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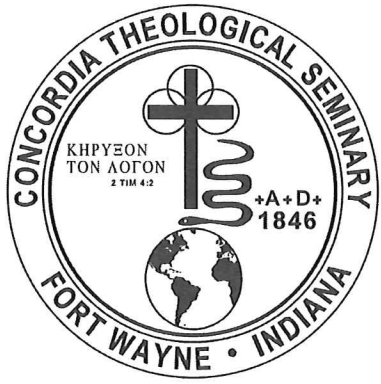

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The Metamorphosis of Confessional Lutheranism

David P. Scaer

Metamorphosis means that the external form of a thing changes, but the thing itself, its essence, remains the same. The Greek word from which the English word metamorphosis is derived is used in the transfiguration narrative to describe how Jesus put aside his humility and resumed the glory which was his from the moment of his incarnation: "he was transfigured [μετεμορφώθη] before them" (Matt 17:2).[1] Its cognate in Philippians 2:6–7, μορφή, is translated in the NIV as "nature" and not "form," as it is correctly rendered in the RSV, NRV, and ESV. Jesus put aside the external appearance of God, his divine *Gestalt*, and he took on the appearance of a man so that in every way he looked like an ordinary human being (Phil 2:7, ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων).[2]

This essay has to do not with Christological but confessional metamorphosis. Perhaps the plural metamorphoses is preferable because historically Lutheranism has taken several forms, some voluntarily and others by compulsion. In the theological milieu, metamorphosis means that ecclesiastical scenery changes. The church never remains in the same setting. In response to changes, the biblical books came into existence and sermons are formed or should be formed. Some sermons hardly differ from those preached at any other time. Historical theology traces past metamorphoses. Theology proper, systematic theology, is the science of responding to current changes. Paul Tillich's "how my mind has changed" might be described as an intellectual metamorphosis, but changing one's mind has to do with a fundamental change, a transubstantiation, not an external one, a metamorphosis. Conversion is a transubstantiation, not a

[1] I am continually amazed that some liturgically informed clergy genuflect at "he was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary" and not "he was made man," the moment in which the metamorphosis from glory to humility took place.

[2] The NIV, which until recently enjoyed official Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) status by its use in the lectionary, was in line with the Reformed position that Jesus had a divine nature but that the human nature was not given divine characteristics. The traditional Lutheran view is that the man Jesus has a divine form, *morphe*, which he exchanged for a human form, *morphe*, of which the crucifixion is its highest expression. Critical biblical methods have little interest in such old dogmatic questions since they move no closer than the historical Jesus that their methods allow them to discover.

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metamorphosis, because the reality of being a sinner is replaced by the reality of being a saint, or at least the one being placed alongside of the other. Each person's earliest circumstances constitute his or her first orthodoxy, and homegrown orthodoxy is not easily challenged. It is easier to stay put in one's home town and leave the rest of the world undiscovered, but different circumstances require one to reevaluate what he once thought about certain ideas and how he regarded other people. For example, what one thought to be thoroughly Lutheran ideas may turn out to be a lightly-coated Protestantism.

I. Biblical Metamorphoses

In recent times, changes in confessional Lutheranism have been more kaleidoscopic, perhaps more for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) than for the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). Basic changes in the LCMS version took shape in the first decades of the twentieth century, when it began assimilating conservative Protestant thought into its core belief. Another metamorphosis came after World War II with the intrusion of neo-orthodoxy which externally resembled the LCMS theology. Both the LCMS and the predecessor bodies of the ELCA were confronted with hermeneutic methods which cast doubts on the historical character of events in the bibical narratives. This was at the heart of the disruption of the St. Louis seminary in 1974, but contemporary biblical methods found a place in the LCMS without compromising the older faith. Challenged was the axiom that the older faith depended on the historical-grammatical method, which affirmed the Bible's historical character, but the method itself was incapable of going behind the sacred texts through the oral tradition to the events themselves. Form criticism as offered by Rudolph Bultmann and Martin Dibelius did go behind the biblical texts to events, though what they discovered was meager. For all its failings, form criticism recognized that before the Scriptures were written there was a world out of which and through which the Scriptures came into existence. The Scriptures are embodied tradition. Since salvation had taken place in the events and not in the texts which reported them, the events had a foundational importance upon which the tradition and later the texts depended.

Following form criticism came redaction and narrative criticisms. Like the historical-grammatical method, these methods dealt with the biblical texts and not with the oral tradition behind the texts. Form criticism and the historical-grammatical approach agreed that something stood behind the text, even though the former found very little of it and the latter found it by way of its doctrine of inspiration by first traveling with the Holy

Spirit into heaven and then back to earth. Though requiring belief in biblical history, the approach was fideistic. Current LCMS scholars have used the newer criticisms, always with the understanding that a real history exists behind the biblical texts but not always addressing a necessary connection between the event and the text. So the historical content reported in the biblical text remains an unexamined assumption. Richard Bauckham and Larry W. Hurtado trace the oral tradition back from the texts of the first century to the earliest witnesses.[3] Like other criticisms, it does not cross Lessing's ditch to the event itself, but we may have to accept that this ditch will never be crossed and we will have to content ourselves with those biblical criticisms which provide the best vantage points from which the events of salvation can be viewed.[4] Use of biblical criticisms by LCMS biblical scholars constitutes a real metamorphosis, but such use is normed by LCMS traditional core beliefs.

Through the controversies of the historical content of the Bible, the LCMS espoused a *sola scriptura* theology and lived off its own traditions. Its theological discussions inevitably devolve into determining what the founding father intended in *Church and Ministry* and *Law and Gospel*.[5] A

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[3] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), and Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in the Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003). In particular, see Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 1–33.

[4] Gottfried Lessing, an eighteenth century philosopher, set down the terms for critical biblical studies by putting the events themselves beyond the range of scholarly investigation: "The contingent truths of history can never become the proof of the necessary truths of reason." This referred to "the inability of historical 'facts' to guarantee the truth of kerygma and faith (e.g., Barth, Bultmann)." This is Lessing's "ugly ditch." Behind this was "the ancient Platonic distinction between *uncertain opinions* based on untrustworthy sense impressions of shifting external phenomena and *certain knowledge* of eternal truths known by reason alone." David Laird Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem: The Canon, the Text, the Composition, and the Interpretation of the Gospels* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 173. One is left only with uncertain impressions of things without grasping the reality of the things. Dungan notes that this is only an unproven axiom and is destructive of any relationship between God, man, and the creation. Since an axiom is impregnable to refutation, to participate in scholarly discussion biblical scholars committed to the incarnation and biblical inspiration may have to operate within the terms of Lessing's ugly ditch and content themselves in getting next to the event without asserting its factuality. Should Lessing's principle be applied across the board to all past events, nothing from the past could be known with certainty. This is contrary virtually to all human experience.

[5] C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry: Witnesses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the Question of the Church and the Ministry*, trans. J. T. Mueller (St. Louis: Concordia

reference to the *Brief Statement* may still in certain situations trump every argument.[6] Referencing convention resolutions and theological commission reports charts LCMS theology. Ironically, doing theology by self-citation may have contributed to the LCMS having a theology closer to the Scriptures and the Confessions than other Lutheran churches who were more attuned to newer biblical methods. More than anything else, LCMS tradition was the one reason which allowed for the LCMS to survive its own Armageddon in the 1970s when it was faced with biblical methods which undermined biblical history. In spite of the prominence of *sola scriptura* as the reigning principle in doing theology, by relying on its own tradition the LCMS operates according to a catholic principle, as idiosyncratic as that may be.[7] After the trends of the 1970s, LCMS scholars followed the lead of Evangelical scholars by participating in critical biblical conversations.[8] No longer was the historical-grammatical method enthroned as the Rosetta Stone for unlocking the Bible's meaning. Passages could not simply be collected to provide support for an existing dogmatic system. Concordia Theological Seminary students no longer take one course in biblical hermeneutics, but they take courses that cover the four Gospels, the Pauline Epistles, the Pentateuch, the Major Prophets, and the Psalms. The biblical documents are confronted in their own particularities.[9] One shoe does not fit all.

Publishing House, 1987), and *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel: Thirty-Nine Evening Lectures*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929).

[6] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932).

[7] Frank C. Senn observes the following: "Even the LCMS is not as lock-step in its biblical interpretation of the Bible as we might suppose. Otherwise, that synod wouldn't be engaged in intense internal debates over such issues as closed versus close communion or prayers with others in the public arena." "One Book, One Church, No Longer," *Lutheran Forum* 40, no. 3 (2006): 11.

[8] See for example Bethany R. Nummeia, "The Impact of Postmodernism on Missouri Synod Biblical Interpretation," *Lutheran Forum* 40, no. 4 (2006): 53–56. Evangelical scholars have led the way in this area. See Grant R. Osborne, "Historical Criticism and the Evangelical," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42 (1999): 193–210.

[9] The following statement by Frederick D. Bruner was favorably cited at the December 2006 LCMS Consultation on Man and Woman in St. Louis: "Nothing makes the gospel according to Paul more necessary than the Gospel according to Matthew. For if Matthew's Jesus is telling the truth, then we badly need a Savior and his forgiveness that reaches down beneath our will, underneath our sinful acts, and covers our sinful *nature*, our subterranean *drives*, our *original* sins, our depths." *Matthew: A Commentary*, vol. 1, *The Christbook, Matthew 1–12*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 222.

Each hermeneutical method has the potential of uncovering something not previously recognized in the biblical texts. A method productive for one biblical book, however, may not be so for another. Hidden in any method is a bias, which like any axiom is assumed and not proven. Form criticism could affirm as historical only that which had no parallel in the ancient world. Earlier liberalism took the reverse view. Only that with parallels in the extra-biblical history was true. Narrative criticism assumes that the evangelists were writing stories. Canon criticism addresses what the church believed when it collected the sacred books. Each biblical criticism defines the boundaries of its research and so avoids what it considers prior unacceptable approaches.

If one dare speak of a Lutheran hermeneutic, it is to be formed by the determinative Reformation issues of justification and the sacraments that made Lutherans distinct from the Roman Catholics and the Reformed. The doctrines of justification and the sacraments are both dependent on the incarnation. Sacraments are an extension of the incarnation into the life of the congregation. Without a real incarnation, the sacraments are without substance. A Lutheran hermeneutic must be incarnational so that the word that creates faith has a foundation in the event in which salvation took place, but recent methods like the historical-grammatical method show a hesitancy to take the leap from the text to the event. As already stated, the *sedes doctrinae* approach resolves the historical problem by using the doctrine of inspiration to support the biblical history. By using the Spirit to establish biblical history, however, faith is given a role for which it was not intended. Also problematic is that the older method determines which passages are clearer in comparison with others to support its theological system. This puts it at odds with its other tenets such as the perspicuity of the Scriptures and their plenary inspiration. In choosing the clear passages, the interpreter or theologian is no longer under but above the Scriptures. Biblical criticisms can be effective when they work within a church environment affirming what is already believed. This is as true for narrative and canon criticism as it is for the historical-grammatical method. Working outside of a churchly environment, biblical studies produce different and often amusing results. Bible passages are placed beneath murals in the rotunda of the Pennsylvania State House depicting episodes from the life of William Penn, that state's founding colonial father.

The secularization of the Enlightenment detached the biblical texts from church tradition, and this approach may be considered the majority view among university scholars. Scholars "moved by faith concerns are [held to

be] irrelevant to the scholarly enterprise."[10] By eliminating faith based communities from the hermeneutical task, *sola scriptura* is given full reign. In the face of this understanding of *sola scriptura,* one should recognize that the theological task is not only directed by the biblical texts but by the catholic principle, which in providing the historical dimensions to the theological task looks at what the church has believed and practiced. Church beliefs and practices are rooted in the beliefs and practices found in the teachings and actions of Jesus and the apostles. The evangelical principle is the reliance of the theological task on the Bible and the catholic principle is following the church example. One looks at what Christians were doing. Since the Scriptures arose from within and were formed and preserved in the life of the church, the evangelical and catholic principles constitute one principle in such a way that one informs and critiques the other. Allowing the Scriptures to stand as a solitary authority, which is what *sola scriptura* means, would allow a non-believer the same right of interpretation as a believer.

II. Liturgical Metamorphoses

Contemporary liturgical movements, now with a middle age paunch, also classifies as a metamorphosis. New worship forms, initiated with Protestant freedom, were placed alongside of traditional ones. It tested the Aristotelian theorem that the accident of a thing could be separated from the substance of a thing without changing it. For example, brown as a color is an accident of hair, which can be changed to white and the hair remains hair. No one is arguing that Aristotle got it right, but it is helpful in understanding what was intended with liturgical metamorphoses. External worship forms can be changed without affecting core Lutheran beliefs, so the argument goes. Whether this is so or not can be tested by collecting and analyzing field data. Are members of congregations using new worship forms more or less likely to be Lutheran than those who use *The Lutheran Hymnal* from 1941?

Liturgical metamorphoses are not new to Lutherans. After the Reformer died, imperial forces entered Lutheran lands to impose Catholic worship forms, which under different circumstances may not have been so bad. In the nineteenth century, Prussian rulers eliminated characteristic Lutheran forms of worship in favor of Reformed ones with the intent that a liturgical metamorphosis would work its way down into the core belief. Lutherans

[10] Richard B. Hays, "Theological Interpretation of the Bible: Diverging Roads," in *A Report from the Center – Autumn 2006,* ed. Michael Root (Columbia, SC: Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, 2006), 3.

would then discover that they were not that much different from the Reformed, and two centuries later it seems as if it worked. Contributing to the success of inaugurating a common liturgy in Lutheran and Reformed congregations was the Enlightenment of the previous century, when Lutherans had de-sacramentalized their liturgical forms. So metamorphoses of doctrine and worship can come from either the outside or inside and be imposed by force or undertaken voluntarily.

An example of disjunction of outward form and essence can be taken from LCMS history. For the first century of the Synod's existence, months could pass without the Lord's Supper being offered in its congregations. As recently as half a century ago, only a monthly celebration was common.[11] Along with this minimal sacramental practice was the LCMS insistence that the Sacrament was really Christ's body and blood, but the rite itself did not rank up there with the preached word. Preaching was an every-Sunday event, but the Sacrament was not. The Lord's Supper, like Baptism, was a secondary fundamental doctrine. Call it "Protestant Practice, Catholic Substance." The LCMS dialectic between what it said about the Sacrament and its practice was not as blatant as what was found within the common space of the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer with its catholic formula for distribution followed by a Zwinglian sacramental definition in the Thirty-Nine Articles found in the back of the book. For the LCMS, it was Nestorian. Doctrine and practice existed in parallel lines that touched each other four times per year. LCMS sacramental belief was partially fueled by its determination not to be Reformed, but the common LCMS receptionist doctrine of the Lord's Supper came close to the Reformed view. Yes, earthly elements serve as vehicles of Christ's body and blood but only for the shortest time at the moments of its being received into the mouth. Belief that Christ's body and blood were on the altar or in the hands of the clergy person was considered an unacceptable Catholicism. For the Reformed, faith had a role in making the Sacrament what it was. The mouth performed this role for many Lutherans.

A significant metamorphosis towards catholic form came with the introduction of the common service taken from a predecessor synod of the

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[11] One historian describes the situation in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod as Zwinglian. Mark Braun, "The Black Geneva Piety of the Wisconsin Synod: An Analysis of the Changing View of the Relationship of Doctrine and Liturgy within the WELS," *Concordia Historical Quarterly* 79 (2006): 182–187. According to Braun, the average LCMS communicant received the Sacrament only twice a year. "The Black Geneva Piety," 188.

ELCA into the LCMS hymnal in 1912 and its retention in *The Lutheran Hymnal* in 1941. Yet as long as page five, "The Order of Morning Service without Communion," and not page fifteen remained the norm, the worm had not become a butterfly. The title, "The Order of Morning Service without Communion," was more Protestant than catholic and so it was neither biblical nor catholic. It might be appropriate for a lay-led service, but then the issue of whether a lay person could lead any service was not envisioned. Editorial changes in *Lutheran Worship* and the *Lutheran Service Book* rectified matters. In their lifetimes, Arthur Carl Piepkorn and Berthold von Schenk were controversial figures for advancing catholic-style worship,[12] but what they advocated is now common practice. At one time, college and seminary chapel services were regarded as no different from family devotions consisting of a hymn, sermon, and prayer. Leaders were attired in black academic robes. Congregations worshiped in the same way. From externals it might appear that LCMS congregations had succumbed to the Enlightenment or joined the Prussian Union. Not only are surplice, alb, and stole now the usual garb, but chasubles no longer create the horror that the pope's troops are at the gates. A weekly eucharistic celebration is more the norm than the exception[13] and has been matched by more sacramentally developed theologies and biblical interpretation. Manuscripts arguing that the evangelists had eucharistic intentions in the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer and in the miraculous feedings are no longer rejected by LCMS doctrinal reviewers,[14] though non-sacramental interpretations are the preferred coin of the realm.[15]

Liturgical metamorphoses, placing the catholic principle alongside of the evangelical one, have not developed far enough in the LCMS to compete

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[12] Braun, "The Black Geneva Piety," 189–191.

[13] When nearly all LCMS clergy wore morning coats and black academic robes for the service, Berthold von Schenk was advocating a full eucharistic liturgy. For his own account of reasons for its re-institution, see Berthold von Schenk, *Lively Stone: The Autobiography of Berthold von Schenk*, ed. C. George Fry and Joel R. Kurz (Delhi, New York: American Lutheran Publicity Bureau, 2006), 121–148.

[14] David P. Scaer, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Church's First Statement of the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 170–183. Within the context of Matthew, the reference to "daily bread" in the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer can only with difficulty be taken as a reference to ordinary food, since concern for this is seen by Jesus as a lack of faith. The LCMS procedure for doctrinal review should itself be reviewed. Though it seems farfetched, the account has been substantiated that an LCMS doctrinal reviewer initially rejected Luther's Flood Prayer from the agenda of the *Lutheran Service Book*.

[15] Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 331–335.

with Rome in attracting dissident ELCA clergy.[16] LCMS clergy in search of a more definitive catholic principle have made Eastern Orthodox communions and not Rome the port of choice. Since Lutheranism arose within Roman Catholicism, it is hard to explain this attraction to the East. Though the lure of a church with a more catholic program remains strong, the American religious atmosphere is Protestant. Classical Calvinism determined the religious character of the New England colonies, but the prevailing Protestant climate is Wesleyism. Lutherans in this country are more likely to see themselves as Protestant.[17] With Roman Catholics adopting Protestant worship practices and Lutherans heavily invested in liturgical revival, Lutherans may be less uncomfortable with Roman Catholicism than they were a half-century ago. While the ELCA breathes in the classical liberal air of mainline Protestantism,[18] the LCMS leans toward evangelicalism, a movement in which Wesleyism wins over Calvinism. Lutheran presentations of biblical inspiration and faith look suspiciously like the Reformed definition. Missing in Evangelical definitions of inspiration is the christological component which locates Christianity in the history of Jesus. Faith is regarded as of greater importance than the sacraments—an amazing conclusion—since the sacraments are the forms with which the Trinity is clothed.[19] By being placed side by side with the sacraments, which really are tangible things, faith also becomes a thing. In beginning the theological task with God and not Christ, one is closer to Calvin than Luther.[20]

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[16] Leonard R. Klein notes that Lutherans with a strong creedal commitment, like the LCMS, are not as sacramental as the Wittenberg reformers. "Part of the Problem Goes All the Way Down," *Logia* 15, no. 4 (2006): 19. This may reflect the situation in the middle of the last century. Newer pastors are more likely to have a greater liturgical awareness than pastors did a century ago.

[17] The introduction of traditional liturgical forms was seen as catholic. For a discussion of this issue in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) see Braun, "The Black Geneva Piety," 189–191. This attitude was widespread in the LCMS.

[18] Robert Benne, "Lutherans Undefined," *First Things* 157 (2005): 12–15.

[19] Gary Budinger expresses the classical Evangelical belief that faith is more important than Baptism: "I thought the sacraments vs. faith path to salvation was a key difference between 4th-century orthodox Christians and 16th-century evangelicals." Letter to the editor, *Christianity Today* 50, no. 12 (2006): 10. Compare Francis Pieper: "Baptism and the Lord's Supper, important as they are, do not have same importance and necessity as basis of faith as the Word in the form of the Gospel and are therefore called secondary fundamental articles." *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 1:86.

[20] N. T. Wright points out that beginning with "God" leaves open the understanding of what is meant by "God." This meant something different to Greeks who worshipped

III. Metamorphoses in the Office of the Ministry

With different historical roots, ELCA metamorphoses are not the same as those of the LCMS. Its liturgical roots are deeper and provided a basis for an alliance with the Episcopal Church in America (ECA). Comprising churches formed in colonial America, the ELCA doctrinal core was formed in Pietism, shaped by the Enlightenment, and turned in a time-reverse towards confessional Lutheranism by Charles Porterfield Krauth. Today the confessional voice is raised by the Society of the Holy Trinity whose membership is predominantly ELCA clergy. They recognize that the ELCA is more and more indistinguishable from mainline Protestantism. This agony has been spelled out in the pages of *Forum Letter* and *First Things* and has recently appeared in *Logia*, and the ink on this issue is not likely to go dry.

ELCA changes arguably have to do more with doctrinal substance and less with appearances, but the metaphorical elephant in the room for the ELCA catholic party is the ordination of women. Women serving as eucharistic leaders constitutes a real metamorphosis. For two millennia, catholic practice—a redundant phrase, since catholic means what *is* practiced—did not know of this. It is difficult to say whether the change came first in the form or in the substance. Perhaps one is as much the cause and effect of the other. Since socialist northern European governments required women pastors, the change began in the form. Hence this was a metamorphosis with a theological readjustment following. In America the movement requiring equality between the sexes, as for example in the almost successful Equal Rights Amendment, provided this impetus to let women celebrate the Eucharist. This was followed by change in substance, namely, that biblical passages once used to allow only male clergy were judged to be adaptations to ancient cultural norms and hence were no longer binding for church practice. In other words, the Holy Spirit accommodated himself to the times of the biblical writers. This hermeneutical method flourished in eighteenth-century rationalism and has proven to be an all-purpose tool for conservative and liberal theologians to dispose of embarrassing passages.

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many gods than to Jews who believed in the God who was the creator and made himself known in Torah. "The Biblical Formation of a Doctrine of Christ," in *Who Do You Say That I Am*, ed. Donald Armstrong (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 50–54. One wonders if, in first speaking of God's sovereignty and immutability, we diminish our doctrines of incarnation and biblical inspiration so that we can only accept them with reservations. The God revealed in the Old Testament has been taken captive by the Greeks.

The equality movement did not stop in giving the ELCA women clergy, but it reappeared by determining the all-powerful ELCA church council according to quotas. Support for all this was wrenched from Galatians 3:28, a passage which really says that God does not use quotas.[21] With females constituting the majority of ELCA seminary students, the metamorphosis from a chiefly male to a chiefly female clergy will be in place in the next generation, as it is now already in the ECA. Consecrating a homosexual bishop in the ECA has raised to national prominence the question of whether gender and sexual preference is a factor in who can be ordained. It was raised at the last ELCA convention with a solution that satisfied neither proponents nor opponents of allowing homosexual clergy. Before his death, Louis A. Smith, a prominent member of the Society of the Holy Trinity, came around to opposing ordaining women and so the issue is not settled in the minds of some ELCA clergy. Reasons for leaving the ELCA for Rome are varied and complex, but ordaining women is part of the mix. Confessional minded ELCA clergy persons have expressed their concerns and dilemmas in *Forum Letter*, but for its editor the ordination of women is a non-issue. He writes that the ordination of women is "a closed subject, isn't it? Except for a few unenlightened holdouts—like, you know, Roman Catholics, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and the Orthodox—ordaining women is a done deal that's so done it hardly merits any discussion at all, not among civilized Christians at any rate. You just don't dare to bring it up, not even in gender-segregated company."[22]

It is strange that the majority of Christendom should be called "unenlightened holdouts." Among the unenlightened are my seminary classmates Richard John Neuhaus and Robert Wilken, the late Jaroslav Pelikan, Leonard R. Klein, and Phillip Max Johnson, formerly of the Society of the Holy Trinity—not the worst company to keep. Some "unenlightened holdouts" have suffered their share of public rebuke. The Right Reverend Walter Obare Omwanza, presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya, was removed from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Council for ordaining candidates for Lutheran ministry in the Church of Sweden. These candidates were willing to be members of the same church in which women clergy served but they

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[21] "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

[22] Russell E. Saltzman, "Down under Lutherans," *Forum Letter* 35, no. 11 (2006): 1. Pastor Saltzman wrote to say that I had not recognized his irony. True enough, but irony is an effective corner of the truth. I sent apologies.

refused to be ordained with them.[23] Ordination of women has become the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae.* Ironically, justification, which has the traditional honor of being the doctrine by which the church stands or falls, provided justification for the practice. The argument goes likes this: Since we are all forgiven or justified by faith in Christ, distinctions between men and women, including as they apply to the pastoral office, are no longer operative. Strangely the cry of antinomianism has come more from ELCA corners.

Paul uses both evangelical and catholic principles in addressing whether women can serve as preachers—the evangelical principle being the Bible and the catholic principle being practice. He first appeals to Torah, the evangelical principle (1 Cor 14:34, καθὼς καὶ ὁ νόμος λέγει), and—in the light of 1 Timothy 2:13-14—he has in mind Genesis 1-3, Torah in its quintessential form. Paul's catholic principle is his reference to universal church practice (1 Cor 14:33-34, Ὡς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῶν ἁγίων). Paul does not base his arguments for the Lord's Supper and the resurrection on his own experiences but on the composite apostolic doctrinal tradition as provided by the Jerusalem church. His citation of "a command of the Lord" (1 Cor 14:37, κυρίου ἐστὶν ἐντολή) comprises both evangelical and catholic principles. He received it. He did not invent it. This is the catholic principle. It is unlikely that "the command of the Lord" refers to a direct, mystical communication from Jesus, but to Jesus' commissioning of the eleven disciples. They were required to teach all the things that he taught (Matt 28:16-20, διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην). For Paul, both the words and the event in which the words were spoken constitute one divine command limiting the preaching office to men. In choosing men as apostles, Jesus determines who is eligible for the ministerial office. Lutherans are less likely to argue from example, but Roman Catholics and the Orthodox do.[24]

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[23] Walter Obare Omwanza, "Choose Life!," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 69 (2005): 309-326.

[24] Frank C. Senn argues that since all sides to a dispute cite the Bible, matters including the ordination of women cannot be resolved by interpretation alone. "Without the Confessions to guide us, biblical interpretation becomes what each church body and each person within each church body thinks is right." "One Book, One Church, No Longer," 11. All those who think this way can really come to no other conclusion than the conclusion that women should not be ordained.

IV. Ecclesial Metamorphoses

Future historians will be able to map out the current ELCA travail because those departing the ELCA and those remaining are leaving behind a clear literary trail. Current ELCA clergy are the primary audience of these orations and LCMS clergy the secondary ones.[25] In an op-ed piece in *Forum Letter*, "I'll Stay Here, Where I Stand," a slight reworking of Luther's famous "Here I stand," Frank C. Senn gives his reasons for not following Phillip Max Johnson, a personal friend and former co-leader of the Society of the Holy Trinity, into the Roman fold. Senn argues that the form of the Roman Church might not be as catholic as the recent converts think. "And in my congregation, at least, I don't have to fight a cultural battle to raise the level of liturgical music, such as several former Lutheran pastors have experienced in Roman Catholic parishes."[26] In other words some, perhaps a majority, of Roman parishes have undergone a metamorphosis so that they look more Protestant than Senn's church service. All this should have gone unnoticed by Richard John Neuhaus, but it did not. In converting to Roman Catholicism, he was by his own admission returning to his Lutheran roots or more precisely to an inchoate c(C)atholicism unrecognized in his youth.[27] Neuhaus concedes Senn's point—"The whack at Catholic music is fair enough"[28]—but at the same time he misses it. Senn is not speaking of musical aesthetics, but of Roman Catholic parishes compromising core beliefs with their worship. The question facing ELCA dissidents is finding the church in which one can best be a Lutheran—or catholic, as some see both terms as having the same referent.[29] Alongside of this ecclesial metamorphosis, a literary one has arisen. As problems arose in the LCMS in the 1960s and 70s, *Christianity Today* was the periodical of choice. Today *Pro Ecclesia*, *Lutheran Forum*, and *Forum Letter* are center stage. *Logia*, with its strong confessional bias, has become a rallying point for inter-Lutheran exchange. It is probable that a greater percentage of LCMS clergy read *First Things*, with its Lutheran to Catholic converted editor, than Catholic priests do. Card carrying priests are less likely to take Neuhaus seriously.

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[25] Klein, "Part of the Problem Goes All the Way Down," 19–24; Frank C. Senn, "I'll Stay Here, Where I Stand," *Forum Letter* 35, no. 8 (2006): 1–3; and Richard J. Niebanck, "The Inescapable Choice," *Forum Letter* 35, no. 8 (2006): 3–5.

[26] Senn, "I'll Stay Here, Where I Stand," 3.

[27] Richard John Neuhaus, "How I Became the Catholic I Was," *First Things* 122 (2002): 14–20.

[28] Richard John Neuhaus, "While We're At It," *First Things* 168 (2006): 69.

[29] See, for example, Carl E. Braaten, *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

A different metamorphosis is afoot outside of the United States. While ELCA clergy are taking the bypass around the LCMS into the Roman fold, LWF member churches in Latvia, Lithuania, and Kenya are choosing the LCMS option. Lutheran churches in Madagascar and Indonesia are looking at the LCMS. Not unexpectedly, the LWF is marshaling its financial resources to keep its members in line, and, where its will is defied, it finances competing churches.[30] Rome and Constantinople are not options for these European, African, and Asian Lutherans, and so the LCMS is the best show in town or the nearest port. Choose your metaphor. The LCMS is reaping where it has not sown,[31] not exactly like but somewhat akin to Luther and Melanchthon drinking beer as God was bringing about the Reformation. Maybe the interest of other churches in the LCMS is God saying "be all that you can be" or "become what you are" (slogans which I have never figured out). Clouds darken the LCMS's heavens. Decisions to ordain women have only been postponed in the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany and the Lutheran Church of Australia. Should either approve it, it would have met the one LWF criterion for membership and would disrupt the budding confessional consensus in Third World Lutheranism.

Emigration out of the ELCA and LCMS into Rome and the East can be counted pastor by pastor. Measuring the attraction of the influence of Evangelicalism or conservative Protestantism on the LCMS is not so easy, because Lutheran pastors can adopt styles of preaching and worship from Evangelicalism without changing affiliation. For years Billy Graham has been a model for ministers who fancy themselves conservative, but there is no mass migration into the Southern Baptist Convention. Infant baptism plugs up that hole. An inventory of Lutheran church libraries would be a good a barometer of influence from Evangelicalism. Since church boundaries are less of an issue for Evangelicals, change in church affiliation is not problematic.

Some displaced confessional Lutherans find themselves on a pilgrimage. Their looking for a home is a real metamorphosis, but perhaps this is the way it has always been.[32] If personal religious belief determined where one serves, several priests in the Archdiocese of Chicago would have become

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[30] Omwanza, "Choose Life!," 123–124. The LWF contributed $370,000 to support a church in a newly formed opposition synod.

[31] "I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor" (John 4:38).

[32] See Senn, "I'll Stay Here, Where I Stand," 1–3, and Niebanck, "The Inescapable Choice," 3–5.

Lutherans in Senn's opinion. For Lutherans, according to Francis Pieper, the chief doctrine is that members of the *una sancta* are those who believe that God is gracious to them on account of Christ's salvation.[33] To coin a phrase, they might be called anonymous Lutherans. Some of these are fully aware of the contradiction and suffer the agony. This contradiction between what a church believes and practices and what the church should be, the *una sancta*, comes with the Lutheran turf. The church is never so *sancta* in our own eyes, so, like all other articles of faith, we can only believe it.

[33] Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 3:424.

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Confessional Lutheranism in an Ecumenical World

Carl E. Braaten

One of the benefits of retirement is the time it affords to retrace one's steps, to write one's memoirs, and to speak one's mind without worrying about the consequences. The first essay I wrote and published after finishing my graduate studies in theology at Harvard and Heidelberg Universities in the 1950s was entitled: "The Crisis of Confessionalism."[1] I thought of myself then as a confessional Lutheran theologian, and proud of it. I had studied under Edmund Schlink and Peter Brunner at Heidelberg. Before that I studied with Paul Tillich at Harvard for two years and became his teaching assistant, but I never became a Tillichian. I could never make the categories of German idealism that controlled Tillich's systematics fit into my head. My mind had been steeped too long in the writings of the great neo-orthodox Lutheran theologians, such as Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros*, Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor*, Regin Prenter's *Spiritus Creator*, Hermann Sasse's *This Is My Body*, and Helmut Thielicke's *Theological Ethics*, plus the many monographs written by scholars during the hey-day of the Luther renaissance.[2] There was no question in my mind but that I would go on to become a teacher of Christian dogmatics in the Lutheran tradition.

When I began my teaching career at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in the early sixties—I was then thirty-two years old—I worried about the state of confessional Lutheranism in America. At that time many church leaders were calling for greater Lutheran unity in America and the world, leaders such as Frederick Schoitz, Franklin Clark Fry, and Malvin Lundeen, to name only a few. As I examined the scene, I observed that Lutherans were not in agreement on how to answer the simple question:

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[1] Carl E. Braaten, "The Crisis of Confessionalism," *Dialog* 1 (1962): 38–48.

[2] Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953); Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1951); Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, trans. John M. Jenson (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953); Hermann Sasse, *This is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959); Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, ed. William H. Lazareth, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), and *The Ethics of Sex*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1964). The Luther renaissance included Karl Holl, Emanuel Hirsch, Heinrich Bornkamm, and Paul Althaus.

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What is Lutheranism? Even those who believed it necessary to base Lutheran identity on the *Book of Concord* did not agree on how to interpret and apply the Confessions in the present situation. Already at that time Lutheranism in America found itself in a pluralistic situation. That trend has accelerated in the decades since. Using the typological method, I will describe various kinds of Lutheranism or ways of dealing with the Confessions.

I. The Crisis of Confessionalism

First, there was a kind of *repristinating confessionalism*. This position holds that the development of doctrine from Luther, through the Lutheran Confessions and seventeenth-century scholastic orthodoxy, is unilinear and provides a pristine model that all succeeding generations ought to retrieve and implement in their teaching. Second, there was a type of *non-confessional liberalism*. Much of the modern Luther research was motivated by the desire to appeal to Luther's experience of faith over against the lapidary dogmatics of Lutheran scholasticism. *Was Luther Sagt* [what Luther says] became more important than the confessional writings, especially among the followers of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl, and Adolf von Harnack. Third, some theologians had bought into an *anti-confessional biblicism*. Here one sees an appalling ignorance and indifference to the confessional theology of the Lutheran church, a condition that prevailed even in many seminaries. Among midwest Lutheran pietists, influenced by low-church Scandinavian revivalism, the back-to-the-Bible movement gave rise to the Lutheran Bible Institute. In general, it presented itself as an alternative to what the pietists liked to call the "dead orthodoxy" of confessional dogmatics.

There were at least three types of Lutheranism prevalent at the time. For the first type, the touchstone was the *Book of Concord*; for the second, the touchstone was the theology of the early Luther; and, for the third, the touchstone was the Bible. I would be false to history and my own experience, however, without taking into account a fourth type that was in the making, an embryonic movement quite complex and in search of new understanding and new expression. It was easy to say what this fourth approach was not: it was not repristinationist scholasticism, fundamentalist biblicism, culture-accommodating liberalism, or pietistic anti-intellectualism. To give expression to it, Robert Jenson and I founded a theological journal that we named *dialog*, a journal that aimed to Americanize Lutheranism. After thirty years of editing the journal, we abandoned it to found a different journal of theology that we named *Pro Ecclesia—A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology*.

Well, we have not come very far: confessional Lutheran theology in America, now in a new millennium, is still in a state of crisis, or, maybe worse, it may have contracted something like a sickness unto death. The emerging voices in American Lutheranism that collaborated in the founding and editing of *dialog* and that authored many volumes of theology, including two volumes of *Christian Dogmatics*,[3] have joined different choirs and are singing different melodies in theology. In the interest of full disclosure, I acknowledge that I am a partisan in the struggle with a definite point of view which, I hope, will become clear in the course of this presentation. To explain what happened in the splitting up of the group around *dialog* and the dogmatics project, I will need to deal with the second aspect of my topic—the modern ecumenical movement. The irony is that the very movement that was created to bring Christians and churches together has had the opposite effect of causing new divisions within the churches.

II. Catholics in Exile

The Second Vatican Council made me into an ecumenical Lutheran theologian. The most memorable year for me was 1965, the same year that the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues began. It was then that I gave my first ecumenical address. This was my chance to declare where I stood as a Lutheran theologian in the new ecumenical situation, shaped by the Second Vatican Council and the bi-lateral dialogues. To prepare the address I read a few new books. One was by Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism*, in which he devoted a chapter to "the tragic necessity of the Reformation."[4] His point was that although the Reformation was necessary, it was also tragic in its consequences. The second was by Hans Küng, *The Council and Reunion*, in which he debunked the traditional Roman Catholic idea of ecumenism as a perennial papal call for Protestants to return to Rome, as though Rome is home.[5] The third was an essay by George Lindbeck, "A Protestant View of the Ecclesiological Status of the Roman Catholic Church."[6] My address was entitled "The Tragedy of the Reformation and the Recovery of Catholicity." It was published in *Una*

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[3] Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Christian Dogmatics*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

[4] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism* (New York: Abingdon, 1959). "The Tragic Necessity of the Reformation" is the title of chapter 4, pages 45–57.

[5] Hans Küng, *The Council and Reunion*, trans. Cecily Hastings (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961).

[6] George A. Lindbeck, "A Protestant View of the Ecclesiological Status of the Roman Catholic Church," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (1964): 243–270.

Sancta by its editor, Richard John Neuhaus, under the altered title of "Rome, Reformation, and Reunion."[7]

The basic aim of my 1965 ecumenical proposal was to answer the question of how to affirm Lutheran identity with confessional integrity in an ecumenical age. Well, who are Lutherans anyway, some over sixty million of us? The question cannot be answered in a vacuum, but only in the context of our origin, history, and envisioned future. My answer was then and still is: Lutherans are Catholics in exile. To elaborate further, I argued then and have done so ever since that Lutherans, living in exile, are evangelical without being Protestant in a denominational sense, catholic without being Roman, and orthodox without being Eastern. To make my point, I adapted from Lindbeck's article a parable that harked back to World War II. In June of 1940, Hitler's army invaded and conquered France. Many a loyal and patriotic Frenchman, however, protested against the puppet government of Marshal Pétain installed by Hitler. They left France and rallied around General Charles de Gaulle, and they fought to liberate their beloved fatherland with all the Free French forces in exile.

Now, what if the Free French forgot the reason for their exile, and as expatriots became so accustomed to life outside of France that they forgot about returning and reuniting with the French countrymen they had left behind? What if they began to think and act as though what was meant to be only a temporary arrangement in an emergency situation had actually become for them a permanent home and established settlement? Suppose they ignored the cause of liberation for which they had left France to join the Free French forces of General de Gaulle and instead set up a new government in some other colony, calling it New France, with no intention of ever returning to the land of their birth. If that would have happened, one would call it a tragedy, akin to the tragedy of the Reformation.

The editor of *The Christian Century* wrote a scathing review of my article in an editorial entitled, "Protestant Hara-kiri."[8] Braaten was calling for Protestants to commit suicide, it said. The editor, Kyle Haselden, was angered by the very idea that Protestants should be asked to "return to Rome." The editor was a Protestant. In terms of my parable, he was thinking of Protestants as emigres, not as exiles. I responded that I was not writing as a Protestant but as a Lutheran, and, thanks to him, he had

[7] Carl E. Braaten, "Rome, Reformation, and Reunion," *Una Sancta* 23, no. 2 (1966): 3–8.
[8] Editorial, "Protestant Hara-kiri," *The Christian Century* 83 (June 22, 1966): 794–795.

helped to make clear the difference.[9] Lutherans are not Protestant emigres who care nothing about reconciling with those they left behind. That may work for the sons and daughters of Calvin, Zwingli, and Müntzer, but not for those of Luther and Melanchthon. No, Lutherans are catholics in exile, if they remain true to their confessional origins. Lutherans today should realize that they belong neither with conservative Evangelicalism, on the one hand, nor with liberal Protestantism, on the other.

The editor of *The Christian Century* had missed the point of my address. The exiles cannot return, I said, until there is a change of government back in the fatherland. Their struggle is to overcome a false government—an authoritarian regime—in control of their homeland and not to create a new Christianity. Ever since the Reformation, the symbol "Rome" has stood for false government. The catholics in exile are not prepared to acknowledge Rome as their final authority or the inflated status it claims for itself.

III. The Papacy as Ecumenical Problem

We are living in strange times. Some of my Lutheran colleagues have jumped ship and individually, one-by-one, decided that Rome is home. They do not accept the implications of the parable. For them there is no "false government" anymore, if there ever was, and there is no need to continue to call for changes in the way the Roman Church is governed from the top down. After one of my friends joined the Roman Catholic Church, I asked him, "Do you really accept as true the doctrine of papal infallibility?" He replied, "I do not look upon doctrine as you do, as something propositionally true or false." "Well," I responded, "how do you understand doctrine, if not true or false?" His answer was, "Doctrines are only the rules of the game." Admittedly, there is nothing true or false about a rule in playing a game. A rule is purely arbitrary. A field goal in football could just as well be worth five points as three. I do not agree with his response. It is a cop-out, and I believe it is not at all true to the way Rome understands its infallible dogmas. They are not mere rules but binding propositions with cognitive status, to be believed precisely because they are true.

In my view, there is no ecumenical advance or lesson to be learned when Lutherans leave their fellow-exiles to accept prematurely the false government that excommunicated them and drove them into exile in the

[9] Carl E. Braaten, letter to the editor, *The Christian Century* 83 (August 17, 1966): 1011. This letter was followed by a brief response, and the exchange received further comment in another editorial, "The Braaten Brouhaha," *The Christian Century* (October 26, 1966): 1296–1297.

first place. The number one issue that stands in the way has little to do with incense, candles, rosaries, saints, and all the rest. It has to do with the late-nineteenth-century dogma of papal infallibility, which the pope promulgated in his own behalf.[10] After reading the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues on papal authority and infallibility,[11] my judgment is that Lutherans need not be confessionally opposed to the papal ministry as such, but only to its false claim to universal jurisdiction, something Eastern Orthodoxy also rejects.

Then, out of the blue came the papal encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (That All May Be One), which claims to have heard the lamentations of the exiles. The Pope expressed confidence that if we would take Christ's call to unity to heart, "every factor of division can be transcended and overcome. . . ."[12] In this statement, John Paul II echoed the words of Pope Paul VI who said in 1967: "We are aware that the pope is undoubtedly the greatest obstacle in the path of the *Ecumene*."[13] I agree, with this qualification: the papal claim to infallibility and universal authority remains the greatest obstacle, despite growing agreement on other fronts.[14]

IV. Two Types of Confessional Lutheranism

Most Lutheran theologians who take their stand on the Lutheran confessional writings could perhaps agree with that position. Perhaps we can also agree that what we need now is a return to confessional teaching to recuperate our sense of Lutheran identity in faithfulness to the gospel and the Scriptures that convey the truth of Christ in the power of the Spirit. But then we come to a fork in the road. Ecumenism—*quo vadis*? Where do

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[10] The doctrine of papal infallibility was defined dogmatically in the First Vatican Council of 1870. This was reaffirmed by paragraph 18 of *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, which was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964.

[11] Published as Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy, eds., *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church*, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 5 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974), and Paul C. Empie, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church*, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 6 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980).

[12] John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Ut Unum Sint: On Commitment to Ecumenism* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), no. 1. For an ecumenical discussion of *Ut Unum Sint*, see *Church Unity and the Papal Office: An Ecumenical Dialogue on John Paul II's Encyclical* Ut Unum Sint *(That All May Be One)*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001).

[13] *Acta apostolicae sedis* 59 (1967): 498.

[14] See also Carl E. Braaten, *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

we go with our confessional Lutheran self-understanding—ecclesiologically speaking? What do we envisage for the ecumenical future of Lutheranism? History will not allow us to stand still.

George Lindbeck has said that Lutherans divide into two camps on how to read Luther and the Confessions. The approach of the one camp he calls "constitutive"; the approach of the other, "corrective." The constitutive approach sees the Reformation as the beginning of Protestantism, and Martin Luther as the founder of the Lutheran denomination. Alongside, there are other Protestant denominations with roots in the Reformation era, most notably the Reformed and the Anabaptists and their many offspring. Denominational Lutherans liken the *Augsburg Confession* to the Declaration of Independence. Today they call themselves "radical Lutherans." They believe that the first Lutherans have all the answers we need today. The founding documents of Lutheranism define the difference between Lutherans and all others who claim to be Christian, and there we should stand. It is hard for them to get excited about the ecumenical movement if ours is the only church with the pure teaching of the way of salvation, except possibly to use ecumenical dialogue as an occasion to bear witness to our sense of the truth and to refute the false doctrines taught by others.

The "corrective" approach, in contrast, sees Luther and the Confessions in continuity with the mainstream of the Western Catholic tradition. Its aim is to renew the church in line with the Scriptures, the Ecumenical Creeds, and the Fathers and Doctors of the Great Tradition. The claim of the confessors was that they were true catholics, in no way teaching anything new or different from classical Christian doctrine. In Article 14, the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* states: "Our consciences are not in danger, because we know that our Confession is true, godly, and catholic" (Ap XIV, 3; my translation).

The difference between the constitutive and corrective interpretations of the Reformation lies at the base of the controversy concerning the ecumenical decisions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Lutherans who understand themselves as evangelical and catholic do not read the Augsburg Confession as a "Declaration of Independence." The founding fathers of our nation who signed the Declaration of Independence had no intention of returning to the old country. They left it for good and did not plan to return when the war is over. They were not exiles but emigres. Evangelical Catholics challenge the Protestant self-understanding of Lutheranism as being one denomination among many. The concept of various denominations is completely foreign to the *Augsburg Confession* and its *Apology*. They were written as public

testimonies to the truth of the gospel on the basis of Holy Scripture and the ancient creeds of the church, to correct erroneous teachings and practices and to preserve the unity of the church that was endangered at the time.

History, however, played a trick on the intentions of the Lutheran confessors. After the Reformation, Lutheranism underwent a series of transformations that betrayed its original purpose to be a gospel-centered reforming movement within the one, holy, catholic church. Consider its roller-coaster ride through four centuries of bouncing from one "ism" to another—scholasticism, pietism, rationalism, romanticism, revivalism, idealism, modernism, historicism, biblicism, and fundamentalism, each one occasioning a new quest for Lutheran identity. Now historical destiny has given to Lutherans a new "ism"—ecumenism—one that ineluctably calls for a response. We certainly do live in an ecumenical age. We may receive it as an opportunity for new self-understanding and as a gift of the Holy Spirit to the churches of today, or we may run from it as from the smell of a skunk. In either case, we will be defined by our response—positively or negatively—to the ecumenical dialogues and by the decisions made or not made by our various Lutheran church bodies.

V. The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

Confessional Lutherans who understand themselves as evangelical, catholic, and orthodox believe that the best hope for the future of Lutheranism lies in the direction of reconciling differences, removing mutual condemnations, and restoring full communion wherever possible, as steps on the way to full visible church unity. So we rejoiced in the signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, therewith consigning to oblivion the mutual condemnations of the sixteenth century.[15] This is the biggest enchilada because it deals with what Lutherans have called "the article by which the church stands or falls."

According to the *Joint Declaration*, Lutherans and Catholics now confess certain basic truths: first, that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation; second, that God forgives sin by grace and at the same time frees human beings from sin's enslaving power and imparts the gift of new life in Christ; third, that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ; fourth, that in baptism the Holy

[15] The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000). Hereafter *Joint Declaration*.

Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies, and truly renews the person; fifth, that persons are justified by faith in the gospel apart from works prescribed by the law; sixth, that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God; and, seventh, that good works follow justification and are the fruits of faith.

Then the *Joint Declaration* states that "a consensus in basic truths of justification now exists between Lutherans and Catholics."[16] It goes on to declare that the mutual condemnations of the sixteenth century no longer apply to the teachings of the other church. It concludes with this prayer: "We give thanks to the Lord for this decisive step forward on the way to overcoming the division of the church. We ask the Holy Spirit to lead us further toward that visible unity which is Christ's will."[17]

This is truly remarkable. I believe that it is a miracle of grace. It is not good enough, however, for the majority of German Protestant professors of theology, probably because most of them since Kant and Schleiermacher have quit believing in miracles. No, that is not the reason. The more likely reason is that agreement on justification gnaws away at the foundations of the century-old concordat that keeps Catholics and Protestants apart. The thought is not original with me that consensus is perceived as a threat to their vested economic interest in preserving separate state-funded theological faculties.

In 1963 Lutheran theologians from around the world met in Helsinki under the auspices of the Lutheran World Federation to produce a consensus statement that would resolve internal disagreements on justification. Notoriously they failed completely. Why? In my book, *Justification,* I tell the story of how the doctrine of justification by faith alone has been a bone of contention between gnesio-Lutherans and their pietistic opponents.[18] Catholic theologians in dialogue with Lutherans since Vatican II have had to ask themselves: Which Lutherans are we talking to—Germans, or Finns, or Americans, those representing orthodoxy, or pietism, or modern existentialism? They observed at least three kinds of Lutheran interpretations on justification. One was the forensic view of justification, according to which God imputes righteousness to sinners without any merit on their part, faith itself being a gift of grace. A second was the modern existentialist view, with its roots in

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[16] *Joint Declaration,* no. 40.

[17] *Joint Declaration,* no. 44.

[18] Carl E. Braaten, *Justification: The Article by which the Church Stands or Falls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

pietism, by which the kerygma brings about a new kind of I-Thou relationship between God and humans. A third view has more recently been injected into the dialogue by the new Finnish interpretation of Luther, which holds that the righteousness of Christ himself is present in faith. This gave the Finns a link to the Eastern Orthodox understanding of justification as *theosis*. The entire intra-Lutheran debate on justification opened up old wounds that Lutherans inflicted on each other in the sixteenth-century controversies on election and free will, a smoldering issue that has never been resolved among Lutherans holding contradictory views.

When I entered Luther Seminary in St. Paul in 1952, the campus was aflame with passionate debate going on between two professors, one a pietist, George Aus, the other orthodox, Herman Preus. George Aus believed that when God offers salvation, persons are free to accept or reject. He liked the picture of Jesus knocking at the door. The person on the inside has his hand on the door knob. It is his choice to open the door or to keep it shut, according to Aus. This decisional theology was popular with most of the students. Herman Preus was on the other side of the debate. He held to Luther's idea of the bondage of the will. When God offers the gift of salvation, he not only foresees who will believe, but he sees to it that they will believe. Faith itself is a free gift of salvation. Can we blame Catholics for needing a hearing aid to grasp what Lutherans really have at stake in the doctrine of justification?

As a student at Luther Seminary, I would venture out on weekends to preach in rural congregations. In southwestern Minnesota, I preached in two congregations, twenty minutes apart, with less than a hundred in attendance at each service. At 9:30 a.m. I would preach at one, and 11:00 a.m. at the other. I asked the church councils why we did not combine the two services and just have one. After all, the service was the same and the sermon was the same. The president of one congregation said that that would be impossible. I asked why. He said, "We just don't agree on Lutheran doctrine." I asked what the difference was all about. He said that it had to do with the election controversy earlier in the century among Norwegian Lutherans, which caused the two congregations to split. One side was in favor of predestination, and the other believed in free will. I said, "Ya, I know about that. And what side was your congregation on?" He said, "I can't remember. It's so long ago."

VI. The Problem of Authority in the Church

The ecumenical train runs on two tracks. One is the institutional track where official dialogues take place between leaders of church bodies and

agreements are negotiated for the sake of reconciliation and communion. The other is the spiritual track where the Spirit of God is at work in the hearts and minds of lay folks across ecclesiastical boundary lines. What if we patch things up ecumenically at the highest institutional levels, while internally our church bodies are being eviscerated by viruses that invade from the surrounding culture of decadence? What if churches officially enter into "full communion" agreements but inside they are being racked by heresies and teetering on the brink of schism? No church body today is spared; we are all more or less in the same boat. The confessional center no longer holds as the denominational machinery spins out of control.

It is not the ecumenical policies and decisions of the ELCA that drive me crazy; it is the easy accommodation of cultural trends and fads in our church headquarters, councils, congregations, colleges, and seminaries, so much so that life-long Lutherans no longer feel at home in their own church. Many are asking whether we all do in fact hold the same faith, worship the same God, baptize into the same name, and proclaim the same gospel, surrounded and infiltrated as we are by therapeutic religion, left-wing and right-wing ideologies, new age spirituality, entertainment evangelism, mega-church idolatry, multi-cultural quotas, radical theological feminism, all together crowding out a single-minded devotion to the evangelical and catholic substance of the Scriptures, creeds, commandments, liturgies, symbols, and sacraments of that Great Tradition that has endured down through the centuries and across all cultures.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: "The concept of heresy has been lost today because there isn't any teaching authority."[19] Well, as Lutherans do we not have a clear sense of authority? Of course we do. Do we not subscribe to the authority of the Bible, as well as the Ecumenical Creeds, and the Book of Concord? Of course we do. That is good—very good—but we have no concrete official and public locus of authority whose task is to implement the normative sources of the faith. Where does the buck stop when it comes to matters of interpretation and discipline? Our authorities are all written down on paper; you can find them in the constitution filed away on a library shelf at church headquarters. There it sits. Something is lacking—an instrumental link from paper to people. The early church created the office of bishop precisely to provide such a link, and from that linkage—the story is too long and complex to relate here and now—we got the canon of Scripture, the orthodox creeds, and the catechisms taught to the people. Without the episcopal councils of the ancient church, we would

[19] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3 (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1966), 206.

hardly have any of those lifelines. The irony is that non-Catholic Evangelicals accept the decisions of the ancient councils of the Church but reject the ecclesial offices from which the creeds with their authority emerged.

We have learned from recent history that the mere recovery of the office of bishop is no panacea. The bishops are often part of the problem. So far they cannot even remind the churches they serve that same-sex behavior is sinful and that clergy with same-gender partners must be defrocked. If they cannot at least do that, they should not be trusted with the gospel. They run the risk of losing their pastoral and theological credibility when they sink up to their noses in the sludge of antinomianism and moral relativism.

We face a crisis of teaching authority in the churches today, and Lutherans share in it. Lutherans have stressed orthodox faith; Catholics have stressed episcopal order. I believe that orthodoxy without episcopacy is blind, and episcopacy without orthodoxy is empty. It was my hope that if we put the two together we might have a workable model of authority in the church. That was the experience of the early church and that is a lesson we can learn from church history when Christians have been engaged in a struggle to be faithful to God and the gospel. Why is it not working? There is something wrong. As one Episcopalian said of his church, we are in a "mell of a hess." If I knew how to solve the problem, I would run for office or write a best-seller.

VII. Conclusion

Wherever I go, people pine and opine that something is wrong and not working. I do not believe that the so-called "radical Lutherans" with their anti-ecumenical bias have the right answer. Nor do I believe that the minority of Evangelical Catholics will prevail in American Lutheranism. The vast majority of Lutherans think of themselves as Protestants in just another Protestant denomination, whether it be the one on the right that feels closer to conservative Evangelical Protestantism, or the one on the left that feels closer to liberal mainline Protestantism.

I do believe strongly—and I end with this opinion—that our best hope is to move toward rapprochement with Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox, leading eventually to eucharistic fellowship in a communion of churches. Pope John Paul II stated that "the Church must learn to breathe

again with its two lungs, its Eastern one and its Western one."[20] I fear that if Lutherans breathe only the oxygen they generate for themselves, they will die of halitosis; if they choose to be cut off from the Catholic and Orthodox traditions of doctrine, worship, spirituality, and church life, they will eventually be engulfed by the surrounding neo-pagan culture now taking hold of much of American Protestantism, both on the left and the right, and as a result lose the gospel and the confession that gave them birth. It is with convictions such as these that I together with my wife LaVonne and the Jensons, Robert and Blanche, founded the *Pro Ecclesia* movement sixteen years ago. Only God knows whether it will bear good fruit for the gospel and the church.

[20] "Discourse to Members of the Roman Curia, 28th June 1985," *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 29, 1985. Pope John Paul II frequently used this expression. See also *Ut Unum Sint*, no. 54, and the Apostolic Letter *Redemptoris Mater* (March 25, 1987), no. 34.

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Confessional Lutheranism in the Ecumenical World: A Missouri Synod Challenge

Samuel H. Nafzger

In the spring of 2004, a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastor doing graduate studies at General Theological Seminary in New York sent me a copy of an essay he had written for the Anglican/Lutheran Historical Conference. The title of his paper was "The Ecumenical Agenda of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod." He began this paper with these words:

> Curious things happen whenever "ecumenism" and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are mentioned in the same breath. Eyebrows are raised. Laughter, registering everything from incredulity and sarcasm to exasperation and unease, can be heard. Invariably someone utters some form of "Now, I've got to hear that!" Even more curious is the fact that very often these reactions arise from within the Synod's membership. The topic of this paper . . . produced some rather interesting reactions. One individual was rather astonished. "You mean there actually is an ecumenical agenda?" Another provided the gentle reminder that, unless the conference was considering composer John Cage, a blank sheet of paper would hardly qualify as acceptable, although it might be eminently readable. Still another posed the rather intriguing question, "How many ways can you find to say the word 'No'?"[1]

An e-mail I received a couple of weeks ago while I was working on this presentation illustrates this point of view. Its author asked:

> In view of Synod's Constitution (Article III, Sec. 1) why does the Missouri Synod not consider the subject of Ecumenism to be a top priority? I have been a member of LC—MS congregations now for over 75 years, and there does not seem to be any interest at all in this subject, on the part of congregations, Districts, or the Synod as a whole. . . . I know we have occasional talks and dialogues with the ELCA, but there

[1] Edward J. Callahan, "The Ecumenical Agenda of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod" (unpublished paper in the Commission on Theology and Church Relations files, 2004).

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is no true emphasis on Ecumenism, and there are many in our Synod that wonder why.[2]

It is also true, however, that not everyone agrees with the viewpoint expressed above. There are those who feel that the Missouri Synod has already gone overboard in its involvement in ecumenism. When it was announced in the Synod's official paper, *The Reporter*, for example, that the LCMS had accepted an invitation to rejoin the Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogue in the USA, a layman from the Southeastern District of the Synod sent me the following letter:

> Perhaps . . . the Catholics now see a glimmer of hope that they may drag some more Lutherans down the abyss with them as they have done with the ELCA. Before we go chasing after new doctrines, perhaps we should get our own house in order. . . . The message we have, the Catholics have already heard and rejected. I believe participation in this proposed round of discussions to be nothing more than an *ego trip for LCMS executives*! In my opinion, you will be squandering the Lord's treasury if you spend one cent, or even one minute, on this endeavor, while there are so many true mission opportunities to the unchurched needing our support! Do I sound outraged? You bet I am.[3]

Each of these viewpoints is reflective of attitudes and positions regarding ecumenical endeavors not only of lay but also clergy members of the LCMS. These polar opposite positions on Missouri Synod involvement (or lack thereof) in ecumenical endeavors are indicative of the spectrum of views which are present in the Missouri Synod about ecumenism, views that I have sought to take into account as I worked on this assignment.[4]

In order to address the challenge that "the world of ecumenism" poses for the Missouri Synod, which certainly wants to be a confessional Lutheran church, I believe that it would be most helpful if we first of all took a look at what the Lutheran Confessions have to say about the church and its unity.[5] It will then be helpful if we sketch out the position of the

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[2] E-mail message to author, December 13, 2006 (on file in the CTCR offices).

[3] Letter to the author, December 2, 2005 (on file in the CTCR offices); emphasis in the original.

[4] This article was originally a paper delivered at the 2007 Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The topic of this paper was assigned.

[5] All members of the Synod, which includes the congregations of the Synod, have signed its constitution. The Confessional article of the LCMS constitution says that every member of the Synod accepts without reservation "all the Symbolical Books of the

Missouri Synod on ecumenism as presented in the Synod's constitution, doctrinal statements, and resolutions, as well as consider what the Synod has actually done by way of involvement in ecumenical endeavors. Only then will it be possible to say something about the nature of the challenge which the ecumenical world poses for the LCMS.

I. The Lutheran Confessions on the Doctrine of the Church and Its Unity

The Lutheran confessional writings do not explicitly address the topic of ecumenism. They do present a clear doctrine of the church, however, which, as Robert Preus has pointed out, is "well thought through,"[6] and which lays out the theological foundation for the ecumenical endeavors of a confessional Lutheran church, and which does indeed talk about how to work for external unity in the church.

The "one holy, catholic church," says Philipp Melanchthon in Augsburg Confession VII, is "the assembly of all believers" (*CA* VII, 1; German) or "the assembly of saints" (*CA* VII, 1; Latin). The Apology of the Augsburg Confession calls the church "a spiritual people . . . reborn through the Holy Spirit" (Ap VII and VIII, 14). Martin Luther, in the Large Catechism, states that the church is "a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ" (LC II, 51), and in the Smalcald Articles he refers to the church as "holy believers and 'the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd'" (SA III, 12, 2). In so describing the church, the Lutheran confessors demonstrate their agreement with the understanding of the church and its unity presented in the Nicene Creed where it is confessed that we believe "in one holy, catholic, and apostolic church."[7]

Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God." LCMS Constitution, art. 2, sec. 2. It is therefore to the writings contained in *The Book of Concord* that we must turn in order to see what confessional Lutheranism believes the Scriptures teach about the doctrine of the church and its unity.

[6] Robert Preus, "The Basis for Concord," in *Formula for Concord: Essays* (St. Louis: Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1977), 12.

[7] The inclusion of the three Ecumenical creeds in *The Book of Concord* provides a clear insight into the Lutheran confessors' understanding of ecumenism. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, in the "Editors' Introduction to The Three Ecumenical Creeds," state: "The compilers of the Book of Concord itself understood the Augsburg Confession as a creed or, using the Greek and Latin term they preferred, 'symbol' of their time, reflecting the same faith as found in the three ecumenical creeds. . . . Inclusion of the ecumenical creeds in sixteenth-century books of doctrine dates back at least to the *Corpus doctrinae Philippicum* of 1560. . . . Their inclusion underscored the deep conviction

Lest he be misunderstood in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Melanchthon not only says what the church is; he also confesses what it is not. The Apology expressly rejects the position of Roman Catholicism that the church consists of all those who profess the Christian faith *and* who are also under the rule of legitimate pastors and the Roman Pope. According to Melanchthon and the Lutheran confessors, the church is not essentially a visible, tangible, entity or institution.[8] The church is the assembly of believers, of those who truly have faith in their hearts in Jesus Christ.

This understanding of the church and its unity leads the Lutheran confessors to make a fundamental distinction between what they referred to as the church *properly* speaking (*proprie dicta*), and the church *broadly* speaking (*late dicta*). Responding to Rome's rejection of the understanding of the church as "the assembly of the saints" (*CA* VII, 1), Melanchthon writes: "We grant that in this life hypocrites and evil people are mingled with the church and are members of the church according to the external association of the church's signs—that is, the Word, Confession of faith, and sacraments—especially if they have not been excommunicated" (Ap VII and VIII, 3). However, this does not mean, he continues, that the

among Evangelical theologians that the Reformation, far from breaking with the ancient church, upheld and recovered the chief teachings of the universal Christian faith. Throughout the history of the church, people have witnessed to that gospel, as the creeds themselves bear testimony." In *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, tr. Charles Arand et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 19.

[8] Cf. Robert Bellarmine, who writes: "The church is an assembly of men, an assembly which is visible and perceptible to the senses just like an assembly of the Roman citizenry, or the kingdom of France or the Republic of Venice." *Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae* (Paris, 1615), I:982. This continues to be the Roman Catholic understanding of the church down to the present. Karl Rahner, for example, writes: "Since the visibleness and visible unity of the Church are constituted by the sacramental and juridicial authority of the Church (which latter includes in its turn the teaching and ruling authority of the Church), *all and only those belong to the Church as members who are visibly*, i.e., in the external form, subject to two powers of the Church. And everyone who, on the social plane, is cut off or has withdrawn himself from one or both of these powers, is not a member of the Church." Rahner, "Membership in the Church According to the Teaching of Pius XII's Encyclical *'Mystic's Corporis Christ,'*" in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 2, trans. Carl Kruger (Baltimore: Helican Press, 1963), 17; emphasis added. Cf. also *"Dominus Iesus": On the Unity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Churches*, issued on September 5, 2000, by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It was published in *Origins* 30, no. 14 (2000): 209–219. Paragraph 17 states that "the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery, are not Churches in the proper sense."

church is "only an association of external ties and rites like other civic organizations." On the contrary, the church "is principally an association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of persons" (Ap VII and VIII, 5). Lest he be misunderstood, Melanchthon then repeats what he had said earlier:

> Hypocrites and wicked people are indeed associated with this true church according to the external rites, nevertheless when the church is defined, it must be defined as that which is the living body of Christ and as that which is the church in fact as well as in name. . . . If we define the church only in terms of an external government consisting of both the good and the wicked, people will not understand that the kingdom of Christ is the righteousness of the heart and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Instead they will think that it is only the external observance of certain religious rites and rituals. (Ap VII and VIII, 12–13)

He concludes: "Thus, the church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is precisely speaking the congregation of the saints" (Ap VII and VIII, 16). In other words, the Apology clearly distinguishes between the *una sancta*, "the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church," which is the church properly speaking, and the local and territorial entities with their rites, orders, and external membership, which is the church broadly speaking.

This does not mean, however, that the Lutheran confessors regarded the church as some kind of a "platonic republic" which did not actually exist in the real world. This church really does exist, insists Melanchthon. It consists of "true believing and righteous people scattered throughout the entire world" (Ap VII and VIII, 20). True, the church properly speaking is hidden from human eyes. Its actual limits are not visible. But we do know where it is located because of its "marks: the pure teaching of the gospel and the sacraments" (Ap VII and VIII, 20).[9] Wherever the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered, there is the church. It is made up of real people. It never exists, however, as an institution. As

[9] Robert Preus notes that "the Word does not cease being a mark when it is for some reason not taught in all its truth and purity. The intrusion of error does not automatically or immediately destroy the marks of the entire congregation. Paul struggled with this situation at Corinth and Galatia. . . . This seems to be essentially what Melanchthon is saying throughout [*CA*] Article VII." Preus, "The Basis for Concord," 18 n. 11. See also C. F. W. Walther, who says that the Reformed church may be called "a true visible church in a *qualified* sense." Walther, "Communion Fellowship: Western District Convention 1870," in *Essays for the Church*, vol. 1, *1857–1879* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), 203; emphasis added.

Luther once put it, "The church that is without sin must be invisible and spiritual and is grasped only by faith."[10]

This understanding of the church had fundamental implications for how the Lutheran confessors regarded their efforts to overcome their disagreements with Rome. The purpose of their confession at Augsburg, as they saw it, was not to bring about the unity of the church in the strict sense. This unity already existed. They were members of this church even though they were no longer a part of the church in Rome. Their hope and their desire was to overcome the divisions in visible Christendom. It was to this task which they devoted their energies in writing the Augsburg Confession and its Apology.

The compilers of the confessional documents included in *The Book of Concord* emphasize the desires of the Lutherans "to live in one Christian church in unity and concord" (*CA* Preface, 4). In the Preface to *The Book of Concord,* they made it clear how the agreement in confession demanded by the Holy Scriptures could actually be achieved. "There was no better way," they said, to overcome their disagreements with Rome as well as the later internal disagreements that had arisen among the Lutherans themselves, than "thoroughly and accurately, on the basis of God's Word, to explain and decide the divisions that had arisen in connection with all the disputed articles, to expose and reject false teaching, and clearly confess the divine truth" (Preface to Book of Concord, 8). As the writers of the Formula of Concord had put it, they sought genuine agreement in confession that would not be guilty of "papering over differences and simply giving the appearance of unity." Rather, they wanted "to treat the issues in a fundamental way" (FC SD XII, 5). Compromise on doctrinal matters as a way to achieve concord in the church was out of the question for them. The authors of the Formula of Concord state: "[W]e have no intention of giving up anything of the eternal, unchangeable truth of God (which we also do not have the power to do) for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and outward unity" (FC SD XI, 95).

This way of working for external unity in the church, they maintained, "keeps God's honor intact, does not abandon the divine truth of the holy gospel, and concedes nothing to the slightest error." They were convinced that "enduring unity in the church requires above all else a clear and binding summary and form in which a general summary of teaching is

[10] Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Schriften*], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 7:710,2–3.

drawn together from God's Word, to which the churches that hold the true Christian religion confess their adherence" (FC SD Rule and Norm, 1).

To summarize, the Lutheran confessors clearly distinguish between the church properly speaking and the church broadly speaking. The unity of the church properly speaking already exists. Its unity is a given. It comes with faith in the heart. The church broadly speaking as it manifests itself in the world, however, is not united. It is divided, rent by divisions and schism. Genuine concord in the church broadly speaking can be attained only on the basis of agreement in the faith which is confessed, the *fides quae*, that is, on the basis of doctrinal agreement, as the Formula of Concord states: "For this reason the churches are not to condemn one another because of differences in ceremonies when in Christian freedom one has fewer or more than the other, *as long as these churches are otherwise united in teaching* (doctrina) *and in all the articles of the faith as well as in the proper use of the holy sacraments*" (FC SD X, 31; emphasis added).

II. Ecumenism in the LCMS

Article III of the Synod's Constitution provides the framework and sets the tone for the LCMS's official position on ecumenism. The very first "objective" or purpose for the formation of the Synod is that

> The Synod, under Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, shall . . . conserve and promote the unity of the true faith (Eph. 4:3–6; 1 Cor. 1:10), work through its official structures toward fellowship with other Christian church bodies, and provide a united defense against schism, sectarianism (Rom. 16:17), and heresy. (LCMS Constitution, art. 3, sec. 1)

According to its constitution, ecumenical endeavors must have high priority in the life of the Synod. The actual wording used in the LCMS Constitution is important. This article states that the Synod shall both "conserve" the unity of the true faith, and that it shall "promote" it. The unity of the true faith possesses a two-fold dimension. It is a "given," but it is also something "to be striven for."

Moreover, in this article the Synod states that *conserving* and *promoting* unity is not simply a theoretical matter. It demands actual effort on the part of the members of the Synod. The Synod shall "work" through its official structures. It is necessary that the members of the Synod actually do something to implement "the unity of the true faith." It is also significant that the scope of these ecumenical endeavors, according to the Missouri Synod's constitution, extends to "other Christian church bodies" and not just to other Lutherans. Finally, the Synod in this constitutional article recognizes that these ecumenical endeavors "provide a united

defense against schism, sectarianism and heresy." Conserving and promoting the unity of the true faith will help the Synod to keep from falling into isolationalistic sectarianism and the sin of separatism on the one hand and into false teachings based on a compromise of the gospel on the other. Both of these errors produce the scandal of divisions in visible Christendom.

Article VI of the Synod's Constitution is also relevant when delineating the position of the Synod on ecumenism. This article lists as the first two requirements for holding membership in the Synod the "acceptance of the confessional basis of Article II" and the "renunciation of unionism and syncreticism" (LCMS Constitution, art. 6, sec. 1–2). Two examples of the latter are expressly listed:

a. Serving congregations of mixed confession, as such, by ministers of the church;

b. Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession. (LCMS Constitution, art. 6, sec. 1)[11]

This official "condition of membership" (as the constitution calls it) on the part of synodical pastors and congregations regarding joint participation in ecumenical worship services is often misunderstood, especially outside the Synod, but also by many within the Synod. Moreover, it is to a large extent responsible for the popular belief that the Missouri Synod has no ecumenical agenda, or, even worse, that it is anti-ecumenical.[12]

The Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR)—the entity which since 1962 has been given the task to provide guidance to the Synod in matters of church relations—has been asked to prepare no less than ten documents in its 45 years of existence on the subject of ecumenism.[13] These CTCR reports delineate and discuss the principles

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[11] See Samuel H. Nafzger, "Syncreticism and Unionism," *Concordia Journal* 29 (2003): 240–264.

[12] Cf. LCMS, "Resolution 3-03B: To Study Fellowship Principles and Practices," in *1998 Convention Proceedings* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1998), 114. See also the results of an analysis of 4300 responses to "The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship," a document prepared by the President of the Synod and the CTCR, in *2001 Convention Workbook* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2001), 48–51.

[13] These reports and reviews include "Theology of Fellowship" (1965); *A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism* (1974); *The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship* (1981); "The LCMS Response to the Commission on Faith and Order of The World

which govern the Synod's ecumenical endeavors. It will be helpful, I believe, to highlight some of these principles.

After a review of the Scriptures, the early church, and the Reformation period on fellowship matters, "Theology of Fellowship" (1965) calls upon the Synod to be on guard against the twin dangers of unionism and separatism and to "shun" *both* of them. This document concludes with guidelines which it calls "Scripturally sound, and in harmony with the Lutheran Confessions." The first two of these guidelines are the following:

1. Our Synod should treasure the fellowship in the Gospel and in the sacraments which it enjoys with its sister churches and which it expresses through what is usually called pulpit and altar fellowship; and it should foster this fellowship with all diligence;

2. Our Synod should work zealously for the extension of this fellowship by engaging in doctrinal discussion with other churches in the interest of achieving such fellowship where this can be done without compromising sound doctrine.[14]

The 1974 report *A Lutheran Stance toward Ecumenism* most directly relates to this topic. In this document the CTCR defines "as ecumenical

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Council of Churches to the Text of 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry'" (1985); "Inter-Christian Relationships: An Instrument for Study" (1991); "A Response to the U. S. Lutheran-Roman Catholics Dialogue Report VII 'Justification by Faith'" (1992); "Admission to the Lord's Supper: Basics of Biblical and Confessional Teaching" (1999); "The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship" and "The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship: A Report on Synodical Discussions" (both of these documents were prepared jointly by the President's Office and the CTCR in 2000); and "Guidelines for Participation in Civic Events" (2004). In addition to the documents listed above, in 1999 the CTCR prepared and distributed to the members of the Synod study guides for "The Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification," "The Porvoo Statement and Declaration," and "The Formula of Agreement" (adopted by the ELCA, the Presbyterian Church [USA], the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ).

[14] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations, "Theology of Fellowship," in *Supplement to the Report and Recommendation of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1965), 27. This report was adopted by the Synod in 1969 for "Reference and Guidance." It is important to note, in view of the withdrawal of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) from the Synodical Conference, that this report states on the same pages that "our Synod should understand that, in the case of doctrinal discussions carried on with a view to achieving doctrinal unity, Christians not only *may* but *should* join in fervent prayer that God would guide and bless the discussions. . . ." "Theology of Fellowship," 27–28.

endeavors" all those efforts which have as their purpose "to remove the barriers that separate Christians into denominational groups" and to end "strife and divisions among Christ's 'afflicted and scattered churches' (Ap Preface, 19)."[15] Moreover, "God-pleasing concord and harmony" in the church is one of the "fruits of the Spirit" for which Christians "earnestly long and fervently pray."[16]

On the basis of a review of Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians, and Paul's letters to Timothy, as well as of the Lutheran Confessions, this report discusses topics such as the sphere and the scope of ecumenical endeavors. It is important to pay special attention to what this document says about the goal of ecumenical endeavors. It states:

> Since the sphere of ecumenical endeavors is properly the *Una Sancta*, it is self-evident that the goal of such efforts is not to create the unity *of* the church (*unitas, Enigkeit der Kirche*). The *unitas* of the *Una Sancta* is given with the faith that joins all Christians to their one Head, Christ, and to each other in the little holy flock which is without sect or schism (LC II, 51). The unity *of* the church is the presupposition, not the goal, of ecumenical endeavors. (*CA* Preface, 10)
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> Ecumenical endeavors are directed toward achieving unity *in* the church. While *unitas* is a constant characteristic of the church, *concordia* is not. Instead of concord, agreement, and peace, there are dissensions (Ap XII, 90) and religious disputes (FC SD XI, 94) which cause "divisions." (FC SD Rule and Norm, 19)
>
> It is to those divisions which obscure and seem to belie the unity of the church that Lutheran ecumenism addresses itself in the spirit of the Augsburg Confession in order to bring about Christian concord.[17]

Understood in this sense, the CTCR does not hesitate to speak of "the *necessity* of ecumenical endeavors."[18]

Building on its earlier reports, in 1981 the CTCR directed its attention to *The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship*. In this report it

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[15] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1974), 4

[16] *A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism*, 4.

[17] *A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism*, 9.

[18] *A Lutheran Stance toward Ecumenism*, 9; emphasis added.

presents nine "Scriptural Principles of Fellowship."[19] On the basis of these principles, the Commission proceeded to evaluate four models for achieving external unity in the church that are frequently mentioned in the ecumenical world today: first, "Conciliarity," promoted by the World Council of Churches; second, "Reconciled Diversity," which has its origins in the Lutheran World Federation (in an essay which was given in 1977 at the LWF Assembly in Dar es Salaam); third, "Selective Fellowship," sometimes suggested by members of the LCMS, and which was actually practiced for a time by the old ALC; and, fourth, "Ecclesiastical Declaration of Altar and Pulpit Fellowship" based on the results of doctrinal discussions held by representatives of two church bodies moving towards church fellowship, which was the historic practice of Lutheran churches throughout the world.[20] Following its evaluation of each of these models, the CTCR concluded:

> Of those models for external unity in the church which have been examined in this report, only ecclesiastical declarations of altar and pulpit offer at least the possibility for being able to take into account all of what the Scriptures have to say about the nature of fellowship. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations, therefore, while recognizing that this model is neither divinely ordained nor Scripturally mandated, is convinced that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod should continue to seek to carry out the Scriptural principles of fellowship at the church-body level by means of ecclesiastical declarations of altar and pulpit fellowship based on agreement in doctrine and practice.[21]

In addition to this recommendation, the Commission also urged that the Synod "continue to study the topic of fellowship" so that the members of the Synod can develop greater understanding and consensus with respect to the implications of the Scriptural principles of fellowship "for relationships and activities between Christians belonging to churches not in church fellowship with the Synod" at the congregational, pastoral, and individual levels.[22] The assignment to prepare such guidelines was

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[19] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations, *The Nature and Implications of the Concept of Fellowship* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1981), 13–16; hereafter *Nature and Implications.*

[20] These evaluations appear in *Nature and Implications,* 21–38.

[21] *Nature and Implications,* 42. In coming to this conclusion, the Commission was actually renewing the recommendation which it had made sixteen years earlier in its "Theology of Fellowship" report.

[22] *Nature and Implications,* 43.

subsequently given to the CTCR by the Synod.[23] In response to this assignment, the CTCR in 1991 prepared a study document titled "Inter-Christian Relationships: An Instrument for Study," and it is presently nearing completion of its final response to this assignment.

One other important document should be mentioned. It has the title "The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship." In 2000 the CTCR, working jointly together with the Office of the President of the Synod, at the request of the Synod, prepared "Study Materials" for a discussion at the conventions of each of the Synod's 35 districts. This document was subsequently adopted by the Synod "for continued use and guidance" at its 2001 Convention.[24] This document begins by reaffirming the critically important distinction between the church's internal unity and its external unity:

> While the church's internal unity is perfect and known only to God (Eph. 1:4), the limits of external fellowship are determined by whether the Gospel is preached purely and the sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution. The Gospel and the sacraments are in themselves always pure. In this way they create and preserve the church in her hidden unity throughout the world. Yet, when church bodies make public confession of the Gospel and the sacraments, tragically some obscure or explicitly contradict the teaching of the Gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments. For this reason the limits or boundaries of the external fellowship are creeds and confessions. Churches in altar and pulpit fellowship share the same confession, including the rejection of errors that contradict this confession. Where churches cannot agree on a common confession, the basis for church fellowship does not exist.[25]

This document reaffirms the historic position of Lutheranism that "doctrinal differences cannot be tolerated either within or between church bodies and are by their nature disruptive and divisive of altar and pulpit

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[23] See LCMS, "Resolution 3-03A: To Prepare Guidelines for Inter-Christian Relationships," in *1981 Convention Proceedings* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1981), 156.

[24] See LCMS, "Resolution 3-07A: To Commend 'The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship' and CTCR Report on the Synodical Discussions," in *2001 Convention Proceedings* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2001), 137–138.

[25] Office of the President and Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *The Lutheran Understanding of Church Fellowship: Study Materials* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2000), 5; hereafter *Church Fellowship: Study Materials*.

fellowship."[26] It is important to note that this document expressly states that it has not discussed "the many questions that remain concerning the various ways individual Christians might relate to each other,"[27] something which the Commission is addressing in its forthcoming report on inter-Christian guidelines.

Yet we must ask: How does the LCMS's actual practice in carrying out ecumenical endeavors stand up in light of its understanding of what the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions have to say about the church and its unity? Consistent with its understanding of the *necessity* of ecumenical endeavors, the Synod has been a part of almost all of the bilateral Lutheran dialogues held in the United States since 1965. It was a founding member of the Lutheran Council in the USA, and since 1998 it has declared itself to be in church fellowship with a number of church bodies around the world such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Latvia, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Lithuania, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Haiti, and, most recently, with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya. It has done so only after having assured itself that the Synod was in fact in agreement in doctrine and practice with these churches. At its February 2007 meeting, the CTCR prepared a recommendation for the consideration of the June 2007 synodical convention on altar and pulpit fellowship with the American Association of Lutheran Churches (AALC). It should also be noted that the Synod has been a member of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) from the time of the Council's formation in 1993. The ILC includes in its membership church bodies with which it is not in altar and pulpit fellowship. At the same time, the Synod is not a member of the National Council of Churches or the World Council of Churches, and it has refused to join the Lutheran World Federation because membership in the LWF, either implicitly (before 1990) or explicitly (after 1990) means church fellowship with all of the Federation's members, many of which hold doctrinal positions contrary to that of the Synod. Moreover, when it became clear that the Synod was not in doctrinal agreement with the American Lutheran Church with which it had declared altar and pulpit fellowship in 1969, it terminated this relationship in 1981.

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[26] *Church Fellowship: Study Materials*, 16. In 1956 Franklin Clark Fry, president of the United Lutheran Church in America, wrote: "Insistence upon agreement in doctrine as a precondition for church fellowship is the distinguishing mark of Lutherans among all Protestants and should never be relaxed." "Franklin Clark Fry's Presentation of United Lutheran Attitude, 1956," in *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America*, ed. Richard C. Wolf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 547.

[27] *Church Fellowship: Study Materials*, 16.

I want to conclude this section with selected positions of a resolution adopted by the LCMS Convention in 1983. This resolution, titled "To Strive for External Unity in the Church," provides a good summary of the Synod's position on ecumenism.

WHEREAS, The Scriptures of God (Rom. 12:14–21; 15:5–6; Eph. 4:1–3; 1 Cor. 1:10–13; 2 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 2:4; Phil. 4:2) mandate the quest for church fellowship (in the sense of the external unity of the church), as well as its acknowledgement when there is agreement in the confession of the heavenly doctrine "according to God's Word of the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures . . ." (*FC* SD Comprehensive Summary 16); and . . .

WHEREAS, The true unity of the mystical body of Christ can never by broken or destroyed, for this unity consists of the unity of believers with our Lord Christ, nevertheless, this unity with Christ will move every true child of God to long for, to work toward, and urgently to pray that the visible church may be united in one confession, in love, in one great goal, in every way to express the unity which the members have with Christ their head, and which Christ the Son has with the Father and the Holy Spirit (John 17); therefore be it

Resolved, That in these last days we urgently pray God the Holy Spirit to grant unity and concord to the visible church on the basis of a pure and correct understanding of the doctrine revealed from heaven in the sacred Scriptures of the apostles and prophets; and be it further

Resolved, That we exhort one another to true and genuine contrition and repentance for the sins of prejudice, ridicule, caricature, separatism, pride, lack of Christian charity toward Christian people of other denominations, which hinder the work of the Spirit of God in bringing about the visible unity of the church and true Christian concord; and be it further

Resolved, That we recognize that contentious persons who constantly seek to "expose" the error of others, and so incite quarrels and division among us, are to be admonished according to the words of Christ and His apostle, Matt. 18:15–17 and Rom. 16:17; and be it further . . .

Resolved, That we . . . give priority to the question of how we may give expression to the external unity of the visible church without compromising the truth of our faith and confession; and be it further

Resolved, That we undertake this quest for external unity of the church with patience, willing to bear with one another's human failings and

weaknesses in both piety and understanding, so that as a Synod we may with one mouth and one tongue give glory to God . . . .[28]

III. The Ecumenical World's Challenge to Missouri

The English word "ecumenical" is rooted in the Greek word *oikos*, which means "house," and in *oikoumene*, the Greek word for "inhabited world." The word "ecumenical" therefore is analogous to the word "catholic" or "pertaining to the whole."[29]

Understood in this sense, what does the "ecumenical" or whole church as it exists in the world today actually look like? There are, according to the most recent accounts of demographers, a little over six billion people on planet earth as we begin the twenty-first century. Approximately one-third of these people may be classified as in some sense Christian. Of these two billion Christians, 52.9% (1.1 billion) belong to the Roman Catholic Church and 10.8% (215 million) belong to the Orthodox communion. Anglicans (80 million) and Lutherans (80 million) each claim 4%. The remaining 28% of the world's Christians, at least according to David Barrett's 2001 edition of his *World Christian Encyclopedia*, belong to 34,000+ different Christian denominations.[30] This figure represents a 39% increase in new church bodies during the past twenty years. According to these figures, 660 new churches come into existence every year, or about 2 per day. These statistics, however, tell only a part of the story regarding the nature of what may well be the greatest challenge which the ecumenical world presents for the Missouri Synod at this point in time. In recent years, debate in our society over issues such as abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, and stem cell research has produced internal divisions in many American church bodies. These horizontal divisions frequently cut across the historical, vertical divisions between the denominations. The result is, for example, that pro-life Catholics and Lutherans may feel a

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[28] LCMS, "Resolution 3-02: To Strive for External Unity in the Church," in *1983 Convention Proceedings* (St. Louis: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1983), 153.

[29] *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church* states that the use of the term ecumenical began "in the Lutheran *Book of Concord* (1580), where the three ancient creeds are designated as 'the three catholic or ecumenical symbols.'" *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, ed. Julius Bodensieck (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965), 1:750.

[30] David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, 2nd ed., 2 volumes (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1:3, and Table 7-5 on 2:10.

closer affinity for each other than they do for pro-choice members of their own church body.

There is an even more pervasive change taking place today that affects the entire world in which we live. I mean the contemporary communications revolution caused by the advent of the Internet. This development, coupled with the highly publicized sexual scandals of a number of church bodies, has strengthened the anti-institutional forces already present in the world today. As a result of these and many other developments, people are no longer gaining their identity from the organizations to which they belong to the same extent that people did a generation or two ago. The end product of the effects of such forces as these is the loss of a clear confessional identity of the traditional denominations, producing the phenomenon sometimes referred to as "ambiguous denominationalism" or "cafeteria catholicism." Not all of the Lutherans are in the Lutheran church, not all the Baptists are in the Baptist church, and so forth.

These developments pose a major challenge for confessional Lutheran churches like the Missouri Synod as they seek to manifest the unity given with faith in Jesus Christ on the basis of church-body-level declarations of altar and pulpit fellowship. They insidiously eat away and undermine the corporate understanding of the church as the body of Christ, and they obscure the confessional underpinnings of a church body today that seeks to be faithful to its confessional foundation.

In order for Missouri to try and meet this challenge, it must, in my opinion—in addition to doing a better job of teaching its own members and instilling in them the teachings of confessional Lutheranism—also recognize that the topic of inter-Christian relationships and ecumenical efforts has not been exhausted with a reaffirmation of the historic Lutheran understanding of church fellowship based on agreement in doctrine and practice. To be sure, this must continue to be done. According to the Scriptures, "external unity in the church is a matter of the right confession of the prophetic and apostolic faith."[31]

The topic of inter-Christian relationships, however, is so much larger than the doctrine of church fellowship. The Synod has been slow to recognize this fact. If the Missouri Synod is to meet the challenge cast its way by the ecumenical world of today, it will be necessary for it to become more, not less, engaged in opportunities to interact with brothers and

[31] *Nature and Implications*, 15.

sisters in Christ not in church fellowship with the Synod. Theological symposia, for example, provide just one example as to how this can be done without compromising the principles of fellowship presented in the Lutheran Confessions. We in the LCMS must confess that there is a reason why the Synod's ecumenical record is so often misunderstood and caricatured today.

At the heart of confessional Lutheranism's understanding of the doctrine of the church is the distinction which the Lutheran Confessions make between the church properly speaking and the church broadly speaking. This is a distinction that many Christians today—including many in the Synod—do not seem to understand. When this distinction is not made, two errors threaten. These errors are illustrated by the examples mentioned at the beginning of this paper—the opposite reactions to the ecumenical endeavors of the LCMS. If the given unity *of* the church properly speaking is divorced from the scriptural mandate to seek doctrinal agreement, ecumenical endeavors will soon be regarded as a waste of time and effort, and separatistic sectarianism threatens. The unity in Christ shared by all Christians provides the motivation, as the Scriptures teach, for seeking to manifest this unity externally. On the other hand, if the unity *of* the church is identified with concord in the church, then "faith in the heart" becomes the basic criteria for external unity. Faith in the heart, however, is hidden from view. Inevitably the apostolic admonition of the Scriptures—"that all of you agree and that there by no divisions among you" (1 Cor 1:10), to avoid those "who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine you have been taught" (Rom 16:17), and "to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:30)—are set aside and made of no effect. The end result is doctrinal compromise which undermines and threatens the very means through which the unity of the church comes into being in the first place.

The LCMS is committed to confessional ecumenism. It has an ecumenical agenda. Together with the Lutheran confessors of the sixteenth century, it desires to manifest the oneness in Christ that it has with all Christians by being united with them "in teaching and in all the articles of the faith as well as the proper use of the holy sacraments" (FC SD X, 31). If it does not do this, it ceases being a confessional Lutheran Church. In a 1957 essay titled "The Nature of the Unity We Seek: A Missouri Synod Lutheran View," Martin Franzmann wrote:

> We desire that men be united in a gladly resolute, radical, and total submission of faith to God as he has revealed himself in his Son, Jesus Christ. . . . This Word made flesh, this Son of God, in turn, is known to us

only and can become ours only by the apostolic word of those who witness to him, those words which the living, potent, and creative presence of the Paraclete has made to be the divinely valid witness to Christ . . . . We have Christ in this inerrantly loosing and binding apostolic word, or we do not have him at all. We seek unity, then, as we seek it under God and in Christ, in a full and common obedience to Holy Scripture.[32]

[32] Martin H. Franzmann, "The Nature of the Unity We Seek: A Missouri Synod Lutheran View," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 28 (1957): 801–802.

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Crossing Old-Line Boundaries: The Works of Lutheran Charity

Matthew C. Harrison

I am going to argue that there are old-line boundaries and that we should cross them. Lutherans should be and are involved in works of charity, hence there are Lutheran works of charity. My friends, this is the very moment of moments to be alive and be a confessional Lutheran.

Before I make a case for that, I should be frank: the state of world Lutheranism is deplorable. The latest report of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has so many female clergy depicted that it looks like a CM Almy special edition catalogue for women. The Church of Sweden jumped off the cliff this past year with respect to homosexuality, merely being consistent in following the consequences of the hermeneutics it embraced which long ago rejected specific mandates of the Lord regarding gender. In 2007, the Church of Norway followed. Any objective observer can see that the leadership of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is amassing its energies at the same cliff, apparently willing to risk all contact with, and cooperation with, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). The Lutheran Church of Australia has battled for twenty years over the ordination of women and is still at a fifty-fifty split. The very spirit of tolerance which the Great Elector, Frederick William (1620–1688), was already pushing a hundred years before the Prussian Union, at the time of Valentine Ernst Loescher (1673–1749), and which was codified in the Brandenburg/Prussian church (then the largest Lutheran church in the world in 1817), has become a spirit of intolerance for what the Lutheran Confessions actually mandate, and has come to dominate completely Lutheran seminaries, Lutheran faculties, and Lutheran judicatories worldwide. What Luther decisively rejected in the 1529 Marburg colloquy when he refused Zwingli's outstretched hand by saying, "You have a different spirit from us"[1]—that is, fellowship with those who do not confess the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament received orally and without respect to the faith of the individual recipient—has

[1] In his letter to J. Probst at Bremen dated June 1, 1530, (no. 1577) Luther, quoting from memory, recounts that he said, *Vos habetis alium spiritum quam nos* (or, in German, *Du hast einen anderer Geist*). Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Schriften*], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), WABr 5:338.

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been accepted in the vast stretches of Lutheranism. One can read about it in *A Seminary in Crisis* by Paul Zimmerman, a new book on the Seminex crisis.[2] How shocking it is to read the 1973 statement of many students of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, supportive of the faculty majority, which notes, among many other things, that strict insistence on the Lutheran doctrine on the body and the blood in the Sacrament should not prevent inter-communion with non-Lutherans and non-Lutheran churches.

Most recently, I saw that the Lutheran church in the Holy Land, the Lutheran Church of Lebanon, a church which has had a lot of LCMS contact over the years although not in communion with Missouri, adopted full communion with the Reformed. To quote Hermann Sasse from his days of intense involvement in the leadership of the Faith and Order Movement, "Our witness was too weak."[3] In fact, we did not really give a witness at all. I am amused by the otherwise wonderful *Logia* series "Wittenberg and/or Constantinople." Just as the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople became a mosque and is now a museum, Wittenberg is all but dead to Luther's own confession and has been for two centuries. As Sasse quipped, "Wittenberg has the smell of an empty wine cask: something sweet was once there, but is no longer present."[4]

Wittenberg has fifty thousand residents; only eighteen thousand register as Christians. Only a small fraction of those go to church. The union swallowed up Wittenberg, closed its university, and finally outlawed the observance of the confession—particularly the Smalcald Articles and the Formula of Concord. In this little town, which was once the impetus for the gospel and all its articles to be proclaimed in a way that shook the world, which boasted dozens of book binderies, it is now virtually impossible to find a Book of Concord. The Luther Haus has a Roman Catholic director. Calvin's doctrine of the Sacrament has as much right at the church's altar as Luther's doctrine, and a preacher has as much right to teach the doctrine of the Heidelberg Catechism as that of Luther.

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[2] Paul A. Zimmerman, *A Seminary in Crisis: The Inside Story of the Preus Fact Finding Committee* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007).

[3] Hermann Sasse, *Luther and the Ecumenical Creeds*, audiotape of a convocation at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, February 11, 1965 (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary Media Services, 1965).

[4] For Sasse's view on the Union, including Wittenberg, see "Union and Confession," in Hermann Sasse, *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, vol. 1, *1927–1939*, trans. Matthew C. Harrison et al. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 265–305. See also "Mercy and the Church's Confession" in Matthew C. Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy: How to Put Your Faith in Action* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 151–169.

The nineteenth-century Lutheran revival, which gave birth to the LCMS and a revival of genuine Lutheranism around the world, never touched Wittenberg. In fact, the real sister church of the church body of which St. Mary's in Wittenberg is a part is not even the ELCA; it is actually the United Church of Christ here in the United States. That church is a result and a descendent of the American mission of the Prussian Union, namely, what became the Evangelical Synod of the West. What was sought by Zwingli, Bucer, Calvin, Elizabeth I of England, the Great Elector, his descendant Fredrick William III, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and forcefully and successfully by Karl Barth at Barmen during the *Kirchenkampf*, has been virtually completely achieved—namely, the "Calvinization" of Lutheranism. This Lutheranism is not a "church" but merely a theological school, a form of piety, perhaps, within one large Protestant communion. This is the great danger of the view that Lutheranism is a confessing movement within the broader church. I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. That church exists on this earth most clearly and certainly where the gospel and all its articles are preached purely and the sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution—Lutheranism—the true visible church of God on earth. Moreover, the church exists, thank God, wherever there is enough of the gospel and the sacraments to create faith. I recently heard the gospel beautifully spoken at my own grandmother's Roman Catholic funeral—a homily that spoke of the resurrection and the forgiveness of sins and grace throughout, and then was negated with the sacrifice of the mass.

Whatever else the LCMS is, it is certainly a church. The LCMS International Center is an adiaphoron. As executive director of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, I am an adiaphoron. Our structures and specific form of constitution and a host of other things that the LCMS does are adiaphora. They can be done in any number of ways or not done at all. The LCMS, however, as a communion of Lutheran churches is church. Sasse warned the Lutheran world about the consequences of purporting to have Lutheran and Reformed make one confession as a church over against Hitler. He warned against the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) being formed as a part of the the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), the broader Protestant union. Sixty years ago, He warned against the weak confessional commitments of the Lutheran World Federation, and he did so in the face of opposition already in the late 1940s from Concordia Seminary (St. Louis). Sixty years has proven him a prophet. It has recently been announced that the VELKD will cease to be an independent legal entity and exist as a department within EKD.

The LWF is a great purveyor of communion with the Reformed. All sorts of games are played in subjecting churches in the developing world and elsewhere to the de-confessionalized theology of the liberal North. Money for seminaries? Oh yes, but only if women constitute a large percentage of the student population. Scholarships? Yes, not for churches which do not ordain women, but for women wanting to be pastors studying in the North and the West, and all kinds of other issues. What is at stake? If, as Luther confessed, the Sacrament is the gospel, then the gospel is at stake. I challenge you to find one Lutheran theological faculty of an LWF church in Europe or America—aside from our faithful Latvian or Lithuanian partners—in which the view that there is salvation outside of Christ is not tolerated or even presupposed and dominant. Show me a faculty where the gospel is not regularly redefined in terms of political theology, theologies of liberation from oppression, not only for the poor but for women and now for homosexuals. Kurt Marquart was right in his drumbeat against historical criticism, upon which the union has always depended.[5] In his drumbeat against historical criticism and against the union, Marquart rightly recognized the Prussian Union as the black hole, as he liked to say, around which the entire Lutheran world has been circling for two hundred years. Depressed yet? Do not be! You should not say, "My, the church isn't what it used to be!" I have news for you: it never was. Do not be depressed; it has never really been any different. Out of this abyss of difficulty is coming unprecedented opportunity for confessional Lutherans.

We in Missouri have our internal struggles. They are serious and they are real. I would recommend, however, that you read a dose of Valentine Ernst Loescher's *Timotheus Verinus*.[6] Lutheranism has, from the beginning, struggled with the problem of authority and theological unity. Nor is it a problem unique to Lutheranism, for even the New Testament betrays the same struggles. Sasse and Elert have repeatedly and richly demonstrated

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[5] Kurt E. Marquart, "The Incompatibility between Historical-Critical Theology and the Lutheran Confessions," in *Studies in Lutheran Hermeneutics*, ed. John Reumann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 313–333. See also Robert Preus's essays, recently released by Concordia Publishing House, which are an absolute *tour de force* testimony of the incompatibility of historical criticism with confessing Lutheran dogma. His essays are collected in *Doctrine is Life: The Essays of Robert D. Preus on Scripture*, ed. Klemet I. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006). In particular, the recent history of the church has proved over and over again the connection between historical criticism and union.

[6] Valentin Ernst Loescher, *The Complete Timotheus Verinus*, trans. James L. Langebartels and Robert J. Koester (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing, 1998).

that there was no golden age of unity in the first centuries of the church's life.[7] There was no ancient undivided church, and there will be no future reunited church. Luther's life was beset with controversy within the churches of the Augsburg Confession. Brecht's magisterial volumes bear that out repeatedly.[8] The period after Luther's death was a disaster until the Formula of Concord brought about agreement, but it did not last long. Helmstedt—the university founded to be a bastion of orthodoxy, even boasting as its first chancellor the strict and intense Lutheran Tilemann Hesshusius (1527–1588), who refused to sign the Formula of Concord for not condemning Philipp Melanchthon by name—soon plunged the church into controversy at the instigation of that great Evangelical Catholic George Calixt (the Tom Oden of his day) over the so-called syncretistic controversy. This was at the very temporal epicenter of the age of Lutheran orthodoxy. Peruse Georg Dedeken's thesaurus[9] or Emil Sehling's edition of the church orders[10] and you find a Lutheran church beset with controversy, doctrinal disagreement, problems of church practice, and struggle over the limits of liturgical freedom. This was all prior to the advent of Pietism in the late seventeenth century.

On the anniversary of the Reformation in 1717, Loescher wrote the preface to volume one of his *Timotheus Verinus*. Loescher begins his chapter "On the General Characteristics of the Pietistic Evil" (*malum pietisticum* in Latin) by noting problems that "manifest themselves":

a) In public movements which harm the church. . . .
b) In dangerous, annoying, and arrogant individual exploits . . . .
c) In frequent and lengthy controversies carried on in public writings.
d) In the ever more obvious division into two or more factions.[11]

Elsewhere, Loescher complains of the "contempt and disregard" for divine orders, for "perfectionism," or the idea that human actions can be sinless, which "finally ends in fanatical independence in everything," mysticism,

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[7] See Hermann Sasse, *Here We Stand: Nature and Character of the Lutheran Faith*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Adelaide, South Australia: Lutheran Publishing House, 1979), and Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. N. E. Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966).

[8] Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, trans. James L. Schaaf, 3 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985–1993).

[9] Georg Dedeken, *Thesauri consiliorum et decisionum volumen I–III*, 4 vols. (Jena: Hertels, 1671).

[10] Emil Sehling, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1902-[n.d.]; Tübingen: Mohr, 1957-[n.d.]).

[11] Loescher, *The Complete Timotheus Verinus*, 9.

rigidism, excessive freedom which breeds fanaticism and enthusiasm, and the confusion of theological categories.[12] He complained about the disconnect between pulpit and seminary lecture hall and asserted that "what is maintained at the academic rostrum and does not agree with the pulpit must for that reason be proclaimed to be an error."[13] Among the other pietistic evils Loescher mentions is the devaluation of the office of the ministry.[14]

What is the point? The church has always been "*tectum [sub] cruce*," hidden under the cross.[15] In the midst of all this nonsense, which is even greater outside of Lutheranism, the Lord continued and continues to work in his word and sacrament for the salvation of souls. As he said, "Upon this rock I shall build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18).

Now, why is this *the* moment for confessional Lutheranism, particularly the Missouri Synod? The Missouri Synod is alive and kicking and in some ways stronger than ever. For all the weaknesses and failings of the Missouri Synod, for all her internal strife and nonsense, in spite of her near capitulation to the so-called inclusive Lutheranism and union in the 1960s and 1970s, she is still here. Warts and all to be sure, but she is still here. Moreover, she is confessing the Book of Concord *quia*. "Missouri is our last hope [*Missouri ist unsere letzte Hoffnung*]," Sasse wrote to a friend.[16]

Her seminaries are unparalleled in the world. Travel and you will find that out. Her institutions have unimaginable capacity for good, for furthering the gospel and the Lutheran confession. We also have unbelievable wealth. We may think of ourselves as a smaller church body, but consider this: if you visited three hundred LCMS congregations per year, which would be impossible, in twenty years you would still not be done visiting all the congregations of this blessed church body! We have a billion-dollar pension fund. We have a billion-dollar extension fund. We have a Concordia University system, which, whatever its weaknesses may

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[12] Loescher, *The Complete Timotheus Verinus*, 12.

[13] Loescher, *The Complete Timotheus Verinus*, 14.

[14] Part One, Chapter 4 addresses "The Third Special Characteristic of the Pietistic Evil: The Invalidation of the Ministry." Loescher, *The Complete Timotheus Verinus*, 93–112.

[15] The phrase *tectum cruce* appears in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession VII-VIII, 18. *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche: herausgegeben im Gedenkjahr der Augsburgischen Konfession 1930*, 10th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1986), 237.

[16] Quoted in Matthew Harrison, "Hermann Sasse and EKiD—1948: The Death of the Lutheran Church," *Logia* 4, no. 4 (1995): 41.

be, arguably has the finest religion faculty overall that it has had in fifty years. We sustain a twenty-five-million-dollar-per-year world mission program. The past three years have sustained more than twenty million dollars per year in human care endeavors of LCMS World Relief and Human Care. Our social ministry institutions touched, this year, three million people with care. Concordia Publishing House is producing, in my view, the finest and most consistently excellent material in its entire history. The new Concordia Commentary Series is unparalleled in biblical and confessional fidelity. In the *Lutheran Service Book*, we have just produced what is arguably the best new hymnal and worship books in the history of the English-speaking Lutheran world. We have access to the generous funding of the billion-dollar Marvin M. Schwan Charitable Foundation, which is as orthodox as it is wealthy. Lutheran Heritage Foundation is producing catechisms and other orthodox material in so many languages that I have lost count. Many, many other strengths could be mentioned.

Missouri is alive and kicking. In my view, this is a great moment to be in the Missouri Synod. All this comes at a perfect moment, when the world has become a superhighway for travel and information. A few years ago, while in Adelaide, South Australia, I met some Singapore pastors. As I was chatting with them, I could see that one young man among them was an intense, confessional Lutheran. I said, "Where did you get this?" He said, "You know *Logia* online?"

The fall of the Soviet Union has brought unprecedented opportunities in Eastern European contacts. Latvia and Lithuania are their own extraordinary stories of contact with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. In addition, there has been the rise of Siberian Lutheranism and fellowship with the Ingrian church. This has been, in many respects, the decade of Missouri.

What about African Lutheranism? I talked to a bishop at a Church World Service meeting in Montreux, Switzerland, some years ago, and told him about the Missouri Synod. He said, "If you would have been here ten or fifteen years ago, all of Africa would have been yours." Now, *he* said that. I would not talk in such colonial terms. The fact is that we have tremendous new opportunities and partners in Africa. In East Africa there is the Kenyan Church, with which we are now in fellowship, Uganda, and the Sudan. How one builds a genuine Lutheran church and human care activities under the challenges faced in the Sudan is a miracle but it has been done. There is also Ethiopia. We even have contacts in Tanzania, and many, many other places, including Madagascar. In Western Africa there

are the churches in Liberia, Togo, and Côte d'Ivoire. Our South African seminary is taking students from all over the continent and is crying out for assistance to make room for many more who want to come. The doors are open for Missouri.

What about Asia? As a result of our own staff member Darin Storkson's work for LCMS World Relief, we have had, for the first time, personal contact with all eleven LWF members in Indonesia. The largest is the Batak Church. That church is half again as large as the Missouri Synod, and many in that church are crying out for a greater definition of Lutheranism. It is challenging. We can learn a great deal from the Batak Church about standing tall in challenging circumstances and facing a government that is not always favorable. Despite this, our brothers in the faith stand tall for the sake of Christ and his gospel. They want Lutheranism. They want Luther's two kingdoms doctrine; they need it in their context. They want the Lutheran liturgy. They want Lutheran doctrine and heritage. What this relationship will be with the Batak Church will be determined by them. These are two partners, the Missouri Synod and the Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP), whom nobody would have ever expected to interact, and here we are talking and sharing resources.

In South and Central America the doors are open. There are possibilities in the Dominican Republic and Guatemala. We now have, with LCMS World Mission, deaconess training beginning in Panama, which will begin a worldwide deaconess effort. There is also a presence in Nicaragua and Venezuela. We have partner churches that are in the LWF. The Missouri Synod should not join the LWF, but it is great to have friends there who bear witness.

With the SELK (the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany), we have now purchased property in Wittenberg which is but twenty yards from the front doors of St. Mary's Church, the church where Luther preached the Reformation to life. We hope this tool, under the direction of the Reverend Wilhelm Torgerson, will become a tool also for worldwide Lutheranism and a rallying point for the Lutheran faith.

Now is Missouri's moment. We ought to have contacts with every Lutheran church in the world, particularly in the developing world. We ought to have redoubled contacts with every Lutheran church in the world which does not ordain women. There has been a revolution at LCMS World Relief and Human Care—pushing the boundaries—and this has been a change for the sake of the gospel and the confession.

Let me tell you how international Lutheran relief has worked. The Missouri Synod has had a long and positive relationship with Lutheran World Relief (LWR), Baltimore. Over the years we have probably given tens of millions of dollars to that entity. The board make up is two-thirds ELCA people and one-third LCMS. Dollars for LWR core operations come from our shop, LCMS World Relief—from the donors of LCMS World Relief. When a disaster strikes or when there are development needs around the world, LWR, which is a fine development and relief agency, goes to the circumstance and finds local partners that are the local non-governmental organizations. Those organizations may be Lutheran but are often not Lutheran. They may be faith-based in some sense or they may be secular. They may be a coalition of other partners or they may be a part of a large ecumenical group such as Action by Churches Together (ACT). What does not generally happen is relief directed to, or capacity built for, specific Lutheran partners, that is, for Lutheran congregations, Lutheran judicatories, Lutheran churches on the ground in the circumstance. In the past, we would have just sent our money to Baltimore when a tsunami struck, and that money would have gone to the region to be doled out, and responsibly so, to a number of carefully chosen non-governmental organizations distributing relief and aid. It is effective and good work, but it is not connected with the gospel and it does not build the capacity of Lutherans or the Lutheran church.[17]

We resolved, in this last disaster, to start spending money in a way that increased the capacity of Lutherans, and by doing so—which is difficult work—to build the capacity both to care for people in need and to bear witness to Christ in the process, as well as to advance the cause of the Lutheran church in good and positive ways. That has been a huge sea change. A similar sea change took place with respect to Hurricane Katrina. In the past, we would have sent money to Chicago, to the ELCA, to be administered by Lutheran Disaster Response (a cooperative venture between Missouri and the ELCA administered by ELCA personnel), which would have been doled out in large measure through the social ministry agencies. These agencies have done a fantastic job of reaching the broader community, but those dollars would not have gone to LCMS

[17] Since this paper was delivered in January 2007, the Reverend John Nunes, an LCMS clergyman, was elected president of Lutheran World Relief, Baltimore. I am delighted to note that already in the interim before his election LWR staff opened a discussion about doing business in a way which would pay more attention to building Lutheran capacity and particularly that of LCMS partners. We are now moving forward with a malaria initiative that is extremely promising in this regard. It is truly a new day.

congregations, the LCMS district, or specifically LCMS people who needed help. Some people have criticized this and said, "Well, by doing this you are just serving your own." The fact is, when our own are hit, they say, "Help us bind up our wounds! Now send more so we can help all these other people around us." As they do so, they do it in the name of Christ and his blessed gospel. That has been a radical sea change, and the change has caused some criticism. I have no doubt, however, that it was the right thing to do. That has been an old-line boundary which we have crossed.

While on the road to Marsabit, in northern Kenya, this past summer, our vehicle had four flat tires. After we finally arrived, we found all these children affected by AIDS, as is the case in many cities in Africa. They are AIDS orphans; their parents are dead. By nature, Kenyans are very humble people. They respect the elderly. They have a calm, very low-key demeanor. People do not raise their voices. These children, however, acted in the opposite fashion, doing all kinds of antics and horsing around, trying to get attention. Some of them were addicts. Why did they do it? It was because of the most fundamental need of all of humanity, that is, to be accounted and recognized as somebody. These were young people whom their community had completely regarded as nonhumans. For all intents and purposes, they did not exist. Last year we helped build an orphanage there. After a twelve-year-old boy gave me a tour of the place, he spoke to me the most profound words I ever heard. I asked, "What do you think?" He said, "I thank God and Jesus Christ that somebody has regarded us as human beings."

My friends, the doctrine of justification is the answer to life's persistent questions. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake has something to say about being human. The doctrine of justification is the heart and soul, the *sine qua non*, of Lutheranism and not only of Lutheranism but the *sine qua non* of Christianity. It is pure gift and bearing witness to it, *sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus*, is far and away our chief ecumenical task. The task of the Lutheran church is to be Lutheran. In his locus on justification, Johann Gerhard wrote, "The Bible is to be read as though every letter were written with the ink of the blood of Christ [*Biblia ita legenda esse, ac si Sanquine Christi per totum essent scripta*]."[18] I tell you that ink from the blood of Christ dripped off Melanchthon's pen when he wrote these words,

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[18] Johann Gerhard, *Loci theologici*, ed. Ed. Preuss, 9 vols. (Berolini: Gust. Schlawitz, 1863–1885), 1:447.

> It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and forgiveness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21–26 and 4:5. (*CA* IV, 1–3)[19]

As Luther stated in the Smalcald Articles: "Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed. . . . On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world" (SA II, 1, 5).[20] According to Article IV of the Augsburg Confession, this faith is held, reckoned, and imputed (*halten und zurechnen* in the German; *imputat* in the Latin) for righteousness. We are justified *coram Deo* not by our own powers or merits. We are justified *propter Christum per fidem*.[21]

Can this dogma have any meaning today? Oswald Bayer writes something terribly profound—and it is profound for works of Lutheran charity. The doctrine of justification is in fact the center of all Lutheran works of charity because the doctrine of justification says something about being human. It says something about the fundamental need to be recognized—to be accounted as a person. Bayer wrote:

> There is no escaping the questions and evaluations of others. If one accepts and welcomes the other or not, if one greets the other or not, if one acknowledges the other—either through praise or reproach, affirmation or negation—or if one does not acknowledge the other and regards the other as worthless, a decision is made concerning our being or non-being. Only a being that is recognized and acknowledged is a being that is alive. If no one were to call and greet me by name, if no one were ready to speak to me and look at me, then I would be socially nonexistent. I would even be physically nonexistent, I would have no life at all, if my parents had not acknowledged me and respected my life even before my birth. I would no longer have any life if after my birth my parents had not smiled at me and talked to me, thus opening a space for community, accepting and acknowledging me. An unwanted child is aware of this rejection. The denial of unconditional and anticipated

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[19] Theodore G. Tappert et al., trans. and ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 30.

[20] Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 292.

[21] *Bekenntnisschriften*, 56.

> recognition, the denial of love, shows how necessary recognition is. Its denial is a painful and especially impressive indication of its necessity, its necessity for life.[22]

Bayer goes on to argue that all reality is involved with the justification debate. I would hold that this doctrine of justification causes us to recognize all as being worthy of Christ's blood and righteousness, for Christ's sake, and then also worthy of our care.

In our circles, for some reason, in the last forty or fifty years especially, we have allowed the government to take over care for the poor and needy. As the welfare state has arisen, we have simply said that the responsibility for care for the needy is not really a Lutheran task—that the Lutheran task is, finally, simply to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. Well, that is certainly our fundamental, *sine qua non* task. Nevertheless, the New Testament, the Lutheran Confessions, and our church fathers bear witness to the responsibility of the church to be involved in Lutheran works of charity. When you go to somebody and proclaim the gospel, if you turn away from that person's need—the most fundamental need—by refusing to acknowledge that person as a valuable human being, you in a way render the gospel impotent.

Christ combined speaking and acts of mercy throughout his earthly ministry, as seen in the Gospels. The early church combined speaking the gospel with acts of mercy throughout. If you have any doubt, take a look at Paul's collection for Jerusalem. The entire sub-theme of the book of Acts is the fact that Paul saw a tremendous need in Jerusalem and spent ten to fifteen years of his life organizing a collection for the poor. All the stewardship passages of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9—for example, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7), "He who sows sparingly shall reap sparingly" (2 Cor 9:6), and "The gift is not acceptable according to what one has but according to what one does not have" (2 Cor 8:12)—have to do with Paul collecting dollars for the church in Jerusalem. Paul did this as an expression of *koinonia*, fellowship.

In the Missouri Synod, we have tended to define "fellowship" as agreement in dogma, period. For Luther, it was much more dynamic. It was certainly dogma, as it was for the New Testament. In fact, Paul even calls the collection a *koinonia* and a *leitourgia* and a *diakonia* in 2

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[22] Oswald Bayer, *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 1–2.

Corinthians. In *The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods* (1519), Luther wrote,

> The immeasurable grace and mercy of God are given us in this sacrament to the end that we might put from us all misery and tribulation [*anfechtung*] and lay it upon the community [of saints], and especially on Christ. . . . When you have partaken of this sacrament, therefore, or desire to partake of it, you must in turn share the misfortunes of the fellowship, as has been said.[23]

Fellowship for the New Testament is not merely unity in dogma and teaching, though such unity is certainly part of fellowship. As the Smalcald Articles state, it is unity in faith, doctrine, Sacraments, and *opera caritatis*—works of love (SA II, IV, 9). Works of love are an indication of *koinonia*. Our fathers taught this regularly.

There are, in fact, old boundaries that need to be crossed. This is a challenging moment for Lutheranism. It is, however, a moment of unprecedented opportunity. Let us cross the boundaries and let us act with charity, speaking the gospel clearly, being Lutherans, and loving people in need.

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[23] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 35:54.

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Sola Fide: Luther and Calvin

Phillip Cary

I am not a Lutheran, but I suppose that I have been invited here because I wrote an article a little while back about why Luther is not quite Protestant.[1] So I figure that I owe you a bit of a warning up front. When I say, "I am not a Lutheran," I mean: I am not an adherent of the Lutheran Confessions, as most of you are. I am an Anglican. On the other hand, I am someone who thinks Luther got most things right, and that is why I am here. On the things that matter most, I think he got more things right than, say, Augustine or Calvin—and that is saying something, for a non-Lutheran. One of my most formative experiences as a theologian was my first extensive reading of Luther in graduate school, when I came to be fascinated by the subtle differences between Luther and Calvin and became convinced that where Luther and Calvin differed, Luther got it right. Yet as I worked out the differences between Calvin and Luther, I came up with a portrait of Luther that had him looking a bit less Protestant than the Lutheran Confessions, especially the Formula of Concord. That is the portrait I will present in this study, concluding with some tentative thoughts about the Formula of Concord.

In general, my portrait of Luther goes like this: I think the difference between Luther and Calvin is that Luther was a sacramental thinker in a deeper sense than Calvin was, but this means that in certain very important respects he was more medieval and more Catholic than Calvin was, and, so far as I can tell, this also means he is in some ways less Protestant than the Lutheran Confessions are.

I. *Sola Fide* in Standard Protestantism

Of course, I am not saying that Luther was not Protestant at all. On the contrary, there is a distinctively Protestant structure of the doctrine of justification by faith alone that he shares with Calvin—indeed, Calvin learned it ultimately from him—and that provides a large area of common ground between the two of them, giving us a backdrop against which to locate the disagreements and differences. So let us start with this common

[1] "Why Luther is not Quite Protestant: The Logic of Faith in a Sacramental Promise," *Pro Ecclesia* 14 (2005): 447–486. I first delivered this paper at the 2007 Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

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ground. First of all the obvious point: both Luther and Calvin taught that we are justified by faith alone—*sola fide*. Slightly less obvious: both of them taught that faith alone justifies because Christian faith is fundamentally belief in the promise of the gospel, and one does not receive what is promised by doing good works but by simply believing the promise.

Where the disagreements begin, I think, is with exactly what the words of the gospel promise are. It is striking how little is said about this, how much is left implicit. Of course, there are many promises in Scripture, and Luther and Calvin both appealed to many of them. When the rubber hits the road, however, and it is a question of how we stand before God, Luther typically thinks of a different set of scriptural promises than Calvin does, a set of distinctively sacramental promises, which have a different logic from the kind of promises Calvin and most other Protestants think about when they speak of the promises of the gospel.

Let me start with the more Protestant kind of promises—the promises that come to mind for theologians who are, in my terms, *quite* Protestant. They belong to a larger pattern of thinking that I will call "The Standard Protestant syllogism."

The Standard Protestant Syllogism

Major Premise:	Whoever believes in Christ is saved.
Minor Premise:	I believe in Christ.
Conclusion:	I am saved.

"Syllogism" is just the standard form of argumentation in Aristotelian logic, which both Luther and Calvin learned at school. It was the natural way for them to think when reasoning carefully. The major premise in a syllogism is a kind of general principle or foundation. In this case, it is the promise of the gospel, derived from Mark 16:16, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." Many Protestants leave out the "is baptized" part; though to be fair, they do assume and even teach that believers should be baptized.

Now this is where the logic becomes important: in order to get from the major premise to the conclusion you need a minor premise, which applies the principle to the particular case in hand. How do I get saved? Well, by believing, of course. This is an explicit condition of the promise. For the major premise is logically equivalent to the conditional statement: "*if* you believe in Christ, you are saved," where the *if*-clause states the condition. So the logic follows from this condition: you are saved on condition that you have faith. Thus if I am to know that I am saved, I must know that I meet the condition.

Because the content of the promise is conditional, explicitly making everything conditional upon faith, I am in no position to say that the gospel promise is about me until I can say, "I believe." For most Protestants, this is a really big deal. The hour I first believed or the moment when I can first say "I truly believe in Christ" is the moment of my salvation, of my conversion and turning from death to life. What matters is that moment of conversion, not the Sacrament of Baptism, because everything depends on my being able to say "I believe." For only if I know that I truly believe can I confidently conclude: I am saved.

Notice what this requires of us: not just that we believe, but that we *know* we believe. I call this the requirement of "reflective faith." Protestant faith has to be reflective in that it is not enough just to believe; you have to *believe* you believe, maybe even *know* you believe. That is a pretty hefty requirement for those of us who are weak in faith, or who believe that all sin is rooted in unbelief and we are still sinners at heart (*simul justus et peccator*, both justified and sinner still). It discourages us from confessing our unbelief and encourages us instead to profess our belief. This actually becomes a technical term in English Calvinism: the Puritans spoke of those who were "professors of religion," meaning that they professed to know that they had been truly converted and regenerated by faith in Christ, whereas those who were not professors might be baptized Christians, able to confess the creed with all sincerity but not able to profess that they had true, saving faith. Those who thus could sincerely *confess* the faith but not confidently *profess* faith were taught to believe they were not truly regenerate or born again. A peculiarly Protestant agony of conscience lies here, as Calvinist ministers realized, and they devoted much of their pastoral practice to dealing with it, addressing the problem they called "the assurance of faith." The problem was to attain assurance that you really had true faith. If that is your problem, then you are quite Protestant.

II. Luther's *Sola Fide*

Now, of course Luther had his own agonies of conscience, but they were not quite the same as this distinctively Protestant agony. That was because the gospel promise which was the foundation of his faith was different. When he wanted to know whether he was regenerate and saved, he turned to the promise made to him in Baptism. So we get Luther's syllogism:

Luther's Syllogism

Major premise:	Christ told me, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."
Minor premise:	Christ never lies but only tells the truth.
Conclusion:	I am baptized (that is, I have new life in Christ).

The major premise here is based on a scriptural promise (Matt 28:19) but is also a sacramental word, spoken at a particular time and place under very particular sacramental circumstances. This makes it profoundly different from the standard Protestant understanding of the gospel promise, a difference that is subtle but makes a huge logical difference in the outcome. To get at these differences, we have to begin by noting the crucial but (I hope) familiar point that it is Christ who speaks the baptismal formula through the mouth of the pastor, so that the baptismal word is nothing less than the word of Christ spoken to me in particular. What I want to dwell on is how we get to this "me in particular"—what Luther calls the *pro me* of the gospel. I suggest that what makes this possible is that this sacramental word of Christ is an *external* word in a deeper sense than the major premise of the standard Protestant promise. For it is tied to external circumstances, a particular place and time of utterance (for example, the Baptism of baby Martin in Eisleben in 1483, or my Baptism in Buffalo, New York, in 1958) in such a way that the word "you" it contains means *me*, or Martin Luther, or some other particular person—depending, of course, on when it is said and to whom—which is to say, depending on who is baptized.

Notice how very different the baptismal formula is from the major premise of the standard Protestant syllogism. Logically, it is not a conditional statement. It lays down no conditions about what I must do or decide or even believe in order to make sure the promise applies to me. The promise applies to me because it says so: Christ says "you" and he means *me*. So the promise of the gospel, on Luther's reckoning, is inherently and unconditionally for me. Faith does not make it so but merely recognizes that it is so, a recognition that happens because we dare not call Christ a liar when he tells us, on that one momentous occasion, "I baptize *you* . . . ." That is why the minor premise is not about my faith but about the truth of Christ. This is absolutely essential, and Luther makes a very big deal about it. Have you noticed how often Luther talks about the truth of God? It is hard to find an important passage about the doctrine of justification in Luther's works which does not hammer at these points: God is true, faith acknowledges God's truth, and unbelief calls God a liar. Romans 3:4—"let God be true and every man a liar"—is a favorite verse hovering behind these discussions.[2]

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[2] Perhaps the most memorable example of this *Deus verax* theme, as I like to call it, is found in *The Freedom of a Christian*. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia:

Now to say that God speaks the truth is, of course, to make a kind of profession of faith—but not in the Calvinist mode, because it is not reflective. We are not required to talk about our faith, to know that we have faith, or to profess, "I believe." We are required, of course, to believe. We must believe that what God says is true, and we must stop calling God a liar (and furthermore, not incidentally, we must believe that Christ who makes the promise is God). That, of course, is what faith essentially does: it believes in the truth of the word of Christ. The problem with reflective faith is that it must do more: if reflective faith is required, then believing in God's word is not quite enough because we must also believe that we believe.

Here is where I think Luther has got it fundamentally right. What faith says, fundamentally, is "God speaks the truth." Only secondarily, and not fundamentally, faith may also say, "I believe." Faith, however, may also say, "My faith is weak" or "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief" or "I have sinned in my unbelief and denied my Lord, like Peter the apostle." Faith may confess its own unbelief. What it cannot do, if it is to remain faith at all, is stop clinging to the truth of God's word. For faith does not rely on faith, but on the word of God. Christian faith, if Luther is right, does not have to be reflective.

III. Pastoral Consequences

This is a point of enormous pastoral importance. For Luther, the doctrine of justification by faith alone does not mean we rely on faith. For faith itself does not rely on faith. Faith does not rely on itself but rather on the truth of the word of God. Luther is particularly clear on this point when he argues, against the Anabaptists, that we should not baptize people on the basis of our knowledge of their faith and that we should not even come to Baptism ourselves on the basis of our own faith. For we can be certain of the word of God, but not of our own faith, as Luther stated in *Concerning Rebaptism*: "the baptized one who receives or grounds his baptism on his faith . . . *is not sure of his own faith.*"[3] The reflective belief in your own belief is not required, for as Luther added, "he who doesn't think he believes, but is in

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Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 31:350–351. Hereafter cited as *LW*. See also the *Proceedings at Augsburg* (*LW* 31:271), the *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses* (*LW* 31:100), the defense of the articles condemned by the Papal Bull (*LW* 32:15), the 1519 treatises on Penance (*LW* 35:12–14), Baptism (*LW* 35:36–38) and the Sacrament of the Body of Christ (*LW* 31:61), *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (*LW* 36:43), and *Treatise on Good Works* (*LW* 44:56)—and this is only an initial sampling of works written from 1518 to 1520!

[3] *LW* 40:240; emphasis added.

despair, has the greatest faith."[4] That is of course a description of *Anfechtung*, Luther's particular agony of conscience. The demand that we know we believe would only make *Anfechtung* worse, undermining our faith in the word of God by turning us back on our own resources and demanding that we find it in our hearts to believe. If you want to build people up in faith, you have to direct their attention to the word of God and not to their faith. Moreover, do not direct them to some general principle—direct them to their Baptism, and remind them that when they were baptized it was Christ himself who, through the mouth of the minister, said "I baptize you" and he meant *you* in particular.

The logical distinction we must observe, then—and it is a crucial pastoral distinction—is between having faith and relying on faith. "There is quite a difference between *having* faith, on the one hand, and *depending on* one's faith, on the other," Luther wrote. "Whoever allows himself to be baptized on the strength of his faith, is not only uncertain [because he doesn't know for certain whether he believes], but also an idolater who denies Christ. For he trusts in and builds on something of his own, namely, a gift which he has from God [that is, faith], and not on God's Word alone."[5] So Luther's *sola fide* does not mean that we rely on faith alone, but rather that we rely on the word of God alone. For that is what faith does: it relies on the truth of the word, not on itself.

This contrast between faith looking at the truth and faith looking at itself is crucial to the very nature and logic of faith. Faith is the heart taking hold of the truth, not the heart taking hold of its faith. This is true of every kind of belief. If I want to find out whether I believe that it is snowing outside, I do not go looking into my heart to find out whether I truly believe this. I try to find out whether it is *true* that it is snowing outside; once I have found that out, I have then settled the question of whether I believe it. Likewise, once I have realized that God was not lying to me when he baptized me, then I know enough about whether I believe. Every time my weak faith drives me into something like Luther's agony of conscience, some kind of *Anfechtung*, then I can turn back to that truth, the truth of my Baptism, when Christ who does not lie made a promise to me in particular.

Is it not much easier to confess, "Christ is no liar," than to profess, "I believe"—especially if what that is supposed to mean is: "I have true faith in my heart, I truly, really trust in God"? For this reflective faith, faith relying on itself, is how faith becomes a work, something we must do and

[4] *LW* 40:241.

[5] *LW* 40:252; emphasis added

accomplish in order to be saved. Then it has exactly the same problems as justification by works. You can always wonder if your works are good enough, and, if you are honest, the answer will be: "No, they are not good enough." In exactly the same way, you can always ask: "Do I trust God enough? Have I really, unreservedly, surrendered my whole heart in faith to Christ? Is my faith strong, sincere, unhypocritical, un-self-serving?" The proper answer to all these questions is: "No." My faith is never good enough, and, thank God, I am not justified by such works of faith but by the truth of the word I believe in. My faith is not good enough, but the one I have faith in is good enough.

This is especially apparent in times of doubt and *Anfechtung*, when holding on to the faith is really a lot of work—a great deal of work at which we are not very good.[6] For we find it very hard to trust God, very hard to hold on to the faith, and when pressed by our doubts, sin, and weakness, Luther says, all we can do is sigh and groan. Yet that turns out to be the strongest faith of all, not because we have a strong sense of trust in our hearts—the whole point about *Anfechtung* is that we do *not* have that—but rather because we find we have nothing at all to hang on to but the bare truth of God's word, which we scarcely feel we believe, and indeed we mostly feel we do *not* believe. The only comfort is that this word is true, despite our desperately inadequate faith. Let God be true and every man a liar—including myself. Let me recognize as clearly as I may that my own heart is full of lies and unbelief; nonetheless, God speaks the truth. That I believe, even when I do not believe that I believe.

If you have to make a choice between the standard Protestant agony of conscience, where you must come somehow to the conclusion that you have true saving faith, and Luther's agony of conscience, where the only question that really matters is whether God is telling you the truth—well, take Luther's agony of conscience. It is the right agony to have. In one form or another, it *is* the agony you will inevitably struggle with if you start with Luther's premises about the nature of the gospel. Honestly, in the end the *only* question that really matters is whether Christ is telling the truth. There are indeed many, many times we find that hard to believe—every time we sin, in fact.

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[6] See Luther's 1535 Galatians commentary: "It is effort and labor to cling firmly to this [word of Christ] in the midst of trial and conflict." *LW* 26:380–381. Note especially the whole discussion on pages 380–389, where Luther presses the point that it is not the strength of our faith that prevails but our helpless sighing, "so faint that it can hardly be felt." *LW* 26:389.

IV. The Protestant Doctrine of Conversion

So how is it that Protestants got into their distinctive agony, asking the question of reflective faith: "Do I truly believe?" It is not simply that most of them dislike sacraments. That would not be fair to say of someone like Calvin, for instance (let us leave Zwingli out of this). There are, however, specific reasons to find the kind of reasoning in the standard Protestant syllogism attractive, and you can even feel the pull of that attraction in some places in Luther.

The problem is this: Suppose that you want to know you are eternally saved. Then no sacrament is going to be good enough for you. In particular, the sacramental promise of Baptism cannot function as an unconditional guarantee that you will be saved in the end, because of course lots of people get baptized (especially as infants) and later abandon the faith of Christ. As Augustine pointed out, eternal salvation requires that God give you not only the gift of faith but also the gift of persevering in the faith until the end of your life.[7] No one—not Augustine, not Luther, not Calvin—thinks that Baptism promises that gift. So if you want to know that you are eternally saved, *now*, you must look to a different promise—one more like the major premise in the standard Protestant syllogism.

You must, in fact, do more than that. You must follow Calvin in what I take to be his most radical innovation in Christian doctrine. You must teach that those who truly believe, *now*, are sure to receive the gift of perseverance in faith to the end of their lives. This is the distinctively Calvinist doctrine of perseverance, formulated in the fifth point of five-point Calvinism (the "P" in the famous TULIP, summarizing the five canons of the Synod of Dordt).[8] This is a stark departure from the Augustinian tradition, for Augustine was quite explicit in teaching that no one knows whether they will receive the gift of perseverance—a point on which he was followed by the Formula of Concord.[9] No one knows their

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[7] Augustine, *The Gift of Perseverance* 1–2.

[8] Found in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990) 3:592–595. For the roots of this doctrine in Calvin, see *Institutes* 3:2.40.

[9] See especially Augustine, *Admonition and Grace* 17–25; but see also his treatises *The Gift of Perseverance* 1 and *The City of God* 11.12 and 21.15. The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord affirms Augustine's view, adding the distinctively Lutheran point that because God has not revealed our election to us in his word, we are not to concern ourselves with it but "to adhere exclusively to the revealed Word" (FC SD XI, 52). The Lutheran Confessions are quoted from *The Book of Concord*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959).

own future that well. For no decision you make now can determine that in five or ten years or even tomorrow, you will not apostatize, abandon the faith of Christ, and go the way of eternal death.

The only way you could know you will persevere in faith to the end of your life is if you could know you are predestined to be saved. Augustine thought it obvious that no one knows this, but Calvin disagreed. This is what is profound and new about Calvin's doctrine of predestination, which in other respects (as Calvin rightly argued)[10] differs little from Augustine's—and therefore from Aquinas's or Luther's. Calvin teaches that believers can and should know they are predestined for salvation,[11] which means they can and should know they will persevere in faith to the end, which means they can and should know they are eternally saved, now, already in this life—not just saved in hope, as Augustine describes the effect of Baptism: saved *in spe* but not yet *in re*, in hope but not yet in reality. Augustine says explicitly: we are "not yet saved."[12] We are still on the road to eternal salvation, and we do not get there until after this life.

So how can Calvin teach otherwise? This is where reflective faith comes in as an essential element in Calvin's theology. He makes a distinction between temporary faith and true saving faith,[13] which of course is faith that perseveres, and he thinks we can and should know if we have true faith. The people with temporary faith may just be mistaken about the status of their faith, which of course is a rather terrifying possibility. I have no idea why he thinks he can get away with this. The agonies of conscience it leads to strike me as utterly unbearable and pernicious. How am I supposed to make this distinction between temporary and true faith? Where am I supposed to look?

Disastrously, I am supposed to look inward. After all, even the unregenerate can do outward good works. So what the mainstream Calvinist tradition does is direct our attention to the fact—and of course it

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[10] Calvin, *Institutes* 3:23.1.

[11] On knowing you are predestined, i.e., elected by God for salvation, see *Institutes* 3:24.1–7. Calvin insists that certainty of our own election depends on the promises of Christ, but the underlying logic requires in addition a reflective faith, as in the standard Protestant syllogism above.

[12] We are *nondum salvi* according to Augustine, *Guilt and Remission of Sins* 2.10, where he also develops the contrast between *in spe* and *in re*. See Augustine, *Against the Two Letters of the Pelagians* 3.5, for a succinct application of this contrast to baptismal salvation. Note also *The City of God* 19.4 where, about halfway through this very long chapter, Christians are described as *nondum salvos*.

[13] Calvin, *Institutes* 3:2.11, in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 555–556; cf. 3:24.7–8.

is a fact—that true faith bears fruits in sanctification of the heart. So if you are a good Calvinist, you are supposed to notice this—notice that you are getting more inwardly sanctified, which gives you assurance of faith, that is, assurance that you really do have true faith. I have to say, this strikes me as a disastrous theological and pastoral move. The result is this: I am *supposed* to believe that I am inwardly holy and righteous. Instead of looking at myself and finding a sinner—for as Luther rightly says, even the righteous man sins in all his good works[14]—and thus being driven in repentance to take hold once again of the gospel alone as the sole assurance of my salvation, I am *supposed* to look at my own heart and see something reassuring. I am *supposed* to see that I have made real spiritual progress and that I am becoming more inwardly holy and righteous.[15]

I do not see how anyone can do this without becoming self-righteous, in a distinctively Protestant way—claiming no righteousness of your own, of course, but comforted by how powerfully the Holy Spirit is working in you, ready to boast of how transformed your inner life is because of God working in your life, and so on. Is not this the very essence of what Luther meant by *Schwärmerei*, fanaticism? It is, I think, the main reason why the very word "righteous" has come to have a bad odor, being virtually indistinguishable nowadays from the word "self-righteous." Just think about it: if you call someone "righteous" nowadays, you are insulting them, no? I think that it is because so many Protestants have worked so hard over the years to convince themselves that inwardly they really are more righteous than their unregenerate neighbors.

One further innovation is needed to make Calvin's radically new doctrine of predestination work. In order to know that I have true saving faith, not the temporary kind which does not persevere, I must know that I have passed a point of no return. At some particular moment in my life I have come into a faith that will never fail. So there develops a distinctively Protestant doctrine of conversion as a once-in-a-lifetime event of justification, before which I had no true faith and after which I know I am eternally saved because I do have true faith. As this distinctively Protestant

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[14] See the defense of articles 31, 32, and 35 in Luther's response to the Papal Bull against him, as well as the extended defense of these articles against Latomus, *LW* 32:83–87, 91, 161–191. This of course is the ground of the principle *simul justus et peccator*, enunciated in numerous forms in these works, for example, *LW* 32:84, 172, 213.

[15] For this point of Calvinist teaching, see the Canons of Dordt in Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3:583–584, as well as Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1978) 176–177. I quote the relevant passages in "Why Luther is not Quite Protestant," 478–479.

doctrine of conversion develops, it replaces Baptism as the moment when I become a Christian and becomes in effect the basis of my assurance that I have a gracious God.

One can see why this is so. If you want to know you are eternally saved, *now*, already in this life, then this is the route you need to go. You can see Luther himself exploring this route in some of the table talk when he counsels people about anxieties about predestination and says that if you know that you believe, you can know that you are predestined for salvation.[16] Yet he never systematically builds a theology around this point, as Calvin does, and indeed sometimes he moves in exactly the opposite direction, as for instance in the table talk where it is reported:

> He [Luther] spoke of predestination and said that when a man begins to dispute about it, it is like a fire that cannot be extinguished, and the more he disputes the more he despairs. Our Lord God is so hostile to such disputation that he instituted Baptism, the word and the Sacrament as signs to counteract it. We should rely on these and say: "I have been baptized. I believe in Jesus Christ. I have received the Sacrament. *What do I care if I have been predestined or not?*"[17]

This table talk, I would suggest, indicates the proper direction for a distinctively Lutheran theology to go, sticking with the sacraments and leaving the knowledge of predestination to God. That has a price, however, for it really does mean that you do not know whether you are eternally saved. That was precisely why *Anfechtung* could take the distinctive shape it did for Luther. When you do start disputing about predestination, you can get anxious about whether God secretly plans to withhold from you the gift of perseverance, so that no matter how faithful you are now, sometime in the future you will lose your faith and be damned. This is a possibility that can rear its ugly head any time you are aware of your own sin, for at the root of all sin is unbelief.[18] If you cannot rely on your faith *now*, how can you count on it being there in the future? That is why *Anfechtung* is never far around the corner.

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[16] Table Talk 5658a, in *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 131–136. See also Luther's letter to Barbara Lisskirchen, April 30, 1531, in *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 115–117. I present these passages at some length in "Why Luther is not Quite Protestant," 481–484.

[17] Table Talk 2631b, in *Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 122; emphasis added.

[18] See, for instance, Luther's Preface to Romans—"unbelief alone commits sin" (*LW* 35:369)—and *The Freedom of a Christian*—"nothing makes a man good except faith, or evil except unbelief" (*LW* 31:362).

The best answer to that worry is not to go Calvin's route but to stick with the sacraments and say "What do I care if I have been predestined or not?" Today's sacramental faith is sufficient for the day. Today you can believe that God is not lying to you. Tomorrow's faith will have to wait for tomorrow. The sacramental promise of your Baptism will still be there, and the struggle to believe it (against worries about predestination, the weakness of your own faith, and so on) will still be there to be fought. That is how Christian faith goes, a continual struggle against unbelief in which—as we experience in *Anfechtung*—unbelief is in fact stronger than the faith of our own hearts, and we have no hope at all except the truth of God's promise in Jesus Christ. That, however, is enough. For precisely the experience of the inadequacy of my efforts to believe is what convinces me that I must put my trust in Christ's word alone, not in my ability to believe it—and precisely this strengthens true faith. So *Anfechtung* is the right agony of conscience to have, rather than the distinctively Protestant struggle to come to the belief that I truly believe and to experience my own inward sanctification and righteousness because of the work of the Spirit in me. Save me from such inwardness, I say. Give me word and sacrament instead.

V. A Question for Confessional Lutherans

The alternative to a once-in-a-lifetime conversion is a repeated, indeed, daily return to Baptism, which is of course a penitent turning away from sin and self and toward the gracious word of Christ. We need to see that conversion happens many times in life if we are to understand exactly what Luther means by justification. As Luther put it in his famous 1519 sermon on "Two Kinds of Righteousness," the alien righteousness by which we are justified before God "is given to men in baptism and *whenever they are truly repentant.*"[19] So justification occurs many times, as often as you repent. That was Luther's doctrine of conversion, as I understand it—"conversion" just being Latin for turning. We are converted whenever the Holy Spirit turns our hearts away from our selves and our sins and teaches us to take hold of Christ himself in his word, by returning to our Baptism, receiving the Lord's Supper in faith, hearing the word of absolution and believing it, or rejoicing at the preaching of the gospel.

We are justified and converted many, many times in life. This is a point that Luther has in common with Roman Catholic teaching, for instance,

[19] *LW* 31:297; emphasis added.

with Thomas Aquinas, who identified the justification of the ungodly with the remission of sins, which is brought about especially by the Sacrament of Penance.[20] So here too Luther is not quite Protestant—not buying into the Protestant doctrine of a once-in-a-lifetime conversion and justification but sharing the medieval Catholic teaching of frequent, repeated events of justification, repentance, and conversion.

That is not, however, how the Formula of Concord seems to put it. It brings me, in conclusion, to my question for Lutherans—that is, those who are not just appreciative readers of Luther, like me, but also adherents of the Lutheran Confessions. It looks to me as if the Formula of Concord adopts the Protestant view of conversion as a once-in-a-lifetime event, and I do not get it. Let me give you an example from the discussion of the synergist controversy in the Solid Declaration: "The chief issue is solely and alone what the unregenerated man's intellect and will can do in his conversion and regeneration . . ." (FC SD II, 2). Who is this unregenerate man who needs to be converted? Have the authors of the Formula of Concord forgotten that everyone involved in this dispute has been baptized, nearly all as infants, and thus that none of them were, at any point in their adult lives, simply unregenerate? Indeed, even if this were not so, why are they talking as if conversion rather than Baptism is how we become regenerate? True enough, in a missionary situation conversion should properly come before Baptism, but an essential result of the conversion will be the intention to seek Baptism (that is why the phrase "and is baptized" is not an inessential part of the promise, "Whoever believes and is baptized is saved" in Mark 16:16). So this talk of conversion, as if it marked the one decisive turning point in a person's life, does not seem to me very much like Luther.

Indeed, if I may say so, it does not even seem to me very much like Lutheranism. Does not Lutheran piety, as a matter of fact—and especially Lutheran child-rearing—operate without much of a concept of conversion? To see what I mean, listen to this little poem, originally in German, which I found on the baptismal certificate of a little girl born to a Lutheran family in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania. Does it not reflect the way Lutherans teach their children to believe? This is the poem:

I have been baptized—even if I die
How can the cold grave do me harm?
I know my homeland and my inheritance
Which I have with God in heaven.

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[20] Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I–II, 113.1.

After I die, there is prepared for me
The joy of heaven and robes of glory.

I have been baptized—I stand in covenant
Through my Baptism with my God,
So say I always with glad lips
In crosses, tribulation, trouble and need:
I have been baptized, and I rejoice in that—
The joy remains forever.[21]

Does this sound like a little girl who must go through a once-in-a-lifetime conversion experience before she can count herself as regenerate? Will not her experience be quite different: for as long as she can remember, this little girl has been (and has been taught to believe she has been) a true, regenerate Christian, capable of obeying God with a glad heart by virtue of the grace of Christ which she received in Baptism.[22]

VI. Afterword: Luther and the Theology of Conversion[23]

The point of every theology of conversion, so far as I can tell, is to mark a "before" and "after" in the life of a Christian. After I am converted, I can

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[21] It is from a 1781 baptismal certificate in the Hershey Museum, Hershey, Pennsylvania. Here it is in the original language (spelling modernized):

Ich bin getauft, ob ich gleich sterbe,
Was schadet mir das kühle Grab?
Ich weiss mein Vaterland und Erbe,
Das ich bei Gott im Himmel hab';
Nach meinem Tod, ist mir bereit
Des Himmels Freud', das Feuerkleid.

Ich bin getauft, ich steh' in Bunde
Durch meinem Tauf' mit meinem Gott,
So sprech' ich stets mit frohem Munde
In Kreuz, in Trübsal, Angst und Not.
Ich bin getauft, dess' freu' ich mich,
Die Freude bleibet ewiglich.

[22] After the lecture, a member of the audience showed me hymn #594, "God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It," in the new *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), which is so strikingly similar to the poem above in both doctrine and phrasing (including especially the repeated confession: "I am baptized") that I have to suppose they share a common source. In any case, the hymn serves to confirm that the poem represents a piety which is still meant to be practiced by Lutherans today.

[23] These further thoughts were added as a result of re-reading and reflection stimulated by conversations with members of the symposium audience after the original lecture.

count myself as saved by faith, but not before—or so it goes in Calvinism and its offshoots, including American Revivalism and Evangelicalism. So why does the Formula of Concord need a theology of conversion? Here too conversion marks a "before" and "after": before conversion, I have no free will that can co-operate with God or do anything good by way of faith or obedience; afterwards my will is freed by grace to believe and obey God with gladness, making a real inward co-operation between God and man possible. Identifying this turning point, this "before" and "after," is a crucial move in the Formula of Concord's effort to clarify the sense in which our free will can and cannot co-operate with the grace of God, which is the key point at issue in the synergist controversy.

The Formula of Concord does not follow Calvin's lead, however, in making the event of conversion irrevocable, as if after conversion there is no going back to what was before. On the contrary, it speaks of the possibility of the baptized sinning against conscience in such a way that sin reigns again in their hearts, so that they "grieve the Holy Spirit within them and lose him" and therefore must be "converted again" (FC SD II, 69). This and another passage in the Solid Declaration suggest that infant Baptism brings about conversion,[24] but only this passage explicitly draws the striking but necessary conclusion that there may be more than one conversion in a person's life. That conclusion indicates to me that the Formula of Concord is not really talking about the same kind of conversion as most Protestants. It is not necessarily a once-and-done sort of thing. The problem is that this makes the Formula's solution to the synergist controversy considerably less clear and neat than it looks at first. Since the "before" and "after" of conversion are not irreversible, it may happen that even after conversion a believer may find himself in a state of sin in which he has no free will to speak of, no real ability to co-operate with the grace of God.

I would go further. The inability to co-operate with God, the lack of a free will that can do anything good, is a specifically *Christian* experience. This is precisely what we should expect if we have noticed that Luther, that mighty Christian, speaks of the bondage of the will from his own deepest experience: "even though a Christian does not fall into coarse sins like murder, adultery, or theft, he still is not free of impatience, grumbling, hatred, and blasphemy against God—sins that are completely unknown to the human reason. . . . [I]n the saintly man impatience, grumbling, hate,

[24] FC SD II, 16 and 67. See also FC SD II, 48, where word and sacrament are identified as the means of conversion.

and blasphemy against God are powerful."[25] He is speaking of how the Christian is "divided . . . into two times,"[26] which he calls the time of law and the time of grace. This is really the *simul justus et peccator* spread out in time and registered in our experience, because of course we do not feel our sinfulness at the same time we feel the grace and comfort of the gospel. Hence "to the extent that [the Christian] is flesh, he is under the Law; to the extent that he is spirit, he is under the Gospel"[27] and when he feels he is under the law he is not obedient and faithful but fearful, angry, hating and blaspheming God. The difference between these two times is therefore not marked by a once-and-done conversion—if it were, we would have to say that the time of law could take place only *after* conversion because natural reason knows nothing of this experience—but rather "this happens personally and spiritually *every day* in any Christian, in whom there are found the time of Law and the time of grace in constant alternation."[28]

The "time of law" is of course just another way of talking about *Anfechtung*, that agony of conscience which Luther thinks of as *the* distinctively Christian experience of struggle against sin, unbelief, fear, and wrath. If Luther is right about the shape of Christian experience, then there is no real work for a theology of conversion to do. Yes, we do have conversion experiences—that is simply a psychological fact—and some of them may amount to dramatic turning points in our lives that are needed to get us back on the right path, returning us to our Baptism after years of straying in a far country. Theologically, however, conversion simply means repentance, which should happen daily, though occasionally it needs to take the form of a dramatic psychological turning point to bring us prodigals back home to our Father. Still, no conversion simply removes the inability of our free will to co-operate with the grace of God, because that inability belongs to the daily experience of every pious Christian. We are always sinners incapable of doing anything good by our own natural powers, as well as righteous people who gladly do good works by faith alone.

In short, Luther's teaching that believers remain both sinners and righteous at the same time undermines the point of the Protestant theology of conversion. We can follow Luther on this issue and still speak of

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[25] Commentary on Galatians 3:23, *LW* 26:340–341.

[26] *LW* 26:342.

[27] *LW* 26:342. Likewise consider the remark: "this is the time of Law, under which a Christian *always* exists according to the flesh." *LW* 26:341; emphasis added.

[28] *LW* 26:340; emphasis added.

conversion, but we cannot make a clear distinction between conversion and daily repentance. It seems to me that what the Formula of Concord says about conversion can be interpreted in Luther's terms, which is to say conversion in the Christian life is any return to Baptism that brings us from the time of law to the time of grace, from *Anfechtung* to the comfort and gladness of the gospel of Christ, which makes possible true obedience and good works from the heart. The only problem is that such an interpretation would make most of the talk of conversion in the Formula of Concord seem either pointless or misleading. For it is true that after conversion we can co-operate with the grace of God, both believing and doing good works freely and gladly, but this does not mean that we will not soon experience again our lack of free will, our inability to believe and obey, and even our hatred and resentment of God. We are never free from the need for renewed conversion, that is, for daily return to the promise of the gospel of Christ spoken to us in our Baptism. Why would we want it any other way?

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Luther, Lutheranism, and the Challenge of Islam

Adam S. Francisco

Michael Scheuer, former head of the unit charged with hunting down Osama bin Laden at the Central Intelligence Agency and now analyst for CBS News and Jamestown Foundation's *Global Terrorism Analysis*, is not known for pulling punches. Still, it is interesting to find in his analysis of the war on terror a jab at contemporary Christianity and its attempts to reach Muslims in the heartlands of Islam. They will never "trade what the West calls their harsh and medieval Islamic theology for the Pillsbury Doughboy-version of Christianity now on offer from the Vatican and Canterbury," he writes. "The gentle refrain of 'kumbaya' will never replace the full-throated 'Allahu Akbar.'"[1] Scheuer, a Roman Catholic well acquainted with missionary endeavors and how they are perceived by Muslims in the Middle East,[2] seems to have concluded that much of modern Roman Catholic and Anglican theology is too impotent and incapable or unwilling to respond to the challenge of Islam.

Scheuer's curt criticism of Roman Catholic and Anglican theologies is not unwarranted. Both traditions have, in the past, had extensive and relatively faithful dealings with Islam. However, recent attempts to address Islam from influential scholars in these two traditions have been soft. For example, in the D'Arcy Memorial Lectures at Campion Hall in Oxford (2000), Thomas Michel, a renowned Jesuit scholar of Islam and Secretary for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome, addressing the divisive theological issues in Christian-Muslim dialogue, has suggested—naming several other prominent theologians in the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican traditions who virtually agree—that Christians might be able to recognize the prophethood of Muhammad, in some sense, as legitimate.[3] The Anglican Keith Ward has articulated in the first tome of his multi-volume work of systematic theology that, while there is

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[1] Michael Scheuer, *Imperial Hubris: Why the West Is Losing the War on Terror* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2004), 46.

[2] Michael Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2006), 272–273.

[3] Thomas Michel, "Paul of Antioch and Ibn Taymiyya: The Modern Relevance of a Medieval Polemic," The D'Arcy Memorial Lectures, 27 January–2 March 2000, Campion Hall, Oxford, U.K.

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something peculiar to the Christian revelation, the Quran[4] could be considered to contain divine revelation.[5] The days are long past when you could count on a Christian scholar to refer to the Quran's teachings as a collection of ancient heresies vomited up through Muhammad, as one medieval scholar and missionary to the Muslim world described it.[6]

One might wonder where Lutherans fit into the mix of Christian responses to Islam. While the subject is rarely covered, it should be known that we, too, have a long history in dealing with the challenge of Islam, dating all the way back to the sixteenth-century Reformation and Martin Luther. We also have our share of contemporary scholars on Islam,[7] but most of them are approaching or are already in retirement. This presents an enormous challenge for us, for Islam will continue to grow, if not through proselytization, then through demographic growth. Since 1945, the number of Muslims across the world has quadrupled, and it shows no sign of decline.[8] This phenomenon is particularly worrisome when one considers the shape of western Europe. Recent analyses suggest that by 2025 one-third of all children will be born to Muslim families, and, according to Mark Steyn's *America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It*, by 2050 the urban centers of Europe will be predominated by Muslims, which will be followed shortly thereafter by radical changes not just in demographics but political and legal structures.[9]

Whether these gloomy predictions pan out remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that Islam as a religious ideology is on the rise and will continue to grow as it is proliferated on the Internet and propagated by Muslim apologists, activists, and academics. The question is: Are we ready

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[4] I have opted, for ease of reading, not to use diacritical marks with transliterated Arabic words.

[5] Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 337.

[6] Jean-Marie Mérigoux, "L'ouvrage d'un frère prêcheur florentin en Orient à la fin du XIIIe siècle. Le *Contra legem Sarracenorum* de Riccoldo da Monte di Croce," *Memorie Domenicane (nuova serie)* 15 (1986): 63.

[7] For example, see James P. Dretke, *A Christian Approach to Muslims: Reflections from West Africa* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979); Roland E. Miller, *Muslim Friends: The Faith and Feeling* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995); and Miller, *Muslims and the Gospel: Bridging the Gap* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2005).

[8] See C. George Fry, "The Witness of the Cross and the Islamic Crescent," in *The Theology of the Cross for the 21st Century: Signposts for a Multicultural Witness*, ed. Alberto L. García and A. R. Victor Raj (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 83–102.

[9] Mark Steyn, *America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2006).

for the challenge of Islam? And, do we have the means to respond to this seemingly new challenge? Now, more than ever, we need to prepare ourselves to respond to this challenge not by borrowing from the "Pillsbury Doughboy" mush of contemporary theology, but rather from the vantage point of the timeless confession of the Christian church. This may not make us popular; certainly it will not be easy, but it is necessary. The intention for this essay is merely to describe Lutheranism's early tangle with Islam and then to make a giant leap forward to consider the challenge that awaits Lutherans today.

I. The Expansion of Islam

Presumably few readers of this journal need to be convinced that Islam poses a significant challenge to Christianity. It is true that, early in his career, Muhammad dissuaded his followers in Mecca from debating with Christians under the pretense that they and Muslims believed in the same prophets, scriptures, and God (Quran 29:46). After the prophet of Islam fled persecution and established political and religious hegemony in Medina, however, this early message of ambivalence toward other faiths was abrogated and Muhammad was ordered, allegedly by God, to cause Islam to prevail over all other religions (9:33). Shortly before his death in AD 632, Muhammad reiterated this in a sermon when he recounted, "I have been commanded to fight against all people, till they testify to the fact that there is no god but Allah, and believe in me (that) I am the messenger (from the Lord [i.e., Allah]) and in all that I have brought."[10] Following their prophet's instructions, the burgeoning Muslim state perpetrated this mission throughout the Middle Ages. They did this not necessarily through forced conversion but political and the consequent legal mastery of non-Muslims.

This was precisely what happened along the shores of the Mediterranean as much of Christian Byzantium suddenly found itself dominated by Arab rulers and Islamic law. Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and most of North Africa all fell to Muslim conquerors by the early decades of the eighth century. And despite the best efforts of apologists such as John of Damascus (ca. 676–749), Theodore Abu Qurrah (ca. 750–820), and

[10] *Sahih Muslim*, trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqi (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1971–1975), 1:9.29–35; cf. *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), 1:2.24; and Muhammad ibn Umar al-Waqidi, *Kitab al-Maghazi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 3:113. It should be noted that this mission to bring (through social, political, and military struggle [jihad]) the world unto submission (Islam) is perpetual, according to Islamic law. See Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2003), 207.

others, the lands and people surrounding the Mediterranean were quickly Islamized.

The first wave of Islamic expansion out of the Arabian Peninsula into the Levant and North Africa (as well as Spain in 711) was followed by a long period of imperial consolidation. It was also during this period that Islamic law and theology were refined and formalized. One development in particular with far-reaching consequences was the bifurcation of the world into two spheres—the house of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) and the house of war (*dar al-harb*). According to Efraim Karsh,

> As a universal religion, Islam envisages a global political order in which all humankind will live under Muslim rule as either believers or subject communities. In order to achieve this goal it is incumbent on all free, male, adult Muslims to carry out an uncompromising struggle 'in the path of Allah,' or jihad. This in turn makes those parts of the world that have not yet been conquered by the House of Islam an abode of permanent conflict . . . which will only end with Islam's triumph.[11]

The two greatest medieval Islamic empires—the Umayyads who ruled from Damascus between 661 and 750 and the Abbasids who ruled from Baghdad up until 1258—failed to realize fully the goal of global political hegemony. In fact, it seemed as if Muhammad's mission and the mission of Islam were forever lost when descendents of Ghengis Khan made their way into Muslim heartlands in the thirteenth century. This caused a fundamental restructuring of the seemingly monolithic Islamic Middle East, as various dynasties vied for power in the lands formerly ruled by the Abbasids.

The most significant dynasty to emerge from the chaos of the Mongolian onslaught was the house of the Turkish warlord named Osman (1258–1326). Osman and his tribe had settled in the eastern parts of modern day Turkey, strategically positioning themselves between the house of Islam and what was left of Byzantium. This was intentional, for Osman and his descendents—known as the Ottomans—were *gazis*—that is, Islamic warriors—charged with expanding the house of Islam. From the early 1300s, after experiencing initial success in their expansion through Asia Minor, the Ottoman Turks saw themselves as a people specially "chosen to

[11] Efraim Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 62.

act as Allah's sword 'blazing forth the way of Islam from the East to the West.'"[12]

The Ottoman Turks first made their way into Europe across the Dardanelles onto the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1348 and from there began their conquest of the Balkans. While they had established hegemony in Asia Minor, and were beginning to do so in southeastern Europe, they had yet to conquer Constantinople. Protected by the enormous Theodosian walls, the ancient Roman capital still remained in the hands of Christianity, and would remain so for nearly a century until the descendent of Osman and Turkish sultan Mehmet II (1451–1481), who styled himself as the "leader of Holy War against Christianity,"[13] extinguished the Byzantine Empire once and for all in 1453. While Mehmet continued to push the borders of the Turkish Empire further into the Balkans towards central Europe, and even into Italy, he was most responsible for laying the foundations for what Bernard Lewis calls the "great *jihād par excellence*" on Europe.[14]

The Ottoman Turkish jihad on Europe reached a head three months after the conclusion of the diet of Worms when the Serbian city of Belgrade was besieged and occupied by Muslim forces in the summer of 1521. Nicknamed the gate to the domain of jihad—or, according to the Turks, *darülcihat*[15]—the Muslims continued to launch their assaults into the eastern horizon of western Europe under the leadership of sultan Süleyman (1520–1566) and his descendents over the next 150 years until, after a century of gradual decline, they were definitively defeated at Vienna, for a second time, on September 11–12, 1683.

II. Luther and Islam

It was the dawn of the first siege on Vienna, in 1529, that provided the impetus for Martin Luther (1483–1546) and the early Lutherans to begin to respond to the challenge of Islam. While their context was much different

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[12] Halil Inalcik, "The Rise of the Ottoman Empire," in *A History of the Ottoman Empire to 1730*, ed. M. A. Cook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 17; cf. Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism*, 88; and Norman Itzkowitz, *Ottoman Empire and Islamic Tradition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 38.

[13] Stanford J. Shaw, *Empire of the Gazis: The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire History, 1280–1808* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 60–61.

[14] Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 10.

[15] Allen Hertz, "Muslims, Christians and Jews in Sixteenth-Century Belgrade," in *The Mutual Effects of the Islamic and Judeo-Christian Worlds: The East European Pattern*, ed. Abraham Ascher, Tibor Halasi-Kun, and Béla Király (New York: Brooklyn College Press, 1979), 149.

than ours, there is much that is relevant in the early Lutheran response to the expansion of Islam. They faced similar issues to what we are facing today: the rise of ideologically inspired violence, an unprecedented level of awareness and contact between Christians and Muslims, and a breakdown in the unity of Judeo-Christian civilization while facing a resurgent Islamic civilization. So a survey of Luther's response to the challenge of Islam will hopefully be not only interesting but also instructive.[16]

Martin Luther was keenly aware of the expansion of Islam into central Europe, particularly as Muslim armies appeared, as he put it, on the doorstep of Germany.[17] Martin Brecht has even suggested that his writings are a "treasure chest" of information on how the Turks and Islam were perceived in the first half of the sixteenth century.[18] The first work in which he assessed the affront Islam posed to Europe and Christianity was his *On War against the Turk*.[19] The chief purpose for this little book was to explain his position on whether or not German Christians could endorse a military response to Turkish encroachment in central Europe. Apparently many within the nascent protestant movement were advocating pacifism and appeasement as word spread that the Ottomans were more tolerant of religious diversity than the Catholic Habsburgs. Luther nevertheless responded by arguing that, first, Christian Europe should stand up to Turkish imperialism in a defensive war led by secular officials, and, second, Germans should not be duped by alleged reports of tolerance amongst the Turks. It was true, he wrote, that Christians were not physically coerced into conversion; but restrictions on external expressions of Christianity as well as the subjugation of non-Muslims as second-class citizens or *dhimmis* would gradually lead to the extinction of Christianity.[20]

In the middle of his argument for a resolute war against the Turks, Luther also offered a brief but penetrating analysis and critique of Islam. Based on excerpts of the Quran that he found in medieval polemical

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[16] An extensive analysis can be found in Adam S. Francisco, *Martin Luther and Islam: A Study in Sixteenth-Century Polemics and Apologetics* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2007).

[17] WA 30.II:207.

[18] Martin Brecht, "Luther und die Türken," in *Europa und die Türken in der Renaissance*, ed. Bodo Guthmüller and Wilhelm Kühlman (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2000), 9–27.

[19] See *LW* 46:157–205.

[20] On dhimmitude, see Bat Ye'or's *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1985) and *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide* (Madison/Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002).

works, he focused on the basic theology of the Quran as it related to Christianity. Interestingly, he began positively, noting that the Quran spoke highly of Christ and Mary, but he quickly explained that this was no real point of theological convergence, for according to Luther, Islam totally re-envisions the person and work of Christ. It views Christ as a mere human prophet who was sent to reiterate the revelation first delivered to Adam, through all the prophets after him (especially Moses), until the aboriginal message of Islam was definitively reasserted by Muhammad and vouchsafed in the Quran. Thus, for a Muslim, while "the office of Christ has come to an end," Luther noted, "Muhammad's office is still in force."[21] In short, Luther argued that the mission of Islam was chiefly to supplant all other religions.[22]

The universal message of Islam was not just theological, though, Luther argued. It was also political, and, as was the case with virtually all historical empires, was often expressed violently. The difference with "Islamic imperialism," as Efraim Karsh has termed it,[23] was that these religiously-motivated expansionistic designs were clearly endorsed in the Quran. Unlike Christianity, which expanded "by preaching and the working of miracles," Islam had grown chiefly "by the sword and by murder."[24]

To top his analysis off, Luther also described the domestic relationships of Muslims, particularly between men and women, and characterized them as unchaste, unstable, and repressive. After reading passages from Quran 2 beginning at verse 223 where wives are described as fields for their husbands plowing and ending at the rather loose Quranic divorce laws (228–237), he argued that the Quran held marriage and women with little regard. Because a woman never has any certainty or stability in her marital relation with her husband—for men can divorce their wives by simply declaring it to be so—he called Islamic marriage non-marriage (*Unehe*). Such a lax attitude toward divorce and lack of commitment to their women resembled, he wrote, the "chaste life soldiers lead with their harlots."[25] Summarizing what he considered to be the essence of Islam,

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[21] *LW* 46:177; WA 30.II:122.

[22] See *LW* 46:176–178; WA 30.II:122–123. Cf. Robert Spencer, *The Truth about Muhammad: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion* (Lanham, MD: Regnery Press, 2006).

[23] The phrase appears as the title of his book, Efraim Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

[24] *LW* 46:178–181; WA 30.II:123–126.

[25] *LW* 46:181–182; WA 30.II:126–127.

Luther then concluded that Muslims were destroyers, enemies, and blasphemers of our Lord Jesus Christ, men who instead of the gospel and faith set up their shameful Muhammad and all kinds of lies, ruining all temporal government and home life or marriage.[26]

What Luther disclosed from the Quran about Islam in *On War against the Turk* was seemingly verified shortly after its publication when the Turks finally reached the gates of Vienna. Although the siege ultimately failed, shockwaves were sent throughout Europe as news of the execution, enslavement, and conscription of Christians circulated in broadsheets and through word of mouth. This, coupled with numerous reports of conversions to Islam, increased the sense of urgency, thereby prompting Luther to write his second work relative to Islamic expansion entitled *Army Sermon against the Turk*.[27] While the first half of this work has received scholarly attention in order to illuminate Luther's conviction that the rise of the Ottomans was prophesied by Daniel,[28] what has not been thoroughly investigated is the second part. In it Luther offers pastoral instruction to Christians who might, in the future, find themselves living among Muslims in *dar al-Islam* or, as he called it, *Mahometisch Reich*. The first bit of advice Luther gave was catechetical. Because one could not expect to have a pastor, the Scriptures, or evangelical literature, he urged all Christians, especially those who risked being caught behind enemy lines (such as soldiers and those living in the Habsburg frontier), to learn at least the basics of the faith—the Apostles' Creed, Ten Commandments, and Lord's Prayer. What was particularly essential, though, especially if one was living among Muslims, was the Second Article of the Creed. Not only would this article of the Creed serve to nurture one's faith, but its historical data also provided all that was needed to defend one's faith. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this work is Luther's advice that Christians finding themselves in Ottoman lands should not attempt to flee, but rather they should accept their fate and, while constantly reminding themselves of their righteousness before God in Christ, should strive to do their best to love and serve the Turks and seek ways to bear witness to Christ as a missionary sent to the Muslim not by the church but through historical circumstances by God himself.[29]

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[26] *LW* 46:195; WA 30.II:139.

[27] See WA 30.II:160–197.

[28] See John T. Baldwin, "Luther's Eschatological Appraisal of the Turkish Threat in *Eine Heerpredigt wider den Türken*," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 33 (1995): 185–202.

[29] WA 30.II:185–195.

It is clear from the *Army Sermon against the Turk* that Luther thought Christian interaction with Islam was inevitable. Thus, he and his colleagues sought to keep on top of Ottoman affairs. In 1530, he published a fifteenth-century account of the life and customs of the Turks (which modern historians consider to be the most important record of affairs in late medieval Turkey).[30] His colleagues translated, from Italian, a history of the Turkish sultans from Osman until Süleyman.[31] Other than this, the republications of the *Army Sermon against the Turk* and *On War against the Turk,* and the drafting of some appeals for prayer, Luther failed to offer any further responses to Islam. This was due to two factors. First, although there were a few episodes of Turkish aggression in the 1530s, for most of the decade Süleyman and the Sunni Ottomans had to deal with the Shia Safavid empire in Persia. Second, Luther was, for the times, unusually careful with what he said about Islam, and wanted to wait until he could get his hands on a copy of the Quran before he dealt with Islam again.[32]

Much to Luther's expressed delight, the University of Wittenberg's library received a copy of the Quran in Latin translation on Shrove Tuesday (21 February) of 1542.[33] The occasion afforded him the opportunity finally to engage Islam at its source. He did so not by composing a new polemic or apologetic from scratch, but by translating, paraphrasing, and assimilating the work of a Dominican missionary named Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (1243–1320) in his coarse German under the title *Refutation of the Quran.*[34] He did so for practical and apologetic reasons, to equip Christians faced with Islam. "What I have written, I do for this reason," Luther wrote, "whether this little book arrives through print or the mouth of preachers struggling against the Turk, I write that those who are now or in the future under the Turk might protect themselves against Muhammad's faith, even if they are not able to protect themselves against his sword."[35] By exposing the errors of the Quran, and thus Islam, in a negative apologetic, Luther was convinced that

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[30] *Libellus de Ritu et Moribus Turcorum,* ed. Martin Luther (Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1530). See Georgius de Hungaria, *Tractatus de Moribus, Condictionibus et Nequicia Turcorum-Traktat über die Sitten, die Lebensverhältnisse und die Arglist der Türken (1481),* ed. and trans. Reinhard Klockow (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1993).

[31] See Paolo Giovio, *Ursprung des Turkischen Reichs bis auff den itzigen Solyman,* trans. Justus Jonas (Augsburg: Steiner, 1538), and *Turcicarum rerum commentarius,* trans. Francisco Negri (Wittenberg: Klug, 1537).

[32] WA 30.II:208.

[33] WA 53:272.

[34] See WA 53:272–396.

[35] WA 53:392.

German Christians would find their faith strengthened. He also hoped, confessing the difficulty, that through a positive apologetic those who had been "led astray by this law [the Quran] might return back to God."[36]

The methodology of Luther's *Refutation of the Quran* is remarkable for several reasons. First, the Reformer adopted and employed a similar methodology as proposed by Thomas Aquinas and the Dominican scholastic school of apologetics, briefly summarized by John Tolan as: expose and destroy error first before arguing for the truth.[37] In Luther's words, "One must not deal with them [that is, Muslims] at first by asserting and defending the high articles of our faith . . . but adopt this way and manner: take and diligently work with their Quran, demonstrating their law to be false and unsubstantiated."[38] Once this was accomplished, then the Christian could begin to offer evidence for the truth of the Christian religion. It is this aspect of Luther's methodology that is even more noteworthy, for the Reformer based his defense of the gospel on key passages of the Quran and by appealing to common sense.

To destroy the foundation upon which Islam stands, Luther started his refutation by launching a full frontal assault on the Quran. Muhammad, he began, did not provide any evidence—either by performing a verifiable miracle or pointing to a legitimate prophecy—to vindicate his status of a prophet, unlike Christianity which was "established with verifiable and significant miraculous signs."[39] The Quran likewise was full of internal contradictions. Passages inciting Muslims to treat non-Muslims kindly (29:46) are contrasted with those that incite them to make war upon them (9:29), just as are passages that claim Christians and Jews will be saved (2:62) and others that claim the opposite (3:19). Following on, Luther also charged that Islam was not just irrational, as the Latin text from which he paraphrased read, but "beastly and swinish,"[40] drawing attention primarily to Muhammad's condoning of violence, his open adultery, and especially the Quran's licentious description of paradise.[41] In addition to its

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[36] WA 53:278.

[37] On the Dominican apologetic strategy, see John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 233–255.

[38] WA 53:284.

[39] WA 53:312.

[40] WA 53:312; cf. WA 53:311.

[41] One sixteenth-century Quranic commentator went so far as to describe paradise for men as follows: "Each time we sleep with a houri [a young woman] we find her virgin. Besides, the penis of the Elected never softens. The erection is eternal; the sensation that you feel each time you make love is utterly delicious and out of this world and were you

contradictions and irrationality, the Quran also contained several factual errors such as its insinuation that Christ's mother Mary was the sister of Moses' brother Aaron (19:29). The significance of this error was not simply that it was so obviously untrue, but, according to Luther, it was placed there purposely, through some sort of divine intervention, to make it easy for anyone reading the Quran to be convinced that it was not from God.[42] After berating Muhammad and the Quran even further for its endorsement of the violent propagation of the faith and unjust description of God's nature, Luther rounded out his attack by exposing the spurious history of the Quranic text, drawing particular attention to missing portions of it still referenced by modern scholars as well as the curious history behind the compilation of the authorized version under Uthman ibn Affan (580–656) the third caliph of Islam.[43]

After finishing what Philipp Melanchthon referred to as a "useful and pious dispute against the insane Muhammadans,"[44] Luther continued his apologetic even further, challenging Muslims to "recognize and convert to the truth."[45] Interestingly, and seemingly counter-intuitive, he based his case upon what he thought was *prima facie* evidence derived from the Quran itself, for Luther was convinced that it expressed, although unwittingly, the doctrines of the deity of Christ and tri-unity of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Even more surprisingly, Luther—making his own theological additions to the medieval text he was working from—suggested that the Holy Spirit had "driven Muhammad to express the highest articles of our faith."[46] Although Luther often asserted that the Spirit's work was only objectively knowable through the external means of word and sacrament, the conservative Reformer did not restrict his activity. The eminent Luther scholar Bernard Lohse remarked that, apart from soteriology, Luther maintained that the "Spirit is present and at work

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to experience it in this world you would faint. Each chosen one will marry seventy houris, besides the women he married on earth, and all will have appetising vaginas." See Ibn Warraq, "Virgins? What Virgins?" *The Guardian*, January 12, 2002.

[42] WA 53:334.

[43] See, for example, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23–39, 41–57, 59–75.

[44] Philipp Melanchthon, *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Carolus Gottlieb Bretschneider, 28 vols. (Halis Saxonum: C. A. Schwetschke, 1834–1860), 4:807. For Melanchthon's attitude towards and work on Islam, see Manfred Köhler, *Melanchthon und der Islam: Ein Beitrag zur Klärung des Verhältnisses zwischen Christentum und Fremdreligionen in der Reformationszeit* (Leipzig: Leopold Klotz Verlag, 1938).

[45] WA 53:364.

[46] WA 53:366.

in all creation as well as in every human deed, even in every natural occurrence."[47] In any case, Luther began his literary reproach to Muslims by honing in on Quranic passages that suggested a plurality within the godhead. He does so by specifically citing the several instances where Allah is recorded referring to himself in the plural just like one finds in passages from the Bible, particularly Genesis. The most convincing passage betraying the subtle trinitarian theology of the Quran, according to Luther, was a fragment from chapter 4:171, which reads, "O People of the book, do not become lax in your law and say nothing about God except the truth, that Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, is a messenger of God, and is God's Word, which he impressed upon her through the Holy Spirit." Here was the trinitarian formula found discreetly in the Quran, Luther thought, but anticipating a Muslim response, especially in light of what follows the excerpted passage—where it reads, "desist from professing the trinity"—the reason it was not taken as such was because Muhammad and the Muslims were not able to comprehend the Christian concept of three persons in one being.

Following his attempt to defend the doctrine of the Trinity, Luther also argued that the Quran explicitly endorsed the Gospels. For example, referring to Quran 5:46—"We sent Jesus the son of Mary confirming the Torah . . . we sent him the Gospel; therein was guidance and light"—he claimed that Muslims were obligated to read at least the narratives of Jesus' life. If the historical accounts were not compelling enough, Luther had even more evidence to support the veracity of their testimony. Not only did the Gospels and the rest of the Bible cohere with secular history, but among its numerous books written over a thousand years the message remained the same from Genesis 3:15 through the prophets up until its fulfillment in Christ and proclamation in the epistles. Moreover, the testimony of the prophets, Christ himself, the apostles, and even the church fathers, he argued, was backed by the testimony of miracles. Lastly, if one just compared the life of Christ to that of Muhammad they would certainly see the superiority of Christianity.

Luther's polemical apologetic against Islam is quite different than what one might expect from the man who, two decades earlier, had written, "How should we present our case if a Turk were to ask us to give reason for our faith? . . . We would have to be silent . . . and direct him to the Holy

[47] Bernard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 235.

Scriptures as the basis for our faith."[48] While it appears as if he may have abandoned his earlier convictions, what seems to have happened is that he soon realized that, as far as Muslims are concerned, one was not engaged in inter-Christian polemics, but as he suggested in his Galatians commentary, "another area"—an area in which the Christian did not share the same common ground as the Muslim. One must therefore "use all . . . cleverness and effort and be as profound and subtle a controversialist as possible."[49]

Perhaps the greatest legacy that Luther left behind with regard to Islam was his involvement in a controversy over the publication of the Quran in Basel in 1542 and 1543.[50] Despite attempts to suppress its printing by the city counsel, Luther argued that, in following the example of the church fathers and so that Christians in his day would be prepared to be "lion hearts" in their defense of the gospel, the Quran had to be published so that everyone could read it for themselves.[51] Publication of the Quran was essential for the apologetic task. Therefore, in addition to his letter of support, wherein he warned that if Basel continued to censor the work he would find a press in Wittenberg for its publication, Luther (as well as Melanchthon) drafted a preface for the forthcoming book. Finally, in early 1543, the Quran—along with several traditional Islamic texts, historical works, and polemical treatises—left the press.[52] For the first time Christian scholars had easy access to it, as Luther envisioned, so that further study could take place in order to prepare for engagement with Islam, whether it be in the study of a scholar in Turkey where "perhaps God would call some of the Turks out of their darkness through their trained Christian captives," or at the very least to strengthen Christians experiencing doubts (*Anfechtung*) while living amongst Muslims.[53]

Much more could be said about Luther and Islam. One thing is clear, nonetheless, even though he was relatively removed from Islam—in fact, he never once met a Muslim, although he did decline an opportunity for an audience with sultan Süleyman—Luther found time, amidst his numerous other activities, to study Islam. He had no choice. He knew from

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[48] *LW* 32:10; WA 7:315.

[49] *LW* 26:29–30; WA 40.I:78.

[50] On the controversy, see Harry Clark, "The Publication of the Koran in Latin: A Reformation Dilemma," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15 (1984): 3–13.

[51] WABr 10:162.

[52] See Hartmut Bobzin, *Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation* (Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995), 153–275.

[53] WA 53:571.

its history and ideology how aggressive it was, and so he did what he could to disperse information and prepare those whom he called his "dear Germans" to respond to the challenge of Islam.

III. Lutheranism and Islam Today

What about us? What sort of conclusions might we arrive at concerning Islam? Does it really present as big of a challenge to Christianity as Luther thought? It might be helpful to cover its basic motifs relative to the faith we profess so as to get a taste for a theology that we will inevitably face.

Naturally, any assessment of Islam should begin with the Quran. As many of us no doubt know, Muslims consider the Quran to be the word of God. A few passages from its rather esoteric text suggest that it has existed for all eternity, but to lead human beings "out of the depths of darkness into light" (14:1) it entered the world, descended upon, and was delivered orally through Muhammad from 610 to 632 (13:39, 97:1–5). Thus, devout Muslims today take the Quran to be the perfectly preserved, uncreated, yet inscripturated, word of God.

The central theological motif of the Quran is the unicity of God—this is known as the doctrine of *tawhid*. In a passage said to encapsulate one-third of all Islamic doctrine, the Quran instructs Muslims to confess that, in addition to being one, God is also the eternal, incomparable, sustainer of all humankind (112:1–4). While this may at first seem compatible with Christian teachings about the nature of God, this passage goes one step further and forever divorces Islam from Christian theism by asserting that he "begets not." Elsewhere and more poignantly it addresses Christian theology specifically when it commands: "Do not say [or confess the] 'Trinity' . . . for Allah is one God" (4:171), for the teaching that three persons comprise the one divine essence of God is viewed, at best, as a subtle form of polytheism—known as *shirk* or associating partners to God—in the Quran.

Nowhere is the Quran's challenge to Christianity clearer than its treatment of the person and work of Christ. While it maintains that Christ was born of a virgin (19:20–21), it flatly denies that he was the son of God, and claims that it is not fitting for God to have a son (19:35, 92), describing the doctrine of the incarnation as a "monstrous" assertion (19:89). Explaining the logic of this, it rhetorically asks, "How can He have a son when He has no consort" (6:100–101)? "Exalted is the Majesty of our Lord: He has taken neither a wife nor a son" (72:3). To be sure, as many note, Christ is revered in the Quran, but it is the Christ of the Quran—who is

only a messenger of God (4:171, 5:75)—not the historic Christ revealed in the Scriptures.

If this were not troubling enough, the Quran even denies that Christ was crucified. Instead, it claims that someone who looked like him took his place while he ascended into heaven to await his return on the Day of Judgment (4:157–159). Despite the contradiction with both the biblical and extra-biblical historical record, that Christ was not crucified is of no consequence to a Muslim, for the Quran denies that human beings are inherently sinful and, furthermore, that sins need to be expiated. While Adam and Eve did fall prey to temptation in the Quran, they were immediately absolved and forgiven (2:36–38, 7:23–24). Neither they nor their descendents fell under the curse of sin and the law.[54] Rather, God simply and capriciously forgives sins as he wills (11:90; 39:53–56), and humans earn their salvation by submitting themselves to God and doing good (4:125, 41:33).

Complimenting this rather low view of sin, or at least of the consequences of sin, the Quran has a very high view of humankind. All human beings are born in a state of righteousness, and, according to their nature (*fitra*), predisposed to worship the god of Islam (30:30). Therefore, according to Islamic anthropology, every human being brought into the world is a Muslim. It is only the misguided nurturing of their parents (and other influences) that turn them from it.[55]

This motif that Islam is the aboriginal religion of humanity and history is prominent in the Quran. All the prophets beginning with Adam through Moses unto Jesus, Muslims allege, proclaimed essentially the same message that Muhammad preached. "God sent down to you (step by step), in truth, the Quran, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Torah (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus) before this, as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the criterion [the Quran]" (3:3, 9:111). Despite the obvious contradictions, however, Muhammad did not start a new religion, the Quran claims. Instead, he revived the religion of Moses and Jesus, whose messages had been corrupted (*tahrif*) by Jews and Christians who purposely altered the biblical text and skewed the message of Moses and Jesus. Thus, God sent Muhammad to reiterate what truth was left in

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[54] See George Anawati, "La Notion de "Péché Originel" Existe-t-elle dans l'Islam?," *Studia Islamica* 31 (1970), 29-40, and Johan Bouman, *Gott und Mensch im Koran* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977).

[55] *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, 6:60.298.

the Judeo-Christian tradition and to secure the full revelation of God once and for all in the Quran.

This, obviously, is a polarizing view of Islam, but it is also a necessary one, for theologically speaking there are very few commonalities—and certainly no meaningful ones—between Christianity and Islam. The debate that seems to be taking place among Evangelicals of every stripe over whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God—because they are both monotheistic—is sorely misguided.[56] Those Lutherans who would attribute such a view to Luther, based on an erroneously translated text,[57] seem to be revealing more about their own theology rather than Luther's. In fact, in *On War against the Turk,* Luther identifies Allah as the devil.[58] It must be recalled that the god in the Quran has not and, in fact, cannot beget a son whereas the God of Christianity is the God who did beget a Son and it is only this Son who reveals the one true God.

Clearly Islam presents a significant theological challenge to Christianity (not to mention the political and demographic challenges). So how should we respond? First, we must not underestimate or misunderstand what we now face. Make no mistake, Islam is expanding, even into the West. While much of its growth is due to high birth rates and immigration, conversions are occurring as well. The reasons behind this phenomenon are plentiful. Certainly attacks on the authority of the Scriptures, disregard—if not contempt—for orthodox doctrine (especially concerning the Trinity, Christology, and the depravity of humanity), and others waged by those who are often regarded as the intellectual elite (for example, Bart Ehrman and Elaine Pagels) coupled with similar assaults launched by Islam (especially the corruption of the Bible [*tahrif*], rejection of the deity of Christ, denial of the Trinity) resonate well with those whose faith has already been weakened or those who have lapsed into cynicism. Regardless of the causes, the best we can do is to circumvent this by, one, exposing the errors of Islam and, two, rigorously defending the veracity of

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[56] See Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad: Understanding the Differences between Christianity and Islam* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002); Mateen Elass, *Understanding the Koran: A Quick Christian Guide to the Muslim Holy Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); Colin Chapman, *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003); and Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002).

[57] See the exhaustive work of Edward Engelbrecht, *One True God: Understanding Large Catechism II. 66* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007).

[58] See, for example, *LW* 46:184 (WA 30.II:129) and *LW* 21:102 (WA 32:384).

Christianity. Luther himself expressed this in his preface to the 1543 edition of the Quran:

> All this should not be thought of lightly especially by those of us who teach in the church. We ought to fight everywhere with the armies of the devil. How many varieties of enemies have we seen in this age of ours? . . . We must prepare ourselves now against Muhammad. But what are we able to say about things of which we are ignorant? Hence, it is useful for those who are experienced to read the scriptures of the enemy in order to accurately refute, damage, and destroy them so that they might be capable to correct anyone, or surely to strengthen our people with solid arguments.[59]

Moreover, Luther argued that those Christians who were caught behind enemy lines—in *Mahometisch Reich*—were not to run or separate themselves from the Muslims; rather, he instructed them to accept their fate as subjects (and neighbors) of the Turks, and, in doing so, to love and serve them in the same way that they would their neighbors back in Germany. In the twenty-first century, Muslims are now found among us, many coming here to escape Middle Eastern despotism and violence. True, some have revolutionary and evil designs,[60] and they must be dealt with even as the violent and rebellious peasants had to be dealt with during Luther's day (1524–1525). We are also, however, to be ready, willing, and able to approach our Muslim neighbors, colleagues, and friends *as* neighbors, colleagues, and friends. We are, moreover, to approach them as those who, like all others, desperately need to hear God's word of law and gospel so that, as Luther hoped, God will call some from their darkness through Christians who have been instructed to respond to the challenge of Islam.[61] Luther himself had hopes of this. In a conversation he had with his successors at his home, he expressed, "I hope dearly to see the day when the gospel will come to the Muslims, as is now a real possibility. It is not likely that I will see the day. But you might, and then you will have to deal with them carefully."[62] God grant that we fulfill Luther's wish—and indeed that of God, who desires that all humans would be saved—and begin to approach this tremendous challenge by witnessing without

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[59] WA 53:572.

[60] See especially Steven Emerson, *Jihad Incorporated: A Guide to Militant Islam in the US* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006).

[61] WA 53:571.

[62] WATR 5:221.

comprise to the gospel of Christ—the crucified and risen One—with grace, charity, and love.

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"The Noblest Skill in the Christian Church": Luther's Sermons on the Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel

Robert Kolb

No other teacher had ever given clearer and more understandable instruction regarding the proper distinction of law and gospel, and with it a correct understanding of righteousness, good works, and repentance, than had Martin Luther. That was the opinion of Luther's student Cyriakus Spangenberg, son of Luther's friend from his days at the University of Erfurt, Johann Spangenberg, the reformer of Nordhausen and Mansfeld county. Cyriakus preached a series of sermons that constituted one of the first "secondary studies" of his Wittenberg professor, and he counted the proper distinction of law and gospel among Luther's most significant contributions to the life of the church and the proclamation of God's word.[1] This was one of the ways in which Luther resembled the prophet Elijah, Spangenberg believed.[2]

In singling out the proper distinction of law and gospel as a key to the reformer's thought and among his most magnificent bequests to his followers, Spangenberg was simply following in the footsteps of another of his instructors, Philipp Melanchthon, and others among his fellow students at Wittenberg. In speaking at Luther's funeral, his colleague had placed the proper distinction of law and gospel at the head of a list of the reformer's contributions,[3] and he repeated this observation when writing the preface for the prefaces to the fifth volume of the complete works of Luther in German

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[1] Cyriakus Spangenberg, *Theander Lutherus. Von des werten Gottes Manne Doctor Martin Luthers Geistliche Haushaltung vnd Ritterschaft . . .* (Ursel: Nikolaus Heinrich, 1589), A2^{r}–[A6]^{v}.

[2] Cyriakus Spangenberg, *Die vierde Predigt, Von dem grossen Propheten Gottes, Doctore Martino Luthero, Das er ein rechter Helias gewesen: Geschehen am tage Concordiae, Den 18. Februarij, Anno 1564. Jm Thal Manssfeldt* (Erfurt: Georg Baumann, 1564).

[3] Philipp Melanchthon, *Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melanthonis Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. C. G. Bretschneider and H. E. Bindweil, 28 vols. (Halle and Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1834–1860), VI:155–170 [henceforth CR]; "Oratio in funere D. Martini Lutheri," CR XI:726–734.

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and the sixth of the Latin volumes.[4] Another devoted disciple, Joachim Mörlin, expressed the wish never to be more than a simple preacher of the Catechism, that is, of God's law and gospel, as Luther had also wished to be.[5]

Later generations have also recognized this teaching of Luther. Theodosius Fabricius, the son of a Wittenberg contemporary of Spangenberg and Mörlin, Andreas Fabricius, praised God for the reformer's restoration of the proper distinction of law and gospel, which had lain for so many years in darkness. This demonstrated, Fabricius believed, that "the Holy Spirit ruled his heart, hand, mouth, and pen."[6] In the period of Lutheran orthodoxy, the understanding of how this distinction actually is to function faded somewhat. Hermann Sasse believed that C. F. W. Walther could be counted among the precursors of modern Luther studies. His lectures on this distinction had contributed to the rediscovery of "law and gospel" as more than just one additional topic within Luther's way of thinking but instead as an element in the presuppositional framework of how all topics of doctrine function within the body of biblical teaching.[7] Twentieth-century theologians have recognized the distinction of law and gospel as one of the key elements in Luther's hermeneutics.[8]

Luther himself had counted the ability to distinguish law and gospel among the chief characteristics of true theologians. "Whoever knows well how to distinguish the gospel from the law should give thanks to God and know that he is a real theologian," he commented.[9] Although he began using

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[4] Martin Luther, *Der Sechste Teil der Bucher D. Mart. Luth. vber etliche Epistel der Aposteln*, (Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1553), Fijᵛ–Fiijᵛ; cf. Martin Luther, *Tomvs qvintvs omnivm opervm Reverendi Domini Martini Lutheri . . .* (Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1555), +iijᵛ.

[5] Joachim Mörlin, *Enchiridion der Kleinen Catechismus* (Eisleben: Urban Gaubisch, 1564), Aiijʳ–ᵛ. On Mörlin's and other catechisms of this period, see Robert Kolb, "The Layman's Bible: The Use of Luther's Catechisms in the German Late Reformation," in *Luther's Catechisms – 450 Years, Essays Commemorating the Small and Large Catechisms of Dr. Martin Luther*, ed. David P. Scaer and Robert D. Preus (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1979), 16–26.

[6] Theodosius Fabricius, *Loci communes* (Magdeburg: Paul Donat, 1597), (?)ijʳ–(?)vᵛ.

[7] Herman Sasse, "Class Notes: H-572, Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Theology," (in possession of the author, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, winter 1965).

[8] For example, Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 251–273; Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 267–276; and Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 110–124.

[9] Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Schriften*], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 40.I:207,3–4 [henceforth WA]; Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T.

the distinction as an operative principle in his thought as early as 1519,[10] he composed no major treatise on the subject. To be sure, his sermons all demonstrated how he used the distinction, sometimes in ways that surprise modern readers. In addition, he preached twice to the congregation in Wittenberg specifically on the use of God's word in the tension between law and gospel. Both sermons found their way into print under similar titles, "How Law and Gospel Are to Be Fundamentally Distinguished"[11] and "A Fine Sermon on Law and Gospel."[12] They were far from sophisticated theological analyses intended for his colleagues and students, even though colleagues and students undoubtedly sat among the hearers in Wittenberg when he delivered them (as his recourse to the technical terminology of Aristotelian logic in the first of these sermons suggests). Publication probably intended to bring these two sermons to village pastors and aid them in their own composition of sermons, but they also found their way into print because they conveyed specific concerns of the reformer at the time to the wider literate lay public.

I. Luther's Two Sermons on the Distinction of Law and Gospel

Luther prepared the first of these sermons for delivery on the Festival of the Circumcision of Jesus in 1532, an exposition of the Epistle for the day, Galatians 3:23–29. It was recorded by Georg Rörer, the amanuensis appointed to this task by Elector John Frederick of Saxony, and is also extant in a second manuscript, as well as in print. It appeared from the Wittenberg press of Hans Weis and in Nuremberg from the printer Kunigunde Hergotin the same year.[13] The sermon appeared also in both the Wittenberg and the Jena editions of Luther's works. Rörer himself may have had a hand in editing the Wittenberg version, but its final form is

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Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 26:115 [henceforth *LW*].

[10] See Lowell C. Green, *How Melanchthon Helped Luther Discover the Gospel: The Doctrine of Justification in the Reformation* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict, 1980), 201–203, and Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel: New Light upon Luther's Way from Medieval Catholicism to Evangelical Faith* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 43–46, 68–71.

[11] Martin Luther, *Wie das Gesetze vnd Euangelion recht gru[e]ndlich zuvngerscheiden sind.D. Mart. Luthers predigt. Item, was Christus vnd sein Ko[e]nigreich sey, Aus dem Propheten Michea capit. v. gepredigt* (Wittenberg: Hans Weis, 1532).

[12] Martin Luther, *Ein schone Predigt von dem Gesetz vnd Euangelio. Matth. 22.* (Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1537).

[13] WA 36:xiii. The text is found in WA 36:8–23.

most likely the product of Georg Major's editorial work. Rörer did edit the Jena version, which expands on the earlier versions.[14]

Modern perceptions of authorship lead some to ask whether the texts of these printed works or one hearer's notes reflect "the real Luther" since his students, who reworked the texts for publication, added and sometimes changed the wording we have in notes of his lectures and sermons. At least two considerations suggest that these texts reflect the message that Luther himself wanted to convey. First, his students regarded his words as authoritative expressions of the proper teaching of Scripture. Many attributed to him the kind of authority that finally came for Lutherans to rest in the Book of Concord,[15] and those who did not regard his words as quite so authoritative nonetheless highly respected him and what he said. They did not want to convey to the reading public something other than what they understood him to have said. Second, Luther himself regarded the Wittenberg reform as a team effort. He entrusted tasks to others. Among them was the task of bringing his spoken words into print. He lived alongside his editors, for the most part, and was quite free in his criticism of his colleagues. If he had found the published versions of these sermons flawed, he would have said so.[16]

In the winter of 1531–1532, Luther focused his attention on the dispute with Rome over justification by faith alone.[17] He had expounded the text of Galatians in the lecture hall from the beginning of July to mid-December the previous year. His sermon in early 1532 echoed one of his chief concerns in his lectures, the distinction of law and gospel, specifically the crushing power of the law and the conditionless nature of the gospel. The second sermon took place five years later, in the midst of the controversy with one of the brightest and best of his own students, Johann Agricola, over the role of the law in the Christian life, the renewal of a controversy a

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[14] These two versions are found in WA 36:25–42. On these two editions of Luther's works, see Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, and Hero: Images of the Reformer, 1520–1620* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 141–150.

[15] See Kolb, *Luther as Prophet*, 39–101.

[16] On one of these editors, Veit Dietrich, see Bernhard Klaus, "Die Lutherüberlieferung Veit Dietrichs und ihre Problematik," *Zeitschrift für bayerische Kirchengeschichte* 53 (1988): 33–47. See the more positive evaluations of these lectures by Gerhard Ebeling, *Evangelische Evanglienauslegung*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962), 17–18, 35, and Ulrich Asendorf, *Lectura in Biblia: Luthers Genesisvorlesung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 36–42.

[17] WA 40.I:33–688, *LW* 26:1–461, 27:1–149. See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, vol. 2, *Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521–1532*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 451–459.

decade earlier.[18] Agricola's rejection of the use of the law in the Christian's life had occasioned sharp public exchanges between him and his Wittenberg mentors a decade earlier. Their dispute flared up again when Agricola moved his family to Wittenberg and implored Luther for a position at the university following his participation in the deliberations in Smalcald in early 1537. Preached on September 30, 1537, this sermon was based upon the Gospel lesson for the eighteenth Sunday after Trinity, Matthew 22:32–46. When it appeared in print from the press of Hans Lufft in Wittenberg,[19] Philipp Melanchthon wrote to his friend Joachim Camerarius, professor in Tübingen, "I am sending you a well-fashioned sermon and instruction of Luther, with which he intends to refute the *kenophonias* [empty words] of the one who is denying that the law should be taught in the church. If I had written this sermon, I would have been harshly criticized, so capricious as the popular opinion is."[20] To the Nuremberg pastor, his close associate Veit Dietrich, he wrote, "I am sending Luther's sermon on the law so that you may see what he has to say on the law and on obedience in such clear words. When I defended this position, I was attacked by the ignorant for it."[21] These two sermons offer the opportunity to compare how Luther applied the distinction of law and gospel in specific situations, even if on the popular level.

II. The Sermon of 1532

The text of the 1532 sermon, Galatians 3:23–29, had already played a significant role in the development of Luther's evangelical thinking. In his Psalms lectures in 1513–1515, he interpreted the role of the law along lines dictated by the medieval view of salvation history, defining the Old Testament law as the foreshadowing of Christ, limiting its function to the

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[18] Timothy J. Wengert, *Law and Gospel: Philip Melanchthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over Poenitentia* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 77–175. Cf. Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Luther and the False Brethren* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 156–179; Ernst Koch, "Johann Agricola neben Luther. Schülerschaft und theologische Eigenart," in *Lutheriana: Zum 500. Geburtstag Martin Luthers von den Mitarbeitern der Weimarer Ausgabe* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1984), 131–150; Stefan Kjeldgaard-Pedersen, *Gesetz, Evangelium, und Busse: Theologiegeschichtliche Studien zum Verhältnisse zwischen dem jungen Johann Agricola (Eisleben) und Martin Luther* (Leiden: Brill, 1983); and Jeffrey Silcock, "Law and Gospel in Luther's Antinomian Disputations with Special Reference to Faith's Use of the Law" (ThD diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1995).

[19] WA 45:145–152.

[20] October 11, 1537, CR III:420, #1615; *Melanchthons Briefwechsel*, ed. Heinz Scheible (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Fromann-Holzbog, 1977–1995), 2:336, #1953 [henceforth MBW].

[21] October 12, 1537, CR III:427, #1619; MBW 2:337, #1954.

time before Jesus' birth. From the mid-1510s, already in his lectures on Romans and Galatians, he moved to the theological definition of the law as the preparation for the coming of Christ to all believers in every age, as God's accusation of sinfulness that calls for repentance.[22]

This interpretation had become an integral part of Luther's understanding of God's economy by the time he preached on Galatians 3 at the beginning of 1532, treating a text that he had analyzed for his students only weeks before. According to Rörer's notes, he lectured to the students on this pericope on September 26 and October 9, 1531.[23] A comparison of the lecture with the sermon reveals that, despite the often homiletical nature of Luther's exegetical lectures, he perceived the tasks of preaching and teaching as quite different. In his lecture he paid a good deal of attention to the specific flow of the text, both in regard to its philological details and its theological content. The sermon was quite thematic, with relatively little attention paid to the individual words and ideas of Paul's writing in these verses. Instead, the preacher proclaimed to the people how the distinction of law and gospel that he found at work in the pericope actually should function in the Christian's encounter with the word of God.

The lectures also aimed at cultivating in his students the ability to distinguish law and gospel. The words of the apostle to the Galatians made this distinction very clear.[24] To be sure, there are common elements in lecture and sermon in this case. For instance, praise for the law as a good instrument of God, both in keeping political order and in leading sinners to the despair that turns their attention to Christ, which Luther made clear in his lectures,[25] does come across clearly as well in the sermon.[26] The treatment of these verses for his students, however, took place within the larger framework of the entire examination of the entire book. The professor presumed that his students understood his distinction of the two kinds of righteousness,[27] the anthropological presupposition he labeled "our theology" in his formulation of the "argument" of the

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[22] Erik Herrmann, "'Why Then the Law?' Salvation History and the Law in Martin Luther's Interpretation of Galatians 1513–1522" (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 2005).

[23] WA 40.I:511,9, and 530,6.

[24] WA 40.I:526,9–10.

[25] WA 40.I:519,5–521,5.

[26] WA 36:13,28–14,21.

[27] For example, WA 40.I:518,12–519,8.

Epistle.[28] Luther did not attempt to present this vital element of the framework of his thought in the sermon. The sermon required his adding the definition of the gospel (which he had treated earlier in the lectures to the students) to the examination of the nature of the law's impact on the sinner (which he could derive easily from the text). Luther, of course, never permitted the exegetical detail to curb homiletical application in lecture or sermon, but in this case his purpose required presentation in some detail of both law and gospel, driven and structured, as the sermon was, by his desire to instruct hearers and readers in the art of distinguishing the two. Therefore, he went beyond the text's description of the law in order to give a full treatment to the content and function of the gospel. In both lectures and sermon, he also added to what stood in the text regarding the law by broadening the analogies for its action. For instance, in his exposition of verse 23, Luther did not limit his comments to describing the law as a prison, as the text states. He used the analogy he would later cite in the Smalcald Articles: God crushes the sinner with the law as with a hammer smashing rocks (Jer 23:29).[29] Indeed, repeating a favorite expression for the justification of the sinner in these lectures, borrowed from Romans 6:3–4 and Colossians 2:12, Luther pointed out to his students that the law kills the sinner,[30] a description of the law's effect that did not find its way into the sermon on the following Festival of the Circumcision. All in all, despite similarities with his previous lecture, the doctrinal exposition of the text in Sunday morning worship for the purpose of making the gospel clear within the proper distinction of law and gospel led the professor to preach in a different manner than he had lectured. The sermon focused on the contrast between law and gospel rather than the text itself in order to execute the purpose for which Luther was preaching it.

His sermon proceeded directly to the heart of the matter. In preparing the text for publication, the editor omitted the initial observation in Rörer's

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[28] WA 40.I:45,24–27; *LW* 26:7. See Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness: Reflections on His Two-Dimensional Definition of Humanity at the Heart of His Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (1999): 449–466.

[29] WA 40.I:517,10–518,6. Cf. SA, III, 3, 2, in *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 11th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 436–437 [henceforth BSLK], and *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 312.

[30] On Luther's use of the baptismal language of killing and making alive in the development of his doctrine of justification in these lectures, see Robert Kolb, "God Kills to Make Alive: Romans 6 and Luther's Understanding of Justification (1535)," *Lutheran Quarterly* 12 (1998): 33–56.

original notes that "this epistle is a little too lofty for the common masses" and proceeded directly to the point: "Saint Paul's opinion is that in the Christian church both pastors and Christians should teach and comprehend the definite distinction between law and faith, between command and gospel, as he commands Timothy to properly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).[31] Making this distinction properly is "the noblest skill in the Christian church," for both are the word of God, but both can be lost if they are mixed together and not correctly distinguished from each other.[32] That was the case under the papacy, Luther believed, when God's commands had been defined as gospel and the chief content of the faith. Thomas Müntzer, whose rampage over the Saxon countryside seven years earlier was only beginning to pale in his hearers' memories, fell into much the same error.[33]

Luther's treatment of the law reflects his understanding of the seriousness of actual sins: "the law demands a much higher righteousness than is found in outward virtue and upright living," Rörer added to the Jena text.[34] But the reformer's conviction that at the root of human sinfulness lie offenses against "the highest command of the first table, which is to be the master of the other commandments," dominated his treatment of sin.[35]

In contrast to his usual practice of bringing the crushing power of the law upon the sinner to prepare the way for appreciation of the gospel, Luther dated the origin of the gospel before the origin of the law, according to Rörer's revision in the Jena edition. Without basis in his own or the other set of notes, Rörer inserted in the Jena text, "The gospel began in paradise, the law was given by God on Mount Sinai."[36] This may reflect the words found in both sets of notes but not in the original printed version, "the law was given by *angelos* ['angels' or 'messengers'], the gospel is God's own word."[37] Luther believed that God had first created human creatures as his own; the Creator gives them their identity as his people, his children, as pure gift, out of unconditional love. To this relationship of human reception he attached his expectations for human performance, which the law describes.

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[31] WA 36:8,14–9,12.
[32] WA 36:8,14–10,18; 25,1–34. Cf. 36:28,12–16 and 33–38.
[33] WA 36:10,9–12,18, cf. 36:25–28.
[34] WA 36:26,19–30.
[35] WA 36:20,25–28, cf. 36:39,9–40,23.
[36] WA 36:25,29–31.
[37] WA 36:9,13–14.

Luther repeatedly drew the contrast between what law and gospel do in the life of the sinner so that his hearers could understand that the living word of God actually is his instrument of judging and restoring life; it impacts their identity and their way of life. "The law is for the Old Adam, the gospel for the troubled conscience."[38] "The law makes me a sinner. The gospel says, 'your sins are not to harm you but rather you shall be saved.'"[39] From Galatians 3:23 Luther reminded his hearers that the law had made them its prisoners.[40] Rörer expanded the text in the Jena edition: "The law demands perfect righteousness from everyone."[41] The preacher strove to deal with the threat of works-righteousness that had proved to be the most pressing issue raised by response to the Wittenberg Reformation in the Confutation of the Augsburg Confession, published a little more than a year earlier.[42] The law tells us "what he commands us to do, what we should do. It demands works from us." That, Luther judged, was easy to accomplish "*in causa formali*" but very difficult "*in causa finali*"—that is, it is easy to ascertain what should be done but difficult to carry it out.[43]

God's commands do express his will for "what God has directed people to do in this or that walk of life, in this or that aspect of daily living."[44] Luther recognized that God had designed human life in interdependence upon other human beings and so he taught the congregation that not only must law and gospel be distinguished but also different laws for specific situations must be distinguished from each other.[45] Rörer added a word of explanation to the Jena edition text: God has specific demands for his human creatures "according to nature, walk of life, responsibility, time, and other circumstances."[46] Luther also was developing his understanding of the obligation of believers to disobey earthly authorities if they issued

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[38] WA 36:22,28–29, cf. 36:41,13–14, 30–32.

[39] WA 36:19,35–36.

[40] WA 36:21,4–25.

[41] WA 36:36,13–14.

[42] See Charles V, *Die Confutatio der Confessio Augustana vom 3. August 1530*, ed. Herbert Immenkötter (Münster: Aschendorff, 1979), 84–87, 88–95, 120–123, translated in *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 108–110, 117–118, and Nestor Beck, *The Doctrine of Faith: A Study of the Augsburg Confession and Contemporary Ecumenical Documents* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987), 52–119.

[43] WA 36:13,25–27; cf. 36:30,19–35.

[44] WA 36:30,22–27.

[45] WA 36:12,6–13,27.

[46] WA 36:30,24.

commands against the first commandment,[47] and he reminded his hearers of this obligation as well.[48] These comments reflect the current threat of the violent suppression of the Lutheran faith that Emperor Charles V had reiterated at Augsburg and echoes Luther's thinly veiled call for resistance to the emperor in his *Warning to His Dear Germans*, which he had composed in October 1530 and had printed in April 1531.[49] Despite such situations which sin and evil create, God's law remains his plan for truly human living. Luther did not deny that "we must keep the Ten Commandments still [in Rörer's notes, "the law is not abrogated," and in the other manuscript, "a person must grasp the decalogue and not reject it"], but we know when to keep them in their proper place."[50] Rörer elaborated in the Jena edition by using Galatians 5:13: "The law or the ten commandments are not abrogated [by the gospel] so that we are free from it in all regards and may ignore it. For Christ has liberated us from the curse of the law but not from obedience to it."[51]

The gospel freely gives the righteousness which the law demands to those who do not have it, that is to all people, out of grace. Those who have not satisfied the law, and thus lie captive in sin and death, should turn from the law to the gospel and believe the message of Christ. That message Luther summarized as follows: "Jesus Christ is truly God's lamb, who takes away the sin of the world, reconciles his heavenly Father, and freely gives eternal righteousness, life, and salvation to all who believe, totally without condition, out of grace."[52]

Luther proceeded with his definition, according to the original printing, reflecting his fundamental anthropological distinction between active and passive righteousness:

> The gospel or faith is something that does not demand our works or tell us what to do, but tells us to receive, to accept a gift, so that we are passive, that is, that God promises and says to you: "this and that I

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[47] On Luther's theory of Christian resistance to secular authorities, see James M. Estes, *Peace, Order, and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the Church in the Thought of Luther and Melanchthon, 1518–1559*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005), esp. 189–192, and W. D. J. Cargill Thompson, *The Political Thought of Martin Luther* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press; Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1984), 91–111.

[48] WA 36:20,3–21,22; 39,9–40,23.

[49] WA 30.III:282,28–283,6, *LW* 47:18–19. See Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531–1546* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 25–30.

[50] WA 36:18,6–7, 14–16, 29–31.

[51] WA 36:37,25–27.

[52] WA 36:36,13–21.

> impart to you. You can do nothing for it; you have done nothing for it, but it is my doing." Just as in baptism, I did nothing; it is not of my doing in any way. It is God's doing, and he says to me, "Pay attention. I baptize you and wash you of all your sins. Accept it, it is yours." That is what it means to receive a gift. This is the distinction of law and gospel. Through the law a demand is made for what we should do. It presses for our activity for God and the neighbor. In the gospel we are required to receive a gift. . . . The gospel is pure gift, freely bestowed, salvation.[53]

The preacher continued by reverting to the language of Aristotelian logic. The formal cause of the gospel is promise; of the law, command. Luther drew an analogy from the social structure of the day, showing that he sensed something in the feudal system of his day akin to what modern scholars of the ancient Near East have called a "suzerainty treaty."[54] When a prince bestows property upon a noble, the noble has done nothing to force the prince to give this gift. When the noble goes to serve his lord, however, he acts, doing something for the prince. Luther's distinction of the two dimensions of human nature or righteousness depended on this distinction between the person and his actions or performance. The devil confuses the two factors [*causae*] at work here and thus drives people either into defiance of God or to despair.[55] With reference to Galatians 4:2, Luther commented that the gospel displaces the law as that word of God which first commands our attention. Both sets of notes record Luther's judgment that when law and gospel conflict it is better to lose the law than the gospel.[56]

Luther demonstrated that the distinction has implications for pastoral care, above all for the consolation of anxious consciences. Faith receives a message from heaven, so that "the law cannot makes its demands on the troubled heart any longer; it has tortured and smothered us enough and must now give place to the gospel, which God's grace and mercy gives us."[57] The gospel concentrates the believer's attention on Christ,

> your treasure, your gift, your help, comfort, and savior. In critical situations the heart cannot distinguish promise and command, giving and requiring. When the conscience is hit head-on and feels its sin, and

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[53] WA 36:14,22-32, cf. 36:311-32,25.

[54] See, for instance, Michael L. Barré, "Treaties in the ANE," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:655.

[55] WA 36:14,8-15,29, cf. 36:34,5-10, 22-29.

[56] WA 36:19,10-20,1; 19,19-20.

[57] WA 36:22,18-21.

> the pressures of death are pressing, with war, pestilence, poverty, shame, and the like, and the law says, "You are lost. I demand this and that from you, but you have not done it and cannot do it." When it comes to this, it terrifies people to death, stomps on them, and they must despair. Whoever can make the distinction in this situation, make it! For here this distinguishing is absolutely necessary![58]

Lutheran theologians have often interpreted Luther's understanding of the hostile function of the law in terms of Melanchthon's description of its accusing power.[59] This passage conforms to Luther's broader understanding of the law's power not only to accuse of specific sins but also to analyze the deeper impact of original sin and the power of the law to crush and terrify, as he expressed it in the Smalcald Articles, for example.[60] "War, pestilence, poverty, and shame," along with guilt, inform sinners that they are lost apart from fear, love, and trust in God.[61] All forms of evil, those which sinners perpetrate and those of which they are victims, terrify them to death and stomp them into despair. To be sure, Luther did not ignore the accusing function of the law in this sermon. He could also say, in the words of the editor of the first printing, "The law lays guilt upon me. I have not done this or that, I am unrighteous and a sinner in God's record of guilt. It is a word which puts my guilt on my account."[62]

Rörer described the goal of the law as pointing to Christ by "terrifying the unrepentant with God's wrath and displeasure."[63] As the sermon came to a close, Luther spoke of the terrified conscience facing the demands of the law:

> Performance is very difficult, particularly when the law wants to put its claim on the conscience. Then a person must grasp the promise, and so that you do not fall under his justice, do not leave it with the law, for whoever denies the gospel must thrash about in the hope that God does have a gospel, that he will not play with me according to the standards of justice, but rather will deal with me on the basis of grace for Christ's

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[58] WA 36:15,30–16,25.

[59] For example, Ap IV, 38, 103, 179, in BSLK, 167, 181, 195–196, and *Book of Concord*, 126, 137–138, 146.

[60] SA III, 3, 1–9, in BSLK, 436-438, and *Book of Concord*, 312–313.

[61] WA 36:16,20.

[62] WA 36:17,23–24, cf. 36:1–35.

[63] WA 36:26,19–20.

sake, that he forgives you all that you have failed to do out of grace, and what he will give you what you cannot do.[64]

Rörer paraphrased the text, "See to it that you grasp the promise and do not let the law gain the upper hand and rule in your conscience. That will bring you under judgment if you deny the gospel. You must cast yourself upon and grasp the word of grace or the gospel of the forgiveness of sins."[65]

In 1532, Luther was battling the teaching of the papal party regarding the necessity of human works and merit in the process of salvation. Therefore, in this sermon new obedience was not the primary focus. In the midst of the battle against medieval popular piety and Roman Catholic theological argument, Luther strove for clarity regarding the gospel, "that the person who is stuck in sins under the law or in death and has not satisfied the law, calls to Christ, and thus receives the gift of the forgiveness of sins, which he is to accept."[66]

III. The Sermon of 1537

The immediate situation in Wittenberg had changed by 1537. The role of the law stood at the heart of the public exchange over the message of the Wittenberg Reformation. Luther decisively rejected the libertinism that he feared might come with Agricola's claim that the law played no role in daily Christian life. Even more decisively, Luther feared a fundamental confusion of law and gospel in Agricola's thought that would destroy the clarity of the gospel. Agricola in fact did not presume that Christians could do anything they wished to do or that they were free from condemnation. He instead defined "gospel" in such a way that it did the accusing of sinners, especially of their "violation of the Son of God," that is, of sins against the first commandment. Furthermore, he labeled "gospel" Christ's admonitions to new obedience, the message which brought Christians the information they need about Christian performance of new obedience.[67] Luther took this confusion of law and gospel very seriously, for assigning

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[64] WA 36:22,30–23,12.

[65] WA 36:41,37–42,21.

[66] WA 36:17,30–33.

[67] In his attempt to avoid any focus on human performance and merit, Agricola defined sin as the "violation" not of God's law but of Jesus Christ. See the works by Edwards, Kjeldgaard-Pedersen, Koch, Silcock, and Wengert in note 18 above, and Christian Schulken, *Lex efficax: Studien zur Sprachwerdung des Gesetzes bei Luther in Anschluß der Disputation gegen die Antinomer* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2005), 150–172, on Luther's response, see 172–209.

the work of the law to the gospel led fundamentally to a falsification of the gospel. Luther saw Agricola's sloppy thinking as a threat to the very heart of his message. With that in mind he stepped into the pulpit on the last day of September 1537.

The 1537 sermon, on the Gospel for the eighteenth Sunday in Trinity, Matthew 22:34–40, begins with an introduction substantially similar to that of the 1532 sermon. God has given two teachings, "the law or the ten commands," and that "regarding the grace of Christ. When one perishes, the other does, too."[68] But instead of drawing out the contrast between the two, this sermon focuses first on the law, without mention of Agricola's name but with specific reference to the ideas that he held or that Luther feared might arise out of his thought. Again, the preacher set his definitions in place. The law reveals "what the human being is, what he was, and what he will become once more."[69] Its first prescriptive is "'You shall love God with your whole heart.' . . . You had this treasure in paradise and were created so that you could love God with your whole heart. You have lost that and must return to it. Otherwise, you cannot come into God's kingdom."[70] With this understanding of the law, Luther confronted libertine tendencies that he detected in Agricola and his supporters. It is false and cannot be tolerated that someone preaches that even if you love neither God nor neighbor and are an adulterer, "it does not harm you if you just believe."[71] Sin brings condemnation. That is clear, the preacher argued, from Galatians 5:19–21, Matthew 5:17–18 and 12:36, as well as Romans 8:3–4 and 3:31.

The proper treatment of law and gospel was based on Luther's understanding of the fall into sin:

> Adam lived before the Fall in perfect love toward God and pure love for the neighbor, in total obedience, without evil desires. Had he remained in that state, we would not be in the state we are. Because he fell into sin, fell from this command, we lie in the same misery as he, full of sin and disobedience, under God's wrath and curse, and we tumble from one sin into another. The law stands there at all times, regards us as guilty, drives us and demands that we should be upright and obedient to God.[72]

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[68] WA 45:145,31–33.
[69] WA 45:146,25–26.
[70] WA 45:146,27–31.
[71] WA 45:146,41.
[72] WA 45:147,37–148,15.

The law sets my conscience against me, Luther pointed out, "because I am to love God with my whole heart and my neighbor as myself, and I do not do it. So I must be condemned."[73]

Having delivered the law's message, the preacher turned to the proclamation of the prophets that had promised Christ's coming and that gives "help to leave sin, death, and the devil behind, help for the restoration of body and soul, so that we return to loving God and the neighbor from the heart. That will become complete and perfect in the next life, but it begins in this life."[74] Christ came "because we could not keep the law. It was impossible for our nature."[75] Christ has come, stepped between us and the Father, and intercedes for us. Christ died and poured out his blood, a demonstration that he loves God the Father with his whole heart, and that he also loves our neighbors, for whom he poured out his blood. For Christ's sake God remits the sins that arise because we do not love him with our whole heart. He gives us this gift, but the gift does not free us from the fact that the law expresses God's design for truly human living. In a typical use of dialog in Luther's sermons and lectures, the editor paraphrased what Rörer had noted: Christ says, "Dear Father, be gracious to them and forgive them their sins. I will take their sins upon myself and bear them. I love you with my whole heart and also love the entire human race. I will demonstrate that by pouring out my blood. I have fulfilled the law and done it for their good that they may enjoy my fulfilling of it and through it come to grace."[76] This means that sin is completely forgiven. It does not mean that we do not have to obey the law. Luther elaborated on this insistence on the performance of works of love on the basis of God's grace in Christ at some length, concluding that faith consists in "the free gift of God or forgiveness and in the initiation of [the work of] the Holy Spirit or the fulfilling [of the law]."[77] In this latter passage the description of the fulfillment of the law could imply a denial of the distinction of the two kinds of human righteousness by anchoring salvation in the keeping of all the commandments. This implication is absent from Rörer's record of what Luther actually preached. Where Rörer recorded that Luther had said, "We keep the law," the editor expanded, "we keep and fulfill the law."[78]

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[73] WA 45:148,18–19.
[74] WA 45:148,26–30.
[75] WA 45:148,38–39.
[76] WA 45:148,40–149,14.
[77] WA 45:150,23–24.
[78] WA 45:150,10 and 30.

In any case, Luther acknowledged that the law's accusing or crushing force remained primary. He told the Wittenberg parishioners, "When I measure my life against the law, I see and feel all the time its opposite in my life."[79] The law convinces sinners of the nature of the ruin and the sickness which they suffer. It therefore leads to Christ as "helper and savior,"[80] thus meeting Agricola on the ground he was trying to occupy, making the person of Jesus Christ the entire content of his theology. Luther then explained that Christ helps sinners in two ways. First, he takes our part against God and serves as

> the cloak that is thrown over our shame—ours, I say, the cloak over our shame because he has taken our sin and shame upon himself—but in God's sight he is the mercy seat, without sin and shame, pure virtue and honor. Like a brooding hen he spreads his wings over us to protect us from the hawk, that is, the devil with the sin and death that he causes. God has forgiven this sin for Christ's sake.[81]

The gospel, however, does not only speak of the forgiveness of sins. It also provides the power and strength to live as the children of God. God has bestowed this new identity as his children on sinners by means of that forgiveness.

> He not only covers and protects us, but he also wants to nourish and feed us as the hen nourishes and feeds her chicks. That is, he wants to give us the Holy Spirit and the strength to begin to love God and keep his commandments. When Christ demanded that the man give up everything to follow him (Matt. 19:16–25), he was saying that keeping God's commandments involves knowing and having Christ.[82]

Luther's formulation of two dimensions of the gospel's activities illustrates his efforts to hold justification and sanctification distinct but inseparable. God's gracious bestowal of the new life that identifies sinners as his children brings with it expectations for Christian living.

"What does it mean to know Christ?" the preacher asked.[83] Psalm 110 provided the basis of the answer, as Luther presented the Savior as both "David's true, natural descendent, of his flesh and blood, and at the same

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[79] WA 45:151,5–9, 26–28.
[80] WA 45:153,26–32.
[81] WA 45:153,33–154,14.
[82] WA 45:153,15–154,36.
[83] WA 45:154,37.

time David's Lord."[84] For knowing the law is not enough. This Christ does what the law cannot do. He renews the sinner. He was born as a human being,

> out of the pure drops of blood of the Virgin, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, conceived as a human being, born pure and innocent, without sin. He is the only human being who could keep and fulfill the law, for he shared human nature with all other people, but without the same guilt, apart from sin and God's wrath. He has gone before God on our behalf, and he is the curtain, the shadow, the brooding hen, under whom we have forgiveness of sins and salvation from God's wrath and hell. Not only that; he gives us the Holy Spirit, that we may follow him and begin to suppress and kill sin as long as we come to him and become like him, without sin and in complete righteousness. For this reason he is risen from the dead, and sits at the right hand of the Father, that he may take away and destroy our sin, death, and hell and bring us to a new eternal righteousness and eternal life.[85]

As he defined both law and gospel, Luther was combating Agricola's brand of antinomianism in this sermon. He feared the confusion that Agricola's ideas could spread among the populace, and he strove to counteract that threat with positive instruction in the proper use of God's word.

IV. Conclusion

Theologians seldom reflect directly on their presuppositions and the mechanics of the theological task from the pulpit. Their assignment, as Luther and Melanchthon defined theology, is to distinguish and apply law and gospel as the living, active word of God to their hearers, not to discuss how to do this task. However, in two different circumstances—in 1532 and 1537—Martin Luther addressed the congregation in Wittenberg directly on the topic of how to practice the distinction of law and gospel. In these sermons he built upon his typical practice of actually distinguishing law and gospel, which had guided his theology since 1518, with an explanation of how the distinction applied to the specific issues the Wittenberg theological faculty was confronting in each of these years. In both cases he made it clear that God designed the law—his expectations for the performance and action of his human creatures—in such a way that the law crushes, accuses, and condemns sinners. He spelled out, particularly in

[84] WA 45:155,36–37.
[85] WA 45:156,21–35.

the second sermon, that the expectations of the law that are hostile to sinners remain God's plan for true and good human living. Luther also insisted to the congregation that meeting these expectations remains impossible for sinners apart from the power that the Holy Spirit brings with the forgiveness of sins. He directed the message of Christ's forgiveness to his hearers, bestowing and renewing their identity as forgiven children of God, liberated from their sinfulness through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without separating the gospel's action into separate parts, he noted for the congregation that the forgiveness of sins, which bestows this new identity upon sinners, also moves and propels them to live as the human beings that God designed them to be, that is, to demonstrate their humanity in love for God and other creatures.

Proclaimers of God's word always must meet the natural tendency of sinful human creatures to ignore God and resist his will with the proclamation of the crushing force of the law and with the pure and adulterated repetition of the promise of forgiveness of sins, new life, and salvation in Jesus Christ. Preachers must always aid the faithful with instruction for the pious practice of that new life which the Holy Spirit plants and nurtures through the word of forgiveness. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the church in North America faces a situation not unlike that of Luther in 1532, for the society which surrounds it on this continent evaluates human beings on the basis of what they do, of their accomplishments. Against the widespread belief in our culture that human beings create the worth of their own lives by what they achieve on their own, the gospel of Jesus Christ makes it crystal clear that we are creatures of our creator, and that he has come as our savior and liberator to free us from slavery to sin and our own standards of performance.

At the same time, the church in North America faces a situation not unlike that of Luther in 1537, for the society which surrounds it on this continent is engaged in what from the standpoint of human history seems a ludicrous attempt to live without public values and a structure for decent human living. Against the widespread belief in our culture that to be human means to be free to fashion our own plans for human living according to our own desires, the instruction of the church must make it clear what form a God-pleasing, God-designed life takes in service both to God and to other creatures. For these inseparable tasks, the thought and practice of the preacher Martin Luther offer rich resources.

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The Argument over Women's Ordination in Lutheranism as a Paradigmatic Conflict of Dogma[1]

Armin Wenz

I. An Ongoing Conflict

In the June 2006 issue of the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, American church historian Kenneth G. Appold opened his article on women in early modern Lutheranism with the following words: "The path of Lutheranism to women's ordination is long, often controversial, and in many cases unfinished."[2] In view of the "possibilities that can, in hindsight, be connected with Luther's redefinition of the preaching office and his concept of the general priesthood of all believers," Appold finds it surprising that although Lutheran churches started to ordain women after World War II, there is still opposition to this practice.[3] Appold, who currently works at the Ecumenical Institute in Strasbourg—probably the most important think-tank of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)—mentions as examples "on the forefront" of such renitent behavior the Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church (SELK) in Germany, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), but "also some churches of the Lutheran World Federation," among them explicitly the Lutheran Church in Latvia whose example shows "that the path to women's ordination also can be reversed."[4]

By doing so, Appold gives his thoughts a church-political dimension that is worth noting. Probably not by accident, Appold's essay appears at a time when the Lutheran World Federation is struggling for its existence. It thus fits nicely into the attempts of the LWF-mainstream to discipline deviants in Latvia and elsewhere. By way of example, I only point to the repression attempts against the Latvian church documented by Reinhard

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[1] This essay was first published in German under the title: "Der Streit um die Frauenordination im Luthertum als paradigmatischer Dogmenkonflikt," *Lutherische Beiträge* 12 (2007): 103–127. It was translated by Holger Sonntag.

[2] Kenneth G. Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum: Kirchliche Ämter und die Frage der Ordination," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 103 (2006): 253.

[3] Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 253.

[4] Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 253. Yet for such an evaluation one would have to look carefully at how and, respectively, under what pressure the introduction of women's ordination in Latvia once had come about.

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Slenczka,[5] but also to the correspondence between the two bishops of the LWF-member churches in Sweden and Kenya concerning the episcopal consecration in the Swedish Mission Province.[6] By his explicit reference to the SELK and its sister churches, Appold also weighs into the debate which is going on at least in the SELK, a church in which, according to Appold, the path to women's ordination "is still unfinished." Appold's judgment—"Any attempt to resist women's ordination based on tradition or some 'confessional heritage' is futile"[7]—is oil into the fire of those favoring women's ordination in the SELK.

Appold's semantics are marked by a historical axiom that is typical of much of today's Protestant theology. Resistance against women's ordination "still" takes place; the path to the desired goal is "in some cases" "not yet" finished. In some cases it is even "reversed." Such a way of speaking reveals a soteriologically charged view of history as process, which, however, strangely can no longer be made plausible to those churches exposed by Appold as *having relapsed* or *remaining backwards*. This has to do with the fact that the struggle regarding women's ordination can be perceived in a totally different matter, namely, not as progression into a future of wholeness, but as a paradigmatic conflict of dogma that touches on central aspects of church and theology, a reality that was pointed out already years ago by Bavarian Bishop Dietzfelbinger.[8]

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[5] Reinhard Slenczka writes: "The consistory, working with its partner churches, is to bring to bear its influence in the Lutheran World Federation and urge considering women's ordination, as it is being questioned, as *status confessionis* (question of confession)." "Die Heilige Schrift, das Wort des dreieinigen Gottes," *Kerygma und Dogma* 51 (2005): 177 n. 8. Thus reads the September 1996 resolution of the convention of the Lutheran territorial Church of Schleswig-Holstein quoted by Slenczka; see also 174 n. 1. For an English summary of the essay, see Holger Sonntag, "Holy Scripture, the Word of God: The Recent Debate in Germany," *Logia* 15, no. 2 (2006): 29–35. Furthermore, see Reinhard Slenczka, "Die Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche," in *Neues und Altes: Ausgewählte Aufsätze, Vorträge und Gutachten* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund, 2000), 3:183.

[6] See the documentation of the correspondence between Archbishop Hammar and Bishop Obare in *Lutherische Beiträge* 10 (2005): 57–61; furthermore, see Johannes Junker, "Eine Missionsprovinz in Schweden," *Lutherische Beiträge* 10 (2005): 52–56. For Obare's response to the LWF inquiry, see Walter Obare Omwanza, "Choose Life!," *CTQ* 69 (2005): 309–326.

[7] Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 279.

[8] Hermann Dietzfelbinger, *Veränderung und Beständigkeit: Erinnerungen* (Munich: Claudius, 1984), 319: "I am convinced that the fact, that we did not, with the patience necessary, take a joint approach to this only seemingly secondary matter that in reality affects almost all basic problems of the congregation of Christ, did significantly hinder

This perception, however, is diligently combated by the proponents of process thinking. This can be seen especially in those churches where the quarrel is still going on, that is, where the path to women's ordination has "not yet" been finished, and they still find themselves in a different "phase" of the "process." By observing the debate within the SELK and the LWF, one can make an interesting discovery. Where women's ordination has not yet been introduced, it is asserted that such a step is an adiaphoron and would by no means affect the gospel; it would, therefore, not have divisive effects.[9] Yet where women's ordination has been introduced and opposing voices do not fall silent, condemnations are issued. From this a new "ecumenical" consensus emerges that goes beyond confessions and countries. The anathema hurled against criticism of women's ordination is heard in Anglicanism[10] as well as in Lutheranism, in Scandinavia as well as in Germany. The most prominent example is the 1992 statement of the Theological Commission of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) on "women's ordination and the office of bishop."[11] Reinhard Slenczka, who has repeatedly examined women's ordination critically, comments on this text as follows:

> When at first there seemed to be only a question concerning church order, dealing with external peace and not with eternal salvation, opposition suddenly makes it clear that apparently there are, after all, questions involved which have to do with fellowship in the right

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the consolidation and inner strength of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD)."

[9] This oft-repeated *ceterum censeo* of a lecture series of the faculty of the Lutheran Theological School at Oberursel has been published as *Frauen im kirchlichen Amt? Aspekte zum Für und Wider der Ordination von Frauen*, ed. Volker Stolle (Oberursel: Oberurseler Hefte, 1994). See the important critique of it in Gottfried Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle (Hrsg.): Frauen im kirchlichen Amt?* edited by Jobst Schöne (Berlin; Hanover, 1995), 10. Furthermore, Hermann Sasse, in view of this argumentation, talks about the phrases "the Gospel is not at stake" and "it is only an outward law [Ordnung] which has been altered" as the "great tranquilizer for disturbed consciences in modern churches." Sasse, "Ordination of Women?" in *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, trans. M. C. Harrison et al. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 2:404.

[10] *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 11, 1994: "Wer sich der Frauenordination widersetze, irre im Glauben—ein kleiner Bannfluch ex cathedra aus Canterbury nach Rom" (translation: "Who resists women's ordination errs in the faith—a little ban ex cathedra from Canterbury to Rome").

[11] Kammer für Theologie, *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt* (Hanover: Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, 1992). This document was published as no. 44 in the *EKD-Texte* series. Hereafter *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*.

doctrine and in the true church. The result is that a new consensus is not only demanded by disciplinary action, but also pushed through by doctrinal condemnations and exclusion from the church, even though the other side appeals to the conscience bound by God's word, which according to Romans 14 has not only a legal, but also a spiritual right to be protected.[12]

After a phase of appeasement thus follows the phase of the solitary rule of the advocates of women's ordination who demand the unconditional surrender of all who think differently.[13]

The *conclusion* of the development Appold longs for thus in fact leads to *exclusion*. The condemnations uttered show that the introduction of women's ordination has a *de facto* divisive effect, as it leads to the existence of two churches that *contradict each other* in many ways. In prophetic farsightedness, this was formulated already by great Lutheran theologians of the post-World War II era. Peter Brunner cautiously uttered the supposition that women's ordination could be a heretical practice, a supposition he saw validated by his inquiry.[14] Anders Nygren commented on women's ordination, recommended by the Swedish government to the church in 1958, by saying that now the Church of Sweden had committed the Gnostic aberration.[15]

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[12] Reinhard Slenczka, "*Magnus Consensus*: The Unity of the Church in the Truth and Society's Pluralism," *Logia* 13, no. 3 (2004): 21.

[13] See *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 8. The letter, written by bishop Walter Obare Omwanza, Kenya, to Archbishop K. G. Hammar on March 16, 2004, fits well here: "The consecration of women to the apostolic priestly office is a novelty. . . . This Gnostic novelty now demands apparently not only to rule alone in the church, but also exercises tyranny because it cannot not tolerate even a minimal cooperation with classic Christianity, as this is found especially in the Lutheran Confessions." The German is in *Lutherische Beiträge* 10 (2005): 60.

[14] See Peter Brunner, "Das Hirtenamt und die Frau," in *Pro Ecclesia: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur dogmatischen Theologie*, 3rd ed. (Fürth: Flacius, 1990), 1:319. On page 332, he also writes: "The *kephalé*-structure of the relation between male and female established in the creation of man and the command of submission (*hypotagé*) that applies to the woman based on this order in a particular way are in force in the church of Jesus Christ to the Last Day. If a person were to contest the factually effective existence of this order and the factual validity of the command corresponding to this order in teaching and proclamation, he would, at a central point where ultimately the whole of the Christian message is at stake, proclaim a false teaching; he would be a heretic."

[15] *Kyrkomötets protokoll* no. 4 (1958), 154: "Since the decision now made represents not only a decision concerning the limited question of female priests but, in my mind, at the same time includes the fact that our church changes over into a heretofore foreign track toward a view held in Gnosticism and among the 'enthusiasts,' I have to bring forward

Thus, the introduction of women's ordination has led both sides to make dogmatically weighty judgments that, as with all doctrinal condemnations, mark ultimate boundaries and have an eschatological quality, insofar as they bind the consciences of those judging before God. The radical nature of the change in church and theology that took place within one generation cannot be overestimated. It is a peculiar development that, parallel to the numerous efforts to reach convergence in the *ecumene*, the question of women's ordination has led to new confessional church bodies. When dissenters are denied their right to exist by dogmatic definitions, they lose the possibility to participate in spiritual life or theological discourse and are forced to continue their being the church outside the heretofore common walls. Just like at the time of the Reformation, however, such an eschatological situation of crisis offers above all a chance to study aspects of the gospel, which possibly have hardly been noticed and have now been condemned by one side as error, and to build the church by doing so.

That this really takes place becomes apparent when we first shed light on the material dogmatic dimension of the conflict regarding women's ordination in order to ask how it is possible to reach such diametrically opposed positions within the Lutheran church. For the material dogmatic decisions each presuppose fundamental theological premises in hermeneutics and the understanding of Scripture that have ecclesiological-eschatological consequences when they lead to the exclusion of differing positions. In this sense, the following elaborations are meant to measure the whole import of the conflict that has broken out.

II. The Material Dogmatic Disagreement: Between Paradigm Shifts and Deepening of the Heritage

In many areas of Lutheran theology, the justification of women's ordination has led to far-reaching modifications in doctrine, reaching from the understanding of the office via the theology of creation to the image of God. This is not to say that all advocates of women's ordination follow through with all paradigm shifts in all these areas. Yet one needs to point out that also on the level of material dogmatics there has been an increasing—process-like, at times slower, at times faster—"radicalization"

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my serious complaints about the decision made and make known my reservations" (quotation furnished by E. Andrae; translation into German by J. Diestelmann). These minutes from the 1958 Church Assembly of the Church of Sweden are also quoted in Rune Imberg, *Tillsammans – Gud till ära och människor till tjänst. Om man och kvinna i den kristna kyrkan* (Gothenburg: BV-förlag & Församlingsförlaget, 1999), 41 n. 14.

of the positions,[16] that therefore the "material for sharpened juxtapositions"[17] has not decreased but increased during the last years, in the SELK as well as in the LWF or in the EKD.

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[16] There is not enough space here to report on the events in the SELK during the last 15 years. Some hints must be enough. The controversy in the SELK circles around the question, in what sense Article 7, 2 of its Constitution, according to which only males can be ordained to the preaching office, can be grounded theologically. After laborious work in commissions, partial results have been published in the past years, e.g., on the question of adiaphora or on that of order of creation. A promising elaboration of the Theological Commission on "Office, offices, and services" is currently being discussed at pastors' conferences. All these efforts are an important expression of the will to walk together on a path that can be supported by as many people as possible. However, one must not be blind to the fact that in parallel to these efforts some proponents of women's ordination have further fortified and sharpened their argumentative position. This applies especially to the attempt by Volker Stolle to introduce Luther and the Lutheran tradition as chief witnesses in favor of women's ordination, which will be discussed below. At the same time, one must not overlook that Stolle's argumentation goes hand-in-hand with an explicit paradigm shift that affects central aspects of theology, leading to a thoroughgoing destruction of Lutheran doctrinal contents. See, for instance, Stolle's book *Luther und Paulus: Die exegetischen und hermeneutischen Grundlagen der lutherischen Rechtfertigungslehre im Paulinismus Luthers* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2002). This destruction affects not only the office of the church, but also the question of justification, which in Stolle is "constructed" totally from scratch. In his book, Stolle has also applied the inner-canonical material criticism, which he practices in his argumentation for women's ordination, to other areas of the New Testament and other doctrinal questions. Since Stolle is the most important theological mentor of the proponents of women's ordination in the SELK, one must expect his further paradigm shifts to be received as well (as the tip of the iceberg, see the internet portal www.frauenordination.de, there the button "Vorgänge SELK"). Noteworthy is, for example, Stolle's compilation of clarifications, disseminated not only via the internet (the aforementioned Web site), "Ausgeblendetes, was jedoch für das Thema von großer Bedeutung ist, sowie Unklarheiten, die zu falschen Schlüssen verleiten können," on the bible study produced for the SELK's consistory: "Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche? Seminareinheit für die theologische Weiterarbeit durch die Bezirkspfarrkonvente zum Jahresthema II/2006." The way in which one then reencounters these "clarifications" in the churchly discourse shows that one indeed is dealing here with the "formation of a school," in which one person sets the tone and others follow collectively. On Stolle's "destruction of the Lutheran whole of meaning" (thus Stolle himself in his book, *Paulus und Luther*, 438), see *Lutherische Beiträge* 8, no. 4 (2003) and my critique: "Wider die alten und neuen Antinomer: Über 'Paradigmenwechsel' in der lutherischen Theologie," in *Sana Doctrina: Heilige Schrift und theologische Ethik* (Frankfurt / Main: Lang, 2004), 335–356. See also John Stephenson, review of *Luther und Paulus: Die exegetischen und hermeneutischen Grundlagen der lutherischen Rechtfertingungslehre im Paulinismus Luthers* by Volker Stolle, *Logia* 13, no. 3 (2004): 41–43.

[17] Stolle, *Frauen im kirchlichen Amt?*, 8.

For example, prominent advocates of female pastors view the churchly preaching office as merely a function or emanation of the priesthood of all believers.[18] This is the point of departure and, respectively, the central theological "principle" to be kept in mind in the statement of the Theological Commission of the EKD[19] as well as in Volker Stolle, the theological champion in the battle for women's ordination within the SELK. Accordingly, the office is seen as an order that is necessary for the sake of peace in the church. Any ties back to the apostolic office or even to the institution of the office by Christ himself are questioned or simply denied. Correspondingly, there can be no talk of representation of Christ by the incumbents of the office while they exercise their official duties.[20] The question regarding an exercise of the pastoral office by women, therefore, is exclusively answered based on the criterion of "equality" or "emancipation."[21] A text like Galatians 3:28, therefore, relegates "the apostle's individual restrictive demands of silence and submission of women" to the realm of "taking care of current questions of order,"[22] that either are not at all related to the preaching office or simply have to be seen as time-bound accommodation. In Stolle one can even read: "In the Christian congregation the difference between man and woman, as it is established in creation, . . . does not matter anymore."[23] According to this view, there can be no talk of apostolic instructions that are indissolubly connected with the gospel and therefore binding even today. They are neutralized as a time-bound snapshot. The concrete shape of the proclamation of the gospel is left to the decision of the church in its

[18] See, for example, the summary of Gustaf Wingren by Regin Prenter, *Die Ordination der Frauen zu dem überlieferten Pfarramt der lutherischen Kirche* (Berlin; Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1967), 15.

[19] See also Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," who repeatedly invokes Luther's connection between the general priesthood and the office without explaining how they are both related in Luther.

[20] See Volker Stolle, "Im Dienst Christi und der Kirche: Zur neutestamentlichen Konzeptualisierung kirchlicher Ämter," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 20 (1996): 126.

[21] On almost every page of *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt.*

[22] *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 6. Correspondingly, Stolle speaks of time-conditioned "structures of order" in "Neutestamentliche Aspekte zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen," in Stolle, *Frauen im kirchlichen Amt?*, 69; on this, see the critique in Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 31.

[23] Stolle, "Neutestamentliche Aspekte zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen," 73–74. See the critique of Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 37: "The claim that, in the Christian congregation, 'the distinction between male and female, as it is ordered in creation, plays no role anymore,' is perhaps true for certain Gnostic congregations, certainly not for Paul and his congregations. How one can arrive at such assertions in view of 1 Cor. 11; 14; Eph. 5; and 1 Tim. 2 is a mystery."

"evangelical" freedom. Yet the gospel is turned into a veritable manifesto for emancipation by means of materially critical deconstructions and reconstructions. It is thus not at all surprising that occasionally there are polemics against "andristic exegeses"[24] and demands to discover the femininity of God,[25] so that in this argument for women's ordination even the notion of representation reappears in a transformed fashion, even though this is hardly done in a conscious manner.

On the other hand, the rejection of women's ordination is, at least among its Lutheran representatives,[26] based on the perception of the institution of the ecclesiastical office by Christ himself, as it is witnessed in the Lutheran Confessions, and on the perception of the biblical statements on the creation of man as male and female in the equality of rights with a difference in gifts and callings. A decisive aspect here is the notion of the representation[27] that is anchored in the doctrine of the Trinity as well as in the history of salvation and that has anthropological implications. In this way, the unity of creation and redemption and, respectively, order of creation and order of redemption is emphasized as well as the correlation between the image of God (God as Father; sending of the Son) and the office of shepherd (sending of the apostles by the Son; passing on of the office to male bishops and, respectively, presbyters).[28] Although detailed theological reflections cannot be presented here, I will point out that the

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[24] Stolle, "Neutestamentliche Aspekte zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen," 78–79.

[25] See the elaboration by A.-E. Buchrucker, *Frauenpfarramt und Feministische Theologie* (Hanover, 1995), which was not without reason published in response to Stolle, "Frauen im kirchlichen Amt?" An English translation of Buchrucker appeared in *Logia* 9, no. 1 (2000): 9–20.

[26] As paradigmatic for this stance, the 1994 "Hirtenbrief zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche" by Bishop Jobst Schöne is to be commended, in *Botschafter an Christi Statt: Versuche* (Groß Oesingen: Lutherische Buchhandlung Harms, 1996), 70–82.

[27] See William Weinrich, "'It Is not Given to Women to Teach': A *Lex* in Search of a *Ratio*," in *Church and Ministry Today: Three Confessional Lutheran Essays, Preus, Marquart, Weinrich)*, ed. John A. Maxfield (St. Louis: Luther Academy, 2001), 210: "We need to reflect upon the inner and organic connections which bind the speaking of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments to the inner life of the most Holy Trinity." Note also the context of the quotation.

[28] See Schöne, "Hirtenbrief zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche," 79: "The image of Christ as the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (1 Peter 2:25) pales unless there are shepherds who speak and act in his name and by his commission, whom he sent as his ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20). Experiences and wishes, needs and expectation that are deduced from humans and are related to them, especially to women, can then quickly shape a new image of God and Christ."

conflict regarding women's ordination in the SELK has led to a deepening of neglected questions in an impressive thematic breadth. This holds for the examination of the question of whether the "one office of proclaiming the word and administering the sacraments, instituted by Christ," "exists at all and whether it can be found at least in the New Testament," done by Gottfried Martens, who works out the basic approach of the New Testament, especially of the Pastoral Letters, regarding the theology of the office.[29] There are furthermore the studies by Gert Kelter on the Lutheran Confessions' theology of the office and its position between the doctrinal decisions of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD) and Rome regarding the theology of the office.[30] Additional contributions shed light on the "doctrine of the orders of creation" and its being anchored in the Lutheran Confessions[31] or on the doctrine of the office in the pastoral theologians of the nineteenth century.[32] Also the question of adiaphora that is constantly brought up in the debate regarding the ordination of women has been discussed on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions.[33]

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[29] Gottfried Martens, "Gibt es das 'eine, von Christus gestiftete Amt der Wortverkündigung und Sakramentsverwaltung'? Beobachtungen zur Frage von Amt und Ämtern im Neuen Testament unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Pastoralbriefe," *Lutherische Beiträge* 10 (2005): 3–20. On the New Testament situation, see also the essays by Hartmut Günther, "Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche? Erwägungen zu einer umstrittenen Frage," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 21 (1997): 99–113, and John W. Kleinig, "Die Heilige Schrift und der Ausschluß der Frauen vom Hirtenamt," *Lutherische Beiträge* 2 (1997): 5–20.

[30] Gert Kelter, "Das apostolische Hirtenamt der Kirche als institutionalisierte Zuspitzung der potestas clavium: Entwurf einer Zuordnung von Amt, Ämtern und Diensten in der Kirche vor dem Hintergrund von CA XXVIII," *Lutherische Beiträge* 10 (2005): 21–34, and "Parochiales oder diözesanes Bischofsamt? Versuch einer Auseinandersetzung mit neuen Ergebnissen ökumenischer Forschung," *Lutherische Beiträge* 11 (2006): 71–91. See also Armin Wenz: "'Vom Amt der Schlüssel'—ein Katechismusstück und seine Bedeutung," in *Einträchtig Lehren: Festschrift für Bischof Dr. Jobst Schöne*, ed. Jürgen Diestelmann and Wolfgang Schillhahn (Groß Oesingen: Lutherische Buchhandlung Harms, 1997), 542–558.

[31] Armin Wenz, "Die Lehre von den Schöpfungsordnungen—ein überholtes Theologumenon?" in *Sana Doctrina*, 146–181.

[32] Armin Wenz, "Ministry and Pastoral Theology of Löhe and Vilmar," *Logia* 16, no. 3 (2007): 15–23.

[33] Gottfried Martens offers an important summary: "FC X shows clearly that viewing churchly practices as adiaphora . . . , where this view is taken seriously, must in the long run lead to a separation from those who contradict this view; and it admonishes us to use this terminology carefully and in a theologically responsible way." Martens, "Die Adiaphora als theologisches Problem: Ansätze zu einer Hermeneutik von FC X," *Lutherische Beiträge* 5 (2000): 127.

Taking up the approach of Peter Brunner, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the LCMS in 1985 addressed women's ordination.[34] This discussion within the LCMS was deepened in an unmatched study by William Weinrich,[35] based especially on 1 Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5, that went to the heart of the question as to why the specific correlation of man and woman in creation is reflected in the relation of Christ and his church. According to Weinrich, the apostolic instructions for the office can be seen as results of the divine economy of salvation, which is why they can by no means be qualified as time-bound, but bind the church permanently.[36] All these studies are by no means the private teachings of fanatic confessionalists; they rather bear witness to a broad doctrinal consensus with Lutheran theologians who discussed the question of women's ordination already earlier in the twentieth century on an exegetical and dogmatic level.[37] I mention in addition to Peter Brunner the names of the German theologians Hermann Sasse, Joachim Heubach, and Hermann Dietzfelbinger, as well as the Scandinavians Regin Prenter, Bertil Gärtner,[38] and Bo Giertz. Thus, a consensus spanning generations, countries, and confessions[39] in these questions pertaining to women's

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[34] A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Women in the Church: Scriptural Principles and Ecclesial Practice* ([St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House], 1985).

[35] Weinrich, "It Is not Given to Women to Teach," 173–215.

[36] Weinrich, "It Is not Given to Women to Teach," 210–211. On the commandments indissolubly connected to the gospel, see pages 212–213.

[37] See the forthcoming volume of essays edited by Matthew C. Harrison and John T. Pless, *Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008).

[38] Bertil E. Gärtner, *Das Amt, der Mann und die Frau im Neuen Testament*, ed. Ernst Seybold, trans. Georg Stoll (Bad Windsheim: H. Delp, 1963).

[39] From the Anglican perspective, see Günther Thomann, "Die Frauenordination und ihre Folgen für die Anglikanische Gemeinschaft—Eine kurze Übersicht," *Lutherische Beiträge* 4 (1999): 106–124. From the Evangelical camp, see Werner Neuer, *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective*, trans. Gordon J. Wenham (London et al.: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990; Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991); Markus Liebelt, *Frauenordination: Ein Beitrag zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion im evangelikalen Kontext* (Nürnberg: VTR, [2003]); and Heinzpeter Hempelmann, *Gottes Ordnungen zum Leben: Die Stellung der Frau in der Gemeinde* (Bad Liebenzell: VLM, Verlag der Liebenzeller Mission, 1997). On the Orthodox position, see Peter Hauptmann, "Protestantische Frauenordination in russisch-orthodoxer Sicht," *Lutherische Beiträge* 1 (1997): 21–30. A historically far-reaching and ecumenically significant standard work has been presented by the Roman Catholic theologian Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood? A Systematic Analysis in the Light of the Order of Creation and Redemption*, trans. David Kipp (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988).

ordination cannot only be attested on the side of the proponents of women's ordination.

Yet since both sides arrive at opposing doctrinal results when it comes to evaluating the relationship between man and woman, between order of creation and order of salvation, between shepherding office and image of God, between gospel and apostolic instructions, while equally invoking Scripture and Confessions and, respectively, the Lutheran doctrinal tradition, we have to turn to the fundamental theological opposition in dealing with Scripture and Confessions that lies behind these opposing material dogmatic results.

III. The Fundamental Theological Disagreement

The historical-theological accusation of being "retarded" – that is, behind the times and slow to change – directed by Appold and others at opponents of women's ordination is repeated on a fundamental theological level both in the struggle for the correct use of Scripture and in the question regarding the catholicity of women's ordination, that is, its conformity to tradition or confession.

The Disagreement in the Evaluation of the Scripturalness of Women's Ordination

The opponents thus are accused of espousing a fundamentalist understanding of Scripture[40] and, respectively, of arguing based on the Baroque "proof-text" method,[41] a practice that today, in the age of the historical-critical method, cannot be regarded as an adequate way of

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40 This is the basic tenor of the Internet portal www.frauenordination.de. It is interesting how this argument affects the so-called culture of discussion or arguing. For there is no need to listen to serious material arguments made by theologians whom one already knows to be fundamentalists or fanatical doctrinaires. On the peculiar experiences one can then make in the discourse within the church, see the striking gloss by Gert Kelter, "Theologie und Wirklichkeit: Eine sehr populärphilosophische Glosse," *Lutherische Beiträge* 11 (2006): 253–255. What is really behind the accusation of fundamentalism is an ignoring of the Spirit-wrought reality of theology and church. Thus postmodern, constructivist hermeneutics totally changes communication. When one no longer can agree on objective realities, including biblical statements and contents, because they are viewed only as time-conditioned constructions and because every understanding is seen as relative, then communication becomes a struggle for power, in which the strongest ("most plausible," most powerful, etc.) constructor prevails.

41 *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 5: "Obedience to the Scripture cannot mean that individual biblical verses are isolated as 'proof texts' (*dicta probantia*) and their narrower and wider context is ignored."

dealing with Scripture. To counter dogmatic definitions, one points to the basic diversity of biblical "traditions" "that want to be read in their differences and in their being tied to the times"; this is why, accordingly, it is to be said: "In the bible, there is neither a comprehensive doctrine of the office nor a dogma on the role of the woman that transcends time. Rather, the history of primitive Christianity points us to different regulations in different congregational situations and resists a premature systematization."[42] Accordingly, Stolle speaks programmatically of a "New Testament conceptualization of ecclesiastical offices."[43] Yet such time-conditioned conceptualizations are, both according to Stolle and the Theological Commission of the EKD, to be measured by the "center of the gospel." Based on this center, one can and must materially criticize misleading Scripture passages which therefore also may not claim apostolic authority that would bind the church today.[44] In Stolle one can read: "Biblical-theological contributions, which could help in the process of arriving at a decision, can, according to Lutheran hermeneutics, not consist in remembering apostolic orders as permanently binding decisions. Rather, they will, from the center of the gospel, take into account especially also the formative powers of the word of God . . . ."[45]

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[42] *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 5.

[43] Stolle, "Im Dienst Christi und der Kirche," passim.

[44] See *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 5: "When later texts and traditions mention women as causing sin in the world and demand their subordination under men (so esp. 1 Tim. 2:8-15), then this is the result of a reader response that moves away from the original meaning, but that always has to be measured anew against the liberating message of the gospel of Jesus Christ and its understanding of creation"; and Stolle, "Neutestamentliche Aspekte zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen," 77: "The limiting directives, on the other hand, take up legendary elaborations which in the texts' tradition of interpretation attached themselves to the texts and represent their timely actualization and application (1 Cor. 11:7-10; 1 Tim. 2:13-15). Under different cultural and societal conditions they, with their actual presuppositions, lose their plausibility and become meaningless." Furthermore Stolle's review of Ulrike Wagener, *Die Ordnung des "Hauses Gottes": Der Ort von Frauen in der Ekklesiologie und Ethik der Pastoralbriefe* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994): "In a good and insightful manner, the study at hand leads into the hermeneutical problematic that First Timothy, in the texts discussed, deviates from the theological line of Paul and seeks to shape the congregational life based on extra-Christian societal premises. If this is perceived correctly, then the church cannot avoid the decision whether it wants to follow uncritically the ancient order of society or give room to the evangelical freedom given as a gift in Christ." Review in *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 19 (1995): 159.

[45] Volker Stolle, "I Kor 14,26–40 und die Gottesdienstreform der lutherischen Reformation: Die biblische Grundlegung des Gottesdienstes als hermeneutische Frage," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 19 (1995): 135.

If one does not allow the fundamentalism charge to turn one off from independently looking into the biblical-theological elaborations of the Lutheran theologians rejecting women's ordination, one finds that they do not contain any undifferentiated use of contextually isolated "proof texts." This is true especially for the careful elaboration of Peter Brunner, which was probably not accidentally first caricatured and then rejected by the Theological Commission of the EKD.[46] Brunner himself, just like the many theologians following up on his work or arriving at similar results on a different path, explicitly distances himself from a fundamentalist and, respectively, biblicist-legalistic understanding of Scripture.[47] The point of departure for his exegetical observations, however, is the differentiating perception that there are in Scripture solemn divine institutions or orders that are by no means time-conditioned, which also are not only manifestations of God's will but that out of themselves—that is, by virtue of divine omnipotence—establish a universal and therefore also current reality that wants to be perceived by us. Such divine orders Brunner finds, on the one hand, in the institution of the office by Christ himself and, on the other hand, in the primeval creation of man as male and female in their specific coordination to each other. All of Scripture is permeated by the witness to the interdependence and the inexchangeability of man and woman, to the equality of rights, and to the difference in vocations of man and woman in marriage and congregation. The institution of the worldwide-missionary proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments by Jesus himself in the New Testament never takes place in an abstract way, but is always tied to persons. The two classic proof texts on the question of a preaching office of women (1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2) thus by no means represent cultural adaptations within the context of the entire Bible[48] but the point where the creation-theological and the office-theological lines converge.

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[46] *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 4–5. On this, see Reinhard Slenczka, "Ist die Kritik an der Frauenordination eine kirchentrennende Irrlehre? Dogmatische Erwägungen zu einer Erklärung des Rates der EKD vom 20. Juli 1992," in *Neues und Altes*, 3:201. Martens calls Brunner's treatise "Hirtenamt und die Frau" "probably the most profound negative contribution on this question." *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 4.

[47] Brunner, "Hirtenamt und die Frau," 317. See Prenter, *Ordination der Frauen*, 6–8; Gärtner, *Das Amt, der Mann und die Frau im Neuen Testament*, 8.

[48] Weinrich, "It Is not Given to Women to Teach," 189: Paul argues "not on the basis . . . of the culture and society," but "on the basis of the story of creation."

By observing the Lutheran hermeneutical premise that the Holy Spirit does not contradict himself,[49] a number of inner-canonical tensions can be made plausible. There is, for example, the observation that Jesus, on the one hand, could gather many female disciples around him, but, on the other hand, only called men by name in order to entrust them with the sacraments as well as the Great Commission. In this way, one can understand why Jesus revealed himself as the risen one to the women who had come to perform the last service of love and then sent them with a limited charge to his disciples before he then meets the disciples himself to awaken their faith and to send them out into the world. One can then understand why it is a matter of course for Paul that women are present in the divine service and involved in prayer and praise, while he at the same time prohibits them to teach in the congregational assembly.

It may be that the respective exegetes cannot answer every question to the last detail. Yet the unbiased observer will notice that the interpretations of Brunner, Prenter, Weinrich, and others, which are different and yet in agreement in their basic decisions, correspond to the hermeneutical bases of the Lutheran Reformation. This is especially true of the perception that God works what he says through his solemn ordinations, a truth of faith that is frequently attested in Scripture and that is true for all the works of the Trinity: creation, redemption, and the work of the Holy Spirit. It furthermore has to do with the principle that the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is a spiritual, God-wrought unity.

Contrariwise, if one considers how Scripture is used by proponents of women's ordination, one, to be sure, also finds here the affirmation of viewing Scripture as God's word. This, however, is understood in a way that is quite different than in the Lutheran tradition, which becomes apparent when in the actual use of Scripture one observes again and again a characteristic "change in subject."[50] One no longer talks about divine institutions, but about "structures of order" conditioned by each period of time. The office of shepherd is not viewed as an institution of Christ which his apostles "hand down," as it were, for the post-apostolic period to the bishops and presbyters, but one talks instead about conceptualizations of churchly offices. The vis-à-vis of Lord and church, head and body, command and obedience is thus replaced by the concept of a tradition-

[49] Hans Kirsten points to this premise and its application by Luther in "Luther und die Frauenordination," in *Die Kirche in der Welt: Aufsätze zur praktischen Theologie aus drei Jahrzehnten* (Groß Oesingen: Lutherische Buchhandlung Harms, 1983), 192–193.

[50] Martens emphasizes this in *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 31–33.

historical development that can view the levels of development reached in the New Testament as time-conditioned variations but by no means as sign posts that are binding for later Christianity.[51] In fact, one can obviously ask whether the polemic against the "proof-text" method does not really fall back on the advocates of women's ordination. Texts like Galatians 3:28 are often torn out of their context (which is certainly not about teaching in the worship service or a public exercise of the office of shepherd) and leveled against perceived illegitimate inner-canonical misjudgments regarding the relation of man and woman in the question of the office.

The Disagreement Regarding the Evaluation of Women's Ordination's Conformity to the Confessions or Tradition

It is precisely the tradition-historical concept that is behind the motif of a process-like path to women's ordination and that shapes the way in which its proponents deal with the tradition of the church. It is claimed that, on the one hand, the Lutheran Confessions are silent on the question of women's ordination; but on the other hand, the concept of the priesthood of all believers actually suggests the ordination of women, even if it could not yet be realized at the time of the Reformation because one had to respect the societal circumstances that have since changed. Accordingly, tradition—especially the Lutheran tradition—has cleared the path to women's ordination in increasing clarity.

Here, too, one discovers time and again—especially in the use of Luther quotes—the totally naïve use of a "proof-text" method that ignores the context.[52] It is extremely strange in this context how, for example, Volker Stolle deals with Luther's statements. "Luther apparently had great difficulties to get a theologically accurate and definitive grasp of the reality of the churchly office."[53] Luther's understanding of the office is destroyed

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[51] For a critical view of this, see Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 49

[52] This applies especially to the "proofs" for Luther's alleged derivation of the churchly office from the general priesthood. For example, see *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 3. The fact that the Lutheran Confessions do not mention the "general priesthood" even once when they discuss the foundation of the churchly office is, for its part, not worth mentioning.

[53] Volker Stolle, "Luther, das 'Amt' und die Frauen," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 19 (1995): 20. Also, on page 8: "In this way, one attempts to undergird one's own culture-historical limitations in a biological and biblicist way"; and page 21: "Contrary to the word from Scripture, 1 Peter 2:9, that clearly unfolds its independent power, in fact, its critically explosive power, the commandment of silence and, respectively, the prohibition to teach, does not have any effect out of itself, but serves as the supplementary biblical foundation of convictions that appear evident based on other presuppositions."

by repeated caricatures, before it then is said, in summary: "The exclusion of women from the office of the church, as Luther proves it, turns out to be an element in his understanding of the office that is relative to time and that is therefore also time-bound. Accordingly, the ordination of women does not represent a break with the doctrinal tradition of the Lutheran church, insofar as Luther can be taken to be normative for it."[54]

Appold, in his overview on "women in early-modern Lutheranism" mentioned above, argues in a similar way. At first, Appold rightly points out that orthodox Lutheranism highly appreciated woman and also female offices such as that of a midwife.[55] It is an equally important reminder that women as midwives and teachers could work in close contact with the office of pastor. Furthermore, Appold's hints at the beginnings of reestablishing the early church's office of deaconess are interesting. Caspar Ziegler also suggested for this a specific solemn rite of consecration.[56] Although Appold cannot adduce a single proof for an ordination of women to the preaching office,[57] he draws the conclusion: "All the

[54] Stolle, "Luther, das 'Amt' und die Frauen," 22. In "I Kor 14,26–40 und die Gottesdienstreform der lutherischen Reformation," 134, Stolle summarizes: "The exclusion of women from the churchly office was not derived from the commission of the gospel and the call by Christ, but attributed to human orders." On page 134, note 132, Stolle calls it an "exception" that Luther himself could prove the exclusion of women from the churchly office based on the commandment of Christ. The way he deals with the quotation by Theodosius Harnack on the same page shows that Stolle can arrive at his conclusions only because, for him, the order of creation always implies "human order," but not, as for Harnack, "divine" order.

[55] See also Eckhard Struckmeier, *"Vom Glauben der Kinder im Mutter-Leibe": Eine historisch-anthropologische Untersuchung frühneuzeitlicher lutherischer Seelsorge und Frömmigkeit im Zusammenhang mit der Geburt* (Frankfurt am Main; New York: P. Lang, 2000).

[56] Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 275–276.

[57] Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 277: "There is no proof for women being ordained in early modern Lutheranism for the preaching office." All that Appold's observations show (and that is certainly noteworthy) is that the orthodox Lutherans were so "pro-women" that indeed numerous churchly offices existing *alongside the pastoral office* were open for them. Yet this is also exactly the proposal of numerous important Lutheran theologians who rejected women's ordination for theological reasons and therefore demand to create specifically churchly offices for theologically qualified women. See Prenter, *Ordination der Frauen*, 17; Brunner, "Hirtenamt und die Frau," 337–338; Slenczka, "Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche," 195; and Schöne, "Hirtenbrief zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen zum Amt der Kirche," 81. One can also point to the fact that, in the United States, it is precisely the LCMS and the Roman Catholic Church that have by far the most women employed in qualified churchly offices—with the exception of the pastoral office.

presuppositions for women's ordination can be found in the 16th and 17th centuries."[58] Among these presuppositions are, according to Appold, "a clear relativizing . . . of the bible passages used against women's ordination" already in Luther and "in almost all exegetes of orthodoxy."[59] Appold also claims that Luther and the Lutheran theologians did not understand the "subordination" of woman as based on creation, but exclusively as a result of the fall according to Genesis 3:16, which is why they repeatedly relativized it.[60] Accordingly, only the social-historically conditioned view of the lacking aptitude of woman for the preaching ministry prevented women's ordination.[61] Appold concludes, quite in agreement with Stolle: "Returning now to the initial thought and again asking the question whether women's ordination represents a break with the confessional-Lutheran heritage, one can unequivocally answer this question in the negative." In fact, that theological line is to be identified as "Lutheran tradition," "which stretches from Luther's view of the general priesthood and office via the many women of early modernity working in the church . . . a line which increasingly destroys the obstacles for women's ordination and prepares the path all the way to the total opening of all offices for women."[62]

Rudolf Eles, Tom Hardt, and David P. Scaer have critically discussed Stolle's "proof from tradition."[63] Their critique of Stolle can, by and large, be applied to the way Appold handles tradition. First of all, one needs to ask how Appold himself understands the repeatedly invoked connection between office and general priesthood in Luther and in the Lutheran tradition. The Lutheran Confessions, at any rate, do not speak about the general priesthood in the context of their elaborations on the theological foundation of the preaching office. According to the Lutheran view, the

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[58] Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 276.

[59] Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 276.

[60] Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 277.

[61] Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 277.

[62] Appold, "Frauen im frühneuzeitlichen Luthertum," 278–279.

[63] Rudolf Eles, *Martin Luther und das Frauenpfarramt. Bemerkungen zu Prof. Dr. Volker Stolles Aufsatz: "Luther, das 'Amt' und die Frauen"* (Groß Oesingen: Lutherische Buchhandlung Harms, 1995); Tom Hardt, "Die Lehre Martin Luthers von der Frauenordination: Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung," in *Ich will hintreten zum Altar Gottes: Festschrift für Propst em. Hans-Heinrich Salzmann*, ed. Michael Salzmann and Johannes Junker (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 2003), 213–229; and David P. Scaer, "Ordaining Women: Has the Time Come?" *Logia* 4, no. 2 (1995): 83–85, an introduction into the debate in the SELK in the English language. Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 52, therefore rightly rejects the attempt of "making the Reformer himself into the chief witness for the legitimacy of women's ordination."

preaching office is founded on the mandate of Christ, not on the general priesthood. Also, the claim that the statements on women by the Lutheran theologians are exclusively founded on the fall, that is, based on Genesis 3:16, and on sociological considerations is, at least as far as Luther is concerned, not correct.[64] The reference to the office of deaconess and to an ordination to the same merely proves that some theologians could apply the term ordination to different ecclesial offices. If the statements of orthodox Lutheran exegetes really are to come into view, one would have to look especially into their commentaries on 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. In his church-politically motivated study, Appold dispenses with this as well as with a survey of the locus *de ministerio* in the numerous dogmatic works of orthodoxy.[65]

One can confidently question the claim that the Lutheran Confessions are silent on the issue of women's ordination. Karlmann Beyschlag writes in his history of dogma, pointing to Augsburg Confession XIV: "I venture to point out that the 'rite vocatus' of AC XIV is masculine. The Protestant 'women's ordination' to the spiritual office is thus not only contrary to Scripture but also contrary to the confessions."[66] Beyschlag has been ridiculed for this statement by those who do not want to see the reference to the male gender of the office holder in the context of the history of dogma, in which Beyschlag locates it by inner necessity.[67] In Beyschlag one finds not only the hint that the line of tradition, in which women's ordination is located, is not the one stretching from the New Testament to the Reformation, but the contrary one, namely, the Gnostic-sectarian one. Beyschlag writes on Augsburg Confession V: "What is right away significant in this formulation is that it restates the occidental conviction

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[64] See Hardt, "Die Lehre Martin Luthers von der Frauenordination," passim, and Eles, *Martin Luther und das Frauenpfarramt*, 13 and passim.

[65] Appold has shown in his habilitation that he is well-acquainted with Lutheran orthodoxy; see my review in *Lutherische Beiträge* 10 (2005): 261–265. It gives one all the more pause that he now throws his theological weight into the discussion in such a church-political way.

[66] Karlmann Beyschlag, *Grundriß der Dogmengeschichte* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000), 2.II:401 n. 181.

[67] Beyschlag, *Grundriß der Dogmengeschichte*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), 1:150–151: "Yet what is 'the Gnostic' par excellence? When one asks for the basic motif, then one time and again runs into the same, ultimately defective structure. It is, with a word, the ontological negativism of the Gnostic doctrine of God . . . , the refusal of order of creation and of theology of creation . . . in favor of a 'soteriology of self-preservation' and 'self-realization' . . . that made Gnosticism unbearable for the church."

that reaches all the way back to First Clement, according to which the institution of the churchly office . . . enjoys priority over the gift of the Holy Spirit who works the faith. Here the Augsburg Confession leans on the catholic pre-understanding and simultaneously destroys the basis for enthusiasm."[68] The delimitation over against Gnosis and enthusiasm involves the perception of the office as well as the creation-based coordination of male and female.[69] Yet Beyschlag's assertion, that the Lutheran Confessions contradict the ordination of women, will certainly only make sense to the person who is willing to perceive also the broad reception of divine institutions or ordinations in the Lutheran Confessions.[70] For, in the confessional writings, the preaching office as well as the specific coordination of male and female is viewed as anchored in salvation history as well as in the holy institutions of the creator and redeemer.

The Basic Hermeneutical Conflict

The disagreement in evaluating the conformity of women's ordination to Scripture and tradition reveals two contrary approaches to Scripture and tradition. It lies, therefore, in the area of hermeneutics.

On the one hand, we have the concept of a tradition-historical process that in its normativity by no means reached its end with the formation of the canon, but, at least in this question, reaches its end—its authoritative and irreversible conclusion—first when women's ordination is introduced. Beyond the "center of the gospel," Scripture offers any number of time-conditioned formations of tradition.[71] This view leads to the observed

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[68] Beyschlag, *Grundriß der Dogmengeschichte*, 2.II:401.

[69] Brunner, "Hirtenamt und die Frau," 310: "Due to the necessary quarrel with Gnostic and heretical groups in the early church, the question of the form of the official service of women in the church was still alive." Also William Weinrich, "Women in the History of the Church: Learned and Holy, but not Pastors," in: *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IIL: Crossway, 1991), 274: "Against the Gnostic, to maintain a distinction of male and female function was to confess a creation theology that respected the concrete, fleshly differences between man and woman."

[70] See Armin Wenz, *Das Wort Gottes, Gericht und Rettung: Untersuchungen zur Autorität der Heiligen Schrift in Bekenntnis und Lehre der Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996), 15–85.

[71] On this idea of the "center of the gospel" as "an organizing principle in the plurality of theological conceptions that can be discerned in the tradition, especially also in the New Testament," that is at work also in the ecumenical dialogue, see the critique in Gottfried Martens, *Die Rechtfertigung des Sünders: Rettungshandeln Gottes oder historisches Interpretament?* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1992), 195. Martens

ongoing change in subject when it comes to perceiving the biblical contents. The evolution of the office is a human conceptualization, not the command and effect of Christ or his Spirit. The "center of the gospel," for its part, gives liberty to the church today to find contemporary solutions to questions of the church's life. This is by no means about material ("dogmatic") recognizability or even identity with earlier stages of the process. Rather, it is enough to make one's own transformations plausible as *effects of the gospel*. This effect consists, above all, in adapting the external forms and signs of the church's life to today's times.

In back of the approach is a binary and, respectively, dualistic understanding of reality. The gospel comes close to an ultimately trans-historical idea that can be separated from its canonically attested historical forms. Since, however, the historicity is a constitutive factor for the gospel of Christ, because divine content (or divine Person) and earthly-historical form cannot be separated anymore by virtue of the incarnation, the explicit criticism of its New Testament forms also affects the gospel itself. The latter becomes, as Regin Prenter rightly writes, "a timeless idea," that runs the risk of losing "its historical foundation."[72]

Yet this has immediate consequences for the doctrine of justification that equally have a major impact on the gospel. For if a "center of the gospel," however that is defined, is isolated from the mandates of Christ and his apostles connected to the gospel, then the work of the Lord is ultimately replaced by the work of the church. The result is the kind of constructivism that is wide-spread in the postmodern philosophy of language. About this constructivism, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, a scholar of Romance languages, writes that its adherents live convinced that "man can reshape everything—from 'gender' via 'culture' to 'landscape'—according to his

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also treats throughout on this topic and on the corresponding "change in subject" when dealing with Scripture.

[72] Prenter, *Ordination der Frauen*, 18. He continues: "There is probably a line from that modern disregard for the historically conditioned external sign of the continuity between the pastoral office and the apostolate to the existence-theological view of the kerygma . . . ." See also the elaborations of the philosopher Kurt Hübner, *Glaube und Denken: Dimensionen der Wirklichkeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 101–102 n. 22: ". . . a recapturing of the presence of Christ at the Last Supper, the officiating priest is his representative. This is why the demand to leave this role of his to women is nonsensical though wide-spread today. As seen, the Catholic Church's retaining of male priests does not have anything to do with misogyny. Such demands are, by the way, only an indicator of once again, as already many times in the history of Christendom, desiring to sacrifice the concreteness of the Eucharist as a matter of flesh and blood to an abstract and pale symbolism."

fancy without any further ado, because everything is allegedly 'only a human construct.'"[73] As an aside, this constructivism is not only behind socio-politically dominating "gender mainstreaming,"[74] but also behind the churchly capitulation to the homosexual movement that is connected to the former, no matter how far the effects of this capitulation have developed.

Such a constructivism was combated full force by the Reformation in its struggle against enthusiasm in all its forms. Not surprisingly, the criteria of the Confessions for the shaping of the churchly life can by no means be reduced to some abstract gospel or even a "center of the gospel," but explicitly takes up the solemn ordinations of God that alone can establish divine right in the church. According to Reformation conviction, the salvation-historically anchored commandments of Jesus and his apostles attested to in New Testament create certainty regarding what is to take place in the church by divine right for the salvation of man and for the edification of the church.[75] This certainly is not some ahistorical bondage, but corresponds to perceiving the presence of the triune God who speaks and works through his commandments that are historically handed down in Scripture. "Historical account and commandment," Prenter says, "come together in the gospel as a whole."[76]

What is at stake here is not only the authority of Scripture, which, just like the authority of Luther, is invoked on all sides, but above all its efficacy and sufficiency which by no means can be reduced to its exemplary nature in the time-conforming accommodation of the message. Rather, Scripture is effective and sufficient in that the triune God, in creation as well as in the order of redemption, works what he says by means of the words of institution handed down in Scripture. The conflict is therefore an ontological one. For if God works what he says, then we are dealing with present realities when it comes to the biblical coordination of male and female in the congregation as well as in questions of the office—realities which the living God, by means of his historically attested canonical word, establishes and defines here and now, as Dietzfelbinger put it, "not only 'time-bound,' but central and all the way to the last

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[73] Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Diesseits der Hermeneutik: Die Produktion von Präsenz* (Frankfurt am Main: Surkamp, 2004), 80.

[74] See Volker Zastrow, "Politische Geschlechtsumwandlung," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 19, 2006, 8.

[75] See Prenter, *Ordination der Frauen*, 8, where he speaks of "commands of order" "which want to guard the right, appropriate handing down of the gospel."

[76] Prenter, *Ordination der Frauen*, 9.

foundations of human existence."[77] Based on the witness of Scripture and the Confessions, Prenter writes on the office: "It is thus part of the institution of the office . . . that it is not only an institution as the establishment of an institution which then can be administered by the congregation itself, but that it is an ongoing sending so that everybody who enters the office stands under the same divine mandate as the apostle. They thus act as representatives of Christ."[78] If one closes one's eyes to these realities, if one engages in their deconstruction to construct or conceptualize what is new and timely, then one loses the salutary things God speaks and works by his word.[79]

IV. The Ecclesiological and Eschatological Consequences

A final confirmation for the truth of the assertion that women's ordination is indeed not about a marginal question, but about the foundations of the church, emerges when one perceives the consequences and continuation of the hermeneutical and material-dogmatic conflict on the ecclesiological and eschatological levels. This affects the determination of the doctrinal consensus that constitutes the unity of the church and the determination of the notion of heresy connected to it. This also touches on the last things, which is finally shown in the question regarding the certainty of salvation.

The Conflict Regarding Magnus Consensus *and Heresy*

Both parties to the conflict appeal to the *magnus consensus* and want to express their connection to the Lutheran Reformation also in this way. The Theological Commission of the EKD points out that the introduction of women's ordination took place by *magnus consensus*,[80] which is why

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[77] Dietzfelbinger, *Veränderung und Beständigkeit*, 318. See Brunner, "Hirtenamt und die Frau," 328: "The order that governs the relationship between man and woman has been established by God in the beginning of all things; it did not come about in history but is given with creation. . . . Paul here looks at the account of the creation in Gen. 2." See also Brunner, "Hirtenamt und die Frau," 335–336.

[78] Prenter, *Ordination der Frauen*, 12, taking up Augsburg Confession XXVIII. On focusing this representation on the power of the keys, cf. Prenter, *Ordination der Frauen*, 13.

[79] See the conclusion by Weinrich, "It Is not Given to Women to Teach," 214–215: "A 'know-nothing' hermeneutic which finds itself satisfied when explicit and particular prohibitions are wanting in Scripture will not be competent to inquire after the inner and organic relation between word and act, between what the incarnate Word did and what the Church must do to be faithful to the Gospel."

[80] Note the contrary judgment by Dietzfelbinger, *Veränderung und Beständigkeit*, 319: "That the problem, on which, after all, hinged all the centuries of church history up till

objections to it cannot be tolerated. In this way, this decision, according to the Commission, even shares in the authority of Scripture and the Confessions and demands absolute obedience.[81] The *casus confessionis* declared within the church also affects the *ecumene* between churches. "False ecumenical considerations" in this question are harshly rejected by the Theological Commission of the EKD; in fact, precisely "out of ecumenical commitment" "the evangelical church must" teach and practice "that there are no reasons based on Scripture and the Confessions to exclude . . . women from the ordination to the pastoral office."[82] Dietzfelbinger still held the view that with the "step to women's ordination" the Lutheran church had "left the ecumenical center" "and allowed itself" "to be marginalized."[83]

However, Reinhard Slenczka pointed out that, according to the Reformation view, there can be no majority decisions in questions of Scripture and the Confessions. The *magnus consensus* formulated in the Lutheran Confession came about by setting forth the teaching that agrees with Scripture and the catholic church and by publicizing it as an offer to all Christians in this church, connected with the invitation to join this consensus. *Magnus consensus* is thus first of all about the proof of the apostolicity and catholicity of one's own doctrine, about the diachronic doctrinal consensus that spans the ages which then sustains and defines the synchronic, contemporary consensus. Thus, the consensus must not refer to the present or the future only, as it is, according to Johannes Wirsching, typical for heretical phenomena.[84] Moreover, it certainly will

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now and pretty sizable ecumenical problems, had been solved or led to a consensus—that could not be said by any means."

[81] See *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 8.

[82] *Frauenordination und Bischofsamt*, 8.

[83] Dietzfelbinger, *Veränderung und Beständigkeit*, 319. Cf. for the debate in the SELK and the warning by Martens going in the same direction, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 48.

[84] Johannes Wirsching, *Kirche und Pseudokirche: Konturen der Häresie* (Göttingen: Vandehoeck and Ruprecht, 1990), 176–177: The heretic "is unable to believe without supplementing the seeming poverty of his faith by additional evidences. . . . This is why the heretic also does not understand his confession of Christ as a witness to the truth of Jesus Christ in communion with the fathers and brethren (horizontal ecumene), but as a program of an elite or avant-garde congregation outdoing the fathers and brethren (vertical or futurist individualization). In this perspective, the heretic does not want to testify to something, but, above all, wants to accomplish something . . . . In all this, heresy proves to be revolutionary, not reforming. The Christian revolutionary always ends up establishing a party (meant to be church), although he wants to remain in the church and preserve it as a pure community of faith, if not even restore it as such."

not do, by disregarding the distinction of the two kingdoms, to place a consensus with society or politics above the consensus with earlier generations of the church.[85] Brunner, applying the two-kingdoms doctrine, writes in all clarity: "An argument, therefore, that thinks it possible to deduce the possibility of placing women into the shepherd's office from their changed position in civil society, has no place in the church . . . ."[86]

One nonetheless can observe a reception of political consensus-finding mechanisms in the church; this holds for the introduction of women's ordination as well as for the debate on the blessing of homosexual partnerships. In the dialogical process, which is charged with quite superstitious salvific expectations,[87] there is first a stepwise change of opinion and finally a majority opinion favoring a "new consensus." However, it is quite interesting that, for example, in the EKD and in the Church of Sweden there is definitely not a "protection of minorities" that is customary in politics. This observation alone shows that a politicization of the church does not mesh with the gospel entrusted to it. The mingling of the two kingdoms that takes place leads to totalitarian results. The church authorities' radical calls for obedience directed at the opponents of women's ordination—calls which take place in a seemingly pluralistic and tolerant age—speak for themselves. One can certainly observe how there are already harbingers of impending totalitarianism in the phase of appeasement. Where Scripture and the Confessions become the objects of our de- and re-constructions, a polarization of the church takes place which theologically has to be called a hereticization in the sense

[85] Stolle, "Neutestamentliche Aspekte zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen," 79: "The church will have to decide the question of women's ordination today because it lives in an age that is on the way to the emancipation of women. I think the church has, based on the New Testament and today's place of man and woman in society, sufficient criteria for such a decision." In critique of this, see Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 43. Furthermore, Stolle, "I Kor 14,26-40 und die Gottesdienstreform der lutherischen Reformation," 135; Dietzfelbinger, *Veränderung und Beständigkeit*, 317-318: "Yet the stronger emancipation movements became in the whole society, the more unequivocal, because the call of female theologians for the pastoral office and ordination like the men"; see also Sasse, "Ordination of Women?" 402-404.

[86] Brunner, "Hirtenamt und die Frau," 334. Martens points out that the Scripture principle is in danger when one introduces "Scripture and society as criteria": "The latter one would then, based on the Lutheran Confessions, certainly have to be called a heresy." *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 43. See also Th. Junker, "Theologische Aspekte zu den Beiträgen 'Frauen im kirchlichen Amt?'" in *Oberurseler Heft* 28 (1995): passim.

[87] Sasse, especially in view of women's ordination, speaks of today as "an age which has a superstitious belief in dialogue as the infallible means of settling everything." "Ordination of Women?" 402.

formulated by Peter Brunner: "The subscription to the confessions is replaced by the subscription to the opinion of this or that theological school, which now necessarily has to assert itself with the exclusive authority of dogma. Where the authority of Scripture is lost, the *hairesis* of the school replaces the *confessio* of the church."[88] Whoever does not join the formation of schools is caricatured ("hierarchically aloof"), reviled, and met with suspicions;[89] he is declared to be unfit for dialogue or even ideologically blinkered and, respectively, stuck in traditional role-models. The confessional principle *sine vi, sed verbo* (*CA* XXVIII, 21) can evidently be abrogated in both phases, in the phase of appeasement as well as in phase of the final enforcement of the "school." The media are not infrequently instrumentalized,[90] or a seeming contradiction to secular laws is pointed out. The politicization affects even the material discussion. This is seen wherever the relation between man and woman, office and congregation, which is qualified by Scripture and the Confessions as a spiritual-theological reality, is reinterpreted as "role models."[91] Criteria that are appropriate in the societal context but foreign to theology are brought to bear on the contents of Scripture; in fact, these criteria are to define the so-called agenda of the church more and more.[92]

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[88] Quoted in Slenczka, "*Magnus Consensus*," 36.

[89] An inquisitorial semantics of "suspicion" permeates especially Stolle's argumentation against those who do not want to share his line of argumentation on the subject, whose material arguments he thus avoids in a psychologizing manner. E.g., Stolle, "Neutestamentliche Aspekte zur Frage der Ordination von Frauen," 78; on this, see Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 42, and Junker, "Theologische Aspekte zu den Beiträgen," 87.

[90] See Slenczka, "*Magnus Consensus*," 35, and Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 47 (on the role television played in the processes of deliberation leading to the introduction of women's ordination in the Lutheran territorial Church of Schaumburg-Lippe and in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Baden).

[91] In a particularly striking manner, Stolle writes on Luther's understanding of the office: "Roles are assigned without equivocation. The office bearers are giving; the congregation is to be receptive. And this understanding of the office is now taken into the rule of man over woman as an integral component. The doctrine of the office thus is conceptualized in correspondence to social doctrine." Stolle, "Luther, das 'Amt' und die Frauen," 16.

[92] Slenczka, "*Magnus Consensus*," 33: "However, to the extent that these bodies follow parliamentary precedent, consensus will become the goal that determines everything for the preservation of cohesion in the ecclesiastical polity, as well as for the pushing through of certain resolutions. Given this presupposition, it is not surprising that the spectrum of public opinion and political directions is reflected in the ecclesiastical bodies as far as the selection of topics as well as the respective attitudes is concerned."

The decisive criterion for defining and delimiting consensus and heresy is ultimately only social damage. Damaging or disturbing the harmonious community must not be tolerated even in cases of conscience and is therefore punished by disciplinary measures. Reinhard Slenczka rightly asks: "What has happened to a church of the Reformation when it declares majority decisions of churchly entities as necessary for salvation; when those who contradict based on Scripture are defamed; and when finally consciences bound to God's word are disciplined by coercive means?"[93] It should give pause that the churches acting in this way become more and more like a quasi-papist totalitarian rule—all the way to the claim of infallibility.[94]

The Conflict Regarding the Certainty of Salvation

It is all the more remarkable that precisely in this situation the legitimacy of the female pastoral office appears implausible to individuals[95] or churches, so that they return to the original consensus in spite of all resistance and countermeasures. The Reformation consensus, however, knows as highest criterion, not "social damage," but "salvation damage" (Johannes Wirsching). Here one knows that the church does not create its boundaries by itself but discovers them when God's institutions are left behind. Here one at the same time lives out of the promise that it is not we who can sustain the church, who are able to secure it by being accommodating to society and its norms; this work of sustaining and securing is done only by the Lord himself by his word and sacrament. Where it is proclaimed in its truth and purity, one comes together with those who do likewise, no matter how that might look at first on an organizational level. When churches allow themselves to be led back to Scripture and the Confessions, as this has taken place in Latvia, then this is a reason for joy, just as when the brothers and sisters excluded from the Church of Sweden gather in the "Mission Province." Both events are concrete examples of the fact that, as Slenczka writes, also after the introduction of women's ordination, "the unchanging word of Holy Scripture continues to exercise its disquieting influence on consciences; even ecclesiastical decisions can never cancel its effect."[96]

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[93] Slenczka, "Ist die Kritik an der Frauenordination," 202–203.

[94] See Slenczka, "Ist die Kritik an der Frauenordination," 205.

[95] See Martti Vaahtoranta, "Dies Geheimnis ist groß—der Sinn von 'des Herrn Gebot' (1. Kor. 14,37): Einige sehr persönliche Überlegungen," *Lutherische Beiträge* 10 (2005): 35–42, and Ulla Hindbeck, "Women and the Ministry," *Logia* 9, no. 1 (2000): 21–22.

[96] Slenczka, "*Magnus Consensus*," 35.

Comparing the discussions regarding the question of certainty in the two phases of the conflict described initially leads to a highly critical point and offers an ultimate proof for the deeply *eschatological* character of the conflict. While during the appeasement phase the rejection of women's ordination based on the argument of a lacking certainty of salvation in the case of the exercise of the pastoral office by women is caricatured or even psychologized and ridiculed by pointing to a dependence on role models,[97] exactly this argument reappears in the arsenal of arguments and disciplinary measures of its defenders after the introduction of women's ordination. Thus it says in a report by the former bishop of the Lutheran Church in Hanover, Horst Hirschler, quoted by Slenczka:

> When one talks about contesting the right of the ordination of women, then a different level has been reached. This is no longer on the table in our church. Whoever has been called into the ministry of proclamation in our church does not have the right to question women's ordination. Why? Because on it hinges the question of certainty of salvation for the members of the congregation. When the ordination of women is not seen before God as an appropriate action of the church, when it is controversial, then congregants can no longer be certain that the worship service they celebrate under the leadership of their female pastor is the place of the promised presence of God. They cannot be certain that God's word is spoken to them in the proclamation; that communion is truly the Lord's Supper; that the forgiveness promised to them by the female pastor is God's forgiveness. Whoever participates in the worship service must be able to be certain that here one speaks and acts commissioned by God.[98]

In this clear statement, which is consistent in itself, are fulfilled the admonishing and warning prophecies of those who already in the first phase of the conflict knew that women's ordination in the realm of the Lutheran church must lead to a division of the church.[99] This insight that

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[97] On this, see Stolle, *Frauen im kirchlichen Amt?* passim, and the pertinent critical remarks by Martens: "Here too, the question of certainty, conscience being bound to the word of God, is only dealt with by way of caricature; not the side that changes the early church's practice, but that which retains it, is suddenly under pressure to justify itself for 'elevating' something 'as a criterion.' In this way, the problem is fully turned upside-down." *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 28; see also 11–12, 50–51.

[98] Slenczka, "Ist die Kritik an der Frauenordination," 208 n. 16.

[99] Martens, *Stellungnahme zu Volker Stolle*, 12–13: "The anathema pronounced by the Commission for Theology makes clear that a coexistence of opponents and proponents of women's ordination in a church that has introduced women's ordination is, in principle, impossible."

last things are nonetheless at stake, in fact, salvation itself, forces a decision.[100] The theological process of clarification that can be observed on both sides has led to a deepening of the difference between paradigm shifts that go further and further and a broad and renewed reassurance concerning the traditional doctrinal consensus of the church. The claims made during the phase of appeasement—that by introducing women's ordination the gospel is not affected and church fellowship is not at stake—must, in light of the most recent developments, be considered refuted. It is thus not surprising that we now are in the process of entering a third phase of the conflict that is characterized by increasingly harsh disciplining on a church-official level and by the kind of church-historical revisions we observed in Appold and Stolle which flank these measures, confirming them either in a supplementary or advance way.

Our overview has also shown, however, that it is by no means surprising that the argument over women's ordination is *still* ongoing. It is grounded in the acting of the triune God in creation and redemption. We therefore affirm with Rudolf Eles:

> Office and congregation cannot be disconnected from God's designs for creation and redemption. As far as their substance is concerned, they will never be emancipated under the law of different societal concretions alien to faith which change more slowly here, more rapidly there. Only males can be called into the office that represents Christ; and the congregation, which understands itself as bride and wishes to hear the voice of the Bridegroom, resists the dissolution of this earthly symbol of its relationship to Christ.[101]

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[100] Sasse, "Ordination of Women?" 410 (my translation): "All these considerations on the basis of the clear words of Scripture make it impossible for the Lutheran Church to recognize women's ordination as valid and permissible. For this church does not cling to human traditions, but conscientiously abides by Holy Scripture as the word of God . . . . We also cannot have fellowship with pastors and bishops who carry out such ordinations that are against God's word."

[101] Eles, *Martin Luther und das Frauenpfarramt*, 30.

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Contemporary Spirituality and the Emerging Church[1]

John T. Pless

A particular example of contemporary spirituality is the Emerging Church Movement. The Emerging Church Conversation, as some of its advocates prefer to call it, is a loosely connected network of pastors, mission leaders, and theologians looking for a new way of defining Christian identity and mission in a postmodern setting. It is most often associated with Brian McLaren, who was the pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church—a non-denominational church in Burtonville, Maryland—from 1982 to 2006.[2] Although, as McLaren puts it, he slipped into the ministry through the back door having no seminary education, he has become a prolific author and conference speaker. Among his many books and articles, *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian* was published by Zondervan in 2004 and has quickly become something of a defining text for the movement.[3]

As the title of McLaren's book amply indicates, the movement is eclectic but it is not rootless. McLaren, like many of the significant figures associated with the Emerging Church, grew up in a fundamentalist church (Plymouth Brethren). His own pilgrimage included involvement with the

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[1] An early version of this paper appeared as "Emergent Church Ecclesiology" in *Theologia et Apologia: Essays in Reformation Theology and Its Defense Presented to Rod Rosenbladt*, ed. Adam S. Francisco, Korey D. Maas, and Steven P. Mueller (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 297–315.

[2] For a history of Brian McLaren's involvement in the birth and transformation of Cedar Ridge Community Church see "Cedar Ridge Community Church: Our History," *The Cedar Ridge Community Church Web site* (Spencerville, MD: Cedar Ridge Community Church, 2007), http://www.crcc.org/section.php?SectionID=29.

[3] The first part of the title of McLaren's book, "a generous orthodoxy" comes from a phrase coined by the late Yale theologian Hans Frei (1922–1988) who is often described as the father of "post-critical" narrative theology. For an analysis of the roots of the Emerging Church, see the three part article of Robert Klenck, "What's Wrong with the 21st Century Church?" *Crossroad Web site* (Kjos Ministries), http://www.crossroad.to/News/Church/Klenck1.html.

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Jesus People and time in a charismatic Episcopal church and various evangelical communions before becoming pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church. In various ways, the Emerging Church Movement may be seen as both a product of, and a reaction against, American Evangelicalism. The term "emergent" was gleaned from forestry where it refers to small saplings that spring up in the shadow of trees; while at first these young plants appear to be insignificant, dwarfed in the shade of older, full grown trees, they eventually thrive and take the place of the older trees as they die off.[4] In the late 1990s, this term was taken by those associated with the Young Leader Network—a group created by the Leadership Network—to identify a new approach to youth ministry and ultimately to the understanding of the church itself. In addition to McLaren, Leonard Sweet has become a prominent voice in the movement arguing that in contrast to both traditional evangelicals and seeker-sensitive evangelicals, ministry in the twenty-first century should be experiential, participatory, image-driven, and connected. Hence the acrostic EPIC.[5] Robert Webber sees the movement as younger evangelicals attempting to find a place in a changing world.[6] Unlike the seeker-sensitive focus of the mega churches, the Emerging Church Movement is critical of programmatic approaches to evangelism with congregations housed in large facilities. Most of the movement's church gatherings take place in homes, coffee shops, or remodeled warehouses. One representative of the Emerging Church Movement, Carl Raschke, argues that the Church Growth movement was yet another example of the church's captivity to modernism as it relied "on rational strategies of technocratic engineering."[7]

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger see the Emerging Church as a deconstructionist ecclesiology:

> Emerging churches utilize the kingdom as a tool to deconstruct all aspects of life including virtually all church practices. They understand that the kingdom gives rise to the church, not the other way around.

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[4] Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 275–276.

[5] D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 40.

[6] See Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002). Also see Robert Webber, ed., *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

[7] Carl A. Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2004), 156.

> Forms and structures are variable in emerging churches, especially in comparison to new paradigm, purpose-driven and seeker churches, which keep most of the traditional structures intact. These older movements maintain an emphasis on paid senior pastors, the Sunday service as what constitutes church, outreach that focuses on lapsed suburban professionals, and the idea that Christians come to church, primarily understood as the church building. Utilizing the kingdom of God paradigm as a tool of deconstruction, emerging churches dismantle many forms of church that, viable at one time, increasingly represent a bygone era.[8]

The testimonies of numerous writers in *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic* are stories of ministers or para-church leaders who became disillusioned by market-driven Church Growth and hard-edged Fundamentalism but were left cold by the sterility of mainline liberal Protestantism. Todd Hunter, formerly a national director for the Vineyard churches, describes his own background: "I was raised in an ultra-liberal United Methodist church, converted into a 'fundamentalist-light' church; experienced the full-blown, fire-hose blasting charismatic movement, sought to win others to Christ via crusades and the seeker movement; and drank deeply from the well of church growth theory."[9] Spencer Burke spent twenty years on the staff of Mariners Church in Irvine, California—a church with over 10,000 in worship each weekend. Complaining of what he calls "spiritual McCarthyism," Burke rejected the rigidity of his fundamentalist past and resigned his position at Mariners in 1998 to form *TheOoze.com* as a space for the nurture of postmodern disciples. He writes, "I've come to realize that my discontent was never with Mariners as a church, but contemporary Christianity as an institution."[10] Jay Bakker, son of the televangelist Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, and Chuck Smith, Jr., son of the well-know southern California pastor of Calvary Chapel, both contribute chapters describing their frustration with Evangelicalism and

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[8] Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2005), 96. I am grateful to a former student, Pastor Ross E. Johnson, for directing me to this book and for his ongoing conversation on the Emerging Church.

[9] Todd Hunter, "Entering the Conversation," in *Stories of Emergence: Moving From Absolute to Authentic*, ed. Mike Yaconelli (El Cajon, CA: Emergent YS; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 42. In a similar vein to *Stories of Emergence*, see Webber, *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*. The Webber volume has articles by five leaders of emerging churches—Mark Driscoll, John Burke, Dan Kimball, Doug Pagitt, and Karen Ward—representing something of the theological diversity of the movement.

[10] Spencer Burke, "From the Third Floor to the Garage," in *Stories of Emergence*, 29.

their embrace of what they see as an emerging form of Christianity that escapes the pitfalls of the past.[11]

While the leaders of the Emerging Church are critical of what they describe as the rationalism of modernity, they are not anti-intellectual. The list of theologians most often cited by Emerging Church thinkers include Stanley Grenz, Miroslav Volf, Lesslie Newbigin, Nancy Murphy, James McClendon, John Franke, Robert Webber, N. T. Wright, David Bosch, John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, Hans Frei, Clark Pinnock, and Walter Brueggeman. Scholars associated with Fuller Theological Seminary and a broad neo-Evangelicalism, especially those who see themselves as "post-foundationalists," figure most prominently in the shaping the theology of the movement.

A common theme in the *Stories of Emergence* is the identification of old-line liberalism as well as Fundamentalism, consumerist evangelistic techniques, evidentialist apologetics, and absolutistic ethics as relics of modernity. Raschke rather optimistically asserts, "To stand up to both liberalism and fundamentalism we need merely to overcome modernism."[12] McLaren anticipates critical readers who argue that his approach to Christianity is an evasive smokescreen for a denial of historic tenets of biblical faith. He writes, "Speaking of smoke, this book suggests that relativists are right in their denunciation of absolutism. It also affirms that absolutists are right in their denunciation of relativism. And then it suggests that they are both wrong because the answer lies beyond both absolutism and relativism."[13] Like his mentor, the recently deceased Baptist theologian Stanley Grenz, McLaren takes it as a given that postmodernism is now normative and that theology must adapt itself accordingly.[14] Such an adaptation is what McLaren seeks to accomplish in *A Generous Orthodoxy*. While the subtitle of his book is admittedly a

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[11] Jay Bakker, "Shocking, Unexpected Grace," in *Stories of Emergence*, 181–191, and Chuck Smith, Jr., "But Can We Get There from Here?" in *Stories of Emergence*, 87–99.

[12] Raschke, *The Next Reformation*, 32. Against such optimism in regard to postmodernity, Oswald Bayer argues, "Postmodernity not only dismisses modernity, it also is permeated with it. . . . Many of our contemporaries therefore still live bodily in modernity, but intellectually and psychologically in postmodernity." Bayer, "With Luther in the Present," *Lutheran Quarterly* 21 (Spring 2007): 5–6.

[13] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 38.

[14] Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 169–171. For an insightful critique of Grenz and other Evangelicals who embrace postmodernism, see David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005).

mouthful, and a confusing mouthful at that, it does indicate how the author sees theology and church life configured in postmodernity.

McLaren holds that such a reconfiguration of theology is necessary for the sake of Christian mission. Hence, the first item in his subtitle is "missional." Critical of both the conservative preoccupation with "Jesus as the personal Savior" and the liberal captivity to modernity, McLaren sees missional Christianity as both communal and cosmic. If Evangelicals were too narrow in their focus on salvation as personal redemption and liberals too "this worldly" in their efforts to build a humane society, then Emerging Christianity will endeavor to evangelize unbelievers into an authentic community that is historically rooted and relevant while transcending time and space. The cosmic nature of this community leaves open the question of who is in and who is out. The old debates between universalism and salvation through faith in Christ alone are rendered futile.

Evangelical is the second descriptive word for McLaren. Hesitating to identify himself as an "an Evangelical of the big-E type"[15]—for this would place him in league with the Religious Right and Fundamentalism—McLaren nevertheless cherishes an evangelical identity that is characterized by a high respect for the Scriptures, an intimacy with God, and a passionate desire to share Christ with others.

McLaren sees himself as Post/Protestant. With this pair of words, he describes himself as one who is protesting or "pro-testifying,"[16] to use his words, so that the Christian community might be restored to God's heart. McLaren inquires, "What might such 'post-Protestant Christianity' be like? People like you and me can, with God's help, be the ones to help answer that question in the coming decades, not just by what we say but how we live—and especially how we love our neighbors."[17]

According to McLaren, the Liberal/Conservative divide within Christianity reflects an unhealthy reactivity with conservatives responding to the worst in liberalism and vice versa. Conservatives sought to establish the truth claims of Christianity against the acids of modernity while liberals became far too complacent with modernity. Both engaged in heroic attempts to preserve Christian faith but at a price that was too high. Thus McLaren writes,

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[15] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 116.
[16] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 127.
[17] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 130.

> When I imagine what a generous orthodoxy can become, I realize I must seek to honor both conservative and liberal heroism. And when I do, I want to consider myself both liberal and conservative. I must learn from their mistakes, and when I do, I don't want to be boxed in either category. Instead they can look up for a higher way and look ahead to the new fields of opportunity and challenge that stretch from here to the horizon, where the terms *post-conservative* and *post-liberal* may be helpful for a while, and then the whole polarizing vocabulary can be, I hope, forgotten.[18]

McLaren sees a convergence between these polarities at least imaginable from an Emerging Church perspective.

Mystical/Poetic is the category McLaren uses to describe the approach to theology in the Emerging Church. A non-prosaic faith will be characterized by imagination and intuition, awe and reverence. It will move beyond the arid categories of rationality and live within an unseen universe where truth is poetry, not fact. It is in this sense that McLaren wishes to see himself as biblical. The inspiration of the Scriptures will no longer be a proposition to be debated by fundamentalists and liberals but a reality demonstrated by the power of the biblical narrative to inspire mission and generate a community of good works. Biblical truth will be experiential truth.

This leads McLaren to declare himself as Charismatic/Contemplative. At this point, McLaren reflects the place of Pentecostalism in his own life. It was from the Pentecostals and Charismatics within mainline denominational groups, such as the Episcopal parish where he maintained membership for a time, that he came to see that the Spirit of Jesus "is real, active, powerful, present and wonderful."[19] There he learned that the Spirit is "one step beyond the normal."[20] Yet he laments that charismatic Christianity could not live up to the expectation always to deliver a high-voltage experience and that all too often excitement was turned into fatigue as religious salesmanship created a market of charismatic consumers. Sometime more was needed to ground and supplement the elusive energy of the charismatic Christians. This, McLaren believes, is found in contemplative spirituality. He writes, "If charismatics gave me my high school diploma in the ways of the Spirit, it was from Catholic

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[18] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 140.
[19] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 174.
[20] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 175.

contemplatives that I earned an undergraduate degree in the liberal arts of the Spirit."[21]

In light of his previous critique of Fundamentalism and mainline Protestantism, the next pair of words might come as a surprise. McLaren professes to be a Fundamentalist/Calvinist. Yet in embracing these labels, McLaren redefines them by claiming that Fundamentalism was originally a movement attempting to create unity on five points thought to be fundamental to Christianity and thus allowing freedom in doctrinal matters thought to be less important. "For me," McLaren writes, "the fundamentals of the faith boil down to those given by Jesus: *to love God and to love our neighbors.*"[22] Although he is troubled by what he sees as philosophical determinism in the theology of John Calvin, he expresses appreciation for the intellectual rigor of Calvinism and its commitment to the notion of *semper reformanda,* the church is always reforming. In keeping with this spirit, McLaren offers his own rewrite of TULIP (T—Triune Love; U—Unselfish Election; L—Limitedless Reconciliation; I—Inspiring Grace; P—Passionate, Persistent Saints). "Reforming in this way, the Reformed faith of today would be both revolutionized and revolutionary, a nightmare to some, a dream for others. Be that as it may, I would hope that these are already in fact the true colors of the best of the Reformed tradition."[23]

McLaren claims that he is an "Anabaptist/Anglican." He sees in the Anabaptists a strong emphasis on personal commitment, an understanding of faith as a way of life that is embodied in a community willing to posture itself against modernity in a radical way, and a peace ethic. He appreciates Anglicanism for its ability to practice beauty in the liturgy and its skill at living within the tension of Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience in such a way as to allow for compromise within an ecclesial structure that remains communal. McLaren also sees himself as a Methodist, for this tradition combines personal piety with concern for the poor. Within Methodism, McLaren sees a catalytic energy that will enrich emerging communities of faith:

> [I]t will empower "lay" people, realizing that baptism itself is a kind of ordination to ministry and that the purpose of discipleship is to train and deploy everyday apostles. And like the earliest Methodists, it will see discipleship as the process of reaching ahead with one hand to find a

[21] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 175.
[22] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 184.
[23] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 197.

mentor a few steps up the hill, while reaching back with the other to help the next brother or sister in line who is also on the upward path of discipleship.[24]

Confessing that he had to lay aside a host of Protestant prejudices, McLaren adds "Catholic"—both with a little c and a big C—to his list of descriptors. From Catholicism, McLaren asserts that he has learned to appreciate the unity and holiness of the church, as well as an appreciation for the sacraments, liturgy, tradition, and the place of Mary. It was the catholic influence that led McLaren to introduce the recitation of the Nicene Creed and other liturgical elements to the worship at his Cedar Ridge Church. He also notes that it is from Roman Catholics that other Christians can learn how to party and how to deal with scandal.

The final descriptive phrases in McLaren's subtitle move away from confessional and denominational labels to more general categories. "Why I Am Green" (chapter 16) asserts the author's appreciation for nature and the need for Christians to articulate an ecologically-sound doctrine of creation. "Why I Am Incarnational" (chapter 17) does not deal so much with classical distinctions of the two natures in Christ as it does with God identifying himself with humanity in the person of Jesus, of God becoming welcoming and hospitable in Christ and the implications that this has for missional Christianity. The book concludes with McLaren's apologetic, "Why I Am Emergent" (chaper 19), and two short chapters that offer a prognosis for the future.

In examining *A Generous Orthodoxy* and other texts produced by McLaren and those more or less identified with the Emerging Church Movement, several key themes surface that are reflective of contemporary spirituality. There is an ecumenism which is both eclectic and elastic. As has already been observed in McLaren, particular themes from a variety of Christian traditions are highlighted so as to form a mosaic of beliefs that complement rather than contradict each other. It remains to be seen how expansive this Emerging ecumenism is. In his discussion of missions and the relationship of Christianity to other religions, McLaren is most generous, but is he orthodox? Setting St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:22 ("I have become all things to all men that by all possible means I might save some") against the particularity of Jesus is the move that McLaren finally makes and it is not difficult to see why his critics accuse him of

[24] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 200.

universalism.[25] Here it seems that McLaren is reflecting a sentiment expressed by several of his neo-Evangelical mentors.

In their book *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context,* Stanley Grenz and John Franke suggest that the Spirit who speaks through the Scriptures is also communicating through creation:

> Because the life-giving Creator Spirit is present wherever life flourishes, the Spirit's voice can conceivably resound through many media, including the media of human culture. Because Spirit-induced human flourishing evokes cultural expression, we can anticipate in such expressions traces of the Creator Spirit's presence. Consequently, we should listen intently for the voice of the Spirit, who is present in all of life and therefore 'precedes' us into the world, bubbling to the surface through the artifacts and symbols humans construct.[26]

Another Evangelical theologian, Amos Young contends that it is possible to discern the work of the Spirit in other religions.[27] These arguments, although less nuanced, are expressed by McLaren in his discussion of Christianity and world religions. As McLaren sees it, charity drives him to adopt a dialogical rather than conversional approach to missions. In McLaren's model, Christ brings to perfection that which the Spirit has already initiated at some level in human culture.

Missions in the paradigm of the Emerging Church is not about bringing the faith-creating word of the gospel to those who are without Christ. Rather, it is relational. It is entering into friendships and conversation so that the presence of Christ may be identified and celebrated. As Raschke puts it, "the unknown gods of contemporary culture do not have to be resisted so much as renamed, reclaimed, and redeemed."[28]

Emerging Church thinkers see it necessary to make a shift away from theological propositions to a theological narrative. Here, of course, they are drawing on a methodology that has been in vogue in mainline circles for

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[25] See Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church,* 168–169. Also see R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 143-155.

[26] Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 162.

[27] Amos Young, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 105–128. One Emerging Church leader, Spencer Burke, tells the story of going to a Buddhist temple with members of his church and practicing guided meditation in order to celebrate the many ways God is revealed. See Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches,* 132–133.

[28] Raschke, *The Next Reformation,* 164.

several decades. Propositional theology is seen to be an artifact of the Enlightenment while the narrative approach is argued to be both more biblical and more congenial to the postmodern period. Meaning is said not to be found in doctrinal asserts but in stories that are constitutive of reality. Propositional claims are said to be rationalist while narrative is experiential.[29] These stories "are not about what happened," writes Mike Yaconelli. "They're about what is going on inside us. They're about the deep hiding places in us that show up and reveal not only us, but God's fingerprints on our lives."[30]

Related to the shift from propositional truth to experiential truth is the openness to the mystical in the Emerging Church. Often this is expressed by an appeal to the emotive as subjective truth is held to be congenial to the gospel. One of the ironies in Emerging Church thinking is that in spite of their probing criticisms of traditional Evangelicalism, there remains a strong attachment to a religion characterized by intuition and feeling. Both the Jesus People of the 1970s and the Charismatic Movement are hailed as precursors of a genuinely postmodern Christianity. Raschke lauds the revivalism of Charles Finney as a helpful slice of the Evangelical tradition that remains as part of the heritage of the Emerging Church. He compares the polemics of Finney's contemporary, Albert B. Dod of Princeton Seminary, on revivalism with that of present day Evangelicals on the Emerging Church:

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[29] Note the observation of Colin E. Gunton: "It must be realized, however, that the anti-foundationalist song is the voice of a siren. The allusion to fideism indicates the perennial weakness of non-foundationalist epistemologies. They may appear to be attempts to render their content immune from outside criticism and so become forms of intellectual sectarianism. In other words, they may appear to evade the challenges of the universal and objective, and to run the risk of the rank subjectivism and relativism into which their extreme representatives have fallen. Theologically speaking, they evade the intellectual challenge involved in the use of the word God." *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 134. Gunton maintains, "The confusion of foundation with foundationalism may be at the root of the finally unsatisfactory appeal in much recent theology to narrative, for example in Ronald Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985). The problem with such appeals is that they either succumb to some form of subjectivism ('I have my story, you have yours') or they introduce in 'narrativity' an implicit and not always acknowledged form of foundationalism." *The One, the Three, and the Many*, 135 n. 6.

[30] Mike Yaconelli, "Introduction: The Illegitimate Church," in *Stories of Emergence*, 20.

> Finney and the revivalists of his day understood that rhetorical intensity and the aesthetics of worship have a lot more to do with prompting conversion than forcefulness of apologetics. This same spookiness that the journalist conveys in sketching the night scene at the frontier camp meeting compares with what might be written today about postmodern worship and prayer assemblies.[31]

The experiential is said to lead to an intimacy with God so that, in the words of Raschke, "faith is the gesture that seeks to speak *to* God rather than *about* God."[32]

Worship in the Emerging Church is experiential, often marked with the use of icons and candles, incense and contemplative chant, as well as contemporary praise songs and the place for personal testimonies.[33] There is both order and spontaneity in liturgical assemblies that tend to be formed as intimate cell groups rather than large performance-oriented audiences. Little is made of Baptism. The Lord's Supper is seen as a communal meal enacting hospitality.

In Emerging Church theology, salvation is defined primarily with therapeutic images rather than redemptive ones. The language of sin is seldom employed and, when it is used, it generally describes injury or offense against self, the neighbor, the community, or creation. It is seen as victimization or brokenness or perhaps as disobedience or rebellion but not as unbelief. So while the cross and resurrection still has a prominent place within the Christian narrative, the overriding conceptuality is not atonement and the forgiveness of sins but the Spirit-led life in the kingdom of God. The gospel is variously defined, often with references to the work of N. T. Wright who is seen as offering a narrative interpretation of the New Testament that is centered in the presence of the coming kingdom.

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[31] Raschke, *The Next Reformation*, 175.

[32] Raschke, *The Next Reformation*, 56.

[33] See the description by Sally Morgenthaler, "Emerging Worship," in *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: 6 Views*, ed. Paul A. Basden (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 217–230. On pages 225–226, Morgenthaler writes of emerging worship: "Essentially, it is a wholesale deconstruction—the dismantling of a multicity of worship forms (both pre-Reformation and post-Reformation) followed by the postmodern art of pastiche: creating something unprecedented out of the pieces at hand. Add to that a strong penchant for paradox (the juxtaposition of seeming opposites) and ecclectism (the combination of seemingly distant and unrelated elements) and you get a palette of colors that is virtually endless. Scared and secular, diverse geographies and ethnicities, past and present, celebration and lament, extreme participation and silence—these all recombine in emerging worship services for the express purpose of exalting God."

Joel McClure offers this definition: "The gospel is that God wants you to help solve that problem, to participate with God through redeeming acts."[34] Another Emerging Church leader explains, "We have totally reprogrammed ourselves to recognize the good news as a *means* to an end—that the kingdom of God is here. We try to live into that reality and hope. We don't dismiss the cross; it is still a central part. But the good news is not that he died but that the kingdom has come."[35] The language of the Emerging Church is not shaped by the vocabulary of grace and faith but of acceptance and participation. Finally, McLaren argues that God's final judgment does not depend on Christ's work on the cross but on "how well individuals have lived up to God's hopes and dreams for our world and for life in it."[36]

Emerging Church thinkers draw heavily on the writings of James McClendon, a Baptist theologian, in particular on the first volume—devoted to ethics—of his three-volume *Systematic Theology*. McClendon argues that the church is a community which is "understood not as privileged access to God or to sacred status, but as a sharing together in a storied life of obedient service to and with Christ."[37] Numerous Emerging Church writers echo McClendon. McLaren writes:

> [McClendon] begins with *Ethics* because a community of faith, in order to exist as a community at all, must have virtue sufficient to forgive, reconcile, and otherwise get along. Without roots in virtue, without practices that strengthen virtue, and without participatory experience of community made possible by virtue, no one is spiritually prepared to explore doctrine or pursue mission, McClendon implies. From this narrative perspective, the practices of humility, compassion, spirituality, and love—which develop only in community—are essential to a good and healthy theology, more primal and important than scholarship, logic, intellect.[38]

However exotic and even eccentric the Emerging Church might appear to be on the surface, I would suggest that it fits within the context of the

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[34] Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 56.

[35] Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 54. On this point, also see Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 218–232.

[36] Brian D. McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In: Further Adventures of a New Kind of Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 166–167.

[37] James William McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 28.

[38] McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 290.

general landscape of North American notions about spirituality.[39] It is not nearly as counter-cultural as its promoters advertise it to be. It is eclectic, consensual, affirming of self, open, optimistic, and pragmatic. Mark Ellingsen has argued that, in North American spirituality, "Select religious teachings are merely a vehicle for supplementing generally sound life instincts."[40] This is amply demonstrated in the literature of the Emerging Church.

In his catalogue of all the things that he is, McLaren left out the Lutheran label.[41] Some might argue that Lutherans are just easy to over look—"remarkably unremarkable" or extraordinarily ordinary, according to the description of Mark Noll.[42] It could be that McLaren does not know much about Lutherans, or maybe he does not know what to do with Lutheran theology. Perhaps it just does not fit with his paradigm. Might it be that Luther (if not Lutheranism) is too radical for the Emerging Church?

Luther, in fact, made a radical move as he began with doctrine, not life, as he worked not with human authenticity but with authentic words from God in law and gospel. Ethics are not salvific, but God's doctrine is. Hence Luther writes in his lectures on Galatians:

> Doctrine is heaven; life is earth. In life there is sin, error, uncleanness, and misery, mixed, as the saying goes, "with vinegar." Here love should condone, tolerate, be deceived, trust, hope, and endure all things (1 Cor. 13:7); here forgiveness of sins should have complete sway, provided that sin and error are not defended. But just as there is no error in doctrine, so there is no need for any forgiveness of sins. Therefore there is no comparison at all between doctrine and life. "One dot" of doctrine is

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[39] For descriptive and critical accounts of contemporary spirituality from a Lutheran perspective, see James M. Kittelson, "Contemporary Spirituality's Challenge to *Sola Gratia*," *Lutheran Quarterly* 9 (1995): 367–390; Hans J. Hillerbrand, "The Road Less Traveled? Reflections on the Enigma of Lutheran Spirituality," in *Let Christ Be Christ: Theology, Ethics and World Religions in the Two Kingdoms: Essays in Honor of the Sixty-Fifth Birthday of Charles L. Manske*, ed. Daniel N. Harmelink (Huntington Beach, CA: Tentatio Press, 1999), 129–140; and Paul Rorem, "Augustine and Luther for and against Contemporary 'Spirituality,'" *Currents in Theology and Mission* 30 (2003): 96–104.

[40] Mark Ellingsen, *Blessed Are the Cynical: How Original Sin Can Make America a Better Place* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), 122.

[41] However, on the back-cover endorsement of Nathan C. P. Frambach's *Emerging Ministry: Being Church Today*, McLaren does state: "Many of us believe that Lutherans have an essential and unique role to play in the emerging church." Frambach, a professor at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, published his book with Augsburg Fortress Publishers in 2007.

[42] Mark Noll, "The Lutheran Difference," *First Things* 20 (1992): 31.

> worth more than "heaven and earth" (Matt. 5:18); therefore we do not permit the slightest offense against it. But we can be lenient toward errors of life. For we, too, err daily in our life and conduct; so do all the saints, as they earnestly confess in the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. But by the grace of God our doctrine is pure; we have the articles of faith solidly established in Sacred Scripture. The devil would dearly love to corrupt and overthrow these; that is why he attacks us so cleverly with this specious argument about not offending against love and the harmony among the churches.[43]

Orthodoxy can never be so generous as to set aside God's doctrine. That would be unbelief. On the other hand, the arena for generosity is life, where sin abounds. There, Luther argues, charity is to prevail as Christians endure and bear the sins of the neighbor.

Missing Luther's radical move, the Emerging Church begins with life not doctrine, and with ethics not faith. While claiming to be generous, open, and tolerant, McLaren—with his incessant focus on the necessity for authentic discipleship, obedience rather than knowledge, and lives characterized by compassion—slips into a rigidity that is unattainable. While the language might sound inclusive and undiscriminating, it is the language of the law. Is it not the case that if one scratches an antinomian, a legalist will be found underneath the surface? Or, as George Marsden observes in his study, *The Soul of the American University*: "Pluralism remains a basis for imposing uniformity."[44] The Emerging Church is not nearly as free from the dreary moralism that they decry. Gerhard Forde has helpfully observed that those who begin with the presupposition of freedom end in bondage.[45] Only a theology that begins with the presupposition that humanity is in bondage can end in freedom—the freedom of the Spirit.

For all of its rhetoric of the Spirit, the Emerging Church is a specimen of postmodern spirituality.[46] This spirituality is more of the human spirit than

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[43] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 27:41–42. Hereafter cited as *LW*.

[44] George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 436.

[45] Gerhard O. Forde, *The Captivation of the Will: Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage*, ed. Steven Paulson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 44.

[46] In contrasting Christian faith with contemporary spirituality, David Wells argues: "In religion of a Christian kind, we listen; in spirituality of a contemporary kind, we talk. In religion of a Christian kind, we accept a gift; in spirituality of a contemporary

the Holy Spirit; it is a spirituality that seeks to be free and questing but finally succumbs to its own legalisms. Enthusiasm is always suffocating. In contrast, Scripture states that "where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17).

I suggest that the Lutheran alternative is to reclaim a robust doctrine of vocation, a doctrine which is so often neglected. Vocation is the work of the Spirit, his calling to faith and life. Edmund Schlink began his dogmatics with the locus on the Holy Spirit, which was indicative of the fact that theology does not begin with our speculation but with the Spirit who has called us to faith by the gospel.[47] We cannot by the potency of our reason or by the depth of our conviction come to know Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who calls us to faith by the gospel, enlightening and sanctifying us with his gifts. The same Spirit who calls us to faith also calls us to a life of love within the structures of creation, or the three estates as Luther calls them. Both dimensions of our vocation—faith and life—are devoid of what the reformers identified as enthusiasm.

We are called to faith in Christ not by a story of our own choosing or a narrative of our own communal construction but by a word that comes from outside of ourselves. It is not just a word about Christ but the word of Christ. It delivers the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection. It creates faith in the hearts of those who hear it when and where it pleases God. The rationalism that the Emerging Church so much fears in modernity is absent in Luther's understanding of the work of the Spirit in and through the gospel, but Luther does not slide into a mystical enthusiasm divorced from history. He does not share the fear of the Emerging Church over assertions. Quite the contrary, as his well-known words in the *Bondage of the Will* indicate: "Take away assertions and you take away Christianity. Why, the Holy Spirit is given them [Christians] from heaven, that he may glorify Christ [in them] and confess him even unto death. . . . The Holy Spirit is no skeptic, and it is not doubts or mere opinions that he has written on our hearts, but assertions more sure and certain than life itself

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kind, we try to seize God. In the one we are justified by the righteousness of Christ; in the other, we strive to justify ourselves through ourselves. It is thus that spirituality is the enemy of faith." *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*, 161–162.

[47] See Edmund Schlink, *Oekumenische Dogmatik* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1983). So also Norman Nagel: "The actual sequence is Third Article, Second Article, First Article. The Holy Spirit with the means of grace bestows the salvation gifts won for us by Christ. These gifts are received in faith. The life of faith is lived begiftedly, and so on then through the First Article and all its *dona creata*." Nagel, "The Spirit's Gifts in the Confessions and in Corinth," *Concordia Journal* 18 (1992): 236.

and all experience."[48] Both Jew and Greek found the cross to be a scandal; even so both the modernist and the postmodernist stumble over the proclamation of the crucified Jesus. Both seek after a form of accessibility and openness while God hides himself to reason and emotion.

Carl Raschke wrote, "By relativizing language and theories of signification, postmodernism makes it possible to honor *the immeasurable holiness of God* in a manner that modern philosophy never could."[49] Yet this claim still leaves man with the *deus absconditus*, the God of mystery and majesty who is a terror. A mere switch of linguistics will not suffice. The theologies of the Emerging Church are not radical enough; they still leave human beings as the subjects of the verbs. In these theologies, God remains the object of our reflecting and acting. Enthusiasm and human works are of one piece.

The Spirit who calls us to faith through the externality of his word also calls us to life in creation. Some within the Emerging Church have experimented with communal living. While such an arrangement is not characteristic of the movement in general, there is a distinctly monastic flavor here. Although critical of perceived isolationistic tendencies in Enlightenment Christianity, Emerging Church thinkers have not been exempt from a sectarianism of their own. Belonging and community are stressed. The community that is yearned for, however, transcends the ordinary structures of family, congregation, and civic sphere; it is the company of those who voluntarily embark together on a higher journey of a deeper, more authentic spirituality shaped by growing conformity to the life of Jesus. In this sense, the Emerging Church can be seen as a postmodern unfolding of Anabaptist movements in the sixteenth century and restorationist movements in the nineteenth century. It is not as novel as many of its adherents claim.

As Luther and the Lutheran Confessions understand vocation, it is not a call of the Spirit out of the world but the calling of the Spirit to live within the mundane estates of congregation, family, and government. Luther spoke of these orders as the most fundamental forms of human existence.[50] In his *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* of 1528, Luther calls them "religious institutions"[51] for they are sanctified by God's word for the

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[48] *LW* 33:21, 24.

[49] Raschke, *The Next Reformation*, 32.

[50] *LW* 1:103–104. See also Oswald Bayer, "Nature and Institution: Luther's Doctrine of the Three Orders," *Lutheran Quarterly* 12 (1998): 125–159.

[51] *LW* 37:365.

service of the neighbor. They are spiritual, Luther says in *That These Words of Christ, 'This is My Body,' etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics*, for

> all that our body does outwardly and physically, if God's Word is added to it and it is done through faith, is in reality and in name done spiritually. Nothing can be so material, fleshly or outward but that it becomes spiritual when it is done in the Word and in faith. "Spiritual" is nothing else than what is done in us and by us through the Spirit and faith, whether the object with which we are dealing is physical or spiritual.[52]

For Luther, the "thank, praise, serve and obey him" of the Small Catechism's explanation of the First Article (SC II, 2) comes to expression in the daily prayers and the table of duties at the end of the Catechism (SC VII–IX). The Third Article takes us to the Second Article and through it to the First Article.

There is a line in Adolf Köberle's *The Quest for Holiness* that is attributed to Luther: "When God is gone, the fairy tales arrive."[53] The postmodern period is a time of fairy tales. In particular, it is the fairy tale that we can be like God, creating our own reality, authoring our own stories, and having a hand in our own redemption. The Holy Spirit is "the shy member of the Trinity," to borrow the words of William Hordern and Frederick Bruner, for he does not preach himself but Christ.[54] The preaching of Christ does not create spirituality but faith, faith that is active in love for the neighbor. There is a difference.

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[52] *LW* 37:92.

[53] Adolf Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Investigation*, trans. John C. Mattes (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1938), 41.

[54] See Frederick Dale Bruner and William E. Hordern, *The Holy Spirit, Shy Member of the Trinity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984). Also recall Luther's words in his John sermons: "Here Christ makes the Holy Spirit a Preacher. He does so to prevent one from gaping toward heaven in search of Him, as the fluttering spirits and enthusiasts do, and from divorcing Him from the oral Word or the ministry. One should know and learn that He will be in and with the Word, that it will guide us into all truth, in order that we may believe it, use it as a weapon, be preserved by it against all the lies and deceptions of the devil, and prevail in all trials and temptations. . . . The Holy Spirit wants this truth which He is to impress into our hearts to be so firmly fixed that reason and all one's own thoughts and feelings are relegated to the background. He wants us to adhere solely to the Word and to regard it as the only truth. And through this Word alone He governs the Christian Church to the end." *LW* 24:362.

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Theological Observer

The Consecration of the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Siberia

This sermon was preached by the Rev. Vsevolod Lytkin on the occasion of his consecration as Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Siberia at the Cathedral Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Tallinn, Estonia, on May 6, 2007. The Editors

Fathers, brothers, and sisters, I would like to begin my sermon with a quote from the song of a famous bard of the Soviet time:

> I remember, I was silly and young
> I heard from my parent
> How my parent destroyed
> The church of Christ the savior.

You know, this is not black Russian humor. There is history in these words, history of my country of Russia as well as history of your country of Estonia, since by the evil destiny you were forced to share our sufferings with us. For over fifty years you were part of the Soviet Union, the country that was founded by hangmen and czar-murderers.

This country is no more. We now live in free democratic countries. Still, almost all of us have "come out" of that Soviet time. Some people were touched more by this, others less. Some people tried to oppose the regime; others have realized all the terror of the Soviet system only after its fall.

"I remember, I was silly and young." From a Christian perspective, one realizes that the most terrible thing was that such a great multitude of people were born in unbelief. They lived all their life in unbelief and the most terrible thing is that they also died in unbelief. I don't like to speak about politics, particularly while preaching, but it is impossible to forget those times. I remember them especially when I visit Estonia, since it was here that my Christian life began.

Just like many others, I was looking for God. I remember how "silly and young" I was; yet, gradually, little by little, I began to seek answers to *eternal questions*. My family was not Christian. Nevertheless, my parents taught me not to trust Soviet propaganda, and so I did not. Since soviet propaganda said that God does not exist, it seemed quite likely that he does. Thus my Christian faith began because of my parents, though they did not tell me about God directly.

Like many other people at the time, we also understood that it was impossible for God not to exist. What would one live for if one's life is limited to earth, not even in a sense that we are just temporary dwellers on this earth, but, as one priest wrote, "if there is no God . . . then all humankind is found collectively not on earth, but in the earth, in our common grave."

I understood little of religion, but I knew that there must be something besides this material world, in which we live, only to die. I purchased books, atheistic books, for there were no other ones at the time, and I tried to find quotations from the Bible in them, words about God, and I found them and tried to understand. Obviously, the atheists quoted the word of God only for critique. But, after all, we were *Soviet* people—we got used to interpreting all official things backwards.

Finally, God's grace led me to Estonia. Here I met Christians for the first time in my life. I will never forget how I talked to an old man who was the guard at the Church of the Holy Spirit. Then I spoke with the wife of Pastor Jaan Kiivit, and finally with the pastor himself. I was twenty when I came here for the first time in order to find the Lutheran church. I did not know anybody. I had virtually no money and lived in the train station for a week where I memorized Luther's Catechism.

I would not dare do that now. But then I came back to the train station every evening and tried to find a seat on a bench in the waiting-hall area. There were a limited number of seats. I was surrounded mostly by poor travelers like me, and also alcoholics and homeless people. It is so strange to recall it now. But I learned the Catechism, and then Jaan Kiivit baptized me. This is how my Christian life began here in Estonia during the old Soviet era.

I remember, I was silly and young,
I heard from my parent
How my parent destroyed
The church of Christ the savior.

You know, these words are a perfect description of Soviet life! Certainly, *my* parents were not involved directly in the destruction of Christianity, but a number of people participated on *a global scale* in the construction of society with no room for God. Wily rulers deceived them by promises of earthly paradise, and they gullibly followed them.

Afterwards it was too late. Millions of Christians were tortured in prison camps; thousands of churches were blown up and demolished. To be sure, the Orthodox Church suffered the most, but other confessions also shared in that horrible slaughter. You know, we have no Lutheran church buildings left in Siberia. All that could be destroyed was destroyed. The last Lutheran church building—St. Peter's in Barnaul—was destroyed in the early seventies. So, what a grace has been given to us that this regime did not outlive us. Rather, we outlived it! And we have not been only passive observers of its collapse but active participants in building a new life.

This happened because God placed us in the ministry of his church. We save people's souls through the word of God and the holy sacraments. Can there be anything more wonderful than this task? But all this is not of us; it is only due

to Christ. It is he who came to us with his word. However little this word can be seen in the essays in atheistic books, nevertheless God helped us to see his word there. And he called us through this word, just as we read in today's Gospel: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden . . ." (Matt 11:28a). The word of God always accomplishes that for which God sends it. One believed secretly, and then he began to believe openly. Another remembered the faith of his parents. And yet another began to seek and he found. You can meet all these kinds of people, laymen and priests, in every parish. One of my colleagues almost joined the Communist Party, but he heard the gospel and was so captivated by this news that he finally left everything, took his wife and children and a box of potatoes, and went to work as a missionary. Finally he became a priest. This is how miraculously God acts in our lives.

Today's sermon is based on the Old Testament reading in our church lectionary, from the twelfth chapter of Isaiah. It describes the joy of deliverance, but it is not limited to *description;* it is rather a praise song of God's people, gratitude to God for his miraculous gifts. It is obvious that this song of praise had a liturgical meaning, because one may see a number of parallels here with the other hymns of praise, most notably with the *Hallel* psalms that the Old Testament church was singing at the Passover and other celebrations while thanking God for the gift of deliverance.

This chapter is like Psalm 118, which we sang on Easter Sunday. "The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. . . . I thank thee that thou hast answered me and hast become my salvation" (Ps 118:14, 21). Salvation is a major theme of both the Psalter and our text from Isaiah. The key word here is *yeshuah,* which is related to the name of Jesus, our savior: "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation" (Isa 12:2).

We also sing another part of Psalm 118, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," every Sunday when we greet Christ who comes to us in the Sacrament of the Altar. God comes to save us. Just as the people of old had been saved from Egyptian slavery, so also we have been saved from the slavery of sin and death through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Christ Jesus—Joshua—has become our salvation. He has come to us in order to bring liberty to the oppressed and to give rest to all who labor and are heavy laden: "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" (Matt 11:28–30). That is: "Come to me, all who carry heavy burdens of life, and I will give you rest. . . . Take *my* yoke, not yours. Take *my* burden, not yours." The "yoke" that our Lord gives us is quite unlike those yokes to which we are accustomed to bearing in this world. There is no violence and oppression here, as Christ is gentle and lowly in heart.

It is not difficult to see here the idea of *the blessed exchange,* so loved by Luther. Those carrying their burdens may take them off their shoulders and take another one, which is of Christ. Those tired and looking for rest may find it with Christ, the Son of God who humbled himself, took the form of a servant, and also took our sins upon himself so that he could present his righteousness to us. He brings salvation to us as a gift. He does not require that we redeem ourselves from our own sins, but grants forgiveness to repentant sinners at every liturgy. And it is only in him that a soul of a sinner who is thirsty for forgiveness and reconciliation with God may find 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" (Matt 11:29–30).

As children, we were taught that only obedient children receive the gifts. The gifts of *God,* however, are given to us without any qualifications or conditions. God does not postpone his grace until *people* do something. God freely gives his blessings. If I have to become somebody or do something for my salvation, if I have to *earn* salvation, then there is no grace here but only unfulfilled law. We can do nothing to be saved. The Lord, nevertheless, does not require it from us. Even before we were born, he came and died for us and rose. He still continues to come and to serve us by giving his true Body and Blood to us at the Eucharist. Through these he strengthens our faith and gives us power to follow him into the kingdom of his Father.

"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isa 12:3). Remember your baptism now. Remember how God accepted you and how you became a Christian. Maybe we do not remember it often, but today God gives us a new opportunity to thank him and rejoice that water from the wells of salvation was poured also on us, that we are saved, and that nobody can snatch us out of Christ's hands. "And you will say in that day: 'Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name; make known his deeds among the nations, proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth'" (Isa 12:4–5).

God always makes great things, even if it seems to us at times that he is idle. Isaiah wrote at a terrible time; Israel's enemies were threatening to destroy God's people. The strong ones of this world attempted to destroy the chosen nation and her monotheistic faith. The hearers of Isaiah may have found it difficult to believe that their God would be known in all the earth. The ancient prophesies are, generally speaking, unusual. They are spoken, and then there is silence until prophecy resumes moving forward with fulfillment. The powerful ones think that all the power is in their hands. Therefore they create empires and name cities in their honor; they build monuments and mausoleums for themselves. But in the end, it turns out that time is not in their hands. Time is in God's hands.

A day comes when that which seemed indestructible and unshakeable is destroyed. People in all the earth are given knowledge of God, acquire faith, come to church, get baptized, bring their children. The church grows—this is how God acts in our lives. "Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel" (Isa 12:6). Brothers and sisters, the Lord is in the midst of us. We are able to hear his word and partake of him. He comes so close to us in the Sacrament of Eucharist that we can even touch him.

The Eucharist not only connects us to Christ, but also unites us with each other. It is so wonderful to have spiritual fellowship with the brothers with whom we share a common faith. However, the special character of this day for us Siberian Lutherans is that not only have we been *one in faith* with the Church of Estonia for a long time, but we have also been a part of her. Now we become an autocephalous church. Though we are independent, the Church of Estonia will always remain our spiritual mother. No matter what happens, we will always remember the many years in which you cared for us.

No matter what happens . . . we went through a number of things together. And who knows what else we will have to go through? We know how the church buildings, even those that were large and sturdy, were destroyed. We know also how fragile temples of human lives are destroyed. It happened often and—who knows—it may happen again. Who knows what the future has in store for us. Global warming, materialism, street extremism, Islamic terrorism, liberal theology—there are so many terrifying and deadly things around us! Yet Christ is among us, both now and forever. Neither death nor hell nor the devil can change that. We will receive forgiveness of sins, rest, and a blessed eternity in Christ. Amen.

Vsevolod Lytkin
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The Reception of *Lutheran Service Book*

When one of the editors of *CTQ* requested that I offer comments on the reception of *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)*, I knew that it would be necessary to begin my comments with a self-disclosure. After all, I spent the past eight years guiding the new Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) hymnal to completion and served as its chief advocate. Clearly, I have a few things to say about *LSB*, and if some of it is a bit biased, then so be it!

As of this writing, *LSB* has been available for 16 months (since August of 2006). During that time, nearly 800,000 copies of the Pew Edition have been sold. Concordia Publishing House (CPH) estimates that the acceptance rate is now over 50% of congregations, and perhaps even over 55%. While it is sometimes prudent to be wary of numbers, they can often enlighten us. To the

best of our knowledge, *Lutheran Worship* (*LW*), published in 1982, never quite reached a 60% penetration of LCMS congregations. Without judging one hymnal over against the other, the rapid and fairly widespread adoption of *LSB* in our congregations certainly says something about how the LCMS is receiving it. While those of us most intimately involved in its development anticipated that there would be broad acceptance, the worries voiced by some that no one would be interested in buying yet another hymnal did cause the occasional doubt to enter our minds. The past 16 months have, fortunately, erased those doubts.

How does one explain the positive response to *LSB*? Perhaps we are too close in time to offer an accurate explanation. The historians among us would probably urge us to wait a decade or two before making any judgments. Still, the process of how *LSB* and its companion resources were developed does shed some light on what we have experienced.

First, the Commission on Worship and its hymnal committees worked very carefully to develop a hymnal that would be a true successor to both *The Lutheran Hymnal* (*TLH*) and *Lutheran Worship*. This was no easy task. Ever since 1982, the LCMS has been a two-hymnal church body. While nearly 60% had moved to *LW*, another 35% of congregations had chosen to stay with *TLH*. In many cases, this was a very deliberate decision. Our work required a careful balancing act that preserved the best of *TLH* while also building on the strengths of *LW*. This meant, for example, that the much-loved "Page 15" service in *TLH* needed to be included with only very minor revisions. In certain places, though, revision was necessary, such as the updating of the creed translations, using what had already appeared in *LW*; in some instances, such as the Salutation, compromise was necessary, with both responses ("And with your spirit" / "And also with you") being used in different services.

While *LSB* is not a perfect hymnal, its rapid and positive reception suggests that our goal of producing a faithful successor hymnal has been successful. That response is seen not only in the numbers given earlier but, more importantly, in the anecdotal comments received during the past 16 months. Time and again, both the Commission on Worship office and CPH received reports of unanimous decisions approving *LSB* at congregational voters' meetings. Several individuals expressed amazement, saying that they seldom—if ever—had unanimous votes on any issue. Once the new hymnals were in the pew racks and in use, many expressed satisfaction with their decision.

Again, what might account for this seeming success? Clearly, the Commission on Worship did its job preparing the LCMS for *LSB*. For nearly eight years, regular reports were issued. Many congregations also took part in testing various resources. For the first time, the internet was used in a variety of ways to disseminate ideas and gather feedback on a hymnal project. We also

listened carefully to complaints about our predecessor books and attempted to learn from previous mistakes. As much as possible, our goal was to prepare a hymnal that not only exhibited doctrinal integrity but also took into consideration the needs of those who would use it for decades to come.

Another factor in the positive reception of *LSB* is the simultaneous appearance of the electronic version, known as *Lutheran Service Builder*. As best we know, this is the first time in history that a hymnal was prepared from the start for both print and electronic media. CPH exhibited tremendous leadership both in developing a truly innovative product and in negotiating agreements that simplify the often arcane world of copyright permissions. While there were some fears that the electronic version might result in significant reduction in sales of the print version, these fears have been allayed. Very precise statistics have shown that more than 80% of congregations that buy the *Builder* also purchase sufficient copies of the hymnal for use in worship.

What the future holds for *LSB* remains to be seen. It is far too early to know what percentage of congregations will ultimately adopt it. While a record was probably set in publishing not only the Pew Edition but also the majority of the *LSB* companion volumes in the same year, there is still more to come. A *Guitar Chord Edition* is nearing completion, and a concordance of the hymns will be ready by mid-2008. Recordings of the hymns and liturgies, for congregations that have no musicians to lead the singing, will soon be made. Also on the drawing board are commentaries for both the services and the hymns. Who knows what other helpful resources may be developed to assist pastors and musicians in unlocking the riches of *LSB*?

It never was our expectation that *LSB* would be adopted in every LCMS congregation. As many have pointed out, "the genie is out of the bottle"; we will likely never see the days of the vaunted 1950s when everyone in the LCMS was using the same hymnal. What about those congregations that choose not to use hymnals or to use them selectively? Two thoughts must suffice for now. First, the "contemporary worship" phenomenon is not nearly so settled as some might be led to believe. Evidence continues to mount, especially outside Lutheranism, which shows that congregations that led the way in informal worship some three decades ago are beginning to rethink what they are doing. That, coupled with a growing desire for more substance—and even tradition—in worship suggests that, although "the genie is indeed out of the bottle," it is quite likely that "the genie" will continue to change, perhaps in surprising ways.

Second, the appearance of *LSB* will, to some degree, influence the worship even of congregations that do not use it. Whether one "likes" the hymns and services in *LSB* or not, it is difficult to deny that on the whole they exhibit a rich and varied expression of the gospel. The contents of *LSB* were carefully

compiled and reviewed by many individuals and groups. Although the hymnal does not represent the limit as to what is appropriate for use in worship, it does place before the entire church an expectation of how the gospel ought to be given expression in all of our congregations. To that end, every pastor and musician in the church will want to become familiar with its contents in order to discover the richness of its gospel expression.

It now remains for those who plan and lead worship to make every effort to become thoroughly acquainted with *Lutheran Service Book*. This will take both time and commitment. The benefits, though, are well worth it. Above all, it will guarantee that this latest hymnal will continue to serve faithfully for many years to come.

Paul J. Grime

"The God Squad": Towards a Common Religion

On Mondays *The Pocono Record* carries a syndicated column by Rabbi Gellman and the Rev. Tom Hartman, a priest, under the title "The God Squad." It is amazing that Jewish and Roman Catholic clergy persons can team up to give religious advice to members of both faith communities and supposedly to Protestants who may need their assistance even more than their own sisters and brothers. On July 23, 2007, four questions were posed, the second of which had to do with the singing of "Amazing Grace," a standard American favorite which entered Lutheran hymnody in *Lutheran Worship* and remained there in the *Lutheran Service Book*. R., Brooklyn, N.Y., submitted the following:

> Q: "Amazing Grace" and "We Shall Overcome," both Christian hymns, have now become popular as civil rights and protest songs. Can people of the Jewish faith feel comfortable singing these hymns?
>
> A: Absolutely. The only hymns that cause problems are those that expressly affirm Christ as Lord. When "Amazing Grace" and "We Shall Overcome" are sung at public rallies, rather than in a ritual setting, their purpose is not to affirm specifically Christian doctrines but to share common sentiments and values.

One does not know where to dig into this tempting morsel, but a petition from the hometown cannot be ignored. "We Shall Overcome" is a protest song, but is "Amazing Grace"? This hymn has taken its place alongside of "God Bless America" as the national hymn. What would the funeral of a politician be without it? At the funeral of non-churched relative of mine, a New York City policeman dressed in kilts led the mourners to a tavern playing "Amazing Grace" on bagpipes. One size fits all. As valuable as *sola gratia* is for Reformation sermons, Roman Catholics claims theirs as a religion of grace. What is meant by grace is a subject for another time. The New Perspective on

Paul has been saying that Judaism was a religion of grace. Paul's problem with the Jews was not that theirs was a religion of works, but that it did not give non-Jews equal standing before God. Supposedly, Luther got it wrong. (See *CTQ* 70 [2006]: 197–217.) Should a standard of orthodoxy require that *Amazing Grace* be removed from the hymnal, other hymns would also face the ax. *Love Divine, All Love Excelling*, especially according to the melody common in Anglicanism, is a favorite of mine. We can postpone its reference to progressive sanctification in verse four until we die, though Charles Wesley thought that we could get a head start on this here below. *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past* oozes a Calvinist's confidence in his election. Like *Amazing Grace*, neither "Christ" nor Jesus is mentioned, but we can refer "Lord" and "God" in these hymns to the second person of the Trinity. No problem with *Love Divine, All Love Excelling*. Jesus plays a bigger part in Arminianism than in Calvinism.

Both the rabbi and the priest get it right. The meaning of a hymn often depends on whether it is sung in a stadium or a church and, add to that, which church. *God of Grace and God of Glory* was sung with gusto when it found a place in *Lutheran Worship*, notwithstanding that Walter A. Maier pointed out to the Missouri Synod laity that its author, Harry Emerson Fosdick, was incorrigibly liberal. Fosdick denied all the fundamental doctrines. For the record, it was the theme song of the Social Gospel movement. Its convoluted wording is one reason not to sing it. Try this one on: "Shame our wanton, selfish gladness, Rich in things and poor in soul." Already with *The Lutheran Hymnal* doctrinal censors took the scalpel to hymns that did not meet orthodox standards. In the hymn credits "alt." means that for doctrinal reasons or literary improvement the hymn has been altered—a most appropriate word for putting the knife into the poet's genius. In *Lutheran Worship*, *Christ Be My Light* became *Christ Be My Leader*, which does not fit with the end of the first verse: "Darkness is daylight when Jesus is there." Some changes qualify as mutilations. Few, if any, parishioners would have been converted to Calvinism if the third verse of *All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name*—"Ye chosen seed of Israel's race"—had not been replaced with "Ye seed of Israel's chosen race." Didn't Paul say that not all Israel was Israel? Some were elect and others were not. The substitute reading could allow for the *intuitu fidei*, but who cares—especially if one is singing a hymn. Hymns having different meanings are hardly new. Certain Psalms, portions of Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon may have been taken over by the inspired writers from other sources in the ancient world.

Amazing Grace is not a favorite of mine, and it is unlikely that I will suggest singing it, but not because it can be sung in the Capitol rotunda or in a synagogue. (Has this ever happened?) For me, grace without Christ is dogmatically cold. That's a personal opinion, and, if a parishioner wants it sung, I will happily and willing go along. From childhood I know by memory all the national songs, which I will continue to sing knowing that the person

standing next to me may give an entirely different meaning, or none at all, to the words. Some of the great choral directors and singers of Bach's *B-Minor Mass* and his other explicitly Christian cantatas are Jewish. Some years ago, Bill Buckley, the conservative writer, said that he would enjoy the ballet in the Soviet-dominated states knowing full well that it was funded by a political system he abhorred. A similar principle is at work with where and how some of our hymns originated as well as where and when I will listen to and participate in them. Life is too short not to listen and possibly sing. Hymns should be exempt from doctrinal censorship, although this is unlikely to happen in our fellowship. Before intended synergistic lines are reworded from some hymns, as I suspect some have been, perhaps we should remind ourselves how we have lived with some unintended synergistic biblical passages. We can give our hymn censors a break. Our minds can make the adjustments.

David P. Scaer

CTQ 71 (2007)

Book Reviews

***The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān.* Edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe. Cambridge Companion to Religion. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 348 pages. Paperback. $24.99.**

The Qur'ān is an illusive book, so a good introduction is practically required in order to make sense of it. The problem is that there are dozens from which to choose, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Recognizing this, Islamic scholars have long expressed the need for a volume that provides essential information on the Qur'ān's history and content along with a summation of developments in the diverse and ever-evolving field of qur'ānic studies. This recent addition to the Cambridge Companion series successfully accomplishes the task.

The book is divided into five parts. Part I covers the Qur'ān's historical background, from the time Muhammad first began to receive revelations until they were recorded and then codified shortly after his death. While the majority of the authors in this volume seem to acquiesce to the traditional account of its origins, competing theories—despite being controversial and dangerous to publish without the protection of a pseudonym—are also given a fair hearing in the chapter "Alternative Accounts of the Qur'ān's Formation" by Harald Motzki.

Part II examines the content of the qur'ānic text as well as its aesthetic value for practicing Muslims. Daniel A. Madigan's "Themes and Topics" provides a brilliant, systematic analysis of its theological motifs. The other two essays in the section are likewise important for making sense of the seemingly incoherent structure of the Qur'ān's 114 sūras and explaining the rationale behind the oft-repeated claim that the Arabic text is a miracle. Part III continues the investigation into the Qur'ān's text, looking at its transmission through the centuries. Beginning with a survey of early manuscript traditions, dating no earlier than the ninth century, its dissemination in various media—from amulets and architectural inscriptions to translations and proliferation on the internet—is explored in detail.

Part IV and Part V look, respectively, at historical and contemporary developments in qur'ānic scholarship and exegesis. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, the book's editor, begins with a survey of the discipline of *'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (qur'ānic sciences) and the classical Muslim exegetical tradition. This is followed by an excellent examination of the Qur'ān's influence on Arabic philology, rhetoric, and literature as well as Muslim jurisprudence, ethics, theology, and philosophy. Then, after a brief history of western interest in Islam's sacred text, the final three chapters hone in on the various postmodern and political trends in contemporary Muslim interpretations of the Qur'ān.

This book was written primarily for students of Islam, but the authors have also endeavored to benefit those with little or no background with the Qur'ān. Its clear prose, coherent structure, and overall breadth (with sufficient depth) make it required reading for anyone looking to deepen their understanding of Islam.

Adam S. Francisco

***Gospel Motivation: More Than "Jesus Died for My Sins."* By Robert J. Koester. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2006. 191 pages. Paperback. $13.99.**

Robert Koester serves as an editor at Northwestern Publishing House but has extensive experience as a parish pastor. His pastoral experience is evident everywhere in this book, which is his comprehensive overview of a biblical perspective on Christian living.

It is no secret that Lutherans have long been faulted for being strong on justification but weak on sanctification. It is this "sanctification gap" that Koester seeks to address. He worries that many Lutherans have abandoned the gospel in their zealous search for a practical and dynamic life of sanctification. I think he is right.

The meat of Koester's argument is that far too many eager Lutherans rely improperly on law motivations when the gospel itself is the only true motivation for the sanctified life. To prove his point, he explores ten distinct gospel aspects in as many chapters: God's Love and Forgiveness in Christ; Death and Life; Slavery to Righteousness; True Spirituality; New Creation; How God Views New Creations; The Kingdom; The Sacraments; Eternal Life; and Our Fellowship in Christ. In each chapter he proceeds to show how the pertinent biblical texts themselves unpack the gospel with its clear implications for Christian living. In each case, Koester not only carefully maintains the distinctions between the law and gospel but also preserves their connections.

Koester, while underscoring the importance of dogmatic theology, bemoans the kind of teaching and preaching that does not allow the biblical text to speak in its full richness. He writes, "Many of the beautiful Bible passages we learned in confirmation class, which were set in the context of a doctrinal topic, are actually found in passages that are teaching and encouraging sanctification" (134). One of the main goals of his book, therefore, is to foster a biblical theology that allows each text to speak with its own accent and nuance—a laudable goal. A very helpful index of the biblical texts addressed in the book, though by Koester's own admission weak on Old Testament references, will make it a useful tool for preachers who want to unpack the biblical text in ways that pertain more directly to their hearers' lives.

Koester insists on the centrality of the gospel in his discussion of the sanctified life. Yet he warns that the gospel dare never be viewed merely pragmatically, as though its chief value were its power to produce a new life: "Although we speak of gospel motivation, the gospel is never merely a means to that end. It is the end itself. It is God's gift to us" (12). One would expect a fuller treatment of the sacraments in a book dealing with the sanctified life. He devotes just over five pages to the sacraments. Yet Koester does mention Baptism in many other parts of his book, calling it "the connecting link between Christ and us" (107).

The weakest part of the book lies not in anything Koester says but in what he does not say. Baptism is a good example. While calling it our "connecting link with Christ," he stops short of unpacking a truly christological understanding of the Christian life in which Christ lives in us by Baptism and we live in him by faith. For Koester, the impact of the gospel is chiefly cognitive:

> What we need are the facts, just the facts, emblazoned on our hearts and minds. We need to clearly see where we would be headed apart from Christ and where we will be headed with him at the lead. The more we see the contrast between the darkness we were in and the light that now shines on us, the more we will say, "Wow!" and the more we will dedicate our lives to the One who has done such great things for us. (130)

In the very next paragraph, Koester quotes the prayer of St. Paul where he asks that the Ephesians would know the love of Christ "that surpasses knowledge" and that they would be filled with "all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:14–21). Here and in other places in the book, the implications of the real presence of Christ among his people by means of gospel and sacrament are not fully explored. Though he mentions the importance of God-given repentance (141), overall Koester gives short shrift to God's work in sanctification.

Koester does provide many helpful observations on the pervasive malaise that threatens contemporary Lutheranism. For example, he bemoans the aversion to theology prevalent in our time:

> So what does it mean to be practical? Sad to say, in the minds of many, practical religion means religion stripped of theology. It means dispensing how-to advice. It means counseling to one's individual, personal, and unique needs, rather than preaching global truths that deal with God's salvation for the whole world and that deal especially with Christians—sin, forgiveness, the new creation, and living lives of love. (139)

He is also critical of what he calls piety's "dark side"—the sort of piety "that puts 'me' at the center" (167)—and he warns against the kind of desire for the growth of the church that is willing to compromise the gospel for the sake of

"practical" religion that bypasses repentance and faith (137–138). All of these criticisms are well taken in view of Lutheranism's present disarray.

In short, Robert Koester has written a very helpful book. While I would wish for more christological depth in view of Scripture's claim that Jesus Christ is not merely our righteousness, but our holiness as well (1 Cor 1:20), there is much in this book that is commendable. I am therefore happy to commend it to pastors who would like to enrich their preaching and teaching.

Harold L. Senkbeil

***The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit.* By Craig Van Gelder. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007. 208 pages. Paperback. $16.99.**

Craig Van Gelder, an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Christian Reformed Church, author of numerous books and publications, church consultant, and currently tenured professor of congregational mission at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, is a leading proponent of the "missional church" concept. In this, his most current book, Van Gelder draws a distinction between the missional church, as he defines it, and current mission models such as the "purpose-driven" church and the "emerging" church. The missional church stresses what it is, whereas other models, according to Van Gelder, stress what the church does. Thus, he asserts, the church is "a community created by the Spirit . . . that has a unique nature, or essence, which gives it a unique identity. In light of the church's nature, the missional conversation then explores what the church does" (15–17). In simple terms, Van Gelder, posits this outline:

The church is:
- The church does what it is.
- The church organizes what it does. (17)

Drawing on some of his earlier work, Van Gelder spends the first two chapters devoting his attention to the Spirit-led formation of the church. Chapters three and four focus on the contextual aspect of missional thinking. In them, Van Gelder summarizes a historical overview of church formation in the American context and draws a distinction between the denominational and corporate American church (in which he would place The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod) and the missional church. In general, he would make the claim that because of the European heritage and American experience, American denominations have difficulty with the missional-church paradigm. Chapters five and six delve into the leadership needs of the missional church. Van Gelder uses many charts and graphs to help simplify his thinking so that the principles he lays out can be more easily put into practice. Chapter seven closes the book by outlining the Spirit's work in the church throughout the

book of Acts, which Van Gelder sees as supporting his thinking regarding the missional church. The book ends with this plea: "let the church be the church—a Spirit-led, missional church that seeks to participate fully in God's mission in its particular context" (182).

It is evident that Van Gelder is a leading proponent of the missional-church model. He is a master at taking complex thoughts and putting them into simplified and understandable structure. There is much to be learned from his thinking, and he adds valuable information to the church in mission discussion. He is not afraid to tackle the tough questions, such as whether doctrine or mission comes first, and supplies a creative middle-way answer to this and other such queries. While there is much to appreciate about the book, this reviewer, who himself has a mission passion, was concerned that the focus of mission—the redeeming of sinful humanity through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—was not clearly stated. While some of the wording could be interpreted as such, it could also be interpreted as being about a general redeeming of society through the work of Jesus. If this estimation is correct, then this reviewer would not believe that true mission has been accomplished. For this reviewer, passion for mission is not about society coming back to its original created purpose but about all heaven rejoicing over every sinner saved through the power of the gospel. With this being said, Van Gelder opens the door for much inner contemplation about one's attitude and thinking about mission.

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***Teaching C. S. Lewis: A Handbook for Professors, Church Leaders, and Lewis Enthusiasts*. By Richard Hill and Lyle Smith. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. 170 pages. Hardcover. $59.99.**

For decades, C. S. Lewis has been a popular and highly influential Christian author. Because of the accessibility of his writing, his books are often commended to readers who seek to know more about the Christian faith and have been the topic of reading groups and discussions. This reviewer has frequently been asked for recommendations for study guides and resources. While there are numerous home-grown studies and published materials for a few books, a more comprehensive resource has been lacking.

Teaching C. S. Lewis answers that need with a focused, lay-level study guide. It offers resources for all twelve of Lewis's published novels (*The Chronicles of Narnia, The Space Trilogy, Till We Have Faces,* and *The Great Divorce*) along with *Mere Christianity* and *The Screwtape Letters*. Other books, including *The Problem of Pain, Miracles,* or Lewis's voluminous essays, are not addressed in this guide.

For each book, the authors provide relevant biographical details for Lewis, followed by plot or chapter summaries, teaching strategies, discussion questions, and a brief bibliography. Focusing on selected themes, they provide an easily adapted starting point for discussion.

The authors are Evangelicals and, like Lewis, they are not theologians but English professors. Thus they have some helpful insights into Lewis's writing, while also sharing some of Lewis's lack of theological precision. For example, while discussing the Trinity, they ask, "how can God be both one person and three persons?" (38). While Lewis also lacked some precision on this topic, in *Mere Christianity* he described "a being who is three Persons while remaining one Being." As Lewis attempted to focus on teachings common to all Christians, so the authors position this book for an ecumenical audience. They note some of Lewis's controversial beliefs, including purgatory, and provide discussion prompts for a leader to address the topic without being too directive of how to address this teaching. Those with a greater theological training will note a preference for the language of free will and a lack of focus on the sacraments (an important topic for Lewis).

Teaching C. S. Lewis is a useful resource for those wanting to lead a discussion of some of Lewis's books. Like all such guides, it is best if used not as a prefabricated curriculum but as a resource to be adapted, contextualized, and used in light of the theological context of the teacher. In this, it is a welcome resource.

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***Theology the Lutheran Way.* By Oswald Bayer. Edited and translated by Jeffrey C. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes. Lutheran Quarterly Books. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. 330 pages. Paperback. $32.00.**

Until his recent retirement, Oswald Bayer served as a professor of systematic theology at the University of Tübingen. *Lutheran Quarterly* has introduced Bayer to the English-speaking world through the publication of many of his articles and his classic short study of justification and sanctification, *Living by Faith* (Eerdmans, 2003). Bayer has a well-deserved reputation as a theologian who uses both Luther and the German philosopher Johann Georg Hamann (1730–1788) in developing an approach to systematic theology that is both faithful and fresh. *Theology the Lutheran Way* is a multi-faceted book that testifies to the vitality of Bayer's approach.

Theology the Lutheran Way engages the question "what is theology?" Bayer refuses to settle for a dichotomy between theology as a theoretical science and

a practical discipline. In fact, theology is not something we do. Theology is God's work as he both kills and vivifies the theologian. It is a passive or, better put, receptive enterprise. Here Bayer uses Luther's famous triad *oratio, meditatio, tentatio* to speak of how theologians are made by prayer, meditation, and spiritual attack. Contrasting Luther's method to medieval forms of speculative and contemplative theology as well as Enlightenment models influenced by Kant and Hegel and the existential approaches of Schleiermacher, Bultmann, and Jonas, Bayer argues for a return to Luther's "catechetical systematics" marked by reliance on God's own *promissio,* a bodily word which accomplishes God's purpose. This is one of the magnificent strengths of Bayer's work.

A second significant strength is Bayer's treatment of the "Divine Service and Theology." Bayer correctly identifies "the distinction between faith and theology is an invention of modernity" (83). Luther's theology guards us against this deforming distinction while providing a place for necessary academic disciplines but disciplines set within a liturgical spirituality. Thus for Bayer, theology has its genesis in the divine service and leads back to the divine service. For Bayer, liturgical theology is not anthropological analysis or ritual commentary, but rather the divine service has to do with promise and faith, God giving and our receiving. His discussions of the church as an "order of creation," the externality of the word, the distinction between gift and sacrifice, and "the day of rest" as receptivity are essential for anyone attempting to articulate a Lutheran theology of worship. This is, however, more than a theology of worship or a theology about worship. Bayer writes,

> If the divine service has this universal dimension that we have demonstrated, then theology, understood in the narrower sense as a disciplined way of thinking, cannot go beyond it. It can never outstrip it, nor even catch up with it. *Theology begins with and ends with the divine service.* As a disciplined way of thinking, it is closely connected to faith, which comes from hearing (Rom. 10:17). Faith loves God not only with all one's heart, but also with every power and vitality, including the mind (Mark 12:30). Broadly speaking, theology is identical with faith. (93)

Bayer is at home in the world of philosophy and he is apt at handling the conceptualities of this world. Yet he does not build a system in conformity with any of these metaphysical paradigms of knowing and doing, but following Hamann (and Luther before him) Bayer asserts that theology's grammar is the language of Holy Scripture. Hence for Schleiermacher faith creates the word, but for Luther the word creates faith.

Theology the Lutheran Way is one of the most promising contributions of our day to the study of theology. By and large, the new curriculum at Concordia Theological Seminary is reflective of the thesis of Bayer's book even though our faculty did not have access to it when the curriculum was being designed.

All of our first year students are working with Bayer's exposition of *oratio, meditatio, tentatio* as part of the field education plenary lectures. Pastors would do well to work through this book individually or in circuit pastoral conferences. To that end, Mark Mattes has provided a very helpful introduction to Bayer's work in "Theology the Lutheran Way: A Synopsis and Glossary" in the Reformation 2007 issue of *Logia*.

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