no reason to think that the challenges today are any more daunting than those in the days of the founding fathers of the synod, when communication and transportation were much more difficult than now.

(2.) A return to the historic position and practice of the synod would greatly ameliorate, or fully satisfy, the needs of the church. As the faculty has observed heretofore (in its "Response to an 'Overture to Establish an Ordained Diaconate'"), "... an alternative means to alleviate the desperate situation of immigrants would be to call an ordained pastor for a particular group from the Lutheran Church (if one exists) in the country of origin of the immigrants. The 'overture' offers little explanation as to why additional missionaries or pastors could not be called by the synod to already existing congregations through which surrounding pockets of people might be reached (in line with the concept of Wilhelm Loehe). The church needs to address the ambivalent relationship between theology and mission-strategy. The mission-strategy of the synod must be realigned and modified to agree with the overriding theological principles of the synod" (*opere citato*). Other Orthodox Lutheran methods of serving isolated congregations (whether geographically or ethnically so), which were employed in the first century of the synod, would be itinerant pastors and, in instances of true necessity, lay readers (in which case, however, the traditional nomenclature and function should be retained). The shortage of clergy would be greatly

alleviated, if not eliminated, by the return to the parish of all ordained men in the synod who hold positions which are now full-time but were not so in the days of Dr. C. F. W. Walther and his colleagues. If districts now are too large to be supervised by presidents who remain pastors, then the districts may easily be divided, as they were in the early years of the synod.

(3.) The nomenclature of "assistant pastor" will necessarily lead to confusion. The designation incorporates the word "pastor" and has previously been applied to men who are equally as well prepared to be pastors as senior pastors and associate pastors. Obviously, therefore, the term will fail to distinguish, in the perception and usage of the people, those who have no theological education from those pastors who do. Whether he has studied four years in the seminary or nary a day, the man will receive and accept the title of "pastor" with equal alacrity.

(4.) A confusion in the proposal concerning the nature of the pastoral call and ordination results in two different kinds of call and ordination (as appears especially from page 3). Particularly objectionable is the way in which the continuation of the "call" of the "assistant pastor" depends upon the mutable pleasure of the congregation, the "supervising" pastor, and the district president. The annual review, in fact, on which the "continued service" of the "assistant pastor" rests makes his supposed call no more divine than the licensing of preachers which was so vehemently condemned by the founding fathers of the synod. The faculty, for example, in its "Response to an 'Overture to Establish an Ordained Diaconate'" quotes Dr. C. F. W. Walther, as describing the granting of licenses as "unbiblical, unscrupulous, and soul-destroying" (*opere citato*). The proposal, in this way and others, ignores the transparochial character of ordination as an action of the whole ministerium on behalf of the whole church of God (as was, again, argued in the aforesaid response). The overture, indeed, thereby undermines the divinity of the pastoral call.

(5.) We dare never forget that one of the primary reasons for the foundation of the synod was the training of pastors by the two seminaries which have produced the vast majority of its pastors in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Two of the first actions of the newly founded Evangelical Lutheran Synod of

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Missouri, Ohio, and Other States were to solicit and then to receive with thanks the ownership of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne. The faculty of the seminary consists in pastors who have received divine calls from the church as a whole specifically to prepare the future pastors of the church. The proposal now in question could produce a sizable proportion, or indeed a majority, of pastors in the synod certified and trained (to the extent that they receive training) by groups and individuals who possess no divine calls of this nature.

(6.) The Book of Concord calls the preaching of the Word of God the "highest office" in the church. According, specifically, to the German version of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, "the very greatest, holiest, most necessary, highest worship of God, which God has required as the greatest in the First and Second Commandments, is to preach the Word of God; for the office of preaching is the highest office in the church" (Article XV: 42). Subsequently, therefore, the same version of the Apology censures the opponents of the Augustana for ordaining pastors with inadequate preparation: "they care nothing about how one teaches or preaches, they care nothing about how the Christian use of the sacraments is to be preserved, they ordain crude asses; Christian doctrine, therefore, has declined, because the churches are not supplied with competent preachers" (Article XXVIII: 3). The traditional description, in fact, in the Lutheran Church of the pastoral ministry as the highest office in the church is an accurate encapsulation of the teachings of Sacred Scripture itself and of the Lutheran Confessions concerning the holy ministry of the Word of God and sacraments of Christ. The proposal now before us fails to do justice to such a conception of the ministry and, specifically, to the premium placed upon competent and responsible preaching of the gospel by Sacred Scripture and the Book of Concord. The proposal, in fact, requires less of pastoral candidates—in knowledge of Scripture and Confession and competence in applying them—than is required, quite rightly, of various others in the church, such as those preparing to be school-teachers and deaconesses.

(7.) Holy Scripture itself demands of pastors a level of competence which considerably surpasses the criteria of admission established

in the proposal now being made. For the Word of God requires, among the various qualifications of any man desiring the office of bishop, that he be "able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2). We fail to comprehend how any man can be able to teach who is himself untaught. We are concerned firstly for the welfare of the church of God (which may be subjected more easily to unscriptural teaching), but secondly, too, for the welfare of men pushed into a divine office which they are unprepared to fulfil. For the Apostle James expressly warns us against assuming or dispensing the holy ministry too lightly: "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (James 3:1). We can, in consequence, by no means bring ourselves to endorse the call and ordination of men who as yet know not what they do. For the Apostle Paul warns Saint Timothy and us: "Lay hands hastily on no man, nor share in the sins of others; keep yourself pure" (1 Timothy 5:22). We, for our part, desire to keep ourselves, by the grace of God, as undefiled as we can by the errors in doctrine and practice of unprepared pastors upon whom hands have been laid too quickly.

In fine, again, the consensus of the faculty is that the proposal in question, while evincing the good intentions of the task force, is unwarranted and counterproductive. We should hope that, instead of such proposals, the special task force would recommend and the Board of Higher Education would provide the full subsidy to both seminaries of the synod which they originally received. The seminaries would then be able once again, by the grace of God, to attract and prepare enough men to serve as truly able ministers of the New Testament in all the parishes of the synod and in all the additional settings to which the synod wishes to bring the ministry of the Word of God and the sacraments of Jesus Christ. Commending, then, the thinking of the faculty on these matters to your careful and prayerful consideration, I remain, in Christ,

Respectfully yours,

Douglas McC.L. Judisch  
Secretary of the Faculty

[The preceding letter was presented to the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary in the course of its regular meeting of 19 February 2001. Following some discussion of the text itself and related matters, the faculty accepted the letter by consensus. D. McC. L. J.]



## An Overture of the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary to the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in Convention

### **“To Complete the Study of the Call Already Authorized by the Synod Before Considering Any Proposal to Establish a New Position of ‘Assistant Pastor’”**

WHEREAS the Holy Ministry is a divinely instituted office, and its nature is thus an article of faith; and

WHEREAS any innovations in our application of this article must, therefore, be addressed theologically and not simply pragmatically; and

WHEREAS the memorial proposed by the Task Force on Diaconal Ministry “To Establish the Position of ‘Assistant Pastor’ Where Full-Time Pastoral Ministry Cannot be Maintained” introduces a number of innovations in application of the doctrine of the ministry; and

WHEREAS these innovations raise serious theological issues including the following:

- (1.) The provision that an “assistant pastor” retain his position only “provided his work is satisfactory to his district president, supervising pastor, and congregation” as established by an annual review (thus producing a temporary call), severely undermines the biblical relationship between pastor and people, as our synod has long understood (C. F. W. Walther, *Pastoral Theology*, pages 26-28).
- (2.) The requirement that the “assistant pastor” demonstrate only pre-seminary level competence in Holy Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and Christian doctrine before ordination calls into question his ability to rightly administer the Holy Communion, since he is to admit to the Lord’s Table only those who are united in the gospel and all its articles (in accord with Article VII of the Augsburg Confession and Article X of the Formula of Concord), and he himself will not yet have demonstrated his own understanding of all articles of the gospel.
- (3.) Declaring that a man who has been called and ordained may serve only in one location seems to separate the call of the congregation from the call of Christ, suggesting, likewise, that the actions of an individual congregation are not valid for the whole church.

WHEREAS, moreover, the memorial of the Task Force gives only a practical rationale for its proposal and does not address the preceding and other theological concerns; and

WHEREAS the Commission on Theology and Church Relations and others are currently studying the doctrine of the call, a study which could be helpful in resolving these and other issues; and

WHEREAS the synod has available at present various means to serve

congregations in which full-time pastoral ministry cannot be maintained, including the following:

- (1.) lay readers of sermons prepared by pastors trained by the seminaries of the synod;
- (2.) adjusting the times of services so that congregations may be provided the ministry of Word and Sacrament by neighboring pastors;
- (3.) the significantly increasing number of deferred vicars who have completed their theological training at the seminaries of the synod and have demonstrated personal and theological maturity;
- (4.) the expansion and further utilization of Distance Education Leading to Ordination (the program known as DELTO).

WHEREAS, moreover, a change in practice as significant as creating a new position in the synodical roster will quickly become institutionalized and thus be extremely difficult to reverse should it in the future prove unwise or theologically unsound; therefore be it

RESOLVED that the Commission on Theology and Church Relations be encouraged to complete its study of the doctrine of the call as efficiently as possible, taking into consideration the preceding and other theological issues raised by the proposal of the Task Force; and be it further

RESOLVED that the synod take no action to establish the proposed position of "assistant pastor" until this study has been completed; and be it finally

RESOLVED that the church proceed aggressively to use lay readers, adjustments in times of worship, deferred vicars, DELTO, and all other available means to serve congregations in which full-time pastoral ministry cannot be maintained.

The Faculty  
Concordia Theological Seminary  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Douglas McC. L. Judisch,  
Secretary  
19 February 2001

[The preceding overture was discussed by the Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary in the course of its regular meeting of 19 February 2001. The faculty then resolved, without dissenting vote, to submit this overture to the Sixty-First Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, which is scheduled to convene in St. Louis in July of the year of our Lord 2001. D. McC. L. J.]

# Theological Observer

## On Language and Morology: A Plea for the Language of the Church

At one time the whole earth had one language and few words. In their arrogance, the people of that time sought to build a tower that would reach to the heavens. The Lord's response was, "Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech" (Genesis 11:7). Without a common language, the people were scattered.

As it was in ancient Babel, so it is in the modern Babel of the church in general, which, indeed, can be heard even within the Missouri Synod. At one time, we spoke the same language or at least wanted to speak the same language. The last quarter of the twentieth century brought tremendous changes to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. From the trauma of the explosion at Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis to the latest travails of a synod in search of its identity, it is truly by grace alone that a confession of biblical truth can still be heard among us. Only God knows what the next twenty-five years will bring.

According to its constitution (Article III), the first objective of the Synod is that "the Synod, under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, shall conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Ephesians 4: 3-6; 1 Corinthians 1:10). . . ." How are we doing? Not well, according to the Reverend Gerald B. Kieschnick, the president of the Texas District of the Synod. In a letter to the editor of the *Reporter* (August 2000), he describes the reality in this way: "our Synod appears to be, and actually is, far from united in some areas of doctrine and practice. . . ." That the president of a synodical district and the chairman of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations should make this observation is significant.

How did we arrive at the place where an eminent official of the Synod can make this claim? No single answer will suffice. But until we can identify and treat the causes of doctrinal disunity, we can never find a solution. And if we cannot find a solution, the Synod must be prepared to acknowledge the implications of its own *Brief Statement* (Article 29):

The orthodox character of a church is established not by its mere name nor by its outward acceptance of, and subscription to, an orthodox creed, but by the doctrine that is actually taught in its pulpits, in its theological seminaries, and in its publications. On the other hand, a church does not forfeit its orthodox character through the casual intrusion of errors, provided these are combated and eventually removed by means of doctrinal discipline, Acts 20:30; 1 Timothy 1:3.

Our beloved Synod is at a crossroad and must choose one of two paths. Either we will be an orthodox synod or we will be a unionistic fellowship. There is no third and middle ground.

When I became a member of a congregation of the LCMS in 1978, I was overwhelmed by the profound desire of the Synod to move forward again in unity of doctrine and practice. How refreshing that was to a refugee from the old Lutheran Church in America! When I began my studies at Concordia Theological Seminary in 1980 and sat in the classrooms of the finest theological faculty in existence, I began to understand the reason that I was so thrilled to be a part of the Missouri Synod. These teachers thought and taught with the words of Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions – in other words, with the language of the church. How powerful those words were then! How powerful they are today as my colleagues at Concordia Theological Seminary continue to endeavor to speak the language of the church!

President Kieschnick's letter, with heartfelt praise of district conventions as the ultimate expression of the Synod's voice, does more than merely bemoan a loss of doctrinal unity. He also pleads for honest discussion: "In this writer's humble opinion, such questions among us must be resolved, prayerfully and carefully, on the basis of our Scriptural-Confessional study, sharing, dialog and mutual conversation, informed by our constant focus on the mission of God's Church!" In my even more humble opinion, President Kieschnick is entirely correct on this point.

The problem is that many in the church no longer speak the language of the church, preferring instead that each person do what is right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6) or, more precisely, say what is right in his own ears. This preference seems to me to be at the heart of the doctrinal issues that divide us and keep us from truly walking together. The vocabulary and syntax of theology are important, and it is vital that we all speak the same theological language. After all, the work of a pastor and theologian is to speak and write so that eternal truth is communicated to human beings. To fulfill this calling we must use human words. We do not speak with the language of angels, but with the language of people, whether that language is English, Spanish, Russian, Sign, or any of the myriad of other tongues in this world. The Tower of Babel broke down the commonality of language, but not the commonality of a need to hear and understand the truth of the Creator whom the people of Babel thought that they could reach with their tower.

What theological languages, then, do we speak in the Synod today? While others could certainly be identified, several will suffice to characterize the modern Babel in our midst:

### 1. The Language of Foreign Liturgy

Every community of faith shapes and is shaped by any number of factors involving language. Among these is the liturgy of the community that arises from the language and thought that is its own. To superimpose the liturgy of one community on another that does not share its theological life is to impose a foreign culture on that community. Something will change, and more often than not that something is the doctrine of the community. To be more specific, a Lutheran congregation that adopts a Baptist liturgical form will eventually find itself more Baptist in theology as well and less Lutheran in both.

Two examples may be cited. First, during a Divine Service, I heard a pastor offer the following absolution: "Upon this your confession, I announce the grace of God to all of you who truly repent." It was, to be sure, a slight modification of the words, but it was a major redaction of the doctrine of justification! No longer does the objective justification of the world in Christ Jesus serve as the basis of absolution. Now repentance is its basis.

Second, several years ago, the Fort Wayne Lutheran Schools conducted a "worship celebration" entitled "Christ-Liked." In addition to some of the more shallow of contemporary choruses, the children were asked to participate in antiphonal readings. John 3:16 ("God so loved the world") was spoken by all, and response by all the students in the ninth through twelfth grades was "Fine." God loves the planet. But does He love us? Is not "humanity" the meaning of the word "world" in the text of John 3:16? How can truth be communicated if the clear language of Holy Scripture is obfuscated? Later in the "celebration" a Baptist minister gave his "testimony." I do not recall his exact words, but they did not help to clarify the antiphonal reading.

In the same service some students read these words: "God, through Paul, tells us in Colossians 3 to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." Verse 13 also mentions that we are to forgive. To this sentence other students responded: "I think I can do that." In fact, however, we humans cannot "do that." We are incapable of fulfilling the law of God. It is for this reason that God sent His Son to fulfill the law for us. Whatever happened to the simple language of law and gospel?

### 2. The Language of Morology

As it is with liturgical language, so it is with the language of theological interchange. In some cases, it is quite obvious and borders on morology. A certain publishing house, with a staff of editors and writers who certainly possess at least one dictionary among them, advertises itself with these words

"We resource churches." This claim is certainly memorable and catchy in the fashion of Madison Avenue, but what does it mean? The word "resource" is a noun, not a verb. The slogan of this advertising campaign probably does not affect the theological life of the Synod. But it does illustrate the casual manner in which the English language is employed.

One generally intelligent and thoughtful Lutheran pastor fell into the habit of speaking of congregational size in terms of "they worship 100." I asked him how such worship was possible since the congregation that I attend worships only One Essence in three persons, that is to say the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. A hundred seems a great many to me, since "worship" is a transitive verb with a deity as its object. To say that a congregation worships "100" is to speak meaninglessly at best. While cute and trendy, such language does not indicate careful theological reflection, nor does it help us in engaging in serious dialogue. A trusted colleague tells me that such terminology is common among the Reformed. If such is the case, it illustrates the influence, not only of morological, but also of Reformed thought, on Missourians.

### 3. The Language of American Evangelicalism

More dangerous yet is the insidious reshaping of Lutheran thought through the unreflective adoption of the theological language of American evangelicalism. This phenomenon is easily identified. A Lutheran pastor once spoke approvingly of the "ministry" of a Pentecostal evangelist. He admired him because "he has saved thousands of people." I responded by stating that I knew someone who had saved billions, not just thousands. "Who?" he asked almost breathlessly. "Jesus Christ," I replied. I must say, in fairness to this pastor, that he certainly did not mean what he said. Yet his language betrayed his intentions. Few pastors in the Missouri Synod would speak as foolishly. Unfortunately, however, it is increasingly common to make words mean whatever the individual wants them to mean.

### 4. The Language of Corporate America

American evangelicalism is not the only force that undermines Lutheran theological thought through its linguistic influence. Too often the language of the secular American culture is allowed to dominate the language of the church. Some congregations, for example, now have a "Board of Directors" and a pastor who is designated as its "Chief Executive Officer" (CEO). These are good terms to describe an efficient business structure. They do not, however, reflect anything known from Holy Scripture or the Lutheran Confessions or the historic practice of the church. The use of such language recasts the church from her image as the Bride of Christ, a biblical "she" in

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union with the Heavenly Bridegroom, to a secular "it" in union with corporate America.

### 5. The Language of Extremism

Not all destruction, however, of the language of the church comes from the outside. Often it arises from controversy among her children. In recent years, much debate has taken place over the doctrine of the ministry. This debate, tragically, has often been heated and has led to overstatements on both sides of the issue. Some, in the heat of debate and with a desire to defend the divine origin of the office, have said that "the pastor is Jesus." Others, in the heat of debate and with a desire to defend the priesthood of all believers, have spoken in terms of the pastor as merely performing the functions that rightly could be performed by any baptized Christian.

Such extreme language leads either, on the one hand, to a near deification of the pastor or, on the other hand, reduces the office to something only necessary to good order and thus a function of the law. The genius of the Missouri Synod in maintaining a balanced and biblical view of the pastoral office is lost in the ensuing debate. Nowhere is this balance clearer than in two nearly contemporary documents. The *Brief Statement* of 1932 asserts that the pastor executes his office by virtue of the call that he has received through his congregation: "By the public ministry we mean the office by which the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments are administered by order and in the name of a Christian congregation" (Article 31). The *Lutheran Hymnal*, published in 1941, balances this statement with the assertion that the pastor executes his office by the virtue of the mandate that he has received from Christ:

Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Does the pastor serve as the representative of Christ or of the congregation? The answer of the Missouri Synod in the 1930s was not one or the other, but both. On the other hand, the language used in debates today is often such that an unbalanced view of the office is implied.

### 6. The Language of Unreflected Repristination

Some theological language is perhaps less recent and yet just as imprecise. It is not uncommon, for example, to hear that one is saved "by faith." But is that phrase what we mean to say? Is faith the cause of salvation, or is it the

receiving instrument through which one apprehends the salvation offered in the gospel? Are we saved *by* faith or *by* grace *through* faith? There is a difference and that difference is critical to any serious discussion of soteriology. Propositions have meaning and their meaning shapes our understanding.

In a similar way we customarily speak of the pastor's call coming *from* a congregation. This phraseology is certainly true in a secondary sense. Yet ultimately, the call comes from God. For this reason we refer to it as a divine call. The congregation is a necessary part of the process as the Holy Spirit works to place a particular man into the public ministry in a particular place. To speak, therefore, of a call *through* a congregation would more accurately reflect the divinity of the call and the divinely mandated role of the congregation in mediating that divine call.

One may also ask how helpful some traditional theological terminology really is. If, for example, both law and gospel have a "narrow use" and an overlapping "broad use," how do we know what a speaker or writer really intends in a given context? Precision in language is difficult to attain. I have no doubt that I too can be criticized quite fairly for my own imprecise use of the English language. Yet, before we can begin the process for which President Kieschnick calls, we must rediscover a common theological language. We must, in other words, reclaim the language of the church and commit to speaking this language to each other in the process of scriptural and confessional study, sharing thoughts with others, in dialogue with others, and in mutual conversation.

Daniel L. Gard

### *Ex Oriente Lux*—Light From the East

Of enormous importance for world Lutheranism are the recent actions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania and of the Belorussian Evangelical Lutheran Church. The latter's "Declaration" is reprinted following.

The Lithuanian Church held its last synod—the event occurs once every five years—at the end of July 2000 in Tauroge. On December 2, the Belorussian Church held its constituting synod in Vitepsk. Four times since its foundation in the sixteenth century the Lutheran Church of Belarus experienced suppression by its enemies—lastly by the recent, unlamented Soviet regime. Now once more this long-suffering church has been raised from the dead. The event was fittingly celebrated the next day, which was the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of the new Year of Grace. Present were Bishops Kalvanas and Roth, of the Lithuanian and the Independent German



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Lutheran Churches, respectively. Also represented were the Polish, Ukrainian, and Missouri Synod Lutheran Churches.

What these two synodical gatherings had in common was an understanding of church fellowship that took the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions seriously. Both churches made it clear that while they could have all sorts of relations with all sorts of other churches, actual church fellowship was possible only with churches that stood firmly on the same biblical-confessional ground of the one evangelical, apostolic truth and doctrine. Both churches confessed the Bible as the inspired, inerrant word of God, and the Book of Concord as the true presentation of that word. This is in marked contrast to the soggy opportunism of the "Lutheran" World Federation, where historical criticism has for decades been corroding biblical authority and all Christian dogma.

The Lithuanian and Belorussian synods did not hesitate to make their professions of church fellowship quite concrete in terms of today's issues. Both churches specified four aberrations with which no church fellowship was possible. The four specifics named were compromise in the article of justification, surrender of the sacramental presence of the Lord's true body and blood, ordination of women, and approval of homosexuality. The first point clearly aims at the feckless "Augsburg Concession" to the Vatican on justification on the part of the "Lutheran" World Federation. The second point takes seriously the Sacrament of the Altar as confessed in the Book of Concord, but surrendered in church-political compromises with Reformed churches, like the Leuenberg Concord and the Formula of Agreement. This again involves many member churches of the "L"WF, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The last two points, ordination of women and approval of homosexuality, though at first seemingly unrelated, really form two sides of the same high-profile coin of modern feminist ideology. As also the ELCA is beginning to find out, one cannot consistently deploy Galatians 3:28, "there is neither male nor female," in favor of women's ordination, without surrendering to the "interchangeability of the sexes" all along the line, including same-sex "marriages"!

Both in Lithuania and in Belarus, liberal German and "L"WF forces were represented and made themselves felt. It struck this observer as particularly arrogant when an official German Church representative criticized the Lithuanian Church constitution and expressed the hope that his previous suggestion that synods be held annually and not every five years would now be enacted! And of course there were dire warnings against entanglements with Missouri's "fundamentalism." There was hand-wringing even over the homosexuality issue, with the plea that this should not be declared to be "contrary to the word of God," since others were also seriously "wrestling"

with this issue, attempting to be true to the word of God, but not adopting simple solutions! In Belorus Archbishop Kretschmar himself pleaded for a unionistic foundation for the new church, so as to embrace also Reformed congregations in principle!

In the contrary case he threatened division, that is, support of dissidents who would stand on a unionistic basis. The "L"WF camp showed what it really stood for: "tolerance" and "inclusion" for all and sundry—except for churches faithful to the Bible and the Book of Concord! The attitude towards such "fundamentalists" was clear: intolerance and division!

In nineteenth-century North America another set of "Four Points" played a decisive role among Lutherans. They were chiliasm, mixed communion ("open communion" today), pulpit exchanges with sectarians, and secret, anti-Christian societies. Eventually confessional and anti-confessional forces united and divided over those issues. Our East European brothers have now raised the standard of the Bible and the Book of Concord with unmistakable clarity and courage in respect of four points that go to the heart of today's confessional crisis in world Lutheranism and beyond. Our Synod and its sister churches worldwide must not miss this unique KAIROS of truthful confession and CONCORDIA!

K. Marquart

**Declaration of the  
Constituting Synod of the  
Belorussian Evangelical Lutheran Church**

**2 December 2000**

**City of Vitebsk**

We, the representatives of the Evangelical Lutheran congregations of Belorus, delegates of the Constituting Synod of the Belorussian Evangelical Lutheran Church, confess [our] belonging to the one, holy, ecumenical and apostolic church, which our Lord Jesus Christ founded, and confirmed through His disciples-apostles for all nations until the coming of the Lord's Kingdom, and which is called to preserve and propagate His message—the gospel—in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We confess that the cornerstone of the church is Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, Who has redeemed us from the power of sin, death, and the devil by His holy, precious blood.

We confess, that the only source and firm, inerrant norm of churchly teaching and action are the canonical books of the Holy Scripture (the Bible)

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of the Old and New Testaments, inasmuch as they are the inspired and infallible word of God as a whole and in each part of it. As the true expression of the biblical doctrine of faith we accept the symbols of faith of the Lutheran Church, set out in the Book of Concord and comprising the ancient catholic (worldwide) symbols of faith (the Apostolic, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan, the Athanasian), the unaltered Augsburg Confession and its Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, the Large and Small Catechisms of Dr. Luther, and the Formula of Concord.

We desire to have church fellowship with churches that are one with us in our confession of faith, are grounded on Holy Scripture as the infallible and inerrant word of God; regard as the true expression of the biblical doctrine of faith the Book of Concord; do not permit compromises in doctrine on the matter of justification; believe that during the sacrament of Holy Communion there are really present, distributed, and received in the bread and wine the true body and blood of Christ; do not ordain women and do not support the ordination of women; regard the practice of homosexuality as sinful and impermissible in the church.

On the basis of this confession we, the delegates of the Constituting Synod of the Belorussian Evangelical Lutheran Church, having voluntarily assembled here in the unity of spirit and faith, expressing the will of our congregations, proclaim the unification of the Lutheran congregations of Belorus into the Belorussian Evangelical Lutheran Church, being the successor of the Lutheran Church which existed on the territory of the Lithuanian Grand Duchy from the sixteenth century, and of the other Lutheran churches which existed in the territory of Belorus in subsequent times.

[This declaration, accepted unanimously, was translated from the original Belorussian by Kurt E. Marquart.]

## Book Reviews

*Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America.* By John H. Wigger. Religion in America Series, Harry S. Stout, General Editor. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. ix + 269 pages. \$55.00

The rise of the Methodist Church in the United States is nothing short of astounding, going from fewer than 1,000 adherents in 1770 to more than 250,000 in 1820. Along the way, Methodism helped change the face of American Christianity in both its doctrine (from Calvinism to Arminianism) and practice (from a liturgical service to revivalism). John Wigger's purpose is to document the story of Methodism's remarkable rise in the early national period, from the late eighteenth century when Methodists made up approximately 2 percent of the American religious population, to 1850, when they made up more than 34 percent and in so doing, to demonstrate how they contributed to a "fundamental reformulation of Christianity in America" (7).

Wigger divides the narrative into eight chapters: 1) The Emergence of American Methodism; 2) The Methodist Connection; 3) The Methodist Itinerant; 4) The Social Principle; 5) A Boiling Hot Religion; 6) Slavery and African-American Methodism; 7) Sisters and Mothers in Israel; 8) Methodism Transformed. Wigger argues that were it not for Methodism, Christianity may "have gone the way of the church in much of Europe." However, in America "religion came so firmly under the sway of the laity that popular beliefs and customs became the very frameworks around which new churches were built" (11). One might note that this was also the case in which older denominations transformed themselves, including the Lutheran Church. The impact of Methodism on S. S. Schmucker, for example, quickly comes to mind.

What was at the heart of Methodism's success? A host of factors, answers Wigger. "The replacement of state-sponsored churches with a religious free market, the pervasive impact of republican ideology, and the rising strength of America's geographic and cultural peripheries. . . . Methodism capitalized on these trends by identifying with middling people on the make . . . making use of an efficient system of itinerant and local preachers, class meetings, love feasts, quarterly meetings, and camp meetings; embracing popular religious enthusiasm; creating a variety of new roles for women; . . . and making Christianity accessible to African Americans." His conclusion? "Within this context the movement's style, tone, and agenda worked their way deep into the fabric of American life, influencing nearly all other mass religious movements that would follow as well as many facets of life not directly connected to the church" (5). The evidence for Wigger's sweeping claims remains apparent even today.

One of the more perplexing elements of Methodism and its relation to the emerging American mind is its hierarchical polity. Nathan Hatch, in his seminal work *The Democratization of American Christianity* (Yale, 1989), has shown that by appealing to Americans' sense of personal identity and self determination, pastors in the early national period were able to empower themselves by empowering the

people. How is it that Methodism and its episcopal polity could prove so effective in a democratizing atmosphere. Wigger hints at the solution to the problem. Episcopacy affected the clergy most primarily. The author tells the story of how bishops would keep their horses saddled and close at hand for a quick getaway when it came time to post assignments to circuits. On the other hand, while people on the circuits might be interested in the assignment of a preacher to their circuit, there was little they could do about it; and if the preacher was effective in his ministrations, then he would be readily accepted. In the end, pragmatism reined: "For the majority of Methodist leaders and followers alike, what counted most was the ability to reach the widest possible audience" (41).

*Taking Heaven by Storm* is a fine addition to the literature of American Christianity. Appropriate images are splashed here and there in the text, bringing faces together with names. The notes are extensive and will satisfy the student who wants to pursue topics for further study. Though the hardbound book is priced at \$55.00, the paperback, scheduled to be issued in September 2001, should make this fine work easily available to interested professors, students, and pastors.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

***The Encyclopedia of Christianity Volume 1 (A-D)*. Edited by Erwin Fahlbusch, Jan Milic Lachman, John Mbiti, Jaroslav Pelikan, and Lukas Vischer. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leiden: Brill, 1999. xxxviii + 893 pages. \$100.00.**

Based on the third edition of *Evangelische Kirchenlexicon* in 1986, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* will ultimately comprise five volumes. Once complete, it will provide a comprehensive overview of Christianity historically and theologically. If the remainder of the volumes hold up the high standard of the first (and there is every reason to expect they will, given the credentials of the editorial team), this set may well become a standard reference work for theologians and pastors in the church.

The volume provides rich summaries of the various Christian traditions of the world and demographic and statistical information on these traditions, as well as their representations in most of the countries of the world. For example, in this volume, there are entries on Argentina, Bangladesh, Congo, and Djibouti. Socioeconomic, philosophical, and extra-Christian entries also find their way into the work. Here entries include Amnesty International, the categorical imperative, democracy, and Depth-Psychological Exegesis.

The heart of the text is the fine theological and historical articles, with topics such as Alexandrian Theology (by Ulrich Wicker), Catechist (by Eckart Schwerin), and Deacon/Deaconess (by Elsie Anne McKee). Several topics receive more than one entry, a case in point being Saint Augustine. Eugene Teselle of Vanderbilt University supplies an excellent introduction to the life and thought of the North

African Bishop. Gerard O'Daly then offers a nuanced and succinct treatment of Augustine's theology. All entries feature concise and poignant bibliographies.

All in all, while *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* does lean toward a more liberal interpretation of Christianity in many of its articles, it remains an excellent resource for Confessional Lutheran theologians. Though the scope of the work is enormous, the work holds together well. The translations read very well and the scholarship is fresh. The one downside to the work is its cost. While \$100.00 for a volume of this type is not outrageous, it does perhaps place it outside of the means of many pastors to purchase it for their personal libraries. On the other hand, if church libraries could put together a plan for purchasing the volumes over a number of years, they would find themselves with one of the richest resources for questions regarding Christianity, its history and theology.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

*Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation: Essays Presented to David C. Steinmetz in Honor of His Sixtieth Birthday.* Edited by Richard A. Muller and John L. Thompson. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996.

David Steinmetz is one of the leading Reformation scholars of our day and a central theme in his work has been the study of biblical exegesis in the Reformation period. Therefore, a collection of essays by friends and former students devoted to the same subject is an appropriate tribute to Professor Steinmetz on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday.

Seventeen essays are organized into four parts, "The Medieval and Renaissance Background," "Exegesis and Interpretation in the Early Reformation," "Continuity and Change in Mid-sixteenth-century Biblical Interpretation," and a "Conclusion." While they exhibit a variety of approaches and topics, they all demonstrate a high level of scholarship and readability.

Especially noteworthy are the articles by Kenneth Hagan ("Luther on Psalm 116"), Timothy Wengert ("Melanchthon on Romans"), and Robert Kolb ("Nicholas Selnecker on Psalms"). Hagan's essay locates Luther as an exegete in the tradition of his medieval forebears by examining that tradition with respect to just one verse, but an important one to Luther, Psalm 116:11, "Everyone is a liar." Returning to Jerome and Augustine, Hagan points out that the medieval tradition understood the Psalter theologically and, therefore, this verse as a statement about man before God apart from grace. Luther sharpened the contrast between man and God and emphasized that only in Christ does man's false self-understanding cease, but in no way did Luther depart from his tradition or anticipate "modern" exegesis.

If Hagan has shown that Luther's exegesis was medieval, Timothy Wengert demonstrates that Melanchthon's was humanist, "Melanchthon's method rendered the exegete and the exegetical tradition nearly invisible. . . . Melanchthon blended evangelical theology and humanist method and placed

both in the authoritative mouth of St. Paul himself" (118). Using Melanchthon's *Annotations on Romans* (1522), Wengert shows how Melanchthon broke new exegetical ground in the sixteenth century by analyzing the epistle as a "letter, shaped by its author, using common rhetorical methods to make a single theological point, the letter's *scopus*" (126). But such an analysis was hardly devoid of theological relevance. Melanchthon, using the techniques and terminology of humanist rhetorical criticism, argued persuasively that the point of Paul's entire letter was justification by faith. He did this not by quoting the apostle to prove Luther, but by letting Paul speak for himself.

Robert Kolb's article on Nicholas Selnecker examines the latter's Christology as it appeared in his exegesis of Psalms 8, 22, and 110. Besides helping to compose the Formula of Concord, Selnecker also wrote voluminously, including a massive homiletical treatment of the entire Psalter. Kolb's analysis is based on this work.

Besides Luther, Melanchthon, and Selnecker, the articles in *Biblical Interpretation* discuss numerous non-Lutheran exegetes of the period such as Erasmus, Zwingli, and Calvin. As the examples discussed above illustrate, these essays treat narrow topics from a broad perspective. They offer careful readings of particular texts but place them into the context of larger themes present in contemporary scholarship. Most readers will probably not read this book straight through, but those that do will get a fine sampling of how today's scholars are studying biblical interpretation in the Reformation period.

Cameron A. MacKenzie

*Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements*. Edited by Richard A. Landes. Routledge Encyclopedias of Religion and Society, Davide Levinson, series editor. New York and London: Routledge, 2000. xii + 478 pages. \$125

With the coming and going of the year 2000, myriads of books on millennialism made their appearance. Covering millennialism in religion from A to Z in one almost 500-page volume, the *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements* is an outstanding resource with a sweeping scope.

Landes's editorship is supplemented by a fine group of associates, including the likes of Michael Barkun, Eugene Gallagher, and Robert Whalen, among others. This fine team brings a wealth of scholarly research and writing experience to the task. Articles touch on millennialism in Christianity and in World Religions. Ranging from 666 to Ghost Dance and from Demagogues to Y2K, the articles show a consistently fine level of research and are captivantly written. Many images supplement and enhance the text. Scattered throughout are primary source readings. For example, one may read The Delaware Prophet's Vision of 1762-63 (120) or a Letter Found in Jonestown. There is even the occasional appearance of millennial humor (371). Each major article features a bibliography.

Given the astonishing popularity of the Left Behind series—even among Lutherans!— and its less than subtle advocacy of dispensational premillennialism, this volume should prove to be an extremely helpful resource to pastors in the parish. Although the doomsayers of the year 2000 are busy revising their calculations, one thing of which we can be certain is that yet other attempts at discerning the time of Our Lord's return will be forthcoming. When they do, a book like this can provide significant aid in helping to the pastor in answering the questions of the people committed to his care. Its price of \$125.00 is rather steep for the average pastor, yet one may find it well worth the money, depending on the situation in which he serves.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

*God in Russia: The Challenge of Freedom.* Edited by Sharon Linzey and Ken Kaisch. University Press of America, Inc., Lanham, Maryland, 1999. 428 pages.

As articulated by editors Linzey and Kaisch, "The collection of articles contained in this book is designed to elucidate the peculiarities and issues involved in [the] meeting of the American West and post-Communist Russia in the arena of Christian purpose and mission. What are the existing prejudices, stumbling blocks, and perspectives, and what can we in the West hope to accomplish in the post-Communist East? What is hopeless to attempt? The collection is addressed to missionaries and those who support them with their prayers and dollars. It is addressed to historians, theologians and researchers. It is addressed to the ecumenically minded and to those who think the ecumenical movement is a hopeless enterprise" (19).

The sudden fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 opened the floodgates to foreign missionaries. Foreign and indigenous cults and sects joined the fray. In the brief span of twelve years, these mission efforts have caused resentment and negative reactions from both the Orthodox Church and the government. *God in Russia* is to be commended for its irenic tone and candor, as it attempts to understand and explain the convictions and passions, the laudable accomplishments and embarrassing blunders of both the western missionary enterprise and historic Russian Orthodox Church. A few quotations will suffice to demonstrate the insightful and thought-provoking nature of these essays. Deacon Andrey Kourayev strongly opposes western Protestants and their "'Bible' parties at the stadiums" in Russia. He posits that the Russian "people have a different understanding of repentance than those who think it can be done in ten minutes at the stadium. And while it may be possible to advertise the Gospel much like you do toothpaste in America, this method is impossible in Russia" (57-58). Writing from the Balkans, Dimitrije Popadic observes, "...when the Slavic people hear the word 'Protestant,' the ideas which come to mind are: loud, rich, Western, disrespectful of tradition and customs, and contentious" (246). Curiously, Papadic notes, "the optimum time for establishment of Orthodox/Protestant relations, spiritually, theologically, and ecclesiastically, might have been during the



Reformation" (248). Unfortunately, Orthodox Patriarch Jeremiah II (1572-1595) rejected the Augsburg Confession as obvious heresy and wrote, "And we beg you not to trouble us further...Go your way and write us not more about dogmas" (248-249).

Should Christian Churches from the West be engaged in mission work in the nations of the former Soviet Union? Is it in the interest of these nations to afford religious freedom to all religions, including the right to gather for public worship and the right to evangelize? *God in Russia* answers yes. The value of this book, however, is the conversation concerning the challenge of *how* mission work should, and should not be done. Here the issues are many and mystifying. Abbot Innocentiy Pavlov's essay addresses the inadequate translations of Holy Scripture in the Russian Language. He strongly advocates training Russian theologians and linguists in the most recent achievements of archeology, philology and exegesis in order that the unadulterated Word of God might be heard by the Russian people. From this Pavlov deduces: "The evangelism of Russia can be carried out best by Russians themselves. Just as Westerners generally are not able to translate from an 'insider's' understanding of the Russian mentality and culture without putting in years and years of study, so they also are not really qualified to reach Russians in a way that can be permanently satisfying. The best that can be done by Western Christians who have an earnest desire to help solve the problem of evangelism of Russia is to help Russia with good theological literature. First and foremost, Russians need help in the field of Biblical studies, to prepare well-educated scientists, theologians, and Biblicists to reach their own people. This may be difficult for Westerners to understand, but it is the view of most indigenous Russian Christian pastors, academicians, and missionaries, whether they have the courage to risk alienating their Western supporters and counterparts, or not" (245). Indeed, it is consistent with the missiological perspective of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne. In the past five years, CTS has trained more than thirty men (from the nations of the former Soviet Union) for the pastoral ministry, plus several women who serve as translators and musicians.

The Orthodox Church, however, is unprepared to respond in a positive manner to the new religious freedom. Its clergy remain largely uneducated and its leadership compromised. This is not surprising since the communists did their best to obliterate the Orthodox Church by destroying buildings and killing priests and believers. According to Russian scholar Dr. Boris Gontarev, "Officially and formally the communist power seemed to wither and die in August 1991. But some of the former communist institutions survived and are blooming even as you read this." Gontarev is referring to the "bureaucratic structure and top hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church." He advises Americans, "It seems incredible, but it is a fact. Regardless of their respectful beards and swinging big crosses upon their fancy robes, they are what they are—the same Soviet privileged officials fully rewarded for their blind obedience to the Soviet State and nominated for the clerical positions they inherited from their communist bosses"

(216). Gontarev is equally forthright in his critique of "evangelical" missionaries from America. "We must find devoted Christians who are Russian nationals. Give them a fitting preparation for the job and let them evangelize." Unfortunately, most of the preparation is grossly inadequate. "They graduate from short-term *schools of evangelism*, oriented in evangelical Christian theory and practice. But their newly acquired ability to play country-style chords on the guitar and sing the very inept Russian translations of English hymns will do them little good in evangelizing Russians in Russia. Frankly, I don't see a great future for this type of evangelism in Russia" (154).

The overall caliber of the twenty-four contributors is quite impressive. They comprise both ordained and lay scholars, including a former United Nations Secretariat in New York (Gontarev) and a former dissident who became an elected member of the first Russian democratic Parliament (Fr. Gleb Yakunin). The book also includes a forward by Dr. Ben Armstrong (executive secretary of the National Religious Broadcasters, 1966-89) and a second foreword by the Rev. Canon Michael Bourdeaux (founder and first director of the respected Keston Institute, Oxford, England). Theologically the authors represent two groups--moderate Orthodox and "Evangelical Protestants," (for example, from historic Reformed and Anabaptist traditions). Lutherans eavesdropping on the conversation can learn much about the historical, religious, cultural, and contemporary context in which mission work in Russia is carried out. Lutherans tempted to adopt missiological models from American "evangelicals" can also learn much about the futility of imposing a shallow American Protestantism, which lacks both sacramental depth and a corresponding thick theology of the Holy Ministry, upon the Russian people.

Coincidentally, I read this book on the train ride between Moscow and Saratov. I took the opportunity to run a few of its themes by one of my traveling colleagues—a young Russian who converted to the Lutheran faith. He corroborated the views expressed in several chapters. He remarked, "Most Orthodox people know little about Jesus Christ. They know who Jesus is. They know he suffered and helps people. However, when you take it to a deeper level and discuss the doctrine of justification and that Jesus redeemed us from sin, they lose interest." There is a major disagreement between the Orthodox and evangelical Protestants over the definitions for *proselytism* and *evangelization*. The Orthodox "consider it proselytism for evangelical Protestants to proclaim the gospel to those whose only contact with the Orthodox Church may have been infant baptism, while evangelicals view any with an inactive faith as in need of 'evangelization'" (391). Historian Yakov Krotov explains, "One problem is that the Protestant missionaries from the West came to Russia with the explicit purpose of proselytizing. Now you may call it 'converting the lost,' but this is not how it comes across to officials of the Russian Orthodox Church....I believe the practice of proselytizing among believers of Russian Orthodoxy is wrong. You should know that the Patriarch's position is that all citizens of Russia belong to the Russian Orthodox Church, whether they are believers or not. This also seems

wrong to me. The problem is how to make a distinction between the truly Russian Orthodox and mere Russians" (69). Krotov advises, "I recommend quietude and passivity on our soil. This does not mean that you cannot actively go about your work. It does mean that you must work quietly without making a ruckus. Don't try to be best friends with the Patriarchate. They despise you for your naivete because you never will achieve it." A 1996 survey in the Russian newspaper *Segodnya* "confirmed the fact that the great majority of Russians are not actively Orthodox...51% consider themselves Orthodox...30% assert that they are unbelievers...only 6% to 7% attend church services once a week...67% very rarely go to church" (392). Gontarev notes, "I firmly believe that the evangelism of . . . post-communist Russia is a very special kind of activity, decidedly different from the evangelical practices extensively used by Western Christian organizations in other unevangelized areas of the world. Spreading the Gospel in Russia has very little in common with evangelism in the Amazon jungle, Laos, South Korea, or even in the inner cities of Detroit or Philadelphia....Americans should realize that they are not evangelizing 'from scratch.' Actually you are engaged in the process of *restoring* the Christianity that existed in Russia long before Columbus discovered your beautiful continent" (217-218).

Timothy C. J. Quill

***Medieval Exegesis. Vol. 1: The Four Senses of Scripture.* By Henri de Lubac. Translated by Mark Sebanc. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998.**

Along with Beryl Smalley's *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, Henri de Lubac's *Medieval Exegesis* has long been recognized as a major contribution to the understanding of biblical interpretation in the Middle Ages. Unlike Smalley's work, however, de Lubac's appeared originally in French (1959-1963) and only now is appearing in English, thanks to Eerdmans publishers. Anyone who is interested in the history of biblical exegesis should be grateful.

As most readers of this journal probably recall, Martin Luther broke decisively with the medieval tradition by repudiating the fourfold interpretation of the biblical text in preference to one literal sense. But what is not always understood are the nature and origins of the tradition from which Luther departed. De Lubac's book provides that information.

So does Beryl Smalley's. However her work, first published in 1941, argues that the medieval approach to the Scriptures, that of treating the text as an allegory in which the literal meaning of the text represents other, more spiritual truths, has its roots in pre-Christian Alexandria, most notably in Philo. He interpreted the Old Testament the way pagans were accustomed to treating their primitive texts like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, that is, not as literal, historical accounts but as symbols of universal (for example, neoplatonic) truths. From Philo, Clement of Alexandria and especially Origen and then subsequent exegetes like Jerome and Augustine as well as their medieval epigones learned to read the biblical text as symbolic of Christian truths. Although more respectful of the facticity of biblical

narratives than Philo, they nevertheless understood the facts as pointers to ultimate truths. The literal narratives, especially in the Old Testament, were valuable not in themselves but in leading the reader to the spiritual truths they represented. For Smalley, therefore, a major theme in her work is how medieval exegetes recovered the significance of the literal meaning in itself; and implicit in her argument is the conclusion that biblical interpretation had taken an illegitimate turn right at the beginning of the Christian era under the impulse of the Alexandrians.

De Lubac's work is an answer to Smalley's and constitutes a defense of medieval allegorization, the impulse for which, he argues, is christological not pagan and is to be found in Origen, not Philo. De Lubac writes, "However numerous may be the borrowings that Origen makes from Philo . . . , it is impossible to assimilate these two exegeses. Origen's third sense [the sense of Christ], serves not merely to 'modify' Philo's exegesis, or, to put it more broadly, Jewish exegesis in general. Jewish exegesis is really and truly surpassed, since what is at stake is now a new principle which owes nothing to it" (150). In other words, for Origen and those who followed him, the key to understanding the Old Testament is not a set of universal truths but the coming of Christ. All the Law and the prophets give witness to Him and must be interpreted accordingly.

According to De Lubac, medieval exegesis is a profoundly christological reading of the Scriptures, "[Jesus Christ] is the Master of the First Testament as he is of the Second. He has made them for each other. He separates them and reunites them in himself. Thus, if such a transition can be made from one to the other, it is because it is a 'transition to Christ' and concurrently a 'transition that is effected in Christ'" (236). In principle, therefore, no reading of the Scripture is permissible if Christ is not its content—the work of Christ, the church of Christ, the promises of Christ, etc.

This means also that "Christian exegesis is an exegesis in faith. . . . Taken in its entirety, not in its details, and in its substance, not in its embroideries, it is an act of faith in the great historical Act that has never had and never will have its equal: for the Incarnation is unique" (260). The literal meaning of the Scriptures is true—all that it recounts has happened in history—but the purpose of the Bible is not simply to recount history but transform the reader by bringing him into Christ. Therefore, being true to the ultimate goal of Scripture means interpreting it in such a way that it nurtures faith, life, and hope in Christ. In other words, for the medieval theologian biblical exegesis necessarily included the doctrine, morals, and eschatological expectations of the Christian church because they are the ultimate content of the Bible. Not to find them there would be an act of unbelief.

Thus, De Lubac is eloquent in relating the medieval *method* of exegesis to the christological convictions of its inventors. The argument, however, is not entirely convincing. For example, when Luther began to lecture on the Scriptures (Psalms, 1513-1515), he already knew that one could employ the method to advance a

worldly agenda not Christ (WA 3: 11,12); and a few years later, when he actually repudiated the method, he was convinced that scholastic exegetes had used it to obscure Christ rather than to reveal Him (*Operationes in Psalmos* WA 5: 643-647). For Luther, the literal meaning was the christological sense. His Christian convictions did not lead him to allegorize the text but to a renewed appreciation for what it actually said.

That being said, however, even if one does not embrace De Lubac's argument in its entirety, this book is a remarkable achievement. The author's familiarity with a vast array of medieval sources is extraordinary and his ability to expound these sources according to their fundamental theological presuppositions is very impressive. To be sure, this work is not for everyone; Smalley's book is a better introduction to the subject. But for those who are seriously interested in the topic and have the requisite background, Henri de Lubac's *Medieval Exegesis* is required reading.

Cameron A. MacKenzie

Kathy Black, *Culturally-Conscious Worship*. Saint Louis: Chalice Press, 2000. x + 153 pgs. \$19.99.

Matters surrounding the planning and leadership of worship in multicultural congregations are this book's topic, though less attention is given to specifics and more to "cultural conflicts that arise in regard to the various expectations people bring to worship . . ." (Preface, x). Black cites her own book, *Worship Across Cultures* (Abingdon, 1998) as a resource for specific information. She wants to show how "assimilationist" congregations require members to subjugate particular cultural practices to a pre-existing pattern sponsored by the dominant culture. "Culturally-conscious" worship, in contrast, is intent on awareness and use of elements and styles from all cultures present.

An early chapter lists reasons people might join a multicultural church, or else a church of another culture, including desires to be integrated with a larger community, to assimilate to the dominant culture, to be loyal to denomination, to be geographically close to the building, to manifest concern for justice, or the desire to make a difference. One suspects these are reasons anyone might give for joining any church. Further, as in culturally homogeneous parishes, there are a variety of ways in which worship is planned in multicultural settings, ranging from the rubrics of a common liturgy to the pastor's preference or team of leaders. Again, the reader senses nothing remarkable about this, though congregations wishing to maximize diverse cultural resources are advised to use the team approach. A short section on various ways to deal with multiple languages in one church does offer some practical advice.

A chapter on "Kin-dom Visions and Kinship Values" attempts a theological apology for culturally-conscious worship. Besides the egalitarian motif, the "kin-dom vision" seeks unity-in-diversity, as opposed to the segregation of "kinship

values." Black reviews forms of inclusion and exclusion ranging from assimilation (subjugation of cultural particularities) through ethnocentrism, overlooking differences, internalization of perceived inferiority by minority cultures, to unity-in-diversity, the "kin-dom" ideal of Acts chapter 2.

Confusion about worship practices and expectations spring in part from cultural complexities, explored in another chapter. Worship leaders should be aware of and sensitive to expectations as to sermon length, musical style, announcements, creeds, methods of passing the peace, or greeting. Leaders do well to provide space for airing expectations and preferences, even though some cultural norms dictate silence around these matters out of deference to authority. In any case, as Black suggests, these preferences may have as much to do with denominational or theological tradition as ethnicity.

Culturally-conscious parishes should work to build a shared story, a unified culture made by balance and blend. For instance, a Korean presence might introduce the Tong Song Kido method of simultaneous prayer. Some used to kneeling and others who stand for communion might blend by varying the posture according to the liturgical season. A variety of musical styles and texts should be used. Black asks why some cannot sing the *Gloria Patri* with inclusive language while others use the traditional formula. Here, and in other spots in this book, sufficient distinction between theological and cultural matters is not made. The inclusive language preference is ideological, and, one presumes, does not represent a "culture" in the same sense that, say, Indonesia does. What sort of theology of prayer is suggested by the Korean prayer method? Where do the boundaries between cultural preferences and theological authority lie? The sensitivity this book encourages about diversity is not matched by consideration of the theological implications of blending various practices simply for the sake of a unity-in-diversity.

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*The Oracles of God: The Old Testament Canon.* By Andrew E. Steinmann. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999.

Debates about canonicity are not merely of academic interest. They touch upon vital areas of theological concern, such as questions of inspiration and inerrancy; the role and authority of the church in the canon's formation; and historic differences between Christian communions regarding the extent of the canon. Because of this, a study such as Andrew Steinmann's is of tremendous service to the church. By a meticulous analysis of ancient texts that shed light on the canonical process, he provides the reader with a detailed, yet lucid, account of the history of the Old Testament canon.

Steinmann introduces the subject with a brief description of several modern theories that posit various answers as to how and when the Old Testament canon was closed. Finding faults and weaknesses in each of these, he proceeds to lay the groundwork for a new theory. The main body of the work is divided into three sections. In the first, he explores a host of nonbiblical Jewish texts from the second century B. C. to the early first century A. D., the content of which implicitly or explicitly sheds light on two questions: (1) what was the extent of the canon (for example, which books are and are not included) and (2) was the canon considered closed (in theory or in reality)? The second section concentrates on evidence from the first century A. D., including, of course, the New Testament texts. Here, as above, the same two primary questions are posed to each text. The third section is divided into a discussion of the canon's history in both the synagogue and the church from the second through the fourth century. In the final chapter, he summarizes his findings, and, upon that basis, clearly explicates his theory of canonical formation and closing.

Steinmann's findings substantiate the three basic points of his thesis. First, the Old Testament canon was formed before the second century B. C.. This early date is supported by a multiplicity of early Jewish and Christian texts that assume the existence of a distinct group of books. Second, before Jerusalem's destruction in A. D. 70, the canon was not a *list* of books, but a *collection* of books kept in the temple archives in Jerusalem. This understanding of the canon explains the absence of any list before the temple's destruction. Third, when the temple archives ceased to exist, the canon made the transition into a list of books that were considered normative.

The evidence that Steinmann cites and analyzes proves not only that the Old Testament canon was closed before the second century B. C.; it also demonstrates that the majority of early Christians agreed with the Jews regarding the extent of the canon. Although some Christians argued with the Jews regarding the canonicity of certain *additions* to biblical books (for example, the Greek additions to Esther), they did not propose that other books belonged in the canon besides those accepted by the Jews in and before the time of Christ. It was primarily in the Christian west, largely due to the influence of Saint Augustine, that books historically viewed by the Jews and early Christians as outside the Old Testament canon, came to be considered canonical.

Steinmann's book is well argued and well written. It deserves study by all those who are called to meditate and preach upon "the oracles of God."

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*Psalm 119: The Exaltation of Torah.* By David Noel Freedman. *Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego.* Volume 6. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1999. 94 Pages. Cloth.

Of the eight acrostic poems of the Psalter, Psalm 119 (traditionally called "The Great Psalm") is the most easily recognizable example of this poetic genre. The psalm is divided into twenty-two stanzas (one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet) with eight lines to each stanza, each line beginning with the corresponding Hebrew letter of that stanza. Of the 176 lines, 167 of them include either the noun *tôrâ* or seven other terms within the semantic range of *tôrâ*. The repetition of these eight key words (with *tôrâ* chief among them) establishes the undeniable theme of the psalm as delight in the *tôrâ* of YHWH.

In *Psalm 119: The Exaltation of Torah*, David Noel Freedman explores these well-known data about "The Great Psalm" in four essays (two previously published). His primary goal is to demonstrate that, contrary to the opinion of some scholars, Psalm 119 is not "an artificial product of religious poetry" (Weiser), but a creative, complex work of art exhibiting both symmetrical and asymmetrical patterns.

In the first essay, Freedman examines the similarities and differences among the eight acrostic Old Testament psalms (9/10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145). Six of these are paired (Psalms 9/10 and 37; 25 and 34; 111 and 112) according to similarity in structure. When the total lines or cola of these six pairs are added to the cola of Psalm 145, the number matches that of the cola of Psalm 119. Thus, Freedman concludes, the symmetry of the eight acrostic psalms is a master work of unity and integrity.

The second and third essays are concerned with the arrangement and distribution of key words, syllable count, and accentual count of Psalm 119. Freedman's punctilious labor reveals that the total number of eight key *tôrâ* words (177), although not arranged in a wooden fashion, approximate the number of lines in the poem (176). The average syllable count (16 per line) affirms the veracity of a quote from Eusebius of Caesarea that Hebrew poetry consists of sixteen syllables per line. The accentual count, however, follows no consistent pattern.

In the final essay, Freedman draws upon his structural analysis to summarize the theology of Psalm 119. Of special interest is his affirmation that "Psalm 119 gives *tôrâ* virtually the status of a divine hypostasis, like wisdom [ . . . ] in Proverbs 8 [ . . . ] Each of them embodies an essential aspect of Yahweh that nevertheless can be addressed, invoked, and appealed to itself as the object of devotion," (89-90). Such an insight undergirds a Christian reading of Psalm 119 which understands Christ as the incarnate *tôrâ*—the Word made flesh.

For those looking for a theological exposition of the text, or a verse-by-verse commentary, this is not the book for you. It is, however, a helpful analysis of the structure of Psalm 119. As such it provides a needed foundation upon which to



build further. Although the analysis is highly technical at times, numerous summaries and charts help the reader follow the course of the argument. Such scholarly treatments as Freedman's ought to be used and applauded by the church as she continues to point to Christ as the Key of David – the content and the praying one of "The Great Psalm."

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P4