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Is Law Intrinsic to God's Essence?

David P. Scaer

Concern has been brewing in some Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) circles over antinomianism. Antinomianism is a term broad enough to embrace libertinism, the idea that Christians can do whatever they want. Antinomianism questions the function of the law in Christian life, a locus in dogmatics known as sanctification and discussed in the Formula of Concord, article VI, under the heading "The Third Use of the Law." For the record, there is only one moral law with three functions, not three laws.[1] To say it another way, it is one law with three appearances, depending on the situation.[2] Those questioning the third use hold that the law is addressed to Christians as sinners but has no place in their life of faith. Law is seen as one huge negative, an overwhelming "No," and like an autoimmune disorder, law eventually turns on itself to self-destruct; it does not belong to God's essence and is not eternal.

The New "Theology of the Cross" and the Third Use of the Law

Deniers of the law's third use have arrogated to themselves the well-known phrase "the theology of the cross,"[3] which actually means that those who become Christians should expect to suffer with and for Christ. While this phrase may be part of the paradigm of the new definition of the law, its striking feature is that the law has no function for faith. Those not acquainted with this proposal (denying the law's

[1] Thus, the three uses of the law are uses of the *one moral law*. The Lutheran Confessions (Ap IV [II] 6, in Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959], 108, hereafter Tappert) and the Lutheran dogmatic tradition also recognize three kinds of *Old Testament law*: moral, ceremonial, and civil. See Luther's preface to the Old Testament (1523), vol. 445, pp. 243–244, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–1986); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE.

[2] This suggestion is offered by Bernd Wannenwetsch of Basel, Switzerland. See my discussion of this in *Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace*, ed. John R. Stephenson (St. Louis: The Luther Academy, 2008), 62–69.

[3] See the classic book, Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 108–109: "The temptation is always to fall back on the law, either in its original sense or perhaps in some new sense like a 'third use.' But the theologian of the cross knows that there is no way back."

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third use under the moniker "theology of the cross") may easily think that it is Luther's theology. It is not, and it is this issue that we want to address. To avoid confusing this new proposal with what Luther taught, we will refer to the new proposal with quotation marks as the new "theology of the cross."

Those who identify with the new "theology of the cross" also march under a banner inscribed with *lex semper accusat* ("the law always accuses"), words excised from the Apology.[4] Law as accusation exhausts its function; for the new "theology of the cross," function determines the Law's essence. Put another way, it argues back from the effect to the cause. Since the law unveils sin, in its essence, it accuses.

While the LCMS accepts the entire Book of Concord, some Lutheran churches do not accept the Formula, where the law's third use is defined. Thus, one might argue that its denial is of little consequence, that is, until one realizes that the law, with no function for the life of faith of believers, also has no role in understanding God, with the result that Christ's sufferings and death cannot be seen as an atonement for sin and for the penalties that the law imposes. Ironically, the Apology, from which *lex semper accusat* is taken, provides this excellent description of what came to be called the third use. "We do not overthrow the law, Paul says (Rom. 3:31), but uphold it; for when we have received the Holy Spirit by faith, the keeping of the law necessarily follows, by which love, patience, chastity, and other fruits of the Spirit gradually increase."[5] Luther scholar Timothy J. Wengert goes as far as speaking of "the 'notorious' third use of the law" among Lutherans.[6]

Christ as the "End of the Law"

Steven Paulson's denial of the third use relies on an idiosyncratic and false interpretation of Romans 10:4, "Christ is the end of the law"[7] that is, that Christ terminates the law.[8] Yet, Robert Jewett in the Hermenia commentary series of

[4] Ap IV (III) 46, 164 (= Ap IV 167, 285, Tappert, 130, 150); XII (V) 88 (Tappert, 195); cf. Ap IV (III) 136 (= Ap IV 257, Tappert, 144); XII (V) 34 (Tappert, 186), where the law "only" accuses in certain situations.

[5] Ap XX 15 (Tappert, 229).

[6] For a lengthy argument against the third use, see Timothy J. Wengert, *Reading the Bible with Martin Luther* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 37–39.

[7] Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

[8] Steven D. Paulson and Nicholas Hopman, "Christ, the Hated God," *Lutheran Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2016): 1–27, here at 1, 6. Paulson places this interpretation in the introduction to his *Lutheran Theology* and claims it as Luther's position. "For Luther the break-through of the gospel is that where Christ is preached as crucified for our sins and sake, the law comes to an end. That is the central point of Paul's letter to the Romans (10:4): 'Christ is the end of the law' " (Steven D. Paulson, *Lutheran Theology* [London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2011], 4).

Fortress Press says that this passage "should not be understood in this context as cessation and termination" but "as 'fulfillment' or 'goal,' which means that the teleological perspective remains primary in this verse."[9] It "has a directional sense that explains how Christ is the goal of the law."[10] It does not refer to the law's cessation as proposed by the late and still influential Luther Seminary professor Gerhard O. Forde and by his disciples Timothy Wengert, James Nestingen,[11] Steven Paulson, and, more recently, Nicholas Hopman.[12] In accusing sinners, the law has outlived its function and so, for faith, has no purpose.[13] Paulson reinforces his untenable interpretation of Romans 10:4 as proof for the law's extinction by advising readers to consult Paul before preaching on the Gospels, thus encouraging preachers to read the Gospels not on their own terms but through the lens of his misunderstanding of Paul's words "the end of the law."[14] But is the law inherently accusatory, and need we consult Paul to understand Jesus?

The Third Use of the Eternal Law

In Eden, Adam's moral nature corresponded to the law implanted in creation. It was without accusation. The command not to eat of the tree was not a legal prescription but a test of Adam's faith and love for God. By disregarding God's

[9] Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary,* Hermeneia, ed. Eldon Jay Epp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 619.

[10] Jewett, *Romans*, 619–620.

[11] James Nestingen, "Speaking of the End to the Law," in *The Necessary Distinction: A Continuing Conversation on Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 169–184. Nestingen acknowledges Forde's influence (175) and speaks of the termination of the law (170).

[12] Paulson and Hopman, "Christ, the Hated God," 1–27; Nicholas Hopman, "The Heidelberg Disputation; April 26, 1518," *Lutheran Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (2017): 436–444; Steven D. Paulson and Nicholas Hopman, "Atonement," in *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert, et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 48–51.

[13] Paulson, "Christ, the Hated God," 1. Also cited in support of the view that law has come to end is John 1:17, "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." At face value, it could be taken to contrast the law with the gospel, but William C. Weinrich, *John 1:1–7:1*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 119, 187–191, points out that it contrasts the written revelation of Torah to the superior one in God's incarnation in Jesus Christ. See also Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 78–79. Simply put, John 1:17 is not a law and gospel passage. Ironically, Gerhard Forde, on whom Paulson is dependent, correctly uses the Greek word τέλος when he says, "The Word and sacraments are themselves the end (*telos*), the purpose of it all" (*Theology Is for Proclamation* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990], 35). The public Office of the Ministry is also described as the *telos* of all offices (181). In both places, Forde uses the word *telos* in the proper sense of purpose and completion and not as annihilation, as Paulson does.

[14] Paulson, "Christ, the Hated God," 9. "So true preaching is learned from Paul before one ventures into the lengthy gospels without being tempted with displacement, which is original sin's repeated failure in telling the story of Jesus Christ."

command, he gave birth to the law's second use; but in the next life, the law's third use will be its chief and only use. We will do the things God wants from our hearts, without fear of accusation. When the Formula states that the law reminds Christians that their good works are still impure (FC SD VI 20–21), the law's third use can soon be seen by some as the flip side of the second use. Piotr Malysz notes that "the third use of the Law is frequently little more than the second without a 'sting,' with salvation serving as a catalyst."[15] In this fallen world, accusation is the law's chief function, but this does not translate into being its original, final, or now its only purpose. Law does not come to an end by self-destruction, as proposed by Forde and his disciples. As confessed in the Formula of Concord (FC SD II 50), *lex est aeterna* ("the law is eternal").

When the mantra of *lex semper accusat* is taken out of its context in the Apology, it takes on the status of a theological trump card, denying any function to the law but accusation. Seeing law as only accusation disqualifies it as a guide of Christian behavior. Hence, no third use of the law is left. Christians will never be perfect in this life, and the law reminds them that even their good works are impure (FC SD VI 21), but in Christ they are already free from the law's accusations. This is what *simul iustus et peccator* is all about. The law's third use is nothing other than the Ten Commandments christologically fulfilled, informed, and defined. Believers do Christ's works, which God through his Spirit works in them (Phil 2:13). Works of the law's third use are trinitarian through and through. Believers' good works are not only patterned after what Christ did, but are also what Christ does in them. Good works are those of the third use and have their origin in God's trinitarian existence, in which each divine person loves the other with a perfect love (John 5:20). This love manifests perfectly in God offering up Christ as a sacrifice to satisfy the law's demands and suffer its accusations (John 3:16). Trinitarian love that expresses itself in Christ's life and atoning death—his active and passive obedience—comes to further expression in believers who live and die for others (John 15:12–13, 17; 1 John 4:7). That's the third use in a nutshell.

Our response to the misunderstanding of *lex semper accusat* is this: law is intrinsic to God's essence and is reflected in everything he does. Law exists eternally in God and is the first or original revelation of God. Law is what God is, which is to say that goodness and love is what God is. The moral law is not an arbitrary morality or system of ethics imposed on sinners by a capricious deity. Since without the law, the gospel cannot be understood or believed, law's primacy within God is affirmed by the gospel and not abolished or negated. By Christ fulfilling the law, he

[15] Piotr J. Malysz, "The Third Use of the Law in Light of Creation and the Fall," in *The Law in Holy Scripture*, ed. Charles A. Gieschen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 215.

does not terminate it, as proposed by the new "theology of the cross," but affirms it. Law and gospel are both perfect revelations of God but in different ways. Law is what God is eternally in himself and gospel is his gracious response to our disregard of who and what God is. Jesus summed up the law in the commands to love God and the neighbor (Matt 22:37–39). This love originates in the trinitarian relationship in which each divine person loves the other with a perfect love, out of which relationship emerges the command to love the neighbor (John 17:26; 1 John 4:7–21). Love of the neighbor is descriptive of the God who shows his love to us as his neighbors. By creating us and then by rescuing us from our sin, he loved us with an undeserved love. Before asking us to love him and our neighbors, God fulfills his own command to love. Luther's explanation of the first commandment—that we should fear, love, and trust in him above all things—is a call to faith and assumes faith.[16] Each of the Ten Commandments is addressed not to unbelievers but to believers who, in spite of the constant danger of falling into sin, are to live their lives in doing the good works that Christ did. By each of the last nine commandments, which Luther begins explaining by saying, "We should fear and love God," faith is assumed and becomes the source of the good works required of believers. These are the works of the law's third use.

Systematizing theology into separate *loci* can lead to thinking that one doctrine can be separated from another, thus resulting in disconnected abstract truths. Such a situation then allows the law's third use to be detached from the doctrines of Christ and God, as done by the new "theologians of the cross." The Scriptures are not written in this atomistic way, but each doctrine is presented in, with, and under all the others. What Jesus taught was an extension of who he was and what he did. For example, Christ's blood offered to the Father as a sacrifice is the same blood given in the Sacrament (Matt 26:28). To take this one step further, the sacrificial character of Christ's death comes to expression in Christians living and dying for others, as Jesus proposed to James and John (Matt 20:26–28). That is the third use of the law. Christ's humiliation—not using his deity for his own benefit—reaches out into the lives of believers, who are to regard others as superior to themselves (Phil 2:1–11). By sacrificing himself to the Father, Christ assumes the law's accusations to himself and transforms the law's second use into the third use, which is nothing other than the extension of his life (Christology) into the lives of believers. The Samaritan in Luke's parable is a description first of Christ and then of believers (Luke 10:30–37). Martyrdom is the perfect expression of the law's third

[16] See also the Large Catechism: "The purpose of this commandment, therefore, is to require true faith and confidence in God" (LC I 4; Tappert, 365).

use. "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

The Eternal Law and the Atonement

"Soft antinomianism," a recently coined term associated with the new "theology of the cross," comes across as benign, but any denial of the third use, small or catastrophic, is symptomatic of a structural flaw in how God, Christ, and the atonement are understood and corrupts the entire theological enterprise. Foundational for this theological restructuring is the denial of the *lex aeterna*. Since for Forde, Paulson, and Nestingen, law is defined by its accusatory function and does not belong to God's essence, it is not eternal and will pass away.[17] Still left to be answered is where or with whom the law originated. In "The Problem of Freedom Today and the Third Use of the Law," Stephen Hultgren explains how J. C. K. von Hofmann (1810–1877) answers this question in his *Heilsgeschichte* theology. Hofmann articulated essential elements appearing one century later in the new "theology of the cross," such as understanding Christ's death as an expression of God's love for the world and not as propitiation.[18] For Hofmann,

> The Law is an interim measure . . . of God's overall plan to realize his love for humanity. In a certain sense, the Law is only a consequence of humanity's fall into sin and of God's wrath. God's wrath is not directed at human failure objectively to live up to God's standard as revealed in the Law. Rather, His wrath was due to the fact the humanity has turned away from him.[19]

For Hofmann, as for Forde and the new "theologians of the cross" after him, law is God's response to humanity's breaking union with him. Since law is not intrinsic to God's essence, Christ's death is no longer seen as a sacrifice for offenses against the law.[20] In Hofmann's scheme (adopted by Forde), atonement no longer takes place between the Father and the Son but between God and believers when they hear God's word of forgiveness in the preaching. Forde calls this "a reversal in direction," so that "atonement occurs when God succeeds in getting

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[17] Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 224. "The law remains eternally, but it is not an eternal law in the sense of ruling or making any demands of Christians—nor is it the very mind of God itself." In this explanation of the Greek word *τέλος*, Nestingen understands fulfillment of the law as termination ("Speaking of the End to the Law," 170).

[18] Stephen Hultgren, "The Problem of Freedom Today and the Third Use of the Law," in *The Necessary Distinction*, 197–199.

[19] Hultgren, "The Problem of Freedom Today and the Third Use of the Law," 199.

[20] Gerhard O. Forde, "The Work of Christ," in *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2, ed. Robert Jenson and Carl Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 47–49; Hultgren, "The Problem of Freedom Today and the Third Use of the Law," 199.

through to us who live under wrath and law."[21] What Forde confidently labels "Luther's Theology of the Cross" is not actually a doctrine of the atonement but a malformed theory of justification posing as a doctrine of atonement.[22] Inherent in Hofmann's redefinition of atonement is a particular form of dispensationalism—the belief, still popular among some Evangelicals, that God works differently in different periods of time (called "dispensations"). For Hofmann, law has a function only until the gospel comes. In the new "theology of the cross," when faith is created, the law has outlived its purpose.

The inclusion of the law's third use in Formula of Concord VI is regarded as a Calvinist intrusion into Lutheran theology, which was first introduced by Melanchthon in 1534. Not explained is how Melanchthon provided the battle cry *lex semper accusat* in the Apology in 1531 and then only three years later was considered responsible for introducing the third use of the law into Lutheran theology.[23] Arguments advancing the new "theology of the cross" are just as likely to reference Luther as they do the Scriptures, perhaps even more so. It presents itself at least as a culturally Lutheran Reformation theology. During the Reformation quincentennial, the new "theology of the cross" garnered additional support; it is claimed to represent what Luther actually believed.[24]

Although the new "theology of the cross" cannot be equated with Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor* theory,[25] which was popular in the last century, it has taken over its terms in describing Christ's death as a conflict with demonic forces. Yet, there is an important difference: for the new "theology of the cross," the conflict is not a cosmic, interstellar one, as it was for the Gnostics and Manicheans, but an internal existential conflict that Christians experience. In letting themselves be justified by God, believers are freed from having to justify themselves.[26] Forde understands law not as *lex aeterna* but as "a generalized existential dread expe-

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[21] Forde, "The Work of Christ," in *Christian Dogmatics* 2:47.

[22] Forde's restructuring of the doctrine of atonement into a malformed doctrine of justification has been adopted by Wengert, Nestingen, Paulson, and Hopman and is promoted in *Lutheran Quarterly* and now in the C*oncordia Journal.* See Nestingen, "Speaking of the End to the Law," 175; Joel P. Meyer, "Justification as the Ground and Goal of the Christian Life in Luther's Catechisms," *Concordia Journal* 43, no. 4 (2017): 43–57.

[23] Wengert, *Reading the Bible with Martin Luther*, 38.

[24] Paulson makes this clear in his introduction to *Lutheran Theology*, 4. (See note 8, above.)

[25] Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

[26] Forde, "The Work of Christ," in *Christian Dogmatics* 2:36–41. Paulson follows Forde in seeing the atonement existentially as taking place within the believer and not as a cosmic battle, which he describes as Manichaeism (Steven Paulson, "A Royal Ass," in *The Necessary Distinction*, 270–272). See also Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation*, 131–133. In that theology, atonement affects a change in us, not in God.

rienced by human beings in the old, evil age."[27] According to his scheme, he cannot define the gospel as a fulfillment of the law, since this would make the gospel subservient to the law. This view, which is unacceptable in his sight, is found in Lutheran Orthodoxy, in which the doctrine of the law was essential for its doctrine of Christ's substitutionary atonement. Justice and mercy cannot be given equal standing in God. This is reason enough for Forde to reject the Lutheran Orthodox view of the atonement, which requires that God's justice and mercy be balanced into one act.[28]

Existentialism and the New "Theology of the Cross"

The new "theology of the cross" is a theology of justification and neoorthodoxy is a theology of revelation. In spite of their differences, one can hardly fail to recognize similarities. Both focus on the oral word, in other words, preaching as a present reality that is not grounded on past events. Historical critique of the biblical reports does not play a prominent part. Both proposals are based on existentialism.[29] The title of Forde's book *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament* speaks volumes.

The *extra nos* element that is so essential to the Lutheran orthodox doctrine of reconciliation and justification—that these take place outside of us—is neglected or explicitly denied by the new "theology of the cross." Reconciliation and justification are placed instead in the preached word. Objectivity is found in the word or the promise and not in any act or apart from the faith created by the word. In this scheme, there is no place for what is called "objective justification" in Lutheran dogmatics—that, in raising Jesus from the dead, God forgave the sins of the entire world. Justification in the new "theology of the cross" is no more than a subjective, existential experience taking place in a person when he responds to the gospel or the promise. Word or proclamation is the ultimate reality behind or under which there is no external substructure either in history or in God. Absolution is the ultimate form of the word addressed to the believer. Absolution is even defined by Nestingen *as* the atonement: "[Christ] enters the conscience through the absolution, through the proclaimed Word and the administered Sacrament to effect

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[27] Jack D. Kilcrease, "Gerhard Forde's Doctrine of the Law: A Confessional Lutheran Critique," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 75, nos. 1–2 (2011): 153. See also Scott Murray, *Law, Life, and the Living God: The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 128.

[28] Forde, "The Work of Christ," in *Christian Dogmatics* 2:25. "Christ suffers the punishment due us under divine wrath. Punishment and satisfaction are more less equated."

[29] Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation,* 35. "The concrete moment of proclamation is the doing of the mighty act of God in the living present. It is not a recital of past acts, but the doing of the act itself now."

the forgiveness of sin. This is the true substitutionary atonement, happening here and now."[30] There is good reason to challenge Nestingen's claim that this is Luther's view.[31]

In a dictionary entry coauthored with Hopman, Paulson denies that the atonement is Christ offering himself to God,[32] saying, "Therefore righteousness does not win the victory over sin in Christ's obedient death on the cross by making a payment for sin to the law (as in the [Lutheran] orthodox system). Instead, righteousness defeats sin in Christ's resurrection."[33] Paulson's view is at odds with Romans 4:25: "[Jesus] was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification."[34] Here, justification is a result of the atonement and not a substitute for it. Paulson also sets forth his denial of the atonement in his *Lutheran Theology*[35] and in *The Necessary Distinction*.[36] Again, in the new "theology of the cross," atonement is no longer seen as God sacrificing Christ so that he can be righteous in forgiving sinners.[37] This position is seen by Paulson as a defect in Lutheran orthodoxy. For him, law is alien to God's essence, that is, alien to who he is and hence not eternal. Thus, there is no necessity for Christ—or, for that matter, anyone else—to appease God's wrath. In coming to terms with why Christ died, placating divine wrath is taken off the table. Removed from the essence of God is the moral component of law. Atonement is no longer a struggle within God in which his love satisfies his avenging justice so that he can justify the sinner, but it is replaced by a struggle that the Christian experiences within himself. This internal struggle is passed off as the atonement. Consider what Paulson says: "Until the law is satisfied—that is, until the sinner dies—there simply will be no atonement and reconciliation with God."[38] Atonement now "is Christ who gives himself to his opponents in the form of a simple

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[30] Nestingen, "Speaking of the End to the Law," 174.

[31] Marc Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 280–286. See also 381, "There, Luther describes Christ, who is delivered up to the wrath of the Father, bearing the punishment deserved by sinful humanity and reconciling God and humankind."

[32] Paulson and Hopman, "Atonement,"48–51.

[33] Paulson and Hopman, "Atonement," 51. See also Forde, "The Work of Christ," in *Christian Dogmatics* 2:25.

[34] My translation.

[35] Paulson's *Lutheran Theology* is listed by *Logia* as one of the twenty-five best books in the last twenty-five years (John T. Pless, "Twenty-Five Titles in Twenty-Fives Years," *Logia* 26, no. 1 [2018]: 9).

[36] Paulson, "A Royal Ass," 265–284. Cf. Nestingen, "Speaking of the End to the Law," 169–184.

[37] Paulson and Hopman, "Atonement," 51: "Atonement is not a legal transaction between the Father and the Son. Instead, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (who preaches and believes the good news) work together outside the law in mercy."

[38] Paulson and Hopman, "Atonement," 51.

promise."[39] The weight of God's action is switched from the atonement that Christ offered
at Golgotha to the moment of faith that believes the word. This position is at odds with that of the LCMS's premier theologian Francis Pieper, who wrote that "the objective reconciliation or objective justification [is] of the whole world."[40] Unless this is preached, faith cannot be created. But the new "theology of the cross" places both the atonement and reconciliation in the moment of faith, and together they define justification.

In setting forth their doctrine of atonement, Forde and Paulson make use of Luther's "happy exchange" language, in which Christ and the believer each take the place of the other. As we share in his blessedness, he shares in our misery. But they give a different twist to Luther's "happy exchange" description of the atonement. According to them, Christ shares in our misery, but does not take our place under God's wrath. If this were the case, so it is argued, law would become superior to God. According to Forde and Paulson, this cannot be allowed, because law is not eternal and does not belong to who God is. Christ shares in our sin, not by imputation but by becoming one with us.

Digression: Objective Justification

Not long after the LCMS was formed, it had to address the denial of objective or universal justification first with the Ohio Synod and then with the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod, both forerunners of the ALC and now the ELCA. In both cases, fellowship was disrupted. Rather than seeing justification first as an act of God in forgiving the world of sin in Christ's resurrection (objective justification), it was seen as the personal experience that took place only when a person heard and believed the gospel (subjective justification). Faith was made a cause of justification. Justification was to be understood as subjectively happening in the faith of the believer and not objectively in God forgiving the world in Christ. Denial of objective justification surfaced again in 1965 at Concordia Theological Seminary and was resolved when it was rejected by the faculty in the 1980s after the seminary moved to Fort Wayne. This denial of objective justification in the LCMS did not deny the vicarious satisfaction, as is now done in the new "theology of the cross"; however, both positions placed the deciding moment in faith and not in what God accomplished in Jesus.

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[39] Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 5.

[40] Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics,* 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950–1953), 2:402.

Ramifications of Denying Objective Justification in the New "Theology of the Cross"

Paulson defines Christ's atonement as his identifying with sinners. By placing himself under the law's accusations, Christ comes to see himself as a sinner and even the original sinner.[41] This identification of Christ with sinners is not substitutionary or vicarious in the sense that by placing himself under God's wrath over human misconduct, he satisfies it. This Paulson rejects as the "legal scheme" that he finds basic for the Anselmic theory of atonement, which he rejects. Of this, he says, "Theories of atonement developed as a means of making the cross of Christ fit into this legal scheme. It is true that Christ pays debts, suffers punishment and pays ransom to the old lords of this world, but not to the legal scheme rule."[42]

In support of his rejection of Christ's death as a substitutionary satisfaction, Paulson references Luther's explanation in the Small Catechism of the creed's second article, which states that Christ has redeemed the sinner not with gold or silver but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. Rather than taking this as an opportunity to affirm the Anselmic view of the atonement, which Luther intended, Paulson holds that the believer, not God, receives Christ's atoning action. "It is faith that receives this blood (not the Father in heaven, or the law, or the devil), thus reversing and bringing to a halt all sacrifice that proceeds from sinner to God."[43] All that is needed is "a simple promise: I forgive you."[44] What Paulson describes as atonement is at one level a falsely formulated doctrine of justification, but it is better designated as a doctrine of sanctification. Without belief in objective justification, subjective justification simply becomes another way of speaking of sanctification because it takes place within the believer. Pieper, on the other hand, places the atoning moment in Christ and not faith.

> The reconciliation of the world was not accomplished, either in whole or in part, by the Savior's guaranty that his disciples would lead a life "united with God," but solely and entirely by the Savior's own fulfillment of the divine Law. The Savior Himself paid the entire debt, "mathematically" and "juridically" computed, and in His resurrection received God's receipt for it; and this receipt was made out to mankind. Christ, who was given into death for our sins, was raised again for our justification (Rom. 4:25).[45]

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[41] Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 104–105.
[42] Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 91.
[43] Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 93.
[44] Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 5.
[45] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* 2:365.

In classical Lutheran theology, as presented by Pieper, Christ suffers not for his sin, but for the guilt of the sin of all. Paulson sees it otherwise. Christ "came to believe that his Father was not pleased with him, thus multiplying sin in himself just like any other original sinner who does not trust a promise from God."[46] So, for Paulson, Christ regarded himself as a sinner. His plea in Gethsemane to remove the cup is seen as his confession of his own sin and his cry of dereliction as a statement of unbelief.

> Then finally in the words of the cross, "My God, my God . . . " he made the public confession of a sinner, "why have you forsaken me ?" (Mark 15:35 NRS). Confessing made it so, and thus Christ committed his own, personal sin—not only an actual sin, but the original sin. He felt God's wrath and took that experience as something truer than God's own word of promise to him ("This is My son, with whom I am well pleased"). He looked upon himself on the cross and believed in his own unbelief.[47]

To his own sin, Christ added the sins of the entire world. Sin is seen as unbelief in not accepting the gospel or the promise.[48] In assessing his situation of being crucified, Christ let his mind-set be determined more by the misery of his death by crucifixion and less by his self-awareness that having done God's will, he was God's Son.

This bizarre and totally unacceptable interpretation cannot go unanswered. Jesus' plea to God in the moment of his greatest desperation was the most profound expression of faith ever spoken. True faith is not seen in the hour of health and prosperity but in the moment when the believer is overwhelmed by death. Jesus' enemies got it right: "He trusts in God; let God deliver him" (Matt 27:43). This God did by raising him from the dead; and so his faith that he was God's Son was confirmed (Acts 13:33).

Paulson's view that atonement takes place in the faith of the believer resembles Osiander's view that justification is only a subjective experience. He denies objective justification and holds only to subjective justification, which is, as explained above, only sanctification. Nevertheless, Paulson distances himself first from what he calls the ontological view of Osiander, that "sinners become righteous in themselves," and then from the Lutheran orthodox view that sinners "can be

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[46] Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 105.

[47] Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 105.

[48] This view was proposed by Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation*, 124, and now also by Joel P. Meyer in the *Concordia Journal:* "Our root sin is not to make bad choices according to a standard of right and wrong, good or bad. Our fundamental sin is that we do not expect good things from God" (Meyer, "Justification as the Ground and Goal of the Christian Life in Luther's Catechisms," 46).

declared righteous, forensically as in a court of law."[49] His rejection of forensic justification raises concerns. Pieper enumerates six objections to forensic justification[50] and then adds this telling condemnation: "Those who deny the juridical character of reconciliation and of its appropriation are thus engaged, consciously or unconsciously, in the evil work of destroying the entire Christian doctrine, as it is revealed in Holy Scripture."[51] By juridical, Pieper expressly means *actus forensis*. Paulson will have none of this.

For Paulson, justification happens in the present moment and so is properly described as existential. For him, justification "is faith in Christ in the form of a promise made by Christ, and conveyed to you by a preacher." And "Christ is present in faith, but in a hidden way, that is by means of a simple word. Christ is heard, not seen; even when the disciples had him in plain sight."[52] Here we have to ask if Paulson is proposing that the disciples' witness to the resurrected Jesus was more a matter of hearing than seeing.[53]

Again we come back to the major flaw of the new "theology of the cross": that by redefinition, the atonement is denied. This follows from denying that law belongs to God's essence. Without the inner compulsion of fulfilling his own law, God simply forgives the sinner. To this, Pieper provides a more than adequate response: "Luther states that it is paganism (the faith 'of the Turks and Jews') to imagine that God is gracious to men 'without cost'—without the Vicarious Satisfaction."[54] In the new "theology of the cross," God forgives simply because he is God, without the necessity of propitiation. What Pieper wrote more than a century ago of the Socinians (Unitarians) is prophetically applicable to the new "theology of the cross": "Men have asserted that God can forgive sins by His almighty power and therefore satisfaction to be rendered by Christ is superfluous."[55]

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[49] Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 124.

[50] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* 2:351–355.

[51] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* 2:355.

[52] Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 126. On this thought, he converges with Oswald Bayer, though one is not dependent on the other. See Trygve Wyller, *Glaube und autonome Welt: Diskussion eines Grundproblems der neueren systematischen Theologie mit Blick auf Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Oswald Bayer und K. E. Løgstrup* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 90–145, esp. 142.

[53] Paulson's right of center position in the ELCA has been reason enough to provide for him an audience in the LCMS. He has contributed to *Logia*, been published by the Luther Academy, and contributed to Concordia Publishing House's recently published *The Necessary Distinction,* where he sets forth his view that the law is not eternal. Cf. Paulson, "A Royal Ass," 265–284, here at 271; Steven D. Paulson, "The *Simul* and the Two Kingdoms," *Logia* 24, no. 4 (2016): 17–26.

[54] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* 2:347. See also C. F. W. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, trans. Christian C. Tiews (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 196. "[God] has laid the burden of our sins upon Him and given Him up to be crucified for our sins."

[55] Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* 2:351.

The Rise of the New "Theology of the Cross" and Responses to It

Forde began proposing his "theology of the cross" at least by 1969,[56] when the LCMS had begun to recognize the devastating effects of higher critical methods and the accompanying neoorthodoxy at its St. Louis seminary. In his locus on Christology in the Braaten-Jenson *Christian Dogmatics* in 1984, Forde further developed his views.[57] After his death in 2005, his essays continued to be published.[58]

Scott R. Murray may have been among the first in the LCMS to see the fundamental flaws in Forde's theology in his 1998 doctoral dissertation, published in 2002 as *Law, Life, and the Living God: The Third Use of the Law in American Lutheranism.*[59] In 2009, Jack D. Kilcrease presented a polemical tour de force against Forde's denial of the atonement in his doctoral dissertation.[60] In 2011, he took on Forde's doctrine of the law in a *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (*CTQ)* article.[61] And he also addressed Forde's theology in a lecture at the symposia series of Concordia Theological Seminary—Fort Wayne in 2011, which was published in *CTQ* in 2012.[62] Without specific reference to Forde, but with him in mind, Kilcrease evaluated historical understandings of the death of Jesus in *The Self-Donation of God* in 2013, arguing against Forde that for Lutherans, Christ's death was a propitiation.[63] In 2018, he extended his critique of Forde in *The Work of Christ: Revisionist Doctrine and the Confessional Lutheran Response.*[64]

Another response to a theology along Forde's lines comes from Nathan Rinne who takes issue with Nicholas Hopman's interpretation of Luther. In his article "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations* and *lex aeterna*," Hopman proposed that Luther did not believe the law was eternal.[65] Yet as Rinne shows, what presents itself as scholarly Luther research may not be so.

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[56] Gerhard Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969).

[57] Forde, "The Work of Christ," in *Christian Dogmatics* 2:5–104.

[58] Gerhard O. Forde, "Sacraments as Eschatological Gift and Promise," *Lutheran Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2017): 310–319.

[59] Murray, *Law, Life, and the Living God*, 123–132.

[60] Jack D. Kilcrease, "The Self-Donation of God: Gerhard Forde and the Question of Atonement in the Lutheran Tradition." PhD diss., Marquette University, 2009.

[61] Kilcrease, "Gerhard Forde's Doctrine of the Law," 151–179.

[62] Jack D. Kilcrease, "Gerhard Forde's Theology of Atonement and Justification: A Confessional Lutheran Response," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 76, nos. 3–4 (2012): 269–293.

[63] Jack D. Kilcrease, *The Self-Donation of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013). For a thorough discussion of Christ suffering under the law in Luther's theology, see Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 280–286.

[64] Jack D. Kilcrease, *The Work of Christ: Revisionist Doctrine and the Confessional Lutheran Response* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), esp. 105–170.

[65] In this issue of *CTQ*, Nathan Rinne (librarian at Concordia University, St. Paul, MN) takes issue with Hopman's reading of Luther. See below in this issue, pp. 65–82.

Forde presents his theology as Luther's. Hence, his chapter in the Braaten-Jenson *Christian Dogmatics* is called "Luther's 'Theology of the Cross.' " Paulson, Wengert, Nestingen, and Hopman present Forde's "theology of the cross"[66] as if it were an acceptable and academically informed interpretation of Luther's theology. They have been so successful that denial of the law's third use has come to be seen as a mark of loyalty to Luther. *Lex semper accusat*, ripped out of context, has come to be revered as incontrovertible truth. Since God forgives without Christ offering himself as a sacrifice under the law—what Paulson calls "the legal scheme"—their theology can be summed up with "God's gift for you," a phrase that exhibits the new "theology of the cross's" confusion of justification with the atonement. For Lutherans, justification is by grace, but atonement came with a high price, which, according to Luther's Small Catechism, is Christ's blood. Put Luther to the side and let the words of the Holy Spirit speak for themselves: "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet 1:18). Hear also the words of Jesus, "This my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (Matt 26:28).

This new theology could be rectified by understanding the gospel as the proclamation that Christ has both actively and passively fulfilled the law, but this is something that Paulson and the others explicitly reject. Since law does not have a fixed place in God, it does not lay down the framework in which Christ accomplishes his redemptive work. For Paulson, law and gospel are not complementary, and so proclamation of Christ's fulfillment of the law is not the gospel.[67]

In a book review in *National Review*, David French, who is not identified as a theologian, writes, "Christians are familiar with the concepts of justification and sanctification. Justification is the moment when God—through His Son's atoning sacrifice—declares man righteous in His sight. Sanctification is the lifelong process of spirit battling flesh, of the redeemed man's journey to holiness."[68] In the new "theology of the cross," atonement, justification, and sanctification are reduced to the moment of hearing and believing.

Conclusion

In this world of sin, law comes as accusation to the old Adam within each of us. *Lex semper accusat*, but in Eden this was not so, and in the next world it will not be so. By disregarding the command that was a call to faith, to take God at his word,

[66] Nestingen, "Speaking of the End to the Law," 169–184.

[67] Paulson, "A Royal Ass," 271. "Nor is God . . . a being who 'corresponds to Himself' in the end—which is a version of making God into nothing but the eternal Law itself."

[68] David French, "Charity in an Angry Time," *National Review* 69, no. 22 (2017): 46.

Adam was responsible for turning the law as a description of God's positive relation to man into an accusation that no man but Christ alone could resolve. In Adam, "you shall" became "you shall not."[69] By Christ's fulfilling the law's requirements and suffering its accusations and penalties in our stead, he returned our perception of the law to its original, pristine condition as a perfect revelation of who God is and how Adam saw it before he transgressed. Christ accomplished what God demanded, and so the law's threats were transformed into gospel. The gospel is nothing else but the proclamation, that by his life and death, Christ absorbed the law into himself. It was not only a formal fulfilling of law, but he transposed the law into a brilliance far beyond what Adam knew. Now the law is christologically fulfilled and defined. So, the third use of the law is not only that believers refrain from moral wrong, but also that they do the works that Christ did. Here, Luther should speak.

> Natural man would prefer that there be no law, because he is not able to perform what it demands. The sin that has been committed is the second tyrant, and it brings forth the third, namely, death and damnation. Who could be happy when he is answerable to those three? But now they have been vanquished, the Law is fulfilled by Christ and then also by us who have been endowed by the Holy Spirit. He adds the courage so that we may glory even in our sufferings (Rom. 5:3), and thus the Law is no longer outrageous in its dictates but an agreeable companion. The Law itself indeed is not changed, but we are.[70]

If Christians now love the law, we can take this a step further: Christ does the works of the law in believers. *Simul iustus et peccator* describes our condition. Until we die, we live in two diametrically opposing realities: in one, we are shown our sin, and in the other, we are free from the law's accusations because we are in Christ. Denial of the third use of the law does not in each case translate into a redefinition of God as one who no longer requires the death of Jesus as atonement for sin. But it does allow it. And a denial of the eternal, unchanging nature of the moral law of God (FC SD II 50) demands it.

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[69] See Luther's discussion of the law in Eden in his *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545/1544–1554), AE 1:103–110. One should not look to Luther for first, second, and third uses of the law. Yet, he does condemn as equivocation that the law has the same meaning in each case. So he writes, "That the Law before sin is one thing and the Law after sin is something else" (109–110).

[70] Luther, *Lectures on Isaiah* (1528), AE 16:98–99.

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Johann Gerhard, the Socinians, and Modern Rejections of Substitutionary Atonement

Jack D. Kilcrease

I. Introduction

Among the many historic Christian doctrines that have received a cold reception in post-Enlightenment theology, the doctrine of substitutionary atonement stands out particularly as an object of derision. This assault on the orthodox view of atonement has generally taken a two-pronged form. First, it is typically argued that Christ's death as a payment for sin presupposes a negative picture of God as child-abuser[1] or vindictive moral bookkeeper.[2] Second, an argument is mounted in favor of a view of the divine-human relationship that is more "loving" and "affirming." Nevertheless, the logic of the more "affirming" view of the divine-human relationship is inexorably tied to an implicit (or, in many cases, not so implicit) legalism.[3]

The last point is particularly salient from those operating within the confessional Lutheran paradigm. For Lutheran Christians, modern flights from substitutionary atonement are highly problematic not only because they directly contradict numerous and clear statements of the Bible and the Book of Concord[4] but also because they endanger the chief article of Christianity: justification through faith alone. Put succinctly, without a Christ who genuinely

[1] See this frequently cited article, which perfectly embodies this line of argument: Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World?" in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique, ed.* Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole Bohn (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 1–29.

[2] Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 174.

[3] See J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement, 2nd* ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 129–218.

[4] See Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2003), 179–217; Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 342–382; John Schaller, *Biblical Christology: A Study in Lutheran Dogmatics* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1981), 135–187.

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fulfills the law on behalf of humanity (both actively and passively), there would be no alien righteousness for justifying faith to receive. As is evident from the soft-moralism from the opponents of substitutionary atonement, rejection of substitutionary atonement inevitably leads to a form of works-righteousness.

In this, as in many other matters, Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) anticipated and provided important resources for contemporary Lutherans to combat such destructive teachings. Indeed, recognizing the deep connection between the work of Christ and the article of justification, Gerhard devotes a significant portion of his Theological Commonplace on justification to the early modern challenges that face the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. Such challenges are analogous to, if not the same as, those that we face in our own environment.

In his seventeenth-century environment, Gerhard's main opponents were the Socinians, a group of early Unitarians operating out of the kingdom of Poland.[5] As will be observed below in the writings of the Socinians and Gerhard's response to them, errors in the doctrine of atonement ultimately often express less immediately recognizable errors in the doctrine of God (among others). Examining these sources and their arguments will grant us an important perspective from which we can observe how a similar logic of belief has pervaded modern rejections of substitutionary atonement. Although it is highly questionable that Socinianism served as a direct inspiration for modern rejections of substitutionary atonement, it will nevertheless be shown that the Socinians present similar patterns of argumentation and therefore also offer similar aberrations in other doctrines of the Christian faith.

II. The Teachings of the Racovian Catechism on Atonement and Justification

Among the many Socinian sources that Gerhard cites, the Racovian Catechism (1605) is the one that features most prominently. For this reason, we will examine some of its contents below before discussing Gerhard's response to its teaching on atonement.

The Racovian Catechism was the product of the Racovian Academy in Raków, in what is modern-day Poland.[6] The authors of the work (Valentinus Smalcius, Hieronim Moskorzowski, and Johannes Völkel[7]) were part of an antitrinitarian

[5] Charles A. Howe, *For Faith and Freedom: A Short History of Unitarianism in Europe* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1997), 61–78.

[6] Piotr Wilczek, *Polonia Reformata: Essays on the Polish Reformation(s)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 57–59.

[7] Wilczek, *Polonia Reformata*, 58.

break-off sect from the Reformed Polish Church. This break-off sect is often referred to as the Polish Brethren or Ecclesia Minor.[8]

Fausto Sozzini (latinized as "Socinus," from whom Socinianism takes its name) found little more than persecution throughout Italy and Switzerland for his Unitarian beliefs, until he made his way to Poland.[9] Poland possessed a monarch who was supportive of religious toleration.[10] There, Sozzini took it upon himself to convince the Ecclesia Minor to reject their Arian beliefs in favor of his pure Unitarianism.[11] After having established the Racovian Academy, the Ecclesia Minor published the Racovian Catechism as a confession of faith and apparently also as a means of spreading Socinian belief throughout Europe. For example, it was sent to King James I in England as a way of planting Unitarian belief in that nation.[12]

For our purposes, a word must be said regarding the theological method of the Racovian Catechism. By and large, the Catechism's orientation might be described as biblicistic rationalism.[13] The authors typically begin a section by appealing to a magisterial (rather than ministerial) use of reason as the basis of their own position or as a basis of attacking a historic Christian belief. After reaching their conclusion through a rationalistic argumentation, they then attempt to expound Scripture in support of this conclusion. As might be expected, the authors of the Catechism interpret Scripture in a biblicistic manner, that is, one that does not take into consideration the tradition of the ancient church or its creeds. Nevertheless, the authors make an attempt to mimic the language of biblical-creedal Christianity as much as possible. To say the least, many of their scriptural arguments rely on ad hoc reasoning and are very strained. Indeed, modern liberal critics of Scripture would probably not even accept these arguments. In part, this seems to be due to the fact that unlike modern Unitarians, the early Socinians still held fairly traditional Christian beliefs about the inspiration and authority of the Bible while simultaneously holding to rationalistic beliefs that had come about apart from any engagement with the Scriptures.[14]

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[8] Phillip Hewett, *Racovia: An Early Liberal Religious Community* (Providence: Blackstone Editions, 2004), 20–21.

[9] Jerzy Kloczowski, *A History of Polish Christianity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 105.

[10] Marian Hillar, "From the Polish Socinians to the American Constitution," *A Journal from the Radical Reformation: A Testimony to Biblical Unitarianism* 4, no. 3 (1997): 22–24.

[11] Howe, *For Faith and Freedom*, 62–63, 65, 74.

[12] Wilczek, *Polonia Reformata,* 231.

[13] See Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:394; Klaus Scholder, *The Birth of Modern Critical Theology: Origins and Problems of Biblical Criticism in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Trinity International Press, 2013), 27–28.

[14] See *The Racovian Catechism*, trans. Thomas Rees (London: Paternoster Row, 1818), 1–19; Wilczek, *Polonia Reformata,* 47–48.

The doctrine of the atonement fundamentally deals with the question of how God re-establishes his relationship with humanity by removing the barrier of sin. How one defines God will necessarily inform how one interprets the divine solution to sin. Therefore, it is worth beginning our discussion with the Racovian Catechism's doctrine of God. When called upon to define God's fundamental nature, the Catechism answers the question thus:

> What do you understand by the term God? The supreme Lord of all things. And whom do you denominate Supreme? Him, who, *in his own right, has dominion over all things*, and is dependent upon no other being in the administration of his government. What does this dominion comprise? A right and supreme authority to determine what he may choose (and he cannot choose what is in its own nature evil and unjust) in respect to us and to all other things, and also in respect to those matters which no other authority can reach; such as are our thoughts, though concealed in the inmost recesses of our hearts; for *which he can at pleasure ordain laws, and appoint rewards and punishments*.[15]

What comes across most strongly in this definition of God is the notion that he is an infinitely powerful and utterly autonomous being. As such, God establishes the law, thereby rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked as he sees fit. Indeed, although the authors seem to imply that God possesses fundamental attributes ("he cannot choose what is in *its own nature* evil and unjust"), they also suggest that he sets standards of reward and punishment in a somewhat arbitrary manner in accordance with his own supreme freedom ("*he can at pleasure* ordain laws, and appoint rewards and punishments"). Hence, much like many in the Reformed tradition,[16] the Socinians defined God on the basis of his ability to exercise an uninhibited sovereignty.

As for Luther, although he would no doubt agree that God is sovereign over his creation (particularly in his discussion of "the hidden God"), in many of his writings, he argues that God's most fundamental nature is revealed in his self-communicating and loving triune agency in creation and redemption:

> These are the three persons and one God, *who has given himself to us all wholly and completely*, with all that he is and has. The Father *gives himself to us*, with heaven and earth and all the creatures, in order that they may serve us and benefit us. But this gift has become obscured and useless through Adam's fall.

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[15] *Racovian Catechism*, 25. Emphasis added.

[16] See a brief and enlightening summary in Donald K. McKim, "A Reformed Perspective on the Mission of the Church in Society," in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 362.

> Therefore the Son himself *subsequently gave himself and bestowed all his works*, sufferings, wisdom, and righteousness, and reconciled us to the Father, in order that restored to life and righteousness, we might also know and have the Father and his gifts.[17]

After listing the divine attributes in a manner consummate with the tradition of Classical Theism, the Racovian Catechism begins its polemic against the doctrine of the Trinity on predictably rationalistic grounds:

> Prove to me that in the one essence of God, there is but one Person? This indeed may be seen from hence, that the essence of God is one, not in kind but in number. Where it cannot, in any way, contain a plurality of persons, since a person is nothing else than individual intelligent essence. Wherever, then, there exist three numerical persons, there must necessarily, in like manner, be reckoned three individual persons.[18]

This argument against the Trinity is interesting on several levels. First, it illustrates the rationalism of the Catechism, as well as its lack of serious engagement with the catholic tradition of the church. The Catechism's argument may rightly provoke the reader to ask (along with the church fathers) why the authors do not take into consideration the fact that there are examples in the natural world of genuine substantial unity with a simultaneous plurality of centers of identity (fountain and stream, sun and rays of light, etc.).[19] If there are natural phenomena that analogically correspond to orthodox Christianity's understanding of the Trinity's unity and harmony in difference, how could one rationally rule this out as existing in the realm of the divine?

Second, it should be noted that the authors' argument hinges on the definition of "person" ("individual intelligent essence") developed by Boethius in his The Trinity Is One God, Not Three Gods (ca. AD 520–521).[20] Although, broadly speaking, this definition is biblically accurate, it is also in many respects ambiguous. Put succinctly, the definition is problematic insofar as it could characterize either

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[17] Martin Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528): vol. 37, p. 366, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress Press, 1957–1986); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE. Emphasis added.

[18] *Racovian Catechism*, 33.

[19] See Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 325*, vol. 3, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 603.

[20] Boethius, "The Trinity Is One God, Not Three Gods" in *The Theological Tractates*, trans. H. F. Stewart and E. K. Rand (London: William Heinemann, 1918), 2–37.

the whole of the divine substance or an individual person within the Godhead.[21] Not only did such ambiguity create significant problems for the western discussion of the Trinity in the Middle Ages but also, as Richard Muller has shown, the Socinians exploited ambiguity of the definition to their advantage in their debates with the Protestant Scholastics.[22]

When addressing the question of Christology, the authors of the Racovian Catechism assert that although Jesus was certainly miraculously born of the Virgin Mary,[23] he was nevertheless a mere human and in no way divine. Beyond the aforementioned argument against the Trinity, the authors state that, logically speaking, a person cannot subsist in two natures. In order for a person to possess a nature fully and completely, that nature must be predicated of that person "absolutely." Therefore, it would be a contradiction in terms for the Son to possess a divine and human nature absolutely (thereby making him *vere deus et vere homo* simultaneously), insofar as each nature would necessarily qualify and relativize the absolute reality of the other.[24] This of course raises the issue as to why the New Testament repeatedly refers to the man Jesus as God (John 1; Heb 1; Phil 2, etc.). According to the Catechism, Jesus is called God insofar as he is an exalted human being who exercises sovereignty as the ruler of the whole universe.[25] Again, it should be observed that the Socinians define divinity by its ability to exercise autonomous authority.

When they discuss the work of Christ, the Socinians adapt Calvin's concept of the threefold office of Christ to suit their purposes.[26] Whereas for most of the theologies of the magisterial reformers the accent falls most heavily on the sacerdotal office of Christ,[27] the Racovian Catechism emphasizes the prophetic office.[28] The authors see Christ as the revealer of the higher and better law than can be found in the Old Testament. Likewise, in contrast to the understanding of the magisterial

[21] Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:34.

[22] Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:79, 178.

[23] *Racovian Catechism*, 52–53.

[24] *Racovian Catechism*, 55–56. See discussion in Wilczek, *Polonia Reformata,* 48–49.

[25] *Racovian Catechism*, 55.

[26] See John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.15.1–6; John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, trans. and eds., *Calvin: The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 1:494–503; *Racovian Catechism*, 169.

[27] Regarding Luther, see Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 201–223; Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development,* trans. and ed. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 223–228. For Calvin's understanding of the work of Christ, see Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 158–166.

[28] *Racovian Catechism*, 168–173.

reformers,[29] the Socinians do not understand the ethical teachings of the beatitudes as Christ's purification of the law, as it was already articulated in the Old Testament, from false interpretations. Rather, the Catechism's authors insist that Christ genuinely revealed a higher and better moral law.[30] In addition, Christ's law also contains within it the promise of salvation and eternal life for those who obey it. The Catechism argues that although the Old Testament prophets hoped for eter-nal life, there are no genuine promises of eternal life in the Old Testament.[31]

In the sections on justification and theological anthropology, the Racovian Catechism explains how this view of the law fits into the Socinians' soteriology. They reject the doctrine of original sin in favor of a belief that humans can follow the law by their own efforts.[32] They qualify this by admitting that in the postlapsarian world, humans are somewhat habituated to sin.[33] Nevertheless, they still suggest that through self-discipline and the aid of the divine Spirit, humans can obey the law of Christ sufficiently to achieve salvation.[34]

From this, it logically follows that the Catechism necessarily rejects the Reformation's sola fide.[35] Of course, humans should have faith in God, in that they must trust in him and believe the truths of the faith. Nevertheless, the more important point is that faith gives rise to an obedience (they cite Jas 2:26 at this point) that adheres to Jesus' newly revealed divine law.[36] Obedience to Jesus' newly revealed law is the basis of our inheriting eternal life, as opposed to the ceremonial law of Moses.[37] Ultimately, this is the Catechism's interpretation of the distinction that Paul makes between law and gospel.[38]

In light of this highly legalistic and Pelagian notion of salvation, one is compelled to wonder what conceivable rationale Christ's death on the cross might have. It should first be observed that the sections on the death of Christ and his sacerdotal office are at times somewhat confusing. As noted earlier, the authors of the Catechism have a tendency of trying to mimic the language of orthodox Christian teaching, even when they clearly attack and reject it. Hence, there is a great deal of talk of "Christ's death for sinners," along with much other language that

[29] See Luther, *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)* (1532), AE 21:74–115. See Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.8.7; McNeill and Battles, *Calvin*, 1:373–374.

[30] *Racovian Catechism*, 173–249.

[31] *Racovian Catechism*, 277–284.

[32] *Racovian Catechism*, 325–326.

[33] *Racovian Catechism*, 326.

[34] *Racovian Catechism*, 330.

[35] *Racovian Catechism*, 320–321.

[36] *Racovian Catechism*, 321–322.

[37] *Racovian Catechism*, 322.

[38] *Racovian Catechism*, 324.

sounds (if not read carefully) as if the Catechism is teaching substitutionary atonement.[39]

Nevertheless, the authors eventually launch a lengthy polemic against the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. Christ taught that by following the divinely revealed law, one would attain eternal life. Nevertheless, the world rejected Christ and crucified him. The crucifixion reveals the testing that true and obedient believers will have to endure if they are going to attain the eternal life. In the same manner, the resurrection reveals the eternal life that believers will attain if they are obedient and suffer for Christ's law.[40] Passages such as Romans 3:25 and 1 John 2:2, which speak about Christ's "propitiation" on the altar of the cross, are reinterpreted as "expiation" insofar as Christ's death "removed" sin, that is, revealed the Father's will to remove sin by forgiveness.[41] Beyond the promise of eternal life, the resurrection represents the Father's public stamp of approval on the teachings of Christ.[42]

When they present the traditional Anselmic rationale (generally shared by both Roman Catholics and the reformers alike[43]) for the substitutionary nature of Christ's death, the Racovian Catechism's authors criticize it on the basis of its supposedly improper understanding of the divine attributes of mercy and justice:

> They [orthodox Christians] say that there are in God, by nature, justice and mercy: that as it is the property of mercy to forgive sins, so is it, they state, the property of justice to punish every sin whatever. But since God willed that both his mercy and justice should be satisfied together, he devised this plan, that Christ should suffer death in our stead, and thus satisfy God's justice. . . . This reason [offered above] bears the appearance of plausibility, but in reality has in it nothing of truth or solidity; and indeed involves a self-contradiction. For although we confess, and hence exceedingly rejoice, that our God is wonderfully merciful and just, nevertheless we deny that there are in him the mercy and justice which our adversaries imagine, since the one would wholly annihilate the other. . . . But as it is evident God forgives and punishes whenever he deems fit, it appears that the mercy which commands to spare,

[39] E.g., see comments in *Racovian Catechism*, 297–298, 350.

[40] *Racovian Catechism*, 297–300.

[41] *Racovian Catechism*, 318–319.

[42] *Racovian Catechism*, 301. See a good summary of Socinian views of atonement in L. W. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement* (New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1920), 281–290.

[43] Anselm of Canterbury, "Cur Deus Homo?" 1.12, in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, trans. and ed. Eugene R. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 120–121.

> and the justice which commands to destroy, do so exist in him as that both are tempered by his will.[44]

As can be observed, they argue on rationalistic grounds (typical of the Racovian Catechism) that if the Anselmic claim—that God is both just and merciful in the absolute sense—is granted, then these divine attributes would simply cancel each other.

Several other things should be noticed about the passage cited above. First, the idea that mercy and justice are not absolute in God, but rather "temper" each other in their application to the divine-human relationship, leads inexorably down the path of works-righteousness. In other words, in practice, the authors' claim about the divine attributes results in a conception of a God who is perhaps less inclined to punish sin with death automatically (Rom 6:23) but nevertheless also expects humans to strive for their own moral improvement as a condition of his leniency and granting of salvation. Indeed, one of the chief arguments the Racovian Catechism makes against substitutionary atonement is that if humans are told they cannot earn their salvation, they will not strive to do good works.[45] From this, it becomes clear that in rejecting penal substitution, the Socinians do not eliminate the problem of the law and its judgment. Rather, they simply pass the problem on to sinners in the form of a new legalism.

Second, it should not go unnoticed that a significant part of the Catechism's rationale for the rejection of substitutionary atonement is God's ability to exercise arbitrary authority ("God forgives and punishes whenever he deems fit"). We have previously seen this tendency in earlier statements of the Catechism. As a distant, isolated monarch, the Socinian God may simply judge and show mercy without exercising faithfulness to his own eternal nature, or for that matter, his previously issued commands and promises.

III. Gerhard's Response to Socinian Atonement Theology

Gerhard addresses the Socinian rejection of substitutionary atonement in his Theological Commonplace on justification. He begins the work by refuting the Roman Catholic understanding of the terms *justification* and *grace* as taught by the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and the premier Catholic apologist of the early modern period, Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621).[46] Throughout this discussion, Gerhard borrows terms from schematization provided by Aristotelian causation

[44] *Racovian Catechism*, 307.

[45] *Racovian Catechism*, 306.

[46] Johann Gerhard, *On Justification*, Theological Commonplaces XIX, trans. Richard Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018), 13–52.

theory (formal, material, instrumental, final[47]) to describe the manner in which God effects justification.[48]

In this section, Gerhard designates Christ and his death on the cross as the "meritorious cause" of our justification.[49] Although this is obviously not a category of causation found in Aristotle's metaphysics, it is, interestingly enough, one found in the sixth session of the Council of Trent (i.e., the decree on justification).[50] Moreover, although Gerhard repeatedly notes that there are significant disagreements between his Roman Catholic opponents and himself regarding the nature of jus-tification (i.e., imputed vs. infused righteousness), he also affirms that there is a broad consensus between them regarding the fact that Christ's substitutionary death on the cross was a necessary condition for salvation.[51]

For Gerhard, the broad consensus between Catholics and Lutherans on the death of Christ stands in stark contrast to the heretical views of the Socinians: "All agree that Christ our Mediator and Redeemer is the meritorious cause of our justification, that is, all except the Neophotinians."[52] For those unfamiliar, it should be noted that Gerhard typically refers to the Socinians as "Neophotinians" or simply "Photinians."[53] Photinus was a fourth-century heretical bishop who taught a form of modalism and denied the incarnation.[54] In light of his deep study of the church fathers,[55] Gerhard thought of the Socinians in large measure as being a mere revival of the ancient heresy of Photinus. Later, Gerhard also connected the Socinian

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[47] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 5.2, section 1013a in *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, trans. W. D. Ross (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1984), 533.

[48] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 27, 56. Also see Johann Gerhard, *Annotations on the First Six Chapters of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Paul Rydecki (Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 2012), 166.

[49] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 56–57.

[50] *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. Theodore Alois Buckley (London: George Routledge & Co., 1851), 33.

[51] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 53–54.

[52] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 54.

[53] E.g., see Johann Gerhard, *On the Nature of God and On the Most Holy Mystery of the Trinity*, Theological Commonplaces I–II, trans. Richard Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 295.

[54] See description in R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318–381* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 236–238.

[55] See Benjamin Mayes, "*Lumina, Non Numina*: Patristic Authority According to Lutheran Arch-Theologian Johann Gerhard," in *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Muller on the Maturation of a Theological Tradition*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor, David Sytsma, and Jason Zuidema (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 457–470. Also see Johann Gerhard, *Confessio Catholica*, 2 vols. (Jena, 1634–1637) and Johann Gerhard, *Patrologia sive de primitivae ecclesiae christianae doctorum vita ac lucubrationibus opusculum* (Leipzig, 1653).

teaching with Peter Abelard's (1079–1142) development of the moral influence theory of the atonement.[56]

Gerhard considers the fact of Christ's death for our sins to be so unassailable that he quips that the teaching of the Socinians does not even rise to the level of heresy, but is rather pure insanity: "In the previous century they vomited up this blasphemous error, or rather not so much an error as a madness."[57] Gerhard argues that the heresy the Socinians promote is rooted in two other errors found in earlier theologians. The first is the antitrinitarianism of Calvin's most famous opponent, Michael Servetus (ca. 1511–1553):[58]

> The occasion for this blasphemous error is twofold. (I) The denial of Christ's divinity. Around AD 1532, when the Spaniard Miguel Servetus renewed the error of Paul of Samosata and Photinus concerning the deity of Christ, those who followed in the footsteps of that Neophotinian began to deny Christ's satisfaction, which was offered for our sins, along with His divinity. Since a mere man could not pay a ransom equivalent to our sins, once they have denied Christ's divinity it is then easy for them to deny His satisfaction.[59]

Gerhard goes on to argue that the second basis of the Socinian heresy was the adaptation of the Reformed tradition's tendency to see God as exercising arbitrary authority:

> [The second basis of the Socinian heresy is] [t]he absolute decree of election, which the Calvinists champion. You see, if it is by the absolute will of God that those to be saved are elected to eternal life, then surely it is also by the absolute will of God that their sins are forgiven them—or at least were able to be forgiven—and there would be no need for Christ's satisfaction and merit. See Grawer (*Dissertatio opposita Ostorado*, p. 8) where he lucidly demonstrates that, as long as the dogma of an absolute decree of predestination stands, it is impossible to solidly refute the error of the Neophotinians. Here I quote Calvin's words (*Instit.*, bk. 2, ch. 17, sect. 1): "As for me, I confess that if someone wanted to set Christ against the judgment of God simply and of Himself, there would be no place for merit since there is no worthiness found in man which could propitiate God."[60]

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[56] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 55. See Peter Abelard, "Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans," in *Scholastic Miscellany*, 276–287.

[57] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 54.

[58] See Roland Bainton, *Hunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Servetus, 1511–1553* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960).

[59] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 56.

[60] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 56.

Gerhard's first observation regarding the source of the Socinian heresy is straightforward insofar as it draws on the classical Christian rationale for the incarnation. Jesus had to be God to die on our behalf on the cross. God does not owe himself a debt of obedience, and only God can forgive sins.[61] Likewise, only God could overcome death and renew his image within us.[62] Gerhard's second point is subtler and, in fact, intricately connected with larger medieval and Protestant Scholastic discussions regarding the freedom of divine will and its bearing on the necessity of the incarnation and the atonement.

Although there was generally a consensus in the medieval period that Christ's substitutionary death on the cross was the cause of human salvation,[63] there was nevertheless a significant disagreement over how necessary it was for God to act in this manner to redeem humanity. On one end of the spectrum, Anselm (1033–1109) taught in his work *Cur Deus Homo?* that because God is by nature the highest good and governor of the moral order of the universe, the crucifixion was a necessary and fitting condition for salvation. Ultimately, insofar as God is by nature both merciful and just, he could not bring about redemption without expressing both attributes in the redemption worked through the crucifixion.[64] By contrast, Duns Scotus (ca. 1266–1308) held that God's will was considerably more capable of arbitrary action. According to at least one reading of his theology of atonement, no action possesses intrinsic merit, not even the work of the God-man. Therefore, Christ's death on the cross was sufficient only because God accepted it as such (*acceptatio divina*).[65]

In late medieval theology, these differing concepts of the necessity of atonement fed into differing interpretations of the distinction between God's "absolute power" (*potentia absoluta*) and "ordered power" (*potentia ordinata*). William of Ockham (1285–1347) followed in a similar trajectory of the fellow Franciscan Scotus and argued that God could do all possible things (i.e., things that were not inherently contradictory, such as to create square circles) before he created the world.

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[61] Anselm of Canterbury, "Cur Deus Homo?" 2.6–7, in *Scholastic Miscellany*, 150–152.

[62] Athanasius, "On the Incarnation of the Word," trans. Archibald Robertson, in *The Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward R. Hardy (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 52–110.

[63] Gwenfair M. Walters, "The Atonement in Medieval Theology," in *The Glory of the Atonement*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank James III (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 239–262.

[64] Anselm of Canterbury, "Cur Deus Homo?" 1.12, in *Scholastic Miscellany*, 120–121. Also see Burnell F. Eckardt, *Anselm and Luther on Atonement: Was it "Necessary"?* (San Francisco: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).

[65] Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 104. Also see discussion of the acceptance theory of the atonement in Robert Mackintosh, *Historic Theories of Atonement* (London; New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1920), 110–111.

Nevertheless, after establishing creation and the order of redemption, the Lord could only exercise his divine omnipotence in accordance with his covenantal promises (*pactum*).[66] By contrast, Thomas Aquinas (who recognized a similar distinction in the two divine powers) opines that even in acting in accordance with his absolute power, God would be bound to behave in accordance with his eternal transcendental properties, such as wisdom and goodness. Hence, for the Angelic Doctor (Aquinas), God's establishment of his ordered power was by no means arbitrary, but it expressed his eternal nature as goodness and wisdom itself.[67]

How one understands the boundaries of God's absolute and ordered power obviously has a great deal of bearing on how one understands the necessity of the work of Christ. On one end of the spectrum, Anselm held that God could not act in a way that does not accord with his nature. For Anselm (as well as Aquinas), in creating the world and establishing the order of redemption, God's absolute power was still ordered by his transcendental attributes. Hence, the substitutionary price of the work of Christ is not arbitrary but a necessary expression of God's inherent qualities as God. By contrast, for Scotus and Ockham, God's actions in establishing the order of redemption were almost purely arbitrary.

This medieval discussion provides a valuable background of different theological schools that emerged in the Reformation and post-Reformation era. Indeed, the reformers, and the Protestant Scholastics after them, did not rethink everything in the medieval theological system. Rather, they largely limited themselves to reformulating the doctrines of justification, the sacraments, and the church. Much of the rest of their theology drew significantly from pre-Reformation models as a means of providing a complete system of doctrine for their students.[68] This is evidently the case for Gerhard as well. Anyone casually familiar with Gerhard's writings will recognize his deep engagement with the patristic and medieval traditions on every page of his Theological Commonplaces.

In light of this, it should be noted that Gerhard, along with the other Lutheran and Reformed Scholastics, not only accepted the distinction between God's absolute and ordered power[69] but also extended the same principles found in the medieval

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[66] Helmar Junghans, *Ockham im Lichte der neueren Forschung* (Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1968), 233–243; Armand Augustine Maurer, *The Philosophy of William of Ockham in the Light of Its Principles* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 259–263; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 3: 69–70.

[67] *Summa Theologiae,* 1a, q. 25, art. 5; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Glencoe Publishing/Christian Classics, 1981), 139–141.

[68] See comments in Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics,* 1:34, 49–61, 446–450.

[69] See a brief summary in Gerhard, *On the Nature of God and On the Most Holy Mystery of the Trinity*, 195–196; Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn*

debate over the possibilities of God's absolute power into the distinction between God's "necessary will" (*voluntas necessaria*) and his "free will" (*voluntas libera*). God's necessary will refers to the fact that according as God is God, he necessarily wills himself and his own goodness and glory. God's free will refers to the range of decisions that God is able to make in accordance with his necessary will: whether to create the world, make a covenant with Israel, send Christ to die for our sins, and so on. These decisions represent possibilities that God might actualize, but they do not add anything to God's reality as God. Therefore, God does not make them out of the necessity of his nature but out of free choice.[70]

In light of this background, it is not difficult to interpret where Gerhard and his opponents stand within the spectrum of theological opinion present in both medieval and Protestant Scholasticism on the question of the necessity of atonement. Although the sources of Calvin's theology are a notorious point of debate,[71] it is clear from the discussion in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* (cited by Gerhard above[72]) that he takes a position quite similar to that of Duns Scotus. For Calvin, the work of Christ possessed no inherent value. Nevertheless, the Father affirmed that the death of Christ would suffice as the price of salvation by fiat, and hence it became so.[73] Gerhard notes that in a similar manner, Calvinists also hold that God chooses the elect without reference to the merit of Christ (contrary to Eph 1:5).[74]

Seen from this perspective, Gerhard's insight into the Socinian position proves cogent. If God was capable of arbitrarily choosing the elect and simply assigning a value to the work of Christ (as Calvin and some of the Reformed authors claimed), then why should one not take this position to the extreme and claim that God can simply decree forgiveness and salvation with an equal level of arbitrariness (i.e., without the death of Christ as the price)? Indeed, it is Gerhard's contention that this is precisely what the Socinians did.

In contrast to all this, Gerhard stands quite squarely in the trajectory of Anselm and Aquinas. Indeed, in refuting the Socinian position, Gerhard recommends both Anselm's work and that of Bernard of Clairvaux.[75] This being said, it should of course be cautioned that there are real differences between Anselm and Gerhard's

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Principally from the Protestant Scholastic Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985), 231–232.

[70] Gerhard, *On the Nature of God and On the Most Holy Mystery of the Trinity*, 244–246; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics,* 3:432–475; Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 197–203, 224–249.

[71] For various discussions, see Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[72] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 56.

[73] Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.17.1; McNeill and Battles, *Calvin*, 1:52.

[74] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 56.

[75] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 74.

views of atonement. Like Luther, Flacius, and the Formula of Concord,[76] Gerhard accepts the doctrine of active and passive righteousness, wherein for the sake of redemption, Christ must both positively fulfill the law (active righteousness), as well as suffer its punishment (passive righteousness).[77] By contrast, Anselm saw the crucifixion as a supremely meritorious act of supererogation, wherein the goodness of Christ's voluntary death compensates God for his loss of honor incurred by the act of human sin.[78]

After reviewing and refuting the Socinians' exegetical arguments, Gerhard turns to his account of the divine will and attributes as they relate to the question of atonement. Due to the unity and the simplicity of the divine essence, the Socinians are certainly correct that there is no conflict of justice and mercy within God's eternal being: "Surely God's justice and mercy are not in and of themselves contrary properties since they are the very essence of God, which admits no contrariety at all because of its utter simplicity."[79] Nevertheless,

> At the same time, however, with respect to its object—namely, the human race, which was inimical to God through sin—it was required that the marvelous *disposition of justice and mercy be obtained through Christ's satisfaction*. . . . According to *its very nature, God's mercy* wanted to spare man who had been misled by the devil's deceits and had fallen into sin and eternal death since, through the fall, man did not cease to be a creature of God. But, on the other hand, His righteousness decreed that man must be brought to the punishment he deserved on account of his sin. The *truthfulness of God* added its assent to this, and therefore the merit and satisfaction of Christ has intervened. Through this a transferal of the punishment owed to our sins has occurred so that God has *maintained His justice and truthfulness* and taken us into His grace. The pious ancients, especially Anselm and Bernard, have very beautiful thoughts on this.[80]

Gerhard agrees with Anselm and Aquinas, against Scotus and Ockham, that God possesses a certain transcendental goodness that is expressed in his exercise of the condemnation of sin. Nevertheless, whereas for Anselm and Aquinas, the dis-

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[76] See Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1–4* (1535), AE 26:280; Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 354; and W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente, eds., *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921).

[77] Johann Gerhard, *On Christ*, Theological Commonplaces IV, trans. Richard Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 320.

[78] Anselm of Canterbury, "Cur Deus Homo?" 2.18, in *Scholastic Miscellany*, 179.

[79] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 74.

[80] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 74, emphasis added.

cussion of divine justice focuses on abstract attributes within the eternal being of the one God, Gerhard focuses primarily on the concrete reality of God's holy word in Scripture. What is supremely important for Gerhard is God's "truthfulness" in his words of condemnation and mercy.[81] Since God speaks truthfully about his eternal legal will (*lex aeterna*) revealed to us in his word of law, it logically follows that sin is antithetical to God's own eternal nature:

> If the Law is the sign of the most just divine will, then surely it is by means of this most just *will that God desires that which the Law has expressed.* . . . And the image of God after which man was created was the perfect conformation of the entire person to the divine Law. Therefore it is by means of His most just will that God wills—indeed immutably wills—that which He expressed in the Law (Matt. 5:18; Luke 16:17). He who is just by His *own nature cannot help but be opposed to and punish sins on the basis of his justice.* But now, God is just of His own nature (Ps. 7:12), for *otherwise He would be unjust by His own nature*.[82]

Hence, justice and mercy are part of God's necessary will ["primary actuality"] and are expressed in his free will and ordered power ["secondary actuality"] through the law and the gospel as they are recorded in Holy Scripture. The Socinians do not understand this and assume that divine freedom allows God to act in ways that are arbitrary, haphazard, and contrary to his very nature as God. Hence, the Socinian claim is that God's free will and ordered power are to be collapsed into his absolute power and necessary will:

> If [it were the case] as Socinus teaches (*Contra Covet*., pp. 9–11; *Praelect. theol*., ch. 16), that the wrath and vengeance of God so depend on God's absolute will that He would be able not to deliver people who are clearly sinners up to eternal death, and then later He did deliver them up to death by His edict, and if by His power He was able to free them again without the intervention of satisfaction, it would follow (1) that "sin" and "not sin" are the same before God since there is the same disposition toward both in His nature. (2) That sin of itself is nothing, but rather is an opinion to be thought of as the arbitrary choice of the divine will. But now, "the power of sin is the Law" (1 Cor. 15:56). (3) That God's love for the devout and His hate for the wicked depend not on natural justice but on some arbitrary choice. (4) That nothing is ever opposed to God's nature, for whatever he can want to leave unpunished would be so. (5) That if God were to will idolatry, blasphemy, or perjury, these would not be sins. The Photinians are confusing God's mercy with His ἐνεργείᾳ

[81] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 74.
[82] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 74–75, emphasis added.

> ["working"], and secondary actuality with primary actuality. *Primary actuality is simply essential to God and is interchangeable with God's essence so much so that, within the utterly simple essence of God, His mercy is something that is simply one and the same thing with the very essence of God*. However, it is called secondary actuality insofar as His mercy advances outwardly with respect to creatures, and thus concurs with the divine will. The will serves all the essential properties in God and of itself produces no effect without its union with one or the other of them, etc.[83]

Ultimately, sin is antithetical to God's very nature. Therefore, for the Lord to will to forgive sin without atonement would be tantamount to him willing the very thing he rejects. At the same time, God is by nature loving and merciful, and he has revealed this merciful nature in his promise of the gospel. Because God loves his creation, in becoming incarnate as Christ, he placed himself under the curse that his retributive justice imposed on his creation. Out of pure self-donating love, Christ suffered the penalty of sin on the cross. Hence, for Gerhard, in the cross, God reveals himself as both truthful and faithful. He is faithful to his own eternal nature as God, and he is truthful to the words of law and grace revealed to his creatures in historical time.

IV. Modern Rejections of Substitutionary Atonement

In this final section, we will focus on the modern rejections of the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. We do not have the space to deal exhaustively or fairly with modern objections to the doctrine. Instead, we will primarily deal with criticisms of the doctrine as they have developed in Lutheran circles over the previous two centuries. We will begin with the Hofmann controversy of the mid-nineteenth century and end with the theologies of the Lundensian school of the early twentieth century. Since we have already dealt with effects of these theological controversies surrounding the atonement theologies of Gerhard Forde and Robert W. Jenson in the late twentieth-century elsewhere, we will not trace the discussion down to the present.[84]

We contend that although it would be difficult to draw a straight line of historical influence between the Socinians and these modern figures, there nevertheless remain many similar patterns of thought between the two groups of thinkers. At the heart of these theological systems lies a common under-standing of the doctrine

[83] Gerhard, *On Justification*, 75, emphasis added.

[84] See Jack Kilcrease, "Gerhard Forde's Theology of Atonement and Justification: A Confessional Lutheran Response," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 76, nos. 3–4 (2012): 269–294; Jack Kilcrease, *The Doctrine of Atonement: From Luther to Forde* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018).

of God. Both the Socinians and the modern theologians discussed below maintain that divine freedom trumps God's faithfulness to his nature and covenants/testaments. Therefore, the fulfillment of the law by Christ on the cross is unnecessary for the achievement of redemption.

This way of viewing God's nature and the work of Christ invariably leads down the paths of both antinomianism and legalism. The antinomianism of these positions is manifest in their belief that humans can move beyond the condemnation of the law without having the law fulfilled on their behalf. The legalism of these positions logically results from their initial failure to take seriously the fulfillment of the law as a necessary condition of redemption. As can be observed both in the Socinians and in these later systems of theology, if Christ has not fulfilled the law, then invariably the problem of the law is passed onto sinners in the form of a new law that they must fulfill.

In nineteenth century Germany, Johannes von Hofmann (1810–1877) became the leading figure of the atonement controversy in Lutheranism.[85] As a young man, Hofmann attended the University of Berlin, where he studied under Schleiermacher and Hegel and read the works of Schelling.[86] Within the German idealist tradition represented by Schelling and Hegel, God is seen as an "Absolute Subject."[87] Through an act of self-alienation, God uses human history as a means of self-development and discovery.[88] Therefore, like the autonomous subject of modern Euro-American culture, or what the philosopher Charles Taylor calls the Enlightenment's "Punctuated-self,"[89] the German idealist God was not thought of as acting in a manner that is necessarily faithful to a discernible eternal nature that transcends history.

It could be argued that this development in German idealism and its influence on modern theology is by no means unsurprising in modern conceptions of human agency and destiny. Throughout history, humans have typically identified the divine with what their culture deems to be most real. For example, beginning with Thales,

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[85] See Matthew L. Becker, *The Self-Giving God and Salvation History: The Trinitarian Theology of Johannes von Hofmann* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004); Karlmann Beyschlag, *Die Erlanger Theologie* (Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 1993), 61–83; and Lowell C. Green, *The Erlangen School of Theology: Its History, Teaching, and Practice* (Fort Wayne, IN: Lutheran Legacy, 2010), 105–133.

[86] Becker, *The Self-Giving God,* 6, 102–120.

[87] See Quentin Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982), 115.

[88] See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[89] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 159–176. Taylor speaks of Locke here, but much of what he says is applicable to the rest of the Enlightenment and modernity in general.

the Greek philosophical tradition generally viewed the cosmic order as most real.[90] For this reason, God was to be primarily identified with the deep structures of the cosmic order itself (Stoicism's immanent *Logos*) or as the orderer of the cosmos (Aristotle's Prime Mover, Plato's *Demiurge*, etc.).[91] Human vocation and ethics within this worldview likewise was seen as a conforming to and finding one's place within the cosmic order (*lex naturalis*).[92]

By contrast, post-Enlightenment Western culture, with its twin engines of mass democracy and consumerism, has come to see the individual engaged in the activity of expressing his autonomous desires and free self-development as being most real. Indeed, the autonomous and rational subject is so real that the cosmic order is to be modified when it conflicts with the individual's interior desires (i.e., homosexuality, transgenderism, etc.). For this reason, the concept of God as an "Absolute Subject," which began in German idealism (or even possibly going back to Descartes[93]) and is present in many modern theologies, makes a great deal of sense. Seen from this perspective, the God of modern theology and philosophy has become a gigantic projection of the Western autonomous individual. Moreover, such a conception of God would form a point of contact with the Socinian conception of God as an arbitrary monarch who can simply abandon his commitment to his law at will and with it the requirement that atonement be made for sin.[94]

Due to the influence of German idealism, Hofmann largely rejected the classical theistic account of God as immutable and outside of time, found in the pre- and post-Reformation traditions of Western Christendom. Instead, Hofmann posited a God who evolved through time and was shaped by history.[95] Nevertheless, God's evolution does not occur through the universal history of humanity, such as Hegel and later figures like Pannenberg would contend.[96] Rather, the triune God develops himself through a specific history, namely that of Israel and the early church as it is

[90] Fredrick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome, From the Pre-Socratics to Plotinus*, vol. 1 (New York: Image Books, 1993), 22–24.

[91] See Adam Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers as Theologians: The Divine Arche* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[92] See Howard P. *Kainz, Natural Law: An Introduction and Re-examination* (Chicago: Open Court, 2004), 1–14.

[93] James Henry Owino Kombo, *Theological Models of the Doctrine of the Trinity: The Trinity, Diversity and Theological Hermeneutics* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2016), 69.

[94] F. LeRon Shults has noted the point of contact between early Enlightenment concepts of the self and the popularity of Socinianism in late-seventeenth-century England. See F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 50–51.

[95] Becker, *The Self-Giving God*, 144.

[96] Wolfhart Pannenberg, Rolf Rendtorff, Trutz Rendtorff and Ulrich Wilkens, eds., *Revelation as History*, trans. David Granskou (New York: MacMillan, 1968).

recorded in the Bible. In later theology, this came to be called "*Heilsgeschichte*" or "salvation history" theology.[97]

As someone who regarded himself as Lutheran, Hofmann insisted that the structure of this historical revelation takes the shape of law and gospel. Nevertheless, law and gospel possess different meanings for Hofmann than they do in orthodox Lutheranism. Unlike in the Formula of Concord, Hofmann did not identify the law with the eternal and immutable commandments of God (*lex aeterna*) and various ways that those commandments relate to human existence under sin and grace (*triplex usus legis*).[98] Instead, the law is to be seen primarily as the time of the old covenant, wherein there was a reign of divine wrath and mechanical legalism: "[God's] wrath is not something eternal, *but a historic relationship of God*."[99] Indeed, when Paul contrasted law and faith, he meant merely to oppose "legalistic actions" to "an attitude which is contrasted with a legalistic outlook."[100] Despite the fact that the Old Testament has a status as an era of wrath, Hofmann nevertheless admits that it still contained within itself many prophesies and intimations of a coming age of grace.[101]

Conversely, for Hofmann, the gospel primarily refers to the era of the New Testament and its ethos of grace. In enfolding his triune life in history, God has effectively evolved past his manifestation in the Old Testament age of wrath by sending his Son to overcome wrath with love. Jesus did not so much die as a substitute for sin as he revealed and actualized God's love in history. Christ entered the world and was opposed by those who did not accept God's love. Through the cross and empty tomb, Christ accepted the violence of human sin, and, through the resurrection, he overcame the negative verdict that those who had rejected him imposed on his person.[102]

As can be easily observed, this account of atonement presupposes that God's arbitrary freedom allows him to move autonomously past his previous legal relationship with humanity without a fulfillment of the law. This represents a similar line of reasoning to the Socinian concept of divine freedom and sovereignty. Overall, there is common assumption that God can simply transcend the judgment of the law through an act of will.

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[97] Johannes von Hofmann, *Interpreting the Bible*, trans. Christian Preus (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959), 31–32.

[98] FC SD II 50; III 57; VI 1; Dau and Bente, *Triglot Concordia*, 901, 935, 963.

[99] Johannes von Hofmann, *Theologische Ethik* (Nördlingen: C. H. Beck, 1878), 35. Emphasis added; my translation.

[100] Hofmann, *Interpreting the Bible*, 186.

[101] Johannes von Hofmann, *Der Schriftbeweis*, 2 vols., 1st ed. (Nördlingen: C. H. Beck, 1852–1855), 2.1:115–140.

[102] Johannes von Hofmann, *Encyclopädie der Theologie*, ed. H. J. Bestmann (Nördlingen: C. H. Beck, 1879), 84– 85; Hofmann, *Der Schriftbeweis*, 1:441–451.

According to Hofmann, by the power of the Spirit, Christians can now live out a spontaneous existence of love under the reign of God's grace: "The Spirit of Christ instructs as to what he [the Christian] must do, and motivates him to do it, and that which he then does is undeniably correct."[103] As Gerhard Forde has noted in his treatment of Hofmann, the gospel is for Hofmann not a promise but a new "internal law."[104] In the new era of grace, the church is free from the enslaving mechanical legalism labored under during the era of wrath. Hence, the two words of law and gospel are not juxtaposed to one another in the proclamation of the church but are rather eclipsed by a unitary principle of the love-ethos.[105]

In this, the consequences of the rejection of substitutionary atonement become clear. Since the law is no longer fulfilled on behalf of Christians in the cross, Hofmann predictably comes to redefine the gospel as the experience of God's love and the love-based ethos that is now possible in the era of grace. Put succinctly, for Hofmann, the gospel is effectively a new law that replaces an old law. This represents another point of contact with the Racovian Catechism and its old law/new law theology.

Hofmann's theology of *Heilsgeschichte* and atonement sparked a debate not only with his Erlangen colleagues Theodosius Harnack (1817–1889) and Gottfried Thomasius (1802–1875)[106] but also with the Rostock theologian F. A. Philippi (1809–1882).[107] All three theologians agreed that Hofmann's position on atonement effectively destroyed the confessional Lutheran doctrine of forensic justification. With regard to Hofmann's rejection of substitutionary atonement, Philippi was especially tenacious in his appeal to the classical Anselmic logic of God's need to express his holiness and love in his work of redemption.[108] Philippi ultimately accused Hofmann of abandoning forensic justification in favor of a Roman Catholic doctrine of infused righteousness.[109]

Among his many responses to these criticisms, one of Hofmann's attempts at a counter-argument proved to be extremely influential in future debates within Lutheranism on the issue of atonement. Hofmann spoke of Christ's work as an act of conquest, not only of the sinners who reject him but also of Satan, who instigated

[103] Hofmann, *Theologische Ethik*, 78, my translation.

[104] Gerhard O. Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), 33.

[105] See Green, *The Erlangen School,* 124; Robert Schultz, *Gesetz und Evangelium in der Lutherischen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1958), 110–120.

[106] Gottfried Thomasius, *Das Bekenntniss der lutherischen kirche von der Versöhnung und die Versöhnungslehre D. Chr. K. v. Hofmann's* (Erlangen: Theodor Bläsing, 1857).

[107] F. A. Philippi, *Dr. v. Hofmann gegenüber der lutherischen Versöhnungs- und Rechtfertigungslehre* (Erlangen: Theodor Bläsing, 1856).

[108] Philippi, *Versöhnungs- und Rechtfertigungslehre*, 35.

[109] Philippi, *Versöhnungs- und Rechtfertigungslehre*, 28.

the human revolt against God. In Hofmann's mind, this image of Christ the conqueror represented a point of contact with Luther. Appealing to some of the reformer's writings where he described Christ as struggling with demonic forces, Hofmann insisted that Luther had not actually fully accepted a doctrine of substitutionary atonement but had instead taught something akin to the *Christus Victor* model of some of the church fathers.[110]

Although Theodosius Harnack skillfully refuted this claim with a lengthy two-volume study of Luther's theology,[111] Hofmann's trajectory for the interpretation of Luther found expression in many in the twentieth century, including Gustaf Aulén (1879–1977) of the Lund School.[112] Aulén's work on atonement and Luther follows a similar outlook to that of Hofmann, but with some modifications. These modifications can be attributed to the obvious differences in *Sitz im Leben* but also to his interaction with Aulén's colleague Anders Nygren's project of motif research.[113]

In his classic work, *Christus Victor*, Aulén identified three major atonement motifs throughout the history of Christian thought: substitution, moral influence, and *Christus Victor* or conquest.[114] The last motif describes Christ as true God who unilaterally acts on behalf of humanity, thereby destroying and despoiling the forces of darkness that enslave humanity. As Aulén emphasizes, the image of *Christus Victor* is not so much a set theory of the atonement as it is a recurring image of how God in Christ saves. Aulén viewed this motif as being the primary one promoted by the church fathers[115] and (following Hofmann) revived by Luther in the sixteenth century.[116] Luther's view was supposedly suppressed later by the rationalizing Scholastic Orthodoxy of the seventeenth century.[117] For Aulén, Luther's great

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[110] Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 62–64.

[111] Theodosius Harnack, *Luthers Theologie mit besonderer Beziehung auf seine Versöhnungs- und Erlösunglehre*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1969).

[112] Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate*, 47.

[113] Anders Nygren, *Meaning and Method: Prolegomena to a Scientific Philosophy of Religion and a Scientific Theology*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: Epworth Press, 1972). For those unfamiliar, Arne Rasmusson summarizes the program of motif-research thus: "A basic motif is, in this case, the answer of a religion to the basic categorical question, which for religion is the question of the eternal. It is the basic conception, the driving and unifying force of a religion. It is that which gives a religion its systematic meaning. Although these basic conceptions are historically given, the task of determining them is not only a genetic-historical question, but also and primarily a systematic issue of showing the driving and unifying motifs of, in this case, Christianity" (Arne Rasmusson, "A Century of Swedish Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 21, no. 2 [2007]: 134).

[114] Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 1–16.

[115] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 16–60.

[116] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 101–122.

[117] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 128–133.

innovation over the church fathers was to see divine wrath and law as something to be conquered along with the other forces of darkness.[118]

The motif of conquest was most important and fitting for Aulén because it resists rationalizing God's work of salvation through a mechanism of substitution. The *Christus Victor* motif also portrays God as acting out of unilateral love to rescue humanity from his own wrath as well as the power of the devil. Such a view of the work of Christ emphasized God's one-way movement to humanity, rather than (in Aulén's mind) the movement of humanity to God that is present in the Anselmic belief that Christ represents humanity before God and placates his wrath.[119]

As the reader may discern, this description of atonement echoes Hofmann's in some respects. The main difference would be that whereas Hofmann emphasizes human (and satanic) opposition to God's love, Aulén takes seriously the continuing opposition of the wrath of God. Nevertheless, such wrath is not overcome by the penal substitution of Christ but by a mere divine decision of love manifest in Christ's struggle, albeit a mysterious one.

Christus Victor's understanding of divine love as a unilateral movement that excludes any prompting on the part of humanity (i.e., Christ as the sacrificial representative of humanity *coram Deo*) echoes in many respects the motif research of Aulén's colleague Anders Nygren in his equally seminal work *Agape and Eros*.[120] In this work, Nygren identifies three major motifs regarding the divine-human relationship through the history of Western theology and philosophy. The first is the *Eros* motif. This motif describes the relationship of the human with the divine as a self-seeking love that lusts for fulfillment.[121] Plato conceived of the "Good" as the supreme and genuine object of human desire, of which earthly erotic desire was a misdirected shadow.[122] Second, there is the *Nomos* motif, which sees the divine-human relationship as structured within a legal framework. Judaism and Stoicism are examples of this.[123] Finally, Nygren posits the existence of the *Agape* motif, which finds its clearest expression in the New Testament. The *Agape* motif describes the divine-human relationship as based on a divine love that unilaterally moves toward humanity and is not prompted by any desirability on the part of the divine love's object.[124]

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[118] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 111–116.

[119] Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 145–159. See a similar argument in Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 199–202.

[120] Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953).

[121] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 160–199.

[122] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 166–181.

[123] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 254–288.

[124] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 61–159.

Nygren argues that over time the New Testament's *Agape* motif became diluted with both the *Eros* and *Nomos* motifs within the theology of the early church.[125] He argues that this dilution found its most systematic expression in Augustine's "*Caritas* Synthesis," which combined Paul's *Agape* with Plato's *Eros*.[126] Augustine and the medieval theologians saw God as the highest good and proper object of human desire. Nevertheless, God should be loved for his own sake, not because he fulfills the selfish longings of the human heart. Moreover, within this theology, God's grace is seen primarily as having the purpose of making humans capable of achieving sanctification and good works so that they might become objects of God's desire.[127] Coming at the end of the Middle Ages, Luther is thought to have destroyed the *Caritas* synthesis and returned Christianity to the *Agape* of the New Testament by emphasizing the unilateral nature of divine love present in the gospel. Christian freedom, therefore, implies an ethic based on disinterested self-sacrificial love.[128]

Nygren's concept of the divine-human relationship based on *Agape* and Aulén's thinking on atonement possesses a clear parallel. For Nygren, the *Agape* motif is the essence of true Christianity[129] because it portrays divine love as unilateral divine movement, unprompted by the desirability of human works. Likewise, on the basis of this unilateral divine movement of love, the Christian acts out the same *Agape* toward his neighbor. It might be inferred that in Aulén's thinking, this notion of the essence of Christianity expresses itself in the form of a preference for the conquest motif of atonement. As we have seen, for Aulén, God's love unilaterally moves to conquer demonic forces that enslave humanity. Implicitly, Aulén would appear to associate the doctrine of penal substitution with a kind of *Eros*, wherein Christ as the representative of humanity makes himself an object of divine desire by his obedience.

In evaluating their position, it should be noted that, from a confessional Lutheran perspective, Nygren and Aulén are correct in seeing God's love as creative and unprompted. As Luther aptly observes, "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it."[130] Nevertheless, this by no means excludes God's holiness or his faithfulness to the law in his act of redemption. This fact is precisely the reality that substitutionary atonement is meant to embody. God's love in sending Christ as a sacrifice for sin was not inspired by any legal obedience or

[125] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 247–448.
[126] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 449–558.
[127] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 609–666.
[128] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 681–699. See also Rasmusson, "A Century of Swedish Theology," 134–135.
[129] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 41–48.
[130] Luther, *Ninety-Five Theses* (1517), AE 31:41.

ontic desirability on the part of sinful humanity. Nevertheless, because of God's justice and faithfulness to his word of law, there was no saving humanity apart from his fulfillment of the law.

At least in the case of Nygren, the failure to see God as faithful both to the law and the gospel results in the same pattern of antinomianism and legalism that we observed earlier in Hofmann. Nygren does not so much speak of law and gospel, but rather, in a manner reminiscent of Hofmann, of the Old Testament as embodying the *Nomos* motif[131] and the New Testament the *Agape* motif.[132] Indeed, the Old Testament's continuing significance lies only in its ability to make the events of the New Testament explicable and to serve as a foil to the *Agape* motif, manifest both in the divine redemptive action of Christ and the ethics of the individual Christian.[133] As a result, *Agape* as explicated by Nygren seems to collapse law and gospel into each other by blending them together into a unitary principle of unconditional love.

If Hofmann's theology of atonement presupposed the Hegelian concept of God as an absolute and historically evolving subject, Nygren's (along with Aulén's) concept of God implies Kant's concept of the morally autonomous subject. Nygren's affinity for Immanuel Kant's work is well-documented,[134] and some have detected the influence of Kantian moral philosophy on the thesis of *Agape and Eros*.[135]

In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant argues that true morality means willing the good for its own sake and thereby becoming autonomous. A person who does the good for its own sake is autonomous, which means that he is self-legislating. He does the good because he wills to do it, not for the sake of some other good that he is seeking to achieve. If a person acts morally for some other end, he is subjecting his will to some outside force (heteronomy) and thereby loses his autonomous authenticity.[136] Nygren's theology and ethic of *Agape* as something willed for its own sake bears extraordinary similarities to Kant's notion of moral autonomy described above.

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[131] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 254.

[132] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 46–48, 61–159.

[133] Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 255–257.

[134] William Alexander Johnson, *On Religion: A Study of the Theological Method in Schleiermacher and Nygren* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), 151; Rasmusson, "A Century of Swedish Theology," 133.

[135] Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 232.

[136] See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 21–55.

V. Conclusion

As Gerhard's critique of the Socinian heresy shows, God as he is revealed in Christ and his atoning work is a God who is faithful. Before time, God the Father eternally and faithfully corresponds to himself in his word (Col 1:15, Heb 1:3). In his dealing with humanity in creation and redemption, the same triune God also faithfully fulfills his words of condemnation and mercy in the cross and empty tomb (Rom 3:23–26). For this reason, believers can rely on God's promise of salvation with the complete certainty of God's truthfulness (Rom 8:38–39; Heb 10:22). As we have observed, positing a God who is otherwise, necessarily calls into question the definitive nature of grace manifest in the cross, thereby returning believers to the challenge of achieving salvation by their own efforts.

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Luther on Vocation and Baptism: A Correction to Charismatic and Situational Ways of Discerning God's Call

Benjamin T. G. Mayes

I. Introduction

The English word *vocation* is ambiguous. Many think of it as a career. We have "vocational schools" that prepare people for a trade or career. Christians remember that the word "vocation" is from the Latin *vocatio* and means a "calling." Now, if God is doing the calling, then it is a divine calling, a divine vocation. This is what Christians mean when they speak of the doctrine of vocation. But even in this Christian sense, there is an array of ideas loaded on the term. For Roman Catholics, vocation is normally a call to the priesthood or monastic life. For Lutherans, vocation often means that God calls us to the ordinary duties of human life in which we find ourselves, and these ordinary duties are where God calls us to serve.[1] Sometimes, however, this divine vocation is extended to every permissible area of human activity, whether or not God in Scripture has commanded it or called anyone to do it. People speak as though vocation means the same thing as the duty to serve God and neighbor in every area of life. But what really is a divine vocation or calling?

What passes as the Lutheran doctrine of vocation these days has two fundamental errors. One error is to overspecify vocation at the expense of Christian freedom. The other error is when vocation is used as a replacement for the moral law of God[2] and thus tends toward libertinism. Both of these errors appeal to Luther

[1] Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Working for Our Neighbor: A Lutheran Primer on Vocation, Economics, and Ordinary Life* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2016), xv.

[2] The moral law of God is distinct from the Old Testament ceremonial and civil laws. "For in order to put human nature to the utmost shame, he not only gives laws like the Ten Commandments that speak of natural and true sins, but he also makes sins of things that are in their nature not sins. Moses thus forces and presses sins upon them in heaps. For unbelief and evil desire are in their nature sins, and worthy of death. But to eat leavened bread at the Passover [Exodus 12–13] and to eat an unclean animal [Leviticus 11, Deuteronomy 14] or make a mark on the body [Lev. 19:28, Deut. 14:1], and all those things that the Levitical priesthood deals with as sin—these are not in their nature sinful and evil. Rather they became sins only because they are forbidden by the law. This law can be done away. The Ten Commandments, however, cannot be done away, for here there really is sin, even if there were no commandments, or if they were not

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for support. But a closer examination of Luther, particularly his baptismal sermons, shows that God's call leaves room for career choice, while the doctrine of vocation operates only within the parameters of the moral law, which is revealed in Holy Scripture.

II. The Problem with Charismatic Views of Vocation

There are two questions that have remained unanswered in most Lutheran accounts of the doctrine of vocation or in studies of Luther on vocation: (1) How do you know to what stations in life God has called you? And (2) Is it permissible to change vocations?

Career Choice as Vocation?

The most influential study of Luther's doctrine of vocation in North America is undoubtedly Gustaf Wingren's book *Luther on Vocation.*[3] Wingren's book presents views related to vocation from many stages of Luther's life. But his book also raises further questions. For example, does Luther have anything to say about how one *enters* into a vocation? Wingren says a vocation is always "given by God." How does this happen, practically speaking? Can one ever give up or change vocations? For example, can a cobbler become a farmer, or is he in duty bound to remain in his calling? The duty to remain in one's calling seems to apply to vocations like marriage but not to vocations that are not specifically instituted in God's word. Related to this is the question of how the three estates (church, civil government, family) relate to other career-vocations, such as butcher, baker, and candlestick-maker. Are the latter subsumed under family/domestic estate/*oeconomia,* or do they *add* to the three estates? The question here is: What is a vocation? Can one have a divine vocation to be a computer programmer, for example? If so, where would you look to substantiate such a claim, since Scripture says nothing about that particular vocation?

Sometimes Luther's doctrine of vocation is seen as something in which there is no freedom to move from one occupation to another or from a lower social class to a higher. When viewed this way, people react negatively to it. According to some,

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known—just as the unbelief of the heathen is sin, even though they do not know or think that it is sin" (Martin Luther, *Preface to the Old Testament* [1523], vol. 35, pp. 243–244, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976]; vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann [Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–1986]; vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–], hereafter AE).

[3] Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982).

the reformers saw any attempt to change one's station in life as sinful. Such people claim that Luther and other reformers did not consider the terrible consequences of injustice in the economy and workplace. People were stuck in unjust working situations.[4]

In Missouri Synod circles, perhaps the most popular presentation of the doctrine of vocation is Gene Edward Veith's *The Spirituality of the Cross.* Veith argues that every lawful career is or can be a divine vocation. While the vocations of spouse, parent, and citizen are "perhaps more important" than career-vocations,[5] every career, such as musician or electrician, is a divine calling. Because Veith does not distinguish between the vocations instituted in Scripture and all particular career-vocations, he suggests it may be sinful to tinker in an area in which one is not skilled. "Again," he writes, "consider the spectacle of me trying to repair electrical appliances. When we work outside of our vocation—that is, without regard to our God-given abilities, inclinations, and station in life—we usually fail miserably or, more seriously, violate the moral law."[6] If this were true, however, it would border on sinful to try to do anything oneself or to learn a new skill by trying it. Instead of identifying every permissible career as a divine vocation, one should distinguish adiaphorous career-vocations from the divinely established vocations that are revealed in Scripture.[7]

It is significant that studies of Luther's doctrine of vocation do not address how one knows what vocation one has, nor how or whether one may change careers.[8] This indicates that perhaps Luther himself does not address those questions. What we find in Luther's writings instead is that God does not command people to enter careers; his callings are limited to the stations of life that are established in Scripture.[9]

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[4] Sandra Beardsall, "A Funny Thing Happened . . . 'Vocation' in the Reformation Era," *Touchstone* 34, no. 2 (2016): 11.

[5] Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *The Spirituality of the Cross: The Way of the First Evangelicals*, rev. ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010), 91.

[6] Veith, *The Spirituality of the Cross*, 107.

[7] Jane Strohl notes that career-vocations were adiaphora for Luther. If this is so, how can they be considered vocations, duties to which God calls individuals? (Jane E. Strohl, "The Framework for Christian Living: Luther on the Christian's Callings," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'ubomír Batka [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014], 365–369).

[8] Robert Kolb, "Called to Milk Cows and Govern Kingdoms: Martin Luther's Teaching on the Christian's Vocations," *Concordia Journal* 39, no. 2 (2013): 133–141; Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 36–42; Douglas James Schuurman, "Vocation," in *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

[9] Commenting on Galatians 2:5 in 1519, Luther suggests that entering what I have called a career-vocation is a matter of free choice, not a specific command of God (*Galatians* [1519], AE

Commenting on 1 Corinthians 7:18–19 in 1523, Luther emphasizes that not only is circumcision free; (not commanded) but that marriage is also. Even marriage is optional. Not everyone has to enter it.[10] Of course, once you are in it, there are certain divinely established duties that attend to it. In other places where Luther speaks of a divine calling in career-vocations, he does not say that God commands us to enter a specific career but that God commands us to fulfill our duties.[11] Again, on 1 Corinthians 7, Luther says, "In all these matters service, loyalty, and duty are to be maintained, regardless of whether the one party is Christian or non-Christian, good or bad, so long as they do not hinder faith and justice and allow you to live your Christian life. For all such estates are free and no impediment to the Christian faith."[12]

Thus, if one wants support for speaking of a divine call to be a plumber or computer technician, he will have to look someplace other than Luther. Christians who are plumbers or computer technicians or who hold any other lawful career are indeed called by God to various duties, and they should also fulfill the duties that they have voluntarily accepted. But if the plumber decides he does not want to be a plumber anymore, God will not be upset. This is a matter of freedom.

Enthusiasm: Discernment of God's Call

How do we know our vocation? How do we know what God is calling us to do? Popular Lutheran accounts of vocation emphasize that you must discern God's call from your situation, your gifts, and your inclinations (what you like). For example, Veith's view of vocation directs people to examine their situation in order to discern their vocation:

> A vocation is not something we choose for ourselves. Rather, it is given by God, who "calls" us to a particular work or station. God gives each individual unique talents, skills, and inclinations. He also puts each individual in a unique set of external circumstances, which are understood as having been providentially arranged by God. Since vocation is not self-chosen, it can be known also through the actions of others. *Getting offered a job, being elected to an office, and finding someone who wants to marry you are all clues to vocation*.

27:204). Commenting on Genesis 44:17 toward the end of his life, Luther does not say that anything your hand finds to do is your vocation, but that for believers who attend to their calling, anything else their hand finds to do is pleasing to God (*Genesis* [1535–1545/1544–1554], AE 7:366–367).

[10] Luther, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7* (1523), AE 28:40–42.

[11] See, for example, Luther, *Notes on Ecclesiastes* (1526/1532), AE 15:151, on Ecclesiastes 9:10.

[12] Luther, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7* (1523), AE 28:43.

> Essentially, your vocation is to be found in the place you occupy in the present.[13]

While this strong emphasis on situational discernment of vocation has the potential for abuse, Veith is by no means a moral relativist. There are concrete moral norms. Some careers are always impermissible, such as robber, prostitute, and hitman.[14] For Veith, the situationality only functions within the boundaries set by the moral law. So, for example, God will never give you a vocation that calls you to violate the sixth commandment. But in all the areas left free and permissible by the moral law, Veith seems to regard vocation as adding extra divine commands to individuals.

This way of thinking goes especially wrong in the American neo-evangelical context. A typical example of the neo-evangelical *Schwärmerei* that Lutheran pastors often face can be found in Gordon T. Smith, *Spiritual Direction: A Guide to Giving and Receiving Direction*.[15] Smith is a good example of how many people, even in our congregations, think about religion and religious experience. For Smith, emotions are the primary place of God's communication to mankind. For him, there is divine revelation apart from Scripture. How God commands a certain individual outside of Scripture can be radically different from how he commands or leads someone else, in a way reminiscent of situation ethics. For neo-evangelicals like Smith, "spiritual direction" is mainly about encountering the Holy Spirit in one's emotions. The joys and sorrows of individuals are, for him, the "primary data" to become aware of the Spirit's presence.[16] The neo-evangelicals also approach vocation this way. According to them, one must discern God's call from one's situation and from the immediate revelation of the Holy Spirit.

Another example of charismatic vocation is Rick Warren's bestselling *The Purpose Driven Life*.[17] The premise of the book is that it takes about forty days to discern what God is calling you to do. Warren says, "Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do."[18] Yet, Warren does not just leave people to search their hearts for God's call. He has five "purposes," the first three of which could be summarized as living in fellowship with God. The fourth purpose is "You Were Shaped for Serv-

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[13] Veith, *The Spirituality of the Cross*, 103, emphasis added.

[14] Veith, *The Spirituality of the Cross*, 101n.

[15] Gordon T. Smith, *Spiritual Direction: A Guide to Giving and Receiving Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

[16] Smith, *Spiritual Direction*, 40. We see this also in his view of prayer. For him, prayer is not mainly intercessory. Instead, he speaks of prayer as communion with Christ and especially as listening to Christ during prayer time (53–54).

[17] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

[18] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 10, supposedly quoting Romans 12:2.

ing God." Here we can see the charismatic view of vocational discernment clearly. On the basis of one's spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, and experience, one will discover "God's will for your ministry."[19]

The questions raised by the need to discern one's vocation are many. If God's gifts to me are clues to my vocation, then what is the relationship between gifts and offices? Is God's calling based on the gifts I notice in myself? If one thinks that God is calling him to something if he has the gifts for it, this, too, leads to problems. There are always possibilities of self-deception. What if I think God is calling me to be the mayor of my city but other people do not recognize this? Are they resisting God's will? What if I am good at *several* things but do not have time to do them all? Should I think that God is calling me to do all of those activities? What role do my preferences play? Maybe I am good at playing piano, but I do not like it. Is it sinful not to use the gifts that God has given? What about people who think they have the gift of marriage, and then later think that they do not, and so seek divorce? If God's vocation, his call, is located in his gifts—or if the gifts I notice in myself are clues to God's call—then the stations or offices that God has established (pastoral ministry, marriage, civil government) are merely instrumental, a means toward exercising God's gifts and calling. Then one will have to ask a question like: Is this station configured in such a way that I can use my gifts? If not, then the station may need to be changed. This way of thinking may not be a problem if it is applied to stations in life that have been created by human beings, but it is disastrous when applied to divinely instituted stations such as those in the church, marriage, and family.

Gilbert Meilaender is one of the few who have noticed this problem with what passes as the doctrine of vocation. He has noticed, on the one hand, that it is a problem to identify God's vocation with the drudgery of one's present career; then there is no escape. And on the other hand, there is a problem in identifying our own desires with God's call. This collapses the first love commandment into the second. Loving one's neighbor becomes the same thing as loving God. And the danger of being self-deceived in such cases is very present. As Meilaender characterized that view, "Whatever work we want to do—we'll just call that our vocation."[20] These concerns should be heeded. First, some see a specificity of God's call where God has not revealed it in Scripture nor given a duty through his institutions of family, church, and civil government. Second, some look for God's call in their own hearts and desires. Third, some overlook the fact that God's main call is to belong to him and be united with him.

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[19] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 237.

[20] Gilbert Meilaender, "Divine Summons: Working in the Horizon of God's Call," *The Christian Century* 117, no. 30 (2000): 1115.

Now, what does Luther have to say about discerning one's vocation? Luther does not have a fully detailed presentation of vocation that would answer the questions modern people might put to it. Luther seems not to have been worried by the question of how you know what God is calling you to do. And in the published English translations of Luther, he simply does not address how to "discern" one's vocation. What he does, instead, is this: he constantly points his readers and hearers to the scriptural word of God. Preaching on Baptism on January 6, 1539, Luther said, "A Christian should not think of basing his faith on his own judgment and opinion, nor on the revelation even of angels or saints, but on the sure Word of God, which comes from God."[21]

Luther also does not develop any unified description of how you enter the stations. How do you enter the vocation of husband or wife? Luther says it happens through mutual, public consent, with the consent of parents.[22] Human choice is a factor in entering marriage. God does not command you to marry this person as opposed to that person. But things are different when it comes to how you become a son or daughter, or even a citizen. You are simply born into these stations. Your choice plays no role whatsoever. So, already it should be clear that we cannot take the call to one station and apply it across the board to all the stations. The ways to enter the various stations or vocations are all different. For the divinely established station-vocations, we must look to how each station is established individually and described in Scripture. We must not apply a general theory of "vocation" to them. That is, we must be inductive, not deductive.

There are, of course, passages where Luther emphasizes that everyone has his *own* calling from God. In these passages, Luther does three things. First, he does not speak of discerning God's call to you. Instead, he assumes that your call is your station in life and is very obvious. Second, he does not address whether you can change careers. Instead, he emphasizes that you may not shirk your duty in order to run away on a religious pilgrimage or to enter a monastery. Third, he says that the stations in life are consistently three: household, church, and civil government. These are the divinely established stations in life for Luther, not whether to be a miner or a lawyer.[23] Therefore, the charismatic view of vocation, so common in modern books on discerning God's call for your life, really cannot look to Luther for support.

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[21] Luther, Sermon of January 6, 1539, in Martin Luther, *Ungedruckte Predigten D. Martin Luthers aus den Jahren 1537–1540*, ed. Georg Buchwald (Leipzig: G. Strübigs Verlag, 1905), 501, trans. Matthew Carver.

[22] Luther, *On Marriage Matters* (1530), AE 46:267–277; cf. Tr 78.

[23] See, for example, Luther, *Church Postil* (1525/1540), AE 75:352–357.

What makes the charismatic approach to vocation so appealing is that it provides an explanation for the experiences that many Christians have. For example, many of our new seminary students have come here because they *feel* that God wants them to be pastors. They *feel* called. This feeling that people have seems to be the source of the charismatic approach. Yet, the answer is not to tell our students that they have not had this feeling. Indeed, God may put desires into the hearts of Christians to pursue this or that career or another permissible choice. This is how it is with our new seminary students. God may be putting into their hearts the *desire* to offer themselves to the church for the work of the ministry, somewhat in accord with 1 Timothy 3:1: "If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work."[24] (Likewise, in Ezra 7:27, God put the desire to rebuild the temple into the heart of Artaxerxes. Cf. Neh 2:12.) But this desire does not mean that God has called them yet. The desire is not a divine command. If God has not revealed His will in Scripture, then we should not feel guilty one way or the other in making a choice in an adiaphorous area.

When people are faced with a hard choice, and there is no clear word of the Lord on the issue, they must still decide. In these cases, people may suffer feelings of guilt. Even in a case where God neither commands nor forbids something, people can feel torn. They might wonder: Have I done the right thing? Is this false guilt, or something more? Perhaps this is an indication of our human predicament of being fallen people living in a fallen and broken world. In these situations, we can take comfort, and comfort others, in the freedom that God gives and in the sure gospel comfort that God works all things to the good of those who love Him (Rom 8:28).[25]

III. The Problem with Situational Views of Vocation

When other authors speak of discerning God's call, they generally deal not with direct enthusiastic revelation but with discerning one's situation. The problem here is when situational/contextual discernment replaces the concrete parameters of biblical moral law.

Gustaf Wingren's *Luther on Vocation* has been the standard work on Luther's view of vocation for decades. Wingren has remained popular in part due to how he brings forth Luther's emphasis on the holiness of everyday duties and work. As Wingren says, "Luther liked to think that the most commonplace matters in the world often contain just such invisible and hidden secrets, where man least expects it. God abides in the deep, and he makes his noblest jewels of 'nothing,' of that which

[24] Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture translations in this article are from *The Holy Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

[25] I am indebted to Jason Lane for this observation.

is poor and rejected."[26] Yet, Wingren's description of vocation makes it appear as though the law is abolished, and in its place comes vocation, which is situationally unique for every individual. This is not Luther's view. For Luther, Christian freedom does not mean that the law and command of God ceases to apply to Christians or is abolished.

According to Wingren, the new man acts as he is moved by the Holy Spirit. There are no rules for this.[27] Love rises above the law. Christians have freedom to do and to omit,[28] and Wingren does not specify but seems to mean this in an absolute sense. Wingren seems to think that for Luther, vocations are unique to individuals. He says "my" vocation is mine alone, and there can be no imitation of others in their vocations.[29] Vocation for him assumes that *everyone* has different works.[30] Wingren stresses that, for Luther, there is no standard outward form of life.[31] "No particular form of conduct is fixed in advance as holy. A person has to wait and see what others need and do just that in a particular situation. Another time, something quite different may be necessary."[32] When asserting that vocation is unique in such a way that there can be no imitation, Wingren appeals to three writings of Luther, all of them before 1520. One of his references is in error. The others actually speak against the idea that people could be justified by imitating the works of the saints.[33] That is different from saying that all divine callings are unique.

Wingren is suggesting that Luther advocates a situation ethics. Wingren shows Luther's stance against imitation[34] without, however, explaining how this view could be reconciled with writings such as Article XXI of the Augsburg Confession, which Luther approved. Article XXI of the Augsburg Confession links vocation and imitation together when it says that the commemoration of the saints should be set before the church "in order that we might *imitate* their faith and good works according to our *vocation*, as the emperor can imitate the example of David in waging war to fend off the Turks from our country. For both are kings."[35] Vocations are not situationally unique. How, then, is Luther's critique of "imitation"

[26] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 183.
[27] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 146.
[28] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 147–148.
[29] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 155–156, 171, 173, 180, 181, 184.
[30] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 172–173.
[31] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 176–177.
[32] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 178.
[33] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 181n. Wingren refers to Luther's *Treatise on the Sacrament of Baptism* (1519), AE 35:40; *Commentary on Romans* (1515–1516), AE 25:263–264; and *Commentary on Hebrews* (1517–1518) in Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Schriften*], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 57:87 (hereafter WA). The Hebrews reference is in error.
[34] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 171, 173, 180, 181, 184.
[35] AC XXI 1, my translation and emphasis.

to be understood? Luther's critique has to do with imitation at a high level of specificity and for the purpose of meriting righteousness. In rejecting imitation, he rejects those who seek holiness by imitating the inconsequential details of another's life—for example, St. Bernard's white robe or St. Paul's missionary journeys. Instead, Luther points out that within one's vocation, the day-to-day requirements of how the neighbor is to be served may be quite variable. Although Luther stresses that love must serve the *variable* needs of the neighbor, he never loses sight of the fact that God has given *specific* commands to humankind. Insofar as vocation itself has *specific* duties, these duties would act as the boundaries *within which* the details may change. Luther's statements against particular outward forms of life seem to be applicable against a high level of *specificity*, not against all objective ethical standards. Wingren, unfortunately, does not make this explicit.

With vocation as radically unique to each individual, how does one know how he should behave in a given situation? According to Wingren, people will gain clarity from prayer. For proof, Wingren cites Luther's 1523 *Secular Authority*.[36] Yet, in that place, Luther does not say that God reveals his will in prayer but that a prince should pray for wisdom. Nevertheless, for Wingren, reason and prayer are the means for making moral decisions in one's vocation.[37]

Wingren's book has not gone unchallenged. Kenneth Hagen gave a critique in 2002.[38] Before him, Holsten Fagerberg rightly pointed out that the Lutheran confessions do not "identify" vocation with the law; that is, they are not the exact same thing. Instead, vocation comes from the law (in Scripture and in creation). Fagerberg also said that one cannot deduce his duty from his situation, but only from the Decalogue.[39] That is to say, good works are defined by the Decalogue. But we often have additional duties (and thus opportunities for good works) from our additional vocations, such as "father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker,"[40] ruler, subject, preacher,and hearer. The works of one's vocation and good works are not the exact same thing. "Good works" is the broader category. All the works of one's vocation (done in faith) are good works, but not all good works are the works of one's vocation.

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[36] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 197–199. There he cites WA 11:272.

[37] Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 207.

[38] Kenneth George Hagen, "A Critique of Wingren on Luther on Vocation," *Lutheran Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (2002): 249–273. Most helpful is Hagen's explanation of Wingren's polemical goals against Anders Nygren and Einar Billing.

[39] Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions 1529–1537*, trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 286–288.

[40] SC, Confession . Quotations from the Small Catechism are from *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*,

Wingren's situational approach has been followed recently by ELCA professor Mark Tranvik. In his recent book, *Martin Luther and the Called Life*, he gives an account of vocation that floats free of the moral precepts of Scripture. According to Tranvik, vocation is the role in life to which God calls all people, and it must be discerned by individuals in the context of their community. Luther's *life* is a model for finding one's own vocation.[41] Yet, Tranvik would have done better to listen to how Luther actually *teaches* vocation, such as in the Small Catechism's Table of Duties, which roots vocation in specific moral precepts that are revealed in Scripture. Instead of looking to the written word of God for God's call, Tranvik points people to God's creation, by which he means everyone's situation in life.

All of these modern approaches to vocation have much in common with the view of morality set forth in 1966 by Joseph Fletcher in his *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*. The major, overriding situation put forth by Fletcher at the beginning of the book is abortion. If a psychopath rapist impregnates a girl, may the fetus be aborted? His answer is "YES."[42] Here the subjective experience of the situation trumps all moral laws. One of Fletcher's problems is that he moves from something true, namely, that "circumstances alter cases" (which Thomas Aquinas and Lutheran moral theologians have always recognized), to the falsehood that "circumstances alter rules and principles."[43] Fletcher bases his view, ironically, on 2 Corinthians 3:6 and Galatians 5:14, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."[44] Yet, here the law of love trumps the specific divine commands in the Scriptures. No longer is there any real moral order. Fletcher seems to have only the short-term end of love in mind, as if saying, "The girl has been raped. I seek the short-term (proximate) advantage for the girl. Therefore, it is loving to abort." But this is false. It assumes that individuals know best what the ultimate advantage of their neighbors is. It sets man on God's throne.

The list of theologians whom Fletcher invokes in support of his position is, nevertheless, impressive: Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Emil Brunner, H. Richard Niebuhr, James Gustafson, and several others.[45] For Fletcher and Karl Barth, in particular, situations are radically unique.[46] Karl Barth opposed

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[41] Mark D. Tranvik, *Martin Luther and the Called Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016).

[42] Joseph F. Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 38.

[43] Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*, 29.

[44] Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*, 30.

[45] Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*, 34.

[46] Nigel Biggar, "Moral Reason in History: An Essay in Defence of Casuistry," in *Issues in Faith and History: Papers Presented at the Second Edinburgh Conference on Dogmatics, 1987*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1989), 24; see also pp. 24–25, 27; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley, vol. 3.4 (Edinburgh:

any special ethics or casuistic ethics in which universal laws are applied to cases, and thus in which cases of conscience are decided by a casuist in advance for others to follow. In such a casuistry, according to Barth, the casuist makes himself God, knowing good and evil; such a casuistry treats the command of God as a universal rule, which Barth strenuously opposes; and such a casuistry destroys Christian freedom, which is necessary for an action to be good. Barth's basic thrust is that situations and the human beings in those situations are radically unique, and, therefore, there can be no "ethics filled out with material content."[47] (Of course, even Barth's ethics and dogmas have a contour and state some things as wrong and others as right.[48])

Yet, if the law is replaced by situation ethics, then the result for many people will be the disaster of modern sexuality. Witness the ELCA statement "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," adopted by the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA in August 2009. In this statement, "vocation" divorced from scriptural moral precepts is one of the arguments used to justify homosexual practice.

> We recognize the complex and varied *situations* people have relative to human sexuality: being in relationships, being single, being a friend, living in a young or aging body, being male or female, being young or old, or having different sexual orientations and gender identities. In whatever the situation, all people are *called* to build trust in relationships and in the community.[49]

Divorced from a concrete, real moral order, one's ethic will usually serve one's personal interests. In this case, as Paul says, for those who exchanged the truth of God for a lie, God gave them up to vile passions (Rom 1:26).

Of course, one's situation in life does play a role in one's vocation. As Luther puts it in the Small Catechism, "Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker?"[50] Situation, if understood as station, really matters. A husband is not a wife. A father and his son are not equal. The problem comes when a situational or contextual theology separates God's call from the eternal moral law that is revealed in Scripture.

T. & T. Clark, 1961), 5–31. See also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 85–86, 284–285.

[47] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.4:8.

[48] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.4:6–31.

[49] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust." Presented at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, Minneapolis, MN, August 19, 2009, http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/SexualitySS.pdf?_ga=2.106406662.488279729.1532380714-786766238.1532380714, 8–9, emphasis added.

[50] SC, Confession.

IV. Luther on Baptismal Vocation

As a corrective to enthusiastic and situational views of vocation, let us learn from Martin Luther's Baptism sermons. In January and February, from 1528 to 1539, Luther sometimes interrupted the readings of the seasons of Epiphany, pre-Lent, and Lent to preach sermon series on Baptism.[51] Luther's Baptism sermons provide rich instruction on vocation in two ways. First, the command-validity of vocation is parallel to the command-validity of Baptism. Second, the baptismal vocation is a life of good works that are defined by love and the moral law revealed in Scripture.

The Command-Validity of Vocation Is Parallel to the Command-Validity of Baptism

The first definitive place where Luther discusses his doctrine of stations in life is in the Small Catechism's (1529) Table of Duties, which has the title "The House-Table of Several Passages for All Manner of Holy Orders and Stations [*Stende*], Through Which They Are to Be Admonished Concerning Their Duty [*Ampts*] and Service, as Through Their Own Proper Lesson."[52] Here the biblical commands for various stations are set forth. Second, in *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528), Luther lists three "holy orders and true religious institutes," which are "the office of priest, the estate of marriage, the civil government," with the helping offices that attend to these.[53] In addition, there is "the common order of Christian love, in which one serves not only the three orders, but also serves every needy person in general with all kinds of benevolent deeds."[54] Here, the connection with God's external, scriptural word is clear. Luther says, "For these three religious institutions or orders are found in God's Word and commandment; and whatever is contained in God's Word must be holy, for God's Word is holy and sanctifies everything connected with it and involved in it."[55] What needs to be emphasized here is that the word of God is what makes a station what it is or makes the station legitimate instead of sinful.

Examining Luther's Genesis lectures, Paul Gregory Alms finds that Luther discusses vocation in a sacramental framework. In both the sacraments and vocation, God's word is what makes ordinary creational objects divine and gives

[51] See Martin Luther, *Martin Luther on Holy Baptism: Sermons to the People (1525–39)*, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018).

[52] Irene Dingel, ed., *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche: Vollständige Neuedition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 894, my translation.

[53] Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528), AE 37:364.

[54] Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528), AE 37:365.

[55] Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528), AE 37:365.

certainty that this particular thing is pleasing to God.[56] Alms is correct, but more can be said. In our day and age, it needs to be stressed that we find God's word of command in Scripture alone. Without God's scriptural word of command establishing a station or giving a duty, there is no divine vocation.

In Luther's baptismal preaching, he gives many examples of the parallels between vocation and Baptism. The main thing that makes the water of Baptism a saving water and a sacrament is God's command. Luther points out in the Large Catechism that this is parallel to other commands that God gives. For example, in the Decalogue, God commands obedience to father and mother, and it is God's *command* that then actually makes this obedience into a good, God-pleasing work, as opposed to man-made, supposedly good works, like undertaking a pilgrimage to Rome or Santiago de Compostela.[57]

In 1534, against the Anabaptists, who looked only at the physical element of water and decided it could not help the soul, Luther shows that the objective word of God is what gives Baptism its power, and as he does so, he points to the vocations of parents and princes as a parallel example. God's word of command is what gives the vocations of parents and civil government their authority, distinguishing them from other people.[58]

Luther also draws a parallel from Baptism's validity by the word to the creation's objective existence. God's creation of the sun remains true whether or not someone can see the light.[59] Similarly, the command of God to baptize is parallel to the objective and eternal nature of the Ten Commandments and to vocations. As Luther says, God's work, "once done, lasts and avails forever."[60] The fact that the Israelites disobeyed the Ten Commandments does not invalidate or abrogate them. The fact that David fell into adultery and murder does not mean that new commandments must be made. God's command remains valid. The vocation of prince is likewise "not weakened when a prince has many disloyal and disobedient subjects in his principality."[61] And the same is true of Baptism. God's command to baptize remains valid, regardless of whether people believe it. In all of these cases, the explicit command of God is what makes it what it is, regardless of how people regard it, regardless also of faith. Just as Baptism is valid regardless of how one regards it, so also the vocations that God has established continue to exist, regardless of how one *feels* about those vocations.

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[56] Paul Gregory Alms, "The Sacraments and Vocation in Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 80, nos. 1–2 (2016): 3–19.

[57] LC IV 14, 19–20.

[58] Luther, *On Holy Baptism* (Jan.–Feb. 1534/1535), AE 57:146.

[59] Luther, *On Holy Baptism* (Jan.–Feb. 1534/1535), AE 57:156–157.

[60] Luther, *On Holy Baptism* (Jan.–Feb. 1534/1535), AE 57:184.

[61] Luther, *On Holy Baptism* (Jan.–Feb. 1534/1535), AE 57:184.

Four years later, in 1538, Luther again preached that Baptism's validity, based on the word of God, is parallel to the objective validity of the Ten Commandments and the vocations of father, mother, and prince. Here, he focused on the scriptural basis of both Baptism and the vocations. The fourth commandment established obedience to parents and princes. In the same way, Christ's word established Baptism. Both of them remain established and true, based on specific scriptural institution texts, regardless of how one feels about them.[62]

Just as the word of God distinguishes plain water from Baptism, God's word distinguishes marriage from a life of fornication. Luther preaches:

> But be sure yourself that it came from heaven, or it is nothing. For example, whores and rakes[63] live together, raise children, and collect property. This behavior and life is so similar to holy matrimony, it is beyond telling, and yet they are whores and rakes and in a sinful condition. Why? God's command is absent. However, if they are married, it is proper, for then it has the proper dress, God's Word. . . . And so it is not the same work any more than the cohabitation of married people and of whores and rakes are the same. And God says to married people: "You shall live together in holy matrimony," but He forbids whores and rakes to do so. They are not to lie together in unchastity. And this creates the distinction that holy matrimony is God's institution while God has forbidden fornication.[64]

Luther also gives the example of the distinction between a judge and a robber, both of which kill—one with God's command (Rom 13:4) and one without.[65] What distinguishes the two kinds of killing is *God's scriptural command*, applied to the estate (station) of civil government.

Again, in 1539, Luther contrasts honest labor with theft. Labor *in general*, he explains, has God's command. He preaches:

> Likewise, thieves and robbers drink and dine together, and it tastes as good to them as it does to those who make a living by manual labor and eat and drink. Indeed, it tastes far better, for there is often house and home, money and goods. Yet in the case of the thieves and robbers, there is only the devil's word. But in the case of those who labor, there is God's Word and command, and you can

[62] Sermon of January 27, 1538, in Luther, *Martin Luther on Holy Baptism*, 69–70.

[63] *Huren* und *Buben*. The word *Buben* has a range of meanings, from "scoundrel" to "philanderer," or in general, a dissolute, profligate person. By speaking of cohabiting unmarried people as "whores and rakes," Luther uses derogatory language to make such cohabiting shameful.

[64] Sermon of January 19, 1539, in Luther, *Martin Luther on Holy Baptism*, 107–108.

[65] Sermon of January 19, 1539, in Luther, *Martin Luther on Holy Baptism*, 108.

> eat your bread with a good conscience and make use of what you have. In the first case, where it is similar, he says: "I do not want to you have this."[66]

Here "labor" is a divine calling, but not the specifics of what that labor entails. Moreover, private property is authorized by divine command.

Over and over again, Luther emphasizes that vocational certainty must come from the Scriptures. "One should not say: 'I am a husband, but who knows whether that estate pleases God?' No, it must be certain. One must say: 'I am baptized. I have partaken of the Sacrament and have a wife and it is God's will that it be so.' No fornicator can say that."[67]What distinguishes a divine vocation from a different arrangement is the word of God, which specifies one and forbids the other—not an enthusiastic inner message from God, and not simply one's situation.

The Baptismal Vocation Is Forgiveness and a Life of Good Works That Are Defined by Love and the Moral Law Revealed in Scripture

Rather than being so concerned about discerning God's call in our lives, we must continuously emphasize that the universal call of God for all Christians is the *baptismal* vocation. Baptism itself is vocational. The baptismal vocation is forgiveness and a life of good works that are defined by love and the moral law revealed in Scripture.

The Large Catechism states that Baptism daily strengthens the new man and smothers the old man.[68] To use the language of the Small Catechism, "The Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and . . . a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."[69] This is what can be called the "sanctification aspect" of Baptism's ongoing benefits. Luther does not usually use the word "sanctification" to describe this; instead, he speaks of the fruits and consequences of Baptism: since people have died to sin and become new people in Baptism, now they must live a new life and honor their Baptism with good works. At other times, Luther describes this as the gradual putting to death of the old man, the growth of the new man, the growth of the fruits of faith, sweeping out sin, renewal, and so forth. Luther has many different ways of describing this gradual transformation.

In this ongoing effect of Baptism, Christians are not purely passive. Luther states in the Large Catechism, "We must do the work of which we are Christians."[70]

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[66] Sermon of January 19, 1539, in Luther, *Martin Luther on Holy Baptism*, 108.
[67] Sermon of January 19, 1539, in Luther, *Martin Luther on Holy Baptism*, 110–111.
[68] LC IV 83–84.
[69] SC, Baptism.
[70] LC IV 85, my translation.

That is to say, the power of Baptism works in us and *with* us. In that respect, its effect is cooperative with us.[71] Sometimes Luther emphasizes the power that Baptism provides, but at other times, he stresses the responsibility of the *believer* to *do* good and *avoid* sin.[72] In the 1534 sermons, he emphasizes the responsibility of believers. We must honor Baptism with good works. And so he preaches,

> Although it was without our works and good life that we found grace to obtain Baptism correctly, we are still to devote ourselves to honoring and adorning it with words and works and our whole life from now on. Baptismal fonts, altars, and pulpits are there to remind us of this. Since they are to bear witness to the fact that we are baptized and Christians, we should also plan to honor the baptismal font and so live that we may view it with joy and that it may not bear witness against us.[73]

Luther states that good works are necessary:

> Being baptized and remaining in sin do not go together. It is given for the very purpose of taking sin away so that man would become just and increase in good works. If he was disobedient, angry, spiteful, unfaithful, and unchaste before, he is to depart from that, pray an Our Father instead, and from that point on take care and strive to be obedient, patient, and kind. If you do not do this, do not think that all is well with you nor boast about the grace of Christ a great deal in order to justify your sin.[74]

But he also speaks of the new life and good works as being an effect of Baptism, an effect that you can actually perceive:

> Likewise, if you had been an adulterer, fornicator, or coveter, then Baptism should teach you from that point on not to strike, commit adultery, covet, steal, and rob any longer. The former is forgiven and dead, and from that point on there is to be a different, just, righteous, beneficent, disciplined man. If you find such life and fruits in yourself for a length of time, it is a sign that Baptism has taken effect in you. If it should happen that you go amiss in one or two things, which would be called falling and stumbling, you may take comfort in grace and forgiveness; yet not in such a way that you would remain lying in it or continue and keep saying: "What can I do about it? I cannot get rid of it. Anyway, all is grace and forgiveness," etc.[75]

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[71] The same is in FC Ep II 17; FC SD II 65–66.
[72] Luther, *On Holy Baptism* (Jan.–Feb. 1534/1535), AE 57:185–186.
[73] Luther, *On Holy Baptism* (Jan.–Feb. 1534/1535), AE 57:186–187.
[74] Luther, *On Holy Baptism* (Jan.–Feb. 1534/1535), AE 57:187.
[75] Luther, *On Holy Baptism* (Jan.–Feb. 1534/1535), AE 57:187–188.

Over and over again, Luther emphasizes the theme he developed in the Large Catechism, that Baptism implants in us a power actually to become good. It does not work all at once, but it does happen, and it results in people who are renewed and equipped for good works.[76]

But if Baptism includes both the Holy Spirit's renewing gifts and a call to holiness and good works, what are these good works? Here we are back at the question of whether we must discern God's call in our heart and situation or whether we should look to the scriptural moral law. Is the law instructive in good works or not? Holsten Fagerberg found that even though the parts of the Book of Concord written by Luther and Melanchthon do not list a "third use of the law," an instructive use of the moral law is nevertheless present there.[77]

In Luther's classic sermon on the thorough distinction of law and gospel, preached on Galatians 3:23–29 on January 1, 1532, he specifies that the "form" of the law, what makes it what it is, is not the function of condemnation or accusation but the *command* of what we should do, toward *God* and neighbor (not just toward the neighbor). The law also needs to be distinguished and applied rightly according to one's vocation. For example, scriptural commands to kings do not apply to Luther. They have different vocations, but the duties of those vocations are taught from the scriptural moral law.[78]

But if Baptism and the gospel send us back to do good works that are defined by the moral law, is not Christian freedom being denied? Are we not freed from the law? Even as early as 1522, in what would later be called the *Church Postil*, Luther explained that freedom from the law does not mean that the law loses its power of obligation. The law is not changed by Christ. We are changed. So in the *Church Postil*, he writes,

> 21. So, if a lord had you confined in prison, and you were exceedingly unwilling to remain there, someone could free you from it in two ways. First, bodily, so that he would smash the prison, set you free bodily, and let you go wherever you wanted. Second, he could do you much good in prison—make it pleasing, light, spacious, and richly ornamented for you, so that no royal chamber and kingdom was so costly—and could break and change your attitude so that you would not leave the prison for all the property in the world, but would pray that the prison would remain and you could stay in it, which had become for you no longer a prison but rather a paradise.

[76] Luther, *On Holy Baptism* (Jan.–Feb. 1534/1535), AE 57:188.
[77] Fagerberg, *A New Look*, 85–86.
[78] Luther, *On Holy Baptism* (Jan.–Feb. 1534/1535), AE 57:64–76.

> Tell me, which release would be the best? Is it not true that the spiritual is the best? In the first release, you remain a poor beggar, as before; but here you have a free spirit and everything you want.
>
> 22. So Christ has redeemed us from the Law spiritually. He did not smash and abolish the Law, but rather so changed our heart, which before was unwillingly under the Law, did so much good to it, and made the Law so delightful that [our heart] has no greater delight or joy than in the Law, and would not willingly lose even a dot from it [Matt 5:18]. Just as the prisoner makes his prison narrow and oppressive for himself by his loathing, so also we are hostile to the Law, and it is disagreeable to us because we loathe being locked away from evil and being compelled to good.[79]

Luther was not always as clear as this. Preaching on 1 Timothy 1:5 in 1525, Luther frequently speaks of the abolition of human laws and even of the law of God. Human rulers can abolish human laws, but only Christ could abolish God's law, or, as Luther alternatively expresses it, "Therefore we must have Him over whom it has no power, who satisfied it for us."[80] Yet, when Luther argues that the law is abolished, he means *not* that it ceases to exist, ceases to be preached, or ceases to be God's will, but that, instead, "the Law remains in place," and the righteous person, having the Holy Spirit and a pure heart, acts in *accordance* with the law.[81]

In two sermons on Jeremiah 23:5–8 in November 1526, Luther explains that all sins have been forgiven by Christ, "provided that I believe in Him," and yet there are sins remaining, from which believers are in the process of being cleansed.[82] The freedom that Christians have from the law is not absolute. They are free in the conscience and the soul, but it would be wrong to apply this freedom to the body, "as the peasants did last year" (in the German Peasants' War, 1524–1525).[83] Therefore, according to Luther (not just late but also early), Christian freedom does not mean that the law is abrogated. Rather, the Christian is forgiven and saved

[79] Luther, *Church Postil* (1522/1540), Epistle for New Year's Day, AE 76:9. Again, in his 1528 lectures on Isaiah, Luther makes clear that Christian freedom happens not by the abolition of the law, but by the change of man's relationship to the law: "Natural man would prefer that there be no law, because he is not able to perform what it demands. The sin that has been committed is the second tyrant, and it brings forth the third, namely, death and damnation. Who could be happy when he is answerable to these three? But now they have been vanquished, the Law is fulfilled by Christ and then also by us who have been endowed by the Holy Spirit. He adds the courage so that we may glory even in our sufferings (Rom. 5:3), and thus the Law is no longer outrageous in its dictates but an agreeable companion. The Law itself indeed is not changed, but we are. Obviously this is Christian liberty, when the Law is voluntarily fulfilled, so that it cannot accuse, demand, and render guilty" (Luther, *Lectures on Isaiah* [1528/1914], AE 16:98–99).

[80] WA 17/1:117 (AE 56).

[81] WA 17/1:130, 114 (AE 56).

[82] WA 20:573–574 (AE 56).

[83] WA 20:579 (AE 56).

despite the fact that he has not kept the law perfectly, and then his attitude toward the law is changed. "The Law itself indeed is not changed, but we are."

What do we find from this? Good works are defined by the moral law of God. Vocation is defined by the divine institution of each specific station of life: marriage, family, civil society, church, and ministry. Where God's word in the Bible does not speak, there is vocational freedom. Where God's word *does* speak about these vocations, that is what they are. These things are not determined by the hearts of individuals; they are not to be divorced from God's scriptural word.

V. Conclusion

When I helped start Christ Academy while a student worker at CTSFW in 1999, we used a trick question on the application form: "How does the Holy Spirit work in your life?" If a young man had been taught well, he would say something about being forgiven through word and sacraments and maybe being instructed in holy living through the word of God. If he had not been taught well, he would say something about how the Holy Spirit made him feel or about messages that he received from the Holy Spirit outside of Scripture. The doctrine of vocation seems to have fallen into the same error. People seem to have forgotten about Christian freedom on one hand and about the eternal[84] moral law of God on the other. Luther's baptismal sermons can help us with this, if we are willing to hear him.

[84] FC SD II 50.

CTQ 82 (2018): 65–82

Paradise Regained: Placing Nicholas Hopman's *Lex Aeterna* Back in Luther's Frame

Nathan Rinne

Academic disputations, which featured men engaged in the vigorous exchange and debate of ideas, were a common feature of university life in the Middle Ages. As certain aspects of Scholasticism were challenged in Martin Luther's time, he also eagerly embraced the practice of holding these disputations, as he believed they were critical to the defense of the truth. When the church went off the tracks and the gospel of Jesus Christ became obscured, Luther's *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* (the 1517 Ninety-Five Theses) and *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518) were the result. From 1537 to 1540, Johann Agricola (1494–1566), one of Luther's colleagues, maintained that the Christian only needed the gospel and not the law—the law with its coercion was only for the civil sphere. Luther responded with his Antinomian theses and disputations. Unlike the other disputations, however, there were six sets of Antinomian theses and four disputations about them (the third and fourth set were not debated publicly). Perhaps by virtue of their being available only in Latin, the four disputations have only recently been made available, translated and edited by Holger Sonntag and published by Lutheran Press in 2008.[1]

I. A Brief Introduction to Nicholas Hopman's Article

In his article "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations* and *lex aeterna*," Nicholas Hopman tackles Luther's statement that "only the Decalogue is eternal."[2] Hopman makes the case that the idea that the law is eternal, what other theologians have called the *lex aeterna*, has little to do with the concrete reality that Christians experience.[3] What *can* be rooted in concrete reality, however, is the law that is felt when it accuses us in our hearts. In fact, the essence of the law is that it accuses of sin. Luther, Hopman claims, defines the law by its effect.[4] This is the foundation for the rest of Hopman's article and influences how he sees Luther's theology in the *Antinomian Disputations* and beyond.

[1] Martin Luther, *Solus Decalogus Est Aeternus: Martin Luther's Complete Antinomian Disputations*, trans. and ed. Holger Sonntag (Minneapolis: Lutheran Press, 2008), 11–21.

[2] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 129; WA 39/1:413.16–18.

[3] Nicholas Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations* and *lex aeterna*," *Lutheran Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2016): 167, 172.

[4] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 157.

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Hopman concludes his article "in agreement with Gerhard Forde"[5] and claims that "Christ's fulfillment of the law is total and it ends the law . . . (Rom. 10:4)."[6] For, if the static *lex aeterna*, "a theological projection of divine, eternal, objective order,"[7] "becomes the framework for the whole theological system, [it] destroy[s] the inherently eschatological nature (Rom. 10:4) of the law-gospel distinction."[8]

Hopman's article brings to our attention several important matters that deserve our reflection and discussion. In this piece, I will first summarize the content of his article and then show that Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*, particularly when read side by side with Luther's Genesis commentary from around the same time period, present in the final analysis a view of God's law as both eternal and grounded in God's original creation. This, in turn, affects how Luther sees and treats the law in the life of the Christian in the present, as one looks to the life to come.

II. The Eternal Law in Hopman's Luther

Essentially, Hopman makes two core claims about Luther's view of God's law that we will examine and begin to critique in this section. First, in Luther's thought, a definition of God's law devoid of an accusation of sin is inconceivable.[9] After all, in the *Antinomian Disputations*, Luther says that "the essence of the law . . . is its condemning office," and that " 'the office of the law' is . . . 'whatever shows sin, wrath, and death.' "[10]

Second, "The law, even and most especially 'the Decalogue itself,' demands Christ and it demands sinners become new creations in Christ. Therefore, Christ and his redeemed are the *res* [or thing,] of the Decalogue, the *res* which remains eternally apart from and greater than the law, 'even the Decalogue itself.' "[11] A corollary of this claim about God's law is that an orthodox Lutheran view of the

[5] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 172.
[6] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 165.
[7] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 153.
[8] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 172.
[9] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 164.
[10] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 154. Hopman also states that for Luther, the law, sin, and death are inextricably connected: the law "is essentially [a] threatening and condemning personal force"; a "law that does not condemn is a fake and counterfeit law, like a chimera or a goat stag"; and "there is no distinction between the law's requirement/demand (*exactio*) and the law's accusation/condemnation (*accusatio*)" (see Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 153, 155, 159).
[11] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 165.

eternal law, in other words, that "the law in the most proper sense is internal to God,"[12] causes a "binary distinction in the doctrine of the law."[13]

To counter this kind of distinction, Hopman's own working definition of *lex aeterna* is "any concept of law defined apart from sin and the law's attack on sinners."[14] In adopting this unique definition of *lex aeterna*, Hopman wants to make clear that as Luther defines it, the law always relates to sin,[15] and he "purposefully (knowingly and dogmatically) equates the law's being and its effect."[16] Luther, per Hopman, "literally defines the law's very being as synonymous with its [condemning] office (not distinguished from it)."[17] Again, "Law and showing sin, are, in fact and in concrete reality, synonymous."[18] For example, he quotes Luther stating in the twentieth thesis of the "Second Set of Antinomian Theses": "The law and the showing of sin, or revelation of wrath, are synonymous terms as are man and risible and rational."[19] In sum, Hopman is keen to emphasize repeatedly that Luther himself says that when we speak about the law, we speak about "the law's proper effect . . . you always ought to remain in the chief (principal) definition of the law, that it works wrath and hatred and despair."[20]

Hopman's Luther also teaches, without any qualification, that "the content of the commandment/law is always a weapon attacking human sin."[21] The gospel, however, changes all of this. "The fulfillment of the law actually empties the law of all its content, namely, its threatening teeth,"[22] and then, due to this action from our Lord, "where there is no accusation, there is no law."[23]

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[12] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 162. He also complains that those who have used the doctrine of *lex aeterna*, or the eternal law, "have not defined [it] very precisely" (153). But perhaps, in line with the various ideas of the law they had received from their posterity, they considered the matter to be rather straightforward. A fuller definition than the one given above might be akin to the following: God's law, in line with his holy character, sums up his will that his creatures dwell in harmony with him and his creation, fearing, loving, and trusting in him and what he commands above all things; and, to paraphrase from the Small Catechism, that we do not despise or anger him, but honor him, serve and obey him, love and cherish him (see the explanation of the fourth commandment). Clearly, something like this is at the heart of God's will and is therefore not merely temporal.

[13] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 152.

[14] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 153.

[15] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 155.

[16] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 156.

[17] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 154.

[18] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 156.

[19] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 155.

[20] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 157.

[21] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 159.

[22] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 160.

[23] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 164. A corollary of this in Hopman's work would seem to be that "only where there is freedom from law . . . can there be love of the law," for "the law and delight in the law are two mutually exclusive realities" (167). He states that "the

Hopman's statements about the law's content being emptied demand more engagement on our part. When he speaks about this, what specifically does he mean? Since in his view, Luther sees the law's essence primarily as something that "accuses," "pricks," "burns," and "terrifies," Hopman also as-sumes that its content is its "teeth" or "stinger." What does this mean? When Luther speaks about the fulfilled law as an "empty law,"[24] Hopman states that "the law's stingers or teeth are this commandment or that commandment, natural law, a dry leaf, and so on."[25]

This brings us to Hopman's claim that Christ and his redeemed are actually the *res*, of the Decalogue. When the law becomes "empty"—finally fully in heaven—God's moral commandments, both as written and as inscribed on the heart, disappear as what they were pointing to is revealed.[26]

In order to follow Hopman's argument, it is important specifically to look at what Luther says about the eternal law:

> The Decalogue . . . is greater and better [than things like circumcision and even baptism] because it is written in the heart and minds of all and will remain with us even in the coming life. . . . Only the Decalogue is eternal—as such, that is, not as law—because in the coming life things will be like what the Decalogue has been demanding here.[27]

The word that Holger Sonntag translates as "as such" is the Latin word *res*. Hopman says it should be translated as "as fact of course, not as law."[28] What, therefore, is the thing or fact *outside of the law* that it demands? Hopman's answer is Christ and his new creation, the believer. When they are present, the law ceases and is removed.[29]

Here, comments from one of the towering Lutheran figures of the nineteenth century, Theodosius Harnack, the father of Adolf von Harnack, are very interesting. Hopman mentions Harnack and deals with him in some detail. He relies on Robert C. Schultz to cast a shadow on Harnack's basic distinction between the law's essence

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Christian, in faith alone, is beyond the law" (160), and that "the law is present only where Christ is absent" (164). In fact, the Christian is successful against sin because the Christian and Holy Spirit are not law (171); the Holy Spirit is, in fact, "the opposite of the law" (166).

[24] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 161, from Martin Luther, *Die Thesen gegen die Antinomer 1527–1540*: vol. 39/1:433.2, in *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Schriften*], 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), hereafter WA.

[25] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 159.

[26] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 157, writes of the law on earth, "The law is natural, summarized in the Decalogue, [and] comes in specific commandments."

[27] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 127, 129; WA 39/1:413.16–18. For Hopman's utilization of the quotation, see Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 164.

[28] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 166.

[29] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 164.

and office.[30] However, simply looking at a concrete example Harnack cites from one of Luther's sermons shows that the latter cannot be dismissed so easily. In a 1526 sermon on Luke 2, Luther, utilizing Galatians 4, distinguishes between the law as it is and the work that happens in our heart by faith. The basic distinction between the essence and work of the law are already contained in the Latin-German sermon transcript:

> Not on account of the law in itself. For the law is good and holy, but on account of the office it carries out in our hearts. Thus, when Paul speaks about the law in this way [i.e., as a tyrant and disciplinarian, Gal. 4], we are to understand this concerning the office it carries out, and not concerning its essence.[31]

Noting that Luther made statements like "love is the law" and even "love is the empress over the law,"[32] Harnack says that, ultimately, one must distinguish "between law and law"[33] in Luther. On the one hand, there is "the law in itself, by itself or substantively, according to its essence," and on the other is the law's actual functioning in time (he says Luther calls it its "office"), that is, as it relates to human

[30] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 174nn13–15, 176n43.

[31] WA 20:244, cited by Theodosius Harnack, *Luthers Theologie mit besonderer Beziehung auf seine Versöhnungs- und Erlösungslehre* (Erlangen: Theodor Bläsing, 1862), 1:499. All quotations from Harnack have been made available to me by Holger Sonntag. The Luther references in Harnack are to the eighteenth-century edition by Johann Georg Walch, ed. *D. Martin Luthers sowol in Deutscher als Lateinischer Sprache verfertigte und aus der letztern in die erstere ubersetzte Sämmtliche Schriften*, 24 vols. (Halle: J. J. Gebauer, 1740–1753), here at 11:2883 (hereafter Walch).

[32] Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* 1:494–495; Walch 9:534, 293; 11:2260; 12:489. More from Harnack, *Luthers Theologie*: "However, when you ask why God then did not let the one commandment of love be sufficient, I answer: the single commandment is certainly sufficient, but it was necessary to indicate to man where he should show this love, lest man seduce himself with false opinion and trust in himself, imagining that he has the love he does not really have." Harnack supports his position by quoting Luther, "Thus, this commandment of love is a short commandment and a long commandment, a single commandment and many commandments; it is no commandment and all commandments. It is short and single in itself; it is quickly understood. However, it is long and many according to practice, for it comprehends and masters all commandments. And it is no commandment when you consider the works because it does not have a particular named work, but it is all commandments because the works of all commandments are, and are to be, love's works. Thus, love abrogates all commandments and yet establishes all commandments, all this because we should know and learn that we are not to keep or observe any commandment, any work further than love demands it (12:495ff.; cf. this entire sermon; also 19:2030)" (Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* 1:493, 494–495).

[33] Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* 1:495.

beings throughout the stages of history:[34] "what man was, what he became, and what he shall and can become again."[35]

Harnack, therefore, insists that Luther speaks of a "norm of man's essence and behavior," which, depending on the "epoch" in time, takes on different manners and forms of the law.

> [For example], regarding the last epoch, "when we will be perfect as a new creature of God," [Luther] teaches that "one cannot actually say that there the law will be fulfilled because there will be no law then, but rather the very thing which the law demanded in this life." And he immediately adds that one "may only speak so roughly and ineptly, according to the weak understanding in this life," about that condition—by applying the term "law"—to understand the matter more clearly. "For what is by nature the way it should be cannot and does not need a law to be or become like that." This is why "then the law, as law, will perish and be abolished" [Walch 19:1770].[36]

Although it might appear as if Hopman has Harnack's full support here, one should not be too hasty in that evaluation. Harnack also points out, with several examples from the reformer's writings, that Luther consistently "equate[d] enmity against the law and enmity against God."[37] For Luther, he says,

> [The law is]—and he puts the greatest emphasis on this everywhere—"God's eternal, immovable, unchangeable will," his "eternal, unchangeable judgment," which is also why he repeatedly calls it "God's will and commandment, God's truth, word, and doctrine," stating that it is "as almighty as God himself who gave it and imprinted it in the heart of man . . . that is, it is the expression of God's will" that is implanted in the heart of all men by creation.[38]

Harnack says, in a helpful summary,

> In a word, the law is the expression of the basic relationship between God and man established permanently in and by creation. This relationship is unchangeable in and by itself and it, regardless of man's behavior,

[34] Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* 1:495–496. This is, as Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* 1:495–496, puts it, "The law in its absolutely identical and abiding essence and unity, generality, and general applicability that was 'implanted in man in and through creation,' " which, he says, for Luther, is distinguished from " 'the law according to its office' or the law defined 'actively, passively, and neutrally' [Walch 11:2883; 8:2456]."

[35] Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* 1:496.

[36] Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* 1:496.

[37] Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* 1:491.

[38] Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* 1:491.

> accompanies, and towers above, the various stages and changes of humanity's history as that which always remains the same and always remains in force.[39]

Regarding "humanity's history," he also writes that "that norm [of man's essence and behavior at] first takes on the manner and form of the law, properly and strictly speaking, as a result of the happening of sin."[40]

What, more specifically, does this mean? Again, while much of what Harnack writes above might conceivably give one a reason to think his views are in line with Hopman's, the following section will begin to show that there are aspects of Luther's thought that need to be considered more deeply in relation to these questions.

III. The Overriding Significance of Eden

In the *Antinomian Disputations*, Luther says that we are all ultimately convicted "not because the Decalogue was handed down and written for us, but so that we know even the laws which we brought with us into this world"[41] and that the law describes "who we were before and who we will be in the future."[42] What are the full implications of these statements? Should we talk about the Decalogue as being something less than eternal, as something ended in Christ? These questions will be dealt with in this section, with the implications of the same for the Christian's life on earth being covered in the following section.

Many of the things Harnack says above about Luther's view of the law of God can be reinforced by statements from Luther in his *Antinomian Disputations*. In Luther's view, law is love, and yet it is also trumped by love while still being called law: "In heaven there will [once again] be no debt or any demand, but the finished work of the law and the highest love."[43] Further, even though Luther in one place insists that the law, properly defined, is that which accuses, he also says that "law in Paul simply and properly means the law which is not yet fulfilled but which is to be fulfilled."[44]

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[39] Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* 1:492. Harnack also states that "[for] Luther, the law is an objective force, not only in the sense of a phenomenon of the common human spirit, but in the sense of a divine force that is willed and established by God and that is absolutely inviolate" (1:491).

[40] Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* 1:496.

[41] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 321; WA 39/1:540.11–12.

[42] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 321; WA 39/1:539.15. See also, e.g., Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 149, 183, 189, 229, 239, 291, 293, 295.

[43] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 61; WA 39/1:374.12–14.

[44] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 283; WA 39/1:510.13–14. In addition, also in the *Antinomian Disputations*, note that Luther speaks about "a very appropriate and very joyous definition of the law" (Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 171), namely, how the law terrifies consciences in an "evangelical" way by instructing toward Christ. And this naturally brings this passage to mind: "Christ took our place and supplied what we lack, and erased with his blood the handwriting of the decree which

Nevertheless, the *Antinomian Disputations* make it clear that, for Luther, the law or commandment not only orders our lives on earth but also brings threat and accusation. Given what Luther writes above, the Scripture's affirmation that the law is good (Rom 7), and the fact that God created us "very good" (Gen 1), one naturally asks "Why?"

Hopman touches on the all-important answer when he says, "When Luther says in the *Antinomian Disputations* that the being of the law is to reveal sin, he speaks of the postlapsarian world."[45] This, of course, makes perfect sense. Law and the showing of sin are synonymous for Luther, with their "oppression of the heart," as Hopman puts it,[46] because of the law's true content: that who we once were and what we should be is written on our hearts: "Who will eliminate that living law inscribed in the hearts (cf. Rom. 2:15)"[47] of those who ultimately will "do by their nature what the law requires (cf. Rom. 2:14)?"[48] Indeed, for Luther, because of the fall into sin, which marred the image of God, "The order of the matter is that death and sin are in nature before life and righteousness."[49]

At the same time, though, Hopman himself does not explicitly draw this conclusion from his observation about Luther's concern to distinguish a pre- from a post-fall world. Instead, the point that he wants to make is that in the pre-fall context, the law that existed had an element of threat:[50] "Both [the law before and after the fall] threaten, both are related to sin, meaning, the law in Eden prevents sin

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was against us, until the law was finally satisfied by one in the stead of all of us. This is what we mean by law" (Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 163; WA 39/1:434.14–17). Luther also talks about the law being fulfilled by imputation, delivering the benefits of Christ's work, and then also "formally," as the Christian, in line with Romans 8:3–4, fulfills the law as well (see, e.g., Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 159 and 163–169). In sum, "The saints are under the law and without the law" (Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 161; WA 39/1:433.1).

[45] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 161; see also 173n4.

[46] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 158.

[47] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 233; WA 39/1:352.5.

[48] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 163; WA 39/1:435.3.

[49] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 37; WA 39/1:347.1–2.

[50] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 161, states that "for Luther a threat is so essential to the law that the presence of God's threat in Eden, before Adam or Eve sinned, proves the presence of his law in Eden." Hopman's statement rings true when he notes that sin's connection with the law is so close that the threat of punishment proves to Luther that there is law in the garden. After all, we recognize that the law makes specific requirements and backs them up with the threat of punishment from God. When Christ comes, however, this "requiring" ceases in him. See Luther in Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 71; WA 39/1:379.16–17, 380.1–2, "The law and the prophets last till Christ. When he is present, they cease, since he fulfills the law. And then, since the law condemned him as an innocent, he removed the entire power of the law, which consists in requiring, accusing, and terrifying." Again, note that prior to the fall, accusing and terrifying was not the function of the law.

whereas the law after sin also condemns and increases sin (Rom. 5:20), and both are related to death."[51]

So, what is the real significance of the postlapsarian aspect of the law? The answer to this question, again, relates to the "*res* of the Decalogue" and whether it "remains eternally apart from and greater than the law, 'even the Decalogue itself,' " as Hopman claims.[52] In truth, as we will see, his limited view of the Decalogue's *res* prevents him from understanding its significance in creation and, ultimately, in the Formula of Concord.

Hopman states that "in faith alone [believers] are beyond the ordered demand of the law that God has placed in his old earthly creation."[53] But what, more specifically, is the nature of this "ordered demand of the law" of which he speaks? This is a particularly interesting question, given that he says, "Whatever eternity [the law] will have in God's kingdom will be defined by its lack of 'lawness.' "[54]

Here, it is important to look at what Luther says about God's original creation of man and his giving man the law. In the *Antinomian Disputations*, we read that originally, without sin in the garden,[55] man obeyed God's commandment perfectly, and the law was "not only something possible, but even something enjoyable."[56] It is only after Adam and Eve were "infected by the venom of Satan"[57] that man (without a gospel-like motivation by which his conscience "may intend the good") could no longer "intend good."[58] As Luther notes in his Genesis commentary, it is for this reason that "the Law given to the unrighteous is not the same Law that was given to righteous Adam."[59]

With regard to how this first law differs from law subsequently given, Harnack explains Luther's position more:

> [Luther] wants a "difference to be made between the law given before sin, when Adam was still perfect, pious, and righteous, and the law given after sin." This

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[51] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 162; see also 161. It is important to note that when Luther deals with the law increasing sin in the *Antinomian Disputations*, he speaks about it being "increased" in the sense of its being more fully revealed and brought to light, not as the law as the efficient cause of creating more sinful activity (Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 69, 337–345).

[52] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 165.

[53] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 163.

[54] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 166.

[55] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 83; WA 39/1:386.5–7.

[56] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 47; WA 39/1:364.10–11. See also Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 291, 293.

[57] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 277; WA 39/1:505.4.

[58] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 33; WA 39/1:345.28–29.

[59] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1–5* (1536): vol. 1, p. 109, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–1986); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE.

> is why he says that only "this law, given to the unrighteous, was not given to righteous Adam; however, since a law was given to righteous Adam, it follows that it was a different law (that is, a different kind of law)" than the latter one. For there was "one law before sin and a different one after sin," just as "being righteous was much different before sin than after sin" (1:196ff.). Thus, his [Luther's] opinion is that Adam, to be sure, was not without law in the state of innocence—the same law considered substantively—but that there can be, concerning Adam, no talk of the law in the latter sense "which prohibits sin" since he still was without sin and the law was still one with his essence and being that completely corresponded to the divine likeness. For "Adam was created in a way that he did not need a commandment" (3:87). This is why "you must separate by far the commandment (not to eat of the tree) from all other commandments subsequently given; for Adam was still without sin" (ibid.).[60]

If Harnack is right in his summary of Luther, one can see that the reformer by no means intends to imply the law given in Eden did not, like the Ten Commandments, tell man to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. By making this distinction, Luther is keen to show that the law was different because Adam was different.[61] In other words, contrary to Gerhard Forde's insistence, the fall really does matter.[62]

As Harnack puts it, Luther is talking about "the same law considered substantively,"[63] as illustrated in the last section of this article. This makes sense if one believes that right from the beginning, God's law would take into account certain social and material parameters built into his creation—constraints that, when violated, do not increase trust, love, and loyalty, but instead dissolve these things. In other words, in commanding loyalty to God alone—who commands the love of neighbor in specific ways—the Decalogue and the natural law written

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[60] Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* 1:497.

[61] Harnack, *Luthers Theologie 1:*498: "[Luther] wants to have the manner and form, in which this self-identical moral norm presently appears and operates and which is that of the outward law or, as he puts it, 'the manner of Moses,' 'separated by far' from the form which it had originally and which it will have again in the future. It was then and will then be 'no law'—to be sure, of one substance with the law, but not of the same 'manner' and 'office,' strictly speaking. The norm becomes the law first under the impact which it suffers from the sinner and which it inflicts on the sinner—actively and passively, as Luther puts it. As violated by the sinner, that norm becomes one that encounters the sinner externally, that is, it becomes the law. And only this law in this stage of its history conditioned by sin is what Luther talks about negatively."

[62] See, e.g., Gerhard Forde, *The Captivation of the Will: Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 70. See also, Gerhard Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 48–55.

[63] Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* 1:497.

on men's hearts show us what love looks like in any age, directing us to the highest expression of God's unchanging desires for those created in his image.

Here, Hopman may well agree, for, as he says, "The law is natural, summarized in the Decalogue, [and] comes in specific commandments," and so on.[64] The critical question here, though, is whether the radical nature of the gospel means that we should preach and teach that the law no longer has any content at all. In other words, whether we, in proclaiming the gospel, should say the law has ended, not only as regards its accusation, but also as regards commands that are in fact eternal.

On the one hand, it seems that the answer might be yes. After all, Luther seems eager to distinguish the written law from the love that fulfills the law, first in Christ and then in the Christian. This can be seen when Harnack quotes Luther saying, for example,

> In short, before sin the law was a law of the Spirit, "which is not written by any letters, which is not spoken by any word, which is not comprehended by any thought, but which is precisely the same living will and the experiencing life; it is absolutely the very thing that is written in the heart with the finger of God" [9:121].[65]

On the other hand, the strongest case can be made that Luther ultimately would not have God's servants do this! For instance, regarding the quote above, we note that when it comes to the *content* of the natural law, Luther never strictly distinguishes between an internal natural law written on the human heart and an external law written with letters, words, and sentences. Here, one must keep in mind that Luther himself was quite clear about the difficulties we often have with human language not being wholly sufficient for communicating the richness and depth of divine truths. There is also more that can be said, outlined, for example, in the three points that follow.

First, for Luther, true eternal life is found in the Holy Spirit, who works in us in love, and "the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. . . . Love is the fulfilling of the law" (i.e., the Decalogue) (Rom 13:8, 10).[66] In other words, love's very definition is obedience to the law (negatively and positively). It is for this reason alone that the word *love* can be used to summarize each table of the Decalogue! At the same time, our flesh desperately wants to avoid this definition of love, thereby avoiding suffering and the cross. Luther will have none of this. Throughout the *Antinomian Disputations*, when he does not talk about the doctrine of justification

[64] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 157.

[65] Harnack, *Luthers Theologie* 1:497.

[66] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

being administered to those with terrified consciences, Luther states time and again that the natural law/Decalogue does not cease; it is not abrogated or abolished like the rest of the law.[67] He even makes statements like this: "These true disciples of Satan seem to think that the law is something temporal that has ceased under Christ, like circumcision."[68]

Second, in the *Antinomian Disputations*, Luther contrasts the law "taken simply" with the law that accuses us. For the angels and saints in heaven, "The law is empty speech, because they do with joy the things of the law."[69] It is neither credible nor responsible to put forth an interpretation here that suggests Luther could say these things while denying that the law's content points to a form or way of life that conforms to God's will now and forever. Hopman must be challenged when he solely associates the law's/commandments' content with its "stingers or teeth" and goes so far as to associate this with the natural law itself.[70]

Third, Luther's words in the *Antinomian Disputations* seem to suggest that commandments in the way of love would not be out of place in the life to come: "[The saints in heaven will not say] I should love the Father" but rather "I love the Father" and "as he has given me command, thus I do."[71] In sum, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that for Luther, the content of the natural law, which Moses recorded and Jesus Christ embodied and fulfilled, is not only God's unchanging commandments but also a seemingly eternal or even "static" righteousness and goodness itself—love itself![72]

What the Formula of Concord states about the law of God makes sense: it is to be fully identified with the will of God (FC Ep VI 7). After all, when the one who writes the blueprints of the house sees that the house is finished, his blueprints no longer "demand," for they have been fulfilled. It would, however, be wrong to conclude that the blueprints no longer represent the will, or desire, of the builder. The "norm" Harnack identifies in Luther remains.

While Luther did speak of the law in Eden in terms of threat, an evaluation of his Genesis commentary reveals that in no sense did this law actually accuse or terrify Adam and Eve.[73] The law was not meant to drive by force; rather, it was meant

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[67] See Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 61, 63, 71, 73, 83, 165, 385.

[68] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 141; WA 39/1:350.5–6.

[69] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 161; WA 39/1:433.2.

[70] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 159.

[71] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 61; WA 39/1:374.9–10.

[72] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 159, quotes Luther in the *Antinomian Disputations* saying that the law ceases to demand—and hence is "empty"—in the ultimate sense, when, in heaven, we will render what it demands freely and willingly, "out of love of righteousness and goodness and of God himself."

[73] See Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1–5* (1536), AE 1:62–63, 65, 111.

to inform them of and keep them from very specific dangers, in addition to spurring them on to right worship.

Reflecting on these matters further, one might postulate, in line with the first table of the Ten Commandments, that this warning from the law was meant in part to make them hunger for a day when they, fully mature in their relationship with the Lord, would not feel temptation in the least—a day when it would not be possible for them to sin. In any case, if God meant for "very good" Adam and Eve to be prevented from sinning via such warnings, how much more might this be true for us who are and remain sinners?

Hopman's essay, although sometimes based in scriptural truth, succeeds admirably in summing up only "half of the story." That said, there are areas where he has deviated from Luther's fuller understanding. More important, he has not taken fully into account the significance of Eden, and this influences the way he sees the Christian life in the present.

The law is abolished in that, as in the garden, it no longer condemns us—and faith confirms and establishes the law.[74] It comes as no surprise, then, that Luther uses the law not only with the intent to kill and condemn, insofar as we remain sinners, but also to admonish the Christian by the mercies of God.[75]

IV. Facing up to Luther's "Other Simul": Victorious and Militant

As we can see from the previous section, when Hopman writes that "one can imagine a distinction that creates a non-condemning eternal aspect of the law, but such a law remains a counterfeit in reality,"[76] he oversimplifies the issue that we face. Even as Luther distinguishes senses of the law, he gives no indication that it should be thought of as temporal in any sense.

Therefore, our loving obedience in heaven will be more like that which once was in Eden, where the original law given in the garden was meant to direct God's people in right worship. As Luther illustrates in his Genesis commentary, it is

[74] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 249, 385; WA 39/1:357.37–38; 39/2:130.5–8.

[75] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 211, 213; WA 39/1:474.29–475.6. In short, this is because the Christian lives by grace. *Qua* new man, he, under Christ and cooperating with the Spirit, begins to see the law as something enjoyable (Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 47, 61, 63; WA 39/1:363, 374, 375). Therefore, he can, for example, say, "The believer does not 'serve the law,' in one sense, even as 'with the mind, I serve the law of God (Rom 7:25)' " (Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 301; WA 39/1:523.2–3). The law "taken simply" can be contrasted with the law that accuses us: for the angels and saints in heaven, "The law is empty speech, because they do with joy the things of the law" (Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 161; WA 39/1:433.2). As Luther puts it elsewhere regarding the angels (which also applies to the saints in heaven, per other parts of the *Antinomian Disputations*), "The law 'Yield fruit!' is empty to the fertile and fruit-bearing tree, since it yields fruit by its own nature" (Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 163; WA 39/1:435.4).

[76] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 155.

certainly true that Adam and Eve had to fight temptation actively and consciously, consenting to the work of God's Spirit through his word within them:

> This tree [of the knowledge of good and evil] in the middle of the garden would have been like a temple in which this Word would be preached: that all the other trees were wholesome, but that this one was destructive. Therefore they should have learned to obey God and to render Him the service of refraining from eating of it, since God had forbidden it.
>
> In this way uncorrupted nature, which had the true knowledge of God, nevertheless had a Word of command which was beyond Adam's understanding and had to be believed. Moreover, this command was given to Adam's innocent nature that he might have a directive or form for worshipping God, for giving thanks to God, and for instructing his children. Since the devil sees this and knows that this command is beyond the understanding of the human being he tempts Eve so that she herself may not proceed to ponder whether this is God's command and will or not. This is the beginning and the main part of every temptation, when reason tries to reach a decision about the Word and God on its own without the Word.[77]

In short, this commandment did not bring accusation but was an opportunity for Adam and Eve, who were already at peace with God and accepted by him, to cling to his word. The commandment, connected with this special tree, was an invitation to grow in their fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Hopman's chosen frame of minimizing the importance of the fall in time, and focusing exclusively on accusation, skews and masks the fullness of the law that Luther describes here and in the *Antinomian Disputations*. As Adam and Eve would have enjoyed obeying God's commandment and therefore fighting temptation, Christians, redeemed by Christ, can be eager to fight not only temptation but also sin in all forms. For Luther, the Christian in the current time, or epoch, is righteous in two primary ways: on the one hand, by passive imputation, and on the other hand, formally, in the Christian's Holy Spirit-driven life of repentance, which continually purges sin.

This issue, like so many of the other topics dealt with in the *Antinomian Disputations*, is complex. Christians are, in a sense, totally saints and totally sinners. Like the apostle Paul, who called himself the chief of sinners (see 1 Tim 1:15), Christians can never cease to see themselves as sinners without ceasing to be Christians. Christ only comes for sinners. On the other hand, in the context

[77] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1–5* (1536), AE 1:154. See also AE 1:227, where Luther explains that the tree had a "death-dealing" power because of the word of God coupled with it, much like the serpent that was raised up in the wilderness had "life-giving" power to save.

of Christians' growth or sanctification—what the Formula of Concord calls our renewal (FC SD IV 7)—it is also sometimes appropriate to talk about them being partially saints and partially sinners. Here is the idea that there is an old Adam that is to be increasingly purged from the Christian's life by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hopman mentions that Luther sometimes states the Christian is *partially* a sinner and *partially* a saint, but he does not explicate how this is consistent with Luther's views.[78]

Christian pastors and teachers especially owe it to those they serve to have these things worked out in their minds in some detail. For Luther, the fact that the Christian can repress his old man in an attempt to drive out sin in part due to a sinful fear shows that at times it is best to understand the sinner-saint reality in this partial sense.[79] Even if he is born of a spontaneous love, the good intentions and works that characterize the "new man" will be tainted by sin even as that sin is covered by Christ's blood.

While the Christian's primary identity before God is saint, in order to be a saint, one must see oneself as a sinner. In like fashion, when we talk about the new man, we may speak, perhaps, of not necessarily needing the law for instruction at all times (even as the new man always delights to hear it and says, "Amen"!).[80] On the other hand, Christians on earth still need the law for instruction and admonition.

Hence, while Hopman proclaims only a justification note, namely, "The law is to be preached to Christians as fulfilled, not needing to be fulfilled,"[81] Luther preaches the following kind of sanctification note: "The law is not to be taught in such a way among the pious, so as to accuse and condemn, but so as to admonish to good. . . . The law then is to be attenuated for them and is to be taught them by way of exhortation."[82]

And this brings us to yet a third way of looking at Christian anthropology and the Christian life: the Christian as victorious and militant at the same time. Even though there is some overlap in the sinner-saint ideas above—particularly as the "saint" relates to the "victorious" Christian—this concept is different in that the aspect of sin is not used to describe one of the "sides" or "natures" of the Christian.

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[78] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 168.

[79] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 269, 275; WA 39/1:500, 504.

[80] See FC SD VI, 11ff. Here, it is also relevant to consider that as a child, even our Lord "increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52), and, as a part of this experience, gladly heard teachers of the law and, undoubtedly, his parents. This aspect of our creatureliness should surely be kept in mind versus any interpretation of the new man, which, improperly elevating passages like Jeremiah 31:34; 1 Corinthians 2:15–16; and 1 John 2:27, might insist that the new man never learns through teaching (seeing this as synonymous with coercion!).

[81] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 160.

[82] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 211, 213; WA 39/1:474.29–475.2.

For some reason, Luther believed introducing this unique concept was important. What was that reason?

Here, in Luther's telling, the Christian actively runs back to Christ to receive not only perpetual pardon, or justification, but also the corresponding gift of power (the Holy Spirit) to fight the constant dangers posed by the world, devil, and flesh. He speaks of this battle and God's help in quite vivid terms:

> "Yet Christ," they say, "has removed your sin. Why are you sad?" This is why they continue to do what they do in an utterly secure manner. They translate the merit of the passion of Christ and of the remission of sins into luxuriousness. . . Christ fulfilled the law, but it needs to be added: "Later see to it that you lead a holy, pious, and irreproachable life, as it is fitting for a Christian. This is what you have heard so far: Be forgiven. But lest you complain that you are utterly forsaken, I will give you my Holy Spirit, who makes you a soldier; he will even produce mighty and unspeakable cries against sin in your heart, so that you thus finally do what you wish." But am I not unable? "Pray that I may hear you, and I will make you able."[83]

Presumably, Luther can say all this while also stating elsewhere that "the law is neither useful nor necessary for justification or for any good works, let alone salvation."[84] This is a passage that Hopman understandably emphasizes in his own article. On the other hand, when it comes to dealing with this battle the Christian faces—this battle that Luther delves into deeply—Hopman only deals with it in the most cursory of fashions: "The law alerts Christians to the presence of sin and the need to continue to struggle."[85]

V. Christ as the "End" of the Law

Hopman concludes his argument by stating, "This study argues, in agreement with Gerhard Forde, that Christ is the end of the law (Romans 10:4)."[86] Indeed, Christ is the *telos* of the law, but what does this mean for the law?

The critical question, of course, is how Luther, following the Scriptures, treats the matter of God's law. Luther says that the law's accusation ceases and that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness: "After sin has been taken away, the law has

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[83] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 303, 305; WA 39/1:526.2–8.

[84] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 239; WA 39/1:354.7–8, as quoted in Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 170.

[85] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 171.

[86] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 171.

no right to accuse us, so that he now 'is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.' "[87]

VI. Conclusion

When Hopman claims at the beginning of his article that making "distinctions within the law itself affect[s] the proper distinction of law and gospel,"[88] he is exactly right. As has been demonstrated in this article, however, law and gospel cannot be properly understood without reference to God's original intention for man in the Garden of Eden. God's Holy Spirit accuses us with the law only because what went wrong there affects us still today.

The law, therefore, must be positively stated in line with what Luther calls "the good."[89] Positively stated, he views the law in line with the eternal righteousness and goodness of Christ, which the redeemed increasingly come to know through his word operating in his creation.[90] And particularly in those through whom he brings his kingdom, namely those created in and growing in accordance with his moral character or image. More specifically, God's law, in line with his holy character, sums up his will that his creatures dwell in harmony with him and his creation—fearing, loving, and trusting in him and what he commands above all things. To paraphrase the explanation of the fourth commandment in the Small Catechism, God's law is that we do not despise or anger him but honor him, serve and obey him, love and cherish him.

As Luther puts it in a passage from the *Antinomian Disputations*,

> Peter explains in Acts 15 how it is to be understood that neither the ceremonial law—with which he deals there chiefly—nor the moral law, is to be imposed on the neck of the brethren; obviously because Christ has come in order to fulfill the law, which neither the fathers nor their offspring were able to bear; and to liberate all who believed in him from the curse of the law. Since, therefore, its office is to terrify and condemn, its yoke is to be removed from the necks of the believers, Gentiles as well as Jews, and Christ's yoke is to be imposed on them, so that they may live under him in peace who rendered the owed obedience required by the law and gave it to those who believe in him. It is nonetheless to be fulfilled by the pious also, to mortify the works of the flesh

[87] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 51; WA 39/1:366.3–4.

[88] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 152.

[89] Hopman, "Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 33.

[90] And of course, this is not to say, as Hopman does ("Luther's *Antinomian Disputations*," 153), that "the law is one thing in eternity, or heaven, or in God himself, while it is quite different in its earthly temporal relationship with sinful human beings." Nor that the law exists in God "apart from creation and human beings" (172). It is, however, to say that it certainly did exist and will exist apart from the sin of human beings!

by the Spirit, in order to purge out the old leaven (Rom. 8:13; 1 Cor. 5:7). Thus, the law remains, but its burden or yoke does not weigh down the necks of those upon whom Christ's burden is imposed, because it is easy and light (Matt. 11:30).[91]

[91] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 73; WA 39/1:380.19–381.10.

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The Theology of the Cross and the Lutheran Confessions

Andrew J. Preus

What is the theology of the cross? Although the topic of the cross does not receive its own article in any of the symbolical writings, the Augsburg Confession, in passing, identifies the cross as a doctrinal topic.[1] Melanchthon even identifies afflictions as a sacrament, if rightly understood.[2] There is a promise attached to our afflictions that God will compensate us for our losses.[3] Yes, the topic of the cross is taken up in our Confessions. But what about the theology of the cross?

I. The Theology of the Cross

The theology of the cross is a common term among Lutherans, yet this term is not found in the Lutheran Confessions. Does this mean that the Lutheran Confessions do not teach the theology of the cross? Now, this is a loaded question, because it assumes that all agree on what the theology of the cross is. The theology of the cross is part of a greater debate on what Luther's theology really was. This has been the quest of Luther research since the start of the so-called Luther Renaissance in the twentieth century. Much has been written about when Luther discovered his Reformation theology and what exactly the defining feature of that theology was. We know that it has something to do with faith and the righteousness of God because this is what Luther describes in the preface to his Latin writings, published in 1545.[4] Here, Luther recounts his discovery of the gospel, when he realized that the righteousness of God was not his judgment on sinners and his strict standard

[1] AC XXVI 15, 30; cf. Ap XV (VIII) 43 (= XV 43, Tappert p. 221). For references to articles from the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, follow Benjamin T. G. Mayes's research notes in "Apology of the Augsburg Confession Comparison Chart," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 80, nos. 3–4 (2016): 337–339.

[2] Ap XIII 17.

[3] Ap IV (III) 242 (= IV 363, Tappert p. 162).

[4] Martin Luther, *Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings* (1545): vol. 34, pp. 323–338, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–1986); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE.

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that we must accomplish but rather the mercy of God by which he justifies sinners. It is the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel (Rom 1:17).[5]

The theology of the cross is simply one term to describe Luther's understanding of the gospel. He often referred to this as "our theology." Many readers of Luther may be familiar with the famous Latin phrase from Luther's *Labors on the Psalms* (1519–1521).[6] Commenting on Psalm 5, he says, "*CRUX sola est nostra theologia*," "The cross alone is our theology."[7] "Our theology" was a common term Luther used throughout his life. One should not consider this simply *his* theology. It is "our theology." This is the Reformation theology to which Luther subscribed in his catechisms, the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, and his own Smalcald Articles.

The theology of the cross itself is a very broad topic, even addressing certain themes of prolegomena, such as revelation and natural theology. It also treats the topic of salvation, including faith, the atonement, and the life under the cross. In his foundational work, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*,[8] first published in 1929, Walther von Löwenich describes the theology of the cross as a theology of revelation and faith, focusing also on the Christian life. Thus, Luther's theology of the cross was taken as an overall approach to theology. In his more recent study of the same name, Alister McGrath focuses on Luther's discovery of the righteousness of God (*iustitia Dei*), arguing that Luther's breakthrough in the theology of the cross centered on his understanding that God's righteousness is given to the Christian through faith when he is humiliated by God.[9] Drawing from Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* of 1518, McGrath and Löwenich both summarize the leading features of the theology of the cross in the same five points. They are as follows.

First, the theology of the cross is a theology of revelation, contrary to speculation and preconceived notions of God. Second, such revelation is indirect and concealed; God is only seen with eyes of faith. Third, this revelation is recognized

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[5] Luther, *Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings* (1545), AE 34: 337.

"At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, 'In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."' There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'"

[6] Martin Luther, *Operationes in Psalmos* (1519–1521), in Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [*Schriften*], 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), 5:19–352, hereafter WA.

[7] Luther, *Operationes in Psalmos* (1519–1521), WA 5:176.

[8] Walther von Löwenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, trans. Herbert J. A. Bouman (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976).

[9] Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishing Inc., 1990).

in the suffering and cross of Christ, not in man's moral activity or in the created order. Fourth, such knowledge of God is a matter of faith. And fifth, God is known through suffering, first in Christ's suffering, but also then in the Christian's suffering.[10] These five points serve as the outline for Luther's theology of the cross.

So, how do the Lutheran Confessions teach the theology of the cross? To go through all five points would require a much longer study. Instead, this study will focus on the fifth point. God is known first through Christ's suffering and then also in the Christian's own suffering. The Lutheran Confessions have much to say about Christ's act of salvation by his death on the cross, and they also say much about afflictions in the Christian life. While discussing how the Confessions treat this topic, it is beneficial to review briefly Luther's theology of the cross, specifically from his *Heidelberg Disputation* of 1518.[11] As one takes up the topic of Christ's work and the Christian life, it is necessary to pay attention to how Luther's theology of the cross teaches what Christ did to accomplish our salvation. What is Christ's righteousness? And how does this affect the Christian life? What one teaches about Christ's cross determines how one understands the Christian's cross. In other words, Christ's life and death determine what one teaches about the Christian's life and death.

II. Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*

The first place to start when discussing Luther's theology of the cross is his *Heidelberg Disputation* of 1518. Luther's goal in this disputation is to combat the false teaching that man has any natural powers or free will to come to God. Luther intends to show that natural man does not even understand God rightly. Instead, the cross of Christ destroys the works and wisdom of man. Here, Luther makes a distinction between the theologian of the cross and the theologian of glory. The theologian of glory, who does not deserve to be called a theologian, is described in Thesis 19: "That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened."[12] In other words, Luther explains that just because someone recognizes the virtues of God (such as wisdom, godliness, justice, and goodness), this does not make one a theologian. It does not mean that one knows God.

In Thesis 20, Luther describes a true theologian as a theologian of the cross: "He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and

[10] McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross,* 149–152; Löwenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 19–22.

[11] AE 31:35–70.

[12] Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), AE 31:52.

manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross."[13] Here, Luther sets the cross up against human works. God cannot be grasped by human wisdom and merits. Instead, by his humility and weakness, God destroys the wisdom of the wise. He saves those who believe through what the world counts as foolishness (1 Cor 1:21). It is in this way that God hides himself, just as Isaiah says (Isa 45:15).

A theologian of glory imagines that he can know God rightly through his own wisdom and works. A theologian of the cross knows God only in the suffering of Christ, through faith. It follows that the theologian of glory is going to call the cross and suffering evil. But the theologian of the cross calls it good.[14] Thus, Luther, in his *Fourteen Consolations*, published in 1520 for Elector Frederick, lists seven evils and seven blessings, and he calls all fourteen of them comforts.[15] The evil of suffering is good. It is comforting. This is true, first of all, because Christ's suffering saved us and, second, because our suffering proves our faith, teaching us that our good works are not our own but God's.[16]

The concept of God revealing himself by hiding himself under weakness and affliction is thoroughly biblical. God hides himself under his improper work of wrath so that he might reveal his proper work of mercy (Isa 28:21).[17] St. Paul says that God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and the weak things of the world to shame the mighty (1 Cor 1:27). Luther alludes to the theme of God hidden under the assaults of the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh in his treatment of the third petition, "Thy will be done," as well as the sixth petition, "Lead us not into temptation." It is through these assaults of the devil and his minions that God strengthens his Christians in their spiritual battle. And as Luther says in his Large Catechism, one should expect this whenever the word of God is proclaimed and believed rightly; the cross cannot be wanting.[18] Christ tells St. Paul that his strength is made perfect in weakness. Paul, therefore, concludes from this that he is strong precisely when he is weak (2 Cor 12:9–10). The Lutheran dogmaticians often argued

[13] Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), AE 31:52–53.
[14] Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), AE 31:53.
[15] AE 42:117ff.
[16] Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), AE 31:53.
[17] Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), AE 31:44.
[18] LC III 65. Cf. *Commentary on Psalm 117* (1530), AE 14:31–32. Walther von Löwenich comments, "At one time [Luther] traces the trial back to the devil, at another time to God. We see now that this can only be a tentative distinction. Both views find their unity in the idea of the hidden God or the alien work, as the case may be. God conceals himself under the devil's mask. If faith succeeds in recognizing this as a mask, if it comes to the insight that in the alien work of trial God has become the devil, then the trial is overcome" (Löwenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 137).

from this passage of 2 Corinthians that God sends the cross through the instrument of the devil, or, as St. Paul calls it, a messenger of Satan.[19]

God meets us in our weakness even as he saved us in the weakness of his Son. The theology of the cross teaches that what Christ did to save sinners (dying on the cross) permeates not only all Christian doctrine but also the entire Christian life and outlook on life. Christ suffered. Therefore, those who are in him suffer. As Christ says, a servant is not above his master (John 15:20). The faithful must be conformed to his image by means of suffering (Rom 8:29).

III. The Righteousness of Christ and the Cross of Christ

The cross of Christ describes Christ's action to save poor sinners. The cross of the Christian describes God's action in testing and proving the faith of his children. But what is Christ's action to save sinners? What is the righteousness by which we stand righteous before God? Luther is clear in his *Heidelberg Disputation* that the righteousness of God is not acquired through works, but it is obtained through faith. He is clear that, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:30, Christ is our righteousness. But what does this entail? How is Christ our righteousness? Did he actually fulfill a standard or norm of righteousness? Did he satisfy God's justice against sin?

Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* does not thoroughly answer these questions. It describes how the individual is righteous through faith in Christ, and it identifies Christ as our righteousness. The disputation discusses how this is revealed, namely, through the cross, hidden under wrath. But Luther's theses do not define Christ's righteousness received through faith as comprehensively as our Lutheran Confessions do. The Solid Declaration defines the righteousness that faith receives as the "obedience, suffering, and resurrection of Christ, since he has made satisfaction for our sake to the law and paid for (*expiavit*) our sins."[20] It understands Christ's righteousness as that which fulfills and satisfies God's law under which Christ placed himself to redeem mankind (Gal 4:4).[21] This assumes that God's law is his eternal, immutable will, a standard of righteousness.[22]

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[19] Cf. Abraham Calov, *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata* (Dresden and Leipzig: Zimmermannus, 1719), 2:344.

[20] FC SD III 14. Quotations from the Lutheran Confessions in this article are from W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente, eds., *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921). "*Itaque iustitia illa, quae coram Deo fidei aut credentibus ex mera gratia imputatur, est obedientia, passio et resurrectio Christi, quibus ille legi nostra causa satisfecit et peccata nostra expiavit" (Triglot Concordia*, 918).

[21] FC SD III 15–16.

[22] FC SD VI 3, 15, 17.

This is where it is crucial to pay attention to what is written about Luther's theology of the cross. Many are already familiar with the works of Gerhard Forde such as *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*. Forde fundamentally rejected what the Formula of Concord teaches about the righteousness of Christ. He specifically denied what has often been called the vicarious satisfaction, namely, that Christ, taking the place of sinners, paid to God's eternal justice what his law demanded from sinful mankind.[23]

Some may assume that as long as one does not follow Forde's atonement theology, the rest of his theology of the cross is of great value. It cannot be denied that Forde and confessional Lutherans have common enemies. He was a staunch opponent of prosperity gospel, and with his heavy emphasis on the word of God, a confessional Lutheran can find an ally against those who promote the false notion that one can preach the gospel without using words. His emphasis on the bondage of the will should also find much commendation. While one can, with discerning eyes, glean benefit from Forde's insights, it would be nothing short of naive to assume that his denial of this central tenet of the Christian faith is not deeply rooted in his overall approach to the theology of the cross.

At the beginning of his book, Forde endorses the approach of *being* a theologian of the cross rather than merely studying a theology *about* the cross. He explains this further by expressing the vanity in writing about the theology of the cross. Such an attempt, Forde argues, "would no doubt be just another attempt to give a final propositional answer to Jesus' cry from the cross, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' We can't answer Jesus' question. We can only die *with him* and await God's answer in him."[24]

It is true that human reason cannot sufficiently answer this question. That Christ, the innocent Son of God, must die, is contrary to the wisdom of this age. But this does not mean that there is no answer revealed in God's word. Christ died to pay what sinners owed, just as Luther explains in his Large Catechism on the Second Article.[25] While a confessional Lutheran can appreciate the emphasis on the

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[23] For a more thorough summary of Forde's atonement theology, see Jack Kilcrease, "Gerhard Forde's Theology of Atonement and Justification: A Confessional Lutheran Response," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 76, nos. 3–4 (2012): 269–294.

[24] Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 3.

[25] LC II 31. "Let this, then, be the sum of this article that the little word Lord signifies simply as much as Redeemer, i.e., He who has brought us from Satan to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and who preserves us in the same. But all the points which follow in order in this article serve no other end than to explain and express this redemption, how and whereby it was accomplished, that is, how much it cost Him, and what He spent and risked that He might win us and bring us under His dominion, namely, that He became man, conceived and born without [any stain of] sin, of the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary, that He might overcome sin; moreover,

mysterious power of the word of the cross killing and making alive, the idea that one cannot give a propositional answer to Jesus' cry of abandonment from God leads to something in Forde's theology that does not jibe with the theology of the Lutheran Confessions.

Forde identifies some errors for which he may be commended. For example, he warns against turning "occasional pain" into "our good work" that merits some kind of favor.[26] But his disdain for propositional answers to Jesus' cry from the cross manifests itself in his denial of Christ's vicarious satisfaction of God's wrath. Describing the erroneous speculations of theologians of glory, he writes,

> [The cross] becomes a launching pad for speculative flights into intellectual space, into the invisible things of God. It is not simply that a man sent from God is suffering, forsaken, and dying at our hands—as if that were not enough!—but he is a payment to God (whose justice one has supposedly peered into and figured out) in some celestial court transaction.[27]

But Forde's real problem with Jesus satisfying God's wrath is not that it is an attempt to figure out God's justice. Again, one cannot deny that the depths of God's justice are a mystery to our sinful reason. Rather, Forde denies that Christ satisfied God's wrath because he denies that God's wrath is something active and eternally binding. Instead, Forde understands wrath as simply the sinner's perception of God. The law is merely the conditional scheme we sinners place on life, which leaves us with a wrathful God. This is why he can still speak of the sinner experiencing the wrath of God in inner struggles.[28]

In his "Caught in the Act: Reflections on the Work of Christ,"[29] Forde further explains his understanding of God's wrath. He warns against the "fatal flaw" of looking away from the actual events of the atonement to "eternal truths," ignoring or obscuring the event and our part in it.[30] He again expresses his concern that one

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that He suffered, died and was buried, *that He might make satisfaction for me and pay what I owe, not with silver nor gold, but with His own precious blood.* And all this, in order to become my Lord; for He did none of these for Himself, nor had He any need of it. And after that He rose again from the dead, swallowed up and devoured death, and finally ascended into heaven and assumed the government at the Father's right hand, so that the devil and all powers must be subject to Him and lie at His feet, until finally, at the last day, He will completely part and separate us from the wicked world, the devil, death, sin, etc." *Emphasis added.*

[26] Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 83–85.

[27] Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 76.

[28] Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 86.

[29] Gerhard Forde, "Caught in the Act: Reflections on the Work of Christ," in *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism*, ed. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 85–97.

[30] Forde, "Caught in the Act," 86.

should avoid what he sees as abstract propositions. Throughout his essay, he discusses some different theories of the atonement.

This should be the first red flag for any subscriber to the Formula of Concord. When people discuss different "theories" of the atonement, they are assuming that doctrine is human theory and speculation. But these propositions about what Christ did and how he did it are not simply human speculations. Sure, man can, to an extent, follow the theme. Natural man can understand, at least outwardly, the concept of God paying the debt his servants owed him by sending his Son to suffer. But this does not mean that such teachings are man's theories. The Scriptures do not teach theories of the atonement. Instead, the Scriptures reveal a doctrine of the atonement. They reveal God's wrath from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom 1:18). They reveal that Christ paid to God what we sinners owed, thereby freeing us from God's wrath, from sin, from the devil's dominion, and from death (Gen 3:15; Isa 53:4–6, 10, 11; Matt 20:28; John 14:30b–31; 2 Cor 5:19, 21; Gal 3:13; Eph 5:2; 1 Thess 1:10; 1 John 2:2). This encompasses the so-called theories of the atonement, whether we call it the vicarious satisfaction or the victory motif.

Forde's theology of the cross does not allow affirming any objective proposition about God's wrath and the need for his wrath to be satisfied. He sees this as mere speculation. He admits that, in a sense, the work of Christ was to "satisfy" divine wrath, but he affirms again that we are mistaken to say that Jesus was killed to satisfy God's justice and bring reconciliation. "[We] miss the point that *we* are the obstacles to reconciliation, not God."[31] The wrath of God is of our own creating, so to speak. He came to have mercy. We killed him. So the God who is only a God of mercy becomes to us a God of wrath. Yet Jesus was so devoted to showing mercy that he endured the murder. His unconditional love was a threat to our conditional way of running things. That is why we crucified him.[32]

Therefore, Forde asks, why must Jesus die? He explains that God's "problem" is not that he cannot show mercy until he has been satisfied but rather that he will not be satisfied until he has shown mercy. The problem, then, is that the sinful world will not have it, and we are thus under God's "wrath." As long as he is not satisfied in showing mercy, he remains jealous, and this is his "wrath." God shows unconditional mercy. We are in a conditional world. God knows this, but he will not stop himself from showing mercy. He knows that we will resist his Son, but he still sends Jesus, knowing that we will kill him. Thus, Jesus bears the "wrath" of God in that, obedient to the will of the Father, he shows mercy relentlessly, all the way to the cross. Forde says that Jesus concretely bears our sin by being beaten and tortured

[31] Forde, "Caught in the Act," 91.
[32] Forde, "Caught in the Act," 92–93.

by wicked men. So he puts to death the old as his death becomes our death.[33] Faith, therefore, when created in us, fulfills God's satisfaction of showing mercy. Forde writes, "When faith is created, when we actually believe God's unconditional forgiveness; then God can say, 'Now I am satisfied!' God's wrath ends actually *when we believe him*, not abstractly because of a payment to God 'once upon a time.' "[34]

Again, one can notice Forde's suspicion of abstractions and so-called eternal truths. He believes that he is representing the atonement concretely, while a penal substitution is the product of mere abstract thinking of the eternal truth of God's wrath on sinners. By rejecting the doctrine of Christ paying our penalty to God's justice, Forde is being faithful to his view of the theology of the cross. After all, the cross must destroy all human wisdom, all man-made theories and concepts of justice. And if the vicarious satisfaction is a speculative theory attempting to answer a question from the cross that cannot be answered by such propositions, then the theologian of the cross must reject it.

But does Luther's theology of the cross exclude any understanding of Christ satisfying God's justice? This again goes back to Luther's understanding of righteousness. What is the righteousness of God in the theology of the cross?

McGrath sees Luther's understanding of the righteousness of God as the catalyst of his theology of the cross. He explains that Luther viewed the righteousness of God according to its mode of being received in man, as well as according to its nature. First, Luther recognizes that man attains this righteousness only when he is condemned and humbled. This is the humility of faith (*humilitas fidei*).[35] As he comments on Psalm 96, Luther lists a series of maxims elaborating on Christ's words, "He who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11).[36] Here he says that when man makes himself a fool, he becomes wise, and when he condemns himself, he is saved.[37] Compare this to Luther's twenty-fifth thesis in his *Heidelberg Disputation*, where he says, "He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without works, believes much in Christ."[38] Whether he calls it

[33] Forde, "Caught in the Act," 94–96.

[34] Forde, "Caught in the Act," 97.

[35] McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 153ff. Here, McGrath builds on the work of Löwenich, who sought to demonstrate that Luther's theology of the cross was not a simple rehashing of the monastic moral instruction of humility, a mere ethic for the right demeanor of a Christian. Instead, Löwenich shows that Luther's view of humility is an emptying and nothingness on the part of the sinner who realizes that he can contribute nothing before God. Thus, Luther often speaks of humility synonymously with faith. Cf. Löwenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, passim.

[36] Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

[37] Luther, *First Psalm Lectures* (1513–1516), WA 4:110–111, cf. AE 11:263.

[38] Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), AE 31:41.

condemning himself or making himself a fool, Luther speaks in the same way as he speaks of faith making one righteous. As faith exists in such humility, McGrath points out that God's mercy is only recognizable in wrath. This is why Christ is the righteousness of God by his cross, because his cross is where God's wrath is revealed.[39] McGrath explains that the nature of the righteousness of God is revealed in the cross, because it is completely contrary to man's understanding of righteousness. Thus, the essence of the righteousness of faith is when the sinner recognizes his total unrighteousness.[40]

However, McGrath does not describe the nature of the righteousness of God as much as he simply reiterates how man, humbled because of his sin, receives this righteousness by faith. To be fair, McGrath focuses on Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation*, which does not flesh out Christ's righteousness as thoroughly as the Formula of Concord and later Lutheran dogmaticians. Instead, like much of Luther's explanations of justification, he focuses on how the individual Christian receives what Christ did.

This is often how the theology of the cross is presented. It is not so much about what and why Christ did what he did. Instead, it is a theology of revelation and faith, as described by Löwenich. Thus, the righteousness of Christ is presented mainly in how it is revealed and received. Instead of being the means by which Christ earned for sinners God's favor, the cross is rather revelation of God's favor. But what is the actual basis of this revelation? What is being revealed? Can the Christian not explain from Scripture why there is no life apart from Christ's act of salvation? Is it not clear that Christ was obedient to God's law because we, by our sin, were not (Rom 5:18–21; 8:3)? We cannot hold to the revelation of Christ's righteousness if we do not affirm what that righteousness actually is. Romans 1:17—that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith—is incomplete without Romans 3:25–26 and 5:18–21, which describe what that righteousness of God is. It is that Christ fulfilled what the law demanded but, being weakened by the sinful flesh, could not produce (Rom 8:3).

While Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* does not explicitly spell out how Christ fulfilled the Christian's righteousness, this does not mean that Luther has no concern for Christ's vicarious obedience. After all, while teaching from the Scriptures that Christ is our righteousness (1 Cor 1:30), he says that what Christ does actively is received by us as an accomplished fact. Here he refers to Matthew 5:18, that not one jot may pass from the law until it is accomplished.[41] Luther thereby implies that Christ's righteousness fulfills the law, which is identified as that

[39] McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross,* 155ff.
[40] McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 156.
[41] Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), AE 31:51–62.

immutable will that must above all things be accomplished. To fulfill such a law is to make satisfaction. This central detail was by no means lacking in Luther's theology.

Christ's vicarious obedience is indispensable for a certain and confident faith, a central tenet in the theology of suffering. This point came alive in Luther's disputes about repentance, or the practice of penance. The papists made a distinction between satisfaction of guilt and that of punishment, asserting that while Christ alone made satisfaction for guilt, one cannot enjoy this benefit without making satisfaction for the punishment of sin. By doing this, they rendered the distinction practically moot. After all, if the full benefits of Christ's satisfaction are not enjoyed apart from the penitent making satisfaction for punishment, then for all intents and purposes, the forgiveness of guilt remains dependent on the remission of punishment. For one to enjoy the remission of guilt, one must, through works of satisfaction, attain the remission of punishment as well.

But Luther begged to differ. In his theses entitled *For Seeking the Truth and Consoling Terrified Consciences (1518)*, written the same year as his *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther says that it is actually more useful to salvation if the punishment remains on the penitent. Instead of making satisfaction for punishment a necessary part of enjoying the full benefits of Christ's satisfaction of guilt, Luther turned the punishment into a salutary cross, that exercises faith. "It is more profitable to salvation," Luther asserted, "if the one absolved from guilt omits the redemption of punishment."[42]

In these theses, Luther does not specifically address the satisfaction of Christ, but, as in his *Heidelberg Disputation*, he focuses on how the individual is justified by faith. However, the satisfaction of Christ is the basis for the benefits received by faith. In his *Lectures on Hebrews* (1517–1518), we find this connection between Christ's actual work on our behalf and the certainty of faith. Commenting on Hebrews 9:14, "How much more will the blood of Christ . . . purify our conscience," Luther again presses the centrality of faith. A clean conscience is nothing other than faith in the word of Christ, which proclaims the atoning death of Christ. This is, as St. Paul calls it, the testimony of our conscience (2 Cor 1:12).[43]

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[42] Luther, *Pro veritate inquirenda et timoratis conscientiis consolandis conclusiones* (1518), WA 1:631: "*Magis prodest ad salutem, si absolutus a culpa omittat redemptionem penarum." Translation my own.* With such certainty of faith, Ronald Rittgers comments, "the believer could face divine penalties joyfully, knowing that they were not a means of rendering satisfaction for sin to the divine judge; rather, they were (and could only be) an opportunity to have one's faith and love proved by one's heavenly Father" (Ronald K. Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2012], 107–108).

[43] Luther, *Lectures on Hebrews* (1518–1518), AE 29:172. "St. Bernard speaks axiomatically in the following way: 'It is necessary for you to believe that God can remit your sins, bestow grace on

From here, Luther attacks any meritorious view of human suffering. Only the flesh and blood of Christ can cleanse the conscience. Therefore, when people meditate on Christ's passion as a way to suffer with him and thereby merit favor from God, their meditation is fruitless and heathenish.[44]

Luther speaks even more explicitly of Christ's satisfaction in his Smalcald Articles as he sets it against the vain satisfaction of the papists. "Neither can the satisfaction be uncertain," he writes, "because it is not our uncertain, sinful work, but it is the suffering and blood of the innocent Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world."[45]

Christ making satisfaction for sins is crucial to a correct understanding of any Lutheran theology of suffering. This was especially evident in the later Lutheran dogmaticians when they treated the topic of the cross in the Christian life. They distinguished the Christian's cross from Christ's cross for this specific reason.[46] If Jesus has satisfied God's wrath against sins, then the suffering Christians endure reminds them of this. Suffering is no accident. It is either punishment or comfort. In itself, it is a sign of wrath and punishment, but the Christian's suffering is seen through faith as a sign of God's mercy. And this is only true because Christ satisfied God's wrath.[47]

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you and give glory to you. And this is not enough, unless you believe with complete certainty that your sins have been remitted, that grace has been bestowed on you, and that glory is to be given to you.' And this is the testimony of our conscience—the testimony which the Spirit of God gives to our spirit. Concerning this the apostle says in 2 Cor. 1:12: 'Our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience.' For, as St. Bernard says, the testimony of the conscience is not understood as being of the kind that is to us from us—for this is Pelagian—and glory in shame, but as the testimony which our conscience receives, just as it receives righteousness and truth, etc."

[44] Luther, *Lectures on Hebrews* (1518–1518), AE 29:210–211.

[45] SA III III 38.

[46] Jakob Heerbrand explains: "Only the cross of Christ appeases the wrath of God, makes satisfaction, propitiation for the sins of the whole world (Isa 53). 'I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the gentiles no one was with me (Isa 63:[3]).' But the cross and sufferings of the pious have other causes and goals. They are not expiation of sins, neither of themselves nor of others" (Jakob Heerbrand, *Compendium Theologiae questionibus methodi tractatum* [Tubingen: Gruppenbachius, 1572], 463). Translation my own.

[47] Selnecker lists four headings when discussing the cross: (1) The filth of sin, (2) the satisfaction Christ gave on sinful man's behalf, (3) the example given for the Christian to imitate, and (4) the consolation in every cross and calamity (Nikolaus Selnecker, *Institutiones Christianae Religionis* [Leipzig, 1579], 1:396–397. Cf. 1:409). "Afflictions are not signs of wrath or perdition, but they are signs—rather certain seals σφραγίδες [2 Tim 2:19]—of the mercy and grace of God. Pericles knows that he is being divinely punished. But he is not able to be strengthened by the thought that he is being punished in this way, so that he might be called back to repentance rather than that he might be reduced to nothing. But Christians ought to be strengthened that calamities are testimonies and pledges of the good will of God toward us, and that they are exercises of faith, of fear, and of the subsequent spiritual fruits in us. As Peter says, it is necessary to be saddened by various afflictions so that the proving of our faith might be purer than fire. And Jeremiah says 31[:18], 'O Lord, you have chastised me, and I was instructed; as a bullock untrained, after you

What is said about Christ's cross determines what is said about the Christian's. If Christ's cross did not satisfy God's justice, then the Christian's cross must play some role in this, or else God's wrath might be defined as simply one's own existential estrangement or despair rather than God's active will to punish sinners according to his strict justice. If this is the case, then the basis for our justification before God becomes our own realization that God is not mad at us, rather than Christ's saving work on our behalf by which he turned his own wrath away. In other words, instead of being justified before God through faith on account of Christ, it is on account of faith—*propter fidem* rather than *per fidem propter Christum.* We know, of course, that if this were the case, then the certainty of our salvation before the law's condemnation would not be the objective obedience of the Lamb of God who bore the sin of the world but rather some personal encounter with God's mercy. And who is to say that this encounter is legitimate?

Speaking of the relationship between Christ's obedience and the Christian's obedience, one must remember that what is taught about the one affects the other. Bearing this in mind, one may consider another aspect of Christ's obedience. The Lutherans of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries distinguished between Christ's active and passive obedience. If this distinction is rightly understood, then it should give insight into understanding the Christian's own life within the new obedience.

The distinction between the new obedience and Christ's obedience is similar to the distinction between active righteousness and passive righteousness, not to be confused with active and passive obedience. The distinction between active and passive righteousness describes what Luther calls "our theology" in his *Lectures on Galatians (1531/1535)*. The passive righteousness is the righteousness possessed by the Christian through faith, and the active righteousness is the righteousness of the law as it is acted out in the Christian life with good works. These two kinds of righteousness have nothing to do with each other when one considers justification. This is because the passive righteousness of the gospel is received only by faith and pertains to the new man, while the active righteousness of the law requires works and pertains only to the old man. Passive righteousness means to know nothing but that Christ has gone to the Father and is in heaven.[48]

It appears that Luther did not see Christ winning salvation by an active fulfillment of God's law, since he says that these two kinds of righteousness have nothing to do with each other. It would appear instead that Christ brings about something completely different, a different dialect than the word of law.

converted me I repented.' Further David says [Psalm 119:71], 'It was good for me that you humiliated me, that I might learn your righteousness.' " Translation my own.

[48] Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535), AE 26:7–9.

However, one should not draw from this that the law has nothing to do with the gospel. Rather, Luther's distinction between the two kinds of righteousness has to do with the obtaining of righteousness, not the essence of it. The righteousness of faith is not the righteousness of works, since the righteousness of faith is received as an accomplished fact wrought by Christ's obedience, while the righteousness of works is always imperfect. The active righteousness pertains to the law because it is acted out by works, not because it is an accurate manifestation of the law. The law requires much more than this active righteousness. In fact, it condemns it.

It is worth discussing what the fulfillment of the law actually is. Although it is true that Luther spoke of the atonement in a less systematic way than his successors, one cannot deny that Luther understood Jesus' saving act in his fulfilling of the whole, eternal law. Luther especially emphasizes this in the heat of the Antinomian Controversy in 1536–1537. This is where the obedience of Christ relates to the new obedience. In his *A Beautiful Sermon on the Law and the Gospel*, printed at Wittenberg in 1537, Luther highlights the connection between the law and the gospel. The gospel gives what the law demands. The law teaches what man is, what he has become, and what he should again become. Jesus fulfilled the law; the law is therefore being fulfilled in us, albeit imperfectly. It is fulfilled first by imputation and then formally in us.[49] Here, the obedience of Christ precedes the new obedience of the Christian.

As he does in his *Antinomian Disputations*, Luther also connects Christ's fulfillment of the law with the Christian's imperfect fulfillment of the law in this life. He cites Matthew 5:17b;[50] Romans 3:31;[51] and 8:3–4.[52] Jesus fulfilled the law. Luther argues this by pointing out that the law should be fulfilled in us.[53] To fulfill the law summarized in the Ten Commandments is, as Luther describes in his Large Catechism, part of the goal in the Christian's life of prayer as he battles against the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh.[54] The fact that the righteousness of the law is being fulfilled in us demonstrates what Christ fulfilled on our behalf, namely, the righteousness of the law!

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[49] Luther, *A Beautiful Sermon on the Law and the Gospel (1537),* AE 79:173–174. Cf. Martin Luther, *Solus Decalogus est Aeterna: Martin Luther's Complete Antinomian Theses and Disputations*, trans. and ed. Holger Sonntag (Minneapolis: Lutheran Press, 2008), 45, 51, 77.

[50] "I have not come to abolish [the Law or the Prophets] but to fulfill them."

[51] "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law."

[52] "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

[53] Luther, *Church Postil on Matthew 22:34–46* (1544), AE 79:173.

[54] LC III 2.

Of course, we do not fulfill the law perfectly. And Luther says this is so "because we do not believe [what Christ did for us] with a firm faith."[55] Faith and unbelief are the difference between righteousness and unrighteousness. If we believed perfectly, then we would fulfill the law perfectly. This is because the first commandment—that we fear, love, and trust in God above all things—encompasses all of the commandments, which Luther says in his Large Catechism "are to be referred and directed to it."[56] The whole law is fulfilled when the first commandment is fulfilled, that is, when faith receives what Christ has given.[57] Christ fulfilling the entire law (Matt 5:17; Rom 10:4) is what is received by faith (Rom 3:31).

Christ's fulfillment of the first commandment is his obedience to the Father, who gave him the command to save sinners (John 14:31). His passion marks his fulfillment of the first commandment by loving God with everything he had, even unto death. But this is precisely how he fulfilled the *entire* law, since all other commandments are encompassed in the first. In fact, he loved God by means of loving his neighbor. And so he fulfilled the law.

But why the distinction between active and passive obedience in the later Lutheran theologians? Martin Chemnitz described a double debt to the law, which is fulfilled by the obedience of Christ. He both fulfilled the demands of the law and suffered the penalty for our sins.[58] This is what is known as his active and passive obedience. It cannot be denied that there was a difference in terminology among the later Lutheran teachers and Luther.[59] But is Luther's understanding of Christ fulfilling the law, encompassed in the first commandment, really different in substance than the later understanding of Christ fulfilling both the active and passive requirements of the law?

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[55] Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 72–73. "*In Christo est impleta perfecte, in nobis non, quia hoc firma fide non credimus."* Cf. Luther, *Solus Decalogus,* 104, 105. "*Dixi supra, incredulitatem in filium duplicem transgressionem esse. Primum contra legem, quae requirit timorem, fidem, dilectionem Dei perfectam. Quia vero nemo eam praestat, ideo sunt omnes eius transgressores et mortis rei. Deinde quia non suscipiunt sed oderunt filium, qui venit legem implere etc."* "I said above that unbelief in the Son is a double transgression. First, against the law which requires perfect fear, faith, and love of God. Since, however, no one is able to render it, therefore all are its transgressors and guilty of death. Second, since they did not accept but rather hated the Son, who came to fulfill the law etc."

[56] LC I 321.

[57] Cf. Ap IV (III) 149–150 (= IV 270–271, Tappert pp. 147–148).

[58] Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 890.

[59] Robert Preus shows this to be the case with the use of infusion and imputation. "There is no doubt that [the later dogmaticians'] terminology differs from Luther's to a marked degree, especially after the Formula of Concord. Luther, in speaking of the foreign righteousness which becomes ours through faith, does not shrink from calling it a *justitia extra infusa*, even though he insists that it is a *justitia aliena*" (Robert Preus, "The Justification of a Sinner Before God: As Taught in Later Lutheran Orthodoxy," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 13, no. 3 [1960]: 274).

Such a distinction was a response to the papal teaching that justification is not only the forgiveness of sins but also the renewal of the Spirit.[60] The Lutherans clarified that Christ did not suffer and die only so that the righteousness required by God would be infused into our souls through the habit of divine grace. This would not be true forgiveness. Rather, such righteous requirements of God's law are already fulfilled outside of us in Christ (Matt 5:17–18).[61]

It is important to clarify that this distinction between active and passive obedience was not a synthetic one but rather analytical. That is to say, it does not suggest that Jesus was first obedient actively and then, in a series of events, was obedient passively, as if he conceivably could have been obedient in one way and not the other. The words of St. Paul from Philippians 2:8, "to the point of death, even death on a cross," describe the obedience of Christ, which he rendered to the Father.[62] The passive obedience describes the active obedience, as the writer to the Hebrews says (Heb 5:8), "He learned obedience through what he suffered." Commenting on the Formula of Concord, Edmund Schlink argues,

> The series "obedience, suffering, death, and resurrection" seems at first to suggest the understanding of a succession in time. But at the same time the whole way of Jesus until death is described as obedience. In his entire life he rendered "total obedience" to God "by doing and suffering, in life and in death" (SD III, 15).[63]

This distinction is an analytical distinction, an observation about Christ's work revealed by the Scriptures as a clarification against those who would try to obscure the true benefits of Christ. The active and passive obedience of Christ should not be taken as two different acts of obedience, one active and one passive. Rather, there is one obedience, which is both active and passive. As the Formula explains, it is his only (*sola*),[64] whole (*solidam*),[65] most perfect obedience (*perfectissima obedientia*).[66]

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[60] Chemnitz describes the error of Johann Gropper (1503–1559), a German theologian active at the Council of Trent, who argued "at great length that Christ by His obedience did not merit only the remission of sins but also the Spirit of renewal; and that God remits sins to no one without at the same time renewing the spirit of his mind [Eph 4:23]" (Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, 874).

[61] As we have seen in Luther, Chemnitz used Matthew 5:17–18 (specifically v. 18) to prove this (Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, 889, 986, 1000, 1026ff.). In Hafenreffer's short *Compendium,* he cites Matthew 5:17 as the *sedes* for Christ's active obedience (Matthias Hafenreffer, *Loci theologici . . . , De cruce et precibus* [Tübingen, 1600], 384–385).

[62] Cf. FC Ep III 3.

[63] Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehneke, Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 80.

[64] FC SD III 55.

[65] FC SD III 58.

[66] FC SD III 4, 9, 15, 22, 30.

To elaborate further on the active and passive obedience, one may compare the passive obedience to the weightier matters of the law, while the active obedience is the outward duty. Jesus calls the weightier matters of the law justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matt 23:23). Matthew also records Jesus referring to the prophet Hosea (Matt 9:13; Hos 6:6), "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice." The weightier matters of the law describe the very heart of God. And this is why the law requires us to fear his justice, be merciful as he is merciful, and trust his faithfulness. Thus, the explanation of every commandment of the second table of the law, describing our outward, *active* obedience, is prefaced in Luther's Small Catechism with "fear and love God." The law condemns us not simply because we neglect outward duties. It condemns the heart precisely because it is contrary to God's heart. It is not moved with compassion as God is.

IV. The Obedience of Christ and the New Obedience

God is love. He is just. He is merciful. He is faithful. He does not choose the easy part but gives his dearest treasure. He is the suffering and dying God who declared, "Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25). Jesus says this right before his passion, which glorifies God's name (John 12:28). In other words, it is the glory of God, the very nature of God, who from eternity has begotten the Son (John 17:5).

Therefore, obedience without suffering is simple hypocrisy, which neglects the weightier matters of the law. It proves that one does not know who God really is. And this is why Moses condemns those who reject Christ, because they do not believe in mercy incarnate (John 5:45–46).

The active obedience is the outward duty in one's station in life. The passive obedience is the suffering of love, which bears all things (1 Cor 13:7). To pursue the weightier matters of the law apart from this active obedience is to create justice, mercy, and faithfulness in one's own image. It is to ask with the lawyer seeking to justify himself, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Rather, God teaches that the Christian is to pursue justice, mercy, and faithfulness within the concrete stations in life—as a child obeying his parents, as a neighbor protecting another's property, as a husband loving his wife, and so on. Jesus fulfilled all of these active stations even if he did not occupy each one. And he did this by fulfilling the weightier matters. He passively commended himself to God, whose justice is true (1 Pet 2:23). Thus, he fulfilled all righteousness, just as he bore witness at his Baptism (Matt 3:15). Such righteousness is a baptism of fire and anguish (Luke 12:49–50). It is hidden in suffering and death.

Christ's active obedience is hidden under his passive obedience. One may, therefore, make the same observation about the new obedience, except, of course, that it is not perfected.[67] The new obedience is hidden under suffering just as Christ's obedience was hidden under suffering. The teaching of the new obedience and good works includes the cross, in which the Christian must fight against his sinful flesh as he bears other afflictions. In fact, the cross shapes and encompasses the new obedience. As he suffers the crosses of the devil, the world, and his own sinful flesh, the Christian constantly requires consolation, even while he is walking in good works.[68] The new obedience, while active in good works, remains passive under the cross and in need of consolation from the gospel. After all, while the law requires such weighty matters of justice, mercy, and faithfulness, only the gospel bestows them.

There should, therefore, be no disconnect between Christ's obedience and the Christian's obedience. Surely they are distinct, but the latter proceeds from and is constantly dependent on the former. The fact that the new obedience is hidden under suffering demonstrates how faith remains central to the entire new obedience. This is because the suffering—passive obedience—of the new obedience teaches the Christian that he is a sinner, drives him to constant repentance, and proves his faith in the righteousness of Christ. In his *Treatise on Good Works* (1520), Luther argues that because faith is most needed in suffering, suffering is therefore the greatest work.[69] This is also why the Apology can entertain the thought that the bearing of afflictions is a sacrament, since it has God's promise attached to it.[70] It follows that the new obedience is not simply moving on to an active obedience. Instead, the active obedience—fulfilling the law in one's calling and station in life—remains subordinate to the passive obedience, which, pursuing the weightier matters of the law, finds rest through faith in the righteousness, mercy, and faithfulness of Christ.

V. The Cross and the New Obedience

This connection between the passivity of the new obedience in suffering and the passivity of faith in receiving consolation from the gospel is demonstrated by the

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[67] FC SD III 28, 32, 34, 51.

[68] As Luther says in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535), describing the active righteousness, "We do not fulfill the law even when we fulfill it" (AE 26:8).

[69] AE 44:28–29. "For faith and confidence make precious before God all that which others think most shameful, so that it is written even of death in Psalm 116[:15], 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.' And just as confidence and faith are better, higher, and stronger at this stage than in the first, so the sufferings which are borne in this kind of faith excel all works of faith. Therefore there is an immeasurable difference between such works and sufferings, and the sufferings are better."

[70] Ap XIII (VII) 17 (= XIII 17, Tappert p. 213).

fact that the Apology assumes the sixth and twentieth articles of the Augsburg Confession ("Of New Obedience and Of Good Works") into its defense of the fourth and fifth articles ("Of Justification and Of the Ministry").[71] In other words, just as faith passively receives what the gospel gives, so does the new obedience passively en-dure suffering under God's mighty hand (1 Pet 5:6). Here lies the relation between Christ's vicarious obedience and the Christian following Christ's example in his new obedience. It is an example of suffering (1 Pet 2:21). While this suffering brings to mind God's anger against sin, faith meanwhile receives the comfort and assurance of the gospel. In this part of the Apology, one may see the predominance of afflictions in need of consolation within the doctrine of good works and the new obedience.

The doctrine of justification and the doctrine of good works and new obedience are related through the cross and afflictions. One learns to show mercy by constantly knowing what it means to need mercy. After condemning the Anabaptists and others for teaching that the Holy Spirit comes through their own preparation and works, without the external word,[72] Melanchthon then turns it around by teaching that only in the heart that has been prepared by the terrors imposed by God himself is faith received. This faith alone gives the sinner peace with God precisely in the midst of such suffering (Rom 5:1). Such afflictions demonstrate that man cannot be justified by his works.[73] Thus, while the Christian is not justified or preserved in his faith by his works and afflictions, his faith is strengthened in his afflictions.[74] That is to say, in the cross, faith grows by the power of the gospel.

The Apology affirms that the Decalogue requires much more than outward works, but that one truly fears, loves, and trusts in God, obeying him in death and afflictions. Therefore, only the specific faith (*fides specialis*), which lays hold of the remission of sins for Christ's sake, can fulfill this. That God wishes to be worshiped through faith and not because of man's merits is the greatest consolation in all afflictions.[75] The Christian needs the constant application of the gospel precisely because he cannot, with his own strength, bear these afflictions required and imposed by God.[76] His works are helpless, only pleasing to God on account of faith, by which he submits to God in all afflictions.[77]

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[71] Ap IV (II) 1 (= IV 1, Tappert p. 107).

[72] AC V 4.

[73] Ap IV (III) 74 (= IV 195, Tappert p. 134).

[74] Ap IV (III) 21, 212 (= IV 143, 333, Tappert pp. 126–127, 158)

[75] Ap IV (II) 8, 45, 60 (= IV 8, 45, 60, Tappert pp. 108, 113, 115); Ap IV (III) 172, 212, 266 (= IV 293, 333, 387, Tappert pp. 152, 158, 166).

[76] Ap IV (II) 45–50 (= IV 166–171, Tappert p. 130).

[77] Ap IV (III) 51, 135 (= IV 172, 256, Tappert pp. 130–131, 144).

Here one can speak of *propter fidem*, that is, when one considers why the Christian's works, labors, and especially suffering are accepted before God. As the Apology maintains that faith exists within repentance,[78] it is with this insight that one may understand how faith exists within the new obedience. The new obedience consists of constant repentance. This includes suffering the cross, which constantly drives the Christian to repentance in true faith in God's promise.

VI. Conclusion

If Luther's theology of the cross is the same as "our theology," then of course we should expect it to be taught in the Lutheran Confessions. This is why Robert Preus identified the theology of the cross as simply the article of justification. It cannot be divided or separated from the other articles, whether creation, sin, grace, Baptism, the church, the Lord's Supper, or Christ's return.[79]

If it is simply the article of atonement and justification, then of course this is taught in the Confessions. Article IV of the Augsburg Confession speaks specifically of how we are justified through faith in Christ, who made full satisfaction for our sins, and how we are not found righteous in God's sight by anything that we do. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession calls this the chief topic of Christian doctrine.[80] In his Smalcald Articles, Luther calls this the first and chief article, without which "all is lost, and the Pope and devil and all things gain the victory and suit over us."[81] Throughout the Confessions, the main concern is that Christ alone is our salvation, and that we obtain this not by works or merit, but only through faith.

Preus would also refer to this theology of the cross as the *solus Christus* principle (Christ alone). This teaches not merely that Christ is our only Savior from sin but also that indeed all theology is only about Christ. Such a principle is not meant to reduce doctrine to a lowest possible standard. Instead, if understood rightly, it does the opposite. If all doctrine is about Christ, then all doctrine is crucial to Christian faith and life.

Every article of faith pertains to Christ alone. In other words, every part of Christian doctrine is about Christ and what he did, specifically by his death on the cross, to save poor sinners. Whether we are talking about how we are to behave in our various stations in life or we are contending for a true confession of doctrine, we live and speak in the weakness of our flesh under the afflictions of the devil and this world, and we hold the treasure of Christ's word in jars of clay (2 Cor 4:7).

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[78] Ap IV (III) 21 (= IV 142, Tappert p. 126).

[79] Robert Preus, "The Theology of the Cross—Part 1," *Reformation and Revival* 7, no. 4 (1998): 49.

[80] Ap IV (II) 2 (= IV 2, Tappert p. 107).

[81] SA II I 5.

All of this—God's holy doctrine as well as our weak faith to confess it—is sent by God so that we might take refuge in the weakness of Christ, who is our only strength. To speak of the theology of the cross, whether we call it the *solus Christus* or the chief article, is to say that what Jesus did to save poor sinners from the wrath to come and to declare them righteous is the very center and sum of all Christian doctrine and life.[82]

This should also, then, inform our understanding of polemics. We do not fight for the truth for our own pride of being right and winning debates but, as St. Peter says, in meekness and fear (1 Pet 3:15). Fear of whom? Of God! This is because we are dealing with much more than our own opinions or encounters of the Almighty. We are dealing with God's eternal truths, which have eternal consequences.

This is what the cross teaches us. Whether we are talking about the doctrine of creation, marriage, the church, the sacraments, sin, wrath, hell, death, faith, or even good works and the new obedience, every topic of Christian doctrine revealed in Scripture is centered in Christ and his saving act. We know this by how the world opposes such doctrines, just as it opposes Christ. And this means that these things are all worth suffering for and even dying for. Some pastors might be sneered at for defending the existence of God's wrath and Christ's act of satisfying it. Some might be driven out of their parishes for defending the right use of the sacraments. Others might be marginalized for defending the order of creation. All of these issues are united in the cross of Christ. They are, therefore, all worthy of our cross.

One more element deserves emphasis when considering the theology of the cross in the Lutheran Confessions. Following Melanchthon's lead, the later Lutheran theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries described the cross of the Christian as that which brings to mind God's judgment and wrath.[83] This is the mark of the theologian of the cross, when he makes his confession with such confidence that God's real judgment is in mind. This is why Chemnitz insists that some ancient and medieval writers erred in the doctrine of justification, because they treated it purely academically apart from the cross and prayer under the tribunal of God.[84] A

[82] Robert Preus, "Luther: Word, Doctrine, and Confession," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (1996): 196–197.

[83] Philip Melanchthon, *The Chief Theological Topics: Loci Praecipui Theologici 1559*, trans. J. A. O. Preus, 2nd English ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 352. "Since the world does not consider that this inner uncleanness of human nature, our doubts about God, or our neglect of Him are things which are condemned by God, and since it despises the wrath of God, the church is even more pressed down because God wills that His wrath against sin be seen, and He wills that repentance increase among us [1 Pet. 4:17; Jer. 30:11; Isa. 66:2]."

[84] Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici,* 925. "The diversity of opinions arises mostly from this, that without the struggle of temptation, idle and secure disputations, joined with the philosophical opinions of human reason, have disturbed the minds of men. But this exertion, illustrating the doctrine of faith more than all commentaries, is undertaken chiefly in two ways—either the

theologian of the cross sees his confession the same way the original signers of the Christian Book of Concord saw theirs:

> This Confession also, by the help of God, we will retain to our last breath, when we shall go forth from this life to the heavenly fatherland, to appear with joyful and undaunted mind and with a pure conscience before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ.[85]

May Christ's cross—his vicarious obedience—permeate our entire theology, our entire confession, our entire lives. It is what consoles us before the tribunal of God and under every cross we bear. It makes every part of our task as pastors imminently relevant and always practical. God grant that we confess this theology of the cross, even as we learn it from the Scriptures and our Lutheran Confessions!

conscience places itself before the tribunal of God . . . or it finds itself under the cross and temptation, in petition and expectation, both spiritual and corporal."

[85] Preface to the Christian Book of Concord, 16.

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The Catholic Paul: Allegory and Perspicuity in Irenaeus's Reading of Scripture

James G. Bushur

I. Introduction: Correlative Theology

My gratitude to Dr. William Weinrich has only grown and deepened since my first class with him in the fall of 1989. Our Lord likens words to seeds, and so Dr. Weinrich's words—at least some of them—have taken root and continue to bear fruit in my life. Of course, today I am bound to give him thanks for something more—for the great privilege of occupying this chair in honor of his parents. Indeed, thanks to this chair, I now have a title that will not fit on a business card or within the temporal confines of an answering machine.

However, beyond its prolixity, there is an aspect of this title that is a genuine hallmark of Dr. Weinrich, namely, the combination of New Testament and Early Church Studies. The conjunction "*and*" joining these two nouns is, I believe, more than merely a conjunction of addition; it is a conjunction of correlativity. Dr. Weinrich's theological work has taken place in a time when theological discourse has been marked by fragmentation. In the so-called battle for the Bible, neither side found much value in the study of the early church fathers as exemplary or authentic readers of Scripture. One side found them too primitive and biased to bear any authority regarding biblical interpretation, and the other side likewise neglected them in order to seek an epistemological ground for their exposition of Scripture that would please the modern academic community. Thus, the battle for the Bible took place in the arena of the academy, relegating the church to the status of spectator.

Dr. Weinrich ostensibly followed a different path, one that assumed the interconnection between New Testament studies and the concrete life and history of the early church. For Weinrich, the Bible is not merely an archaeological artifact to be investigated by the academy, but the inspired word of God. To speak of the Scriptures as inspired is to say that they subsist in the Spirit as God's direct address

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to his people. Thus, the church already subsists within the Scriptures as the divinely intended audience, whose life and identity are generated within God's direct address. If this is true, then theology is not simply a monergistic lecture that sounded forth in the distant past with no regard for the hearer; rather, theology is an ongoing, reciprocal dialogue, that is, a dialogue between the Father and the Son. This divine dialogue has been opened up to humanity through the incarnation and continues to be heard even today in fellowship of the Holy Spirit by those with the ears to hear.

Thus, this chair in New Testament and Early Church Studies is a single chair intended to promote the correlativity of these two theological disciplines. Perhaps there is a christological metaphor to be employed here. Cyril of Alexandria spoke of one Christ out of two natures. This confession meant more than merely the addition of the human to the divine as Nestorius taught; rather, it meant the reciprocal correlativity of the divine and human natures so that the two become one in the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God. This correlativity means that the Son of God cannot be engaged or known except in and through his flesh. In the same way, the New Testament cannot be engaged except as it addresses the church and is heard and preached within the community of the faithful. Thus, while exegetes seek to study the word of God as preached by prophets and apostles, patristic studies provide a glimpse of how the divine word has been heard by the faithful and has given form to the church's life. It is this intimate correlation between Christ and his body, the church, that was, is, and will ever remain the hallmark of the church's catholicity, and, in my humble opinion, this correlative catholicity has found its greatest witness within our community in Dr. William Weinrich, for whom we must give thanks to God.

II. The Perspicuity of Paul: An Ancient Debate

To assert this correlativity is one thing; to maintain it is another. Every preacher knows that what he intends to proclaim is not necessarily what his audience hears. Jesus chastises his disciples for their dull hearing more than once. Paul claims that he cannot address the Corinthians "as spiritual men" but only "as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ" (1 Cor 3:1).[1] Similarly, Paul is confounded by the Galatians, calling them "mindless" and wondering if they have been "bewitched" (Gal 3:1). Indeed, the misunderstanding of St. Paul seems to have been an ongoing feature of early Christianity. The author of 2 Peter testifies both to Paul's wisdom as a preacher and to the difficulty of understanding him. "The ignorant and unstable twist [his

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture translations are my own.

words] to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures" (2 Pet 3:16, ESV[2]). This disconnect between the preaching and hearing of the word invites an engagement with the question of the Scripture's perspicuity. While the word at its origin in the Father may have a consistent, harmonious, and unchanging intent, its movement from human mouths into human ears is living and dynamic, operating within the human mode of existence subject to temporal and spatial conditions. Thus, the question—Is Scripture clear?—requires a more complex answer than is at times suggested. Yes, the word of God is clear according to its eternal origin in the Father, its manifestation in the Son, and its perfection in the Spirit. Yet this theological clarity does not mean that in the present moment, subject to the limitations of our creaturely mode of existence, the word of God is not often misunderstood since now we know only in part and see through a mirror dimly (1 Cor 13:12).

The question of scriptural perspicuity lay at the heart of the second-century debate between Irenaeus (the bishop of Lyons) and his Gnostic opponents, the followers of Valentinus. For both Irenaeus and the Valentinians, the debate revolves around the way Paul's letters are heard and appropriated in the church. Irenaeus recognizes that all three of his primary opponents have their point of departure in the way they read Paul's letters.[3] The Ebionites repudiate Paul and accept nothing but Matthew's Gospel. The Marcionites portray a negative image of the Ebionites, accepting Paul's testimony above all else. The Valentinians, however, represent a more insidious approach. They do not take their stand on their own peculiar reading of Paul's letters; rather, they claim to be the heirs of a secret tradition that proceeds from the mouth of Paul himself. According to Theodotus, Paul handed over his secret knowledge to his disciple Theudas, who in turn traditioned it to Valentinus. This secret genealogical connection to Paul gave Valentinus and his followers—Ptolemy, Theodotus, and Heracleon—the right to pen gospels and epistles of their own, making clear and transparent what was merely hidden in the apostle's public

[2] Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

[3] Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III.13–15. The translations are my own, but certainly based on A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325,* vol. 1 (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1994), hereafter *ANF*. My translations of *Adversus Haereses,* books 1–3, are based on the Latin and Greek texts gathered by W. W. Harvey, *Sancti Irenaei episcopi Lugdunensis libros quinque Adversus haereses,* vols. 1 and 2 (Cambridge: Typis academicis, 1857), hereafter Harvey. My translations of *Adversus Haereses,* books 4–5, are based on A. Rousseau, B. Hemmerdinger, L. Doutreleau, and C. Mercier, *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les Hérésies, Livre IV,* Sources Chretiennes 100, 153 (Paris: Cerf, 1965, 1969), hereafter SC. Hereafter, Irenaeus's work will be referenced in the following format: *AH* III.13–15 (*ANF* 1:436–439; Harvey 2:72–73).

epistles. The writings and fragments we have from these teachers betray their loyalty to a secret Pauline tradition. Ptolemy references Paul by name[4] and asserts that his instruction to Flora comes from "apostolic tradition," which was "received by succession."[5] Another Valentinian epistle written to Rheginus, called the *Treatise on Resurrection*, simply refers to Paul as "the apostle."[6]

So whose interpretation of Paul is correct? Why has Paul's preaching been subjected to such a fragmented hearing? For Irenaeus, these questions revolve around a central issue—the perspicuity of Scripture. After spending most of the second book of *Adversus Haereses* exposing and ridiculing Valentinian allegories, Irenaeus articulates what is perhaps the first Christian form of the perspicuity principle. He writes,

> He who has a healthy mind and does not seek peril, but is pious and loves the truth will zealously contemplate what God has placed within the power of humanity (τῇ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐξουσίᾳ) and has submitted to our knowledge; and in these things, he will progress, the learning taking place quickly within himself on account of daily discipline (ἀσκήσεως). Yet, these things are those that fall within our sight (ὑπ᾽ ὄψιν), things that have been dictated manifestly (φανερῶς) and without ambiguity in the very words of the divine Scriptures. Therefore, parables ought not be adapted to ambiguous things. For, if this procedure is avoided, he will avoid danger and the parabolic sayings will receive a similar explanation from all; and from the truth, the body persists as whole, and its members properly connected and without contradiction.[7]

This principle of perspicuity—that ambiguous and parabolic passages should be conformed to what is clear and manifest—seems logical enough. Irenaeus asserts this principal without much argument as a rational presupposition that all would accept. Indeed, Anthony Briggman has written a two-part study concerning Irenaeus's use of ancient literary and rhetorical conventions.[8] Among them is the perspicuity principle, which has ancient roots in Aristotle, Quintilian, Cicero, Plutarch, and others. However, the ancient origins of the perspicuity principle do not settle the argument for Irenaeus against his opponents. While Briggman's articles admirably demonstrate the ancient roots of the perspicuity principle, they lead to a much more important and central question: What precisely are the clear

[4] Ptolemy, *Epistle to Flora* 6.6. Cf. Bentley Layton, trans., *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 313.

[5] Ptolemy, *Epistle to Flora* 7.9 (Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures,* 314).

[6] *Treatise on the Resurrection* 45.23 (Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 321).

[7] *AH* II.27, 1 (*ANF* 1:398; Harvey 1:347).

[8] Cf. Anthony Briggman, "Literary and Rhetorical Theory in Irenaeus, Part 1," *Vigiliae Christianae* 69, no. 5 (2015): 500–527; "Literary and Rhetorical Theory in Irenaeus, Part 2," *Vigiliae Christianae* 70, no. 1 (2016): 31–50.

things to which we adapt the ambiguous sayings? What does Irenaeus mean by truth that is manifest? Indeed, Irenaeus is well aware that his Valentinian opponents have their own set of clear texts that shape their reading of Scripture. The distinctive way Valentinians read Scripture is brought out in an interesting little book by Elaine Pagels, entitled *The Gnostic Paul*. Her study does not seek to establish the original intent of Paul's letters; rather, she focuses on the way Paul's preaching was heard in the church and specifically within Gnostic communities. Pagels clearly wants to claim legitimacy for the Gnostic reading of Paul; she even makes the subtle and deceptive assertion that some read Paul "gnostically" and others like Irenaeus read Paul "antignostically."[9] Hidden in this assertion is the idea that orthodox readings were a later reaction to Gnostic readings, which, being earlier, were perhaps more authentic.

While her understanding of Irenaeus is inadequate at best, the strength of Pagels's book is her understanding of how Gnostics read Paul. She begins with the general observation that spiritual Gnostics read the Scriptures allegorically, while most Christians were obsessed with the literal text. However, as she summarizes the Gnostic reading of specific Pauline texts, this basic distinction between allegorical and literal readings becomes shallow and increasingly untenable. Indeed, Pagels's study indicates that allegorical readings require literal texts that support and even demand the use of allegory. Gnostic allegory is like an airplane that can only soar into the heavenly realm if it has earthly runways from which to take off. Their allegories are like skipping rocks on a pond, where certain points on the surface of the water allow rocks to bounce up and make progress through the air. Thus, Gnostic readers tended to take certain Pauline texts in an extremely literal way. One such passage is Romans 2:28–29, which Gnostics understand to be a clear statement from Paul that his teaching about Jew and Gentile is not to be understood literally in terms of race but spiritually in terms of different factions in the church—namely, the relation between pneumatics (elite Christians, people endowed with spirit) and psychics (common Christians, people endowed merely with soul). Other passages include: 1 Corinthians 2:6–7, which speaks of "hidden wisdom"; 1 Corinthians 2:13–16, which claims that spiritual things can only be understood by the spiritual; and, perhaps most fundamentally, 1 Corinthians 15:50, which boldly asserts that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (ESV). Such texts are taken in a literal way to support and even propel the allegorical flight from the fleshly mode of existence toward the spiritual

[9] Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1975), 5.

realm. Thus, Ptolemy cites Paul as the teacher who established the Gnostic example of reading the law symbolically and allegorically.

III. Irenaeus's Critique: Images of an Invisible Archetype

For Irenaeus, the allegorical reading of Scripture by Valentinian teachers violates the perspicuity principle. Yet, their violation is not merely methodological or the way they engage sacred texts, as Pagels suggests. Their challenge to the perspicuity principle is not their grammatical, rhetorical, literary, or rational engagement with scriptural texts. Irenaeus does not oppose the Valentinian allegorical method with his own literal method; he does not combat their emphasis on Paul with an alternative emphasis on John or Peter; he does not simply oppose their favorite texts with his own favorites. Indeed, contrary to Pagels's assertion, Irenaeus does not read Paul "antignostically." Rather, against the Gnostic Paul, Irenaeus places the catholic Paul.

> Yet, those who declare that Paul alone understood the truth, the mystery being made manifest to him by revelation, let Paul himself convince them, saying that one and the same God worked through Peter as the apostle among the circumcised and through himself among the Gentiles (Gal 2:8). Therefore, Peter was an apostle of the same God from whom likewise Paul came; and that God, whom Peter announced among the circumcised, even the Son of God, this one Paul also announced among the Gentiles. For, our Lord did not come to save Paul alone; nor is God so poor that he has one apostle alone who understands the economy of his Son.[10]

For Irenaeus, Paul must be read as one member of the whole apostolic body. Thus, Paul is to be heard in communion with Peter, Luke, and the rest of the apostles. "The doctrine of the apostles is clear and firm," asserts the bishop of Lyons, "lacking nothing, nor teaching some things secretly and other things manifestly."[11] Thus, Irenaeus's perspicuity principle entails a conciliar hermeneutic that connects Paul to the whole company of the apostolic preaching. "We hold it necessary," Irenaeus writes, "to adhere to the universal mind of the apostles who come from our Lord Jesus Christ."[12]

Irenaeus's emphasis on the "universal mind of the apostles" suggests that the perspicuity of Scripture is more profound than mere grammatical clarity or textual cherry-picking. Indeed, for Irenaeus, it is his opponent's limitation of scriptural perspicuity to a single apostle, a few texts, or a private knowledge that has led to the

[10] *AH* III.13, 1 (*ANF* 1:436; Harvey 2:72).
[11] *AH* III.15, 1 (*ANF* 1:439; Harvey 2:79).
[12] *AH* III.16, 1 (*ANF* 1:440; Harvey 2:82).

loss of catholicity, that is, the fragmentation of the Scriptures, the partiality for Paul or another apostle, and the exaltation of some scriptural texts over others. In short, for Irenaeus, the problem at the heart of his opponent's allegory is not methodological but theological. Scriptural perspicuity is not a matter of human process or technique but has its ground in the divine origin of the text. Here, the ancient world is quite different from our contemporary context.

Academic discussions of the last few centuries concerning hermeneutical method presuppose the secular anthropology characteristic of the Enlightenment and its aftermath.[13] Enlightenment interpreters assumed that clarity of meaning could be sought in the psychological exchange between human authors and their readers. Due to the obvious corruption of the medieval church, Enlightenment scholars challenged her place as a privileged reader of Scripture. Rejecting the validity of the church's subjective and biased reading, the Enlightenment hermeneutical approach optimistically sought a universal and objective meaning for the Scriptures hidden in the minds of ancient authors and extracted by the social sciences. However, following the skepticism of David Hume and Immanuel Kant, our postmodern age is marked by a fundamental despair of attaining such an objective perspicuous meaning. No reader can escape the filters of his own perception and, therefore, cannot help but impose his own meaning on sacred texts. This Copernican revolution from a text revolving around human authors to one revolving around human readers has resulted in hopeless fragmentation. The meaning of a text is no longer limited to the psycho-social setting of its author; rather, countless legitimate meanings are generated for a text out of the innumerable psycho-social settings of its readers. Our contemporary age certainly welcomes the Scriptures as a plastic text, that is, a text that radically autonomous readers can use according to their own personal needs and impulses.

Neither Irenaeus nor his Valentinian opponents understand textual meaning within this modern psychological paradigm. For Irenaeus and the Valentinian teachers, meaning is not sought in the psychological exchange between human authors and readers; rather, textual meaning is understood *genealogically* and, therefore, is to be sought in the true generative source of the text.[14] From beginning to end of *Adversus Haereses*, book 1, Irenaeus understands himself as exposing the genealogy of his Gnostic opponents. He begins with the Gnostic genealogy of the spiritual realm (*Pleroma*) that is generated by Bythus and seven other spiritual

[13] For sources comparing and contrasting patristic readings of scripture to post-Enlightenment perspectives, see the following: John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) and Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Wichita, KS: Eighth Day Press, 2007).

[14] Cf. *AH* I.1, 1; I.22, 2 (*ANF* 1:316, 347; Harvey 1:8–9, 189).

beings that make up the Ogdoad.[15] Irenaeus refers to this Ogdoad as the "root and underlying subsistence of all things (ῥίζαν καὶ ὑπόστασιν τῶν πάντων)" according to the Gnostics. Then, after exposing the succession of heretical teachers, Irenaeus writes, "We consider it necessary in the first place to refer to their fountain and root [*fontem et radicem*] so that understanding their most sublime Bythus, you may understand the tree from which such fruit was produced."[16] While in the modern world such a genealogical presentation is considered unfair and utterly biased, in the ancient world, tracing a teaching's genealogical origins would have been considered absolutely necessary.

For ancient readers, the Scriptures do not revolve around just human authors or their readers; rather, they revolve around a theological core. There is a divine reality that pre-exists both human authors and their readers. On the one hand, this divine reality is the source of inspiration for authors. "No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man," says the author of 2 Peter (1:21). Yet, on the other hand, this divine reality also generates meaning for the hearer. "He who is of God," Jesus says, "hears the words of God" (John 8:47).

For Irenaeus, genealogical meaning is embodied in the relationship of a type or image to its archetype. The archetype pre-exists its image as the permanent pattern that is eternal, stable, and unchanging. When this archetypical pattern is stamped into malleable material such as ink or clay, it produces an image or type of itself. Thus, the question of perspicuity for both Irenaeus and his opponents is not a question about which texts are clearer than other texts; nor is it a question simply about the psychological process by which images are produced and interpreted by human authors and readers. Ultimately, the question of perspicuity must consider the archetype itself, that is, the generative source of sacred texts and images.

Thus, Irenaeus's difficulty with Valentinian teachers is not their use of allegory as a method of reading texts. The problem is the archetype that Valentinian teachers assert is the generative source of sacred texts and the unchanging center guiding their allegorical reading. For these Gnostic teachers, true revelation proceeds from the community of spiritual beings that dwell in a transcendent realm far removed from the corruptible world of creation. Thus, Valentinian teachers admit that their archetype is invisible, transcendent, secret, and, therefore, not subject to the human sphere of knowledge. Yet, as Irenaeus will assert, archetypes that are unknowable will always produce images that are ambiguous. It is like trying to assemble the pieces of a puzzle without knowing the archetypical picture the pieces

[15] *AH* I.1, 1 (*ANF* 1:316; Harvey 1:8–9).
[16] *AH* I.22, 2 (*ANF* 1:347; Harvey 1:189).

are intending to represent.[17] The problem does not lie with the individual pieces themselves nor with the inherent clarity of each fragment; rather, the confusion arises due to the inaccessibility of the archetype readers need in order to assemble the pieces into a unified whole.

For Irenaeus, the fatal flaw in his opponent's archetype consists precisely in its invisibility. The Gnostic archetype is unavailable to the human senses—hearing, seeing, touching, and so on—and, therefore, inaccessible to human knowledge. This point is of fundamental importance to the bishop of Lyons. In his articulation of the perspicuity principle, Irenaeus emphasizes the limitations of our human way of knowing. The pious reader, Irenaeus says, "will zealously contemplate what God has placed within the power of humanity (τῇ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐξουσίᾳ) and has submitted to our knowledge." Irenaeus defines what is accessible to human knowledge as those things that "fall within our sight (ὑπ' ὄψιν)."[18] The Gnostic reading of Scripture, however, assumes a spatial dualism; they draw an absolute boundary between textual images that are seen and their transcendent archetype, which is unseen. This spatial dualism drives the Gnostic use of allegory as a way to cross the barrier and change the setting for the text and its reader. Arguing for his own version of the Mosaic law's threefold use, Ptolemy writes,

> And the third subdivision of god's law is the symbolic part, which is after the image of the superior, spiritual realm: I mean, what is ordained about offerings, circumcision, the Sabbath, fasting, Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the like. Now, once the truth had been manifested, the referent of all these ordinances was changed, inasmuch as they are images and allegories. As to their meaning in the visible realm and their physical accomplishment they were abolished; but as to their spiritual meaning they were elevated, with the words remaining the same but the subject matter being altered.[19]

Like the skipping rock that lightly skims the surface of the pond in order to bounce into the air above, so Gnostic allegory promises an ascent from creation and the limitations of the fleshly mode of existence into the communion of spiritual things.

However, for Irenaeus, an archetype that is invisible and inaccessible to the fleshly mode of existence is disastrous for the reading of Scripture. For, once two spatial settings or habitats are established for the reading of Scripture, what is to prevent the establishment of three, four, five, or even more. To have an invisible and inaccessible archetype is the same as having no archetype at all. Thus, Irenaeus

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[17] Cf. *AH* I.8, 1–I.9, 5 (*ANF* 1:326–330; Harvey 1:66–89). For my own more extensive exposition of this text, cf. James G. Bushur, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Mosaic of Christ: Preaching Scripture in the Era of Martyrdom* (London: Routledge, 2017): 81–82.

[18] *AH* II.27, 1 (*ANF* 1:398; Harvey 1:347).

[19] Ptolemy, *Epistle to Flora* 5.9 (Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 312).

writes, "For, if the Creator did not construct the form of creation from himself, but formed them according to transcendent things, then from whom did their Bythus, who in the same way gave form to the Pleroma, receive the form of those things . . . ?"[20] Irenaeus's question is more than clever rhetoric; it intends to demonstrate that the Gnostic reading is really an agnostic reading. Irenaeus concludes, "Therefore, if creation is an image of other things, what prevents the assertion that those things are images of things above them and those of things above them again and to continue to move within innumerable images of images?"[21] Without a perspicuous archetype, Valentinian teachers find themselves caught in an endless cycle of allegories upon allegories; or, as Irenaeus puts it more vividly, the Gnostics "never rest in the one God" and so "are ever swimming in a limitless abyss."[22]

IV. Irenaeus's Reading of Scripture: The Perspicuous Archetype

For Irenaeus, the perspicuity principle is more profound than is often considered. While it has implications for the use of grammatical, rhetorical, literary, and rational analysis in the reading of sacred texts, the perspicuity principle cannot be reduced to any of them. The Valentinians destroy the clarity of the Scriptures not because they simply disobey proper grammatical standards; nor is it due to their preference for images and parables over more literal, paraenetic genres; nor do they undermine scriptural clarity by their predilection for the allegorical method. To be sure, Irenaeus is willing to engage his opponents in all of these areas; but his articulation of the perspicuity principle extends far beyond them, reaching into the very being of God himself. Because Valentinian teachers claim that the Creator himself is merely an image of a transcendent, spiritual, and inaccessible god, their use of grammar, rhetoric, reason, and literary analysis must necessarily serve a theological agnosticism.

> To say . . . that God subsists as an image (εἰκόνα) of another father is to stumble with regard to the truth and become completely foolish and senseless. For, such people will count it necessary, as we have demonstrated many times, to ever discover types of types and images of images, never able to fix (πῆξαι) the mind upon the one, true God. For, their reasoning is exalted above God and their hearts ascend beyond the teacher, supposing themselves to be lofty and exalted

[20] *AH* II.16, 1 (*ANF* 1:380; Harvey 1:305).

[21] *AH* II.16, 1 (*ANF* 1:380; Harvey 1:305). For similar texts in which Irenaeus uses the language of image and type to connect theology and cosmology to the reading of Scripture, see *AH* IV.9, 3; IV.14, 3; IV.19, 1; IV.30, 4.

[22] *AH* IV.9, 3 (*ANF* 1:473; SC 100:488–489).

but in reality moving away from the God who actually exists (ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος Θεοῦ).[23]

An unknowable and inaccessible archetype produces unknowable and inaccessible images. For Irenaeus, the Scriptures are like a wheel turning around an axle; if there is no sure connection to the axle, the wheel will become unstable, and its revolutions will tend toward fragmentation according to the laws of centrifugal force.[24] As long as the Scriptures are rooted in the one God, they have stability and are united in a single narrative moving in one harmonious orbit. Each text can be read in relation to all others as a clear image of the one, true God, who is its fundamental source. Gnostic teachers compromise this connection by introducing a second god who transcends the Creator. "By obscure interpretation of parables," Irenaeus says, "each imagines to find a god of his own."[25] This Gnostic assertion disrupts the movement of the scriptural narrative and leads to an inevitable instability and fragmentation.[26] "Deserting what is certain, without doubt, and true," Gnostic teachers forsake the "firm rock" and "build on shifting sand."[27] Severed from the one God, each text becomes an image employed by Gnostic teachers to promote a variety of false archetypes.

For Irenaeus, the perspicuity of Scripture extends beyond grammatical, rhetorical, literary, or rational clarity; rather, perspicuity is rooted in God himself, who created all things openly, whose word formed the flesh from the dust of paradise and perfected it by his incarnation, death, and resurrection. Irenaeus agrees with his opponents that the Scriptures are full of images, yet these images are clear because the archetype that has generated them is clear. The Creator of heaven and earth is the archetype who produces images in order to approach his human creatures, to make himself available to human senses, and to subject himself to human knowledge. Divine revelation always takes place within the single setting of creation. According to Irenaeus's critique, the flaw in Valentinian exegesis is their compulsion to change the setting in which sacred authors, texts, and readers interact. They use allegory to elevate the mind out of the fleshly mode of existence into the spiritual gnosis of a transcendent world. However, for Irenaeus, humanity's

[23] *AH* IV.19, 1 (*ANF* 1:487; SC 100:616–617).

[24] For my use of the image of centrifugal and centripetal forces to explain Irenaeus's reading of Scripture, cf. Bushur, *Irenaeus of Lyons and the Mosaic of Christ*, 82–83.

[25] *AH* II.27, 2 (*ANF* 1:398; Harvey 1:348).

[26] Cf. AH I.8, 1 (ANF 1:326; Harvey 1:67), where Irenaeus describes Gnostic teachers as those who "disregard the order and sequence of the Scriptures and as they are able, loose the members of the truth." Cf. also *AH* I.9, 4 (*ANF* 1:330; Harvey 1:88–89), where Irenaeus describes his own task as "restoring the individual expressions (of Scripture) to their own order, even fitting them to the body of the truth (τῷ τῆς ἀληθείας σωματίῳ)."

[27] AH II.27, 3 (ANF 1:399; Harvey 1:349).

relation to God does not merely begin in the flesh; it is constituted in the flesh from beginning to end.

Thus, Irenaeus and his Gnostic opponents do not disagree merely about the rational content of divine revelation; they disagree about the very medium in which divine revelation is displayed. While they may begin with sacred texts, Gnostic teachers are finally compelled to assert the "living voice (*vivam vocem*)"[28] of a secret tradition. Divine revelation is limited to the verbal medium; even Christ himself comes, most fundamentally, for the purpose of speaking. "He became a guide," says the *Gospel of Truth,* "at peace and occupied with classrooms. He came forward and uttered the word as a teacher."[29] Yet, as we have argued, words that are not rooted in a substantive and accessible archetype become weightless, free-floating sounds easily carried away according to individual impulses. In contrast, Irenaeus argues that the most fundamental medium of divine revelation is not mere words or texts but human flesh and blood. From the beginning, it is human flesh that bears the intimate "impressions of God's fingers."[30] The moistened dirt of Eden is the malleable material in which the Son of God directly and immediately imprints the form and pattern of his own being and life.

> Therefore, it was not angels who made or formed (*plasmaverunt*) us; for, angels do not have the power to make an image of God (*imaginem Dei*), nor does any other—certainly not a power far removed from the Father of all—no one, except the true God. For, God did not need such things in order to make what he previously determined with himself (*ipse apud se*) should be done, as if he did not have his own hands (*suas manus*). For, with him, the Word and Wisdom were always present, that is, the Son and the Spirit, through whom and in whom he made all things freely and spontaneously (*libere et sponte*); it is to them that he speaks, saying, "Let us make man after our image and likeness" (Gen 1:26). Thus, he acquired from himself the substance of creatures (*substantiam creaturarum*), and the pattern of things made (*exemplum factorum*), and the form (*figuram*) of all the adornments in the world.[31]

Irenaeus's emphasis is clearly on the immediate interaction between God and his human formation. Just as a typewriter makes an ink image of a letter on paper through the imprint of an archetype, so the malleable flesh of humanity is intended from the beginning to be the medium of God's manifestation in the world. "For, the

[28] *AH* III.2, 1 (*ANF* 1:415; Harvey 2:7).
[29] *Gospel of Truth* 19.19 (Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures,* 254).
[30] *AH* IV.39, 2 (*ANF* 1:523; SC 100:966–967).
[31] *AH* IV.20, 1 (*ANF* 1:487–488; SC 100:624–627).

glory of God is a living man," says the bishop of Lyons, "but the life of man is the vision of God."[32]

For Irenaeus, the formation of humanity in the image and likeness of God is the overarching plot that spans the whole of human history from the dirt of Eden to the eschatological fulfillment of the resurrection. "At no time," Irenaeus is fond of saying, "does Adam ever escape the hands of God."[33] At the heart of this plot is the incarnation. The very "hand of God" that formed the flesh of Adam in the beginning "was truly displayed when the Word of God became man, assimilating (ἐξομοιώσας) himself to man and man to himself, so that, on account of likeness to the Son, man might become precious to the Father." Irenaeus then continues with his most important statement concerning the image of God. He writes,

> For, in former times, it was said that man was made according to God's image, but it was not displayed; for, the Word was still invisible according to whose image man was made; but, on account of this also the likeness was easily cast aside. However, when the Word of God became flesh, he confirmed both; for, he displayed the image truly, becoming himself what his image was, and established the likeness with stability (τὴν ὁμοίωσιν βεβαίως), conforming (συνεξομοιώσας) man to the invisible Father through the Word, who is seen.[34]

Irenaeus uses the language of "image" in reference both to humanity and, as we saw earlier, to the Scriptures. This connection between the narrative of Scripture and the formation of humanity is grounded in the Word, who is the perfect image manifesting the Father. The Son as the image manifesting the Father is an important theme that permeates the fourth book of *Adversus Haereses.* Irenaeus writes,

> Therefore, the Father has revealed himself to all by making his Word visible (ὁρατὸν) to all. . . . For through creation, the Word reveals God the Creator; through the world, the Lord who has adorned the world (τὸν κεκοσμηκότα); through the formation, the Artist who has formed him (τὸν πεπλακότα Τεχνίτην); and through the Son, the Father who has begotten him. And while these things address all alike, they do not all alike believe. Yet, through the law and the prophets, the Word preached (ἐκήρυσσε) both himself and the Father alike; and while all the people heard alike, they did not all alike believe. Through the same Word having become visible and palpable (ὁρατοῦ καὶ ψηλαφητοῦ), the Father was displayed, even if all did not alike believe him; but

[32] *AH* IV.19, 7 (*ANF* 1:490; SC 100:648–649). Cf. also *AH* IV.11, 2 (*ANF* 1:474; SC 100:500–501), where Irenaeus speaks of "the man in eucharistic thanksgiving to the One who made him" as "the receptacle of his goodness and the instrument (ὄργανον) of his glorification."

[33] *AH* V.1, 3 (*ANF* 1:527; SC 153:26–29).

[34] *AH* V.16, 2 (*ANF* 1:544; SC 153:216–217).

> all saw the Father in the Son. For, the Father is the invisible (ἀόρατον) of the Son, and the Son is the visible (ὁρατὸν) of the Father.[35]

Thus, just as the divine Word is the hand that forms humanity, so he is the author of all Scripture. "The Son, administering (διακονῶν) all things for the Father, works from the beginning to the end, and without him no one can know God."[36] Thus, as Irenaeus concludes, the Son's manifestation does not begin with his birth from Mary "but applies indifferently throughout all time. . . . For the Son, being present with his own formation (τῷ ἰδίῳ πλάσματι) from the beginning, reveals the Father to all."[37]

In this way, Irenaeus argues that the Son of God is the perfect image of the Father and the eternal archetype by which humanity is formed. He is the "Hand of the Father" who sculpted man from the dust of Eden, generated the ancient narrative of Israel, and finally became flesh, making himself available to sensory experience and accessible to the sphere of human knowledge. Thus, Irenaeus finds it significant that Moses can only glimpse God's glory from the depth of the rock (Ex 33:20–21). This encounter prophesies that "through the wisdom of God, man shall see him in the end, in the depth of a rock, that is, in his presence as man (ἐν τῇ κατ' ἄνθρωπον αὐτοῦ παρουσίᾳ)."[38] In other words, the Son of God is the only true exegete of the Father (John 1:18), and his flesh—taken from the Virgin, crucified on the cross, raised from the dead, and present in the church's Eucharist—is the tissue of divine revelation and the firm rock on which his perspicuity principle rests.

V. The Catholic Paul: Irenaeus's Reading of 1 Corinthians 15:50

This emphasis on human flesh as the medium or tissue of God's self-revelation is not intended by Irenaeus to displace sacred words or texts. Instead of displacing them, the flesh of Jesus anchors the Scriptures in what is real and true. By grounding scriptural texts in the Word's becoming visible in the flesh, Irenaeus is able to argue in two ways. First, human flesh establishes the creaturely mode of existence as the fundamental setting within which all knowledge of God and all interpretation of Scripture must take place. Any allegorical exposition that presumes to transcend the human body and elevate itself beyond the created realm must be censured. Second, the meaning of sacred texts is not to be sought in a transcendent, spiritual gnosis but is generated out of the flesh of Jesus. The flesh of Christ is the source

[35] *AH* IV.6, 5–6 (*ANF* 1:468–469; SC 100:448–451).
[36] *AH* IV.6, 7 (*ANF* 1:469; SC 100:452–453).
[37] *AH* IV.6, 7 (*ANF* 1:469; SC 100:454–455).
[38] *AH* IV.20, 9 (*ANF* 1:490; SC 100:655.

of inspiration for prophets and apostles[39] and the accessible archetype that guides the church's hearing of the word.[40] It is for this reason that the Eucharist (the substantive presence of Jesus' flesh) and the "fourfold Gospel" (the narrative of Jesus' flesh) form the heart of Irenaeus's hermeneutical vision.

In *Adversus Haereses* V.9, Irenaeus takes up his opponent's favorite proof text: "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15:50, ESV). Irenaeus claims that this text "is brought forward by all the heretics in their mindlessness in order to show that the formation of God (τὸ πλάσμα τοῦ Θεοῦ) is not saved."[41] According to Irenaeus, his opponent's reading is too literal. They "do not perceive the sense of the apostle . . . but passionately grasp only the expressions themselves."[42] For the Valentinians, this Pauline verse represents a signal to the Gnostic elite to change the setting for the text. True salvation takes place in the *spiritual* realm, not the material realm of flesh and blood.

In response, Irenaeus offers an extended exposition of 1 Corinthians 15:50. He begins his argument with certain grammatical and contextual arguments designed to undermine the Gnostic reading of Paul's letters. His first argument is that flesh and blood *by themselves*, that is, flesh and blood that "[lack] the Spirit of God,"[43] cannot inherit the kingdom of God. His second argument consists in a grammatical technicality concerning the active voice of the verb *inherit*. "If it is necessary to speak precisely," Irenaeus claims, "the flesh does not inherit but is inherited."[44] His third argument invokes the broader context of Paul's letters. Irenaeus claims that Paul's use of "flesh" does not always refer to the substance of the human body itself but to the sinful life that brings condemnation.

All of these arguments for textual clarity involve the kind of grammatical and rational exposition that we might expect. However, Irenaeus's exposition does not end with such a textual analysis of Paul's letters. Irenaeus moves beyond a strictly textual analysis in three ways. First, he moves his argument about the meaning of "flesh and blood" into the person of Paul himself. Paul bears the very same flesh and blood both before and after his conversion.

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[39] Cf. AH IV.33, 10 (ANF 1:509; SC 100:822–825), where Irenaeus speaks of the OT prophets as "members" of Christ's body.

[40] Irenaeus uses the phrase "the body of the truth" as synonymous with the "rule of truth" that guides the church's reading of Scripture. I think this phrase refers not merely to creedal summaries but also to the actual flesh of Jesus himself present in the Eucharist and narrated in the Gospels. Cf. especially AH I.9, 4 (ANF 1:330; Harvey 1:88–89).

[41] *AH* V.9, 1 (*ANF* 1:534; SC 153:106–107).

[42] *AH* V.13, 2 (*ANF* 1:540; SC 153:168–169).

[43] *AH* V.9, 3 (*ANF* 1:535; SC 153:112–113).

[44] *AH* V.9, 4 (*ANF* 1:535; SC 153:116–117).

> The apostle who was born from the womb, that is, from the ancient subsistence of the flesh, is the same one who says to the Galatians, "But when it was pleasing, God separated me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles" (Gal 1:15–16). It was not one who was born from the womb . . . and another who preached the Son of God; but the same one who formerly was ignorant and persecuted the church preached the Son of God, Jesus Christ, when he received his revelation from heaven, the Lord conversing with him.[45]

For Irenaeus, if Paul is excluding the substances of flesh and blood from the kingdom of God, then he is speaking against his own person and his own ministry to the Gentiles. God does not repudiate Paul's flesh and blood, the very flesh and blood he himself "set apart from the womb" and called to administer the Son's revelation to the Gentiles.

Second, this interpretive move into the very person of Paul leads Irenaeus to corroborate his reading of Paul with the Gospels. What is true of Paul—that he bears the same flesh and blood both before and after his conversion—is also true of Jesus' miracles narrated in the Gospels. The blind received the sense of sight in the very same eyes that formerly were incapable of seeing.

> For the Craftsman (Τεχνίτης) of all things, the Word of God, who formed man from the beginning, finding his own formation (τὸ ἴδιον πλάσμα) afflicted by evil, performed every kind of healing. He healed, on the one hand, each individual member even as he formed them in the beginning; on the other hand, in a single moment of time, he restored the man sound and whole, rendering him perfect (τέλειον) for himself unto the resurrection. For, what reason did he have to heal the members of the flesh and restore them to their original form, if those things healed by him were incapable of salvation? . . . How can they say that the flesh cannot receive life from him when it received healing from him? For life comes through healing, and incorruption is effected through life. The one, then, who gives healing also gives life; and the one who is life also surrounds his formation with incorruption.[46]

This text reveals Irenaeus's hermeneutical vision in concrete practice. The catholic reading of Paul means that Paul's letters are read in agreement with the Gospels. For Irenaeus, Paul must be read as one member of the whole apostolic body. "We hold it necessary," Irenaeus writes, "to adhere to the universal mind of the apostles who come from our Lord Jesus Christ."[47] Thus, Irenaeus's perspicuity principle entails a

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[45] *AH* V.12, 5 (*ANF* 1:538–539; SC 153:156–159).
[46] *AH* V.12, 6 (*ANF* 1:539; SC 153:160–163).
[47] *AH* III.16, 1 (*ANF* 1:440; Harvey 2:82).

conciliar[48] hermeneutic that connects Paul to the whole company of the apostolic preaching.

Yet, within this catholicity of the apostolic witness, Irenaeus gives priority to the four Gospels. This priority is not due to any personal or official superiority ascribed to the evangelists; rather, the Gospels' priority is rooted in the way they relate to Jesus. Indeed, Irenaeus does not speak of four Gospels but of a single Gospel with a fourfold form. Like the four-faced cherubim of old, the Gospels consist of four different narratives manifesting one and the same flesh. For the bishop of Lyons, the gospel depends on the flesh and blood of Jesus. Thus, Irenaeus's argument concerning the meaning of "flesh and blood" in Paul's letters reaches its crescendo in Jesus himself. "For, if the flesh cannot be saved," Irenaeus claims, "then the Word of God would not have become flesh; and if the blood of the righteous is not to be sought, then the Lord would not make the blood his own possession."[49] In this text, Irenaeus refers to Matthew 23:35 and the "righteous blood" poured out since the time of Abel. Irenaeus preaches Christ as the one who "recapitulates" in his own person this shedding of blood from the beginning so that it might be rectified in the end. Irenaeus concludes, "The Lord would not have recapitulated (ἀνεκεφαλαιώσατο) these things in himself, unless he himself became flesh and blood according to the ancient formation, saving in himself at the end what perished in Adam at the beginning."[50]

Irenaeus's contemplation of 1 Corinthians 15:50 certainly takes up grammatical and contextual arguments to thwart the literal reading of his opponents. However, the bishop of Lyons is not content with literary arguments designed to undermine Gnostic readings. Rather, his exposition opens up to a positive proclamation of Christ that roots Christian identity in the flesh and blood of Jesus. Indeed, Irenaeus's contemplation of Christ's incarnation leads directly to the church's Eucharist. Irenaeus concludes his argument with an emphasis on Jesus' flesh and blood as the very currency of our salvation.

[48] Conciliar is used here not as a reference to formal and authoritative church councils but according to its simple, original sense as a reciprocal, collaborative dialogue. For Irenaeus, dialogue resides at the heart of God's relationship to humanity. In AH V.1, 3 (ANF 1:527; SC 153:26–29), humanity's formation proceeds out of the conciliar conversation of the Holy Trinity. Throughout the narrative of Scripture, the Word comes to speak to humanity, bringing us into this divine conversation. Irenaeus reads the Scriptures as the direct discourse of God through his prophets and apostles. Thus, his reading is conciliar in the sense that the collaborative voices of all the prophets and apostles is to be heard in the church as "one harmonious melody" (AH II.28, 3; ANF 1:400; Harvey 1:352).

[49] *AH* IV.14, 1 (*ANF* 1:541; SC 153:182–183).

[50] *AH* V.14, 1 (*ANF* 1:541; SC 153:186–187).

> In every epistle, the apostle testifies with clarity that we have been saved through the flesh of our Lord and through his blood. If, then, flesh and blood are the things that effect life among us,[51] it is not said of flesh and blood in the literal sense that they are unable to inherit the kingdom of God. . . . Remember, therefore, beloved, that you are redeemed by the flesh of the Lord and restored by his blood; and let us "hold the head from which the whole body of the church is being fit together and grows" (Col 2:19), that is, confessing God and the enfleshed presence of the Son of God and steadfastly expecting his humanity; let us make use of these proofs from the Scriptures, easily overturning, as I have demonstrated, all the opinions of the heretics.[52]

For Irenaeus, the flesh and blood of Jesus, present in the church's Eucharist and narrated in the fourfold Gospel, form the axle around which apostolic epistles, prophetic Scriptures, and even the whole of creation revolve. As the axle, Jesus' flesh is the fixed point that allows the whole of Scripture to turn in a centripetal harmony that ever moves into Christ and his eternal fellowship with the Father. The catholic reading of Paul places his epistles in conciliar fellowship with the whole prophetic and apostolic witness. This conciliar witness is anchored in the flesh of Jesus that is present in the Eucharist and narrated in the Gospels. Jesus' flesh and blood is the generative source of the apostolic witness, the inspiration of the prophets and the perfect, perspicuous image of God's own life. "He who has seen me," Jesus says, "has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

VI. Conclusion: Scripture and the Correlative Life of the Church

As with all other doctrines, the perspicuity of the Scriptures, as explicated by the bishop of Lyons, has a christological core. While the Valentinian teachers assert an invisible archetype that leaves scriptural texts and images subject to ambiguity and centrifugal fragmentation, Irenaeus confesses Jesus' flesh as the true

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[51] Irenaeus uses the present tense in this text, which refers to the ongoing presence of Christ's flesh and blood as the very currency by which his life is communicated to us. This text therefore acts as a crescendo for his argument that began at the beginning of AH V. Against the Gnostic rejection of the flesh, Irenaeus emphasizes in AH V.1, 1 (ANF 1:527; SC 153:20–21) that the Lord "has redeemed us through his own blood . . . by means of communion with God." That this "communion with God" entails the Eucharist is clear from AH V.2, 2 (ANF 1:528; SC 153:31–33), where Irenaeus argues, "Vain in every way are those who hold in contempt the entire economy of God, and deny the salvation of the flesh, and spurn its regeneration, saying that it is not capable of incorruption. However, if it is not saved, then neither did the Lord redeem us with His blood, nor is the cup of the Eucharist the communion of his blood (communicatio sanguinis ejus), nor the bread that we break the communion of his body (communicatio corporis ejus). . . . He has acknowledged the cup . . . as his own blood, from which he gives increase to our blood; and the bread . . . he has confirmed as his own body, from which he gives increase to our bodies."

[52] *AH* V.14, 3–4 (*ANF* 1:542; SC 153:192–195).

archetype that fixes and unites the Scriptures into a single, cohesive, and centripetal narrative. Yet, to say that the flesh of Jesus is the very tissue of God's self-revelation is to place the Scriptures into the most intimate association with the life of the church.

First, the flesh of Jesus is substantially present in the Eucharist, where it continues to be traditioned from generation to generation. With regard to the Scriptures, the eucharistic flesh of Jesus acts like a fixed point that supplies scriptural texts and images with stability. "Our mind is in harmony (σύμφωνος) with the Eucharist," Irenaeus says, "and the Eucharist makes firm (βεβαιοῖ) the mind; we offer to him his own things, proclaiming (καταγγέλλοντες) with diligence the fellowship and union of the flesh and the Spirit."[53] Here Irenaeus echoes Paul's traditioning of the Lord's Supper: "You proclaim (καταγγέλλετε) the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26, ESV). Yet, Irenaeus focuses this eucharistic proclamation in a way that combats his opponents' rejection of creation. While for Paul the eucharistic proclamation extends toward the eschaton, for Irenaeus, it also reaches back to the very beginning of creation. "We offer to him his own things," Irenaeus says. The bread and wine are the end of a long narrative that originates in the soil of creation, the sowing of the seed, and the life-giving will of the Creator. The Eucharist also proclaims "the fellowship and union of the flesh and the Spirit." This language recalls the creation of Adam, who becomes a living being when God fills his flesh with his own breath. This fellowship of flesh and Spirit, divided by sin and death, is restored by Jesus' death and resurrection and finally perfected for us in the eschatological resurrection to come. Thus, the Eucharist fixes and harmonizes the narrative of God's relationship to humanity from the creation of the body in the beginning to the resurrection of the body in the end.

Yet, second, the flesh of Jesus that is present in the Eucharist also has a narrative that is read from the church's lectern, confessed, and proclaimed from episcopal chairs. It is for this reason that the "fourfold Gospel,"[54] as Irenaeus puts it, resides at the center of the church's canon of Scripture. The four Gospels display the archetype that holds together the law, the prophetic discourses, and the apostolic epistles in one narrative and canon. Indeed, the flesh of Jesus—present in the Eucharist and displayed in narrative form by the evangelists—is the fixed archetype that gives the entirety of Scripture its perspicuity. Irenaeus's perspective is demonstrated by his reading of the parable of the treasure hidden in the field.

> If one reads the Scriptures with careful attention, he will find in them the account of Christ and the prefiguring (προτύπωσιν) of the new calling. For, this

[53] *AH* IV.18, 5 (*ANF* 1:486; SC 100:610–611).
[54] Cf. *AH* III.11, 8 (*ANF* 1:428; Harvey 2:46–50).

> one is the treasure hidden in the field, that is, in the world, for "the field is the world" (Matt 13:38); yet, he is hidden in the Scriptures since he was signified through types and parables, his humanity not being intelligible before the consummation of prophecies had come, that is, the advent (ἡ παρουσία) of the Lord. . . . For every prophecy before its fulfillment remains full of enigmas and ambiguities for men; but, when the time comes and the prophecy is realized, then they attain an accurate exposition.[55]

Christ's flesh transforms the Scriptures from enigmatic signs of a hidden future into clear images of the one who is present. After the advent of Christ, the Scriptures are no longer merely prophetic; they are descriptive. Thus, the flesh of Jesus gives the Christian reading of Scripture its distinctive character. Irenaeus continues,

> On account of this, when the law is read by Jews in the present moment, it is like a myth; for, they do not possess the exposition of all things (τὴν ἐξήγησιν τῶν πάντων), which is the presence of the Son of God as man. Yet, when read by Christians, it is a treasure, hidden on the one hand in a field, but on the other hand illuminated by the cross of Christ.[56]

The correlative relationship between the presence of Christ's flesh in the Eucharist and the narrative of his flesh in the Scriptures constitutes the life of the church. Indeed, this ecclesial correlation between the Eucharist and the "fourfold Gospel" gives the church a fundamental place in Irenaeus's understanding of the perspicuity principle. On the one hand, perspicuity entails a vertical dimension rooted in the very being of God, extending through the flesh of Jesus and becoming accessible to the human mode of existence. Yet, on the other hand, the fact that God has condescended to human sensory perception means that the perspicuity principle also entails a horizontal dimension that consists in a living, open, and reciprocal conversation within the church. It is for this reason that Irenaeus gives a third level of interpretation to the treasure hidden in the field. Jesus' flesh is not only the treasure hidden in the world and in the Scriptures, but it is also the treasure placed in the church. The church is the household from which "the householder brings forth out of his treasure both the new and the old" (Matt 13:52).[57] Irenaeus then concludes, "Paul teaches where one finds these things, saying 'God has placed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers' (1 Cor 12:28). Therefore, where the gifts of God have been placed, there it is necessary to learn the truth."[58]

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[55] *AH* IV.26, 1 (*ANF* 1:496; SC 100:712–715).
[56] *AH* IV.26, 1 (*ANF* 1:496; SC 100:714–715).
[57] *AH* IV.26, 1 (*ANF* 1:497; SC 100:716–717).
[58] *AH* IV.26, 5 (*ANF* 1:498; SC 100:728–729).

For Irenaeus, the perspicuity of Scripture is firmly connected to the catholicity of the church. "Let us make man . . . " (Gen 1:26). The creation of humanity has its origin in the correspondence between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When the Word became flesh, the theological conversation of the Trinity became accessible to humanity and constitutive of the church's life.

Irenaeus certainly appreciated that he gained access to this divine conversation through Polycarp, Ignatius of Antioch, and Clement of Rome, who in turn gained access through John, Paul, Peter, and the apostles.[59] Indeed, we are all bound to recognize that there are countless preachers, teachers, martyrs, and saints who are part of the theological tradition in which we participate. It is for this reason that it is good, right, and salutary that we give thanks to God for Dr. Weinrich; for all professors, pastors, and teachers; and for the whole catholic fellowship of the church. For, in their company, we receive our place in the divine conversation that continues unto eternity.

To Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.

[59] See AH III.3, 3–4 (ANF 1:416; Harvey 2:10–15), where Irenaeus speaks of the "apostolic tradition" as transmitted from the apostles through bishops and teachers like Linus, Clement of Rome, and Polycarp. See also AH V.28, 4 (ANF 1:557; SC 153:360–363), where Irenaeus quotes Ignatius of Antioch and AH IV.6, 2 (ANF 1:468; SC 100:440–441), where he quotes Justin Martyr. Throughout his work, Irenaeus describes the church as diverse peoples united in a catholic harmony. Cf. AH I.10, 2 (ANF 1:331; Harvey 1:92), where Irenaeus writes that the church is "scattered in the whole world; yet as dwelling in but one house, she preserves [the faith]. She also believes . . . as having one soul, and the same heart; and she preaches, teaches, and traditions [the faith] with perfect harmony as having one mouth. For although the languages of the world are dissimilar, yet the power of the tradition is one and the same."

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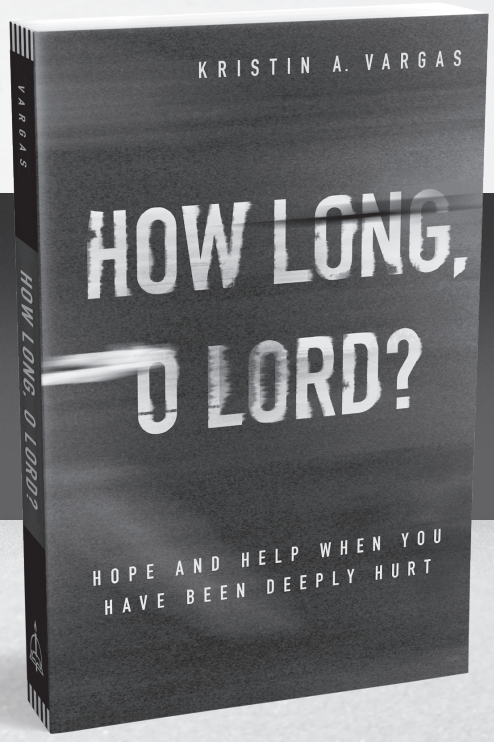

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God Is My Strength and My Song: History and Practice of Old Testament Canticles

Andrew Gerike

I. Introduction

At the first Good Shepherd Institute Conference in 2000, the late Ronald Feuerhahn offered a definition for the word *canticles*. "Canticles," he said, "are songs that we don't notice."[1] Over the years, the daily offices of Matins, Vespers, Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline have put the New Testament canticles on our lips. They have ingrained Mary's *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46–55), Zechariah's Benedictus (Luke 1:68–79), and Simeon's *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:29–32) on our hearts. The last of these garners additional staying power in our memories from its regular use in the Divine Service. If we include with the New Testament canticles the Te Deum Laudamus, we find these canticles to be quite familiar friends in the liturgy, as well as dear aids to our own piety—and rightly so. The spiritual songs, that is, the spirit-inspired songs of the New Testament, deserve pride of place in our worship.

Feuerhahn's definition certainly holds true to this day for the Old Testament canticles as well. We do not notice them. We easily pronounce the Latin names of the New Testament canticles. In our Lutheran circles, we tend to call Simeon's song by its Latin name. Those who would welcome the increased use of Latin in church and who use the One-Year Lectionary have even grown accustomed to announcing the "-gesimas" (the Sundays of pre-Lent) and the historic names for the Sundays in Advent and Lent. But our lack of familiarity with *Cantemus Domino*, *Exultavit Cor Meum, Confitebor Tibi,* and others continues to allow the Old Testament canticles to go by in our hymnal unnoticed. May the next ten years of *Lutheran Service Book* (2006) see a change in this regard.

II. History

When the term *canticle* is used for an Old Testament text, it designates a biblical song or prayer *outside the Psalter*, which is used liturgically. The number of Old Testament canticles varies throughout history and between different liturgical rites.

[1] Ronald R. Feuerhahn, "Healing in the Canticles of the Old and New Testaments," in *Christ's Gifts for Healing the Soul: Toward a Lutheran Identity in the New Millennium* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2001), 25.

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The Eastern Church

In the Byzantine Church, eight Old Testament canticles comprise the majority of the nine "odes" that are sung at Matins.[2] This collection of odes is even printed after the Book of Psalms in some editions of the Septuagint.[3] While we should not grant the Septuagint the reverence that is due only to the inspired Hebrew text, the inclusion of Old Testament canticles in that location does demonstrate an early awareness of their importance for the church. This awareness led early generations of Christians to put these canticles on par with the first hymnal of the people of God. I suppose you could think of it as an early church hymnal supplement.

The Medieval Western Church

In the Western Church, seven traditional Old Testament canticles came into prominence in the Roman breviary, and each was sung on a particular day of the week at the morning office of Lauds, where it served as one of the psalms.[4] In the Holy Rule of St. Benedict, which proved influential for much of Western monasticism, St. Benedict refers to the singing of "the canticle from the Prophets, each for its proper day," when he sets down his instruction for the singing of the psalms at Lauds.[5] The traditional Latin name for each canticle comes from the opening words of the canticle in Latin.[6]

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[2] Ode 1: The (First) Song of Moses—Exodus 15:1–19; ode 2: The (Second) Song of Moses—Deuteronomy 32:1–43; ode 3: The Prayer of Hannah—1 Samuel 2:1–10; ode 4: The Prayer of Habakkuk—Habakkuk 3:1–19; ode 5: The Prayer of Isaiah—Isaiah 26:9–20; ode 6: The Prayer of Jonah—Jonah 2:2–9; ode 7: The Prayer of the Three Holy Children—Daniel 3:26–56 (Apocrypha); ode 8: The Song of the Three Holy Children—Daniel 3:57–88 (Apocrypha); ode 9: The Song of Mary the God-Bearer—Luke 1:46–55 and the Song of Zechariah—Luke 1:68–79.

[3] E.g., the odes appear after the Psalter in the blue Rahlfs edition of the Septuagint, the edition most pastors have on their bookshelves: Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart, eds., *Septuaginta: Id Est Vetus Testamentum Graece Iuxta LXX Interpretes* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006).

[4] Sunday and Festivals: *Benedicite Omnia Opera*—Apocryphal Daniel 3:57–88. Monday: *Confitebor Tibi*—Isaiah 12:1–6. Tuesday: *Ego Dixi*—Isaiah 38:10–20. Wednesday: *Exultavit Cor Meum*—1 Samuel 2:1–10. Thursday: *Cantemus Domino*—Exodus 15:1–19. Friday: *Domine Audivi*—Habakkuk 3:1–19. Saturday: *Audite Coeli*—Deuteronomy 32:1–43. In secular usage, the Old Testament canticle served as the fourth psalm. In monastic usage, it was the fifth. See John Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century: A Historical Introduction and Guide for Students and Musicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 97–98. Citing the research of J. B. L. Tolhurst, Harper notes that though not all monasteries followed the same scheme of the Psalter, there is a discernible consensus, at least in the research of English monasteries (256–259).

[5] Benedict of Nursia, *Holy Rule of St. Benedict* 13.

[6] The liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council expanded the number of Old Testament canticles for use in the daily office to twenty-six. In the reformed office, an Old Testament canticle serves as the second psalm in the office of Morning Prayer in a four-week cycle.

The Lutheran Church—Reformation Era

Luther's deep knowledge of the Psalter and his high regard for the Psalms derives from his years of praying the daily office.[7] The Old Testament canticles also would have been well known to him from his time in the cloister. So it comes as no surprise that we find the Old Testament canticles included in the vernacular and set to music in the first hymnals of the Lutheran Reformation (those hymnals on which Luther exerted strong influence).[8] This aspect of Luther's contribution to church music is almost entirely ignored in liturgical scholarship.[9]

In the influential *Babstsche Gesangbuch* (1545), for which Luther wrote the preface, six of the seven traditional Old Testament canticles from the medieval office were included. Five other Old Testament texts were included as canticles. Some of these were known to Luther from other parts of the monastic office (such as special canticles appointed for Christmas), some are from the traditional canticles of the Eastern churches (such as the Song of Jonah).[10] Above each canticle is a short homiletical summary of the contents. Leaver believes that even though these were probably written by Georg Rörer, they bear Luther's vocabulary and theological influence.[11] The singing of these canticles lasted into the seventeenth century. For example, in early seventeenth-century Magdeburg (1612), the rotation of psalms for the daily office included the traditional usage of the seven Old Testament canticles at Lauds.[12] However, by the eighteenth century, none of the Old Testament canticles were included in hymnals, let alone sung.[13]

See Stanislaus Campbell, *From Breviary to Liturgy of the Hours: The Structural Reform of the Roman Office, 1964–1971* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 166–167.

[7] Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483–1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 64.

[8] As refinements were made to the German translation of the Bible, these changes were reflected in the text of the canticles used in the hymnals (Robin A. Leaver, "The Biblical Canticles in Luther's Hymnals" in *Lord Jesus Christ, Will You Not Stay: Essays in Honor of Ronald Feuerhahn on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. J. Bart Day, Jon D. Vieker, Albert B. Collver, Scott A. Bruzek, Kent J. Burreson, Martin E. Conkling, and Naomichi Masaki [Houston: Feuerhahn Festschrift Committee, 2002], 62).

[9] The exceptions are Leaver, "The Biblical Canticles in Luther's Hymnals," 23–63; and Robin A. Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

[10] The canticles in the *Babstsche Gesangbuch*: canticle 1: Exodus 15:1–18; canticle 2: Deuteronomy 32:1–13; canticle 3: Judges 5:2–31; canticle 4: 1 Samuel 2:1–10; canticle 5: Isaiah 12:1–6; canticle 6: Isaiah 26:1–21 (from the canticles sung at monastic Matins for Christmas); canticle 7: Isaiah 38:10–20; canticle 8: Isaiah 61:10–11 (from the canticles sung at monastic Matins for Feasts of Virgins); canticle 9: Isaiah 63:7–19; 64:1–12; canticle 10: Jonah 2:3–10; canticle 11: Habakkuk 3:1–19. The *Benedicite Omnia Opera* was not included.

[11] Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music,* 265–270.

[12] The 1612 Magdeburg Psalter schedule was graciously shared with me by Mr. Matthew Carver.

[13] Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music,* 62.

The Lutheran Church—America

When *The Lutheran Hymnal* (*TLH*) arrived on the scene in 1941, all seven traditional Old Testament canticles were included on the pages immediately preceding the psalms.[14] This collection of canticles also included the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3–10) and the *Dignus Est Agnus* (Rev 5:12–13; 15:3–4; 19:5–6) from the Revelation to St. John.

However, like the psalms, only the text was printed, with nary a musical note, and there was no direction on how to use these texts given in the hymnal.[15] As Feuerhahn observes, there was little to commend these texts to use—they looked rather "lifeless," not even lending themselves to be read, let alone sung.[16] Not only that, but also only two of the canticles, *Confitebor Tibi* and *Ego Dixi,* escaped unabridged. No one missed the Old Testament canticles that were not included when *Lutheran Worship* came out in 1982. Only the *Benedicite Omnia Opera* was spared excision.[17] In all likelihood, these Old Testament canticles were left out because no one had noticed them in *TLH*. But in all fairness to *TLH,* other Lutheran hymnals in America included the Old Testament canticles in a similar presentation. The earlier *Common Service Book* (1917) and the later *Service Book and Hymnal* (1958) also printed the Old Testament canticles without musical notation or directions for use.

With *Lutheran Service Book* (*LSB*),[18] however, these venerable texts have been returned to our church's hymnal and are available for use. Six Old Testament canticles are included in the pew edition, with an additional four canticles available in *Lutheran Service Builder* and *LSB Accompaniment for the Hymns*. Among these ten are six of the traditional seven canticles, as well as three other canticles that were included in early Lutheran hymnals, such as the *Babstsche Gesangbuch.*[19] The one

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[14] The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), 120–122.

[15] In the general rubrics for the Order of Matins, the altar book for *TLH* did include some direction for how to use the canticles, including their traditional associations with particular days of the week: "Any of the other Canticles, except the Magnificat and the Nunc dimittis, may be used at Matins on any Day except a Sunday or a Feast or a Festival. See page 282" (The Synods Constituting the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, *The Lutheran Liturgy* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946], 423).

[16] Feuerhahn, "Healing in the Canticles," 25.

[17] See *The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982), 9.

[18] The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

[19] The traditional canticles included in *LSB* are "Song of Moses and Israel" (*LSB* 925), "Song from Deuteronomy" (*LSB* 926), "First Song of Isaiah" (*LSB* 927), "Song of Hannah" (*LSB* 928), "All You Works of the Lord" (*LSB* 931), and "Song of Habakkuk" (*LSB* 986). The additional canticles are "I Will Greatly Rejoice in the Lord" (*LSB* 929), "Seek the Lord" (*LSB* 983), "Oh, That You Would

nontraditional canticle is *LSB* 983, "Seek the Lord," based on Isaiah 55. In recent history, the use of this text as a canticle can be traced back to *Lutheran Book of Worship*,[20] followed by its inclusion in the 1979 edition of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

These Old Testament canticles have been given a new lease on liturgical life with this re-introduction to our worship resources. Therefore, "As a bridegroom decks himself . . . and as a bride adorns herself" (Isa 61:10), these canticles are clothed in the new-made garments of theology's handmaiden: they have music! Let us notice and use them!

III. Practice

"Well and good," you say. "So we should use the Old Testament canticles. But *how* do we use them?" Is this not just "mere idealism"? That question was raised in the Liturgy Committee during the *LSB* project when the question of including the Old Testament canticles was brought up.[21]

Must our use of the Old Testament canticles be limited to their historical use in the church's daily prayer? Granted, there are congregations that have schools, and some of those even have daily chapel and use Matins every day. Therefore, perhaps those congregations that are so blessed *could* make use of the historical assignment of the canticles and sing them at Matins on their particular day of the week. However, that gives no real opportunity to use the Song from Deuteronomy, appointed for Saturday. And what should one do on Tuesday, when the historic canticle from Isaiah 38 is not included in *LSB*? As much as I am in favor of a regular offering of daily prayer in our churches, particularly in the schools of our congregations, this seems unrealistic. For each of the very few congregations and schools that could restore the historic usage of the Old Testament canticles in daily prayer, there are hundreds of congregations in which the Old Testament canticles would continue to slip by unnoticed.

A helpful axiom as we consider the issue of how and when to use these canticles is "Think seasonally." Many of these canticles contain strong themes that connect them to the various seasons of the church's liturgical year. I will highlight some

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Rend the Heavens" (*LSB* 984), and "Song of Jonah" (*LSB* 985). The traditional canticle, *Ego Dixi,* from Isaiah 38 was replaced by "Song of Jonah."

[20] *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House; Philadelphia: Lutheran Church in America Board of Publication, 1978), 15.

[21] Paul Grime, Jon D. Vieker, and Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Worship, "Liturgy Committee Minutes: May 13–14, 2002" in *Committee Minutes*, vol. 2 of *Lutheran Service Book Historical Records* (St. Louis: Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Worship, 2007), 482.

of the canticles that are included in *LSB* and then give some suggestions on how to incorporate them into our liturgical life.

Seasonal Suggestions

"Song of Hannah" (*LSB* 928). The Song of Hannah is a remarkable parallel to Mary's Magnificat. The occasion of a miraculous conception is the shared context, and the theme of the "great reversal" is central to the songs of both Hannah and Mary. Incredibly, the words designated as verse 6 in *LSB,* "Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger," were excluded from *TLH*. Compare these words of Hannah, thankfully restored to the canticle, with Mary's words in the Magnificat: "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent empty away" (*LSB*, 248). As the church contemplates the mystery of the incarnation and prepares to celebrate the birth of the Savior from a lowly girl from Nazareth, this is a fitting song to sing during Advent as well as Christmastide.

Rather than using it as a substitute for the Magnificat during Midweek Vespers or Evening Prayer, I think the better way to use this canticle—indeed, all the Old Testament canticles—stems from how they have been understood historically and used in the church's liturgy. Though they are called "canticles" (the same term used for the New Testament canticles and Te Deum), they function as a part of the psalmody. They are used in the same manner and in the same places during the liturgy as the psalms. The *LSB Altar Book* says any of the Old Testament canticles may serve as a substitute canticle in place of the *Te Deum* or *Benedictus*.[22] But I think there is something to be said for recognizing how these texts have been understood historically, and there is wisdom in at least mentioning their historical usage if not retaining that manner of usage.

A better place, then, I would argue, for the Song of Hannah is to serve as a psalm in the Advent evening orders of service. This second option would highlight the beautiful parallel between the songs of Hannah and of Mary, as both are sung—thereby showing that the God who worked wonders for lowly Hannah and brought forth his servant Samuel to anoint the first kings of Israel is the same God who dealt marvelously with humble Mary, the mother of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

"Oh, That You Would Rend the Heavens" (*LSB* 984). This canticle also fits well with Advent. However, with its strong eschatological theme, it could also be used during the final weeks of the church year, which have a pronounced emphasis on the second coming of our Lord in glory.

[22] The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 296.

"First Song of Isaiah" (*LSB* 927). The First Song of Isaiah may be considered the chief canticle of the Old Testament. Presented in the twelfth chapter of Isaiah's prophecy, it follows the three chief messianic prophecies of the incarnation, which are heard by the bride of Christ during the seasons of Advent and Christmas. In those three prophecies, the mighty seer directly prophesies the virgin birth of the Messiah in Isaiah 7. Isaiah 9 reveals that this virgin-born Messiah is the God-man. Chapter 11 further prophecies of the Messiah's person and work as well as the characteristics of his church. This trio of messianic prophecies is then capped off with the hymn of thanksgiving of Isaiah 12.

This canticle is a sacrifice of faith, the church's response of thanks for the saving work of the Messiah, his propitiatory sacrifice by which God's wrath over our sin is turned away. In his suffering and death, "He has done gloriously" (Isa 12:5). Jesus, whose name means "the LORD saves," is God himself, and "he has become my salvation" (Isa 12:2). This canticle is the ongoing hymn of the church.

God himself actually instructs us both as individuals and corporately to sing these words. Twice he says, "You will say in that day."[23] These are the words that constitute and summarize all our hymns of praise to God for the salvation he wrought by the incarnation and sacrificial death of his Son. The hymns of praise erupt not only from the faith of the individual believer but also from the corporate gathering of the church as Christ's bride. Thus, the First Song of Isaiah is fitting at any time but chiefly in the season of Epiphany.

Those who use the Service of Prayer and Preaching (*LSB* 260–267) should already know this canticle. There are two settings of the First Song of Isaiah (again, a testament to its primacy) in *LSB*. In addition to the setting we have been discussing (*LSB* 927), another setting serves as the Old Testament canticle at the beginning of the Service of Prayer and Preaching (*LSB* 261–262). The *LSB Altar Book* notes that other canticles can be used here and also in place of the New Testament canticle (*LSB* 266–267).[24]

"I Will Greatly Rejoice in the Lord" (*LSB* 929). This is another canticle that lends itself well to the Epiphany season, particularly on the occasion of the Baptism of our Lord. Though not one of the seven regular canticles of the Western breviary, it was used elsewhere in the medieval daily office and was included in the early Lutheran hymnals.[25] The words of this canticle lead the church to sing of the salvation and righteousness that the Messiah brings, with which he clothes the

[23] Verse 1: וְאָמַרְתָּ; verse 4: וְאָמַרְתֶּם.

[24] *LSB Altar Book*, 357, 364.

[25] Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy*, 257. It was included in the second imprint of the 1529 Klug *Gesangbuch*, the 1533 printing of the same, as well as the *Babstsche Gesangbuch* of 1545. See Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music,* 249–252.

church. Thus, when used on the observance of the Baptism of our Lord, this canticle highlights the connection between his Baptism and ours. This canticle could also be used on Pentecost Sunday and the weeks immediately following. For, in this canticle, the church also sings of the righteousness and praise that the Lord God will cause to sprout up before all the nations.

"Song of Jonah" (*LSB* 985). Another canticle included in early Lutheran hymnals, though not one of the seven traditional canticles of the medieval church, is the Song of Jonah. The *LSB Historical Records* indicate that this canticle was selected to serve as a substitute for the historic canticle appointed for Tuesday, *Ego Dixi*, from Isaiah 38.[26] It is a hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance. Far from some gloomy individual wallowing in depression, Jonah's prayer gives voice to the *Christian* penitent. This fits well with our understanding of Lent. Even on as solemn a day as Ash Wednesday, the penitential focus is grounded in the Small Catechism's explanation of confession as sorrow for sin and faith that receives the "absolution, that is, forgiveness, . . . not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven" (SC, Confession).[27] Our need for a Savior and deliverance is dire, and like Jonah we call for deliverance to the Lord who answers.

This canticle has further significance. Our highest authority, the Lord himself, says that Jonah is a type of Christ.[28] Jonah is a divinely appointed picture of our Lord. Our Lord cites the circumstances of Jonah's prayer—three days in the belly of the fish—as the sign given to the unbelieving generation of Jews. He will sleep in the belly of the earth, in death, for three days, and then he will rise again (Matt 12:39–40). That sign is the culmination of the Lenten season.

"Song of Habakkuk" (*LSB* 986). The Song of Habakkuk is related to the Song of Jonah. Sung in the daily office every Friday, the verses of Habakkuk 3:1–19 remained a part of the Good Friday liturgy in the office of Tenebrae, which comprised the offices of Matins and Lauds.[29]

> O LORD, I have heard the re- | port of You,*
> and Your work, O LORD, | do I fear.
> In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years | make it

[26] Grime, Vieker, and Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Worship, "Liturgy Committee Minutes: November 6–8, 2003" in *Committee Minutes*, vol. 2 of *Lutheran Service Book Historical Records*, 510.

[27] Quotations from the Small Catechism are from *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, copyright © 1986, 1991 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

[28] W. H. B. Proby, *The Ten Canticles of the Old Testament Canon* (London: Rivingtons, 1874), 76–77.

[29] Prosper Guéranger, *Passiontide and Holy Week*, vol. 6, *The Liturgical Year*, trans. Laurence Shepherd (Dublin: J. Duffy, 1867), 446–446. *LSB Altar Book* notes this historic use of the Song of Habakkuk in the Good Friday Tenebrae liturgy in its comments on the service of Tenebrae Vespers (*LSB Altar Book*, 526).

known;*
in wrath remember | mercy.
God came from | Teman,*
and the Holy One from Mount | Paran.
His splendor covered the | heavens,*
and the earth was full | of His praise. (*LSB* 986:1–4)

This was sung after the first prophecy in the Roman Mass of the Presanctified on Good Friday from at least the eighth century until the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.[30] The words of the prophet Habakkuk express complete confidence in God. The Lord's work of salvation is portrayed in the dramatic pictorial imagery of warfare against the forces of hell:

You crushed the head of the house of the | wicked,*
laying him bare from | thigh to neck. (Hab 3:13; *LSB* 986:10)

These words clearly hearken back to the Protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15, "the fountainhead of all messianic prophecy,"[31] where Satan is told that the Seed of the woman will crush his head. No wonder, then, that this canticle is associated with Good Friday, the day we remember the sufferings inflicted on the Messiah by which Satan was vanquished. This canticle lends itself well to use in Lent, Passiontide, and Holy Week. The *LSB Altar Book* notes further that this could serve as the canticle after the sermon in the office of Tenebrae Vespers.[32]

The Canticles of the Easter Vigil. Aside from the Service of Prayer and Preaching, the likeliest occasion for our people to notice the Old Testament canticles is at the Easter Vigil. The notes concerning the Easter Vigil in the *LSB Altar Book* list the various readings that can be used, each reading followed by a psalm or canticle. There are four Old Testament canticles that can follow a reading: the Song of Moses and Israel after the account of Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea; the Song from Deuteronomy after the reading from Deuteronomy 31; the Song of Jonah after the reading of Jonah's preaching to Nineveh; and finally "All You Works of the Lord," or the Song of the Three Young Men, after the reading of their deliverance from the fiery furnace.[33]

"Song of Moses and Israel" (*LSB* 925) and "Song from Deuteronomy" (*LSB* 926). The Song of Moses and Israel and the Song from Deuteronomy were also a

[30] James Monti, *A Sense of the Sacred: Roman Catholic Worship in the Middle Ages* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012), 406.

[31] Douglas McC. L. Judisch, "The Protoevangelium and Concordia Theological Seminary," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 60, nos. 1–2 (1996): 75.

[32] *LSB Altar Book*, 526. The *LSB Altar Book* also suggests the canticle "Seek the Lord" (*LSB* 983) as another canticle that could be used.

[33] *LSB Altar Book*, 530.

part of the regular weekly cycle of canticles in the medieval office. The obvious connection between the deliverance God wrought for His people in the crossing of the Red Sea and the resurrection of our Lord suggests a continued use of the Song of Moses and Israel throughout the Easter season. It could be particularly appropriate in the early weeks of Paschaltide, which directs our gaze back to the glorious resurrection of our Lord, by which we are rescued from bondage to sin and death and redeemed from the dominion of that old evil foe who held us captive.

"All You Works of the Lord" (*LSB* 931). The final canticle in the Easter Vigil is the *Benedicite Omnia Opera,* the Song of the Three Young Men after their rescue from the fiery furnace. Excluded from early Lutheran hymnals, this canticle was included in *TLH* as well as in *Lutheran Worship*, which excluded all other Old Testament canticles. I suspect this was due to the growing recovery of the Easter Vigil among Lutherans. The role of this canticle in the Easter Vigil is essential, for it concludes the Service of Readings.[34] The Song of the Three Young Men, either in the responsive chant form discussed here or in the hymn paraphrase ("All You Works of God, Bless the Lord," *LSB* 930), can also be used throughout the Easter season. Perhaps this would work best during the later weeks, which do not so much direct us back to the first Easter morning as prepare us for Pentecost. Yet it is still a time of praising the Lord for the salvation he wrought by the resurrection. Therefore, with the three young men, we call on all creation in heaven and on earth to praise and magnify the Lord forever.

Suggestions on Liturgical Use

These canticles work particularly well when used throughout a liturgical season. Such a repeated use over the period of a liturgical season is also simply good pedagogy, for it allows time to introduce and use them, giving the congregation plenty of time to sing and get to know the canticle that is used.

This survey of most of the canticles in *LSB* helps answer the question "When in the church year?" Now we come to the question "Where do we use the canticles in the liturgy itself?" I believe the answer to that lies in the nature of the Old Testament canticles. With regard to their function in the Scriptures and their poetic form, they are psalmody, to be utilized in the same ways as are the psalms. The places for the use of the psalms in the liturgy then become places to use the canticles. Regarding the Old Testament canticles as psalmody also allows a special place and role for the Gospel canticles (Luke 1:46–55, 68–79; 2:29–32), just as the Gospels themselves have a more prominent role within the canon of Scripture due to their firsthand accounts of the Lord Jesus.

[34] *LSB Altar Book*, 541.

With a seasonal use, an Old Testament canticle can be a substitute for the additional psalm after the *Venite* in Matins or where only the *Venite* is used (and thus is the de facto psalm for the day). An Old Testament canticle can also replace the *Venite* during a particular liturgical season. I would not recommend using an Old Testament canticle for each successive season the same year (starting out, at least). That can easily send a congregation into change fatigue. Perhaps it would suffice to begin by using one Old Testament canticle for the time of Christmas and one canticle for the time of Easter. For example, use the "Song of Hannah" (*LSB* 928) during Advent and the "Song of Jonah" (*LSB* 985) or "Song of Habakkuk" (*LSB* 986) during Lent.

Eventually, however, you can reach the point where you have a rotation of several canticles during the festival half of the church year, each of which highlights the themes of the particular season. What about our dear friend the *Venite* (Ps 95:1–7a)? Return to it during the time of the church (the Sundays after Pentecost). As previously mentioned, if you regularly use the Service of Prayer and Preaching, you could substitute one of these Old Testament canticles for one of the canticles given in that order of service.

But what if your congregation does not use Matins? Look to where the Psalm of the Day can be used in the Divine Service.

- Use a canticle as the Psalm of the Day/Entrance Hymn.
- Insert a canticle in place of the Psalm of the Day between the Old Testament and Epistle readings.

If you prefer to use the Introit and appointed psalm or gradual, use an Old Testament canticle as a seasonal offertory or as a distribution hymn. Of course, as with the *Venite* in Matins, we do not want to neglect the regular use of the psalms, but a judicious and seasonal use of these canticles lends well to a use of the church's liturgical treasures while satisfying the desire for variety. The possibilities are already there.

IV. Conclusion

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of *Lutheran Worship's* release, Norman Nagel was asked what he thought was that hymnal's "most significant liturgical music contribution to the worship life of the church." His answer was brief: "Chanting of the psalms."[35]

Aside from six Anglican chant settings in the back of the book, the psalms in *TLH* were just as lifeless and uninviting as the Old Testament canticles that were

[35] William H. Otte, "Lutheran Worship at 10—A Look Backward and Forward," *Lutheran Worship Notes* 25 (Summer 1992): 1–6.

printed on the pages preceding the psalter. That dreary presentation of the psalms is but a memory as the practice of singing the psalms has permeated the worship life of our congregations. Even for those who disliked *Lutheran Worship*, this single contribution is invaluable and incalculable.

As we reflect on the ten-year anniversary of *Lutheran Worship's* successor, *Lutheran Service Book*, may we be spurred finally to notice those other songs that we have been given: Old Testament canticles. As with the chanting of the psalms in these recent decades, let us endeavor to introduce the Old Testament canticles to the worship of our congregations and to the lives of God's people. Let us finally notice them!

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Research Notes

Misquoting Gieschen

It can be encouraging when one's own research is used and cited by other scholars. Since the publication of *Angelomorphic Christology*[1] twenty years ago, I have seen my book cited in the works of several scholars. Often my research is used as positive support for another scholar's work,[2] but occasionally it has been cited with criticism due to honest and real disagreements with a position that I have taken.[3]

Sometimes, however, scholars cite one's research as the basis for their own conclusions, that are far different from one's own. Bart Ehrman, a well-known and prolific writer,[4] does precisely this in his 2014 book, *How Jesus Became God.*[5] A glance through the author index in that volume shows that he cites my *Angelomorphic Christology* three times,[6] one of which claims my research as the basis for his own conclusion. Ehrman cites my discussion of Galatians 4:14 in the following manner:

> I had always read the verse to say that the Galatians has received Paul in his infirm state the way they would have received an angelic visitor, or even Christ himself. In fact, however, the grammar of the Greek suggests something quite different. As Charles Gieschen has argued, and now has been affirmed in a book on Christ as an angel by New Testament specialist Susan Garrett, the verse is not saying that the Galatians received Paul as an angel *or* as Christ; it is

[1] Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence,* Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1998). This volume was recently reprinted in softcover as *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence*, Library of Early Christology (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017).

[2] E.g., see Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

[3] E.g., see Kevin Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels: A Study of the Relationship between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament,* Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 55 (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

[4] Bart Ehrman has written textbooks used in many universities of the United States, such as *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings,* 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford, 2004). He is especially known for his books with provocative titles written for the general public, such as *Forged: Writing in the Name of God—Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

[5] Bart Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperOne, 2014).

[6] Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 395; citations of my book appear on pages 57, 250, and 252.

> saying that they received him as they would an angel, such as Christ. By clear implication, then, Christ is an angel.[7]

This implication, "Christ is *an* angel" (emphasis mine), is quite different from the conclusion of the discussion of this text in my book, which reads as follows: "Paul understood Christ Jesus as God's Angel (i.e., the Angel of YHWH)."[8] My translation of Paul's description of how he was received by the Galatians is "but as God's Angel you received me, namely Christ Jesus."[9] I even attempted to be very careful in emphasizing that Paul did not understand Christ as a *created* angel among the myriad of created angels, as can be read in my own words:

> It has been demonstrated that there is firm literary ground for the conclusion that the Apostle Paul could have been regarded and could have regarded himself as "an angel." A closer reading of 4.14b, however, indicates that Paul is being more specific about the angel of God with whom he was identified. As discussed above, in Gal 1.8 Paul contrasts the authority of his original proclamation of the gospel with that of an angel from heaven: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed, let that one be accursed." This assertion follows Paul's statement about the origin of his apostleship as direct from Jesus Christ and God the Father (1.1) and precedes his discussion of the origin of the gospel he preached as a direct revelation from Jesus Christ (1.11–12). Therefore, Paul places the authority of his office as an apostle and the authority of his original proclamation above that of "an angel from heaven." Based upon 1.8 and its context, Paul does not assert in 4.14b that the Galatians received him as "an" angel from among the myriads in God's service in heaven and on earth; rather, they received Paul as the most authoritative angel who not only sent him (Gal 1.1), but also lives in him (Gal 2.20) and speaks in him (2 Cor 13.3): God's Angel, Christ Jesus.[10]

Anyone who has read my chapter on Paul, much less the rest of my book, knows that I strongly support the understanding that Paul identifies Christ within the mystery of the one God of Israel, including in this possible claim by Paul that Christ is God's Angel. I have an extensive discussion early in the book that demonstrates that the title "Angel/Messenger" is used frequently in the Old Testament for God's theophanies, or visible appearances, which is the probable basis for Paul's use of the title here.[11]

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[7] Ehrman, *How Jesus Became* God, 252–253.
[8] Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 325.
[9] Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 325.
[10] Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 323–324.
[11] Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 51–69.

What does Ehrman mean when he claims that, for Paul, "Christ is an angel"?[12] Some of what Ehrman asserts about Paul's teaching sounds close to later confessions of the divine nature of Jesus: "As the Angel of the Lord, Christ is a preexistent being who is divine; he can be called God; and he is God's manifestation on earth in human flesh."[13] He, however, means something much different, and certainly something quite contrary to my understanding. Ehrman argues that Paul understood Christ to be one of the created angels—albeit the chief of these angels—and somehow "divine." Here is his own explanation:

> Jesus was thought of as an angel, or an angel-like being, or even the Angel of the Lord—in any event, a superhuman divine being who existed before his birth and became human for the salvation of the human race. This, in a nutshell, is the incarnation Christology of several New Testament authors. Later authors went even further and maintained that Jesus was not merely an angel—even the chief angel—but was a superior being: he was God himself come to earth.[14]

I have attempted to quote and represent Ehrman's understanding of Paul's Christology accurately. He should have done the same with my understanding of Paul's Christology, which is radically different from his. After all, I would hope that a renowned textual critic who wrote the book *Misquoting Jesus* would be more careful when using quotations from other scholars.[15]

Charles A. Gieschen

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[12] Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 253.

[13] Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 253.

[14] Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 251. The implication is clear: Ehrman is not convinced that Paul believed Jesus was "God himself come to earth." My response is, "How, then, could Paul, a Jewish Christian, have worshiped Jesus without committing idolatry?" The historical fact that Paul and other Jewish Christians worshiped Jesus as the Lord in the earliest years of Christianity demonstrates that Jesus was identified as being within the mystery of YHWH, the one God of Israel. See Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

[15] Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005); see also Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford, 1993). For a thorough rebuttal of the position that Ehrman takes in these books, see Daniel B. Wallace, "Lost in Transmission: How Badly Did the Scribes Corrupt the New Testament Text?" in *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament: Manuscript, Patristic, and Apocryphal Evidence,* ed. Daniel B. Wallace (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 19–55.

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Theological Observer

Billy Graham

Theologically dominant in the first half of the twentieth century was the leftover nineteenth-century Modernism, or Liberalism, with its insistence that biblical miracles could be explained as ordinary occurrences. Fundamentalism, with its insistence that Genesis was an accurate account of creation, was brought to its knees by those favoring evolution as the correct explanation of how things happen, even though there was never one agreed-upon theory of evolution. Onto the American religious stage stepped a preacher who did not graduate from any seminary but who did more to shape religion in the last half of the twentieth century than anyone else. "Billy Graham" became a household term. His rallies filled large stadiums, and he managed to monopolize television evenings for an entire week. It is hardly possible that anyone did not get a glimpse of him. He called his hearers to confess their sins and believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. There is more to Christianity than that, but that was a message not often heard in mainline Protestantism. For him, the Bible was not a collection of books to be dismantled by the scholarly elite but the word of God that called all men to faith and repentance.

As I can remember, Graham's rallies began with the gospel singer George Beverly Shea "warming up the audience," a method used at some LCMS Reformation rallies. His sermons followed a prescribed format beginning with an appreciation for the host city. Then he would focus on one particular sin and call his hearers to confess it and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. At the end of the rally, he would call on those who had come to faith to come forward to the stage in the middle of the stadium and make a decision for Christ. To lubricate the audience in making decisions for Christ, the Billy Graham team arranged to have local ministers bring their members, often in buses, to these rallies, and at the signal, they would come down the stadium steps to make decisions for Christ. Youth played a big role in the conduct of these rallies. As the faithful came forward to make their decisions for Christ, the members of the audience that remained in their seats would sing "Just As I Am, Without One Plea." With the last words of each stanza, "O Lamb of God, I come, I come," there was no reason not to come. At the end of the rally, the middle of the stadium would fill up with the penitent, with Billy Graham praying on the stage.

By all standards, Billy Graham was a success, and preachers of every denomination, liberal or conservative, attempted to ride on his coattails. A regular

visitor to the White House, he had admirers among Catholic priests and received audiences with popes. Even some LCMS pastors encouraged their congregations to attend Graham's rallies. It was considered a good way to get the youth involved. Preachers copied his preaching style and even his appearance with their eyes piercing into the congregation. Graham was recruited to write the foreword for the autobiography of one of the LCMS's most famous preachers.[1] Since I was brought up on the lukewarm, mediating, neoorthodox theology of the St. Louis faculty in the late 1950s, I was taken in by his "This is the word of God" approach in preaching. While his sermons recaptured the central themes of Christianity, that Jesus Christ was the Savior and that the Bible was the word of God, some eventually realized that biblical Christianity was much more extensive. From that time on, his preaching lost its appeal, but what he did could not be forgotten.

He brought a biblically informed Christianity, minimal as it was, into the "public square," to borrow a term from Richard John Neuhaus. We are now in a period of perilous religious decline in which Christianity is pushed out of the public view. Annual commemorations of September 11, 2001, are totally devoid of any religious reference. Coming from the Latin word *saeculum*, a secular world is a self-contained reality from which God is excluded up to the point of being prohibited. Billy Graham spoke publicly not only of God, as many mainline Protestant clergy often do, but also of Jesus Christ and the Bible, words that have less and less meaning for the general population. His funeral service, at which the highest officials of our nation were present, shows that the church has not been completely pushed out of the public consciousness.

Though not formally educated in theology, he was largely responsible for a movement that transformed a discarded Fundamentalism into an academically acceptable Evangelicalism. Their colleges are scattered throughout the nation and are top-notch. In the Association of Theological Schools, the Evangelical seminaries have replaced mainline Protestant ones as the most successful. Their theologians are leaders in scholarly associations that were once the reserve of those who had no use for miracles. They go head to head with theologians of every type. Evangelical scholars are a force to be reckoned with. Their publishing houses—Eerdmans, Zondervan, Baker, B&H—are scholarly powerhouses.

Graham was also the chairman of the foundation that published the biweekly magazine *Christianity Today*, which during the years of LCMS turmoil (1955–1974) brought a conservative biblical program into the homes of many LCMS pastors. Here lies the connection. Its first and founding editor, Carl F. H. Henry, was a friend

[1] Oswald C. J. Hoffmann and Ronald J. Schlegel, *What More Is There to Say But Amen? The Autobiography of Dr. Oswald C. J. Hoffmann As Told to Ronald J. Schlegel*, foreword by Billy Graham (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996).

of leading conservative theologians at the time, including the late Robert D. Preus. Before becoming president of Concordia Theological Seminary here in Fort Wayne, Preus was the professor responsible for keeping the St. Louis seminary together as an institution after the faculty majority in February of 1974 left their posts.

Due to another commitment, I was able to watch only the first few minutes of Billy Graham's funeral service, and still it was good hearing those in attendance under the revival-styled tent singing "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"—all on national television. Even in his death, Graham was keeping Jesus in the "public square."

David P. Scaer

Sermon for Easter Tuesday

The following sermon was delivered by Dr. David P. Scaer during the daily chapel service on Easter Tuesday (April 3, 2018) at Kramer Chapel, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana. The text was 1 Corinthians 15:35–49. —The Editors

If your birthday comes between March 25 and April 25, there is always the chance that it will fall on Easter. This year, Richard Lammert[1] hit the jackpot. When I asked him how he was going to pass the day, he replied that celebrating the Lord's resurrection precludes celebrating anything else. In comparison to the resurrection, everything else and everyone else is simply unimportant. Jesus' resurrection embraces all mankind. It is true before Mary Magdalene, Peter, and John discover that the tomb is empty and whether anyone believes it or not. It is a fact, not a faith event. The resurrection of Jesus is a cosmic event, transcending and embracing all history: "As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22).[2] And nevertheless, the resurrection happened in ordinary history, during the prefecture of Pontius Pilate, an appointee of Tiberius Caesar; and the place was a rock tomb owned by Joseph of Arimathea. Jesus' resurrection is not an abstract doctrine like the real presence, justification, or sanctification, doctrines that can only be believed. The resurrection is a thing, a something, an "it." It is the foundation of faith, and this faith is first of all what God did in Jesus. So, we put on hold all the first-person singular pronouns *I*, *me*, and *my* found in Luther's explanations, and we let the creed stand on its own merits.

[1] Richard Lammert serves as Technical Services and Systems Librarian at CTSFW.

[2] Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All this has implications for how we celebrate Easter. So, the first hymn of the day is "Christians, to the Paschal Victim" (*LSB* 460).[3] In his resurrection, Jesus is not simply a resuscitated cold corpse, but in his being raised from the dead, he remains, as St. Paul says (1 Cor 5:7), the *pascha*, the "Passover lamb," the perfect and final sacrifice whom God received as an atonement for sin and gives to us as a sacrament in Holy Communion. Then comes the hymn "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today" (*LSB* 457). Translated from the Latin *Surrexit Christus Hodie*, one hymnologist describes it as a hymn "mak[ing] no pretentions to greatness . . . and yet obviously [it] has a certain appeal."[4] And its appeal is that it is all about God. This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes. It is God's triumphant holy day. What divine law required, divine love provided; and all this happened within the trinitarian mystery, which is what God is all about. Condemnation and love is the necessary distinction by which Satan was conquered and the sting of death extracted from our mortal bodies.

Easter is first and last about God, but Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher had a point in saying that religion comes from us and is about us. Socrates put it like this: "Know thyself." We look at ourselves, and we find the mind with malfunctioning gray cells, muscles softening with age, ligaments tightening up and bent over, bones that no longer respond to rigorous exercise. Protein drinks of horrid-tasting greens cannot turn the clock back to what we once thought we were or advance us to what we would still like to be. If Easter means that the crucified body of Jesus is transformed into a glorified body, then in the days after Easter we discover our perishable bodies are ill-equipped to put on the imperishable. Easter ecstasy is muted by a face-to-face encounter with the FairHaven Funeral Home as you exit the campus onto North Clinton. Ash Wednesday is the only reality: "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19; cf. Eccl 3:20). After that, "Man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets" (Eccl 12:5), but to the testament of death, Solomon adds this codicil: "And the [soul] returns to God who gave it" (Eccl 12:7). Going to God is not the resurrection, but it is not without its advantages. Yet Ecclesiastes is the not the last book in the Bible. God has more to say.

The grave is not our eternal home but only a stop on the way, and the song of the mourners is not the last hymn of the day. Jesus takes the ground once cursed with weeds for Adam's sin, and by his resurrection he cultivates it into a fertile soil into which our perishing bodies are planted as the seeds from which our resurrected

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[3] The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

[4] Frank Colquhoun, *Hymns That Live* (Downers Gove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 106–107. The author was Canon Residentiary and Vice Dean of Norwich Cathedral, United Kingdom.

bodies will spring forth with supernatural splendor. In the valley of the dry bones, Ezekiel described how this would happen. Bones, muscles, and ligaments will be tied back together, but it will not happen with the excruciating detail as the prophet said. On this point, Paul got it right. The trumpet shall sound, and in the twinkling of an eye, our deteriorated bodies will be reassembled (cf. 1 Cor 15:52), all in less time that it took God to shape Adam from the clay. We will no longer look like the man who was sentenced to return to the dust from which he was taken, but we will look like the man from heaven, Jesus Christ, whose image he implanted in us in Baptism when we shared in his death.

Some scholars argue that the account of Christ's transfiguration should have been included in the accounts of the resurrection and not in the middle of the Gospels. They have a point. Transfiguration really is a foretaste of Easter. Bodies in the state of deterioration longing to be released from the perishable will put on the imperishable, transfigured glory of Christ's resurrection. It will be a transubstantiation of death into life, a transformation of corruption into incorruption, a transfiguration of the perishable into the imperishable, but it will not be a homogenization. Each of us as individuals will not be blended into a divine nothingness and lost. Each of us will retain our own identity. Just as the light of the sun, moon, and stars differs in intensity and specific color, so the glory of the saints will differ from one another according to the works Christ did in them while on earth.

All that said, Easter is not about our faith or our future. It is about Christ and Christ alone. His empty tomb is the only pulpit, and the only sermon is "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay" (Matt 28:5–6). The details come later.

David P. Scaer

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***Beyond Indulgences: Luther's Reform of Late Medieval Piety, 1518–1520*. By Anna Marie Johnson. Early Modern Studies 21. Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2017. 240 pages. Hardcover. $50.00.**

This fine study evaluates Luther's theological development and his early advocacy of reform in the critical years of 1518–1520 through analysis of twenty-five pastoral writings written in the wake of the Ninety-Five Theses and in the midst of the controversy over indulgences that led to Luther's excommunication. Johnson chose pastoral writings written during this critical time because they have not been substantially incorporated into the numerous accounts of Luther's "road to reformation."

Johnson structures her book with chapters analyzing the practical concerns Luther addressed in these writings between the chronological high points usually emphasized on that road: Lent 1518 (between the Ninety-Five Theses and the Heidelberg Disputation), the summer of 1518 (between Heidelberg and the meeting in Augsburg with Cardinal Cajetan in October), early 1519 (between the Augsburg meeting and the Leipzig Debate), and the longer period from fall 1519 to summer 1520 (between Leipzig and October 1520 when Luther received news of his threatened excommunication). These four central chapters are preceded by two preparatory chapters, one on Luther's vocation as a pastor in the context of late medieval pastoral theology and piety, and a second on Luther's early academic lectures and his initial criticisms of scholastic theology and church practices—the latter culminating in his *Treatise on Indulgences* and the Ninety-Five Theses, both sent to Albrecht of Brandenburg at the end of October 1517. A concluding chapter on "Piety and Luther's Protest" draws on the continuity Johnson finds in Luther's pastoral writings throughout this period, then demonstrates that in his treatise *On Christian Liberty* of November 1520, Luther's concerns for Christ-ian life (true good works as well as freedom from papal rules and false works) are emphasized together with justification by faith.

By this structure of argument, Johnson takes aim at a narrow view of Luther's "reformatory turn" in its later date (e.g. Bizer, Bayer, and Brecht, dating such a turn to the middle of 1518 or even later), concluding that Luther displays "coherence and consistency" throughout this period in a pastoral theology that is already "highly

developed" and that "over the course of two eventful years with twenty-five pastoral writings on a wide range of practices, the core of Luther's instruction was remarkably consistent" (183). Thus, Luther's main concerns for the reform of *Christianity* (not just church reform or reform strictly of doctrine) were already substantially formed at the outset of his conflict with the papal church. As the last lines of the book characterize it, "Luther the pastor was not a kinder, gentler version of Luther the reformer. He was an impassioned reformer who was so committed to the care of souls that he pushed for reform at the risk of excommunication and death. Luther's attempt to reform Christian practice is not an experiential aside to his theological cause, but rather its heart" (192).

While Luther's vocation as a pastor has received increased attention in re-cent years, often looked at via his later writings (such as the catechisms) and his personal correspondence, Johnson's investigation of these early pastoral writings more thoroughly incorporates Luther's pastoral vocation into the story of his development as a reformer and his break with the papal church. Most of these writings are sermons; others are brief explanations of God's commandments, the Lord's Prayer, or how to confess (the sacrament of penance); while the later published sermons of 1519–1520 are more developed treatises analyzing traditional practices and sacraments (preparing to die, penance, the ban, baptism, doing good works, etc.). All of these writings show a pastor at work instructing and consoling his parishioners and also a broader public, offering correction (often quite critically) over against the traditional and often quite popular practices of the church before the Reformation. Reading them gives a very different impression of Luther the man and the theologian than is gained from reading only Luther's polemical treatises written during this same time period. Johnson demonstrates that Luther biography, as well as histories of the Reformation, need to emphasize and more clearly elaborate the practical, pastoral concerns that energized the early Luther and motivated the early reformation movement, which emerged out of his pastoral care as well as his theological and ecclesial protest.

For Lutheran pastors and laypeople, grasping Luther's pastoral concerns in his early years is vital for understanding the nature of his reform and the resulting Lutheran confession of the gospel, and thus of Lutheran identity and practice today. These early pastoral writings are an important but often neglected body of Luther's works. Many of them are available in English translation, but without the introductory tools that help readers grasp the integral role they played in Luther's development. This book provides an excellent introduction.

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***1 Kings 1–11*. By Walter A. Maier III. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018. 1,034 pages. Hardcover. $54.99.**

Maier's treatment of 1 Kings 1–11 is part of the ongoing Concordia Commentary series. As such, it continues the series' great strength in giving attention to the original text via textual notes followed by commentary. Pastors will be greatly served by Maier's notes that elucidate the grammar along with the commentary, giving insight for faithful preaching and teaching. Lay readers who have not been blessed with knowledge of Hebrew can still benefit from the commentary on individual passages.

Like previous volumes in the series, the introductory matters and excurses throughout provide additional assistance to the student of Scripture. I especially commend Maier's treatment of the isagogical matters that often become battlegrounds between critical scholars and those who respect the text. In that regard, Maier's discussion under the titles of "Authorship and Composition," "Chronology," and "Sources" are particularly helpful.

The theological nature of 1 Kings is also seen in Maier's treatment. More than a mere historical record, herein lies the record of God's work among and for his people in history. Maier's introductory section on "The Christology of Kings" is complemented by the ongoing commentary that testifies to Christ being the heart of this text. This is the greatest strength of the volume in comparison to other commentaries on 1 Kings. While others become consumed either in deconstructing the text via particular critical theories or react against such excesses and thus fall prey to primary concern with rebutting critical theories, Maier allows theology (and especially Christology) to take the lead. His treatment offers sound response to critical theories but refuses to allow them to set the agenda.

Because of this breadth of treatment, Maier's work is far from brief. It deserves a place on the shelf of all pastors who would preach and teach the word of the Lord. While most will hold it as a great reference work to be consulted as need arises for preaching, teaching, and casuistry, it also is a fine tome to read cover to cover as a means of continuing education.

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***Succinct and Select Theological Aphorisms in Twenty-Three Chapters Containing the Core of all Theology Drafted and Adapted for Use in Scholastic Disputations (1611).* By Johann Gerhard. Translated by Paul A. Rydecki. Malone, Texas: Repristination Press, 2018. 204 pages. Softcover. $19.95.**

Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) was called to be a pastor and church superintendent in 1606, and in 1607 he began to preside at monthly disputations in Coburg with pastors and teachers of his district on the common topics (*loci communes*) of theology. By 1610 he had finished this series of disputations, and the next year the theses were printed as his *Aphorismi Succincti Et Selecti . . . totius Theologiae nucleum continentes.* These theses were the first stage of what would become his massive *Theological Commonplaces* (1610–1625). The *Aphorismi succincti* were popular enough to have been translated into English in the seventeenth century by Ralph Winterton and published in Cambridge under different titles in 1632 and 1640.[1] Now Paul A. Rydecki and Repristination Press have given us another translation of this dogmatic outline.

In his preface, Gerhard praises and defends disputations, both as academic exercises and ecclesiastical, serious argument. Yet he says the striving for truth must be joined with the pursuit of piety. The theses themselves are adorned by beautiful, pithy quotations from Augustine, Bernard, Hugh of St. Victor, and others. Many of the theses speak briefly of errors without explaining who holds those views and how they seek to support them. Readers will need to consult the *Theological Commonplaces* (CPH) for any points that Gerhard leaves unexplained here.

Besides the pleasure that reading this book provides, it will help readers in several ways. It covers topics ignored by American Lutheran dogmatics (such as details of marriage and just war). It also helps readers to avoid Lutheran clichés, such as that good works are only to be performed for the sake of one's neighbor, which Gerhard corrects: they are also to be done, in faith, on account of God and for our own sake (127–128). In fact, Gerhard could also provide great clarity and dispel ambiguities in recent Lutheran conflicts over law, gospel, justification, and sanctification—as well as anthropology and the end times. Although the book is just over 200 pages, Gerhard is comprehensive.

This is a beautiful translation, and it accords with the analogy of faith (Rom. 12:6), but in some places it is inaccurate. When speaking of the conscience as a syllogism with its premises and conclusion, Rydecki translates *assumo* as "assume"

1 *A golden chaine of divine aphorismes written by John Gerhard Doctor of Divinitie and superintendent of Heldburg. Translated by Ralph Winterton* ([Cambridge]: printers to the Universitie, 1632); *The Summe of Christian Doctrine by John Gerhard Doctor in Diuinitie: And translated by Ralph Witterton Fellow of Kings Colledge in Cambridge* (Cambridge: Roger Daniel, 1640).

and *assumptio* as "assumption" (100), when they should be "supplies the minor premise" and "the minor premise," respectively. These are technical terms in logic. Likewise, speaking of the 16th-century editor of Tertullian, Rydecki renders his name "Blessed Rhenanus" (104). But Gerhard was not pronouncing Rhenanus a saint. His first name was Beatus. Further examples could be cited. Yet despite such mistakes (to which many other translations are even more liable) and the lack of a Scripture index, this volume is highly recommended—both for the elegance of the prose and for the content, which is so needed in our times.

Benjamin T. G. Mayes

***Infants and Children in the Church: Five Views on Theology and Ministry*. Edited by Adam Harwood and Kevin E. Lawson. Nashville: B & H Academic, 2017. 232 Pages. Softcover. $24.99.**

Our world is increasingly hostile not only to Christianity but to any notion of transcendence whatsoever. In such a climate, we are constantly tempted to pursue unity by glossing over precise definitions and dogmatic framework. Joint statements are easier to achieve unencumbered by precision. That is why subpar ecumenism is typically driven by pragmatism and lubricated by equivocation.

Such is not the case with the "Five Views on Theology and Ministry" series. The format of this work allows each contributor an extended forum to develop and defend his particular theology. The result is a refreshingly candid discussion that goes far beneath the surface.

The editors set out to explore four basic questions of theology pertaining to children: 1) How are infants and children impacted by sin? 2) How does God treat people who die in infancy or childhood? 3) When and how are children considered members of the Church? and 4) When and how are children instructed in Christian doctrine?

Answers given by the various authors reveal the fundamental differences between the systems represented. The biggest surprise to this reviewer was the amount of space devoted to the doctrine of Scripture and Church authority. On the one hand, the respective declarations from each denomination were just what one would expect. On the other hand, some authors—the Orthodox and Baptist in particular—struggled to live up to their own principles.

David Scaer's chapter was solidly scriptural and profoundly simple. Lutheran readers will not be disappointed. It seemed to be the only chapter that remained consistent with Scripture both on the doctrine of original sin and on the doctrine of faith. Other chapters revealed numerous instances of qualifying *sola Scriptura* by human reason. Interesting as well were the many intrusions of human will into the doctrines of sin, faith, and salvation.

Despite its title and scope being limited to children and infants, this book offers a comprehensive view of five doctrinal systems. It could easily serve as the sole text for an entire course exploring the differences between the five denominations represented.

Jesus said, "Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of God" (Matt 18:3). By so saying, Christ declares that one's theology and ministry toward children reveals all of one's theology and ministry.

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***When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment*. By Ryan T. Anderson. New York: Encounter Books, 2018. 251 pages. Hardcover. $27.99.**

If Rip Van Winkle were to wake up today from a twenty year sleep he would find the world unrecognizable. The technological advances boggle the mind. Our phones seem smarter than we are. But such changes pale in comparison to the revolution in matters of marriage, sex, and the basic perceptions of who we are. So-called gay marriage, once unthinkable, has become normalized to the point where it is hardly questioned or even noticed. Polyamory is reported but hardly elicits a shrug. Cross-dressing and gender bending, once considered fringe novelties, have been mainstreamed.

Now we have come to what Ryan T. Anderson calls the transgender moment. When gold medalist Bruce Jenner declared himself a woman, all evidence to the contrary, we knew we were in for a bumpy ride. Will no one say that the emperor has no clothes? Or at least that the dress does not fit? A boy is said to be trapped in a girl's body, and a girl in a boy's. At birth, a mother exclaims, "It's a boy." Yet now we are told that this is not a matter of biological recognition but of sex assigned at birth. We are told now that there are over fifty genders and that they are fluid. To bolster this gender ideology new pronouns have been fabricated. It is no longer a matter of his and hers but "xyrs" and "zirs," "vis" and "nirs." Pity the fool who uses them. As with the redefinition of marriage, this has enormous implication for our first amendment rights, including freedom of speech and the free exercise of religion. Fines and penalties are imposed on those who do not play along. As Anderson notes, this radical gender ideology is placing all of our children in jeopardy. School restrooms have been opened up, with boys entering into the place reserved for girls. This also affects overnight sleeping arrangements for school trips. Males are now

allowed even to participate in women's sports, often dominating. The ramifications are stunning.

Each of Anderson's books is worth reading, including his works on marriage and religious liberty. Yet *When Harry Became Sally* may be his best yet. While his writing is known for clarity and airtight arguments, this is perhaps his more charitable and deeply human endeavor. As Anderson notes in the title, this is a transgender "moment." By that he means, I think, that this will prove to be an unfortunate blip in human history, a kind of blindness born of mass delusion. In the meantime, though, we should not be so sanguine. The dangers of this moment are great. Of course there is the threat to our rights of conscience. People who demur are often sidelined, losing their jobs and their reputations. But perhaps most disturbing is the way that those suffering from gender dysphoria are played like pawns.

What is gender dysphoria? It is the feeling, held by a few, that they are trapped in the wrong body. This discomfort is real, as is the anguish. What causes it? There may be biological factors. But other circumstances come into play. Here there is a boy who is sensitive and feels left out. He begins to play with the girls, doing quieter things, perhaps arranging furniture in a doll house. Over here we find a girl who likes to mix it up—a bit of a tomboy who wants to play rougher sports. Throw into the mix a son raised by a mom who wanted a daughter. Consider the boy who could never live up to his father's expectations. For so many reasons children feel left out, not knowing how they fit in. In days past a child would be given the opportunity to discover himself. Perhaps a sensitive boy would find other boys who were not so rough. A girl could play with the boys with nothing assumed. But now gender ideology steps in and turns temporary questions into permanent and irreversible decisions.

The protocol for dealing with gender dysphoria is frightening. A young boy confused about his own identity is typically transitioned at an early age and given a new name to fit his new gender, along with new clothes. There is something perverse and backwards about such thinking. Why did Bruce Jenner start to wear dresses? Are we saying that women are defined by wearing dresses? I thought we were beyond such stereotyping. But nevertheless a child is dressed up. Then, according to the suggested protocol, that child is given puberty blockers and encouraged to stay in an unhealthy state of suspended animation. With the onset of puberty, a young person is then given estrogen or testosterone. Finally, at the age of eighteen, that person is eligible for body-altering and mutilating surgery. Facsimiles of body members are created and carved out. It is difficult to write this but this is the sordid truth of our age.

Anderson contends that we are pigeonholing children who would have probably grown out of their dysphoria. Some 80-95% of children, given no such

treatments, will eventually come to embrace their bodily gender. But instead of offering counseling and real help, we reinforce the delusion, leaving many to live with regrets, and bodies that have been forever altered. The cruelty of such an approach is horrifying. Anderson sensitively tells the stories of those who have gone through the protocol only to regret their decisions. It is sometimes hard to read and yet we cannot but feel for these people. Their stories must be heard so that others need not go down such paths. Anderson also offers hope. There are good counselors, people like Dr. Paul McHugh of Johns Hopkins, who see the problem for what it is and are able to help.

As Anderson notes, our sex differences, male and female, are not really fluid nor are they a matter of body part here or there. Instead male and female are written into every cell of our body. Instead of trying to create new bodies, in which the suffering will be comfortable, we must be about the business of helping people feel comfortable in the bodies that they have. No surgery can ever change a man into a woman, or a woman into a man. It will be cosmetic at best. What is needed is sensitive counseling and love for those who are confused. Given our society, one in which we have no idea what marriage even is, it is no wonder that so many of our young people are indeed confused.

What is the way forward? If we are concerned with human flourishing we do well to return to natural law and to the essential truth and goodness of male and female. Boys and girls are different and that is a good thing. Only a woman can be a mom and only a man, a father. Children need counseling and love, not hormones and surgery. As parents, we must be vigilant. Those who push the transgender ideology are aggressive. For the sake of our children and grandchildren, we must be aggressive, too. There is so much at stake, including our rights to free speech and exercise of religion, the safety of women, and the well-being of all those who suffer and are confused. The transgender moment is our moment to stand up and be counted. If you want to be part of the solution, read this book. Then buy copies for your friends. It is that important.

Peter Scaer

***Retrieving Eternal Generation*. Edited by Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2017. 304 pages. Softcover. $34.99.**

It is perhaps an indictment of my own unfamiliarity with current Evangelical theology that I did not realize that the doctrine of eternal generation was in need of retrieval. The doctrine has, in fact, been challenged not only by liberal scholarship, for whom even traditional theism is up for grabs, but also by conscientious and serious theologians who view it as an unscriptural innovation, an invasion of heathen philosophy that compromises the perfect equality and full divinity of the

persons of the Godhead. It is therefore in need of a careful defense that builds upon clear scriptures and gives a coherent account of the relations between the persons of the Trinity. This need is met, and then some, by the essays collected in the present volume.

Retrieving Eternal Generation is divided into three parts: biblical reasoning (27–146), historical witnesses (pp. 147–240), and contemporary statements (241–285). The first section is the strongest, employing sound exegetical techniques to demonstrate the scriptural warrant for the traditional teaching on eternal generation. Particularly valuable is Charles Lee Irons' essay, "A Lexical Defense of the Johannine 'Only Begotten'" (98–116), which should put to rest the longstanding claims that the term μονογενής means simply "unique" without reference to any relation of origin. The historical section displays a deep reverence for the patristic tradition, while maintaining steadfast fidelity to the scriptures first and foremost. The final section deals less with current objections to eternal generation than one might hope, but it nevertheless aims successfully at providing a way of thinking about the Trinity that faithfully incorporates the scriptural data and integrates with the wider system of theology, particularly soteriology. Overall, *Retrieving Eternal Generation* is an informative, engaging read that encourages the con-templation of God in himself, a sort of proleptic beatific vision.

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Reviews Published Online at www.ctsfw.edu/ctq/reviews

Baughman, Sarah *A Flame In The Dark: A Novel about Luther's Reformation*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018. 320 pages. Softcover. $12.99. (Mary J. Moerbe)

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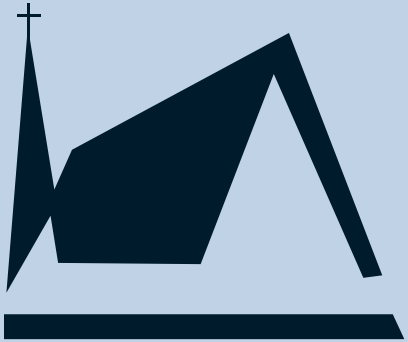

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