



CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

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Christology as Basis for Lutheran Theology¹

Aaron M. Moldenhauer

The Leipzig Debate of 1519, among other things, solidified ecclesial authority as a central question between Martin Luther and Catholic theologians. Indulgences, the topic of Luther's "Ninety-Five Theses," were an afterthought at Leipzig; the cursory discussion on indulgences near the conclusion of the Leipzig Debate revealed a great deal of commonality between the debaters. However, this common ground mattered little by the end of the debate. Already before Leipzig, the question of authority had become central, and that question was firmly established as the heart of the conversation and the dividing point at Leipzig. That move proved significant, as Leipzig and its aftermath set the terms of the conversation for the following decades. Ecclesial and papal authority remained a central starting point—perhaps the central starting point—of theological dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics throughout Luther's life. In the last years of his life, Luther objected to the pope's claim to have authority over a council, and to the pope's maneuvering to determine who would attend the council.²

One could ask how the Reformation might have gone differently if there were a different starting point for the conversation between Lutherans and Rome. Rather than drift into virtual history, here I aim to analyze something concrete: a different way of approaching theology that Luther laid out in his later years. Luther puts forth Christology as a basis and starting point for theology. But to clear the way for that argument, I will first identify and set aside some paradigmatic notions about Luther in order to consider elements of Luther's thought that do not fit within this paradigm.

Several axioms about Luther function as a kind of paradigm in Luther studies. Luther, as everyone knows, was not a systematic theologian. Luther rejects scholastic theology and philosophy. His works are reactionary, determined by the circumstances around Luther and the opponents he addresses. These axioms are points so well established in the field that no evidence is required or sought for them. Since these are agreed-upon basic principles for studying Luther, they shape the

¹ An earlier version of this paper was read at the 42nd Annual Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana, January 14–16, 2019.

² Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church 1532–1546*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 357–361.

methods by which we study Luther and dictate the kinds of questions we put to Luther studies. That is, since Luther's works are reactionary, Luther studies typically begin by framing the particular controversy Luther is participating in at the moment. Often this framing simply takes Luther's word for what his opponents say rather than read those opponents in their own words. Since Luther rejects scholasticism, scholars do not read the scholastics, and see no need to analyze them or look for points of continuity with them in Luther's thought. And, since Luther is not a systematic theologian, scholars do not bother to look for elements of systematic thought in Luther.

Taken together, these points function like a paradigm in Thomas Kuhn's analysis of the history of science. They constitute an agreed-upon, overarching framework within which Luther research is comfortably done. "Normal" Luther research, like Kuhn's "normal science," works within this paradigm to solve what Kuhn calls "puzzles," questions to which one is certain to find an answer when the paradigmatic research methods are followed. In this way, the paradigm generates productive and useful work in Luther studies. Yet there is a cost: as Kuhn argues, the nature of a paradigm is to discount and exclude contrary evidence. The paradigm governs which questions are asked and which are not addressed.³ In Luther studies, this means that questions are not asked about the ideas or works of Luther that do not fit the paradigm.

I am, of course, overgeneralizing and stereotyping. There are Luther scholars today questioning these axioms and others, and producing excellent scholarship in the process. To name a few, Volker Leppin's biography of Luther,⁴ Sujin Pak's book *The Reformation of Prophecy*,⁵ and Eric Saak's book *Luther and the Reformation of the Later Middle Ages*⁶ place Luther into conversation with medieval Catholicism in new ways. In the same way, I would like to lay aside paradigmatic points about Luther to analyze elements of Luther's thought that do not fit within this paradigm. This is important in particular because the methods dictated by the paradigm fail when applied to Luther's late christological disputations, and I suggest that this failure is important, pointing us to insights about Luther we otherwise miss.

³ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁴ Volker Leppin, *Martin Luther: A Late Medieval Life*, trans. Rhys Bezzant and Karen Roe (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

⁵ G. Sujin Pak, *The Reformation of Prophecy: Early Modern Interpretations of the Prophet & Old Testament Prophecy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁶ Eric Leland Saak, *Luther and the Reformation of the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Take, for instance, Luther's 1539 *The Disputation concerning the Passage "The Word Was Made Flesh."*⁷ The paradigm calls for understanding the current challenge to which a reactionary Luther responds. But, as I argue below, no challenge presents itself as a likely occasion for the disputation. Instead of reacting, I suggest in this paper that Luther uses the disputation to focus on the person of Christ, and to put forth this doctrine as a central point and basis for theology. The disputation shows Luther's interest in doctrines (like the person of Christ) for their own sake, and with a particular importance given to understanding the person of Christ by using tools borrowed from nominalist philosophy. While I will only touch on it in this paper, Luther uses elements of late medieval nominalism in the disputation, so that Luther's Christology emerges from his engagement with late medieval scholastic theology,⁸ rather than beginning with a complete rejection of the scholastics.

The third axiom is the one I wish to address, the claim that Luther is not a systematic theologian. I suggest that the 1539 disputation, given its use of scholastic thought and lack of immediate provocation, suggests that there is more order in Luther's thought than is typically granted, giving us insight into what Luther identifies as central to theology. My main argument is that in his late years Luther points to Christology as a basis for theology, laying out the skeleton for a systematic approach to theology. To make this argument, I will first place Luther's *Disputation concerning the Passage "The Word Was Made Flesh"* in the historical context of the discourse between the theology faculty of the University of Paris and Wittenberg. I will then show the points of Christology that Luther lays out as a productive starting point for theology, and argue that Luther's Christology outlines the skeleton for a systematic approach to theology.

I. A Systematic Approach to Theology

Before laying out the historical context of the disputation, it is necessary to define what I mean by a systematic approach to theology. I do not wish to argue

⁷ Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*, 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), vol. 39/2:3–30 (hereafter WA); Martin Luther, *The Disputation concerning the Passage "The Word Was Made Flesh"* (1539): vol. 38, pp. 235–277, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE.

⁸ Here I use the term *scholastic* broadly to refer to the medieval approach to theology carried on in the universities via disputations, lectures, and commentaries on works like Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. Broadly speaking, this kind of theology falls within a contemporary concept of systematic theology as it organizes itself around doctrines, doctrinal questions, and the relation of doctrines to one another.

that Luther wrote a systematic theology in the sense of a single work intending to cover every doctrine. Neither did Luther produce a work that begins with a first principle or two and then deduces all truth from these principles, nor did he resolve every theological tension. Clearly, Luther produced no such work. But to put Luther in context, very few of the scholastics (who are readily considered to be some kind of systematic theologians) produced such a work either. By the late Middle Ages, even the requisite commentaries on the *Sentences* were incomplete, focusing on topics of interest to the author rather than commenting on every one of Lombard's questions.⁹ If the claim that Luther is not a systematic theologian means that he produced nothing like Aquinas's *Summae* or Calvin's *Institutes*, then the claim is accurate.

However, if the claim that Luther is not a systematic theologian means that there is no order or logic to Luther's theology, then this axiom occludes elements of Luther's thought. On the contrary, Luther outlines a systematic approach to theology, by which I mean three things. First, Luther identifies a doctrinal starting point for theology. Second, Luther offers a theological diagnostic useful for assessing doctrines. Third, Luther works to demonstrate the coherence of doctrinal points that appear to be paradoxical or contrary. Luther identifies and uses Christology in each of these three ways. In terms of doctrines, Luther puts forth Christology as a starting point. Of course, Luther uses Scripture as the normative authority for theology, and in the sense of a source for theology, Scripture is the starting point. But among doctrines and in theological debate, Luther points to Christology as the starting point and the center of his thought. Here I follow Johannes Zachhuber, who describes Christology as a kind of lynchpin that holds the various strands of Luther's thought together.¹⁰ While agreeing with Zachhuber on the centrality of Christology in Luther's thought, I aim to clarify just how Christology stands at the center. By clarifying the role of Christology in Luther's thought, I hope to offer insights into the heart of Luther's theology, and suggest his systematic approach as a productive starting point for contemporary theological work.

II. The Sorbonne

Luther names the Sorbonne as the target of his *Disputation concerning the Passage "The Word Was Made Flesh"*, and particularly the claim of the Sorbonne that the same thing is true in philosophy and theology. The Sorbonne was arguably

⁹ Philipp W. Rosemann, *The Story of a Great Medieval Book: Peter Lombard's Sentences, Rethinking the Middle Ages* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Johannes Zachhuber, *Luther's Christological Legacy: Christocentrism and the Chalcedonian Tradition*, The Père Marquette Lectures in Theology 48 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2017), 18–29.

the preeminent theological faculty of the early sixteenth century. The Sorbonne, while only one of the Colleges of the University of Paris, became a common name for the theology faculty of the University of Paris. Both before and during the sixteenth century, the Roman church held the Sorbonne to be a divinely inspired source of doctrine and a mediator of God's truth to man.¹¹ Due to this esteem, there were at least seventy documented consultations of the Sorbonne between 1500 and 1542.¹² Included among these consultations and extending beyond them was the Sorbonne's role in heresy trials throughout the sixteenth century, as the Sorbonne and the French Parlement managed more heresy trials in France than the Inquisition during the sixteenth century.¹³

Given the high esteem awarded to the Sorbonne and its frequent role as consultant in dealings with heretics, it is unsurprising that the Sorbonne was asked to serve as a judge of the Leipzig Debate. While it never passed a pronouncement on the Leipzig Debate, the Sorbonne in 1521 and again in 1523 published judgments against Luther's doctrine based on his publications. The Sorbonne issued decrees against heretics and Melancthon in 1535. The Sorbonne's judgments against Wittenberg are in the background of Luther's 1539 *Disputation concerning the Passage "The Word Was Made Flesh"*. Yet a survey of their judgments raises questions about why Luther directs this disputation against the Sorbonne. The Sorbonne is an odd target for two reasons. First, there is no obvious interchange between Luther and the Sorbonne in 1538 or 1539, precluding the possibility that Luther is responding to a current attack of the Sorbonne. Second, Luther writes that the disputation is intended to counter the Sorbonne's claim that the same thing is true in both theology and philosophy.¹⁴ Yet the Sorbonne's published decisions against Luther do not contain this claim. In fact, the decisions suggest that the Sorbonne recognizes that not everything true in philosophy is also true in theology. Given Luther's stated intention in the disputation, I focus on the relationship between philosophy and theology evident in the Sorbonne's judgments.

III. The Sorbonne's Early Response to Luther

The Sorbonne's 1521 condemnation of Luther subordinates questions about philosophy to questions of ecclesial authority and the merit of human works. The 1521 *Determinatio Theologiae Facultatis Parisiensis* names Luther a heretic who

¹¹ James K. Farge, *Orthodoxy and Reform in Early Reformation France: The Faculty of Paris, 1500–1543*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 1.

¹² Farge, *Orthodoxy*, 115.

¹³ William Monter, *Judging the French Reformation: Heresy Trials by Sixteenth-Century Parlements* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ WA 39/2:3.7–8; 7.8–12; AE 38:239 (Thesis 4) 243.

elevates his judgment above the judgment of the church.¹⁵ Besides being a heretic who does not submit to church authority, Luther is also condemned for speaking against the clear institutes of philosophy. Yet little is said about how Luther violates philosophical principles.¹⁶ As evidence for the charges against Luther, the *Determinatio* lists dozens of Luther's heretical statements. Two main themes emerge from the condemned statements. First, the question of authority is raised, as the Sorbonne's brief replies to Luther's statements assert the authority of church teachings, precepts, and official interpretations of Scripture. Second, the question of human works and their merits is present throughout the *Determinatio*. These two themes, the authority of the church and the merit of human works, are the starting point for the Sorbonne. The Parisian theologians work from these points to defend such acts of medieval piety as the distinction of works, contrition, confession, satisfaction, purgatory, evangelical counsels, and so on.¹⁷ Briefly stated, the argument is that the church has established works by which Christians gain merit, and Luther is wrong to question the authority of the church or the meritorious character of human works. Questions of philosophy are occasionally touched on, but only as instances of the larger themes of Luther elevating himself above the authority of the church and speaking against the merit of human works.

The primary philosophical issue is Luther's dismissal of Aristotelean ethics. The Sorbonne condemns Luther for arguing that Aristotle's ethics are at odds with Christian doctrine and biblical morality. The Sorbonne replies that some points of Aristotle's philosophy agree with Christian theology and faith, so that Aristotle has some value in helping to understand Scripture and theology.¹⁸ By claiming that only "some" points of Aristotle's philosophy agree with theology, the *Determinatio* implies that there are points in Aristotle that disagree with theology, a point readily conceded by scholastic theologians.¹⁹

While the 1521 *Determinatio* sees some correspondence between theology and philosophy, it does not assert that in every case the same thing is true in theology and philosophy. Rather than defend all of Aristotle, the *Determinatio* narrowly defends the kind of ethics that Aristotle taught. Broadly speaking, Aristotle's ethics

¹⁵ The full title of the judgment is *Determinatio Theologiae Facultatis Parisiensis super doctrina Lutherana hactenus per eam revisa*. Caroli du Plessis d'Argentré, *Collectio Iudiciorum de novis erroribus: qui ab initio duodecimi seculi post incarnationem Verbi, usque ad annum 1632 in Ecclesia proscripti sunt & notati* (Lutetiae Parisiorum: Coffin, 1728), 1:365–374. The Sorbonne wanted the *Determinatio* to spread quickly, especially to Francis I and Charles V. Farge, *Orthodoxy*, 127–129.

¹⁶ D'Argentré, *Collectio*, 365–366.

¹⁷ D'Argentré, *Collectio*, 367–374.

¹⁸ D'Argentré, *Collectio*, 373–374.

¹⁹ For instance, medieval scholastics had long rejected Aristotle's claims about the eternal existence of the world. The *Determinatio* does not list or name such claims, but seeks to establish only that some of Aristotle's work agrees with theology.

hold that a person becomes good by doing good. Holding to this notion, the Sorbonne rejects Luther's claim that the quality of a person determines the quality of a work.²⁰ The *Determinatio*'s criticisms of Luther's stance toward philosophy is one approach among others in the document to argue against Luther's doctrine of justification by faith resulting in a person who is then capable of doing good works. The philosophical points raised are secondary and narrow in scope, focusing only on philosophical ethics and implying that philosophy and theology disagree on other points.

Two years later, the Sorbonne issued another *Determinatio* against Luther and his theology. This second *Determinatio* against Luther shows ongoing interest in the Luther question among the Parisian theologians.²¹ The 1523 *Determinatio* is concerned to defend church practice against Luther's attacks. This *Determinatio*, even more than the 1521 document, condemns statements that denigrate practices such as the veneration of the virgin, the invocation of saints, the canon of the mass, and offices for the dead.²² The same central themes emerge as in the 1521 judgment: ecclesial authority and the merit of human works gained through church practice.

The Sorbonne's initial determinations on the Luther question set a pattern of asserting church authority to defend an array of practices that afforded people the opportunity to gain merit through obedience to church practice. Furthermore, it established the pattern that only through the lens of ecclesial authority supporting church practice would practical issues such as indulgences, fasting, or offices for the dead be addressed. This pattern continued throughout the Sorbonne's works on Lutheran and Protestant theology through the 1540s, including the next major engagement of the Sorbonne and Wittenberg in the 1530s.

IV. The Sorbonne and Melanchthon

The middle of the 1530s saw the Sorbonne engage with Protestant theology in response to the Affair of the Placards and a proposed convocation with Philipp Melanchthon. The Affair of the Placards was the posting of anti-Catholic posters

²⁰ The christological critique is against a kind of compositional Christology: Luther is wrong to assert that the two natures are Christ. Presumably, the Sorbonne would hold that the divine nature is the person of Christ. D'Argentré, *Collectio*, 373.

²¹ The full title of this judgment is *Determinatio facultatis Theologiae Parisiensis, super aliquibus Propositionibus certis è locis nuper ad eam delatis, de veneratione Sanctorum, de Canone Missae, deque sustentatione Ministrorum Altaris, & caeteris quibusdam*. D'Argentré, *Collectio*, 374–379. For instance, in 1523 eighty doctors (an unusually high number) attended as the Parisian theologian Pierre Lizet expounded on the dangers of Lutheranism. Farge, *Orthodoxy*, 38–39; Larissa Juliet Taylor, *Heresy and Orthodoxy in Sixteenth-Century Paris: François Le Picart and the Beginnings of the Catholic Reformation*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 77 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 33–43.

²² D'Argentré, *Collectio*, 374–379.

throughout Paris and other French cities in October 1534. The official response in Paris to the Affair of the Placards was a hardening against Protestant theology. Yet at the same time, Francis I of France was exploring a possible political alliance with the Smalcald League. Part of exploring the alliance was an invitation to Philipp Melanchthon to discuss the religious differences between Paris and the Smalcald League. While this meeting never happened, Melanchthon did send twelve articles to Paris as a starting point for the conversation, and the Sorbonne published a reply to the articles in 1535.²³

The Sorbonne's 1535 decrees assert church authority against heretics. In July 1535, the Sorbonne published a document aptly named *Little Book Showing That One Must Not Debate Heretics* that cut off any future disputations with heretics by asserting the authority of Roman tradition.²⁴ In the *Little Book* the Sorbonne likens heretics to gangrenous limbs that need to be amputated so that they do not poison the entire body. The ecclesial equivalent of amputation is to cut off any negotiations or discourse with heretics. Such discourse is impossible, the Sorbonne cautions, with those who deny first principles, as both ecclesiastic authorities and Aristotle assert. Since heretics deny the first principles of church councils, papal decrees, apostolic tradition, customs of the Catholic Church, and the holy doctors' expositions of Scripture, no discourse is possible with them.²⁵ By requiring acceptance of these first principles before dialogue can take place, the Sorbonne frames the starting point for potential disputations with Protestants as ecclesial authority. Again, while Aristotle is invoked, there is no claim that everything that Aristotle holds to is true in theology; here he is invoked simply to defend a general notion of first principles—and in this case, first principles of theology to which Aristotle did not hold.

In August 1535, one month after issuing this *Little Book*, the Sorbonne took up Melanchthon's articles. While the *Little Book* warned about the grave dangers of conversation with heretics, it did not prevent the Sorbonne from meeting in order to consider Melanchthon's twelve articles, presumably because this was a conversation about a heretic rather than with a heretic. Unsurprisingly, the Sorbonne replies to Melanchthon's articles by appealing to ecclesial authority to uphold practices of the medieval Roman church. The Sorbonne appeals to ecclesial authority to defend traditional practices such as fasting, invocation of the saints, and masses for the dead. The Sorbonne also asserts ecclesial authority

²³ Monter, *Judging the French Reformation*, 69–72; Farge, *Orthodoxy*, 150–155; Taylor, *Heresy and Orthodoxy*, 60–63; Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church*, 59–60.

²⁴ In Latin, the title of the work is *Codicillus quo ostenditur non esse disputandum cum Haereticis*. D'Argentré, *Collectio*, 384–386.

²⁵ D'Argentré, *Collectio*, 384–386.

to uphold the theological points undergirding these practices, such as the necessity of good works for salvation and the freedom of the will.²⁶ At a deep level, these instructions view morality in the same light as Aristotle: one becomes good by doing good, whether the discussion is of earthly or heavenly matters. Yet, as in previous works, the Sorbonne does not focus the conversation on the question of philosophy and theology; it asserts ecclesial authority to defend traditional church practices as aids to doing good toward one's salvation. This would be the Sorbonne's final word in response to Wittenberg and Protestant theology before Luther named them as the target of a christological disputation four years later.

V. Luther's Systematic Interest in Christology

Following the Sorbonne's response to Melanchthon's articles, the published records of the Sorbonne include no further documents against Luther or the Lutherans prior to Luther's 1539 disputation. Why then does Luther target the Sorbonne in 1539, four years after the Sorbonne's response to Melanchthon? And why frame the disputation as a rejection of the Sorbonne's assertion that the same thing is true in philosophy and theology when it seems that the Sorbonne never published such an assertion at the time of Luther? And why does Luther focus on Christology, an issue that rarely appears in the Sorbonne's publications against Luther? The Sorbonne frames the Luther question as a question of church authority upholding church practices such as fasting, invocation of the saints, and the like; but Luther wants to talk about Christology and philosophy in relation to theology.

Scholars reach various conclusions about why Luther names the Sorbonne. Stefan Streiff demonstrates that Luther uses the term "Sorbonne" to indicate various schools of scholastic thought in different works, pointing to a historical difficulty in identifying Luther's precise target in the christological disputation. Streiff concludes that Luther does not mean to pick out one particular scholastic school in this instance. Instead, Streiff concludes that by "Sorbonne" Luther means the theological perspective that argues for consonance between philosophy and theology, a move Streiff associates primarily with Thomism.²⁷ Streiff thinks that Luther's formulation "the same thing is true in theology and philosophy" captures the intention of theologians working in Paris between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.²⁸ Graham White finds the closest formula to the one that Luther cites in an Oxford condemnation of 1277, and argues that Luther conflates that judgment with writings of Parisian theologians in the sixteenth century. Moreover, White

²⁶ D'Argentré, *Collectio*, 397–400.

²⁷ Stefan Streiff, "Novis linguis loqui": *Martin Luthers Disputation über Joh 1, 14* "verbum caro factum est" aus dem Jahr 1539 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 86–92.

²⁸ Streiff, *Novis Linguis Loqui*, 80–82.

argues that Luther conflates the Oxford condemnation with a Paris condemnation of 1277, assigning the position to the Sorbonne.²⁹ In light of the publications of the Sorbonne against Luther and Protestants, it seems that White and Streiff are correct that in some way the Sorbonne is a reference to scholastic theology as a whole, or a predominant approach to theology among scholastic theologians typified by the Sorbonne faculty. Yet, even assuming Luther conflates the 1277 condemnations, this does not account for why Luther, in 1539, chooses to take up questions of philosophy, theology, and Christology in light of scholastic thought.

Streiff theorizes that the occasion for the disputation is an internal controversy among the faculty of the University of Wittenberg. As Melanchthon reintroduced the study of Aristotle at Wittenberg in the late 1530s, controversy arose over the doctrine of justification. In 1536 the Cordatus controversy broke out, in which Caspar Cruciger (aligned with Melanchthon) opposed Conrad Cordatus. The controversy centered on questions of repentance and good works.³⁰ Streiff focuses on the part of the controversy in which Cordatus objected to Melanchthon's application of philosophy in theology. The relationship between theology and philosophy had been debated at the University of Wittenberg since the beginning of the Reformation, and the Cordatus controversy saw the question newly raised in 1538. Streiff reads the disputation as Luther commenting on the philosophical question in an effort to clarify how the university faculty should understand the relationship between theology and philosophy.³¹ Streiff's theory is one possibility of why Luther engages with philosophy and theology, but leaves open the question of why Luther engages with Christology. Whether or not the Cordatus controversy plays into Luther's choice of Christology as the topic for this disputation, what is clear is that Luther thinks that the doctrine of the person of Christ deserves careful attention. And, whatever was going on internally in the university, it seems clear that Luther wanted to address Roman theology in some way by directing the disputation against the Sorbonne.

²⁹ Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist: A Study of the Logical Methods Used in Martin Luther's Disputations in Light of Their Medieval Background* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1994), 367–376.

³⁰ Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church*, 148–152.

³¹ Streiff concludes that Luther argues against Melanchthon and Cruciger, asserting that philosophy has no role to play in theology. Melanchthon holds that Aristotle's philosophy, particularly his thought on grammar, is useful for theology. While Luther and Melanchthon agree that philosophy and theology are each their own distinct art and ought to be distinguished, the point of contention is whether philosophy is an aid to theology. Melanchthon thinks it is; Luther thinks it is not. However, the disputation makes use of philosophical tools to explicate Christ's person, calling into question that Luther's goal is to eliminate philosophy from theology. Streiff, *Novis Linguis Loqui*, 35–40.

The question of why Luther identifies the Sorbonne as the target of this disputation raises a significant challenge to the paradigm of the reactionary Luther. There is no obvious, immediate controversy with the Sorbonne to which Luther is responding. He does not, as he often does, go point by point through an opponent's document.³² But if we set aside the paradigm that Luther is reactionary and unsystematic for a moment, perhaps we may see a different side to Luther's thought and work—one that shows evidence of a systematic approach to theology. Like White and Streiff, I suggest that Luther names the Sorbonne as a kind of stand-in for Roman theologians, much like the scholastics name Aristotle (to their mind, the premier philosopher) to refer to philosophy in general. Luther, I wish to suggest, uses the disputation to point to the important doctrine of the person of Christ, and that importance suggests a systematic approach to theology.

After diagnosing the problem, Luther turns to Christology to establish the proper basis for theology, both to work from the doctrine of Christ to other theological questions and to establish the proper relationship between theology and philosophy through engagement with Christology. According to this interpretation, the disputation shows that Luther, even the late Luther, was capable of doing more than reacting to opponents with increasingly bitter polemics. The disputation shows evidence of a theological mind probing underneath surface issues to work out a useful order to addressing theological questions. Luther's strategy is to establish a proper Christology that illustrates and utilizes the correct relationship between theology and philosophy, and from the resulting christological foundation address the proper understanding of justification. Luther's understanding of Christ's person and work, in turn, provides the theological background to assess practices like fasting, the invocation of the saints, and other debated ecclesial practices. That strategy is apparent as Luther produces works as background studies for a church council in the late 1530s.

Luther was engaged in preparations for a proposed council when he organized the 1539 christological disputation. Luther adopted a certain ambivalence toward the council, as evident in his preface to the Smalcald Articles. While doubtful that a council would convene, and convinced that any council would be biased and condemn the Lutherans, Luther did make preparations in case one should convene and give the Lutherans opportunity to confess their faith. One instance of this preparation is the Smalcald Articles; another is *On the Councils and the Church*. Luther published the latter work in March 1539, two months after the disputation against the Sorbonne. Like the January 1539 disputation, Christology is a central

³² For instance, he takes this reactionary approach against the theology faculty at Louvain in 1545. *Against the Thirty-Five Articles of the Louvain Theologians* (1545), WA 54:415–443; AE 34:339–360.

focus of *On the Councils and the Church*.³³ In all likelihood Luther was drafting *On the Councils and the Church* at the time of the disputation, and both works place Christology as a central question for theological discourse as Rome made halting progress toward a council.

Since there is no obvious occasion for Luther to address Christology and the Sorbonne in 1539, the 1539 disputation demonstrates that the late Luther is capable of and interested in a systematic approach to theology. Luther is not just reacting to and rejecting opposing positions in the terms laid out by his opponents, but focuses on a doctrine of his choosing. Luther works to build up future theologians as he organizes the disputation in a way to advance the education of the theology students at Wittenberg.³⁴ Without immediate provocation, and without responding to a position taken against him, Luther frames a theological debate in a way that places Christology at the center of the theological conversation. As he thinks of what the students in Wittenberg will need in their theological careers, Luther turns to Christology as an essential point of their training and preparations, particularly in this case the person of Christ. The disputation rounds out the character of the late Luther by displaying a dimension to his personality and work extending beyond reaction and polemics. While Luther is heavily engaged in reactionary polemics during the later years of his life, he is also engaged in doctrinal theological work in the expectation that future generations will continue the work of theology.

By the later years of Luther's life, the theological conversations in Wittenberg and in Paris were largely internal. Curiously, the theology faculty in both cities discussed the other in January 1539. While Luther held a disputation with Wittenberg professors and students about the theology of the Sorbonne, the Sorbonne held a disputation on the works of Melancthon.³⁵ Yet the two sides were not talking to each other, and their internal conversations began with different doctrinal points. Luther identified Christology as a central and critical point of doctrine for future theologians. The Sorbonne persisted in starting with ecclesial authority, as again in 1542 the Sorbonne put ecclesial authority forward as the starting point of theology. From that starting point, they (again) oriented essential articles of belief to center around church practices designed to assist the Christian to gain merit through confession, invocation of the saints, fasting, and other practices.³⁶ That is, in 1542 the Sorbonne identified the central issues of theology as the very ones they had asserted in response to Luther and Protestant theology

³³ Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church*, 188–198.

³⁴ *Disputation on "The Word Was Made Flesh"* (1539), WA 39/2:6.5–8.8, relation A; AE 38:242–244.

³⁵ D'Argentré, *Collectio*, Index X.

³⁶ D'Argentré, *Collectio*, 413–415.

for the previous twenty years. The Roman insistence of beginning with ecclesial authority at a discussion between Lutheran and Roman theologians at Hagenau in 1540 turned the meeting down a blind alley. Subsequent meetings in Worms and Regensburg likewise proved fruitless.³⁷

VI. Christology as Basis of Theology

Once Luther's *Disputation concerning the Passage "The Word Was Made Flesh"* is freed from the paradigm of a reactionary work responding to immediate provocation, it opens a window to the positive work of Luther's late efforts to make Christology a central point of theology. While not writing a full-fledged systematic theology, Luther locates Christology as the key beginning point to address theological questions, outlining the framework for a systematic approach to theology. Luther uses Christology in a variety of writings to reframe questions with Christology as a basis of theology. Besides his christological disputations in 1539 and 1540,³⁸ Luther makes Christology a central component of the Smalcald Articles in 1537, *On the Councils and the Church* in 1539,³⁹ an *Enarratio* of Isaiah 52–53 in 1544,⁴⁰ and other late works.⁴¹ Setting aside the paradigm of Luther as reactionary, it quickly becomes apparent that these works are not limited to reaction. When Luther does react to opponents in these works, he frequently advances theological arguments beyond harsh polemics to the explication of a Christology fit to undergird his understanding of justification, faith, and Christian life. That is, Luther outlines a certain strand of systematic thought. Luther's christological works offer a glimpse into Luther's mind when he is not engaged in questions raised by others, but free to frame the conversation himself. Read in this light, these late works allow us to see the groundwork for a systematic approach to theology in the late Luther.

In his late writings, Luther puts forth Christology as a basis of theology. By basis, I mean first that Christology is a foundational point of doctrine from which other questions are framed and answered, so that the proper definition of Christ and his work leads to a proper understanding of justification, faith, and other doctrines. Second, Christology functions as a diagnostic tool for theological positions,

³⁷ Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church*, 215–228.

³⁸ Luther in 1540 organizes a *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ*, WA 39/2:97–121.

³⁹ WA 50:509–653; AE 41:3–178.

⁴⁰ WA 40/3:683–746.

⁴¹ Mark Edwards comments that Luther's *On the Councils and the Church* is limited in polemics, and instead builds a historical and logical argument in its main section. I am interested in examining how Christology forms a foundational part of that argument. Mark Edwards, *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531–1546* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 93.

upholding those that are in agreement with Christ's person and work and rejecting those that go against the articles of Christology. Further, Christology is a basis in that it demonstrates the proper relationship between theology and philosophy. That relationship and the tools useful for describing the person of Christ function to show how Luther gives an account of paradoxical theological doctrines. By charting a distinction between theology and philosophy, Luther insists that theology must have room for truths that are not found in the natural world. In particular, Luther sees in Christ's person an example of a unique type of union, a kind of union that Luther uses as a model to articulate Christian life and the relationship between faith and works.⁴² The person of Christ in this way demonstrates the kind of linguistic and logical tools needed to articulate theological truths correctly. By bringing the christological question to the forefront, Luther seeks to begin theological conversations with Christ and then work from his person and work to other theological questions and doctrines.

Luther frequently identifies Christology as the chief article of the Christian faith, pointing to Christology as a basis and doctrinal starting point for theology. He points to three components essential to Christology: one must hold that Christ is God, that Christ is man, and that Christ died and rose for us. Luther writes that one who holds these points correctly remains in the Christian faith, while one who misses any one of these points loses all of them.⁴³ As Luther develops the logic, he works out how and why this is so. If one denies that Christ is either God or man, then he holds only to a partial, counterfeit Jesus, and not the true, whole, incarnate Son of God. If one holds that Christ is God and man but denies that he has died for us, then there is no profit in seeing Christ as God and man, and one loses the whole point of the faith.⁴⁴

A Christian must hold that Christ is both God and man, for only as man could Christ give himself for our sins, while only as God could Christ grant victory

⁴² Johann Anselm Steiger, "Die communicatio idiomatum als Achse und Motor der Theologie Luthers. Der ›fröhliche Wechsel‹ als hermeneutischer Schlüssel zu Abendmahlslehre, Anthropologie, Seelsorge, Naturtheologie, Rhetorik und Humor," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 38.1 (1996): 1–28.

⁴³ *The Three Symbols* (1538), WA 50:266.32–269.20; AE 34:207–210.

⁴⁴ In this way, Luther can say, on the one hand, that he agrees with the Roman Catholics on the articles of the divine majesty (SA I), and yet assert that they have lost Christ by incorrectly describing his work. The christological disputation thus sets to correct the record by working out the proper definition of theology and philosophy that gives space for Christ to make a person "good" by his death and resurrection. Without this work of Christ, there is no gain to be had from correctly identifying Christ as God and man. Scholastic construals of Christ that join theology and philosophy err on that point, by so joining philosophy and theology that there is no room for a person to be counted good apart from doing good.

over sin, death, the devil, and hell, or give peace and forgiveness.⁴⁵ This Christ (God and man united in one person) died for us, Luther says, drawing the distinction that Christ gave himself for our sins, not for our merits or works, and concluding that since Christ died for our sins there is no room for human works to merit salvation.⁴⁶ That is, the Christ who gives himself for human sin does not die to enable Christians to merit heaven by their works. Instead, Christ by his work has merited and won heaven for Christians by taking away their sin. This Christ is the entry point into theology for Luther.

Luther argues that the right Christology will bring with it all other doctrines. He claims that when one holds that Christ is God and man and has died and risen for us, all the other articles of faith fall into place.⁴⁷ Luther follows this order as he works from Christology to other doctrines. For instance, the definition of Christ as God and man united in one person who gave himself for our sins frames the doctrine of justification.⁴⁸ Justification, as Luther defines it in the 1535 Galatians lectures, is Christ saving a person. In this way, Luther works from the definition of Christ's person and work to define what justification is. Christology is also foundational for the proper understanding of faith, which justifies because it lays hold of the entire person of Christ, who gave himself for us.⁴⁹ In this way, Luther uses Christology to determine what gives faith its saving power. Luther also ties the person of Christ to the correct understanding of the bread consecrated in the Sacrament. As the fullness of divinity is one with the finite body of Christ, so the body of Christ is in the finite bread. That is, Christology undergirds Luther's understanding of the presence of Christ's body in the Sacrament of the Altar.⁵⁰ These examples show how Luther works from a correct understanding of Christ to other doctrines such as justification, faith, and sacramental presence. The examples illustrate how Christology functions as the chief article of the faith, an entry point

⁴⁵ For the latter, see the beginning of the Galatians lectures, where Luther sees such things as signs of divinity and argues that it would be sacrilegious to ascribe them to Christ were he not God. *Galatians* (1531/1535), WA 40/1:80.25–81.13; AE 26:31.

⁴⁶ *Galatians* (1531/1535), WA 40/1:78.14–94.12; AE 26:29–39. Luther begins the Galatians lectures with this kind of definition of Christ and derives justification from it. Early in the lectures, Luther puts forth Christ as the starting point of religion. If one is to have assurance of salvation, he must begin with Christ: God and man who gave himself for our sins. From this definition of Christ follows justification.

⁴⁷ *Three Symbols* (1538), WA 50:266.32–269.20; AE 34:207–210.

⁴⁸ *Galatians* (1531/1535), WA 40/1:232.21–242.14; AE 26:132–138. See also the *Disputation on Justification* (1536), WA 39/1:82–126; AE 34:147–196.

⁴⁹ *Galatians* (1531/1535), WA 40/1:163.28–164.30; AE 26:88.

⁵⁰ *Letter to Graf Franz Réway* (October 1, 1538), WA Br 8:296–298. Luther uses the classic christological illustration of the fire and the iron, but applies it to the body and the bread in the Sacrament of the Altar rather than the person of Christ.

for the theologian to do his work. Identifying Christology as the entry point suggests an outline for a systematic approach to theology.

Luther also uses Christology to diagnose and refute opposing theologies. For instance, he identifies a deficient Christology as a fundamental error in Roman theology. Luther argues that theologians under the papacy, while holding that Christ is God and man, deny that he died and rose for us.⁵¹ What Luther means by denying that Christ died and rose for us is that Roman theologians do not think Christ's death and resurrection was sufficient for man's salvation. As Roman theologians hold that people must contribute to their own salvation by their works, their soteriology reveals a deficient Christology that fails to capture the fullness of Christ's death and resurrection for us. Similarly, Luther uses Christology to criticize the scholastic notion of faith informed by love. The object of faith is Christ, God and man in one person, and this Christ gives his righteousness to the believer through faith.⁵² Christ understood in this sense leaves no space for a love that forms faith and then brings righteousness. Such a construal of informed faith displaces Christ in favor of love, ascribing merit to the work of people and taking that merit away from Christ and his work.

At this precise point, one of the reasons for Luther's diagnosis about philosophy becomes clear. The Sorbonne held that Aristotle's ethics were fundamentally correct: a person becomes good by doing good. Luther disagrees. In theology, a person is counted as good through faith in Christ, and only then is able to do good works. In order to make that case for justification by faith, Luther needs to carve out space for theology to have a different view than Aristotle about how a person becomes good.

Luther's use of Christology to reject contrary theological views is typically expressed by Luther's claim that his opponent has lost Christ. Luther writes that one who holds to works in justification loses Christ, as Peter did when he reverted to the observation of ceremonial laws.⁵³ Like Peter, the papacy's problem is contempt of Christ. By despising the idea that Christ gave himself for our sins, the papacy opened the door to justification by the law. Not only does this falsely represent justification, it also robs Christ of his glory as that glory is ascribed to human works.⁵⁴ Where human works are glorified at the expense of Christ's glory, theologians make Christ useless and even abolish him.⁵⁵ In Luther's thought, this denial of Christ continues in forms of worship designed to gain merit for the

⁵¹ *Three Symbols* (1538), WA 50:266.32–269.20; AE 34:207–210.

⁵² *Galatians* (1531/1535), WA 40/1:225.15–229.35; AE 26:127–130.

⁵³ *Galatians* (1531/1535), WA 40/1:202.12–30; AE 26:112.

⁵⁴ *Galatians* (1531/1535), WA 40/1:244.29–253.21; AE 26:140–145.

⁵⁵ *Galatians* (1531/1535), WA 40/1:436.24–437.17; AE 26:279–280.

worshiper to apply to his own salvation.⁵⁶ Note then that Luther approaches questions of church practice through Christology rather than beginning with an ecclesial authority that has authorized such practices. These arguments against opponents demonstrate the centrality of Christology in Luther's theology. Not only do christological errors lead to other theological mistakes, but theological mistakes also result in the loss of Christ. When Luther issues this kind of diagnostic, he argues that theologians go wrong when they posit doctrines without regard to Christ's person and work—again, suggesting a systematic approach to theology.

A third way in which Christology serves as a basis of theology is by showing the kind of logic and language needed to understand complex, paradoxical unities that define Christian life and justification. The person of Christ shows that a union of two natures in one person is possible, and that by this union a single person can bear opposing attributes. Among other attributes, Luther argues that in one person Christ bears the sin of the world and yet eternal righteousness is also in him.⁵⁷ As Christ bears these seemingly contradictory attributes by virtue of his two natures, so also the Christian bears them through faith in Christ. Faith unites the believer to Christ so that the believer and Christ are, Luther says, one person. In this person, opposing attributes stand: sinner and saint at the same time. Furthermore, Luther argues, Christ works in the believer by virtue of this union.⁵⁸ Luther's language and illustrations show that Christology is the model for this construal of faith and life. Luther aligns the sinner and Christ with the two natures of Christ. As Christ's natures each bear attributes communicated to the person of Christ by virtue of the personal union, so also the believer and Christ, united as a single person by faith, communicate attributes to a single person. And, as the person of Christ works according to his two natures, so the Christian acts according to Christ, who works in him, to do good works. I take this to mean that Christology serves as a model for Luther to describe the joyful exchange of sin and righteousness between Christ and the sinner and to account for Christ's work in the believer to do good works.

The person of Christ also serves as the logical basis for the proper relationship between faith and works. Luther argues that Scripture speaks sometimes of Christ as God, and at other times of the incarnate Christ. In the same way, Scripture speaks sometimes of faith by itself, and sometimes of an "incarnate" faith, by which Luther means faith joined to works that the believer does and made evident by those works. Luther's concept of an "incarnate faith" allows him to interpret passages that promise rewards to the one who does the law as promises to reward the believer,

⁵⁶ *Galatians* (1531/1535), WA 40/1:263.33–265.28; AE 26:153–154.

⁵⁷ *Galatians* (1531/1535), WA 40/1:438.32–439.15; AE 26:280–281.

⁵⁸ *Galatians* (1531/1535), WA 40/1:283.18–288.16; AE 26:167–170.

for faith is required for anyone to do the law.⁵⁹ In Luther's analysis following a christological model, promises made to reward works are really God's gracious promises to bless the one whose faith is made evident in the works he does—in the end, it is the believer's faith rather than his deeds that is being rewarded. While faith is not the law, the one with faith does the law, so that there is a concrete unity to doing and believing grounded in the single person doing both. The unity of faith and works does not erase distinctions between them, even as the personal union of Christ does not erase the distinctions between Christ's two natures.⁶⁰ But the unity does enable Luther to claim that promises to reward the one who works are promises to reward the one who believes, and ascribe the cause of the reward to faith rather than works. What interests me here is not so much the question of good works and rewards, but how Luther turns to Christology and specifically the incarnation as a model for a complex unity in which different things are inseparably united yet retain critical distinctions. He applies that model to the relationship between faith and works, holding them to be inseparable and yet retain their own distinctive characteristics even as the two natures of Christ do.

Holding this kind of unity with distinction requires suitable linguistic, logical, and metaphysical tools. Luther uses the christological disputations to explicate the kind of linguistic and logical tools necessary to hold all three of the central claims of Christology Luther identifies as essential: Christ is God, Christ is man, Christ died and rose for us. In his analysis of the kind of language and logic underlying these claims, Luther sees the need for a distinction between theology and philosophy. Luther works in his christological disputations with nominalist sources and using nominalist tools, so that his argument is a selective rejection of certain points of scholastic theology constructed using other tools derived from scholastic theology. The disputations, read as exercises in systematic theology, work out the details of how Christ's person can best be described in theology.

VII. Conclusion

Setting aside basic axioms that guide Luther studies can offer fresh insights into Luther's thought. Luther places Christology as the basis of theology, and by doing this suggests the outline for a systematic approach to theology. A "systematic approach" here means a proper order to theological questions that begins with Christ's person and work, a christological diagnosis of theological problems, and a consistency in that Luther uses the language and logic arising out of Christology to hold paradoxical doctrines together. Christology illustrates the

⁵⁹ *Galatians* (1531/1535), WA 40/1:414.13–416.17; AE 26:264–265.

⁶⁰ *Galatians* (1531/1535), WA 40/1:426.22–427.24; AE 26:272–273.

correct relation between philosophy and theology that allows the theologian to assert all that Scripture does of Christ without producing absurd or heretical claims. And working out the proper relation of theology and philosophy gives the theologian tools to articulate other doctrines like the relationship of the believer to Christ, good works and their place in the Christian life, and the Christian as saint and sinner. While Luther's Christology and its relation to other doctrines is not a fully developed systematic text, there is enough order in Luther's thought to suggest the outline for a systematic approach to theology.

By the later years of Luther's life, much had transpired since the Leipzig Debate. Luther in his later years explicated the person of Christ more fully than he had in his youth. That attention to the person of Christ shows an interest in doctrinal theology in Luther, an interest that comes to light especially when Luther is not responding directly to opponents, but working to train young theologians. Luther's suggestion that Christology is a good doctrinal starting point for theology is one that we can take up in diverse theological contexts. Christology can function as the basis of our theology, offering us a solid starting point for pastoral care and for addressing theological questions of all kinds, a diagnostic tool for assessing theological positions, and an illustration of the kinds of distinctions and nuances that allow for a proper construal of good works, the Christian life, and other doctrines.



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Double Truth? Daniel Hofmann and the Discussion on the Relation of Theology and Philosophy

Roland F. Ziegler

I. Introduction

“Lutheranism and philosophy” is a topic full of tensions. On one hand, there is Luther and his derogatory statements on Aristotle and reason in general. On the other hand, there is not only a history of Aristotelian philosophy in the seventeenth century, but also a philosopher like Hegel who saw himself as a Lutheran philosopher. Is there a Lutheran position on philosophy? Is there a Lutheran approach to philosophy? Historically, there were different positions and approaches. Unlike Roman Catholicism which wedded itself for a long time to Thomistic Aristotelianism, Lutheranism did not make such a judgment. But for a time, Lutherans did philosophize as Aristotelians, a move that seemed quite astonishing in view of Luther’s negative comments on Aristotle and the use of philosophy in theology. Around 1600, there was a change first in the philosophy departments, then also in the departments of theology. Aristotle and Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) were studied, and Aristotelian metaphysics became part of the normative school philosophy. Even before 1600, the Aristotelian method became also the method in theology, and the scheme of the four causes, of form and matter, and Aristotelian logic were used frequently by the Lutheran dogmaticians.¹

In this era of change, there was a controversy at the University of Helmstedt between Daniel Hofmann (1538–1611) and Cornelius Martini (1568–1621), one of the foremost early Aristotelians among Lutheran philosophers. In this paper, I am going to describe Hofmann’s position, then ask if his claim to follow Luther is justified. I will describe the reaction of later Lutheran theologians to Hofmann’s

¹ For philosophy at Lutheran universities, see Walter Sparr, “Die Schulphilosophie in den lutherischen Territorien,” *Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts, vol. 4: Das Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation. Nord- und Ostmitteleuropa* (Basel: Schwabe, 2001), 291–606. For the use of Aristotelianism in Lutheran theology, see E. Weber, *Der Einfluss der protestantischen Schulphilosophie auf die orthodox-lutherische Dogmatik* (Leipzig: A. Deichert’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung Nachf. [Georg Böhme], 1908); Walter Sparr, *Wiederkehr der Metaphysik: Die ontologische Frage in der lutherischen Theologie des frühen 17. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1976); Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 1 (St. Louis, London: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 128–140.

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position, using Jacob Martini and Abraham Calov as examples of Hofmann's position.²

II. The Historical Setting

Daniel Hofmann was a professor at the University of Helmstedt, founded in 1576 by Duke Julius of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel (1528–1589). Duke Julius did not sign the Formula of Concord (FC), and thus the university became an example of a Lutheran church without the Formula of Concord.³ This did not mean that Hofmann was less opposed to Reformed theology. He was involved in extensive polemics with Johannes Piscator (1546–1625) and Rudolph Goclenius (1547–1628).⁴ In this debate, the relationship between philosophy and theology was already a topic. Against Goclenius, Hofmann stated that God cannot be subsumed with other things under a genus and therefore logic does not apply in the same way to God as it does to his creation.⁵ Hofmann was also involved in polemics against Jacob Andreae and Aegidius Hunnius concerning Christology. The doctrine of the omnipresence of the human nature was the theological reason Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel did not sign the Formula of Concord. Hofmann was first a professor of philosophy at Helmstedt from 1576–1578, lecturing on Aristotelian ethics and dialectics (logic). The students even complained: “He philosophizes too much, it's all philosophy with him.”⁶

Cornelius Martini, one of the foremost philosophers of any Lutheran university, and often credited with the revival of metaphysics and the shift from Melancthon and Petrus Ramus (1515–1572) to Aristotle, taught at Helmstedt in the philosophical department and was thus a colleague of Hofmann.⁷ The controversy associated with Hofmann's name takes place at the time and the place of a major philosophical shift among Lutherans. This philosophical shift had also theological consequences. With the revival of metaphysics as ontology (dealing with being *as* being, *ens qua ens*), it becomes a fundamental discipline also

² For the background, cf. Markus Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft: Theologie, Philosophie und gelehrte Konflikte am Beispiel des Helmstedter Hofmannstreits und seiner Wirkungen auf das Luthertum um 1600* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004).

³ The other German universities that were in Lutheran territories that did not sign the FC were Altdorf (Imperial City of Nürnberg) and Königsberg (Duchy of Prussia).

⁴ Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*, 242.

⁵ Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*, 243.

⁶ Ernst Schlee, *Der Streit des Daniel Hofmanns über das Verhältnis der Philosophie zur Theologie* (Marburg: N. G. Elwertsche Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1862), 4, quoting Ernst Ludwig Theodor Henke, *Georg Calixtus und seine Zeit*, vol. 1 (Halle: Buchh. des Waisenhauses, 1853), 102.

⁷ “Martini gilt als deren eigentlicher Neubegründer auf protestantischem Boden.” Walter Sparr, “Die Schulphilosophie in den lutherischen Territorien,” 561.

for theology. Additionally, Martini claimed that syllogistic argumentation is universally valid, even in theology.⁸

III. Double Truth

The literary beginning of the debate on the use of reason in theology and thus the relationship between theology and philosophy is Hofmann's preface to the doctoral disputation of Caspar Pfaffrad (1562–1622) in 1598.⁹ The disputation's theses focus on God and the person and office of Christ. Hofmann wants to maintain Luther's position, a position opposed to the *feces scholasticae* ("scholastic dregs") and those who peddle the word of God (2 Cor 2:17).

In the preface, Hofmann sees the attack of Satan of his time in the domination of carnal reason and wisdom over the doctrine of faith. But such a reliance leads to error, as Colossians 2:8 shows, and leads to factions. Thus, the early church was right in saying that the philosophers are the patriarchs of the heretics.¹⁰ Today, so Hofmann, we see that many theologians refashion the articles of faith according to carnal wisdom and interpret the Scriptures according to philosophy. Hofmann, on the other hand, teaches his students that Luther's theology is superior, because he drove out the leaven of the scholastics and draws only from Scripture.¹¹

In thesis 12, philosophy is lauded *in its area*, but then in thesis 13 the opposition between philosophy and theology is stated. In thesis 15, Hofmann takes up Luther's rejection of the identity of truth in philosophy and theology, because such an identity would mean that the articles of faith would be judged by reason. This contradicts 2 Corinthians 10:15.¹² Hofmann thinks that Calvinists are not able to understand the specific language of the words of institution as "mystical or unusual

⁸ Sparn, "Die Schulphilosophie in den lutherischen Territorien," 560. A syllogism is a form of argument that deduces a conclusion based on two premises. For example: All A is B, but all B is C, therefore all A is C.

⁹ Daniel Hofmann, *Propositiones de deo, et Christi tum persona tum officio* (Helmstedt: haeredes Iacobi Lucij, 1598).

¹⁰ "Quantò verò magis excolitur ratio humana philosophicis studiis, tantò armatior prodit, & quò seipsam amat impensius, eò Theologiam inuadit atrocius, & errores pingit speciosius. Unde Paulus ad Coloss. 2 Philosophiam depraedantem discipulos Apostolorum agnouit, & ad Gal. 5. inter opera carnis reiecti haereses, quod primitiua Ecclesia per experientiam edocta sic explicauit: Philosophos esse haereticorum patriarchas." Hofmann, *Propositiones*, fol. A2r.

¹¹ Hofmann, *Propositiones*, fol. A2v.

¹² Thesis 15 states: "Dominus Lutherus tum erudite tum piè scripsit: Sorbona mater errorum pessimè definiuit, idem esse verum in philosophia & Theologia, impieque damnauit eos qui contrarium disputauerint. *Nam hac sentential abominabilis* docuit captiuare articulos fidei, sub iudicium rationis humanae. Hoc erat aliud nihil quàm coelom & terram includere in suo centro aut grano milij. Cùm contra Paulus 2 Cor. 10. Ver. 5 doceat, captiuandum esse omnem intellectum (πάν τὸ νοῦμα) haud dubiè & philosophiam in obsequium Christi. Haec scitè et sanctè Lutherus." Hofmann, *Propositiones*, fol. B2v.

pronouncements” (*ennunciaciones mysticas seu inusitatas*) because of their use of philosophy. This leads them to reduce the words of institution to tropes.¹³ Therefore, Luther is right, that logic and philosophy need to stay in their sphere, and the kingdom of faith has a new language of its own.¹⁴

This independence from philosophy means also that language about God is neither univocal, as Duns Scotus said, nor is it analogical, as Aquinas said, because God and the creatures are not of the same nature and essence, and there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite. Rather, proper names of God are incommunicable to creatures, and anything that is said properly about creatures is applied only metaphorically to God, as Isaiah 42:8 shows.¹⁵

IV. The Disputation *Pro duplici veritate Lutheri a philosophis impugnata*

Hofmann is most famous or infamous for his defense of double truth that he developed at length in the disputation “In favor of Luther’s double truth, which was attacked by the philosophers,” published in Magdeburg in 1600.¹⁶

The disputation starts with the “occasion for the dispute,” which is the fifteenth thesis of the disputation of Pfaffrad. Hofmann claims Luther’s disputation on John 1:14 of 1539¹⁷ for his position and makes a table contrasting the opinion of the Sorbonne and of Luther. Luther’s argument is that the position of the Sorbonne puts the articles of faith under the judgment of reason, whereas Paul teaches that the mind has to be held captive to Christ (2 Cor 10:5), and that means that philosophy has to be in submission to theology. He contrasts this with the position of philosophers who follow Johann Caselius (1533–1613), who count this saying of Luther among the shameful things (*ad pudenda*) that he said.¹⁸

Hofmann starts with Psalm 116:11: Every man is a liar, therefore no man is truthful. This position is further corroborated with Psalm 62:9. All men lack the

¹³ “contententes, quod enunciationes mysticas seu inusitatas, oporteat per tropum reduci ad Logicas.” Hofmann, *Propositiones*, fol. B2v, thesis 18.

¹⁴ Hofmann, *Propositiones*, fol. B3r, thesis 20.

¹⁵ Hofmann, *Propositiones*, fol. B3v, theses 26 and 27.

¹⁶ Daniel Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate Lutheri a philosophis impugnata, & ad pudendorum locum ablegatâ* (Magdeburg: Andreas Dunckerus, 1600). On the topic of double truth, see L. Hödl, “Doppelte Wahrheit,” *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 2 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 286–287; Martin Pine, “Double Truth,” *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973), 31–37.

¹⁷ Martin Luther, *The Disputation concerning the Passage: “The Word Was Made Flesh”* (1539): vol. 38, pp. 235–277, in *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE.

¹⁸ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate Lutheri*, fol. A3r. Johann Caselius was a professor of philosophy at Helmstedt.

truth. Further, Psalm 5:9 says of the impious: “Truth is not in their mouth; their heart is vain.” Additionally, according to 1 John 2:4, an unbeliever is a liar and the truth is not in him. Therefore, when all men are called liars—when there is no truth in their mouth, heart, or throat—then also all truth according to the wisdom of the world and the philosophers is abolished.¹⁹ This means that in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle there is only a carnal truth, since they are not reborn and thus lack all spiritual truth. Furthermore, the devil, who is called the ruler of the world, rules also the non-regenerate philosophers. Christians and non-Christians do not have the same *intellectus* (“mind, understanding”). And although the unbeliever is very refined through philosophy, nevertheless he is totally swollen up with a wisdom that is stupidity before God.

But what about the fact that believer and unbeliever can have the same knowledge and (historical) faith? This is where his opponents sweat the most, trying to maintain the identity of thoughts (*noemata*) in believers and unbelievers, so that these thoughts do not need to be kept captive in the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:5). Hofmann proposes this syllogism:

Whatever wholly is lost through the fall of Adam has not stayed in any way. Truth, goodness, righteousness, holiness, which are certainly spiritual goods, have been lost through the fall of Adam. Therefore nothing of those goods has remained. The minor premise is proved in Ap II from Eph 4:24. This teaching was repeated in the *Corpus doctrinae Iulium* and the *Book of Concord*, on the sin of origin [FC I].²⁰

¹⁹ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. A3v.

²⁰ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. [A4]v. Here Hofmann quotes the Formula positively, even though he is against it in other respects. Hofmann might be thinking of FC SD I 11: “That not only is original sin (in human nature) such a complete lack of all good in spiritual, divine matters, but also that at the same time it replaces the lost image of God in the human being with a deep-seated, evil, horrible, bottomless, unfathomable, and indescribable corruption of the entire human nature and of all its powers, particularly of the highest, most important powers of the soul, in mind, heart, and will. Ever since the fall, the human being inherits an inborn evil way of doing things, an internal impurity of the heart, mind, and way of thinking from Adam. Following its highest powers and in light of reason, this fallen heart is by nature diametrically opposed to God and his highest commandments. Indeed, it is hostile to God, particularly in regard to divine spiritual matters,” *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 533–534. The *Corpus doctrinae Iulium* is a collection of confessions by Duke Julius for his duchy that contains the ecumenical creeds, the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, the catechisms of Luther, the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, a treatise by Urbanus Rhegius entitled “How one should speak prudently and without scandal of the most prominent articles of Christian doctrine” (Urbanus Rhegius, *Preaching the Reformation: The Homiletical Handbook of Urbanus Rhegius*, trans. Scott Hendrix, Reformation Texts with Translation 2 [Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003]), and finally a “Wohlgegründeter Bericht / von den fürnemsten Artikeln Christlicher Lere / so zu unsern zeiten streitig worden sein” by Martin Chemnitz (cf. J. A. O. Preus, *The Second Martin: The Life and*

Hofmann now goes on to prove with more syllogisms that whatever is called good in civil righteousness is not good in the same sense of the goodness that has been lost. In the same way, goodness, righteousness, and holiness in fallen man are called flesh (Gal 5:17); they are not the same as goodness, righteousness, and holiness in the children of God. Since those who lack the glory of God are the enemies of God, they do not partake in the spiritual goods (2 Cor 6:14–15). The consequence of all this is that there is no identity of the knowledge of God in pagans and Christians, or those who are outside of the grace of Christ and those who have been regenerated through the grace of God. This, so said Hofmann, is a necessary conclusion if one does not want to overthrow the foundation of Christianity. One, therefore, has to distinguish carefully between the truth of philosophy and the truth of theology, between carnal and spiritual truth, or between the pagans and the Christians, the non-regenerate and the regenerate, the unclean and the clean.²¹

Such a radical view of the effects of original sin means that Homer, Aristotle, and Horace are slaves of the devil. Contrary to this fact, Johannes Caselius makes them to be enlightened by the eternal divine mind, friends of God, and heroes elevated to the most Holy.²² But God who is the truth did send his Son, Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, and sends the Spirit of truth who will lead in all truth. Thus, the gifts that have been lost are restored without philosophy, even against reason. For the wisdom of reason holds this restitution of truth to be foolishness.²³

The opponents make the following argument against this: The true agrees with the true, so that God's truth does not contradict God's truth; but the true philosophy and theology is truth and something from God. Therefore, the true philosophy does not contradict the divine truth or the teachings of theologians.²⁴ Hofmann answers that the true does agree with the true, if one maintains the distinctions in regard to "true." The truth does not destroy truth, right again, if one looks at truths under the same aspect (*ratio*). But since the carnal truth is lie

Theology of Martin Chemnitz [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994], 165). Article 4 of this document deals with original sin and states that original sin is "a deep, evil corruption of nature and all powers of man, as the Smalcald Articles refer to it, where man is completely averted from God and his will and thoroughly warped towards everything which is contrary to the divine will, besides a contrarian disgust against God, in all his upper and lower powers in reason, heart, and will, so that every intention of the thoughts of his heart before regeneration by the Holy Spirit is only evil all the time" (*Corpus Doctrinae, Das ist Die Summa Form vnd fuerbilde der reinen Christlichen Lehre aus der heiligen Goettlichen Schrift der Propheten vnd Aposteln zusammen gezogen* [Wolfenbüttel: Conrad Horn, 1576], 70). The similarity of the language to FC SD I 11 is striking.

²¹ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. B1r.

²² "indigetes Sanctissimi." Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. B1v.

²³ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. B2r.

²⁴ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. B2v–B3r.

in spiritual things, it is necessary that it is destroyed by the spiritual truth, even if the carnal truth is loftiness (*sublimitas*), a fortification (*munitio*), reasoning (*ratiocinatio*).²⁵ The argument is, therefore, really with the minor premise: “But the true philosophy and theology is truth and something from God.” Even the perfect and pure philosophy—which is neither that of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, nor Pythagoras—is still to be distinguished from the wisdom of God. How great, he asks, is the distance between philosophy and theology, between a human wisdom, however perfect, and the divine wisdom? Beyond that, there is the question of the status of philosophical truth in those not reborn, who lack the spiritual truth, whose mind is totally unclean and crooked. The truth in the non-regenerate is not the pure truth but truth held down in injustice (Rom 1:18). The scholastics and Jesuits see clearer than his philosophical adversaries. For they exclude reason from sin and therefore think that there can be cooperation of the ability to reason and of philosophy with the Holy Spirit.²⁶ But what about the natural knowledge of God? Hofmann agrees that God manifests what can be known of God (though not God himself) in such a way that man is to conclude from the effect to the cause. What does the mind of the unregenerate do with the object that is put before him? The apostle says they “they hold down the truth in injustice” (Rom 1:18). Their mind and conscience (or consciousness) is polluted, and even those who say that they know, deny it by their deeds (Titus 1:15–16).²⁷ If truth is the conformity of the intellect with an object, then the philosophers have to consider that in the intellect of fallen men resides the denial of truth.

Hofmann does not deny that the unregenerate knows something. The unregenerate can know the truth of geometry, for example. But such knowledge is far removed from spiritual truth. It cannot be said that the unbeliever holds down the truth of Euclid in unrighteousness.²⁸ If this distinction between spiritual truth and the truth of geometry (for example) is not upheld, the danger of Pelagianism arises. This is the reason why, among Christians, philosophers who are not Pelagians are rare. Hofmann is, thus, not ready to concede that philosophy and the heavenly truth are the same. The second syllogism of Hofmann’s opponents goes like this:

If a true statement does not contradict another true statement, then those statements which oppose faith are not true according to philosophy. But true does not contradict true. Therefore the things that conflict with faith are not true according to philosophy.²⁹

²⁵ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. B3r.

²⁶ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. B3v.

²⁷ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. B4r.

²⁸ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. C1r.

²⁹ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. C1v.

Hofmann does believe that what is true in philosophy can contradict a theological statement that is true. Philosophy says that a body is in one place. Theology, though, contradicts and states that Christ wants his body to be in heaven and on earth when the Lord's Supper is celebrated. (Note that Hofmann does not believe in the ubiquity of Christ's body).³⁰ The theodicy problem is another example: If God exists, he is good. But he who permits bad things to happen to good people, and good things to happen to bad people, cannot be good. Therefore there is no God. "Therefore what is very true in reason is false in faith."³¹ Therefore, wherever Scripture contradicts the principles and conclusions of philosophy, there one ought to believe the word of God and not philosophy.³²

V. Hofmann's Consistency or Inconsistency

In the secondary literature, the question of Hofmann's consistency and clarity is raised. Did Hofmann denounce philosophy absolutely, or did he denounce philosophy only when it overstepped its limits? He asserts the latter, but he sounds quite often as if he asserted the former.³³

Friedrich mentions that here fundamental problems of Lutheran theology arise that are not solved by Hofmann. First, Hofmann does not reflect on the possibility that the regenerate uses his reason to develop a Christian philosophy. Second, with the identification of natural and carnal in the unregenerate, everything that fallen man does is carnal, and there is potentially no room for a legitimate ordering of worldly affairs by reason.³⁴ Third, there is the problem of the identity of man through regeneration: How can it be that man is completely changed and is still the same person? Does that not mean that something perdures? And if this is true, then this something is not changed by the new birth.

VI. Hofmann and Luther

Hofmann claimed Luther's disputation on John 1:14 (1539) for his position. But does he do so rightly? The opening theses of the disputation are as follows:

³⁰ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. C2r.

³¹ "Fortiter igitur verum in ratione, falsum est in fide." Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. C2v.

³² Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. C3r.

³³ Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*, 263: "Insgesamt jedenfalls schwankt Hofmanns Bewertung von *philosophia* bzw. *ratio* unglücklich zwischen ihrer Beschränkung auf anerkannte Ausübung in den *externa* und einem Verständnis von *philosophia* als Inbegriff sündigen Handelns des Menschen. Vielleicht wollte Hofmann tatsächlich nur die Scheidung von Vernunft und Glauben scharf betonen und keine Totalverwerfung der *ratio* aussprechen. Sollte dem so sein, so hat er diesen Standpunkt aber vielfach schlecht oder überhaupt nicht durchgehalten."

³⁴ Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*, 263–264.

1. Although the saying “Every truth is in agreement with every truth,” is to be upheld, nevertheless, what is true in one field of learning is not always true in other fields of learning. 2. In theology it is true that the Word was made flesh; in philosophy the statement is simply impossible and absurd. 3. The declaration, “God is man,” is not less, but even more contradictory than if you would say, “Man is an ass.” 4. The Sorbonne, the mother of errors, has very incorrectly defined that truth is the same in philosophy and theology. 5. And has impiously condemned those who have argued to the contrary. 6 For by making this abominable statement, it was taught that articles of faith are subject to the judgment of human reason. 7. This is nothing other than attempting to enclose heaven and earth in their own center or in a grain of millet. 8. Paul, on the contrary, teaches that all thought (no doubt this also includes philosophy) is to be taken captive to the obedience of Christ [II Cor. 10:5].³⁵

These theses certainly sound as if Luther subscribes to a strong theory of double truth.³⁶ On one hand, there is theology; on the other, philosophy, and contradictory statements can both be true at the same time in the same way. But the subsequent

³⁵ Martin Luther, *The Disputation Concerning the Passage: ‘The Word was Made Flesh’* (1539), AE 38:239; *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), vol. 39/2:3.1–4.7 (hereafter WA). “1. Etsi tenendum est, quod dicitur: Omne verum vero consonat, tamen idem non est verum in diversis professionibus. 2. In theologia verum est, verbum esse carnem factum, in philosophia simpliciter impossibile et absurdum. 3. Ne minus, imo magis disparata est praedicatio: Deus est homo, quam si dicas: Homo est asinus. 4. Sorbona, mater errorum, pessime definivit, idem esse verum in philosophia et theologia. 5. Impieque damnavit eos, qui contrarium disputaverunt. 6. Nam hac sententia abominabili docuit captivare articulos fidei sub iudicium rationis humanae. 7. Hoc erat aliud nihil, quam coelum et terram includere in suo centro aut grano milii. 8. Cum contra Paulus doceat, captivandum esse omnem intellectum (haud dubie et philosophiam) in obsequium Christi.”

³⁶ In connection with these theses, there is an extensive discussion on the historical question: When did the Sorbonne define that the same is true in philosophy and theology? There is no such definition explicitly; rather, Luther is summarizing the medieval theological position that expressed the Christian faith in philosophical categories and the rejection of any other methodology. “According to Luther’s opinion this programme . . . leads to a destructive captivity of the articles of the faith in human reason (th. 7) and is comparable with the impossible enterprise, to include heaven and earth in a grain of millet.” “Der Satz ‘dasselbe ist wahr in Philosophie und Theologie’ ist auf diesem Hintergrund nicht als Definition der Sorbonne zu verstehen. Es ist kaum vorstellbar, daß sie einen solchen Satz definiert hat. Vielmehr benennt Luther damit polemisch einen wichtigen Programmpunkt der sich seit dem 13. Jahrhundert durchsetzenden und bald vorherrschenden, thomistisch beeinflussten Schultheologie, die die theologische Überlieferung in philosophischen Kategorien ausdrückt und jedes anders geartete programmatische Vorgehen verurteilt (These 5). Luthers Ansicht nach führt dieses Programm, das er mit der Sorbonne als Exponentin dieses Vorgehens in Verbindung bringt, aber zu zerstörerischer Gefangenschaft der Glaubensartikel in der menschlichen Vernunft (These 7) und ist mit dem unmöglichen Unterfangen zu vergleichen, Himmel und Erde in ein Hirsekorn einzuschließen.” Stefan Streiff, “*Novis linguis loqui*.”: *Martin Luthers Disputation über Joh 1,14 ‘verbum caro factum est’ aus dem Jahr 1539* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 92.

theses show that Luther is not simply holding contradictory beliefs, and he explains what he means by the statement that what is true in philosophy is not true in theology:

25. Or this one: All flesh is a creature. The word is not a creature. Therefore, the Word is not flesh. 26. In these and similar statements the syllogism is a most excellent form, but it is useless with regard to the matter itself. 27. Therefore, in articles of faith one must have recourse to another dialectic and philosophy, which is called the word of God and faith. 28. Here we must take a stand and the arguments of philosophy drawing the opposite conclusions must be regarded as the vain croaking of frogs. 29. Nevertheless, we are also compelled to affirm with regard to other arts and sciences that the same thing is not true in all of them. 30. For it is false and an error in the area of weights to say that weights can be attached to a mathematical point or line. 31. It is false and an error in the area of measurement to measure a pint with the measure of a foot or an ell. 32. It is false and an error in the area of linear measurements to compare them with an ounce or a pound. 33. Yes, it is false and an error to say that a straight line and a curved one are proportionate to one another. 34. This applies also to those who square the circle, although they are not speaking wrongly when they call a straight and a curved line both a line. 35. Nevertheless, it is false if they want to make the straight line proportionate to the curved line. 36. Finally, something is true in one area of philosophy which is, nonetheless, false in another area of philosophy.³⁷

Luther does not simply affirm a double truth. Rather, as the theses show, he denies the omniscience of philosophy and maintains that philosophy is not a universal doctrine. To put it differently, the logic of theology has to be learned through the language of Scripture. The attempt to judge the truth of theological statements philosophically is as absurd as trying to measure volume by feet or trying to measure

³⁷ AE 38:241. WA 39/2:4.5–28: “25. Nec ista: Omnis caro est creatura. Verbum non est creatura. Ergo verbum non est caro. 26. In his et similibus Syllogismus est forma optima, sed nihil ad materiam. 27. Eundem ergo est ad aliam dialecticam et philosophiam in articulis fidei, quae vocatur verbum Dei et fides. 28. Hic sistendum est, et disputationes philosophiae contrarium concludentes pro ranarum coaxatione habendae. 29. Cogimur tamen etiam in aliis artibus negare, quod idem sit verum in omnibus. 30. Falsum est enim et error in genere ponderum, puncto et linea mathematica appendi posse pondera. 31. Falsum est et error in genere mensurarum, sextarium pedali vel ulnari mensura metiri. 32. Falsum est et error in genere linearum uncialis vel libralis comparatio. 33. Quin falsum et error est, quod linea recta et curva sint proportionales. 34. Et quadratores circuli, licet non falsum dicant, dum lineam rectam et curvam vocant utramque lineam. 35. Tamen hoc falsum est, si lineae rectae et curvae proportionem facere volunt. 36. Denique aliquid est verum in una parte philosophiae, quod tamen falsum est in alia parte philosophiae.”

geometrical figures in pounds.³⁸ Luther does not, therefore, claim for theology rules different than those in any other discipline in which statements are made.³⁹ Rather, Luther sees multiple areas of human life that function according to their own subject matter and whose criteria for truth are internal. The omniscience of reason is not denied as a special pleading for theology, but because the claim of the omniscience of reason is itself not reasonable.⁴⁰

Luther does not teach a double truth. What he teaches is that different areas of investigation have their own approach and that the truth of a proposition is dependent on its context and situation and cannot be simply universalized.⁴¹ For Luther, this is a *rational* statement. The problem of scholastic theology is thus not its rationalism, but its *irrationalism* because of its wrong concept of reason. Only by distinguishing the sphere of theology and the sphere of philosophy from each other can the integrity of theology be maintained.

³⁸ “Mehr können und wollen die Beispiele der disp. Joh 1:14 nicht sagen als dies: Die verschiedenen Gattungen sind inkommensurabel, sie haben ihre eigenen Voraussetzungen, die nicht in andere Gattungen übertragbar sind. Wird ein Hohlmaß mit einem Längenmaß gemessen, ist die Aussage falsch oder besser sinnlos (These 31). Ebenso ist der Vergleich von Linien mit Unzen oder Pfunden sinnlos (These 32).” Streiff, “*Novis linguis loqui*,” 100.

³⁹ “38. Thus, in particular liberal arts, or rather crafts, if you look them over, you will never discover that the same thing is true in all of them. 39. How much less it is possible for the same thing to be true in philosophy and theology, for the difference between them is infinitely greater than that between liberal arts and crafts” (AE 38:242). “39. Quanto minus potest idem esse verum in philosophia et theologia quarum distinctio in infinitum maior est, quam artium et operum. 40. Rectius ergo fecerimus, si dialectica seu philosophia in sua sphaera relictis discamus loqui novis linguis in regno fidei extra omnem sphaeram” (WA 39/2:5.31–34).

⁴⁰ “An den einzelnen Gattungen des Maßwesens läßt sich also evident darstellen, was als Unterscheidungskriterium zwischen Theologie und Philosophie nicht unmittelbar einleuchtet, dort aber der Ansicht Luthers nach ebenso gilt: Die einzelnen Gattungen sind inkommensurabel, begrenzte Sinnzusammenhänge eigener Art, deren Regeln eingehalten werden müssen, wenn sinnvolle Aussagen resultieren sollen. Die Übertragung von Kategorien einer Gattung in die andere führt zu Sinnlosigkeit. Die Inkommensurabilität der Sinnzusammenhängen besteht also darin, daß Kategorien nicht von dem einen in den anderen Zusammenhang übertragbar sind.” Streiff, “*Novis linguis loqui*” 101–102.

⁴¹ “Mit dem Nachweis der Inkommensurabilität von Sinnzusammenhängen wird klar, daß eine Aussage kontradiktorischen Characters als Funktion eines jeweiligen Sinnzusammenhanges verstanden werden kann und somit ihren kontradiktorischen Charakter verliert. Die Formel der doppelten Wahrheit büßt dort ihren Sinn ein, wo ein Widerspruch nicht mehr auf derselben Ebene vorliegt, das heißt wo das Herkommen eines Widerspruchs als aus einer andern Sphäre, einem andern Gebiet, Horizont oder Sinnzusammenhang stammend erklärt werden kann.” Streiff, “*Novis linguis loqui*,” 112.

VII. Later Lutheran Theologians

Jacob Martini

Jacob Martini (1570–1649), professor at Wittenberg, wrote a massive defense of philosophy in general and the value of philosophy for theology in the context of a somewhat later controversy that bears a lot of similarity to the Hofmann controversy.⁴² Jacob Martini was a student of Cornelius Martini and of Daniel Hofmann. In the 1200 pages of his *Mirror of Intellect, That Is, Thorough and Irrefutable Report, What Intellect and Its Perfection, Called Philosophy, Is, How Far It Extends and Especially What Use It Has in Matters of Religion*, published in Wittenberg in 1618, he mentions Daniel Hofmann only peripherally, one time positively, stating first that Hofmann did acknowledge the natural knowledge of God, as did Pfaffrad; second, that Hofmann did lecture on logic himself. But as far as I can see, Martini does not engage Hofmann directly, though some of the arguments used by Hofmann are used by the positions Martini attacks. Some words on the history: Wencel Schilling (died June 28, 1637), who had received his master's degree in 1614, had published the book *Visitatio Ecclesiae Metaphysicae* in 1616 in Magdeburg, an attack on the mixing of metaphysics and theology. This book got Schilling into trouble with Cornelius Martini. The university of Helmstedt then charged Schilling with slander because he had attacked philosophy as a satanic art. A legal battle ensued that ended with the expulsion of Schilling from the university and banishment from Helmstedt in 1619.⁴³ But Schilling had also attacked Jacob Martini in 1616 and continued to publish polemics under his own name and under pseudonyms. Schilling was supported by Andreas Cramer (1582–1640), pastor at St. Johannis in Magdeburg.⁴⁴

Martini's position is that one has to distinguish between the natural light of reason, the light of grace, and the false light. The natural light of reason is not extinguished after the fall. Reason or intellect or the natural light contains the *notitia principorum primorum* or *koinai ennoiai*, the basic principles of logic, such as the principle of the excluded third. It also includes the laws of arithmetic, such as that two times two is four. Last, but not least, reason refers to the knowledge of natural law that is implanted in man. The light of grace is the light of the gospel or faith. The false light is man's arrogant self-conceit, the result of original sin. Martini claims

⁴² Jacob Martini, *Vernunftspiegel Das ist / Gründlicher vnnd vnwidertreiblicher Bericht / was die Vernunft / sampt derselbigen perfectio, Philosophia genandt / sey / wie weit sie sich erstrecke / vnd fürnemlich was für einen gebrauch sie habe in Religions Sachen* (Wittenberg: In verleckung Samuel Selfisch Erben, 1618).

⁴³ Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*, 142–149.

⁴⁴ Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*, 180.

Luther's support for this distinction.⁴⁵ In conversion, the natural light is not extinguished by the light of grace, but it is lit above it. The false light, though, is extinguished. When the natural light is enlightened through the light of grace, then it knows God in a spiritual light.⁴⁶

Martini is facing the same issues that were controversial in Helmstedt: In what sense is man totally corrupt in all his faculties, and does this imply that fallen man is outside of the truth in everything he thinks and does? For Martini, the fact of the natural knowledge of God—which includes for him not only the knowledge that God is, but also that he is one, infinite, good, to be worshiped, and so on—and the knowledge of natural law establishes the basis of philosophy as a discipline that knows the truth. Philosophy is for him “a doctrine or knowledge, by which we contemplate or investigate all things that God has put before us in this world to contemplate or investigate, and at the same time to habituate and train our practices.”⁴⁷ Thus, philosophy is the exercise of the noetic abilities capable of knowing the things of this world—including what God has put into this world to know about him. But philosophy also pertains to actions, thus fostering the virtues in man. This knowledge can be ignored and abused by fallen man, but it is still possible.

But philosophy is also useful for theology. The language arts of grammar, dialectics,⁴⁸ and rhetoric (including poetry) are used in theology, as are history and mathematics (namely, in establishing chronologies). But also metaphysics is of benefit for the theologian. If one wants to understand what is meant when God is called “being” (*ens*) or an “essence” (*essentia*), then this leads one to metaphysics. And Scripture itself calls God “being,” namely in Exodus 3:14; Revelation 1:7–8; and 11:17. Metaphysics helps one to recognize that the term *ens* is not used univocally for God and created beings, but analogically. Metaphysics teaches the right division of things (such as how many parts there are in Baptism). Metaphysics teaches what “truth” is and what truth means referring to things, concepts, and words. It teaches what “goodness” is—as a transcendental, as a natural good, or as a moral good. Disputations about whether original sin is a privation or thing are metaphysical. Metaphysics helps us to develop a correct understanding of God's omnipotence and distinguish between active and passive potential (*potentia activa* and *potentia*

⁴⁵ Church Postil, sermon on John 1:1–14, WA 10/1.1:180.4–247.3 (AE 75:277–316); the discussion on natural light, WA 10/1.1:203.3–207.11 (AE 75:290–293). Luther does have the distinction between the three lights, and his statement that the light of reason is a piece of the true light if it comes to the true knowledge of God opens the door for a positive view of reason in the regenerate.

⁴⁶ Martini, *Vernunftspiegel*, 8–11.

⁴⁷ Martini, *Vernunftspiegel*, 732.

⁴⁸ For the use of logic in theology, see Martini, *Vernunftspiegel*, 1138–1146.

passiva), absolute and ordinate power (*potentia absoluta* and *ordinata*).⁴⁹ Metaphysics is here a fundamental discipline whose truth can be known by reason and thus, similar to the language arts, is helpful in articulating the faith. It is actually necessary for the educated pastor who wants to have a deeper knowledge and the ability to refute false teachers. For that reason, Martini wants all future pastors to study philosophy.

Abraham Calov

Abraham Calov (1612–1686) mentions Daniel Hofmann in question 14 of the prolegomena of his *Systema locorum theologicorum*, “Is theology contrary to philosophy?”⁵⁰ Calov mentions also that Reformed theologian Nicolaus Vedel (1596–1642) ascribes the theory of double truth to almost all Lutherans, quoting Luther’s disputation on John 1:14. For Calov, Luther does not assert double truth; rather, Luther wants to state that things revealed are neither true nor false in philosophy, because philosophy does not know anything of them. If philosophy states that a proposition like “the word became flesh” is absurd, then the point is the abuse of philosophy, not philosophy in itself. The reasons why there is no contradiction between philosophy and theology according to Calov are as follows: because truth agrees with truth, it does not conflict with itself; the origin of philosophical and natural knowledge is in God; philosophy leads men to the knowledge of God; and finally, philosophy is praised in Scripture. The references Calov quotes for the praise of philosophy in Scripture are statements concerning; physics (Job 38; Ps 19:2; 148:1); astronomy (Is 40:26; Ecclesiasticus 43:1); music (2 Chr 5:12–13; Ps 150); arithmetic (because there are calculations in Scripture); geometry and architecture through the buildings described; and practical philosophy because of moral precepts. Philosophy is thus taken in a sense that includes the seven liberal arts, rather than “philosophy” in the modern sense.

According to Calov, philosophy is useful for theology, not only because of logic in regard to argumentation and methodically in regard to analytic or synthetic method, but also because it helps to understand the Scriptures in physical matters—here again philosophy encompasses what modern authors would call the natural sciences—and ethics, and because it can provide secondary confirmation in theological arguments.

Finally, the position of the proponents of double truth is totally absurd according to Calov. If Hofmann is right that anything that the unregenerate says is

⁴⁹ Martini, *Vernunftspiegel*, 1220–1225.

⁵⁰ *Utrum Theologia contrarietur Philosophiae?* Abraham Calov, *Systema locorum theologicorum*, vol. I (Witebergae: Sumptibus Andreae Hartmanni Bibliopolae, 1655), 67–75.

false, then suddenly it is false when he says God exists or honor your father and mother. But these statements are obviously true, whoever says them.⁵¹

VIII. Conclusion

The controversy in Helmstedt did not change the course of history. But it shows that the increased confidence in philosophy in post-Reformation Lutheranism did not happen without resistance. Hofmann's example indicates that the resistance was theologically motivated. The radical understanding of the sinfulness of man made it difficult to speak of an untainted remnant in man capable of knowing the truth. The opponents of Hofmann, on the other hand, claimed that reason was competent in things of this world and in certain respects also in regard to God because of natural revelation. Aristotelianism was seen as *the* rational philosophy by Cornelius Martini and his students. The victory of Aristotelianism over other philosophical alternatives and the adoption of Aristotelian metaphysics by Lutheran philosophers and theologians, a metaphysics then universally plausible, helped them to articulate the Lutheran position in their time. But Aristotelianism soon was no longer the universally accepted philosophy, and a philosophy and theology connected to it seemed to be hopelessly outdated. The question of what man can know by natural reason is a question that has not come to a final resolution, and therefore theology would be ill-advised to build theological statements on philosophical "truths" or adopt a philosophical system *in toto*. But neither are theology and philosophy completely separated. Theology has used philosophical tools and concepts in an eclectic way to communicate the truth of the Christian faith in its context.⁵² And as the discussion in Lutheran Orthodoxy shows, a wholesale rejection of the ministerial use of reason can lead to inconsistency, since at least the rules of argument are a rational feature of theology. The relation between Lutheran theology and philosophy remains one of tension, since theology accepts philosophy

⁵¹ Hofmann's position is not quite so absurd if the meaning of such statements depends on the context of the unbeliever. When an unbeliever says "God," does the word have the same meaning in his context as when the Christian says it? There are obvious differences, but if there would be no overlap in meaning, then there would be no communication possible between believers and unbelievers on "God" and, if Christianity determines one's whole life, on anything. The commonality of language between believers and unbelievers speaks against Hofmann's thesis.

⁵² "Insofern bedeutet die angebliche Hellenisierung gerade nicht das, was man negativ damit gemeint hat, sondern einen Prozeß kritisch-selektiver Inanspruchnahme der spätantiken Hilfsmittel, um das christliche Proprium plausibel zu formulieren. (Daß diese Plausibilität zeitgebunden ist, versteht sich angesichts der Beanspruchung konkreter philosophischer Schemata)," Wolf-Dieter Hauschild, "Das trinitarische Dogma von 381 als Ergebnis verbindlicher Konsensusbildung," *Glaubensbekenntnis und Kirchengemeinschaft: Das Modell des Konzils von Konstantinopel (381)*, ed. K. Lehmann and W. Pannenberg (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 42.

as a rational discipline in its sphere and uses it in its task of a contemporary explication of the truth of the Christian faith, but rejects philosophy when it oversteps its realm of competence.

Illumination, Healing, and Redirection: A Lutheran Philosophy of Reason

Angus Menuge

I. Introduction

Luther's paradoxical view of reason is a minefield for interpreters. Reason is pilloried as "Frau Hulda . . . the devil's prostitute," which "can do nothing else but slander and dishonor what God does and says,"¹ "a blind guide, the enemy of faith, [and] the greatest and most invincible enemy of God."² This makes it easy to read Luther as a theological irrationalist, who holds that faith must simply leave reason behind. Yet this same Luther declares that reason "is the most important and the highest in rank among all things and . . . something divine"; "a kind of god appointed to administer . . . things in this life," whose majesty was not removed but confirmed by God after the fall.³

In fact, it is clear that Luther gives great authority to reason in a number of areas. Reason is our best guide and judge in temporal matters and our earthly vocations. Further, Luther affirms that even fallen reason discerns the existence of God, because it is "written in all hearts,"⁴ and supported by several powerful arguments.⁵ Reason is also competent to apprehend the basic meaning of Scripture. The unbeliever understands "you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead" (Acts 3:15) just as well as the believer. But knowing there is a God is not the same as knowing who God is, or knowing his will for us. Seeing God only as wrathful judge, the natural man is an enemy of God (Rom 8:7) who suppresses the little he knows of the true God (Rom 1:18) and substitutes a false god of his own

¹ Martin Luther, *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1525): vol. 40, pp. 174–175, 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 Siegbert Becker, *The Foolishness of God* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2012), 1.

³ Martin Luther, "The Disputation concerning Man (1536)," theses 4, 8, and 9. Available online at https://www.uni-due.de/collcart/es/sem/s6/txt12_1.htm.

⁴ Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), vol. 19:207 (hereafter WA).

⁵ Becker, *The Foolishness of God*, 25.

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imagination (Rom 1:22–23). In this darkened state, reason is incapable of believing that God wants all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:4). Although he understands the meaning of texts that communicate the gospel, he cannot believe the gospel promises without the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. And there is no doubt Luther declared human reason incompetent either to demonstrate or fully comprehend important truths specially revealed in Scripture: the Trinity, the hypostatic union of God and man in Christ, the real presence of Christ in the sacraments, and, above all, the message of salvation by grace alone.

Though clearly not an irrationalist *tout court*, does that mean that Luther qualifies as an irrationalist in *this* area—the acceptance of the higher truths and mysteries of special revelation? The answer to this question depends on what it means to be rational. This is a normative question requiring us to think about the proper *telos* or purpose of reason. We value reason as a means to discovering truth. So is the best way to achieve this goal to accept the Enlightenment ideal of *autonomous* reason, where reason is *closed* to input that cannot be demonstrated by logic or empirical investigation? Or should we accept Luther’s view, that reason is *dependent* on God for its right use and must be *open* to higher input? And if we Christians take the latter view, can we answer the objection that our position is arbitrary, because other religions (such as Islam) offer quite different input?

There is no question that Luther rejected closed systems of reason. Luther holds that reason achieves its *telos* only when it is properly open to God’s guidance. For example, in his “Lectures on Genesis,” Luther writes: “In Adam, there was an enlightened reason, a true knowledge of God, and a most sincere desire to love God and his neighbor.”⁶ While darkened and damaged by the fall, even in this life our reason is illuminated, healed, and redirected to the extent it is captive to the word of God:

Let us learn that true wisdom is in Holy Scripture . . . [W]hat is more preposterous than that we undertake to sit in judgment on God and His Word, we who ought to be judged by God? Therefore we must simply maintain that when we hear God saying something, we are to believe it and not to debate about it but rather take our intellect captive in the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).⁷

But, I will argue, this dependence of reason on external input does not make Luther an irrationalist even about the mysteries of the faith. If we attend to the *telos* of reason, we see that his open view of reason is, in the end, more rational than closed

⁶ AE 1:63.

⁷ AE 1:125, 157.

systems of rationality. And the preference for Christian sources is not arbitrary, because uniquely Christian revelation most deeply illuminates the nature of reality.

We will first consider the *telos* of reason (section 2) and offer two images to guide our reflection (section 3). Next, we argue that a closed view of reason is untenable: an open view of reason is unavoidable (section 4). Then we consider the right input for reason and how we can know what that is (section 5). Finally, we address the objection that the paradoxes and alleged contradictions of Christianity make it irrational, and we argue that it is precisely here that Christianity shows its rational superiority to alternatives (section 6).

II. The *Telos* of Reason

Aristotle distinguished theoretical reason (that concerns right belief) and practical reason (that concerns right action).⁸ Our focus here is only theoretical reason. The *telos* of theoretical reason is truth. But not truth on any terms. We can imagine people who simply believe everything they hear or read: they gain a lot of truths, but also a great deal of error, and their overall system of belief will include internal contradictions and mistakes. So we want not only a lot of truths, but a coherent system that is not contaminated by falsehood. But we can also imagine people so concerned to avoid error that they do not commit to any statement they cannot demonstrate (in different ways, the Pyrrhonic skeptics and W. K. Clifford both tried something along these lines). But as William James noticed,⁹ this may leave us without the most important truths; and it arguably implies that we should not accept *any* truth, since it is impossible to demonstrate every assumption on which a demonstration depends (see section 4).

So we don't want truth entangled with massive error, nor do we want to miss out on important truths that we cannot prove. But we also do not merely want a large *quantity* of particular truths. We can imagine someone devoted to minute observation of the differences between each pebble on a beach. This person might end up knowing more particular truths about those pebbles than anyone on Earth. But what is missing is any underlying principle that makes sense of the cosmos and human life as a whole.

What we want, then, is not merely truths, but the true *worldview*, the best view of the cosmos and our place in it. What I suggest is that the *telos* of (theoretical) reason is this: to acquire that worldview which is most substantively true and

⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

⁹ William James, "The Will to Believe," in *The Will to Believe, Human Immortality, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1960).

uncontaminated by error and incoherence, and most deeply insightful in its account of reality.

If that is correct, how do we decide which to prefer: closed worldviews that do not accept input from beyond human reason, or open worldviews that do? The fairest procedure is to compare the two approaches in terms of their ability to make the most overall sense of the world.¹⁰ Let me first paint two images that suggest the advantages of an open worldview (section 3), and then we will provide some argument to back up those images (section 4).

III. Two Images of Reason

Exploring a Landscape

Two explorers have spent their whole life investigating a landscape by perpetual moonlight. They discover many plants, animals, minerals, and sources of water. They figure out how to use the land to take care of their own needs while maintaining its resources for future generations. They develop technology to make their lives easier.

Then a wonderful thing happens. For the first time, the sun rises. The first explorer turns quickly and looks steadily up into the sun, trying to understand what he thinks is a new addition to the landscape. He is temporarily blinded and cannot see the sun, the other explorer, or anything else in the landscape. "I must just wait," he says, "for the return of the moon, when I can see again. Since the moon has shown me everything I have ever known, I will use the moon to investigate this new light." One day, his sight restored, the first explorer waits until the moon is in just the right position to cover the sun's blinding light. "Now," he says, "I shall be able to figure out this new addition to our world, and see if it will help with our farming and technology." But of course it is a total eclipse: he learns nothing more about the sun, and the moon itself and his whole world are cast into such total darkness that he fears he has gone blind again.

Meanwhile, the second explorer responds quite differently. When the sun first rises, she also turns around. But she turns in wonder, and realizing the direct light of the sun is too much for her, she shields her eyes. Looking down, she marvels at the brilliant rays and the warm glow all around her. Then, when she turns back around, she sees a different world. For the first time, she understands that all those resources in the landscape are creatures, products of the sun; the sun is the creator

¹⁰ In a recent article, Alister McGrath argues that it is in Christianity's ability to make maximal sense of reality that its rationality is to be found. See his "The Rationality of Faith: How Does Christianity Make Sense of Things?" *Philosophia Christi* 18.2 (2016): 395–409.

and owner, while she is only caretaker and steward. Then she turns to the first explorer and realizes with a double shock that he also is a product of the sun, but that he is paralyzed by blindness and does not really know the sun, the landscape, or even himself for what they are. She tries to explain, but at first he does not listen. “Only the moon,” he says, “allows a rational understanding of reality.” But his attempts to understand the sun by means of the moon end in failure. He remains ignorant of the sun, of the real character of the world, and even of himself. He is so lost he does not know that he is lost. She does not give up but offers him a new way to begin to see the world. “You cannot know the sun as you know other things in this landscape,” she says, “for it is greater than they and their creator. But if you trust in the sun, you will start to know it better, and in its light, you will better understand the world, other people, and yourself.”

The moonlight is man’s unaided reason. It has the power to describe, classify, and control our world. But the sun is God himself, and the sun’s light is the illumination of unaided reason by the word of God. The first explorer represents all of the closed systems of reason, like theological rationalism and materialism, which suppose that man’s unaided reason is sufficient to understand all aspects of reality. In pride, the closed system of human reason is used to investigate the divine reason itself (the approach of a theologian of glory).¹¹ This reduces the divine to a creature made in our image. It leaves us with a false God, and without the true God’s insight into the nature of things, we can never see the world, our neighbors, or ourselves as the creatures that they are.

The second explorer represents the open system of reason that Luther prefers. It is humble and recognizes that God cannot be fully comprehended by our unaided reason; yet, accepting him in faith, our reason is illuminated and we start to know God, his world, and his people. Though we cannot reason our way into faith, our faith is subsequently vindicated by helping reason develop a more insightful account of reality.

The Branches and the Vine

In John 15, Jesus compares himself to the vine and his disciples to branches. We may contrast the fate of two branches. The first branch, like the first explorer, has made some progress in studying adjacent branches, but feels too confined to one area of the plant. “The solution,” says he, “is to detach myself from the vine, so that I can move about at will and explore all the other branches, and the vine itself.” But when the first branch detaches himself, he finds to his horror that he no longer has

¹¹ Martin Luther, “The Heidelberg Disputation (1518),” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 2nd ed., ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 30–49.

the strength to investigate anything. He cannot produce new fruit, and even the fruit he has starts to wither and die. Too late, he realizes that what insight he ever had was all derived from the vine.

But the second branch is like the second explorer. When she hears the words, “I am the true vine,” she believes them in faith, and she is rewarded with much fruit. Because she is open to the vine as a higher source, she comes to understand the vine, other branches, and herself better than before. She sees that all of the branches form a community and depend on the vine, who is the source of their life and everything they have.

Contrasting good and bad prophets, Jesus says “you will recognize them by their fruits” (Matt 7:20). By extension, we can compare worldviews by how fruitful they are as explanations. A worldview that is open to input that it cannot rationally demonstrate may commend itself to reason because it makes more sense of reality than worldviews closed to that input. Putting our two images together, the intuition driving the preference for an open view of reason is that it will provide a more illuminating and fruitful account of reality.

Still, images are not arguments. Why should we think closed systems of reason cannot be successful? Why cannot reason—either pure deductive reason or inductive scientific reasoning—stand alone? After all, there are rationalist philosophers like Descartes and his heirs who think knowledge can be founded in absolute logical certainty. And several of the new atheist philosophers and scientists defend a strong version of scientism, claiming that science is the only way to gain knowledge. Scientism denies the need for a “first philosophy” of non-scientific assumptions: empirical science alone is declared adequate to account for all aspects of reality, including the origin and nature of the cosmos and the scientist.

IV. Reason Cannot Demonstrate Its Own Foundations

Interestingly, reason can demonstrate that reason *cannot* demonstrate its own foundations. This applies to both deductive reasoning and inductive reasoning (the scientific procedure of supporting a hypothesis by data).

Deductive Reason

Deductive reason is exemplified by syllogisms and other strict proofs in mathematics and philosophy. It is not possible to demonstrate that sound deductive reasoning is reliable, for two reasons. First, suppose we try to argue for the reliability of deductive reasoning. Our argument will be either sound or unsound. If it is unsound, then it is not a demonstration. But if it is sound, then,

in order to accept this argument, we must assume that sound arguments are reliable, and this is what we had to prove. Using a sound deductive argument to show the reliability of sound deductive arguments is circular. Second, it is not possible to base one's beliefs on demonstration alone. Any argument has premises. But if we can only accept what is demonstrated, we cannot accept the conclusion of the argument unless we have a demonstration of the premises. But these demonstrations will also have premises, and we cannot accept the conclusions of these demonstrations unless we have demonstrations of their premises, and so on. In other words, if we demand a demonstration for everything we believe, this leads to an infinite regress of demonstrations, and no one (except God) has that kind of time.

Now, one might reply that some premises are just self-evident and are directly or intuitively known. This is very plausible. How could one demonstrate $A = A$, for example? Surely any premises for such a demonstration would be less certain than $A = A$ itself. Or how could we prove the law of non-contradiction? If we show that denying the law of non-contradiction is absurd—because it leads to contradictions—then our argument assumes the truth of the law of non-contradiction, which is circular. But as soon as we accept any premises as self-evident, we have given up the idea that it is only rational to believe what we can demonstrate. Deductive reason must be illuminated by some basic, direct insights that are simply given.

When Pascal said, “The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing,”¹² he was not talking about our feelings but our direct apprehension of truth. His point was that all demonstration depends on truths we grasp intuitively that cannot themselves be demonstrated. If we do not simply see that the laws of identity and non-contradiction are necessarily true, then we cannot reason logically. But there is no question of proving either of these principles. We must, in fact, accept them on *faith*, because we trust that our powers of direct intuition can access truth. Behind the process of deductive demonstration, we find non-demonstrable assumptions about the reliability of human faculties.

The limitations of rational demonstration were themselves demonstrated by one of the most important results of mathematical logic: Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorem (1931). Gödel showed that in any sound mathematical system S that includes the axioms of basic arithmetic, it was possible to construct a self-referential sentence (the Gödel sentence) that was clearly true about S , and yet not provable by S . The Gödel sentence says, “This sentence is not provable by S .” Suppose the Gödel sentence is provable by S . Then the Gödel sentence is false, and so S is unsound. So, assuming S is sound, the Gödel sentence must be unprovable

¹² Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 154, #423.

by S, and therefore true. It follows that S is incomplete: there are true statements in the language of S that S cannot prove.¹³

Generalized, what Gödel showed is that for any mathematical system whatever that has sufficient expressive power to allow self-reference, there will be true statements about that system which the system cannot prove, but which we can see are true. More philosophically, Gödel's result reinforces the idea that our ability to discern truth is not limited to what we can demonstrate.

Inductive Reason

Can we argue that the inductive reasoning employed in the sciences is a reliable way to gain truth about the world? Any such argument runs into the problem exposed by David Hume. No matter how much past evidence supports the hypothesis that all swans are white, the future discovery of a black swan is possible (and it has happened). So inductive arguments are not by themselves valid. We can make such arguments valid only by adding the premise that nature is uniform. But our only reason for thinking that nature is uniform is past experience, that is, induction. Since belief in the uniformity of nature depends on an inductive inference, using that uniformity to justify induction is a circular argument. Likewise, if we say that induction has worked well in the past and so can be relied on in future investigations, we are again assuming the reliability of induction to prove it. Hume concludes: "It is impossible, therefore, that any arguments from experience can prove this resemblance of the past to the future: since all these arguments are founded on the supposition of that resemblance."¹⁴

So if we continue to rely on induction, and science seems to have no alternative, we must assume that the cosmos is governed by rational laws, and that our mind is capable of discovering those laws. These assumptions about the cosmos and the human mind cannot be established scientifically because they are assumed by *any* scientific investigation. Scientism is therefore mistaken: science requires a first-philosophy of non-scientific assumptions. The project of science depends on a prior *faith* in the rationality of the cosmos and of the scientist, a faith that science cannot demonstrate.

So reason itself shows us that closed systems of reason are untenable. Whether our reasoning is deductive or inductive, it must be open to input that cannot be demonstrated. But which input should that be, and how can we know? Surely not

¹³ See Peter Smith, *An Introduction to Gödel's Theorems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ David Hume, "An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding," Section IV, Part II, in *Philosophical Classics, Volume III: Modern Philosophy*, 5th ed., ed. Forrest E. Baird and Walter Kaufmann (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2008), 371.

just any old input will do. We can't rely on reading tea leaves, crystal balls, urban legends, or "fake news." If reason is to fulfill its *telos*, it needs the right input to guide it into truth and away from error.

V. Right Reason

Right reason is rightly directed toward its *telos*. The best possible source of input would be (a) necessarily true, and (b) aimed at the flourishing of human faculties, including reason. For Bible-believing Christians, that input is the word of God. As Luther says, "Human beings can err, but the Word of God is the very wisdom of God and the absolute infallible truth."¹⁵ This is the word of an omniscient God who cannot lie (Titus 1:2), and who wants all people to *know the truth* (John 8:32; 1 Tim 2:4). If we accept that word, we must accept what that word says about the nature of fallen man's reason: it is turned away from God and neighbor, and used to rationalize sin and idolatrous "strongholds" (2 Cor 10:4)—false worldviews that are thrown up to suppress the knowledge of God and His world. So we need the *illumination* of the law to see our true condition and to confess with David that "Against you, you only, have I sinned" (Ps 51:4). And we need the further *illumination* and *healing* transformation of the gospel so that we can come to know God's will for us (Rom 12:2), to see the world as God's creation (Heb 11:3), and to see ourselves as adopted children of God (Gal 4:3–7). The new person in Christ receives input to which the natural man is blind, because it is spiritually discerned by those with "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:12–16). Then our reason is *redirected* from self-love and enmity toward God to friendship with God, appreciation of his creation, and love of neighbor. In other words, the biblical view, and Luther's view, is that *right reason is reason illuminated, healed, and redirected by faith*.

How Can We Tell?

For Bible-believing Christians, this answer should be sufficient. Yet even the believer wants to understand his faith (*fides quaerens intellectum*) and benefits from seeing how the world makes more sense in light of that faith. And to make contact with the unbeliever, can we show that reason guided by Christian faith best fulfills the *telos* of reason, that many of the beliefs he shares with Christians are better explained by Christianity than by other worldviews? Here are four reasons for an affirmative answer.

¹⁵ AE 1:122.

Deductive Reasoning

Just about everyone believes in deduction—and if they don't, it is hard to see how they could convince us they are right. But which worldview best explains the reliability of deductive reasoning?

C. S. Lewis, Alvin Plantinga, Victor Reppert, and even atheist Thomas Nagel have all argued that materialism (the thesis, roughly, that only physical objects exist) undermines the reliability of deductive reasoning.¹⁶ On the materialist view, man himself is merely a material object whose abilities must be explained by natural selection and the causal interaction of human beings with the environment. Two problems arise.

First, as leading evolutionary psychologists and philosophers have admitted, natural selection is indifferent to the truth. Steven Pinker admits that in his own naturalistic evolutionary view, “our brains were shaped for fitness, not for truth.”¹⁷ If one's body avoids predators and finds food, it will survive long enough to reproduce. But it does not matter if one flees a lion because one thinks it wants to play hide-and-seek, or if one eats the food because one thinks an earth spirit commands it. Yet if natural selection is indifferent to truth, it is most unlikely to furnish minds capable of truth-preserving inferences.

Second, even if natural selection did account for some reasoning ability, that ability could only derive from past, contingent interactions of the human species with the environment, and so our reasoning would be limited to local rules of thumb that have worked so far. Yet deductive logic is able to show us that there are necessary truths that hold in the future and in other possible worlds, with which we have not interacted. For example, we can all see that if $A = B$ and $C = B$, then it must be the case that $A = C$. This knowledge is not based on the past track record of human experience. As C. S. Lewis says, “My belief that things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another is not at all based on the fact that I have never caught them doing otherwise.”¹⁸

Theism fares better because it does not implausibly claim that reason emerges from mindless matter. Reason has always existed in the mind of God, and this makes

¹⁶ See Alvin Plantinga's “Is Naturalism Irrational?” chap. 12 of his *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), his *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), and his *Where the Conflict Really Lies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Victor Reppert's *C. S. Lewis's Dangerous Idea* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003) and his “The Argument from Reason,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); and Thomas Nagel's *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁷ Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), 305.

¹⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 20.

intelligible the idea that he could make creatures with a similar, if more limited, kind of reason.

But did he? Here a specifically Christian, biblical form of theism fares better than other theistic religions. The Christian teaching is that man is made in the image of a triune God, and though original righteousness was lost by the fall into sin, still man's reason is reliable enough to assist us in our vocation as stewards of the natural world. That vocation requires us to reason soundly about natural resources, which depends on deductive logic. Why suppose we have access to a reliable logic? One reason is that on the Christian view, all of reality is governed by a personal *logos*. As Paul writes to the Colossians,

He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col 1:15–17)

The same personal *logos*, Christ, that lies at the foundation of all reality “before all things,” is also reflected in the reason of those made in God's image: our reason is not limited to what has worked in the past for human beings but is grounded in the divine reason that governs and unites all God has made.

Inductive Reasoning

A similar point applies to the inductive reason of science. Materialism does not explain how human observations and our intuitions of patterns can hope to discover approximate laws of nature. That natural selection has favored creatures who expect patterns to repeat does not show the expectation is justified. Granted materialism, there is no reason to think nature is uniform or that our intuitions of uniformity can be trusted. As Lewis pointed out, here theism has a clear advantage over materialism:

If all that exists is Nature, the great mindless interlocking event, if our own deepest convictions are merely the by-products of an irrational process, then clearly there is not the slightest ground for supposing that our sense of fitness and our consequent faith in uniformity tell us anything about a reality external to ourselves If the deepest thing in reality . . . is a Rational Spirit and we derive our rational spirituality from It—then indeed our conviction can be trusted.¹⁹

And unlike other theistic religions, Christianity affirms that the same divine *logos* reflected in the rational order of nature is also found in the reason of those made

¹⁹ Lewis, *Miracles*, 105.

in God's image: "the human mind in the act of knowing is illuminated by the divine reason."²⁰

Efficient and Final Causes of the Cosmos and Man

Regarding the cosmos and man, Luther argues that unaided reason may disclose the material and formal cause: their composition and structure. But it does not penetrate to the true efficient and final cause: what brought the cosmos and man into being and for what purpose. Pure reason cannot decide between an eternal or finitely old universe as both present problems. But even if some version of the cosmological argument is plausible, as many argue today on scientific grounds, it cannot show us who *the* efficient cause of the universe is or that the cosmos exists to glorify the creator (Psalm 19 and 148). Likewise, unaided reason does not show that man is especially made in the image of God "for the knowledge and worship of God."²¹

Materialism seems to end in absurdity here. For example, having denied all first philosophy and God's existence, Lawrence Krauss makes the heroic attempt to explain how the entire universe arose from nothing at all.²² But, as several critics have pointed out, he simply redefines "nothing" to mean something: expanding empty space, quantum gravity, or a multiverse. As he does not explain why any of these entities exist, the cosmos remains an inexplicable mystery. C. S. Lewis illustrates the problem in his depiction of Uncle Andrew, a stubborn materialist who witnesses the creation of Narnia, but closes himself to transcendent causes:

"Of course it can't really have been singing," he thought, "I must have imagined it . . . Who ever heard of a lion singing?" And the longer and more beautiful the Lion sang, the harder Uncle Andrew tried to make himself believe that he could hear nothing but roaring. Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed . . . He soon did hear nothing but roaring in Aslan's song. Soon he couldn't have heard anything else even if he had wanted to.²³

Man is perhaps even more of a problem. Materialists have no convincing explanation of the emergence of conscious, rational beings that can recognize moral obligations, so they cannot identify the efficient cause of man. And if our existence is an accident, then there is no final cause of man. Existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre

²⁰ Lewis, *Miracles*, 34.

²¹ AE 1:80.

²² Lawrence M. Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing* (New York: The Free Press, 2012).

²³ C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (New York: Harper Trophy, 1994), 137.

concluded from materialism that man simply “shows up” for no reason and must invent a purpose for his life. But this is a futile project, as without an objective purpose, no self-chosen project has any more meaning than it’s opposite. Sartre could serve in the French resistance and object to the Nazis, but he could offer no reason why embracing Nazism was wrong. So man becomes incomprehensible to man.

Yet the very nature of reason shows that man exists for *a* purpose because reason is inherently teleological: we reason to a goal, such as a conclusion or action. But which goal should that be? We need to know *what* our purpose is, what counts as human flourishing, before we can know to which goals we should reason. This is what Christian revelation tells us: we exist for community with God and one another. Once accepted on faith, we see this makes sense of our incompleteness and our need for family, fellowship, and society, but also of our restless heart that finds no refuge in worldly objects that are passing away, but needs the one who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8).

Human Rights

Most people affirm the idea of human rights, basic natural rights that the state must recognize and protect. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) demands “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family.”²⁴ These rights are *inherent* (one has them just because one is human), *universal* (all humans have them), *equal* (all humans have them to the same degree), and *inalienable* (the state has no authority to remove them). But which worldview provides the best justification for these rights?

Materialism makes it hard to see how there could be human rights. If the world is a physical accident and all living creatures are the products of the blind watchmaker of natural selection, it seems arbitrary and chauvinistic to say that human beings have special rights. Thus Peter Singer urges that if higher value depends on sentience, then the whole idea of human rights is “species-ist,” since an adult pig or dog may feel more pain than a newborn human infant.²⁵ Nor will it help to argue that human beings have superior value because they are better adapted to their environment than other creatures, since in point of fact, this is false. As James Rachels points out, “We are not entitled—not on evolutionary grounds, at any rate—to regard our own adaptive behavior as ‘better’ or ‘higher’ than that

²⁴ United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Paris, 1948), available at <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>.

²⁵ Peter Singer, *Animal Rights and Human Obligations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976).

of a cockroach, who, after all, is adapted equally well to life in its own environmental niche.”²⁶

More generally, if materialism is true, the grounding for human rights must be the natural capacities (such as consciousness, rationality, or understanding of moral rules) that emerge from the human organism. But this grounding is inadequate since not all people have these capacities or have them to the same degree (consider the unborn, those with brain deficits, Alzheimer’s disease, the comatose, etc.). So, as J. P. Moreland asks, “Why should we treat all people equally in any respect in the face of manifest inequalities among them?”²⁷

Matters are no better when we consider other religions. For example, Hinduism rationalizes human rights abuses of lower caste members, and Islamic societies do not support the full human rights of non-Muslims (Dhimmi), routinely denying their freedom of expression and religion.

By contrast, historic Christian teaching provides a sound basis for human rights. All human beings are specially made in the image of God. God sent his Son to die for all people, and Christ calls us to go beyond pagan prudence and to care for the “least of these” (Matt 25:45), giving aid to those who cannot repay (Luke 14:13–14). The leading secularist Jürgen Habermas recognizes the uniqueness of the Christian contribution:

Egalitarian universalism, from which sprang the ideas of freedom and a social solidarity, of an autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights, and democracy, is the direct heir to the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged has been the object of continual critical appropriation and reinterpretation. To this day, there is no alternative to it. And in light of current challenges of a postnational constellation, we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage. Everything else is just idle postmodern talk.²⁸

And even Jacques Derrida concedes:

Today the cornerstone of international law is the sacred, what is sacred in humanity. You should not kill. You should not be responsible for a crime against the sacredness, the sacredness of man as your neighbor . . . made by God or by God made man . . . in that sense, the concept of crime against humanity is a Christian concept and I think there would be no such thing

²⁶ James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 70.

²⁷ J. P. Moreland, *The Recalcitrant Imago Dei* (London: SCM Press, 2009), 144.

²⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions*, trans. C. Cronin and M. Pensky (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 151–152.

in the loft today without the Christian heritage, the Abrahamic heritage, the biblical heritage.²⁹

The ideal of human rights is not grounded on Enlightenment ideals of autonomous reason or our natural capacities as Steven Pinker³⁰ and Erik Wielenberg³¹ have attempted to argue.³² Reason requires enlightenment from above that tells us that all men have sacred value.

Without the illumination of Christ, reason, the cosmos, and human dignity are all cast into darkness, like withered branches that have detached themselves from the true vine. We have just the opposite of Colossians 1:17, the lament of W. B. Yeats: “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.”³³

VI. Paradox and Contradiction

Still, advocates of closed systems of rationality (or of other religions) may claim that the cost of a specifically Lutheran open view of reason outweighs its benefits. The Lutheran view accepts the plain, literal teaching of Scripture about the Trinity, the hypostatic union of God and man in Christ, and the real presence of Christ in the sacraments, even though we cannot fully comprehend *how* these teachings can be true. The charge is that Lutherans thereby embrace irrational contradictions and paradoxes.

However, I will argue that the Lutheran view of reason does not embrace contradictions and that the paradoxes it does affirm make more sense of things than their non-paradoxical (rationalistic) alternatives.

Contradictions

Even Siegbert Becker asserts that in accepting the mysteries of the faith “Lutheranism simply says that we must believe the Word of God rather than the law of [non-]contradiction.”³⁴ Well, some Lutherans may say this, and mean well

²⁹ Jacques Derrida, cited in Paul Copan, “Grounding Human Rights: Naturalism’s Failure and Biblical Theism’s Success” in *Legitimizing Human Rights: Secular and Religious Perspectives*, ed. Angus Menuge (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 17.

³⁰ Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2011).

³¹ Erik Wielenberg, *Robust Ethics: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

³² For a critique of Wielenberg, see my chapter “Alienating Humanity: How Evolutionary Ethics Undermines Human Rights,” in *The Naturalness of Belief*, ed. Paul Copan and Charles Taliaferro (Lanham, Md.: Lexington, 2018).

³³ W. B. Yeats, “The Second Coming.” Available online at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43290/the-second-coming>.

³⁴ Becker, *The Foolishness of God*, 192.

by saying it, but I do not think we need to say it. Consider the Trinity. In his “Disputation against Scholastic Theology,” Luther says: “No syllogistic form is valid when applied to divine terms.”³⁵ But he also says that this is not because “the doctrine of the Trinity contradicts syllogistic forms.”³⁶ Luther is clearly maintaining that no attempt to demonstrate or explain the Trinity by unaided reason can succeed, but also that this is no reason to say that the Trinity is contradictory in itself.

Contra Becker, the problem is not the law of non-contradiction. After all, there is no reason to think that the Trinity is contradictory to God with his infinite understanding and knowledge of all things, including himself. The problem rather lies in the inadequacy of our finite, human categories. They are not capable of making full sense of divine truths because they do not capture the fullness of divine categories. God reveals divine terms to us, terms that transcend our powers, such as holiness, perfection, and necessary existence. Since we are unholy, imperfect, and contingent beings, we cannot fully comprehend what these terms mean.

A good analogy for our situation is Edwin Abbott’s portrayal of “Flatland,” a world of two-dimensional objects on a plane. One day, a Square in Flatland is visited by a Sphere from a three-dimensional world. As one might expect, the Square at first interprets the Sphere as a two-dimensional circle. But the Sphere reveals that he is very much more:

I am not a plane figure, but a Solid. You call me a Circle, but in reality I am not a Circle, but an infinite number of Circles, of size varying from a Point to a Circle of thirteen inches in diameter, one placed on the top of the other. When I cut through your plane as I am now doing, I make in your plane a section which you, very rightly, call a Circle.³⁷

Despite many evidences of the Sphere’s reality, as it turns from a point to a large circle and back again, the Square resists this new revelation, because he cannot see how it can be true: “although I saw the facts before me, the causes were as dark as ever.”³⁸ Finally, the Sphere takes the Square up into his three-dimensional world, which allows the Square to look down on the plane of his world and to see it as it looks from beyond the limits of two dimensions. Not only does he see that the higher

³⁵ Luther, “Disputation against Scholastic Theology (1517),” proposition 47, in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*.

³⁶ Luther, “Disputation against Scholastic Theology (1517),” proposition 48.

³⁷ Edwin A. Abbott, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, ed. Philip Smith (Mineola, NY: Dover Thrift Editions, 1992), 58.

³⁸ Abbott, *Flatland*, 59.

dimensional world exists, he understands his own two-dimensional world, including himself, better than he did before.

This is very suggestive. If a divine being reveals some of his transcendent qualities to us, we have two options: we can either, in faith, accept these qualities as true, without fully comprehending them, or we can make the futile effort to reduce them to finite categories, thereby denying their divinity. If our faith is rational, it is not because we can demonstrate these higher truths, but because, once accepted, these truths make sense of other things which would otherwise remain inexplicable. In G. K. Chesterton's terms, it is rational to be a "mystic," that is, one who accepts the given mysteries of the faith, because they so richly illuminate our world, and it is irrational to embrace the reductionist schemes of closed reason because they make the world itself an impenetrable mystery.

The whole secret of mysticism is this: that man can understand everything by the help of what he does not understand The one created thing we cannot look at is the one thing in the light of which we look at everything. Like the sun at noonday, mysticism explains everything else by the blaze of its own victorious invisibility. Detached intellectualism is . . . all moonshine; for it is light without heat, and it is secondary light reflected from a dead world.³⁹

By *exclusive* reliance on reason, the rationalist theologian or materialist attempts to force all truth into the Procrustean bed of finite human categories. But since they do not fit, this inevitably leads to one of two erroneous conclusions: denying the truth, because it does not fit, or substituting a lesser truth that does. Chesterton contrasts the poet (the "mystic" who accepts higher givens that he cannot rationalize) and the logician (the rationalist theologian or materialist): "The poet only asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is his head that splits."⁴⁰

Paradoxes

Still, the Lutheran view does emphasize many paradoxes, such as Christ being true God and true man, the real presence of Christ in the sacraments, and the Christian as simultaneously saint and sinner. Yet the paradoxical nature of these claims is only an objection if reality itself is *not* paradoxical in this way. Chesterton argues that part of the case for Christianity is that, while much of it is reasonable, it is "unreasonable" at just those points that reality is:

³⁹ G. K. Chesterton, "Orthodoxy," in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. I (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 231.

⁴⁰ Chesterton, "Orthodoxy," 220.

Now, this is exactly the claim which I have since come to propound for Christianity. Not merely that it deduces logical truths, but that when it suddenly becomes illogical, it has found, so to speak, an illogical truth . . . It is simple about the simple truth; but it is stubborn about the subtle truth . . . whenever we feel there is something odd in Christian theology, we shall generally find that there is something odd in the truth.⁴¹

This balance between reasonable and unreasonable is just what we find in the scientific theories we believe most closely approximate the truth. In physics, familiar macroscopic objects like tables and chairs are well-behaved: they are “reasonable.” But at the quantum level, “unreasonable” things happen: the same object can appear sometimes as a particle and sometimes as a wave, its behavior has no definite cause, and twinned particles mirror each other in explicable ways. Quantum physics is highly confirmed because it predicts both the “reasonable” behavior of tables and chairs *and* the “unreasonable” behavior of elementary particles. As Chesterton says, “A key and a lock are both complex. And if a key fits a lock, you know it is the right key.”⁴²

We see similar examples in biblical theology. How can it be that man is under a law that he can never keep? Our unaided reason protests, “Ought implies can, but man cannot.” Yet both the obligation to the moral law and our inability to fulfill it remain. It is a paradox, which, as Pascal saw, makes man an incomprehensible riddle to himself. The Christian teaching that man had original righteousness and lost it untangles and illuminates this riddle.

Know then, proud man, what a paradox you are to yourself. Be humble, impotent reason! Be silent, feeble nature! Learn that man infinitely transcends man, hear from your master your true condition, which is unknown to you.

Listen to God.

Is it not as clear as day that man’s condition is dual? The point is that if man had never been corrupted, he would, in his innocence, confidently enjoy both truth and felicity, and if man had never been anything but corrupt, he would have no idea of truth or bliss. But . . . we have an idea of happiness but we cannot attain it . . . so obvious it is that we once enjoyed a degree of perfection from which we have unhappily fallen.

Let us then conceive that man’s condition is dual . . . and that without the aid of faith he would remain inconceivable to himself.⁴³

⁴¹ Chesterton, “Orthodoxy,” 286.

⁴² Chesterton, “Orthodoxy,” 287.

⁴³ Pascal, *Pensées*, 64–65, #131.

More, Christianity teaches something that unaided reason, bound as it is to the law, could never see, that although it is impossible for man to do anything to regain his original righteousness, God can bridge the gap: “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:26).

But how can God do such a marvelous thing? Isn’t the law only for man, and have not all men broken that law? Unaided reason, bound by the law, can only conclude that we deserve punishment, and cannot see how or why God would save us. But this becomes clearer in light of the incarnation. We do not fully comprehend the hypostatic union—how one person, Christ, can be both God and man—but if we accept it in faith, we can see how Christ’s life and atoning sacrifice meet God’s demands for justice and also gift us with the righteousness we need to be reunited with him. For if the Son of God did not become man (as Docetism claimed), then since God is not under the law, the Son could not live out that perfect life that the law demands. And if Christ were a creature (as Arianism claimed), then his death could not atone for the sins of all mankind. But if Christ is true God and true man, then as man he can live the perfect human life, and as God his sacrifice provides inexhaustible merit to cover our sins.

Without these teachings, man’s life is a dark mystery. Like Joseph K. in Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*, he finds himself condemned for a crime he does not understand and cannot undo. But with these teachings, man sees that the law of God is not a cruel and impossible demand, for God has acted in love to save us and restore us to be the people he always intended.

VII. Conclusion

Autonomous reason is a myth. Reason cannot “go it alone,” because all rational inquiry depends on non-demonstrable givens. Since reason must be open, the only real issue is where to find the right input. I have argued that God’s word provides the illumination, healing, and redirection that make the most sense of our world and thus best achieves reason’s *telos*. In its openness to God’s revelation and mystery, a Lutheran philosophy of reason bears great fruit, and proves to be more rational than the dry and withered branches of theological rationalism and materialism. It is, paradoxically, those who attempt to rely exclusively on reason (like Chesterton’s “maniac”⁴⁴) who are most irrational. Seen in this light, the charge that Luther was an irrationalist in theology is false: judged by the fruit, his critique of the limitations of unaided reason and his openness to the higher input of God’s word are both

⁴⁴ This is the title of chapter 2 of G. K. Chesterton’s *Orthodoxy*, which shows that, by its exclusive reliance on materialistic science, modern science makes our world unintelligible.

supremely rational. Reason, like a mighty ship, achieves its *telos* only when it has the right guidance.

The Challenge of Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Word of God

Jack D. Kilcrease

I. Introduction

Although Pope Paul VI was certainly exaggerating when he said that Karl Barth (1886–1968) was the most consequential theologian since Thomas Aquinas,¹ Barth is still generally regarded as the most important theologian of the twentieth century.² It is for this reason that over the last century theologians from across the spectrum have been forced to engage either negatively or positively with Barth's theology.

Moreover, in spite of the fact that Barth was a distinctly Reformed theologian, over the last century Lutheran theology has been significantly shaped by engagement with him.³ It was in reaction to the Barmen Declaration and Barth's "gospel-law" theology⁴ that Werner Elert penned his famous rebuttal⁵ that some regard as having exaggerated the Lutheran law-gospel distinction.⁶ Robert Preus studied under T. F. Torrance, one of Barth's chief Anglophone expositors and translators.⁷ Preus's classic works *The Inspiration of Scripture* and *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* are to an extent defenses of confessional Lutheran theology against neo-orthodoxy in general and Barth's theology in particular.⁸

¹ T. F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 1.

² Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 76.

³ Much of this section is based on, but is not identical to, my discussion of Barth in my doctoral dissertation: Jack Kilcrease, "The Self-Donation of God: Gerhard Forde and the Question of Atonement in the Lutheran Tradition" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2009).

⁴ Karl Barth, "Gospel and Law," in *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays*, ed. Will Herberg (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 71–100.

⁵ Werner Elert, *Law and Gospel*, trans. Edward Schroeder (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 4–10.

⁶ Scott Murray, *Life, Law, and the Living God: The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 28–30.

⁷ David Scaer, "The Theology of Robert David Preus and His Person: Making a Difference," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 74.1–2 (2015): 86.

⁸ Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003); Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970–1972).

Lastly, the two most influential theologians of the late-twentieth-century ELCA, Robert Jenson and Gerhard Forde, both engaged with the theology of Barth extensively in their doctoral dissertations and drew on his work throughout their careers.⁹ Therefore, as we remember the one-hundredth anniversary of the publication of the first edition of *Der Römerbrief* (1919),¹⁰ it is important for confessional Lutherans to revisit Barth's work since it remains such an important challenge even in the present.

Among Barth's many significant teachings is his doctrine of the Word of God. Although highly problematic from a confessional Lutheran perspective, Barth's doctrine of the Word of God is extremely sophisticated and spans most of parts I and II of the first volume of his *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (1932–1967).¹¹ When one considers its importance for contemporary theology, it is not a challenge that confessional Lutherans can ignore. Many mid-twentieth-century confessional Lutheran responses to Barth's doctrine of the Word of God focused on his rejection of inerrancy, verbal inspiration, and his overly existential view of scriptural authority.¹² Although these are important criticisms of Barth, we will examine his teaching from the perspective of other key issues. Below, we will argue that Lutherans must necessarily reject Barth's understanding of the Word of God because its premises conflict with two other key confessional principles: the full communication of the divine attributes to the humanity of Christ (*genus majestaticum*) and the proper distinction between law and gospel.

II. Barth's Movement toward an Analogical Doctrine of the Word

Central to Barth's theology of the Word is the concept of revelational analogy. Barth's analogical theology of the Word is primarily concerned with making God knowable, while preserving his transcendence. On the one hand, God's act of entering creation in the incarnation of Jesus Christ makes a genuine impact on the creaturely realm. Because of his incarnation in Christ, God may be thought

⁹ Gerhard Forde, "Karl Barth on the Consequences of Lutheran Christology," in *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, ed. Steven Paulson and Mark Mattes (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 68–88; Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1969). Also see Robert Jenson, *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002).

¹⁰ Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief* (1919; repr., Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1985).

¹¹ We will be citing the English edition of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik* throughout this article: Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols. trans., G. T. Thomson et al. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936–1977). Hereafter *Church Dogmatics* will be abbreviated as "CD."

¹² See Robert Preus, "The Word of God in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 31 (February, 1960): 105–115; Preus, "The Doctrine of Revelation in Contemporary Theology," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 9.3 (1966): 111–123.

about and known by humans. On the other hand, human knowledge of revelation does not objectify God. Through revelation humans know God as only an analogical echo of the infinite and eternal divine being. Even in the event of the revelation, God remains wholly other.

Regarding Barth's concept of the Word of God, a number of scholarly trends have emerged. Most scholars have recognized and struggled with two tendencies in Barth's doctrine: one dialectical and the other analogical. The first scholar to recognize the dual dialectical and analogical aspects of Barth's teaching was the Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Balthasar claimed that Barth's early writing (particularly his various editions of the commentary on Romans) represented a "dialectical" understanding of the Word of God.¹³ In this view, creation, due to both its creatureliness and its fallenness, is a realm wholly other to God. When God speaks his Word, a violent rupture occurs, thereby destroying the old demonic order and establishing a new one by an act of irresistible grace. Balthasar posited that, after the 1930s, Barth moved away from this stance (particularly in light of his study of Anselm of Canterbury¹⁴) and began to talk about an analogy of the revelation, or more precisely "the Analogy of Faith."¹⁵ God remains wholly other in the giving of his Word. Nevertheless, the event of revelation is now no longer thought of as being one of the pure negation of temporality. Rather, God is conceptualized as being able to take up creaturely signifiers and use them to echo his eternal reality in a non-objectifying way. He thereby reveals himself while maintaining his transcendence.

In the mid-1990s, Bruce McCormack reevaluated Balthasar's interpretation and concluded that Barth's theology of the Word had been part of a single continuous development that was initially purely dialectical, but gradually also became analogical. According to this interpretation, analogy does not negate dialectic, but is in fact simply an expansion and refinement of the initial insight. Commenting on the level of development in this line of thinking, which Barth had achieved by the time he was teaching at Göttingen, McCormack concludes:

[I]t should be pointed out that one of the central defects of the von Balthasarian formula of a "turn from dialectic to analogy" has now become clear. Von Balthasar placed both of these things—dialectic and analogy—on the same plane of discourse. He treated them both as methods. Dialectical method was

¹³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 64–85.

¹⁴ See Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum: Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of His Theological Scheme* (London: SCM Press, 1960).

¹⁵ Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 86–121.

simply replaced by analogical method. In truth, however, while the dialectic in question is a method, analogy is not. Analogy belongs to a vastly different realm of discourse. Analogy—whether the analogy of the cross or the later analogy of faith—is a description of the result of a divine action. It is the description of a relation of correspondence between divine Self-knowing and human knowledge of God which arises as a consequence of God’s act of Self-revelation. Talk of analogy has to do with what God does; talk of dialectic emerges here in the context of what human beings can do in light of the fact that they have no capacity for bringing about the Self-speaking God.¹⁶

In other words, the dialectical and analogical descriptions of the Word of God are not mutually exclusive, but in fact work together. Whereas dialectic is a method for engaging of divine revelation, analogy describes how God makes himself knowable. The analogy of revelation presupposes that God is knowable in created concepts, but that knowledge of God is always the result of divine initiative and not human endeavor. In a dialectical fashion, humans recognize that the revelation of the Word is a form of disruptive grace. This is a total eschatological break with what came before. Nonetheless, the eschatological revelation of the Word also presupposes a need for partial creaturely correspondence (brought about by divine grace) to the act of God’s self-disclosure. McCormack’s view has generally been accepted within the scholarly community. We will therefore roughly follow McCormack’s scholarly trajectory in our discussion of Barth’s mature position as expressed in his *Kirchliche Dogmatik*.

III. Revelation: Dialectical and Analogical

First, it is important to recognize the theocentrism of Barth’s understanding of the Word. Revelation is about God: “God reveals Himself. He reveals Himself through Himself. He reveals *Himself*.”¹⁷ Because the revelation of the Word is about God, it is not about human consciousness or other forms of philosophical knowledge. Knowledge of God is always disruptive. It comes about not on the basis of immanent possibilities within creation, but on the basis of a divine act: “If we really want to understand revelation in terms of its subject, i.e., God, then the first thing we have to realize is that this subject, God, the Revealer, is identical with His act, in revelation and also identical with its effect.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 313–314.

¹⁷ CD I/1.296.

¹⁸ CD I/1.296.

Because God is triune, the event of God's act of revelation is triune. John Webster comments, "Revelation is not the manifestation by God of realities other than God: as self-revelation, it is Trinitarian in character, since God is God's self as Trinity."¹⁹ Therefore, just as God is actualized in his eternal being as triune, he acts in time to reveal himself in a triune manner. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are "Revealer, Revelation, and Revealedness."²⁰ There is then a threefold form of God's temporal manifestation as the Word in the form of the man Jesus, the Bible, and the preaching of the Church.²¹ In this, God "repeats in his relationship *ad extra* a relationship proper to Himself in His inner divine essence."²² Indeed "He makes a copy of Himself."²³

This way of thinking about revelation has several effects on how human language is understood as a vehicle of God's Word. Since revelation as it is comprehended by creatures is a temporal and creaturely echoing of the divine being, it can by no means be directly identical with God's own eternal being and therefore must necessarily be analogical. God's being infinitely transcends human words, and therefore, there can be only a dialectical similitude between the created and uncreated word: "Pressed by the revelation of God we are pushed on to the word 'analogy.'"²⁴ The creaturely echo of God's act is merely similar to God's own eternal being. In spite of this, his being remains mysterious; indeed the act of revelation is one of "veiling."²⁵ There is a "likeness and unlikeness . . . a partial correspondence and agreement"²⁶ between the divine act of revelation and the creaturely analogue. God by way of analogy remains free and revealed simultaneously. He reveals himself, while at the same time he is not objectified by his act of revelation.

Second, because God remains free in his revelation, the analogical similitude between the created signifier and the divine signified is always the result of divine initiative. In spite of Psalm 19 and Romans 1, Barth nevertheless insists that creation in and of itself lacks any inherent ability to reveal God. This is one of the many reasons why Barth does not favor the Thomistic doctrine of the analogy of being: "I regard the *analogia entis* [the analogy of being] as the invention of the Antichrist,

¹⁹ John Webster, *Karl Barth* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 58.

²⁰ CD I/1.295.

²¹ See short description in CD II/1.870–871.

²² CD III/2.218.

²³ CD III/2.218.

²⁴ CD II/1.225.

²⁵ CD II/1.225.

²⁶ CD II/1.225.

and I think that because of it one cannot become Catholic.”²⁷ Not only does Barth claim that this doctrine incorporates humanity and God into one knowable general category of being²⁸ (a charge largely dismissed by his critics as a misrepresentation of the doctrine²⁹), but he also claims that it represents a kind of epistemic Pelagianism, wherein God is knowable automatically without divine grace and initiative. Barth comments:

If grace is alongside nature, however high above it may be put, it is obviously no longer the grace of God, but the grace which man ascribes to himself. If God’s revelation is alongside a knowledge of God proper to man as such, even though it may never advance except as a prolegomenon, it is obviously no longer the revelation of God, but a new expression (borrowed or even stolen) for the revelation which encounters man in his own reflection.³⁰

Of itself, human language does not have an inherent capacity to convey the divine being. What therefore must happen is a divine act of grace that will exalt human language and make it capable of witnessing to the divine being. It is “not that language could grasp revelation” writes Barth, but rather that revelation “could grasp language.”³¹ T. F. Torrance therefore correctly writes: “While God himself infinitely transcends all creaturely forms of our thought and speech, nevertheless he has freely and graciously *bound his written Word to himself* in such a way that *we are bound to it* as the direct canonical instrument of his divine truth and authority.”³²

At best, Barth will allow for what he refers to as the “Analogy of Faith”³³ in the first two volumes of *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (i.e., the doctrines of the Word of God and God). Finally, in the third volume (i.e., the doctrine of creation), Barth introduces the “Analogy of Relation.” The former refers to the previously discussed idea that the grace-wrought word that God gives in his revelation echoes and stands in analogy to God’s own eternal being and Word. The “Analogy of Relation,” on the other hand, refers to the recognition that the structures of the created order (heaven and earth, male and female) bear a resemblance to God as he has already revealed himself (e.g., God’s relationality as Trinity). Barth comments:

²⁷ CD I/1.ix.

²⁸ CD II/I.310. Also see CD II/2.48.

²⁹ Notably Hans Urs von Balthasar. See Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 147–150.

³⁰ CD II/1.139.

³¹ CD I/1.340.

³² Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian*, 92 (emphasis added).

³³ CD I/1.237–247.

[T]here is disparity between the relationship of God and man and the prior relationship of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father, of God to Himself. But for all the disparity . . . there is a correspondence and similarity between the two relationships. This is not a correspondence and similarity of being, an *analogia entis*. The being of God cannot be compared with that of man. But it is not a question of this twofold being. It is a question of the relationship within the being of God on the one side and between the being of God and that of man on the other. Between these two relationships as such—and it is in this sense that the second is the image of the first—there is correspondence and similarity. There is an *analogia relationis*. The correspondence and similarity of the two relationships consists in the fact that the freedom in which God posits Himself as the Father, is posited by Himself as the Son and confirms Himself as the Holy Ghost, is the same freedom as that in which He is the Creator of man, in which man may be His creature, and in which the Creator-creature relationship is established by the Creator.³⁴

There are two important elements here. First, the recognition that there is an analogical correspondence between creator and creature is not due to a knowledge of God gained independently of supernatural revelation (i.e., *analogia entis*, natural theology). Second, because God is infinite and humanity is finite, there is no correspondence between the being of the creator and that of the creature. In other words, as a result of divine aseity and infinity, God's "whatness" does not resemble the "whatness" of his creatures. Nevertheless, God is relationally configured in a particular way (i.e., as the Trinity), and so there is an analogical resemblance between relationally constituted creatures and divine relationality. Put another way, although there is no resemblance of the "whatness" of creature and creator, there is a resemblance of the "howness."

Now that we have established the analogical structure of the revelation of the Word of God in Barth's theology, it is important to examine its connection to Barth's understanding of the incarnation and the authority and inspiration of Holy Scripture. Such an examination will serve as a helpful clarification of the contrast between the confessional Lutheran and the Barthian views of the doctrine of the Word of God.

First, Barth defines the revelation of the Word of God in what might be described as "Christomonistic" terms.³⁵ It is not simply the case that the message of the Bible centers on Jesus, something with which confessional Lutherans would

³⁴ CD III/2.220.

³⁵ See helpful observation in Richard Muller, "A Note on 'Christocentrism' and the Imprudent Use of Such Terminology," *Calvin Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 253–260.

doubtless agree. Rather, for Barth, Jesus is the only true revelation of God,³⁶ although Barth does allow that this single revelation of God is anticipated in the history of Old Testament Israel.³⁷ Hence, Scripture is authoritative only because it is a witness to Jesus as the Word of God.³⁸ Therefore, Barth's view of Scripture is overwhelmingly defined by his understanding of the person of Christ and, as a result, how the two natures in Christ relate to each other.

Second, Barth is a thoroughly Reformed thinker and therefore his system maintains the basic structural priorities one finds in Zwingli, Calvin, and later Reformed scholasticism.³⁹ True to his confessional identity, Barth utterly and completely rejects the *genus majesticum* and the Lutheran *capax* (*finitum capax infiniti*, "the finite is capable of the infinite") in favor of the Reformed *extra calvinisticum* and *non-capax*.⁴⁰ The *extra calvinisticum* refers to the idea that there exists an unincarnate Word (*logos asarkos*) alongside the incarnate Word (*logos ensarkos*) after the incarnation.⁴¹ In other words, the divine being does not become completely tangible in identifying with the humanity of Christ, but continues to retain something of its otherness and intangibility alongside and outside his flesh. It is the logical christological consequence of the Reformed *non-capax*, the idea that what is finite cannot contain what is infinite.

Throughout the later volumes of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, the Lutheran *capax* is the subject of a strong negative polemic. Predictably following the traditional Reformed line of argumentation, Barth largely regards the *genus majesticum* as docetic in that it inappropriately deifies humanity. Ultimately, he finds the notion of any communication of divine glory to the man Jesus problematic.⁴² Nonetheless, this gives rise to the question as to how the divine person acts through the human nature without any act of genuine self-communication. In order to explain this and to make up for this deficit of sanctifying divine glory in the man Jesus, Barth settles on the concept of the *communicatio gratiarum* borrowed from Reformed

³⁶ CD I/1.119.

³⁷ See an interesting argument in Katherine Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew: Karl Barth's "Doctrine of Israel"* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

³⁸ CD I/2.457.

³⁹ Much of this material is covered in a different form in my work, Jack Kilcrease, *The Self-Donation of God: A Contemporary Lutheran Approach to Christ and His Benefits* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 149–197.

⁴⁰ CD VI/1.180; CD IV/2.167–170.

⁴¹ See discussion in Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: From Zurich to Barmen*, trans. John Hoffmeyer (Louisville, KY: John Knox Westminster Press, 1998), 102–107.

⁴² CD IV/1.143. Also see brief discussion in CD IV/2.82–83.

scholasticism.⁴³ Barth states that there is a “total and exclusive determination of . . . [Jesus’] human nature . . . by the grace of God.”⁴⁴ According to this concept, although the humanity of Jesus lacks divine glory, it possesses a superabundance of creaturely perfections.⁴⁵

The christological concept of the *communicatio gratiarum* is partially rooted in the Reformed scholastic distinction between the communicable and the incommunicable attributes of God.⁴⁶ Put succinctly, the older Reformed theologians held that God could communicate his wisdom and moral perfections to his creatures through their created similitude to his being (interestingly, a form of the *analogia entis* doctrine), whereas his qualities of glory (omnipotence, omnipresence, etc.) could not be communicated. If these later attributes could be communicated, God would transmute creatures into himself, which would be a contradiction in terms. When applied to Christology, such a concept also had the advantage of being able to explain the harmony between Jesus’ morally perfected will and the divine person of the Son, without recourse to a real communication of glory within the hypostatic union, which was posited by Lutherans. Therefore, as we will see below, the primary function of the *communicatio gratiarum* for Barth is to describe the activation of the obedience of Christ’s human nature in an analogical correspondence to his divine nature. Such a capacity is the result of the human nature’s created perfections and is not the result of the divine nature’s deification of the human nature’s will.

Barth views Jesus Christ as an image and actualization of the covenant between God and humanity. Christ is the “real man” and the true “covenant-partner of God.”⁴⁷ This covenant is decidedly bilateral, rather than unilateral. Christ the man is exemplar of spontaneous human submission to divine sovereignty under the determination of divine grace. Within this bilateral structure, Christ’s divinity moves toward humanity via the kenotic exercise of his priestly office,⁴⁸ whereas

⁴³ See lengthy discussion in CD IV/2.91–115.

⁴⁴ CD IV/2.88. Also see discussion in Paul Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark International, 2008), 117–182.

⁴⁵ Heinrich Hepp, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), 434–438. It should, of course, also be borne in mind that the Lutheran scholastics never denied that Christ had an abundance of created gifts. They simply insisted that he also possessed divine glory. See FC SD VIII in *Concordia Triglotta*, ed. F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 1033. Hereafter *Concordia Triglotta* will be cited as “*Triglotta*.”

⁴⁶ Hepp, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 60–64; 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), 3:223–226.

⁴⁷ CD III/2.203.

⁴⁸ CD IV/1.142–143.

in his humanity he ascends toward God via the exercise of his kingly office.⁴⁹ In the sequence of Jesus' life, the priestly office corresponds to his *kenosis* and crucifixion, whereas the kingly office manifests itself in the resurrection. As a result, the covenant is actualized because the man Jesus properly corresponds to and analogically echoes the series of God's eternal decrees (i.e., the rejection of sinful humanity = crucifixion, the election of a new humanity = resurrection). In this event, all humanity is irresistibly elected.⁵⁰ Although Barth explicitly rejects universalism,⁵¹ it is difficult not to see this as the ultimate implication of his position.⁵²

From this, it may be observed that in Barth's Christology the accent falls heavily on Christ's grace-determined human agency cooperating with the divine person, rather than on the unity of the divine subject with the *anhypostatic* humanity.⁵³ Unlike the Lutheran understanding of the person of Christ, Barth does not view God's personal agency as present and active in, under, and through the humanity of Christ (*genus apotelesmaticum, genus majesticum*).⁵⁴ Rather, by its obedience, the humanity of Christ analogically corresponds to God's series of decrees (i.e., the Reformed scholastic *communicatio gratiarum*).

By interpreting the relationship between the two natures in this manner, Barth distances the two natures in order to maintain divine transcendence. Also, much like Thomas Aquinas in his concept of theology as "speculative,"⁵⁵ Barth envisions his theology of the incarnation as giving human beings the ability to think into the event of revelation and indirectly see into God's eternal being. By looking on the human nature of Christ, one can see into God's eternal being above and beyond the external Word. In a word, Barth ever remains on the side of the Reformed theologian Johannes Oecolampadius, who at Marburg in 1529 chided Luther for clinging to Christ's humanity, when he should have been looking past it and focusing on his invisible divinity.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ CD IV/2.4.

⁵⁰ CD II/2.116–118.

⁵¹ CD II/2.417–419.

⁵² Interestingly enough, Emil Brunner famously argued that Barth's system represented the most consistent universalism in the history of Christian thought. See Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 314.

⁵³ CD II/2.94–194.

⁵⁴ FC SD VIII; *Triglotta*, 1031, 1041.

⁵⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: The Blackfriars English Translation*, ed. Thomas Gilby (New York and London: McGraw-Hill, 1964–), 1:15–17, 1a q 1 art 4.

⁵⁶ Martin Luther, "The Marburg Colloquy and the Marburg Articles" (1529): vol. 38, p. 46, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis:

Since Barth views Scripture and revelation in christomonistic terms, the function of the Bible is exclusively to witness to the covenant enacted between God and humanity actualized in Jesus. Likewise, his rejection of the Lutheran *capax* in favor of the Reformed *non-capax* also has an impact on how Scripture functions as revelation. Just as the humanity of Christ cannot be the medium of the real presence of his divinity (as it is in the confessional Lutheran understanding), Scripture likewise cannot truly be the Word of God. At best, Scripture is a written human witness to the Word of God. Just as one should look past Christ's humanity and see into his divinity, according to Barth, one should look past the word of the Bible to the real Word of God which it reflects.⁵⁷

Among other things, this means that for Barth Scripture is neither inerrant nor verbally inspired.⁵⁸ Doubtless, part of Barth's rejection of inerrancy and verbal inspiration is simply a holdover from the theological liberalism in which he was trained as a seminarian and young pastor.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, it must be observed that his rejection of verbal inspiration and inerrancy also corresponds to his very Reformed concern that God's revelation in the Word in no way objectifies him or compromises his transcendence. That is to say, if Holy Scripture were actually the Word of God and represented (one might say) the "real presence" of his truth (one could also say, the Lutheran "is," as in "this is my body"),⁶⁰ God's transcendent truth would become objectified in a book and thereby be dragged down to the level of creatures. Such a conclusion is unacceptable to Barth.

Following from this, it should also be observed that for Barth the Bible's witness to the events of salvation history must necessarily be conceptualized as "legendary" and "sagic."⁶¹ It must be borne in mind that this does not (as in the case of Rudolf Bultmann and other modern theologians) entail a rejection of God's miraculous and saving supernatural activity in history. Barth is quite clear throughout his *Kirchliche Dogmatik* that miraculous redemptive events did more or less happen, and the Bible

Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE.

⁵⁷ CD I/2.457.

⁵⁸ CD I/2.507–509; CD I/2.529–533.

⁵⁹ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 30–128.

⁶⁰ Perhaps we might say that the Orthodox Lutheran position is what Robert Preus called "Biblical Realism." See Robert Preus, "How Is the Lutheran Church to Interpret and Use the Old and New Testaments?" *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 14.3 (1973): 31–32. Also, see summary and appreciation of Preus's position in Kurt Marquart, "The 'Realist Principle' of Theology," in *Doctrine Is Life: Essays on Justification and the Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Klemet I. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 367–373.

⁶¹ CD I/1.326–329; CD III/1.80–94; IV/2.478–479. See description in George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 47.

does in fact bear witness to them. Nevertheless, when Scripture witnesses to these events it does so in an analogical and non-objectifying manner. Hence, they are recorded in a manner that mixes literal history together with non-literal and (although Barth would resist the term) mythological elements.⁶²

The logic here is clear: Just as God would be objectified and brought down to the level of his creatures (thereby losing his transcendence) if he truly and fully communicated his glory to Jesus, so, too, his miraculous actions in salvation history would become objectified if they were set down in literal language. Hence, the reports of the events of the history of salvation as they are presented in the Bible must be “similar to, with an even greater dissimilarity” from what literally happened.⁶³

Lastly, with regard to the efficacy of the Word, Barth could often speak of the Bible as “becoming” the Word of God. That is to say, for Barth the Bible possesses its identity as the Word of God only to the extent that it is a medium of God’s communication of his Word to his creatures (what George Hunsinger refers to as Barth’s “actualism”⁶⁴). This can only occur by God’s own sovereign initiative in causing certain human beings to hear him in the words of the Bible. Hence, the Bible is not inherently efficacious, but only occasionally when God chooses to make it so.⁶⁵ Again, Barth’s underlining Reformed logic is clear. If the word of the Bible were inherently efficacious, then God would risk tying himself to a particular creaturely medium and would risk becoming objectified.

This stands in significant contrast with the Lutheran understanding of the inherent efficacy of Scripture as developed in greater detail by Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) against Herman Rathmann (1585–1628) during the “Rathmann Controversy” in the early seventeenth century.⁶⁶ Although Rathmann agreed that the Bible was inerrant and verbally inspired (something Barth would reject), he nevertheless insisted that it was not inherently efficacious outside of its use (*extra usum*). In this, he largely mirrored the position of Reformed scholasticism.⁶⁷

⁶² See discussion in Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 47–49.

⁶³ See fascinating discussion in George Hunsinger, “Beyond Literalism and Expressivism: Karl Barth’s Hermeneutical Realism,” in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 210–225.

⁶⁴ Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 30–35.

⁶⁵ CD I/1.123; CD I/2.457.

⁶⁶ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:367–370. On the controversy, see Johann Anselm Steiger, “Das Wort sie sollen lassen stahn...’: Die Auseinandersetzung Johann Gerhards und der lutherischen Orthodoxie mit Hermann Rahtmann und deren abendmahlstheologische und christologische Implikate,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 95.3 (1998): 340–344.

⁶⁷ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:322–339.

In response to this, Abraham Calov (1612–1686) later pointed out that the Bible (unlike the sacraments) is always God’s Word, even when it is not being used in proclamation. Since it is intrinsically a communication of God’s truth, it must necessarily always be effective. Ultimately, God’s truth is inherently living and effective.⁶⁸

IV. The Confessional Lutheran Response

Barth’s treatment of the Word of God is problematic from the perspective of confessional Lutheran theology for a number of reasons. Central to our critique will be the Lutheran affirmation that the finite is capable of the infinite (*finitum capax infiniti*). As we have already observed, Barth systematically applies the Reformed christological principle of *finitum non capax infiniti* to his whole theology of the Word of God. This manner of thinking about the Word of God also allows creatures to think into revelation, thereby intellectually ascending into God’s eternal being above the dialectic of hidden and revealed, wrath and grace. Therefore, we will argue that this also leads to Barth’s rejection of the proper distinction between law and gospel.

First, it should be recognized that the distinct structural commitments and trajectories of Reformed and Lutheran Christology translate into differing understandings of the purpose and function of the external Word and the means of grace in general.⁶⁹ In profound contrast to Barth, Luther wrote against Zwingli and his other sacramentarian opponents:

We are not willing to give them room or yield to this metaphysical and philosophical distinction, as it was spun out by reason—as though man preaches, threatens, punishes, gives fears and comforts, but the Holy Ghost does the work; or a man baptizes, absolves, and hands out the supper of the Lord Christ, but God purifies the heart and forgives sin. Oh no, absolutely not! But we conclude thus: God preaches, threatens, punishes, gives fear, comforts, baptizes, hands out the Sacrament of the Altar, and absolves Himself.⁷⁰

Earlier in the debate with Zwingli over the Lord’s Supper, Luther similarly stated that “the glory of our God is precisely that for our sakes he comes down to the very

⁶⁸ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:368.

⁶⁹ Again see Kilcrease, *The Self-Donation of God*, 149–197.

⁷⁰ Lowell Green, “Philosophical Presuppositions in the Reformed-Lutheran Debate on John 6,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 56.1 (1992): 29, quoting from Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Tischreden*, 6 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912–1921), 3:673, no. 3868 (Lauterbach text), hereafter abbreviated WA TR. Lowell Green’s translation.

depths, into human flesh, into the bread, into our mouth, and into our heart, our bosom.”⁷¹

Gustaf Wingren offers similar critiques of Barth to those that Luther made of Zwingli and his other sacramentarian opponents: “The Word of the Bible contains within itself the coming of Christ as its general aim to which all tends. . . . It is in the simple words, in what is human in the Bible, that God’s power is hidden; divine and human must not be separated.” Indeed, Wingren states, “Even in the passage and even in preaching, *communicatio idiomatum* holds sway.”⁷² Johann Gerhard writes similarly: “The Holy Spirit speaks to us in and through Scripture. The voice and way of speaking of the Holy Spirit, therefore, sounds in those very words of Scripture.”⁷³

This being said, it is undoubtedly the case that much of the language that Scripture and church tradition uses about God is analogical (e.g., trinitarian “persons” and their relations).⁷⁴ The Bible also uses metaphor and simile. Nevertheless, it is not the specific language employed by the Bible about God that is at issue. Rather, what is at issue is how God becomes present to his creatures in revelation (particularly in the person of Christ), as well as in the Word and sacrament ministry of the Church.

Seen in this light, from the confessional Lutheran perspective the Word and sacrament can never be an analogical word that points beyond itself to some other word of God or higher truth. Rather, in the flesh of Jesus, in the Bible, and in the sacraments, God’s Word and truth become a “real presence” to believers. Christ and his truth are not present as an analogical representation, or, to recall Zwingli’s controversy with Luther, a “figure” that merely indirectly “signifies” God and his truth.⁷⁵ Rather, when God reveals himself and acts upon his creatures, he does so not equivocally or analogically, but literally and concretely through the sacramental mediation of the Word. Therefore, the divine law and gospel proclaimed in the Church are not “like and unlike” God’s judgment and mercy. Rather, they are the

⁷¹ Luther, *This Is My Body* (1527), AE 37:72.

⁷² Gustaf Wingren, *The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church*, trans. Victor C. Pogue (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 208.

⁷³ Johann Gerhard, *On the Legitimate Interpretation of Holy Scripture*, trans. Richard Dinda (Malone, TX: Repristination Press, 2015), 20.

⁷⁴ See Luther’s views in Christine Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 239–241.

⁷⁵ See discussion in Huldrych Zwingli, “Friendly Exegesis, that is, Exposition of the Matter of the Eucharist to Martin Luther, February 1527,” in *Huldrych Zwingli Writings*, 2 vols., trans. and ed. H. Wayne Pipkin (New York: Pickwick Publications, 1984), 2:250–252.

real presence of God's judgment and mercy being enacted on the hearers of the Word (Matt 10:14–15, 40; Luke 10:8–16).⁷⁶

To illustrate how Lutherans have confessed the “real presence” of God's truth in the Word of God (perhaps we might say the Lutheran “is” rather than the Zwinglian “signifies”), it is perhaps useful to revisit a debate that broke out between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions in the mid-seventeenth century. This debate concerned whether the man Jesus possessed what Protestant scholasticism termed the “archetypal theology” and the “ectypal theology.”⁷⁷

In *A Treatise on True Theology*, the Reformed theologian Francis Junius (1545–1602) differentiated between what he called the archetypal theology and ectypal theology. Subsequently, the distinction was introduced into Lutheranism by Johann Gerhard.⁷⁸ In making the distinction, Junius was probably borrowing from Duns Scotus in his differentiation between *theologia in nobis* or *nostra* and *theologia in se*.⁷⁹ Scotus taught that because God was the only one who truly knows himself in an act of eternal self-comprehension (*theologia in se*), he himself was the only true theologian. At best, a human could hope for a small and partial share in God's own eternal act of self-understanding (*theologia in nobis* or *nostra*).⁸⁰

Likewise, Junius posited that because of the ontic distance between humanity and the divine, God communicates an incomplete theology (ectypal theology) through the mediums of nature and Scripture.⁸¹ Through God's eternal act of self-comprehension in the Trinity, he alone possesses the archetypal theology.⁸² Although humans in heaven will possess a much fuller version of the ectypal theology (Matt 5:8; 1 Cor 13:12), they nevertheless can never fully know God in the manner that God knows himself (Isa 40:13; Rom 11:34; 1 Tim 6:16).

True to his Reformed confession, Junius accepted the *non-capax* and therefore posited that the man Jesus only possessed the ectypal theology and not the

⁷⁶ SC V; *Triglotta*, 553. “We receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the Confessor, as from God himself.”

⁷⁷ See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:225–238; Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:112–114; Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Hays and Henry Jacobs (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 16.

⁷⁸ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:113–114. See Johann Gerhard, “On the Nature of Theology,” §§ 15–17, in *On the Nature of Theology and on Scripture*, trans. Richard Dinda, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 22–24.

⁷⁹ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:227–228.

⁸⁰ See Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7.

⁸¹ Franciscus Junius, *A Treatise on True Theology*, trans. David Noe (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 113–120.

⁸² Junius, *A Treatise on True Theology*, 107–112.

archetypal theology.⁸³ In the mid-seventeenth century, Abraham Calov rejected this assertion in his debate with the Reformed theologian Johann Berg (1587–1658).⁸⁴ Calov pointed out that because Jesus possesses the fullness of the divine glory within his humanity (Col 2:9), he must therefore also possess the fullness of divine truth and wisdom: “[Christ] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3).⁸⁵ Quenstedt and the other Lutheran theologians of the later period of scholastic orthodoxy followed Calov in this judgment.⁸⁶

The implications from this debate are clear. For Junius and the other Reformed scholastics, the ectypal theology could be only a created analogical echo of the divine archetypal theology (i.e., a mere “signifies”). By contrast, for the Lutherans, the ectypal theology was implicitly a limited, though nevertheless very real, participation in the archetypal theology mediated to them by the risen Jesus present to them in Word and sacrament: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6; also see 1 Cor 2:16). The “is” of the means of grace gives Christians a share in the real presence of God’s truth.

Hence, from the confessional Lutheran perspective, in the same manner that the humanity of Christ contains the communication of his divinity (*genus majesticum*), through the written Word of Scripture and the preached Word, God truly communicates himself and his truth. This is the case in the sense that he verbally and inerrantly inspires the prophets and apostles to communicate his truth in concrete and literal human words that correspond directly to his truth (John 16:13; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 1:20–21). It is also the case in the sense that in the written and preached Word of the Bible, the risen Christ is present in the power of the Spirit, justifying, sanctifying, and mystically uniting himself with sinners (Matt 18:20; 28:20; Luke 10:16).

This, of course, prompts the question as to why the Reformed and Lutheran traditions have moved in opposite directions on the question of the *capax*. One reason might simply be the differences in philosophical backgrounds between the

⁸³ Junius, *A Treatise on True Theology*, 121–127.

⁸⁴ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:171. Oddly, Gerhard holds that the man Christ knows only the ectypal theology, yet due to the personal union of the two natures in Christ, it is a unique ectypal theology categorically different than what is in other rational creatures. See Gerhard, “On the Nature of Theology,” § 15, in *On the Nature of Theology and on Scripture*, 22.

⁸⁵ Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

⁸⁶ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:252; Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:170–172.

various reformers. Although this probably was a factor, in light of the wide variety of philosophical backgrounds of the various reformers, such a suggestion is likely to be of limited explanatory power.⁸⁷

Perhaps a more convincing answer to the question of the differing trajectories of the two traditions might be the competing understandings of idolatry. That is to say, both wings of the Reformation believed that the chief problem with human beings (and, indeed the late medieval forms of Christianity which they sought to reform) was idolatry. Nevertheless, as Paul Hinlicky has observed, how the Lutheran and Reformed traditions defined idolatry differ profoundly.⁸⁸ Put succinctly, for Luther and later Lutherans, idolatry was placing ultimate trust in anything that was not God. For the southern reformers (as well as for Reformed scholasticism and Barth), idolatry is primarily characterized as the confusion of the glory of the infinite God with anything created.

The contrast between the two traditions can be particularly observed in how their key confessional documents treat the prohibition against images in the Ten Commandments. It is well known that the Heidelberg Catechism separates the prohibition of images from the larger prohibition against idolatry, whereas according to Luther's division in the Large Catechism, the prohibition against images is simply an example (probably the most relevant examples for the environment of the Ancient Near East) of the prohibition against idolatry.⁸⁹

In other words, for Luther, idolatry may indeed take the shape of following a form of primitive superstition that assumes that physical objects are conduits for various nature deities, or even give one the ability to manipulate certain superhuman powers.⁹⁰ But this is only one particular instance of the overall problem of becoming deaf to God's Word and treating creatures as if they are worthy of our ultimate trust. As Luther puts it, "A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress, so that to have a God is

⁸⁷ See Daniel Bolliger, *Infiniti Contemplatio: Grundzüge der Scotus- und Scotismusrezeption im Werk Huldrych Zwingli* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

⁸⁸ Paul Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 98.

⁸⁹ Contrast LC I 1; *Triglotta*, 581–593 with Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 517–536.

⁹⁰ LC I 1; *Triglotta*, 585. "Thus, for example, the heathen who put their trust in power and dominion elevated Jupiter as the supreme god; the others, who were bent upon riches, happiness, or pleasure, and a life of ease, Hercules, Mercury, Venus, or others; women with child, Diana or Lucina, and so on; thus every one made that his god to which his heart was inclined, so that even in the mind of the heathen to have a god means to trust and believe."

nothing else than to trust and believe Him from the [whole] heart; as I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol.”⁹¹

As can be observed, for Luther, the issue is not (as in the case of the Reformed) the confusion of the finite and the infinite. On the contrary, Luther speaks of creatures as God’s “channels,” “wrappings,” and “masks.”⁹² God is active in and through his creatures, most especially in his full communication of his glory to the man Jesus. Indeed, it is highly problematic to look past the visible and auditory words, through which God has manifested himself, into his hidden being (*Deus absconditus*). God hidden in his majesty apart from any means and promises is necessarily a terrifying God who cannot be trusted (Deut 32:39; also see 1 Sam 2:6; Isa 45).⁹³ God removes the terror of the creature and makes himself a true and proper object of trust and worship precisely by making himself tangible in the man Jesus, and then in the Word and sacrament ministry of the Church.

Creatures become objects of idolatry for Luther when one does not listen to the divine word and therefore fails to see the creature as a “channel”⁹⁴ of the invisible and uncreated God behind it. As a result, the creature comes to see the object in and of itself as the giver of the good, thereby making it into a false object of trust. In this, the human fails to hear God’s Word and therefore believe that it is the Lord himself who is behind the mask, channel, and covering communicating the good in and through it:

We need the wisdom that distinguishes God from his mask [i.e., creature]. . . . When a greedy man, who worships his belly, hears that “man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4) he eats the bread but fails to see God in the bread; for he sees, admires, and adores only the mask.⁹⁵

Gustaf Wingren describes the contrast between the Lutheran and Reformed/Barthian theories of idolatry from a somewhat different angle. He observes that at the heart of Barth’s theory of revelation is the belief that there is a fundamental opposition between the infinite and finite. As we observed earlier, idolatry and sin for the Reformed tradition is primarily seen as a function of the confusion of the finite and the infinite, of creature and Creator.⁹⁶ Indeed, this is what

⁹¹ LC I 1; *Triglotta*, 581.

⁹² Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–45/1544–54), AE 1:15; *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535), AE 26:95; LC I 1; *Triglotta*, 587.

⁹³ Luther, *Bondage of the Will* (1526), AE 33:140.

⁹⁴ LC I 1; *Triglotta*, 587.

⁹⁵ Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535), AE 26:95.

⁹⁶ Wingren, *The Living Word*, 91–93.

drives Barth's theory of revelational analogy. It is precisely for this reason that Wingren views Barth as a quasi-Gnostic. Barth moves in a Gnostic direction by prioritizing the God of salvation over the God of creation. Likewise, he comes very close to conflating temporality with fallenness in a manner similar to the Gnostic myth of the fall.⁹⁷

In contrast to this, Wingren argues that God made his creation as a medium of his infinite goodness. Although creatures are of course distinct from the Creator, ultimately the finite was made for the infinite. Therefore, finitude and temporality do not in and of themselves stand in fundamental opposition to God.⁹⁸ Ultimately, the finite becomes problematic only when it takes on a demonic character and opposes the divine. In doing this, it attempts to usurp the place of God as an alien object of trust. In putting itself in the place of God, the demonic seeks to enslave other creatures. The root of all this demonic activity is ultimately Satan. Consequently, what is the opposite of the divine is not creation (as in Barth's theology), but Satan.⁹⁹

Wingren goes on to show that the Lutheran *capax* in both Christology and subsequently in the theology of Word and sacrament means that God in Christ has not left us to ourselves but has entered the battlefield of creation in order to wrestle it away from demonic forces.¹⁰⁰ In, under, and through creaturely means, God restores creation's true identity by freeing it from enslaving powers.¹⁰¹ God's presence within his creation as incarnate places him in total solidarity with all that he has made and thereby prioritizes a relationship of self-donation and trust over Barth's spiritualism and implicit legalism. It also validates creation as an expression of God's goodness and love.

Ultimately, when idolatry is understood in the manner of the Reformed tradition, law becomes consistently prioritized over the gospel. That is to say, from the Reformed perspective the proper structure of the divine-human relationship is conceptualized as being ultimately rooted in divine power and corresponding human submission. By contrast, the Lutheran understanding of the divine-human relationship is fundamentally based on divine grace and passive receptivity to divine grace.¹⁰² This, of course, does not mean that Lutheran theology

⁹⁷ Gustaf Wingren, *Theology in Conflict: Nygren, Barth, Bultmann*, trans. Eric Wahlstrom (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958).

⁹⁸ Wingren, *The Living Word*, 92–93.

⁹⁹ Wingren, *The Living Word*, 93–94.

¹⁰⁰ Wingren, *The Living Word*, 32.

¹⁰¹ Wingren, *The Living Word*, 31–32, 94–95.

¹⁰² See Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas Trapp (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 42–43.

rejects the importance of submission to God's authority and obedience to his commandments. Nevertheless, as Luther's catechisms and the Formula of Concord make clear, Christian obedience should have its source in God's own self-giving grace (Rom 12:1; Gal. 5:6; 1 John 4:19).¹⁰³ The passivity of faith gives rise to an active love which obeys God's commandments.

By contrast, it is Calvin and not Luther who serves as model for Barth. Calvin consistently viewed the third use of the law as the main use. The apparent implication of this is that the gospel exists in order to make the law work as the most proper mode of divine-human interaction.¹⁰⁴ Barth went even further than Calvin. Ultimately, he claimed that the reformational order of law-gospel (shared by both Lutheran and Reformed) should be revised as gospel-law.¹⁰⁵ For Barth, the law is only properly the law when it is the non-accusatory medium through which the divine-human relationship must function within the bilateral covenant enacted in Christ. The "law is nothing else than the necessary *form* of the gospel."¹⁰⁶ The implication of this is that humans become righteous by the power of grace insofar as they are actualized as the proper covenant-partners of God in Christ.

The prioritization of the law over the gospel makes sense of the dynamic of the Reformed *non-capax*. Within this legal relationship, God must stand apart from his creatures in order that there might be a proper distance between them. Much as in Islam,¹⁰⁷ in the Reformed tradition the legal relationship works on the basis of the creature's recognition of God's otherness and sovereignty. Seen from this perspective, the trajectories of the Reformed/Barthian tradition and the Lutheran tradition are the very opposite of each other: for the Reformed tradition, to solve the problem of idolatry creation must increasingly be evacuated of God's presence,

¹⁰³ This can be particularly seen in Luther's exposition of the First Commandment. See LC I 1; *Triglotta*, 581–589; FC SD IV; *Triglotta*, 938–951. Also see Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535), AE 26:4–12; *Two Kinds of Righteousness* (1519), AE 31:297–306; *Freedom of a Christian* (1520), AE 31:333–377.

¹⁰⁴ For discussion of the second use of the law, see ICR, 2.7.9–10 in *Calvin: The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. and ed. John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), 1:357. It should be noted that we are using the Lutheran numbering here. Calvin reverses the order of first and second uses of the law. For the third use, see *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.7.12–13 in McNeill and Battles, eds., *Calvin: The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:360–362. See discussion in William Edgar, "Ethics: The Christian Life and Good Works according to Calvin," in *Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David Hall and Peter Lillback (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2008), 320–346.

¹⁰⁵ Karl Barth, "Gospel and Law," 71–100.

¹⁰⁶ Karl Barth, "Gospel and Law," 80.

¹⁰⁷ See Ian Richard Netton, *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 1994).

whereas for the Lutheran tradition, God's solidarity and presence within creation must become ever deeper.

Barth's Reformed attempt at distancing God from his creation results in a thoroughgoing theology of divine sovereignty at the expense of the incarnation and the cross. As we have already seen, the main focus of Barth's theology of the incarnation and the Word of God is that one does not so much find God embedded in the life of Jesus. Rather, the life of Jesus is meaningful because it is a temporal recapitulation of God's eternal decrees existing before time. The man Jesus is a created analogy that substitutes for the real presence of God and his truth.

The ultimate effect of Barth's attempt to look past the external Word is to reject Luther's dialectic of the hidden and revealed God, as well as the distinction between law and gospel. Because God is known above the external Word, any kind of dialectical manifestation of God in the Word itself is essentially eliminated and neutralized in favor of a dialectic between creator and creature, the eternal and the temporal.¹⁰⁸ For Barth, God cannot operate in two different manifestations (hidden and revealed), and according to two different words (law and gospel). For Barth, God is manifested in a single and unitary Word (i.e., the bilateral covenant enacted in Jesus Christ) above the duality of law and gospel. As a result, law is collapsed into grace, and grace into law.¹⁰⁹ This effectively creates a higher synthesis of the sinner's relationship with God as being structured on the basis of a grace-induced submission to God within the matrix of a bilateral covenant. Although probably an exaggeration, Hans Küng famously argued that there was in reality very little difference between Barth's view of justification and that of the Council of Trent.¹¹⁰

Therefore, for Barth, the passive human reception of grace is not the goal of the divine-human relationship, but is a first step toward establishing a relationship based on performative righteousness. The believer is to engage in an "act of responsibility, offering himself as the response to the Word of God, and conducting, shaping and expressing himself as an answer to it. He is, *and is man, as*

¹⁰⁸ See similar observations in Wingren, *The Living Word*, 208–209. Also see similar critiques to the ones offered above in Gerhard Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate: An Interpretation of Its Historical Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1969), 200–210; Steven Paulson, "Analogy and Proclamation: The Struggle over God's Hiddenness in the Theology of Martin Luther and Eberhard Jüngel," (PhD diss., Lutheran School of Theology, 1992), 216–217. Although we ardently disagree with Forde and Paulson on the key issues of the eternity of the law and the third use of the law, their criticism of Barth's functional rejection of the law-gospel distinction is valid to an extent. Also see a critique of the use of analogy in theology in Lowell Green, *Adventures in Law and Gospel: Lectures in Lutheran Dogmatics* (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1993), 47–53.

¹⁰⁹ Wingren, *The Living Word*, 208–209.

¹¹⁰ See Hans Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2004).

he does this.”¹¹¹ For this reason, *coram Deo* the freedom of the gospel is not the goal of the law’s determination of the divine-human relationship. Rather, grace’s aim is fundamentally to activate human agency and place it in the right direction. Humanity is ultimately defined by “willingly corresponding to the claim laid upon us by the Word of God.”¹¹² As a result, creation’s essence and identity is not to be found in receiving, but rather in doing. In one of the later volumes of his *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Barth very bluntly states regarding this ontic determination that “the statement ‘I am’ demands further explanation. It means: ‘I do.’”¹¹³ By contrast, Luther defines the divine-human relationship as being primarily defined by humanity’s passive receptivity to the Word in faith.”¹¹⁴

Again, all of this is a byproduct of Barth’s analogical concept of the Word. If one is permitted to use analogy to think into God’s reality above the duality of his two words (law and gospel), one will ultimately come to see God’s grace universally revealed in Christ as a law of God’s general relationship with the world. Barth’s implicit universalism may appear initially to be a form of antinomianism, but it very quickly becomes a form of legalism. Since the divine-human relationship is exhaustively defined by grace, Barth functionally turns all knowledge of God into law. Grace becomes a law because instead of being a remedy for God’s wrath revealed in the word of law, it functions as disclosing the law of God’s relationship with the world. This information then demands that the believer conform their behavior to this general situation of grace, rather than trusting in the divine promise of grace juxtaposed with divine wrath. One can find a similar situation in the standard theology of American Mainline Protestantism, which has undoubtedly been influenced by Barth’s theology. Universal acceptance of all without the call to repentance sets forth inclusiveness as a new law that must be obeyed.

By contrast, the confessional Lutheran sees God’s will dialectically revealed in the two distinct, yet related, words of law and gospel. As David Scaer correctly observes: “The Lutheran position is perhaps the most philosophically unsatisfying because the Christian is continually confronted by a God who hates and loves him at the same time.”¹¹⁵ Although faith does lead to the fruit of obedience in the kingdom of this world (*coram mundo*), the divine-human relationship (*coram Deo*)

¹¹¹ CD III/2.175. Emphasis added.

¹¹² CD III/2.181.

¹¹³ CD III/2.181. Emphasis added. For a good summary of how Barth views divine and human agency, see Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 185–224.

¹¹⁴ Luther, *Disputation Concerning Man* (1536), AE 34:139.

¹¹⁵ David Scaer, “Law and Gospel in Lutheran Theology,” *Grace Theological Journal* 12.2 (1991): 167.

is fundamentally defined by the fleeing of the repentant sinner from the word of God's wrath to the word of his grace.

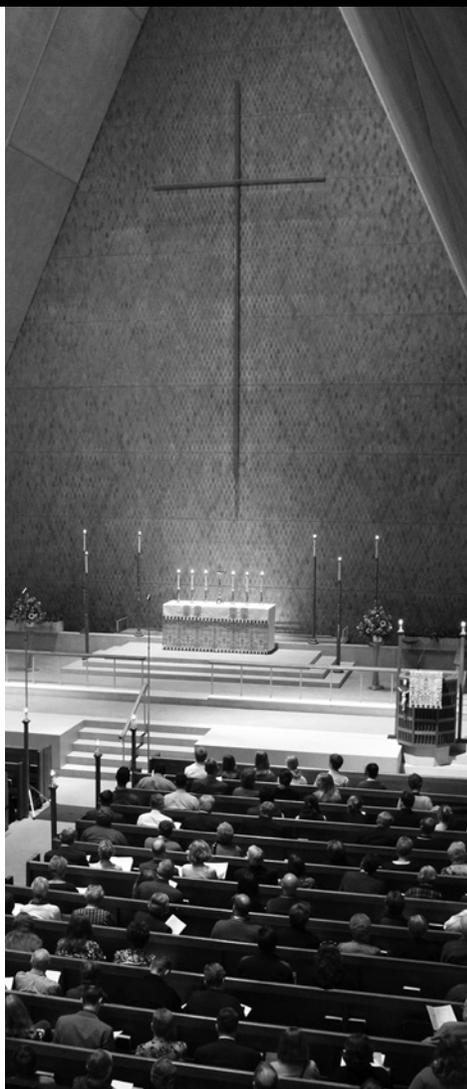
V. Conclusion

As we have observed in our brief study, Karl Barth's doctrine of the Word of God remains problematic for confessional Lutherans for multiple reasons. In their criticisms of Barth, mid-twentieth-century Lutherans were certainly correct to focus on Barth's low view of scriptural inspiration. Nevertheless, as our study has demonstrated, the weaknesses in Barth's view of scriptural inspiration and authority are symptomatic of a larger problem, namely, Barth's distancing of God from the flesh of Jesus and the means of grace. Ultimately, Barth's unwillingness to identify the literal words of the Bible with God's Word is rooted in the failure of his doctrine of the incarnation. Similarly, although his monism of grace initially may seem like a form of antinomianism, it results in a form of covert legalism. The consequence of not taking seriously God's utter hiddenness outside the gospel, and his complete tangibility within it, is the collapse of grace into law, and law into grace.

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Luther on the Fulfillment of the Law: Five Theses for Contemporary Luther Studies

Brian T. German

I. Introduction

How does Luther speak of the fulfillment of the law in his exegetical writings? While it should be relatively uncontroversial that his view of the proper *function* of the law in a fallen world is to convict an individual of sin,¹ what did Luther have to say about the *essence* of the law, and how, moreover, does he speak about that essence being fulfilled?² We can gain a better understanding of Luther's view of the fulfillment of the law if we examine his lectures on the Old and New Testaments. While other works of Luther—his *Antinomian Disputations*, for example—are particularly germane to the topic at hand, his exegetical writings are especially important because they show us how he speaks of these matters in the midst of engaging biblical texts. By examining these exegetical writings, we gain a fuller picture of Luther on this “systematic” question.

Five aspects of the fulfillment of the law appear to be crucial to Luther's thinking. (1) The law is fulfilled in love, (2) the law is fulfilled by faith, (3) the law is fulfilled in the believer, (4) the believer loves the fulfilled law, and (5) the fulfilled

¹ See, for example, Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545/1544–1554): vol. 7, p. 257, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE. Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), vol. 44, p. 489, 33–34 (hereafter WA). Similar examples abound: AE 19:100 (WA 19:247.23–26); AE 12:45 (WA 40/2:248.14–16); AE 26:310 (WA 40:482.12–14); AE 26:345 (WA 40:529.11–12); AE 21:354 (WA 7:600.19–21); AE 22:165 (WA 46:679.25–26).

² I am aware that the very distinction between the law's function and its essence is a contentious matter in Luther studies. For a recent point of entry into the discussion, see Nicholas Hopman, “Luther's *Antinomian Disputations* and *lex aeterna*,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 30.2 (2016): 152–180, and a critique of Hopman in Nathan Rinne, “Paradise Regained: Placing Nicholas Hopman's *Lex Aeterna* Back in Luther's Frame,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 82.1–2 (January/April 2018): 65–82, esp. 69. By “essence” here I have in mind simply a placeholder for those instances in Luther's exegetical writings where he defines the law apart from its accusing and condemning “proper function.” See further below.

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law exists in eternity. I refer to these five aspects throughout this study as five “theses” of Luther on the fulfillment of the law. The relevance of this research for contemporary Luther studies will be evident by comparing the five “theses” to a recent treatment of the law in Luther as given by Steven Paulson’s book *Luther’s Outlaw God*.³ In short, my argument is that Luther’s understanding of the fulfillment of the law depends entirely on the law’s essence being defined as the eternal will of God, but Paulson severely misrepresents Luther in how he handles this very understanding of the essence of the law.

II. The Law as the Eternal Will of God

The reformer leaves us with ample material across his exegetical writings that he understands the essence of the law as none other than the eternal will of God for human behavior and life.⁴ In his *Lectures on Genesis*, for example, Luther’s most basic, barebones definition for the law is “the will of God.”⁵ The same can be found repeatedly in his *Lectures on Deuteronomy*; the law, Luther says, is “the will of God.”⁶ In the same context, Luther again makes it clear that “God reveals His Law, by which He makes His will known to us,”⁷ and that the law is “all His will and counsel.”⁸ To include just one of several similar examples from his New Testament writings, Luther makes the following unambiguous statement about the essence of the law in his *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*: “the Law serves to indicate the will of God.”⁹

But what about that freighted adjective “eternal” in this initial claim that Luther understands the essence of the law to be “the eternal will of God”? This important modifier also occurs quite frequently in Luther’s exegetical writings, but in various ways. In his *Operationes in Psalmos* (1519–1521), for example, Luther notes many times throughout his commentary on Psalm 19 that “the law commands firmly and forever (*inaeternum et stabiliter*).”¹⁰ In the same commentary, Luther says that the

³ Steven D. Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God: Volume 1: Hiddenness, Evil, and Predestination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018).

⁴ In his *Preface to the Old Testament* (1523, 1545), AE 35:243–244, Luther distinguishes the moral law (“Ten Commandments”) as perpetual, from the temporary civil and ceremonial laws of ancient Israel. In our examination, we are focusing on the moral law, not the civil and ceremonial laws.

⁵ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545/1544–1554), AE 3:319.

⁶ Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy* (1525), AE 9:50.

⁷ AE 9:51.

⁸ AE 9:51.

⁹ Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John* (1537–1540), AE 22:143.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *Martin Luther’s Complete Commentary on the First Twenty-Two Psalms*, vol. 2, trans. Henry Cole (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1826), 419–420 (WA 5:560.39–40). Note that this is the first “419–420” in the book, as pages 261–308 have mistakenly been printed as 381–428, thus leaving duplicates of every page number within the range 381–428. All citations from this work in the upcoming discussion are in reference to the first occurrence of that respective

law is “enduring forever (*permanens in aeternum*),”¹¹ and that “the law, being fulfilled by love, is established forever” (*firmatur in aeternum*).”¹² While these remarks come from the earlier years of his career (roughly 1521), in his *Lectures on Genesis*, near the end of his life, Luther similarly describes the law as “the eternal and immutable judgment of God.”¹³ But perhaps the best way to summarize what has been amassed thus far from Luther on the essence of the law comes from a sermon of his on Matthew 22:34–46, where he proclaims that the law is to be understood as “the eternal, immovable, and unchangeable will of God.”¹⁴

We are on solid ground, then, when claiming that Luther understands the essence of the law in his exegetical writings as the eternal will of God. True, Luther will occasionally give even greater precision to this definition, such as the will of God for “faith and love,” which is repeated continually in his *Preface to the Old Testament*,¹⁵ but the formulation “the eternal will of God” best encapsulates the statements provided above.¹⁶ And while it is also true, as Fagerberg points out, that Luther does not always use the term “law” in such discussions but will occasionally use “commandment” (*Gebot, mandatum, or praeceptum*) instead,¹⁷ the quotations given above often do use the term “law,” and they stem from both the earlier and later periods of Luther’s career, from both his Old and New Testament writings, and also from the pulpit.

Thesis 1: The Law Is Fulfilled in Love

For Luther, the law is fulfilled in love. This thesis is very nearly identical, of course, to Romans 13:10, “love is the fulfilling of the law” (πλήρωμα οὖν νόμου ἡ

page number in this particular volume of Luther’s work on the psalms. This same volume will be cited hereafter as “Cole 2.”

¹¹ Cole 2:422 (WA 5:562.36–37).

¹² Cole 2:419 (WA 5:560.31).

¹³ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545/1544–1554), AE 7:275.

¹⁴ Luther, *Church Postil V* (1544), AE 79:174–175.

¹⁵ See esp. AE 35:240–241.

¹⁶ Compare the language used in the Formula of Concord for the essence of the law: “his [God’s] divine, eternal will” (FC SD II 50; Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000], 553); “the unchanging will of God” (FC SD VI 17; Kolb and Wengert, 590); “the eternal and unchanging will of God” (FC SD VI 3; Kolb and Wengert, 587). Fagerberg notes in his study of the Lutheran Confessions that “in the midst of these numerous and seemingly antithetical statements on the Law there is, nevertheless, an important and dominant point of view. The Law is, above all, God’s eternal will.” Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions (1529–1537)*, trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 64. Using more classic terminology: “For the Confessions, then, there is no thought of a law other than the Moral Law” (73).

¹⁷ See Fagerberg, *Lutheran Confessions*, 80–81, 86.

ἀγάπη).¹⁸ While this verse from Romans can naturally be found cited and alluded to throughout the entire corpus of Luther's writings,¹⁹ the above thesis can be supported by examining places in Luther's exegetical writings where he amplifies the relationship between law and love beyond simply affirming his belief in the clear testimony of Romans 13:10.

In his *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther says quite plainly in his discussion of the separation between Abram and Lot (Genesis 13) that "the purpose of all laws is love."²⁰ This way of speaking also occurs in other Old Testament commentaries of his, such as the *Operationes in Psalmos*. On one occasion, Luther calls love "the lady friend (*amica*) of the law," because it "agrees in all things with the law."²¹ In another context, he says that love is "the essential meaning of the law,"²² and still in another that "all the commandments of the law depend on love."²³

Turning more specifically to the law's fulfillment in love, it should be no surprise, then, that Luther will at times in his exegetical writings simply equate the love of the law with the fulfillment of the law. This happens, for instance, in his discussion of Psalm 19, where he says unhesitatingly "the love of the law, or, the fulfilling of the law"²⁴; the two are virtually synonymous for him. Again, in his *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, Luther contends that "If, however, the Law is loved in the heart, it is truly fulfilled. . . . it is satisfied and fulfilled if it is loved."²⁵ While such statements seem to depict the most common way that Luther expresses the relationship between love and the fulfillment of the law, at times he also includes the despicability of anything against God in his talk of the law's fulfillment, such as the following remark again from his commentary on Psalm 19: "the love of righteousness and the hatred of iniquity: that is, the fulfillment of all laws."²⁶

To summarize: while Luther can of course be found affirming his belief in Romans 13:10 in a myriad of places throughout his writings, this brief discussion amplifies that belief by highlighting some instances in his exegetical writings where he discusses the relationship between law and love a bit more elaborately. In short,

¹⁸ Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

¹⁹ Recall also that Luther lectured on the book of Romans in 1515–1516 (AE 25).

²⁰ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545/1544–1554), AE 2:339. This conviction is repeated in analogous ways as he comments on the passage.

²¹ Cole 2:418 (WA 5:559.23).

²² Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (1525), AE 33:133–134.

²³ Luther, "Sermon on Matt. 22:37–39" (1522), AE 51:106. In Luther's *Preface to the Old Testament* there is a similar statement, which also includes faith: "For since all laws aim at faith and love, none of them can be valid, or be a law, if it conflicts with faith or love" (AE 35:240).

²⁴ Cole 2:408.

²⁵ Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy* (1525), AE 9:278.

²⁶ Cole 2:423.

love for Luther is the very essence of the law, whose essence (as we saw above) is none other than the eternal will of God, whose essence (as we know from 1 John 4:8) is love.

Thesis 2: The Law Is Fulfilled by Faith

According to Luther, the law is also fulfilled by faith. We first examine some places where Luther speaks of the fulfillment of the law as stemming from *both* love and faith in the same breath.

In his *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, for example, Luther writes that “the fulfilling of the Law is love from a good heart *and* from faith that is not feigned.”²⁷ Later in the same volume, he expresses the relationship between love and faith in relation to the fulfillment of the law in this way: “His commandment is fulfilled when the Word is in the heart, that is, when it is loved; and that happens through faith.”²⁸ Here the emphasis is on faith bringing about the kind of love that fulfills a commandment. Luther has different ways of expressing this too. In the *Operationes in Psalmos*, for example, he speaks of “the godliness of faith, by which alone the law is fulfilled and loved.”²⁹ Similarly, in his *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John* he put it this way: “If I come to acknowledge and to love the Law, I fulfill the Law entirely, and that happens out of or through faith. Faith brings everything along with it.”³⁰ Whatever else can be said about the relationship between faith and love, therefore, when it comes to the fulfillment of the law, the two for Luther are inseparable.

Seemingly more frequent, however, is Luther’s emphasis on faith alone as that which fulfills the law. In his *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, Luther states clearly that “through faith the commands of God are fulfilled.”³¹ In his *Operationes in Psalmos*, he likewise says that “it is faith alone that purifies the heart (Acts 15) and fulfills all the commandments of God.”³² Not surprisingly, these kinds of remarks typically occur in discussions about the relationship between faith and works, as in Luther’s commentary on Psalm 68. There he says that “faith, and not works, is the fulfillment of the Law.”³³ Again, in the same place, “the Law is fulfilled solely by faith.”³⁴

²⁷ Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy* (1525), AE 9:70 (emphasis added).

²⁸ AE 9:279.

²⁹ Cole 2:427.

³⁰ Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John* (1537–1540), AE 69:329.

³¹ Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy* (1525), AE 9:87.

³² Cole 2:50.

³³ Luther, *Commentary on Psalm 68* (1521), AE 13:19.

³⁴ AE 13:20. This is also a theme in Luther’s “Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans.” For example: “faith alone makes a person righteous and fulfils the law” (AE 35:368); “we fulfill it [the law] by faith” (369).

To summarize: while Luther at times speaks of both faith and love in relation to the fulfillment of the law, or that faith is the means whereby the law is both fulfilled and loved, in many places Luther strongly urges that faith alone fulfills the law. Intriguingly, in one place outside his exegetical writings he even speaks of faith as “the *fullness* of the law (*plenitudo legis*).”³⁵ In short, when it comes to the fulfillment of the law, Luther certainly also believed that it is fulfilled by faith.³⁶

Thesis 3: The Law Is Fulfilled in the Believer

According to Luther, the law is fulfilled in the believer. This thesis shifts the focus slightly from what happens within the believer (faith, love) to the more general claim that the law is indeed fulfilled *in the believer*. This conviction plays a major role in Luther’s understanding of the fulfillment of the law.

Luther’s *Antinomian Disputations* offer some helpful support for this thesis. In a defense of the division of Christian doctrine into law and gospel, Luther evokes Matthew 5:17 (“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”) and chooses to paraphrase this well-known statement from Christ’s Sermon on the Mount as follows: “My office is not to eliminate the law but to fulfill it, and to fulfill it in such a way that those who believe that they are redeemed from the curse of the law because of this, my fulfillment of the law, might also know that *the law is now to be fulfilled by them*, especially since they have already received the first fruits of the Holy Spirit.”³⁷ Here it is clear that, for Luther, Christ’s fulfilling of the law *de facto* takes place in the believer. “It is necessary,” Luther says a bit later in the same disputations, “that both justification *and fulfillment* take place *in us*.”³⁸ Again, and even more succinctly, “Christ fulfilled the law. Therefore we too fulfill it.”³⁹

These remarks from Luther’s *Antinomian Disputations* provide a nice supplement to the many and various statements about the law being fulfilled in the believer across his exegetical writings. In his *Lectures on Isaiah*, for example, Luther contends that “the Law is fulfilled by Christ *and then also by us* who have been endowed by the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁰ Similarly, in his *Lectures on Deuteronomy*, “The

³⁵ Luther, *Against Latomus* (1521), AE 32:178 (emphasis added; WA 8:71.5).

³⁶ Compare here the language of Melancthon’s second edition of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (September 1531): “The fulfillment of the law is not accepted on its own account but on account of faith” (Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 145, text following Ap IV 159).

³⁷ Martin Luther, *Solus Decalogus Est Aeternus: Martin Luther’s Complete Antinomian Theses and Disputations*, ed. and trans. Holger Sonntag (Minneapolis: Lutheran Press, 2008), 45 (emphasis added).

³⁸ Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 175 (emphasis added).

³⁹ Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 301, 303.

⁴⁰ Luther, *Lectures on Isaiah* (1528), AE 16:99 (emphasis added).

Gospel teaches from what source *you* receive the power to fulfill the Law.”⁴¹ Perhaps even more strikingly, in one place of the *Operationes in Psalmos* Luther says that “they [believers] *accord with the law in all things (legi per omnia conveniunt)*.”⁴² The law gives a clear shape, in other words, to how believers live and move and have their being. In fact, in his *Lectures on Hebrews*, Luther goes so far as to say that “he [the believer] owes the Law nothing; but he keeps the Law, and *his life is the Law itself, living and fulfilled*.”⁴³

Especially noteworthy is the theme that recurs in Luther’s *Sermons on the Gospel of John*, that Christ enables this fulfillment of the law in the believer. When commenting on John 1:17, for example—“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”—Luther writes that “He [Christ] supplies grace and truth, and the means which enable me to keep the First, the Second, and the Third Commandment.”⁴⁴ Shortly after this, he says the same thing in another way: “God will lend His aid, so that you may begin to keep the Law through Christ, in whom you believe. And all this is effected through Christ’s grace and truth.”⁴⁵ Again, in the same context, Luther even offers up the following plea: “Oh, come, Lord Jesus Christ, help us and give us grace to enable us to fulfill the Law’s demands!”⁴⁶

To summarize: while Luther fittingly places all the focus on Christ as the one who fulfills the law,⁴⁷ this fulfillment must also incorporate those who believe that this fulfillment happened on their behalf. “This is the office of grace, whereby we know Christ, by whose righteousness, life, and strength we fulfill the law and overcome death and hell.”⁴⁸ Just as Luther often spoke emphatically of love or faith

⁴¹ Luther, *Lectures on Deuteronomy* (1525), AE 9:179 (emphasis added).

⁴² Cole 2:420 (WA 5:560.40; emphasis added).

⁴³ Luther, *Lectures on Hebrews* (1517–1518), AE 29:193–194 (emphasis added).

⁴⁴ Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John* (1537–1540), AE 22:144.

⁴⁵ AE 22:146.

⁴⁶ AE 22:144. Other kindred examples could be added. “He [Christ] assists me in obeying the precepts of the Law” (Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John* [1537–1540], AE 22:148); “Christ alone must endow me with the ability to keep it” (148). For one example stemming from a different chapter of John in the same sermon series, Luther says in his discussion of John 6 that “Christ must come to you before you can do the works of the Law. When Christ comes, then you will do what the Law prescribes and whatever else you are to do” (AE 23:151). Note also Luther’s remarks on Matthew 5:17 in his *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount* (1532), where he writes that it is Christ’s “grace and Spirit [that] enable us to do and keep the Law’s demands” (AE 21:69).

⁴⁷ For more on the atoning work of Christ in Luther, see “Christ’s Work as Satisfaction to God” in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 202–208.

⁴⁸ Luther, *Preface to the Old Testament* (1545 [1523]), AE 35:245.

(or both) as the fulfillment of the law, so also is he adamant that this fulfillment takes place within the believer.⁴⁹

Thesis 4: The Believer Loves the Fulfilled Law

This fourth thesis may not come to the forefront of our minds when thinking about what the reformer had to say about the relationship between the believer and the law, but perhaps it should. Luther's exegetical writings offer several fascinating windows into his clear insistence that the believer loves the fulfilled law. Consider, for example, Luther's commentary on Psalm 19 in his *Operationes in Psalmos*. Here Luther has much to say about the transformation that takes place within the believer in relation to the law before and after conversion. "The law cannot delight us before it is fulfilled, but it must be afterwards."⁵⁰ How is it that such a transformation is accomplished? Luther further explains: "by the Spirit they [believers] come to love it."⁵¹ Yes, it is the Spirit, Luther says in several places, who enters and "fills us with the love of the law."⁵² In fact, with the Spirit, "the law is made innocent, faithful, right, elect, and in all respects amiable."⁵³ While many similar examples of this could be noted, the following is a poignant summary statement of the issue at hand from the perspective of the believer's will in relation to the law: "The will being now changed into another will, the man beholds the law of the Lord, and sees it to prohibit and command those same things which he, being now inflamed by the Spirit, desires and loves. Hence it comes to pass, that he cannot but love that law which answers to his own wishes in all things; nor can he help praising it."⁵⁴ The law for Luther continues to "prohibit and command" all the same, but the will of the believer has been drastically changed. Characteristically, he has an even more succinct way of saying it: "He that loves the law cannot praise it enough, so pleased is he with that which displeased him before."⁵⁵

Another treasure trove of material on the believer's love for the fulfilled law comes from Luther's celebrated "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans" from 1522 (revised in 1546). With resonances to his commentary on Psalm 19

⁴⁹ Compare again the language of Melancthon's second edition of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession: "the very fulfillment of the law, which follows our renewal" (Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 145, text following AC IV 159), and Apology IV 46, "This faith is the true knowledge of Christ; it uses the benefits of Christ, it renews hearts, and it precedes our fulfillment of the law" (Kolb and Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 127; emphasis added).

⁵⁰ Cole 2:417.

⁵¹ Cole 2:415.

⁵² Cole 2:416.

⁵³ Cole 2:425. "I have abundantly observed, therefore, that the law is the letter only, whether it be written, or whether it be spoken, or whether it be understood, until it be loved" (409).

⁵⁴ Cole 2:417.

⁵⁵ Cole 2:409.

about the role of the Spirit, Luther ties together the believer's correspondence to the law via the Spirit with the same believer's love of the law via the Spirit in this way: "But such a heart is given only by God's Spirit, who fashions a man after the law, so that he acquires a desire for the law in his heart, doing nothing henceforth out of fear and compulsion but out of a willing heart. The law is thus spiritual in that it will be loved and fulfilled with such a spiritual heart, and requires such a spirit."⁵⁶ Once again, it is the Spirit who not only "fashions a man after the law" but also stirs up in the believer a love of the same. Shortly thereafter, Luther reiterates this as follows: "To fulfill the law, however, is to do its works with pleasure and love, to live a godly and good life of one's own accord, without the compulsion of the law. This pleasure and love for the law is put into the heart by the Holy Spirit."⁵⁷ While here again it is the Spirit who is responsible for the believer's love of the law, Luther also had other, complementary ways of depicting the same reality. In one place, for instance, he simply says that "grace, however, makes the law dear to us; then sin is no longer present, and the law is no longer against us but *one with us*."⁵⁸

Perhaps a good way of summarizing what we have seen about the believer loving the fulfilled law can be found in Luther's *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*. Returning to his exposition of John 1:17 ("For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"), Luther expressed how positive the relationship between a believer and the law could be: "Formerly I found that I had no delight in the Law. But now I discover that the Law is precious and good, that it was given to me for my life; and now it is pleasing to me. Formerly it told me what to do; now I am beginning to conform to its requests, so that now I praise, laud, and serve God."⁵⁹ In his *Lectures on Isaiah*, he goes even so far as to say that, with the Spirit, "the Law is no longer outrageous in its dictates but *an agreeable companion (iucundus socius)*. The Law itself indeed is not changed, but we are."⁶⁰

To summarize: Luther continually notes in his exegetical lectures that the law is hardly lovable before it is fulfilled, but he is equally insistent that the believer loves the law after it is fulfilled. This love of the fulfilled law by the believer is made possible, we saw again and again, by the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁶ Luther, "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans" (1546 [1522]), AE 35:367.

⁵⁷ AE 35:368.

⁵⁸ AE 35:376 (emphasis added). See also the subsequent paragraphs on the same page for more about taking pleasure in the law.

⁵⁹ Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John* (1537–1540), AE 22:144.

⁶⁰ Luther, *Lectures on Isaiah* (1528), AE 16:99 (emphasis added; WA 31/2:69.26–27).

Thesis 5: The Fulfilled Law Exists in Eternity

Although the support for this fifth and final thesis stems from outside Luther's exegetical lectures, namely, his *Antinomian Disputations*, it seems prudent to include such a thesis here in this part of the study as it provides a more thorough picture of Luther's rich understanding of the fulfillment of the law. Moreover, this last thesis also plays a significant role in the next part of the study.

There are several places in Luther's *Antinomian Disputations* where he discusses the fulfilled law with reference to the life to come. A good place to start would be Luther's assertion that "in the future life we will be like the Fulfiller, Christ (1 John 3:2)."⁶¹ The fulfilled law, then, is not some sort of skin that Christ or believers shed at the consummation of all things. No, when it comes to the law beyond this life, Luther maintains that "we will render it [the law] in the superlative in heaven."⁶² Nor is it the case that God's eternal will as conveyed in the Ten Commandments, for example, will somehow come to a screeching halt. No, Luther clearly believes this revered set of commands will continue to give shape and form even in the heavenly places. He writes: "in the coming life things will be like what the Decalogue has been demanding here."⁶³ Nor is this existence of the fulfilled law in heaven some sort of spiritual idea only. On the contrary, Luther also maintains that the fulfilled law will be carried out by the heavenly saints in both body and soul: "In the future life, however, they will have the will to do the law not only in Spirit, but also in flesh."⁶⁴

In several other places of the same disputations, Luther portrays how the believer's love of the fulfilled law (as discussed in the previous thesis) will also continue into eternity. One image of what that love will look like is this: "In heaven it will not be necessary to admonish to love God. But then we will truly and perfectly do what Christ did here. At that time you will not say: 'I should love the Father,' but: 'I love the Father,' and 'as he has given me command, thus I do.'"⁶⁵ With that in mind, perhaps the best way to encapsulate Luther's view of the fulfilled law existing in eternity with reference to the saints would be the following: "In life eternal we finally will be *perfect and true doers of the law*."⁶⁶

To summarize: Luther's *Antinomian Disputations* reveal the reformer's firm belief that the fulfilled law not only gives shape to the heavenly life but will also one day be completely loved by all the saints in both body and soul. In short, these

⁶¹ Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 73.

⁶² Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 63.

⁶³ Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 129.

⁶⁴ Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 59.

⁶⁵ Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 61.

⁶⁶ Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 185 (emphasis added).

disputations provide ample support for the claim that Luther also believed that the fulfilled law exists in eternity.

Summary of Theses

So far we have seen a series of non-negotiables in Luther when it comes to both the essence of the law and its fulfillment. First, Luther defines the essence of the law across his exegetical writings as the eternal will of God, and he spoke of this law being fulfilled in a number of ways. Chief among them was maintaining, right in step with Romans 13:10, that the law is fulfilled by love (Thesis 1). Luther was also quite comfortable declaring that the law is fulfilled by faith (Thesis 2), that this fulfillment takes place in the believer (Thesis 3), that the believer loves the fulfilled law (Thesis 4), and finally, that the fulfilled law carries on into eternity (Thesis 5). These findings do not imply or advocate any sort of reformulation to conventional understandings of Luther's view of justification or the atonement. While such topics are obviously closely related to the foregoing discussion, my concern throughout has been how Luther speaks of the fulfillment of the law in his exegetical lectures, and my argument here is simply that these theses capture central tenets in how he does that. We now take up Luther's definition of the essence of the law along with theses 3 and 5 and compare them with a recent publication of Luther on the law to see how they match up.

III. Paulson on the Law

Steven Paulson's *Luther's Outlaw God: Hiddenness, Evil, and Predestination* is the first of three volumes exploring places in Luther's theology where God could be said to be an "outlaw." In this initial volume, Paulson sticks most closely to Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* in order to focus on key themes in this famous work where he sees God acting "apart from the law" as he bestows his means of grace. Thus, according to Paulson, Luther's God in *The Bondage of the Will* is one who elects individuals to salvation outside the law, forgives their sins outside the law, grants mercy upon them outside the law, and so on. In sum, Paulson argues, there is much more to Luther's God than just the law, and because of that, "Luther learned both how to flee from and flee to this one and the same outlaw God."⁶⁷

Paulson on the Law as the Eternal Will of God

It does not take long for readers of Paulson's book to realize that he has some serious objections to how one speaks of the eternal will of God. Most often this

⁶⁷ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, xxxv.

comes by way of critique, rejecting propositions such as, “God’s will must certainly be the eternal, objective, unchanging, timeless law.”⁶⁸ In many places, such criticism is lodged to set up a sharp contrast between the will of God as found in his law as opposed to the will of God as revealed in his gospel,⁶⁹ while at other times it serves to place as much distance between God and the law as possible. For just one example of the latter, Paulson states repeatedly in various ways that “the law is not God’s heart. God lives *beyond* the law, *outside* law.”⁷⁰ In the same vein, Paulson contends that the very language of “will” in relation to God’s law is highly problematic. He explains: “the law by itself is not God’s order. God’s mind, will, essence, being, and becoming (or even what is beyond being) are merely human terms that end up operating in a truly odious way.”⁷¹

How, then, does Paulson account for the “eternal” in the understanding that the essence of the law is the eternal will of God? Quite simply—and surprisingly, to use his language—it goes away. Here is how that happens: “In Christ, the law was *historicized*, limited, confined, stopped, and silenced—which was a surprise even to the law, to say nothing of those under it. That law—which for all appearances and by all reason was eternally God’s will, mind, heart, and being—suddenly became subject to him and *even to the limits of time*.”⁷² The word “eternal” in “the eternal will of God” for Paulson appears to apply only until the advent of Christ, which historicizes the law. What was once eternal is now temporal, and this shocks everyone, including the law itself. In short, for Paulson, “the eternal law is brought to an end.”⁷³

Paulson on the Law Fulfilled in the Believer (Thesis 3)

Closely related to Paulson’s misgivings about the law as the eternal will of God are his many objections to the law being fulfilled in the believer, which was the third thesis (given above) for Luther’s view of the fulfillment of the law. In one place of *Luther’s Outlaw God*, Paulson broaches this issue much as we observed Luther doing, namely, by means of a contrast between what happens in an individual both before and after receiving God’s grace, but Paulson has much more to say in his

⁶⁸ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 198. This statement comes in a context describing the position of Erasmus: “Apart from preaching, this kind of disputation did only what Erasmus intended, which was to take up specific words in Scripture only to have a disputant supply the background *assumption* that God’s will must certainly be the eternal, objective, unchanging, timeless law—called ‘justice’” (emphasis added). For similar critiques of “the eternal law,” see page 148 (with a view toward Aquinas) and pages 192–194 (in further portrayal of Erasmus).

⁶⁹ For example: “his will is not law—it is something else” (Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 133).

⁷⁰ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 119 (emphasis added).

⁷¹ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 48.

⁷² Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 27 (emphasis added).

⁷³ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 109.

account about what does *not* happen. He writes: “Only the promise frees, and when it frees it does not free into the blessed order of the law or a happy obedience *or anything like the fulfillment of the law in the sinner as God’s will.*”⁷⁴ Does reference to “the sinner” here leave open the possibility that Paulson would grant a fulfillment of the law in “the saint/believer”? We are not told. In several other places of the book, however, it becomes clear that Paulson is indeed speaking of the new person in Christ. Of the many examples of this that could be noted, consider only the following:

- “Luther’s Christian freedom then means the human is not being freed from hating the law into loving it [*Thesis 4!*], or from being accused by the law to being blessed by it. The Christian is being freed, necessarily, from the law *altogether*”⁷⁵
- “my future would be my will set free from all act—free to be—*without the ‘order of being’ stipulated by the law*”⁷⁶
- “a new life that does not depend either upon God’s particular choice of law *or even a hypothetical eternal law to give it purpose, order and meaning*”⁷⁷
- “a new life lived *entirely outside the law in any way*”⁷⁸

Once the human is freed, Paulson maintains, that individual is simply “free to be.” No order, no purpose, no meaning, and no shape is any longer available to the believer by means of the law, not even by recourse to a “hypothetical eternal law.”

Much as his approach to the law as the eternal will of God, Paulson often speaks of this issue—the law fulfilled in the believer—by means of critique. He is critical, for example, of the idea that “people become complete when they agree with God’s order of the eternal law.”⁷⁹ He is also critical of “participation in the eternal law as joyous obedience in God’s chosen order,”⁸⁰ and when “eternal law is thus taken as the thing of God in which humans participate.”⁸¹ No, according to Paulson, Luther envisioned something very different happening in the believer in relation to the law.

⁷⁴ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 186 (emphasis added).

⁷⁵ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 73 (emphasis added). Regarding the believer’s love of the fulfilled law (Thesis 4), Paulson elsewhere writes: “Nor is freedom a joyful obedience to the law that no longer condemns” (72).

⁷⁶ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 156 (emphasis added).

⁷⁷ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 176 (emphasis added).

⁷⁸ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 198 (emphasis added).

⁷⁹ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 148.

⁸⁰ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 153.

⁸¹ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 206.

As he sees it: “But what did we get instead with Luther? We are thrown into *an illegal chaos with no law*.”⁸²

Paulson on the Fulfilled Law Existing in Eternity (Thesis 5)

Our final point of comparison is with Thesis 5, Luther’s contention that the fulfilled law exists in eternity. There, we recall, Luther said such things as “In the coming life things will be like what the Decalogue has been demanding here,”⁸³ and “In heaven it will not be necessary to admonish to love God. . . . At that time you will not say: ‘I should love the Father,’ but: ‘I love the Father,’ and ‘as he has given me command, thus I do.’”⁸⁴

In Paulson’s treatment of the matter, however, things are once again handled much differently. As is his custom, there is much in *Luther’s Outlaw God* that tackles this issue, too, by way of sneering critique. He is critical, for example, of the notion that Christians will “one day not only live in it [the law] but will love that law completely.”⁸⁵ In the same place, he is also critical of the view that Christians will at some point “be brought back to participate joyfully in it [the law].”⁸⁶ Paulson therefore dismisses the idea that the law will one day give shape to heavenly existence (as Luther believed it would), and that believers will one day love the law completely (as Luther believed they would). No, for Paulson, “this gospel power concerns the future in a way that does not simply dream of the hypothetical law initially, or even one future day, being fulfilled by all.”⁸⁷ Whereas Luther held that “in life eternal we [the saints] finally will be perfect and true doers of the law,”⁸⁸ Paulson says that “the law does indeed go silent, but not as affirmation of its practitioners or by eternal participation in it.”⁸⁹ Whereas Luther believed that “in the future life . . . they [the saints] will have the will to do the law not only in Spirit, but also in flesh,”⁹⁰ Paulson contends that “when the elect are raised, they are not raised back into a non-accusatory law.”⁹¹ And on it goes.

⁸² Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 185 (emphasis added).

⁸³ Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 129.

⁸⁴ Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 61.

⁸⁵ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 64.

⁸⁶ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 64.

⁸⁷ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 119.

⁸⁸ Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 185.

⁸⁹ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 24.

⁹⁰ Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 59.

⁹¹ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 186.

Summary of Paulson and the Law

After a brief comparison of our findings from Luther with Steven Paulson's *Luther's Outlaw God*, it appears that this latest work from Paulson is in many places deeply misleading and, in some places, entirely misrepresentative of the reformer. Paulson's emphasis that the law is not God's will ("his will is not law"⁹²), that the law is not fulfilled in the believer, and that the fulfilled law does not exist in eternity are all directly opposed to some of the most essential features of Luther's understanding of the fulfillment of the law.

In my judgment, Paulson's overarching goal in this book is to make Luther's view of the law as radical as possible (something eternal is surprisingly historicized, Luther throws us "into an illegal chaos,"⁹³ and so on), and one of the primary ways he attempts to do that is by making the law in Luther as *negative* as possible. In addition to what we observed above, consider also how Paulson speaks of the law in the garden of Eden. In his understanding, "All the law does is exactly what Adam and Eve found—it teaches the difference between good and evil by means of a threat."⁹⁴ Again, in another place: "The law from the beginning threatened all creatures; it never was God's plan, formally or otherwise, to perfect or complete creatures above or below the Garden of Eden."⁹⁵ For Paulson, then, *all* that the law does in Eden is threaten creatures—how dreadful! For Luther, however, the law "existed in Paradise in the positive."⁹⁶ Indeed, in his understanding, "When Adam was first created, the law was for him not only something possible, but even something enjoyable."⁹⁷ In fact, even the laws given much later through Moses, Luther believes, were placed "before our eyes so that we might be reminded of what we were before Adam's fall *and of what we shall be in Christ one day*."⁹⁸

Paulson's disparaging rendition of the law in Luther comes with a series of implications, and some of these also deserve mention here because they, too, conflict with our findings from Luther. Consider, for example, how Paulson speaks of the law in relation to the gospel. If these two are in any way taken to be teleologically related (i.e., that in the end they will cohere in some consummate way), this for Paulson is tantamount to the sin of scholasticism: "Scholastic teaching,

⁹² Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 133.

⁹³ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 185.

⁹⁴ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 41 (emphasis added).

⁹⁵ Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God*, 215.

⁹⁶ Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 63.

⁹⁷ Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 47.

⁹⁸ Luther, *Solus Decalogus*, 189 (emphasis added). This is in addition to Luther's positive statements about the law in Eden in his *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545/1544–1554). See especially AE 1:103–104, where he speaks of God's command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as "the establishment of the church" (103).

which we always end up with when the gospel must be squared with the law.”⁹⁹ Luther, however, had no problem speaking of “the law of the Lord *as made lovely by the Gospel (lege domini per Euangelium facta amabili)*.”¹⁰⁰

Another implication surfaces in how Paulson handles the law in relation to forgiveness. In order to keep as much distance between these two as possible, Paulson argues that Luther’s God in *The Bondage of the Will* is not thinking anything whatsoever about the fulfillment of the law when he forgives sins. As he frames it: “God is the one who *opposes the law* with his new word that forgives *without any care about that very law*.”¹⁰¹ Again, in even more blatant terms, “He [God] disregards the law when he forgives sins.”¹⁰² There is a sense, of course, in which that may be true: forgiveness for Luther is certainly not earned by our works of the law. At the same time, however, Luther had no qualms about correlating forgiveness with the law, and he can even be found speaking of the matter in this way: “It is as if God said: ‘I am obliged to forgive them their sins if I want the law fulfilled by them.’”¹⁰³ This last statement, it must be noted, comes from the very same volume that Paulson professes to track most closely throughout his book: *The Bondage of the Will*.

One final and particularly striking implication of Paulson’s negative portrayal of the law in Luther is how he speaks of the law in relation to the person and work of Christ. While it is beyond the scope of this study to venture into debates about the atonement in Luther, we would be remiss not to mention that Paulson does not see the death of Christ as fulfilling any law. Neither, in his view, does it purge any sin, nor is it even necessary. He writes: “Christ’s suffering is then neither purgative nor an act of filling an unfulfilled law, but precisely *unnecessary*.”¹⁰⁴ At this point, we need only ask: where does Luther ever speak of the death of Christ in such terms?

A similar concern could be raised for the very title for Paulson’s book. Where does Luther use the language of “outlaw” (“*exlex*”) in *The Bondage of the Will*? Nowhere. Where does that word occur in all of his other writings? In the entire Weimar Edition—thousands and thousands of pages—only three places: once in reference to the pope,¹⁰⁵ once in reference to the Antichrist,¹⁰⁶ and only once

⁹⁹ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 251.

¹⁰⁰ Cole 2:422 (emphasis added; WA 5:562.31–32).

¹⁰¹ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 41 (emphasis added).

¹⁰² Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 163.

¹⁰³ AE 33:218.

¹⁰⁴ Paulson, *Luther’s Outlaw God*, 226 (emphasis original). For more on Paulson’s understanding of the cross in Luther, see especially his comments on pages 29, 30, 37, 39, and 163.

¹⁰⁵ WA 39/2:82.32–33.

¹⁰⁶ WA 26:18.17–20.

in reference to God.¹⁰⁷ In the last of these, Luther uses it in a sermon on Exodus 9 to emphasize the limitations of reason, and even then, he qualifies the term with “as someone has said” (“*wie man saget*”); it is not his way of speaking. Paulson, however, would have us believe that this “outlaw” God is some sort of key that unlocks Luther’s thinking on how God relates to the law. Francis Pieper noted long ago that “*exlex*” is not even ecclesial Latin,¹⁰⁸ but it now spearheads a three-volume work on the greatest reformer of the church who ever lived.

If the discrepancies between Paulson and Luther are explained simply by the former’s indulgence in rhetorical flourish (e.g., using terminology associated with the essence of the law to make riveting claims about the “proper function” of the law), he has done so to such an extent that the book’s helpfulness for understanding Luther has been severely compromised. It is my contention, therefore, that this latest work by Paulson, a self-professed advocate of “radical” Lutherans,¹⁰⁹ is to be read only with the most radical caution.

IV. Conclusion

The primary goal of this study has been to gain a better understanding of Luther’s view of the fulfillment of the law, especially as this can be gathered from his lectures on the Old and New Testaments. At times, I also drew on his *Antinomian Disputations* for a fuller picture of the topic at hand. On the basis of what has been surveyed, my argument is that Luther’s understanding of the fulfillment of the law—all five “theses” explored earlier—depends entirely on the essence of the law being defined as the eternal will of God for our behavior. To state this conclusion negatively, if the law is not in its essence God’s eternal will but construed as something else—whether that be “its condemning office”¹¹⁰ or any sort of “legal scheme,” “nasty tool,” or “disposable tool”¹¹¹—Luther’s understanding of the fulfillment of the law will suffer catastrophically.

¹⁰⁷ WA 16:142.13.

¹⁰⁸ *Christian Dogmatics: Volume I* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 457n96.

¹⁰⁹ See Paulson’s remarks in “The End of the Law and the Antinomians,” in *Handing over the Goods: Determined to Proclaim Nothing But Christ Jesus and Him Crucified: Essays in Honor of James Arne Nestingen*, ed. Scott L. Keith and Steven D. Paulson (Irvine, CA: 1517 Publishing, 2018), 10.

¹¹⁰ As Hopman claims: “The essence of the law, for Luther, is its condemning office” (“Luther’s *Antinomian Disputations*,” 155).

¹¹¹ The language of “legal scheme” can be found in Steven D. Paulson, *Lutheran Theology* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2011), 2–5. The language of “nasty tool” can be found in Paulson, “End of the Law,” 5. The language of “disposable tool” can be found in Steven D. Paulson and Nicholas Hopman’s “Atonement” entry in *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 51.

To be sure, there is infinitely more that could be said about the law in Luther than was tackled here, including several issues related to its fulfillment. But the five theses rehearsed in this study are offered as an earnest plea to contemporary Luther scholarship in its zeal to advance radical claims for the reformer that it not neglect the *weightier* matters of his thinking and writing about the law.

We close with a reminder that the five theses given in this study are fully in accordance with the scriptural witness. In brief, the law is fulfilled in love because God wills love eternally and is himself eternal love (1 John 4:8). The law is fulfilled in the believer now because “Whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16). Finally, that same believer—on account of Christ’s work on the cross!—also fulfills the law into eternity because even if faith and hope one day pass away, love, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:8, never ends. Another way of saying all of this in one shot, I think, was found already in Psalm 119: “I incline my heart to perform your statutes, *forever*” (Ps 119:112, emphasis added).

Fellowship in Its Necessary Context: The Doctrine of the Church and the Overseas Theses of 1961

Jonathan G. Lange

I. Historical Introduction

The formation of the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States in 1847 took place within an environment of confessional revival that had been sparked by the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in 1817. American Lutheranism had been under its leavening effect for three decades. The Henkel family had departed the North Carolina Synod in 1820, and Wilhelm Sihler parted ways with the Ohio Synod in 1845, both as a result of a growing confessional consciousness.

After the 1847 constituting convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), North-American Lutheranism continued a trend toward confessional orthodoxy. The Wisconsin Synod and the Norwegian Synod were both influenced toward a greater Lutheran identity. Perhaps most notable was the work of Charles Porterfield Krauth and the establishment of the General Council in 1867. As individual synods moved toward orthodoxy, there was a concomitant desire to recognize the ecclesiastical unity that grew out of a renewed study of the Lutheran Confessions.

Erling Teigen aptly captured this momentous time in the following words:

In December 1866, Krauth presented a set of theses on Faith and Polity as the basis of a new general synodical organization, and it was signed by thirteen synods, including Pennsylvania, Joint Synod of Ohio, Missouri, Norwegian, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa, Canada, and New York. A year later, however, in November 1867, when the General Council was formally organized, the Missouri and Norwegian Synods were absent.¹

What explains the withdrawal of Missouri and the Norwegians after they had signed the original theses only eleven months earlier? For that matter, why did Wisconsin, Ohio, and Minnesota later follow the same course?

¹ Erling T. Teigen, “Ecumenism as Fellowship and Confession in the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America,” *Logia* 12, no. 2 (Eastertide 2003): 6.

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Was it the disparity of formal confessional subscription? Missouri's constitution required subscription to the entire 1580 Book of Concord. The General Council, by contrast, limited subscription to the *Augustana* alone. Perhaps surprisingly, this glaring difference was not the deal-breaker.

Confessional fellowship with the General Council was not scuttled by differences in formal doctrine, but by inconsistency of practice. This is evidenced by an 1871 *Denkschrift* (position paper) prepared by F. A. Schmidt. The purpose of the work was to articulate “the reasons for forming a separate conference of synodical organizations.”² It was disseminated in the months leading up to the organizing convention of the Synodical Conference. In its third part, the *Denkschrift* addresses the General Council. After lavishing much praise on the theology of the Council, particularly of Krauth, it says, “So far as the doctrinal basis is concerned which the Council has officially adopted in its constitution, we might be perfectly satisfied with that just as it is, as we would not make a change in it an absolute condition of our attaching ourselves to the Council.”³ Clearly the synods that would soon form the Synodical Conference did not consider a truncated subscription to the full 1580 Book of Concord to be divisive of church fellowship.

The decisive obstacle, instead, was the disparity between doctrine and practice. While the General Council adequately subscribed to the Augsburg Confession, a number of questionable practices troubled the waters. The doctrine of “open questions,” and its toleration of pulpit exchanges and intercommunion with Calvinists and other heterodox church parties, raised the specter that the Council's formal subscription to the Augsburg Confession was, *de facto*, a *quatenus* subscription.

In contrast, the Synodical Conference was determined, from the start, to hold doctrine and practice together. Formal subscription to the Lutheran Confessions needed to be coupled with the actual living-out of the Lutheran doctrine in ecclesiastical life. This became the *raison d'être* for the Synodical Conference. In the end, it also brought its demise.

Formed five years after the General Council, the Synodical Conference lasted from 1872 until 1967 when the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (SELC, or “Slovak Synod”) was absorbed into Missouri as a non-geographical district. Though this was its formal end, the practical end of the Synodical Conference came

² Teigen, “Ecumenism as Fellowship,” 6.

³ Teigen, “Ecumenism as Fellowship,” 15n4, quoting from *Denkschrift, enthaltend eine eingehende Darlegung der Gründe, weshalb die zur Synodal-Conferenz der evang.-luth. Kirche von Nord-Amerika* (“Memorial Containing a Comprehensive Statement of the Reasons Why the Synods Forming ‘The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference’ Could Not Join Any of the Existing Unions of Synods Bearing the Lutheran Name”), which appeared in the Ohio Synod's *The Lutheran Standard* (May–July 1872): 73–98.

six years earlier (in August of 1961) when the Wisconsin Synod (WELS) voted to suspend fellowship with Missouri. Since the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) had already taken similar action in 1955,⁴ this move effectively killed the Synodical Conference.

At the risk of oversimplification, two issues loomed large in the deliberations of the ELS and WELS. First, there was Missouri's ambivalence toward the Boy Scouts. The LCMS in convention declined to take an official stance and left the issue to each congregation. Second, there was at least one congregation that was not practicing according to the synod's formal confession. While a process of discipline was under way, the ELS and the WELS were perennially frustrated with the snail's pace of progress made by Missouri's disciplinary process.

Missouri, for her part, was not idle in addressing the issues. On the contrary, LCMS President John Behnken reached out to Lutheran bodies across the sea in an effort to save the fellowship. He asked our sister synods in England, Germany, Belgium, France, Finland, Brazil, and Australia to form an Overseas Committee that would help the Synodical Conference find its way through the impasse.⁵ Henry Hamann of Adelaide, Australia, chaired this committee, which drew up a set of theses designed to bring clarity to the issues at hand. On the morning of May 17, 1961, at Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee, Dr. Hamann presented the Statement of the Overseas Committee titled "Fellowship in Its Necessary Context of the Doctrine of the Church."⁶

As it turned out, this was effectively the last meeting of the Synodical Conference. Three months later, Wisconsin's suspension of fellowship meant that the conflicting parties would never again meet at the same table.⁷ Lost in the shuffle was the work of the Overseas Committee. To this day, its theses remain unexplored as a resource for navigating the fellowship questions that have bedeviled confessional Lutheranism in America.

While the Overseas Theses were not able to forestall the breakup of the Synodical Conference, it would be shortsighted to consign them to irrelevancy. Oftentimes those closest to the conflict and personally invested are denied the perspective that disengagement allows. The Overseas Committee provided a tightly

⁴ *Reports and Memorials for the Forty-Sixth Convention of the Ev. Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, August 2-5, 1960* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 5.

⁵ Kurt Marquart, "The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance" (Fort Wayne, IN: International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), 3.

⁶ *Proceedings of the Recessed Forty-Sixth Convention*, Lutheran Synodical Conference, 1961, pp. 28-29.

⁷ *Proceedings*, Wisconsin Synod Convention, 1961 (Floor Committee 2, Resolution #1).

reasoned, coherent, and faithful framework for approaching fellowship issues, not only within the now defunct Synodical Conference, but for all times and places.

Kurt Marquart brought these theses to the attention of the first annual National Free Conference in 1990. “To my mind,” he stated, the presentation of these theses “is the high-water mark of the discussion of [church fellowship].” He went on to suggest that “these Thirteen Theses of 1961 would be an excellent starting point.”⁸ Toward this end, the following reflections will hopefully set forth some of the simple profundities of this untapped resource and encourage others to study and consider its implications.

II. Argumentum

Summary

The Overseas Theses are thirteen in number. The first five lay out a concise syllogism, beginning with the church and faith, moving through the means of grace, and resting in church fellowship and the marks of the church. The following eight theses are comprised of four pairs that supplement and clarify terms used in the syllogism. Theses 6 and 7 assert that the marks of the church are, by definition, the pure marks. Theses 8 and 9 define the pure marks by the Lutheran Confessions. Theses 10 and 11 discuss how the pure marks hold sway in concrete ecclesiastical life. Finally, Theses 12 and 13 distinguish between the marks of the church and other visible manifestations of fellowship.

The Syllogism

The syllogism begins:

The holy, catholic, and apostolic church is one body in Christ, incorporating all believers whose faith is created, sustained, fulfilled, and known by God alone. The church and the faith of the heart (*fides qua*) are outside the competence and direct comprehension of men.⁹

Note, first of all, that the four adjectives of the Council of Constantinople describing the church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) are themselves indivisible and are

⁸ Marquart, “The Church and Her Fellowship,” 3.

⁹ Thesis 1. Marquart, “The Church and Her Fellowship,” unnumbered appendix. Each thesis is also footnoted with a number of scriptural and confessional citations. These are reproduced throughout this paper in the footnote following each thesis: “Mt 16:16; Jn 10:16, 27–29; Gal 3:26–28; Eph 1:20–23; 2:14–15; 4:3–6, 15, 16 (Stoekhardt, *Lehre und Wehre*, 1901, 97ff.) – Nicene Creed; SC, Second and Third Articles; AC V and VII; Ap VII.5–8. John 6:44; Acts 13:48; Col 2:12; 3:3, 4; 2 Tim 2:19.”

implied in the definite article. “*The church*,” by its very definition, is simultaneously unified, holy, catholic, and apostolic. There can be no such thing as a church that is unified but not holy, or apostolic but not catholic.

Second, since the church is the body, “incorporating all believers,” it is defined by faith.¹⁰ More precisely, this faith denotes the *fides qua creditur*—saving faith in the heart. Each and every believer and possessor of such faith, across time and space, is a member of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

Third, and this is a vital consideration, since it is impossible for man to perceive saving faith directly, it is also impossible for man to perceive the church directly. Both “the church and the faith of the heart are outside the competence and direct comprehension of men.” Rather, these are “created, sustained, fulfilled, and known by God alone.”

Jesus prepared his church for this reality in the upper room, saying, “A little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me” (John 14:19).¹¹ Expressing this same ecclesial reality, St. Paul wrote the Colossians, “Your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Col 3:3–4).

Faith and church are correlatives. Where there is faith, there is the church and vice versa. This observation leads directly to this statement:

Faith is created and sustained by God through the means of grace. Where the means of grace (Gospel and sacraments) are in use, even where much impeded, there believers are present. We know this by faith and not by empirical experience. This knowledge rests on the promise of God in the means of grace outside of us (*extra nos*) and not on criteria in us (*in nobis*), sanctification, or any assessment of men, their works, polity, or discipline.¹²

¹⁰ Recall that in Greek, Latin, and German, the verb “to believe” and the noun “faith” are derived from the same root. This highlights the essential connection between the act of believing and the possession of faith.

¹¹ All Scripture quotations are from the ESV[®] Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

¹² Thesis 2, “Is 55:10–11; Lk 8:11–15; Rom 10:5–17; 1 Pet 1:23–25; Titus 3:5, 6, CA V: “That we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ’s sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake.” Ap IV:67; 346 (225) [the latter found only in the *Triglotta*, p. 217]; SC, Third Article; (cf. Large Catechism, Third Article.43–45); SD II.50; XI.29, 50. No other criterion: Ap VII.10, 11, 18, 19. 1 Sam 16:7; Acts 15:8.”

While direct perception of saving faith is impossible to the world, the faithful nevertheless know that wherever the means of grace are in use, God is present creating faith. The connection between faith and the means of grace is itself known only by revelation of the external word. Hence any additional or alternative criterion, including church discipline, cannot augment the certainty of God's creative work through the means of grace.

Since faith and the church are correlatives, and since faith is created by the means of grace, it follows:

Where the means of grace are in operation, there the church is to be found—whole, local and tangible. The assembly regularly gathered about the pure teaching and the right administration of the sacraments is called by God Himself the church at that place, irrespective of the hypocrites who may be attached outwardly to such assembly. This is no mere organizational form or association of individuals, but the one church that will remain forever (*Una Sancta perpetuo mansura*) in the exercise of its God-given, spiritual functions (office of the keys). This church is only one. Though locally apprehended, it must not be thought of as isolated, intermittent, or individual with reference to persons, time, or place.¹³

Here is the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church,” of the Nicene Creed; and the “*una Sancta perpetuo mansura*” of *Augustana VII*. As the means of grace create faith, so they are creating the church, which is the assembly of faith. The presence of hypocrites commingled with it in no way compromises this reality. Nor is the church properly understood as organization or association. Rather, God Himself calls the assembly regularly gathered about the Gospel and sacraments “the church at that place.”

Even though the church is “whole, local and tangible, . . . it must not be thought of as isolated, intermittent, or individual with reference to persons, time, or place.” This final sentence of Thesis 3 contains an instructive chiasm. The church is located at a place but is not isolated there; she is found at a definite point in time but is never intermittent; she is comprised of definite persons but is not individualistic. The chiasm here is also correlated with the three adjectives describing the church at the

¹³ Thesis 3, “Mt 18:18–20; Acts 6:7; 8:12–24; 19:20; Eph 4:13–16; 5:25–27. CA VII and VIII; LC, Third Article.51–58, 61f; AS Part 3, VII:1; Tractatus: 24, 67–69; SD X.9 – Luther (WA 18.652) [*Bondage of the Will* (1526), AE 33:89], 743 [*sic?*]: ‘The church is hidden, the saints latent. . . . The whole life of the church and its being is in the Word of God.’ Disputation of 1542 (Drews, 655f): ‘The church is recognized by its confession . . . it is in other words visible by its confession.’ The addresses of the epistles and Acts 2–5; 9:31.”

beginning of the thesis. Hence, the church is whole as regards persons, local as regards place, and tangible as regards time.¹⁴

It is precisely in the relationship of the church to place, persons, and time that we must consider it in the wider sense. While confessing that the church is present “whole, local, and tangible” in the regular assembly of the means of grace, we must not think of it as isolated, intermittent, or individualistic.

It is relatively easy to confess that the church is one across time. Who would not want to be identified with the church of St. James in first-century Jerusalem, or Gregory Nazianzen’s church of the Anastasis in fourth-century Constantinople, or Luther’s St. Marien Kirche in sixteenth-century Wittenberg? Similarly, Lutherans are quick to declare unity with individual members of the church across time. Who but a schismatic would deny fellowship to Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine of Hippo, John of Damascus, or C. F. W. Walther?

It is particularly the catholicity of the church within the present moment, but also across space and person, where difficulties arise. For this entails a concrete recognition of unity without the passage of time to efface the actual sins and contradictions of concrete churches. It requires charity, not only for sins long past, but for ongoing sins, weaknesses, and misunderstandings.

The unity of the church across time, space, and person finds its parallel in the means of grace.

The means of grace, which are the means of uniting the church to Christ, her Head, are a given whole, inseparable from the total revelation of Law and Gospel as set forth in the Scriptures (cf. the whole definition in AC VII).¹⁵

Just as the church is a given whole, so also are the means of grace. Hence, they cannot be considered piecemeal, or in isolation from the “all things whatsoever” of Christ’s baptismal mandate (see Matt 28:20). In terms of the Lutheran Confessions, the “*satis*

¹⁴ Here, let me point out a pertinent historic development. The concept of catholicity was first introduced by St. Ignatius of Antioch. In his epistles, he used this term to assert the completeness of the church at any given locale. It is this concept with which the Overseas Theses seem to be working, by using the word “whole.” Some centuries later, St. Augustine also used the term “catholic.” But he used it to talk about the sum total of Christendom. For Augustine, the accent is on the totality of the ecclesiastical organization and less on the completeness of any local manifestation of the church. This usage of the term “catholic” is not reflected here in the theses. Perhaps this is so because the Augustinian accent clouds the concrete and particular use of the means of grace, substituting instead the organizational aspect of church, which the theses reject as church in its proper sense.

¹⁵ Thesis 4, “Jn 10:34, 35; 16:12–15; 17:20; 1 Jn 2:26, 27; Rom 1:1, 2; 2 Tim 3:14–17; AS Part 2, II:15 ‘The Word of God shall establish articles of faith’; CA first paragraph of transition from Art. XXI to XXII; SD, Rule and Norm. Note the singulars ‘doctrine,’ ‘form of sound words,’ ‘deposit,’ etc. 1 Tim 3:15; Lk 24:47; 1 Tim 1:8, 9 par. – SD V and VI.”

est” of AC VII means the entire “doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments” and excludes only human traditions. There is no article of faith taught by the Holy Scriptures that falls outside the term “means of grace.” Thus, in introducing the Abuse Articles, Melancthon wrote: “the churches among us do not dissent from the catholic church in any article of faith.”¹⁶

Having established the relationship between the means of grace and the existence of the church, and having confessed that this includes the “total revelation of Law and Gospel as set forth in the Scriptures,” the syllogism now arrives at the doctrine of church fellowship.

The means of grace create the fellowship of believers with God and thereby fellowship with all believers. This fellowship is, accordingly, given by God, not achieved by any human effort. Its existence can be believed and known only on the basis of the marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*).¹⁷

What connects the doctrine of the church with the doctrine of church fellowship is the means of grace. That which creates faith in the heart toward God, and with it brings the church into existence, thereby creates fellowship with all believers through the one mediator, Jesus Christ. To be connected with God through the flesh of his Son is to be connected with all of humanity that is in Christ. This dual fellowship with God and with all believers is a single reality, two sides of the same coin.

Christologically speaking, just as the two natures of Christ are united in the person of Christ, so the two aspects of church fellowship (fellowship with God and fellowship with all believers) are united in the means of grace. The apostle John said precisely this in his first epistle: “If we say we have fellowship [*koinonia*] with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:6–7).

Just as the church itself is not the creation of man, but the creation of God through the means of grace, so also church fellowship is not the result of human effort but is given by God through the very same means of grace. When we confess in the Small Catechism that “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus

¹⁶ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 61.

¹⁷ Thesis 5, “Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 1:[9]; 10:16, 17; 12:13; Eph 4:3–6; 1 Jn 1:1–4; 3 Jn 3–8. Ap VII/VIII.5f, 12, 19, 20. [David] Hollaz, *Examen* (1707 and 1750), p. 1300: “The inner and essential form of the church consists in the spiritual unity of those who truly believe, of the saints who are tied together (John 13:35) as members of the church with Christ the Head, by means of a true and living faith (John 1:12; Gal 3:27; 1 Cor 6:17), which is followed by a fellowship of mutual love.” Gal 2:6, 9, 11–14; 2 Th 3:14, 15; 1 John 1:5–7 – Ap VII/VIII.22; SD X.3.”

Christ my Lord, or come to Him” (SC II 3), we are led directly into the confession that God the Holy Spirit himself does this work for us.

We should emphasize here that the work of the Holy Spirit is not limited to the individual, but also works within the church. “In the same way also, He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth” (SC II 3). The Holy Spirit alone gathers the church to make it one. He alone sanctifies the church to make it holy. Just as I cannot come to Jesus by my own reason or strength, we cannot gather or sanctify the church by any human craft or method. For this reason, just as the existence of the church itself can be believed and known only on the basis of the means of grace, so also the existence of church fellowship “can be believed and known only on the basis of the marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*).”

Up until the very last words of Thesis 5, the discussion centered about “the means of grace.” But now, for the first time, we encounter the term “marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*).” This change in terminology is significant and merits some reflection. Three things may be said.

First, since Thesis 5 starts by saying that, “The means of grace create . . . fellowship with all believers,” and concludes that the existence of this fellowship “can be believed and known only on the basis of the marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*),” it is clear that for the Overseas Committee, “the means of grace” and “the marks of the church” are co-terminus. Second, the shift from means to marks signals a shift in focus from the cause of the church’s existence to the visible manifestation of the church’s existence. Third, the introduction of the Latin phrase *notae ecclesiae* introduces the word “marks (*notae*)” thus providing a bridge to the necessary specification of the *notae purae*.

Notae Ecclesiae as Notae Purae

Beginning with the final words of Thesis 5, every subsequent thesis, save Thesis 10, discusses the marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*). Theses 6 and 7 immediately consider the relationship between false teaching and the marks of the church.

Where the marks of the church are opposed by false teaching, not only is this double fellowship (*in the Una Sancta*) endangered, but a power is set up which is in contradiction to the fellowship manifested on earth (see 12). Where the pure marks of the church (*notae purae*) hold sway, this disrupting power is repudiated and overcome through refusal to recognize its right to exist, for Christ alone must reign in His church through His Word. Where the sway of the pure marks of the church is rejected, the fellowship is broken. A rupture of fellowship for any other reason is impermissible. The restoring of a broken

fellowship must be brought about by use of the pure marks of the church, as they cleanse out the impurity.¹⁸

Since the means of grace and only the means of grace create the “double fellowship” with God and with his saints, and since the means of grace are always one and of one cloth with the whole of Scripture, false doctrine can only endanger faith, church, and fellowship, but it cannot enhance fellowship. Nor can its toleration contribute in any way either toward faith in God or love for the brethren. On the contrary, false teaching places the power of Satan within the church, which both undermines faith and contradicts the unity manifested in the *notae ecclesiae*. Hence, the *notae ecclesiae* are by definition the *notae purae*.

There is only one churchly response to false doctrine: “refusal to recognize its right to exist.” Positively stated, “the pure marks of the church [must] hold sway.” Where the *fides quae creditur* of a church is identical with the *notae purae*, there God is giving church fellowship, there God is cleansing out impurity. Again, the catechism says that just as God alone keeps “me in the true faith,” so also only he keeps the church “with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (SC II 3). And he does both works by the same gospel.

Should false doctrine be granted the right to exist, the pure marks of the church no longer hold sway (they are no longer the *fides quae creditur*), and fellowship is broken. For while the word and action of God alone create faith and fellowship, the word and action of Satan destroy both. Just as the creation of church fellowship is not a human decision, but a divine activity, so also the breaking of fellowship is not a human activity, but a satanic activity. In both cases, we can only recognize what has happened.

The reference to Thesis 12 makes clear that an exclusive focus on the means of grace cannot mean the exclusion of the rest of the church’s resultant marks. Rather, Thesis 12 asserts, “In whatever way the fellowship created by Word and sacraments shows itself, all visible manifestations of fellowship must be truthful and in accordance with the supreme demands of the marks of the church.”

The reality by which we see the creation of church and church fellowship is the same reality by which we recognize its destruction, namely, the means of grace, or the *notae ecclesiae*. Hence,

¹⁸ Thesis 6, “Mt 7:15; 16:6; Acts 20:27–30; Rom 16:16–20; Gal 1:8, 9; 5:9; 2 Cor 6:14–18; 11:4, 13–15; Phil 3:2; 1 Tim 1:3, 18, 19; 4:1–3; 5:22; 6:3–5; 2 Tim 2:15–21; 3:5, 8, 9; Titus 1:9, 10; 3:10; 1 Jn 2:18–23; 4:1–6; 2 Jn 8–11. AC VII; SD XI.94–96. The negatives of all the Symbols; AC XXVIII.20–28; Ap VII/VIII.20–22, 48–50; XV.18; SA 2.II.10; Tr 38, 41, 42, 71; Preface to the SD.6–10; X.5, 6, 31. Acts 15; 2 Cor 10:4–6; Eph 4:11–14; 6:17. 1 Cor 1:10; chs 12–14. AC VII.2, 3; Ap IV.231 (110). It is understood that the church takes action through the office of the keys committed to it by Christ (see Thesis 3).”

Impurity can be discerned only by the standard of the pure marks of the church. The subjective faith of any man or group cannot be judged by us, but only what is actually taught or confessed, as it conforms or does not conform to the pure marks.¹⁹

In sum, when the pure marks of the church no longer hold sway, fellowship is broken whether we recognize it or not. Contrariwise, where the pure marks of the church still hold sway, no man ought to sunder what God has joined together—no matter how strained or troubled the relationship is.

This thesis brings us back to the very title of the Overseas Theses, “Fellowship in Its Necessary Context of the Doctrine of the Church.” In order to understand the doctrine of church fellowship, it is absolutely necessary that we begin with the doctrine of the church itself. To begin at any other place, or to make any final pronouncements without the church itself squarely in view, will necessarily lead to confusion about the nature of church fellowship. The risen Lord Jesus is the creator of the church. And he does so through the means of grace, which are co-terminus with the marks of the church. Here and here alone is church fellowship rightly understood and lived out.

The Pure Marks and the Lutheran Confessions

If impurity in the marks of the church destroys fellowship, and only the reassertion of the pure marks restores it, how is purity defined?

The purity of the marks is defined by the Symbols. The Symbols (*norma normata*) as the true interpretation of the Word of God (*norma normans*) are a continuous standard of public teaching in the church from generation to generation and bind together not only all true confessors at any particular time but those of all ages in oneness of teaching (cf. the durative present tenses in “is taught” and “are administered” and also the adverbs “purely” and “rightly” in AC VII). In the Symbols we have a safeguard against those who hold God’s Word to be present only as God wills from time to time, as they are also a safeguard of the truth against reliance upon a traditional exegesis and ecclesiastical success, and against a method of hermeneutics which uses the Bible as a book of oracles to the neglect of the rule of faith.²⁰

¹⁹ Thesis 7, “Jn 8:31, 32; Rom 6:17; 1 Tim 6:13, 20; 2 Tim 1:13 – The passages from the Symbols referred to under Theses 4 and 6.”

²⁰ Thesis 8, “Is 8:20; Mt. 16:16, 17 par; 1 Cor 15:1–5; 1 Tim 6:12–14; 2 Tim 1:13, 14; 2:2; Heb 4:14. AC I; Ap I; AS I; AC VII: ‘Also they teach that one holy church is to continue forever. The church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the

Precisely because (*quia*) they are “the true interpretation of the Word of God,” the Lutheran Confessions (or “Symbols”) “are a continuous standard of public teaching in the church from generation to generation and bind together not only all true confessors at any particular time but those of all ages in oneness of teaching.” Here is the safeguard against the intermittent and time-bound understanding of the church which was denied in Thesis 3. In the terms of the Nicene Creed, apostolicity is also catholicity.

The Lutheran Confessions are not to be understood in parochial terms either with regard to place or time. They are not merely a sixteenth-century Lutheran take on the Scriptures. They are, rather, “the true interpretation” of Scripture. They are binding upon Christians in every place and time because the Scriptures themselves (*norma normans*) are binding upon Christians in every place and time.

Further, since the means of grace are “a given whole and inseparable from the total revelation of . . . Scriptures” (Thesis 4), the Lutheran Confessions cannot be understood as detracting from Scripture’s teaching. So, while Thesis 8 binds us to the Scriptures by binding us to the historical Lutheran Confessions, Thesis 9 will not allow the Scriptures to be limited by the Confessions.

A quantitative approach is as misleading as an unhistorical one. The inexhaustible wholeness of the marks of the church calls for constant and complete submission and acceptance. The Symbols do not speak fully on every doctrine, but as presentations of the marks they have abiding validity, as have also their rejections of what they recognize as falsifications of or subtractions from the marks.²¹

Just as the rule of faith is immutable across time, it is also indivisible and irreducible. God’s word always requires an “Amen.” Therefore, even though the Confessions “do not speak fully on every doctrine,” this can never justify dismissing any scriptural doctrine as unnecessary. The marks of the church cannot be whittled down. The abiding validity of the Confessions is inclusive, not exclusive.

Here is an indispensable point when challenges to biblical doctrine arise that are not addressed in the Confessions. Subscription to the Lutheran Confessions as *norma normata* will never permit the church to assert that something is an open question by the mere fact that it is nowhere addressed in the Book of Concord. Everything that is addressed in the Holy Scriptures must be included among the pure marks of the church.

doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.’ See also FC, Rule and Norm; the Prefaces. Mt 10:32, 33; Rom 10:9, 10.”

²¹ Thesis 9, “Mt 23:8; Jn 10:5, 27; 2 Cor 5:18–20 – AS 3.VII; SD X.31; XI.95, 96; XII.39, 40.”

Notae Purae in Actual Practice

Having defined the marks of the church according to the wholeness of scriptural teaching, Theses 10 and 11 next take up the question of how to determine what is actually taught and confessed in a given church body. Thesis 7 has already asserted that such a determination cannot be based on the unseen *fides quae creditur* but only on visible *fides quae creditur*. But how is this known?

The faith which is taught in a church is first of all the formal and official confession of a church. This may, however, be called into question or rendered doubtful by actual or practical negation of it. In that case a distinction must be made between sporadic contradiction and persistent approval or toleration of contradiction. In the latter case, the official confession, no matter how excellent, is negated.²²

“The formal and official confession” of a church body is the primary way for one to know the doctrine that it teaches. When this formal and official confession either explicitly rejects something of God’s word, or explicitly rejects a full, *quia* subscription to the confession of the church catholic (which was defined as Lutheran Confessions in Thesis 8), a power is set up that endangers faith and the church itself while simultaneously contradicting the manifest fellowship. With such a church body, fellowship does not exist, plain and simple.

There is, however, another way in which a church-divisive power may be set up in a church. The formal and official confession may be called into question by a practical negation of it. The word “may” indicates that any and every practical negation of the formal confession does not necessarily call it into question, but only raises the possibility. To determine when and if the formal confession is being denied by actual practice, more information is needed. Here “a distinction must be made between sporadic contradiction and persistent approval or toleration of contradiction.” Only “in the latter case [is] the official confession, no matter how excellent, . . . negated.”

Recall that this is precisely the reason why the Synodical Conference came into existence. While the formal confession of the General Council was accepted, its admission of the Iowa Synod called this confession into question. Would the General Council let the pure marks cleanse out the impurity? Or would they grant it the right to exist? Time would tell. When the false doctrine and practice of the

²² Thesis 10, “For Scripture, see under Thesis 6 and Thesis 8 – SC, Second Commandment and First Petition; End of Preface to the Book of Concord [e.g., 22–24]; SD VII.1; X.5, 6, 10, 11, 28, 29.”

Iowa Synod was approved and defended, the synods of the Synodical Conference had their answer.

By 1961, this was the very same question that had already caused the ELS to leave the Synodical Conference and had the WELS considering the same action. Would Missouri stand opposed to the false practice found in her midst or, by acquiescing, would she grant error the right to exist? That she was taking action in opposition to the false practice is beyond dispute from any quarter. At issue was whether her action was strong enough or swift enough. At any rate, it seems clear that here is where the rubber meets the road for the authors of the Overseas Theses.

Therefore, let us take a moment to understand more fully the distinction between “sporadic contradiction and persistent approval or toleration of contradiction.” Sporadic occurrences can involve either time or place.²³ When a confessional contradiction occurs at random moments of time, but not in the usual course of church life, this is sporadic. On the other hand, even when it regularly occurs, so long as it is isolated to a particular place and is not widespread, this also might be “sporadic contradiction.”

Further clarity is given by way of antithesis. The opposite of “sporadic contradiction” is “persistent approval or toleration.” Persistent can mean either a firm and obstinate continuance or a prolonged continuance of a particular action. Continuance of an action *eo ipso* does not make it persistent. Persistence entails a rejection of correction or the interminable continuance of an action.²⁴ In the usage of Thesis 10, the persistent action may be either approval of a contradiction to the *notae purae* or tolerance of the same.

These two terms raise any number of value judgments. How widespread and how frequent does a contradiction need to be before it is no longer considered “sporadic”? How long must a state of approval or toleration exist before it is “beyond the usual, expected, or normal time”? When does the continuance in error become a rejection of correction?

Here one should recognize that these are questions of pastoral judgment. Churchmen are called upon every day to judge between weakness and obstinance. Pastors have extensive experience in the application of law and gospel. Therefore, to point out these questions should not be read as an attempt to muddy the waters. The mere existence of the questions does not throw us into a morass of uncertainty. On the contrary, it locates us in familiar ground. One need not use the inherent

²³ Sporadic is defined as “occurring occasionally, singly, or in irregular or random instances,” “Sporadic,” Merriam-Webster, updated March 1, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sporadic>.

²⁴ Persistent is defined as “continuing without change in function or structure,” “Persistent,” Merriam-Webster, updated March 5, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/persistent>.

relative nature of these judgments to excuse any kind of relativism. Rather, the judgments made in these matters are guided by the age-old wisdom of the church.

While the Overseas Theses do not answer questions of scope and office, they do return to the divine boundaries governing these judgments. Whoever makes these judgments, and whatever entities are judged, must do so on the basis of the marks of the church, and only on this basis.

The marks of the church are all-decisive. Everything must be referred to them. This duty is hindered by presumptuous judgments or statements concerning the faith or lack of it in individuals. It is Enthusiasm to build on subjective faith (*fides qua*) and love, for faith is hidden and love is variable. Both are in man. The means of grace are objective, solid, apprehensible. Since these are God's own means, we must attend entirely upon them and draw from them the distinction between orthodox church and heterodox church.²⁵

The judgment that contradictions in practice overthrow a church's formal confession cannot be made presumptuously. This means that they cannot be based on anything internal to man. Faith (*fides qua*) is ruled out since it is hidden in the heart. Love is ruled out since it is variable and imperfect. Fellowship judgments based on factors that are hidden from man and known only to God would fall under the condemnation of every type of enthusiasm.²⁶ "A rupture of fellowship for any other reason [than the marks of the church] is impermissible."

Marks of the Church and Other Visible Manifestations of Fellowship

The final pair of theses is given to address not the inconsistencies in practice, but the open doctrinal disagreement on "prayer fellowship" between the ELS/WELS, on the one hand, and the LCMS/SELC on the other. This is primarily manifested in a congregation's relationship to the Boy Scouts of America.

The fellowship created by Word and sacraments shows itself fundamentally in pulpit and altar fellowship. It can show itself in many other ways, some of which, like prayer and worship and love of the brethren, the church cannot do without; others of which, like the holy kiss or the handshake or the reception into one's house, vary from place to place and from time to time. In whatever way the fellowship created by Word and sacraments shows itself, all visible

²⁵ Thesis 11, "See under Theses 4, 6, 8, 10. Observe that of the abounding polemics in the Book of Concord more than one third is directed against pseudo-Lutheranism."

²⁶ Smalcald Articles III VIII 5, "All this is the old devil and old serpent, who also converted Adam and Eve into enthusiasts, and led them from the outward Word of God to spiritualizing and self-conceit, and nevertheless he accomplished this through other outward words."

manifestations of fellowship must be truthful and in accordance with the supreme demands of the marks of the church. The “sacred things” (*sacra*) are the means of grace, and only by way of them is anything else a “sacred thing” (*sacrum*).²⁷

Here, a distinction is drawn between *sacra* and *sacrum*. By *sacra*, sacred things, we mean only the means of grace, the word and the sacraments. These, and these alone, create the dual fellowship with God and with the brethren. They are constitutive of church fellowship, but they are not the only ways that fellowship is manifested to the world. In creating the church, they also bring about various other “visible manifestations of fellowship.” Prayer, worship, brotherly love, the holy kiss, the handshake, and reception into one’s house can each, individually, be called a sacred thing (*sacrum*) since each is brought about by the sacred things, word and sacrament (*sacra*). But since the word and sacraments alone are foundational, while any other *sacrum* is a part of the edifice built upon the foundation, we should distinguish between the two.

While there are numerous visible manifestations of fellowship, some of which are essential and others variable in time and place, these are not properly numbered among “the marks of the church.”

Prayer is not one of the marks of the church and should not be coordinated with Word and sacraments, as though it were essentially of the same nature as they. As a response to the divine Word, it is an expression of faith and a fruit of the faith, and when spoken before others, a profession of faith. As a profession of faith it must be spoken in harmony with and under control of the marks of the church.²⁸

Those elements of church life that are a response of the saving faith created by God are essentially different than the *notae ecclesiae*, which create faith and are constitutive of the church.²⁹

Prayer has a share in both. While essentially a fruit of faith, it can sometimes be also a profession of faith. Here is the dual reality that comes into play at events like baccalaureates, national holidays, and community gatherings after a disaster. In

²⁷ Thesis 12, “Acts 2:41–47; 1 Cor 1:10; cf. 15:1f; 10:16, 17; 11:22f; 12:13; ch. 14; 2 Cor 8, 9. See also material under 2, 6, and 7.”

²⁸ Thesis 13, “Dan 9:18; Acts 9:11; Rom 10:8–14; 1 Tim 2:1, 2; Acts 27:35 – Ap XIII.16; XXIII.30, 31; LC, Lord’s Prayer.13–30. Also see under Thesis 12.”

²⁹ Christologically speaking, the *genus maiestaticum* might be invoked to explain the difference. While the visible flesh of Christ does, indeed, share in the divinity of Christ’s person, that flesh does not, in turn, communicate its properties to the divine nature. In like manner, the means of grace communicate divinity to the church, but the visible manifestations of fellowship that they create do not, in turn, communicate their essence to the marks.

such settings, prayer must be true and spoken under the control of the marks of the church.

Conclusions

The founders of the Synodical Conference believed that formal subscription and actual practice are inseparable realities. They envisioned a form of synodical fellowship that sacrificed neither doctrinal integrity nor full unity. Her critics considered this vision a pipe dream. They judged that insistence on a consistently faithful practice would inevitably lead to the kind of sectarian spirit evidenced in the incessant fragmentation of American denominationalism. The argument continues to this day.

What the critics predicted did, in fact, come to pass. Were they vindicated by the dissolution of the Synodical Conference in 1961? The Overseas Committee answers this query with a resounding no. They sided neither with the mindset of the General Council, which sacrificed doctrinal integrity for visible unity, nor with the WELS/ELS mindset, which dissolved the conference over questions of the rapidity and effectiveness of disciplinary actions.³⁰ Rather, they charted a way through the troubles that promised to preserve the vision of the Synodical Conference by means of the doctrine of the church.

Until now, their words have not found a hearing. What would be the state of Confessional Lutheranism in North America if the Overseas Theses had been given their proper due? Could the Synodical Conference have survived the crisis that was its undoing? Could it be reconstituted even now? Perhaps recently renewed conversations between our erstwhile partners still hold that promise. Only time will tell. But more immediately, Missouri herself lives in the same existential crisis that undid the Synodical Conference. Some decry our efforts at doctrinal integrity as a pipe dream that only undermines unity in the Gospel, while others are ready to throw in the towel, cease the struggle, and walk away from fellowship with faithful and unfaithful congregations alike.

If the work of our faithful brothers on the Overseas Committee went for naught fifty-eight years ago, can it nevertheless benefit us today? If so, there is

³⁰ The original "Agreement of Missouri and Wisconsin Synods, 1868," stated, "If in the one synod or in the other an error in doctrine should appear, each synod shall be held to remove such error by all means at its disposal. And as long as this is being done, the orthodoxy of the respective synod shall not be questioned." Richard C. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 182 (as cited by Teigen). But Wisconsin questioned the orthodoxy of Missouri while discipline was being carried out. The focus had shifted from the objective fact of discipline to the subjective judgment of its rapidity.

still more work to do. While the Overseas Theses provide us a sound framework for moving forward, they also leave some key questions unanswered. Is there anything more definite that can be said to define when the pure marks still hold sway and when not? Can we come to a confessionally determined certainty about who should be given responsibility for making that judgment? What exactly does it mean that “Everything must be referred to [the marks of the church]” (Thesis 11)? What does it mean that “all visible manifestations of fellowship must be truthful and in accordance with the supreme demands of the marks of the church” (Thesis 12)?

While the need to answer these and other questions still lies before us, we ought not to let it detract from the great gift we have already been given. The bright light given us in the doctrine of the church and the priority of this doctrine for determining church fellowship are precious treasures that can only become more precious as we ponder their implications. For by them, we are compelled to lift our eyes from anthropocentric efforts to see Christ and his work for the church *extra nos*. Here is always our salvation. To see Christ lifted up on the cross always blesses us, not only personally, but corporately as well, “because we are members of his body” (Eph 5:30).

Praying the Psalms with Jesus and His Body

Thomas M. Winger

I. Introduction

“O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise” (Ps 51:15).¹ These beloved opening words of Matins, drawn from Psalm 51, were the subject of a regular joke in my childhood days, as I would hum them through pursed lips and grin up at my mother. After all, how could we sing them if the Lord had not yet opened our lips? The meaning was more sober for the early medieval monks who were woken in the darkness of early morning to process from dormitory to chapel, and this cry to God was literally the first sound to emerge from their somnolent mouths. Matins teaches us that the first words of the morning ought to be God’s praise. But *why* does God need to open our mouths before we can praise him? In the context of Psalm 51, this petition has little to do with sleep-induced lockjaw or even the priority of praise over chatter; rather, David’s mouth had been slammed shut by the shame that had overwhelmed him since the prophet Nathan exposed the evil of his sin with Bathsheba. His heart could not praise the Lord until the refreshing word of absolution would create in him a clean heart. That is how the Lord would open his lips.

The opening call of Matins is therefore a cry for forgiveness, and an acknowledgment that we are entirely unfit to praise the Lord until he moves it. It highlights the priority of God’s saving word over the babble emerging from our unclean hearts (cf. Matt 15:19–20). But that we express our appeal *in God’s own words*, drawn from the Psalms, is even more significant. It speaks our humble confession that we have nothing to say to God until he first speaks to us. Therefore, even our petition for words to speak comes from Scripture. Despite popular opinion, prayer and praise do not consist simply of what overflows from our troubled hearts that wish, sigh, lament, or rejoice heavenwards.² Though we are free to voice to our heavenly Father the very simplest of childlike requests, we do need to be taught how

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together; Prayerbook of the Bible*, ed. Gerhard Ludwig Müller, Albrecht Schönherr, and Geoffrey B. Kelly, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, vol. 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 155.

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to pray. When the disciples approached Jesus begging, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1), they were rightly confessing that God-pleasing prayer does *not* come naturally to us. Just as Christ responded by teaching them the Our Father, so also God’s people from of old had been furnished with a divine prayer book in the Psalter. In it, the Father taught his children to pray as any father voices words to his young children and beams with joy when they learn to say them back. As both God’s word to us and the cornucopia of our prayers back to him, the Psalms express most clearly the rhythm proper to the liturgy itself: like the heart that both pushes out oxygen-rich blood to the body’s starving cells and then draws back the exhausted vehicle of their nourishment, so the Psalms deliver to us the life-giving word of God and by their own muscular pulse return it to him as prayers and praise from our weak lips.

II. The Psalms as Divine Revelation

So, before we can speak of the Psalms as prayer, we need to acknowledge their character as divine revelation. Though inspired through poets like David and Asaph, these are *God’s* Psalms. He teaches us the words to pray and sing, and we voice them back to him. And the Psalms do not simply give us a script for safe worship, as if by voicing them we merely tread a safe path through the liturgical minefield, stepping here and not there to avoid the explosive danger of his displeasure—though they certainly give us such confidence. But as divine revelation, the Psalms teach us who we are. They uncover the state of our hearts, as Nathan the prophet led David to acknowledge. They show us what we need and why we need it. They allow us to speak to God truthfully—not seeing ourselves through our own rosy eyes (like the Pharisee in the temple) but by God’s penetrating insight. And as divine revelation, they also reveal to us the heart of *God*. Horace Hummel warns that “like the whole Bible, [the Psalter’s] real subject is not man, his devotion, inspiration, or experience, but God as He still creates, elects, redeems, sanctifies, reigns, reveals, judges.”³ So the Psalms are not just law—even law in which we take great delight—but embrace the fullness of God’s teaching. They teach us the nature of his kingdom and proclaim what he did for the saints of old: how he rescued them from every danger, how he redeemed his people Israel from Egyptian slavery, how he offers his righteousness in his holy dwelling place, how he will send the Messiah, and how in the end he will come to redeem us too. The Psalms are, then, as Luther put it in his preface to the Psalter, “a little Bible, . . . almost an entire summary of it, comprised in one little

³ Horace D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 448.

book.”⁴ In fact, they are purest gospel—and it is Jesus himself who, following the traditional division of the Old Testament into three parts with the Psalms representing all “the writings,” affirmed: “everything written *about me* in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44, emphasis added).

We must keep their gospel character in mind when we observe their self-proclaimed division into five books—apparently imitating the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch. For they are not “law” but “instruction” in the way of the Lord, God’s “teaching” in both law and gospel, as Horace Hummel taught a generation of Lutherans to understand the Hebrew word *Torah*. With this in mind, and with the necessary tweaking of the translation, we can rightly see Psalm 1 as a prologue to the entire collection:

1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the | wicked,*
nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of | scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law [*Torah*/teachings] | of the LORD,*
and on his law [*Torah*/teachings] he meditates | day and night.
3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its
season, and its leaf does not | wither.*
In all that he does, he | prospers.⁵ (Ps 1:1–3)

The image David uses explodes the notion of the law as mere commandments; the *Torah* is rather that life-giving stream that attracts our roots, nourishes our frame, and allows us to burst into life. The Psalter gives that righteous man, anchored in God’s word, the means to express his great delight. So while the Psalms are, like the Pentateuch, God’s revelation to man, they are much more; they are doxological, as each of the five books expresses at its close. For by teaching us the gracious nature of God as our Creator and Redeemer, the Psalms instill in us both rhyme and reason to thank and praise him.

⁴ Martin Luther, *Preface to the Psalter* (1528): vol. 35, p. 254, in *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE, “The Psalter ought to be a precious and beloved book, if for no other reason than this: it promises Christ’s death and resurrection so clearly—and pictures his kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom—that it might well be called a little Bible.”

⁵ All Psalm verses appointed for singing are taken from The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).

III. The Psalms as Song

Perhaps it should *not* go without saying that the Psalms are also fundamentally *song*. Song and prayer are not mutually exclusive categories any more than revelation and prayer. Singing is simply the *way* we pray them. In the Hebrew text, each Psalm is introduced with a superscription that uses a variety of terms to describe these poems: some mean “song” (*shir*) or “instrumentally accompanied music” (*mizmor*); others mean “teaching” (*maskil*), “praise” (*tehillah*), “prayer” (*tephillah*), or “lamentation” (*miktam, shiggaion*). But these, too, are not mutually exclusive categories, and the superscriptions often give further instructions that emphasize their musical character, naming a melody (e.g., “The Hind of Dawn” in Psalm 22) or at least a tonality, identifying the instruments to be used, and sometimes giving a dedication to a temple musician (e.g., “To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments; according to ‘The Eighth.’ A Psalm of David,” Psalm 6). So also the puzzling interjections like *Selah* (seventy-one times) are probably to be understood as musical instructions. It is, then, no surprise that when the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) selected one term as the book’s title, it settled on ψαλμός, “psalm,” which means “song.” Originally, the word was onomatopoeic, the initial “ps” sound echoing the plucking of a stringed instrument like a lyre, harp, or cithara (κιθάρα, from which we get “guitar”). The related word “Psalter,” used as a title for the collection by way of metonymy, likewise originally referred to the instrument itself, the ψαλτήριον. I mention this because the origin of the Psalms may have been young David’s commission to pluck his lyre (τῆν κιθάραν, *kinnor*) and sing to King Saul to soothe his troubled heart and drive away the evil spirit that burdened him (1 Sam 16:23). When the Lord gave David the throne of Israel, he inspired David to set in order the liturgical contribution of the Levitical choirs, who set the music of the tabernacle to the accompaniment of lyres, harps, and cymbals (1 Chr 25:1). Chief among them was Asaph, who together with David is named as a primary author of the Psalms.

These ancient stringed instruments were likely more rhythmic than melodic in function, which coincides well with the major poetic feature of the Psalms. For unlike traditional English-language poetry, whose defining character is rhyme, Hebrew poetry is marked exclusively by parallelism and rhythm. The Lord in his wisdom thus inspired a form of poetry that survives translation into other languages.⁶ Normally divided into two halves, with roughly the same number of stressed syllables (most commonly 3:3), Psalm verses emphasize and elaborate on each idea by repeating it with synonymous terms or equivalent figures of speech:

⁶ See Clive Staples Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958), 5.

“Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!” (Ps 117:1). Even “antithetical parallelism,” which uses opposite expressions in each half, is meant to express a unified thought: “For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish” (Ps 1:6). Through repetition, this form of poetry not only aids comprehension by restating its thought in other terms, but it also slows down the lips to allow the heart to digest the message. Like an extended Kyrie or litany, the prayer’s repetition ramps up its urgency, the repetition of praise ratchets up its height. More importantly, parallelism enables *dialogue* and suggests that the Psalms were fundamentally intended for use in *community* (Psalm 136 is the stellar example). St. Paul implies that the earliest Christians, in continuing Israel’s use of Psalms in their worship, also sang them *antiphonally*, back and forth on the fulcrum of the half verse: “speaking to each other in psalms and hymns and songs of the Spirit, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord” (Eph 5:19, author’s translation; cf. Col 3:16). It is worth noting, then, that the widespread modern practice of singing the Psalms antiphonally by *whole* verse, likely driven by a desire to maintain the integrity of the musical tone, distorts the essential rhythm of the Psalm verses, 90 percent of which express their parallelism by half verse. By speaking the Psalms to one another as well as corporately to the Lord, we recognize their character as true *praise*, which does not simply express adoration but elevates him by proclaiming his mighty and gracious works. True praise is a form of preaching.

For those of us who grew up with *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) and ignored the small number of Anglican chant settings in the back of the book, the introduction of tones to sing them in *Lutheran Worship* (1982) was a revelation. In many congregations, it was not a smooth transition, and I remain surprised at the number of churches I visit that continue to *speak* the Psalms, a practice that is about as inspiring as a spoken recitation of “A Mighty Fortress.” Form and function are inseparable, and *singing* the Psalms is not only the church’s age-old inheritance but the rubric delivered by the Scriptures themselves. Their character as the *hymnbook* of the Bible is all the more emphasized by a remarkable feature of a great Greek Bible produced in the fifth century (Codex Alexandrinus) and some later manuscripts: at the conclusion of the 150th Psalm, they append a collection of canticles drawn from other parts of the Old Testament and its deuterocanonical insertions (such as the Song of the Three Young Men), and the canticles of Luke 1 and 2 (Benedictus, Magnificat, Nunc Dimittis). They confess that the Bible is not just a sourcebook of doctrine but a service book for the liturgy. While Calvin’s dry branch of the Reformation tree stunted its musical growth by restricting congregational hymnody to metrical Psalms, our Lutheran forefathers drew out the fundamentally Christian meaning of the Psalms by writing hymns on their basis that proclaimed Jesus Christ

(e.g., Luther’s paraphrases of Psalms 46 and 130). The historic church expresses the same conviction that these Old Testament hymns belong to the church of Jesus Christ by appending the doxological *Gloria Patri*. We confess that the same God to whom David sang is indeed the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁷

IV. The Psalms as Prayer

The Psalms are so obviously doxological that it may be counterintuitive to think of them as prayer. Not only are many Psalms extended expressions of praise, but the division of the Psalter into five books is marked by an explicit doxology.⁸ The second book, for example, ends with this:

18 Blessèd be the LORD, the God of | Israel,*
who alone does | wondrous things.
19 Blessèd be his glorious name for- | ever;*
may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and | Amen! (Ps
72:18–19)

And yet, to our surprise, this doxology is followed by the observation: “The *prayers* [*tephilloth*] of David, the son of Jesse, are ended” (Ps 78:20, emphasis added). Now perhaps the Hebrew word translated as “prayers” has a broader meaning, and this verse could simply mean “the *Psalms* of David are ended.”⁹ But just as song and prayer are not mutually exclusive categories—a prayer can be sung and a song can be prayed—so also can words of praise be prayed. For prayer ought not be reduced to the act of supplication, as if it were merely an expression of what we hope to get from God, a sort of liturgical shopping list. The old acronym used in confirmation classes (ACTS) remains instructive: God-pleasing prayer ought to include Adoration, Confession (of faith and sins), Thanksgiving (with its concomitant praise), and Supplication. While one might admit that prayer is formally identifiable by its use of second person pronouns and verbs (you/thou), in distinction from praise language that proclaims what God has done in the third person (he/him), the distinction collapses when we speak back to God all the words he has given us in the Psalms. As Bonhoeffer puts it: “Even those psalms that do not address God a single

⁷ Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 426: “The Gloria Patri is a symbolic way of stressing that the psalms (like the rest of the Old Testament) are not Christianized by ‘reading into’ them some alien meaning, by doing violence to their literary and historical integrity, but by ‘extending’ their literal sense, ‘reading out’ of them together with the New Testament their fulfilled and antitypical meaning in Christ and the Holy Spirit.”

⁸ Psalm 41:13; 72:18–19; 89:52; 106:48; 150.

⁹ The Septuagint translates ᾠδὴν as οἱ ὕμνοι, “the hymns,” either indicating a broader meaning for the word or perhaps evidencing the very confusion of form and function we are addressing.

time (e.g., 1, 2, 78) may be called prayers, for they serve to submerge us in God's purpose and will."¹⁰ By taking up God's own word and praying it back to him, we find our voices strengthened and elevated—not that our own feeble thoughts are ever unworthy of God's attention, but that in our weakness we often struggle to find the words to pray. Even the simple prayers we were rightly taught in our childhood or the pious prayers of our devotional booklets can soon wear thin under the strain of repeated use. Our prayer life can become narrow and weak. So Luther can comment that those who begin to pray the Psalter earnestly will soon give up on light and personal “little devotional prayers and say: Ah, there is not the juice, the strength, the passion, the fire which I find in the Psalter. Anything else tastes too cold and too hard.”¹¹

V. Types of Psalms

If “song,” “praise,” and “prayer” are not mutually exclusive categories, what of the other ways in which the Psalms have been divided into “types”? As we have noted, the Psalms themselves mark different types in their superscriptions, using a variety of technical terms whose difference is not always completely clear, but which may suggest an appropriate use (e.g., praise or lament). The superscriptions also attach personal names to many of the Psalms, seventy-three of which are written by or dedicated to David, twelve associated with Asaph, eleven with the sons of Korah, and so on. This helps to anchor them to a specific historical situation or purpose, and to suggest how they might fit our lives. Indeed, for most of her history the Christian church saw the Psalms chiefly as personal expressions of the faith and life of their historical authors, fit for our use precisely when and because we share their experiences. Liberal scholars in the nineteenth century, skeptical of the value of these historical notes in the superscriptions, thought they could discern behind the text of the Psalms the original circumstances of their use in public ceremonies of Israel's worship life. Hermann Gunkel, the ringleader of form criticism, proposed five genres: hymns, individual laments, individual thanksgivings, communal laments, and royal (enthronement) Psalms.¹² There is much absurdity in Gunkel's “phantastic” suggestions—why invent religious ceremonies for early Israel when the Old Testament itself provides plenty to choose from? His offhand rejection of their

¹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible*, 160.

¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible*, 161, citing Martin Luther, *Foreword to the Neuburg Edition of the Psalms* (1545), in Martin Luther, *D. Luthers Werke: Deutsche Bibel*, vol. 10/2 (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1906–1961), p. 157, hereafter cited as WA DB.

¹² See Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 421–425.

historical roots in the lives of the Old Testament saints is pure whimsy. But his school reminded readers of the Psalter that these poems arose not only in the lives of individuals, but that many at least were composed for the public worship life of God's people.

Dividing the Psalms into categories can be helpful to our prayer life in both its personal and public spheres. Long before Gunkel, the ancient Jews grouped the Psalms according to their liturgical use, particularly those in the final third: Psalms 113–118, the “ordinary Hallel [praise] Psalms,” were associated with Passover and the other major festivals; Psalms 119–136 were known as the “Great Hallel” and were sung at the daily temple services. Luther once divided the Psalms into five types: prophecy (of Christ, the church, and the saints), instruction (in the word of God and the Christian life), comfort (in times of trouble and sorrow), prayer (in distress and mourning), and thanksgiving (praising God for his works).¹³ Bonhoeffer broke them down logically into the major *loci* of Christian teaching: creation, law, the history of salvation, the Messiah, the church, life, suffering, guilt, enemies, and the end.¹⁴ While the Psalms usually fit into more than one category, such divisions can function as a kind of index to help us find the words to pray in specific circumstances. On the other hand, we must take care not to limit our use of the Psalms to those we think will help us. As with the lectionary in the divine service and daily prayer, there is great value in allowing a wisely prepared cycle to deliver the Psalms to us, morning and evening, season by season, or even just in continuous reading. By praying the Psalms according to such a plan, we open ourselves up to the full counsel of God and pray words that we might not have otherwise chosen. In this way, our prayer is formed by the Psalms and not simply by the poverty of our heart.

VII. Praying the Psalms from the Heart

It is our hearts, nonetheless, that pray. The Psalms do not take the words away from our hearts—as if praying from the heart and praying from a book were opposites—but help us to express the faith and feelings of our hearts. In 150 chapters, we find a collection that is both broad and manageable, ranging across the full spectrum of human experience and divine teaching while remaining brief enough to become familiar. There is also a trajectory in the collection. They are roughly chronological, the first two books mainly bearing David's name and the rest mainly deriving from later poets active in the temple over hundreds of years. There

¹³ Martin Luther, *Reading the Psalms with Luther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007).

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible*, 160.

is also a thematic movement from lamentation to praise, from despair to faith, from confession to adoration. The Christian who prays them sequentially will find himself at first thinking, “This is what I’m feeling,” and then will be slowly lifted up to believe, “This is what my gracious heavenly Father feels toward me.” The final third of the Psalter is dominated by praise, as the pray-er learns to proclaim not what he has done but what God has done. And the Psalter ends with five alleluia Psalms in a row, “Praise the LORD,” the final Psalm multiplying the praise in every line, a doxology of doxologies.

Luther compares the Psalms to the popular lives of the saints that were read in the daily office in the Middle Ages. Not only do those legends lack historical credibility, but they paint the saints in such colors that we cannot recognize ourselves in them. The Psalter, on the other hand, gives us examples of real Christian lives and thoughts, and with a great nobility of faith and words:

It presents to us not the simple, ordinary speech of the saints, but the best of their language, that which they used when they talked with God himself in great earnestness and on the most important matters. Thus the Psalter lays before us not only their words instead of their deeds, but their very hearts and the inmost treasure of their souls, so we can look down to the foundation and source of their words and deeds. We can look into their hearts and see what kind of thoughts they had, how their hearts were disposed, and how they acted in all kinds of situations, in danger and in need.¹⁵

By connecting us to our fathers in the faith, the Psalms keep us within the communion of saints and protect us from falling into the way of the sects, Luther adds. They not only teach us, “Know thyself,”¹⁶ but they teach us to know the heart of Christendom, God, and all his creatures.

The Psalter gives us prayers for every aspect of life, and thereby teaches us that it is okay for us to pray for all such things. And so we find prayers for life, protection from evildoers, daily bread, and earthly blessing (e.g., Ps 37; 65; 103)—topics we often fear to raise out of a sense that they are not spiritual enough. But these Psalms teach us that these, too, are gifts of God.¹⁷ On this note, we must be cautious not to let the selection of Psalms provided in our hymnals restrict our use. While the *LSB* Liturgy Committee (on which I served) desired that all 150 Psalms find place in the pew edition, space considerations ultimately prevailed. What is found in the

¹⁵ Luther, *Preface to Psalter* (1528), AE 35:255.

¹⁶ Luther, *Preface to Psalter* (1528), AE 35:257. The editor explains: “‘Know thyself,’ a well-known maxim from Greek philosophy, was the inscription on the temple of Apollo in ancient Delphi.”

¹⁷ See Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible*, 168.

pew edition is only those Psalms required by the lectionaries for use in the divine service (plus a few others). Hence, it stands to reason that many Psalms most suited for *personal* prayer might be omitted—and it must also be admitted that lectionary committees have tended to omit the Psalms that are most uncomfortable or difficult.

Among them are the “Psalms of lament.” In the first two books of the Psalms, at least, the Psalms of lament significantly outnumber the Psalms of thanksgiving. There are perhaps forty in all, forming the very “backbone of the Psalter.”¹⁸ On the one hand, we might think this reflects our natural—and the characteristically Israelite—tendency to grumble. We lament more than we give thanks. And we must acknowledge a certain sinfulness in this imbalance of our souls. But the Holy Spirit has taken up this human condition into his Psalter to give it a God-pleasing expression. So these Psalms, on the other hand, teach us that we are permitted to complain to God about our life and our various sufferings:

serious illness, deep isolation from God and humanity, threats, persecution, imprisonment, and whatever conceivable peril there is on earth They do not deny it, they do not deceive themselves with pious words about it, they allow it to stand as a severe ordeal of faith, indeed at times they no longer see beyond the suffering (Ps. 88), but they complain about it all to God.¹⁹

As these Psalms allow us to lift up these laments to God, they let us unburden ourselves. Psychologically considered, they can divert us from dumping this pain on our loved ones, and thus they can strengthen and heal our relationships. But more important is the matter of faith. Far from evidencing a lack of faith—as if groaning to God meant that we had lost hope in his goodness—the Psalms of lament teach us to whom we can turn for help. They are a profound expression of faith—a weak faith perhaps, which does not know where suffering will lead, but a faith that knows who loves us. And so each Psalm of lament teaches us ultimately to crown our complaint with submission. Note how this Psalm that begins with complaint ends with faith:

1 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me for- | ever?*

How long will you hide your | face from me?

2 How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart | all the day?*

How long shall my enemy be exalted | over me? . . .

5 But I have trusted in your | steadfast love;*

my heart shall rejoice in your sal- | vation.

6 I will sing | to the LORD,*

¹⁸ Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 428.

¹⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible*, 169.

because he has dealt bountifully | with me. (Ps 13:1–2, 5–6)

The seven psalms that we know as “penitential” (6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143) stand at the heart of the Psalms of lament. They teach us that the chief form of lamentation is sorrow over one’s own sin, the ultimate recognition that suffering arises from our misdeeds and not from God’s supposed callous disregard. Here we find the most intimate point of connection with the personal lives and faith of the psalmists. We may sympathize with David’s anger and fear over Saul’s persecution, or his appeal to the Lord for protection in battle, but these circumstances are literally foreign to us. But when David lusts over his neighbor’s wife and commits adultery with her, we can so much more easily see ourselves in the story. And so his words of repentance and faith inked with tears in Psalm 51, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps 51:10), become our own prayer. As Lutherans, this is where we feel at home. It is the penitential Psalms that gave Luther his Reformation insight, that the “righteousness of God” by which we are justified is not our righteousness under the law but God’s just decree that we are forgiven because of Christ’s merits. And here Luther is simply following Paul, who quotes Psalm 32 in Romans 4:

1 Blessèd is the one whose transgression is for- | given,*
whose sin is | covered.

2 Blessèd is the man against whom the LORD counts no in- | iquity.*
(Ps 32:1–2)

This is the true unburdening the Psalms offer—not merely to cast our burdens on God but to know that he is willing and able to keep them. And so these can be the easiest and most refreshing Psalms to pray.

By contrast, the “imprecatory Psalms,” which cry out for God’s vengeance on our enemies, can be a great challenge to Christians. Is their language of hatred and violence a relic of a primitive Jewish religion that has been superseded by Christian mercy and love? Some have thought so; and these Psalms are conspicuously absent from lectionary use. But these, too, are written for our instruction, and three brief thoughts may help us overcome our inhibitions about praying them from our hearts. First, the imprecatory Psalms are really just the most extreme examples of Psalms of lament. They arise in response not only to personal suffering but to the suffering of God’s people on a grand scale. Their moral indignation stems from a heart that takes justice and God’s law seriously and cannot abide the persecution of the innocent. Despite the horrific nature of the

language, it would be far worse to remain silent in the face of such things.²⁰ Second, these the psalmist's harshest words are saved for those who oppose not him but his God. It is not that he believes God should take *his* side, but rather that he is taking *God's* side; *God's* enemies are *his* enemies, rather than the reverse:

21 Do I not hate those who hate you, | O LORD?*

And do I not loathe those who rise up a- | gainst you?

22 I hate them with complete | hatred;*

I count them my | enemies. (Ps 139:21–22)

Thus, the imprecatory Psalms commit vengeance into *God's* hands and restrain us from trying to carry it out ourselves. They let our anger burn in God's asbestos hands until its fuel is exhausted. Third, God reserves for himself in his wisdom how and when he will answer these prayers. Sometimes he wrought revenge on Israel's enemies, and sometimes he showed mercy. Justice will be served on the last day. But meanwhile, God surprises the psalmist by diverting his vengeance onto the one who was truly an innocent sufferer: he pours out his wrath on Jesus, forsakes him and kills him instead of taking vengeance on those who truly deserve it (Ps 22).

A similar stumbling block confronts the Christian who prays with the psalmist words like these:

19 He brought me out into a | broad place;*

he rescued me, because he delight- | ed in me.

20 The LORD dealt with me according to my | righteousness;*

according to the cleanness of my hands he re- | warded me.

21 For I have kept the ways | of the LORD,*

and have not wickedly departed | from my God.

22 For all his just decrees were be- | fore me,*

and his statutes I did not put a- | way from me.

23 I was blameless be- | fore him,*

and I kept myself | from my guilt.

24 So the LORD has rewarded me according to my | righteousness,*

according to the cleanness of my hands | in his sight. (Ps 18:19–24)

Is David playing the Pharisee, guilty of self-righteousness and pride? Unwilling to attribute these sins to him, we kick our Lutheran instincts into high gear and gloss “righteous” as “forgiven” and run this text in the way of the gospel: David is not claiming that he has kept God's law perfectly, but only that the Lord has imputed innocence to him by grace. But accelerating too quickly into the fast lane blurs the Psalm's true scenery. Instead of praying from the heart, we do dogmatics. What does

²⁰ Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 20–33, develops this thought.

David actually mean? First, it is important that we distinguish between “righteousness” and “being in the right.” Confusing the two can be fatal.²¹ In Psalms like this, David is not saying that he has never broken God’s law, but rather that he has remained within the covenant. He has not set aside God’s laws in order to chase after other gods. Therefore he can rightly (not “self-righteously”) lay claim to God’s promises to rescue his people. Furthermore, when David suffers at the hands of Israel’s enemies—who are by definition God’s enemies—he can likewise claim that this is “not right”; it is a violation of God’s order. How helpful it is for us to know that we can pray this way. We can make a claim before God on the basis of his covenant promises. And so these Psalms again call us back to God’s word. Second, when David claims innocence, he is not saying that he is without sin, but rather that he is not suffering *because* of his sin. It is vital to recognize this in an age when pious Christians burden people with the notion that true Christian obedience will ward off all suffering. On the contrary, David notes, he suffers for *God’s* sake. He is persecuted because he belongs to the true God (cf. Ps 139, above).²² It is not his but God’s cause that is just. Israel is a theocracy; any attack on its earthly king is an attack on God. Third, we should take note how often such claims to innocence are accompanied by the confession of sins and an appeal for forgiveness. The same Psalm that cries out, “you have upheld me because of my integrity” (Ps 41:12) can include the plea, “O LORD, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you!” (Ps 41:4)—which reminds us that the instinctive Lutheran reading is not entirely wrong!

VIII. Praying the Psalms with Jesus

Nonetheless, it is the very outrageousness of David’s claims that can make our voices stammer to a halt with a true sense of unworthiness or even falsehood. Can we truly pray, “judge me, O LORD, according to *my* righteousness and according to the integrity that is in *me*” (Ps 7:8, emphasis added; cf. 18:20f.; 26:1)? Stumbling at this hurdle, Bonhoeffer avers, is the moment when we glimpse the Psalter’s true secret:

²¹ Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 16.

²² Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible*, 173: “It is a thoroughly unbiblical and destructive idea that we can never suffer innocently as long as some kind of fault still remains in us. . . . If we are persecuted for the sake of God’s cause, then we suffer innocently, and that means we suffer with God. That we really are with God and, therefore, really innocent is demonstrated precisely in this, that we pray for the forgiveness of our sins. But we are innocent not only in relation to the enemies of God, but also before God, for we are now seen united with God’s cause, into which it is precisely God who has drawn us, and God forgives us our sins.”

The psalms that will not cross our lips as prayers, those that make us falter and offend us, make us suspect someone else is praying, not we—that the one who is here affirming his innocence, who is calling for God’s judgment, who has come to such infinite depths of suffering, is none other than Jesus Christ himself. It is he who is praying here, and not only here, but in the whole Psalter.²³

When *Jesus* prays the Psalms, then the claim to innocence needs no qualification. He truly suffers without cause. He has truly kept the Lord’s covenant with all its precepts perfectly. By praying these words, we submerge ourselves in *Jesus’* righteousness. In the Gospels, Jesus indeed claims the Psalter as his own. Its words are on his lips more than any other book of the Old Testament. All its outrageous claims find their meaning in him—even the royal psalmist’s claim to be the very son of God (Ps 2; cf. Ps 82:6; John 10:34–36).

How can it be that the Psalms of David are the Psalms of Christ? The answer, of course, is that Jesus is the Son of David; or rather, because David is the “type” of Jesus. This is why it is so important that the Psalms are preeminently known as David’s. Though he may have begun to write them in his youthful serenading of Saul, none appear in the canon until after his anointing as king—the anointing that placed him into the office of messianic pattern. David, as a prophet inspired by the Holy Spirit, knew that his words had a deeper meaning, that they pointed to the Son who would occupy his throne forever—so Peter quite remarkably claims when he applies Psalm 16 to Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 2:30–31). Thus, also are David’s dying words introduced:

The oracle of David, the son of Jesse, the oracle of the man who was raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel: “The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue.” (2 Sam 23:1–2)

Nowhere is this deeper meaning more certain than in Psalm 22, which Jesus takes up as *his* dying words from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps 22:1). By quoting the opening line, Jesus claims the whole Psalm, its whole prophecy, as his own. And so the writer to the Hebrews, citing the very same Psalm, can claim that whenever David’s Psalms were sung in the temple, Christ himself was speaking through him, present in person to lead the worship of the congregation of Israel: “I [David/Christ] will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise” (Heb 2:12 quoting Ps 22:22; cf. Heb 10:5). After his resurrection, Jesus would tell his disciples that the whole Old Testament prophesied his passion, “that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and

²³ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 54.

the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). But Hebrews is making an even greater claim: that even those Psalms that do not seem to be explicit prophecies of Christ are nevertheless his own words, that he speaks and prays them all.

So if David’s prayers are really *Jesus’* prayers, does that perhaps make them even more remote from you and me? The answer, of course, is the opposite, and is hinted at in those very words of Hebrews 2:12: “*my brothers.*” Jesus claims us as his brothers, as his very own flesh. It is because we are one flesh with him that the Psalms are also ours. Through our Baptism into Christ, we are one with him, joint heirs of eternal life with him, and through him able to call upon God as *our* Father (Rom 8:15–17). Jesus is therefore the bridge between David’s praying and our praying. The Psalms can be our prayers precisely because they are Jesus’ prayers; they could never be truly ours if they were merely David’s. And they are our prayers because Jesus knows us and our hearts better than anyone else.²⁴ Jesus gives us the Psalms to pray with him just as he gave the disciples the Our Father to pray with him. The Father hears us because he hears Jesus. In the new temple of his body, the dividing wall of hostility (the law) is broken down so that “through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18). This is a *liturgical* claim that describes how we approach the very throne of God in the divine service. It is made possible only because Jesus is the one mediator (1 Tim 2:5), who shares his divinity with the Father and shares his humanity with us, bridging the gap in his person. Jesus prays because of his human nature; the Father hears him because of his divine nature.

The recognition that in the Psalms it is always Jesus praying, and we through him, transforms the Psalms for us. It gives them strength and objectivity. “If we want to read and to pray the prayers of the Bible, and especially the Psalms, we must not, therefore, first ask what they have to do with us, but what they have to do with Jesus Christ.”²⁵ Then, because of our union with him through Baptism, we can be confident that what we pray of him, we pray of ourselves. His suffering gives meaning to our suffering; his righteousness becomes our righteousness; his cry

²⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible*, 160: “It is really our prayer. But since the Son of God knows us better than we know ourselves, and was truly human for our sake, it is also really the Son’s prayer. It can become our prayer only because it was his prayer.”

²⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible*, 157. He continues: “We must ask how we can understand the Psalms as God’s Word, and only then can we pray them with Jesus Christ. Thus it does not matter whether the Psalms express exactly what we feel in our heart at the moment we pray. Perhaps it is precisely the case that we must pray against our own heart in order to pray rightly. It is not just that for which we ourselves want to pray that is important, but that for which God wants us to pray. If we were dependent on ourselves alone, we would probably often pray only the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer. But God wants it otherwise. Not the poverty of our heart, but the richness of God’s word, ought to determine our prayer.”

to God for vengeance and vindication makes our cries for help pure and faithful. This recognition allows us to overcome preoccupation with our own suffering and immerse ourselves in contemplation of his, to receive its blessings, to abandon concerns about our own puny righteousness and rejoice to be given his exceeding holiness. Because we know that the Father hears him, we know that he hears us.²⁶

IX. Praying the Psalms with the Church

Jesus serves as the link in one final relationship as well, for through him we are not only connected back to David and up to the Father, but also across to our brothers within the worshipping congregation. Because we are each baptized into him, we have a share in one another. So if we stumble over Psalms that speak of a suffering, a righteousness, a lament, a thanksgiving that we cannot immediately identify as our own, we may find we are praying on behalf of our brothers with Christ's body, the church. Thus when we pray the Psalms, we pray for and with one another. For this reason, the Psalms have found a central place in the church's liturgical life. This is, of course, true to their origin. Just as there is a movement in the Psalter from lamentation to praise (noted above), so also there is a movement from individual to corporate, from personal prayer to public. The Psalms kick us out of our chairs and drive us to church. Too often, we miss the original liturgical setting of the Psalms that is so clearly described in their superscriptions:

A Song of Ascents.

1 I lift up my eyes | to the hills.*

From where does my | help come?

2 My help comes | from the LORD,*

who made | heaven and earth. (Ps 121:1-2)

Psalm 121 has been a favorite text to offer bedside comfort to the sick and dying in my pastoral ministry. But I must admit that I have misinterpreted the opening lines for many years, as if they were presenting a *contrast*: looking to the hills for help is vain (like waiting for the cavalry to come); true help comes only from God. But reading the superscription changes the meaning: "A Song

²⁶ Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 431: "The Christian church confesses that Christ is the only one who can or who has plumbed the depths of the primal suffering of which these psalms ultimately speak, but whose experience of it was also undeserved and hence of vicarious and redemptive significance for those who join themselves to Him. Only He can fully pray these psalms in all their fullness, and only in covenant with Him can the faithful, Old Testament as well as New, pray them validly. Even more profoundly, we insist that via Baptism it is Christ, the last Adam, the 'new Israel,' who prays these psalms in us and for us before the throne of the Father. And because of His victory, we know that we do not pray them in vain."

of Ascents.” The Psalm was written to be sung by pilgrims climbing up to the temple at Jerusalem (or perhaps for choirs ascending the steps of the temple). Thus, “the hills” is indeed the place from which help comes, precisely because it is the place where the Lord is to be found.

The Psalms written for use in the temple point us to God’s presence among us with his grace and good gifts. They call upon us to enter in with praise and thanksgiving (Ps 100:4). The church has taken up this call by incorporating the Psalms inextricably into all her public worship. Just as the Levitical choirs sang them while the sacrifices were offered at the temple, just as faithful Jews sang them every Sabbath in the synagogue, so we have made them a part of our daily and weekly lectionaries. The Psalms give us the words to pray at key moments in the divine service: entering into his courts with praise at the Introit, thanking him for his word at the Gradual, and receiving his sacramental gifts with thanks in the Offertory. But it is in the daily office that they have truly flourished. It does not by any means go too far to say that they form its backbone; their singing and praying are the morning and evening sacrifice (cf. Ps 141:2). Early monastic orders strove to sing the Psalms continuously, the most rigorous attempting to pray all 150 each day. Benedict, in creating his reformed order in the fifth century, softened the discipline for his “slothful” monks by distributing them across an entire week. Thomas Cranmer’s *Book of Common Prayer* succumbed to human weakness by spreading them across a month. The *Lutheran Worship* daily lectionary proposed singing roughly one a day to get twice through the Psalter in a year, a pattern maintained in our seminary chapel in St. Catharines. *Lutheran Service Book* provides a plan for three select psalms a day. But I fear the rubric in Matins or Vespers that “one or more psalms are sung or spoken”²⁷ is more often breached than observed.

The restoration of psalmody to the center of daily public prayer will not, nevertheless, be attained through exhortation but through the self-testimony of the Psalms, as those who learn to pray them are moved by the Spirit to embrace them as their own. C. S. Lewis has a delightful commentary on what the Psalms mean when they “demand” God’s praise. Certainly, it entails obligation. But there is a nobler movement of the heart involved: “The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about. . . . I think we delight to praise because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.”²⁸ The praise of God is right because it is appropriate to him; it is fitting. And it is appropriate to us as his children and

²⁷ *Lutheran Service Book*, 230 (emphasis added).

²⁸ Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 95.

heirs. The Psalms contain and express the twofold rhythm of worship with which we began: he promises his aid, and we delight to call upon him in every trouble. He gives himself to us, and we embrace his gifts with thanks and praise. So Luther, in introducing the Psalms, invoked God's blessing on our praying them:

Our dear Lord, who has given to us and taught us to pray the Psalter and the Lord's Prayer, grant to us also the spirit of prayer and of grace so that we pray with enthusiasm and earnest faith, properly and without ceasing, for we need to do this; he has asked for it and therefore wants to have it from us. To him be praise, honour, and thanksgiving. Amen.²⁹

²⁹ Luther, *Foreword to the Neuburg Edition of the Psalms* (1545), WA DB 10.2:157; quoted in Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible*, 177.

Contraception: An Embryo's Point of View

Donna J. Harrison

Introduction

Issues surrounding the creation and care of children touch almost every married couple. The marital one flesh relationship forms the context in which God creates new human beings. These new beings make demands of the parents, challenging and stretching their ability to love, to forgive, to be consistent, and to provide for their children's physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. In this practical, immediate care for their children, parents are given an opportunity for character growth.

In the last century, the ability to separate the act of physical intimacy from the birth of children has brought difficult theological and scientific issues into the heart of every marital relationship. Until the 1930s, couples generally understood and accepted that sexual intercourse could very likely lead to conception and birth of children, and married couples mainly faced the challenges of faithfulness to one's spouse and the willingness to give oneself in sacrificial love to each other and to their children. Today's married couples face even more questions: "Do we want to have children?" "Why should we have children?" "How many?" "When is the right time?" "Is there any God-pleasing way to structure our family size and timing?"

Faithful couples faced with these theological and practical questions turn to pastoral counselors for answers. The pastoral counselor seeking scientific information about contraception will find a lot of information designed to sell a particular device or pill. The marketing discussion centers on how effective the drug or device may be in preventing a recognized pregnancy. Little or no discussion is given to the way in which such pills or devices alter or change the natural physiological processes of a woman's body. Rarely is any information given on the effect of that drug or device on interpersonal relationships, long-term fertility, or the effect on an embryo created when the drug fails. The pastor is then left to counsel couples about decisions that have a profound impact on their interpersonal

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relationships, without the foundational knowledge of normal physiological processes, how those processes are altered by contraceptives currently on the market, and the effects such alterations could have on interpersonal relationships.

The purpose of this essay is to equip the reader to better understand how different methods of contraceptives function in relation to the working of the reproductive system. Although each method affects not only the reproductive system and the woman's long-term health, but also the couple's relationship as a whole, this essay will focus only on what is currently known about the effects of contraceptive methods on embryos. Whether or not an embryonic human being faces harm from the use of a contraceptive method is often the single most important question to faithful couples. When pastors and parishioners understand the biological reality of various contraceptive methods, they can then begin to address the deeper theological issues and provide those answers urgently needed to bridge the gap from "What we know" to "What should we then do?"

Normal Physiology of Reproduction: The Symphony of Procreation

In the symphony of human procreation, God designed the bodies of both the husband and the wife to bring new human life into the world in the most protected and nurturing way possible. The biology of procreation is a marvelous illustration of the reality of the one-flesh relationship: It is the only instance in which cells from one person's body fulfill their physiological function inside another person's body!¹ The woman's body provides the safe and nurturing context to receive procreative cells from a man, to stimulate procreation, and for new human life to begin and flourish.

Understanding human procreation starts with understanding a woman's monthly cycles. A woman's monthly cycle is counted from the first day she bleeds (day 1) and ends on the day before she starts to bleed again, approximately 28 days later (range 26–32 days). Between day 1 and day 7 (the first week) of the woman's cycle, her brain² releases Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH) which causes the egg

¹ Sperm cells cannot fertilize an egg as they are when they leave the man's body. Sperm cells become capable of fertilization as they travel through the woman's body, and only here can these male cells finish their maturation and fulfill their purpose.

² A special part of the woman's brain (hypothalamus) conducts this symphony. The hypothalamus drums out a beat [GnRH pulse frequency] which evokes the release of specific hormones from her pituitary gland, which in turn controls the woman's ovary. The rate of this hypothalamic beat in the first two weeks of her cycle causes release of Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH). FSH causes eggs to mature and make estradiol, and a different hypothalamic beat frequency in the second half of her cycle causes release of Luteinizing Hormone (LH) from her pituitary that then tells the woman's ovary to release an egg and make progesterone. The precise timing of estradiol and progesterone production by the ovary in the woman's body not only causes the egg to be released at a precise time, but also prepares the lining of her womb to embrace and nurture a

sacs (follicles) in her ovaries to grow and produce the natural hormone “estradiol.” Estradiol makes the lining of her womb begin to grow again (after being shed in her monthly period).

In the second week of her cycle, one of these follicles will grow faster, as the egg inside gets ready to be released and fertilized. For this reason, the first two weeks of a woman’s cycle spent preparing for egg release is called the “follicular phase” of the cycle.

Near the end of the follicular phase, the woman’s brain senses that one (or sometimes two) eggs are nearly ready to be released. Her brain stops releasing so much FSH, and begins a different hormone called Luteinizing Hormone (LH). Then, around day 12, her brain releases a very large amount of LH, called the “LH surge.” The “LH surge” is what causes the woman’s ovary to release an egg. If there is not enough LH, the egg will not be released from the ovary, but rather will stop growing, and eventually be reabsorbed into the ovary. But, if the LH surge is high enough, the egg will be released and gently swept up into the fallopian tube, ready to meet sperm.

In addition to causing the ovary to release an egg, LH has another very important job in the symphony of procreation. LH reprograms the cells of the ruptured follicle into cells that become yellow (luteus) and begin making a very important natural hormone called “progesterone.” In this way, LH transforms the follicle that once held the egg into a “corpus luteum” (yellow body). The amount of LH in the LH surge determines the number of cells in the follicle that will later go on to produce progesterone. So the amount of LH in the LH surge and the amount of progesterone produced later in the luteal phase of the cycle are directly related. Once egg release happens, the second half of a woman’s cycle is called the “luteal phase” because all the action depends on the corpus luteum producing the right amount and timing of progesterone.

Just as its name implies (“pro” = for; “gest” = pregnancy; “one” = hormone), progesterone is the “for-pregnancy-hormone” that changes the woman’s reproductive tract to be able to care for the embryo. Progesterone causes the woman’s fallopian tube to gently sweep the newly formed embryo toward and into the womb. Progesterone also prepares the lining of the woman’s womb to embrace and nurture the embryo, allowing the embryo to implant. After the embryo has implanted, progesterone causes the womb’s tissues to be able to feed the embryo. So progesterone is absolutely essential to the survival of the early embryo,

new human being. Knowing the basic details of this symphony reveals the implications of interfering at different points with contraceptive drugs, devices, and surgeries.

and LH is the hormone that enables the ovary to produce progesterone. Both LH and progesterone are the targets for hormonal contraception.

One note about the “LH surge”: It is possible to have enough LH to cause the egg to be released, but not enough LH to change a sufficient number of follicular cells to make progesterone, leading to insufficient progesterone to prepare the lining of the uterus to receive and nurture an embryo. This condition is known in infertility research as “Luteal Phase Defect” (LPD). Women who have Luteal Phase Defect have a very difficult time with embryo implantation, and early miscarriage.

Once the egg is released, the egg must be fertilized within twenty-four hours; after this time the egg can no longer be fertilized, and no embryo will be created. Understanding the changes that happen in a woman’s body in preparation for egg release forms the basis of Fertility Awareness Based Methods (FABMs) of avoiding fertilization. By identifying the time of egg release, and knowing that sperm can last up to five days in a woman’s body, couples can time intercourse to either achieve or avoid pregnancy. Since most women have very predictable physiological changes that are relatively easy to recognize, FABMs can be highly effective in preventing fertilization, but require the cooperation of both husband and wife to time intercourse.

If there are sperm present in the fallopian tube to meet the egg when it is released, then fertilization and the procreation of a human embryo can occur. At the moment of fertilization, the sperm and egg fuse together. At the moment of sperm-egg fusion, which happens in milliseconds, an entirely new human being is formed. This new human being has the special scientific name “zygote,” another name for a one-celled embryo. This embryo exhibits all the scientific characteristics of a unique human organism³ and he or she will continue through all the stages of human existence until death.

In order to avoid the reality that a new human being exists at sperm-egg fusion, and to allow for in vitro fertilization research, some researchers began in the 1960s to refer to the zygote as a “fertilized egg.” Scientifically speaking, there is no such thing as a “fertilized egg.” The moment that the sperm fuses with the egg, the sperm cease to exist and the egg ceases to exist. Scientifically, what exists is a unique human embryo at the beginning of that human being’s life.

After fertilization, the one-celled embryo is brushed gently down the tube toward the womb. On the way through the tube, the embryo grows rapidly⁴ and

³ Maureen Condic, “When Does Human Life Begin? A Scientific Perspective,” *Westchester Institute White Paper* 1 no. 1 (2008): 1. Available at www.bdfund.org/whitepapers. Reprinted in: *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 9 no. 1 (2009): 127–208.

⁴ All the stages of embryonic development are available at www.visembryo.com and www.ehd.org/prenatal-images-index.php (accessed July 22, 2016).

prepares to implant in the womb. The trip through the fallopian tubes into the womb takes about five to seven days. The cells of the tube move the embryo response to precise amounts of the hormone progesterone made by the corpus luteum. When the embryo arrives in the womb, he or she arrives at a perfect time, ready to implant. The lining of the womb has also been perfectly prepared to embrace and nurture the embryo as he or she emerges from the covering that protected him or her while travelling in the tube. This precise timing comes from the correct amount and timing of progesterone made by the corpus luteum of the ovary.

Once the embryo has implanted, the embryo herself or himself starts to make a special hormone called Human Chorionic Gonadotropin (hCG). Pregnancy tests available at pharmacies and grocery stores test for the presence of hCG in a mother's urine. When a woman has a "positive pregnancy test" that means that her embryo has produced enough hCG to be detected in the mother's urine. This usually occurs about a week after implantation, when the embryo is around fourteen days old.

By the time hCG is high enough to give a positive pregnancy test, the mother misses her period. A missed period is usually the signal to the mother to consider her embryo might be present. Often at the point of the positive pregnancy test, the mother begins to emotionally bond to her unborn child, weeks after the physical bonding has already occurred.

But hCG does more than trigger the mom's awareness of her embryo. The hCG produced by the embryo stimulates the corpus luteum to continue making progesterone⁵ in exactly the same way that LH stimulated the corpus luteum. As the LH signal from the woman's brain slowly disappears, hCG takes its place to ensure continuous production of progesterone so that the embryo can survive and grow.

Progesterone continues to stimulate the lining of the mother's womb to provide nourishment to the implanted embryo. Without progesterone produced by the corpus luteum of the ovary, nourishing and sustaining the embryo for the first ten weeks of his or her life, the embryo would die.⁶ If for some reason during that time the corpus luteum were damaged or surgically removed, the fetus would die unless the mother is given supplemental progesterone. After approximately thirteen weeks of life, the placenta itself will produce enough progesterone to sustain the unborn child until birth.

During the nine months of pregnancy, and for several months after birth, if she is exclusively breastfeeding, the mother typically will not release additional eggs. If

⁵ Tulay Ozlu, Aysenur Cakir Gungor, Melahat Donmez, and Bulent Duran, "Use of Progestogens in Pregnant and Infertile Patients," *Archive of Gynecology and Obstetrics* 286 no. 2 (2012): 495–503.

⁶ Ozlu, "Use of Progestogens," 495–503.

she exclusively breastfeeds for at least six months, and if she does not resume her monthly cycles during that time of breastfeeding, a woman will naturally tend to bear children on average roughly about once every two years. However, a woman can become pregnant during breastfeeding even if she has not resumed her periods.

In summary, the song of human procreation starts with the intricately timed symphony of pituitary and ovarian hormones, which in turn prepare the woman's body to receive and nurture new human life. The ovary responds to the pituitary by maturing an egg during the follicular phase of the cycle and then releasing that egg in response to LH. After egg release, the ovary produces progesterone. Progesterone then stimulates the tube to move the embryo toward the womb at the right time for implantation, and ensures that the lining of the woman's uterus develops with such precision that, at the point when her embryo enters the endometrial cavity, her uterus is perfectly ready to receive, embrace, and nurture that new life. The mother's ovary responds to the presence of her unborn child (as signaled by hCG) by continuing to produce progesterone, which sustains the maternal-fetal embrace, until such time as the unborn baby's placenta has grown and can produce enough progesterone on its own. The placenta will then support the needs of the baby until birth. If she exclusively breastfeeds, a woman's body will tend not to resume making eggs for several months after birth.

Contraception: An Overview

The scientific and medical concept of "contraception" is a curious one. Usually, drugs, surgeries, and implants are given to cure or prevent a disease. But contraceptives do not prevent or cure any disease. In fact, contraceptives prevent our bodies from doing something our bodies were designed to do, i.e., procreate. Contraceptive drugs, devices, and surgeries induce a state in which the normal function of the body is altered. Why would someone want to alter the normal function of his or her body? Perhaps more significant: ought we be inducing an abnormal physical state in our bodies to make our bodies function the way we want as opposed to the way that our bodies were designed to function? Considering some aspects of contraception may give insight into these questions. This chapter will consider three aspects of contraception: the advent of the term *contraception*, the concept of "efficacy," and the reasons for concern about the environment that embryos face when they are created during the use of contraception.

The Advent of the Term Contra-ception

Contra-ception is a term coined in the 1960s for drugs, devices, and surgeries that prevent a sexually active woman from obtaining a positive pregnancy test at the end of her cycle. The term was designed to be the opposite of *conception*.

The term *conception* is understood by most people to be the moment of fertilization—the moment when the sperm penetrates the egg. The term *conception* is used interchangeably with the term *fertilization* in many biology textbooks, as well as current medical dictionaries.

In the 1960s, researchers discovered that giving large amounts of artificial estrogens and progestins could interfere with a woman's reproductive system and keep her from having a positive pregnancy test. But some people were concerned about how these artificial hormones actually worked. Could these hormones harm a human life at the beginning? The general public understood that ending an unborn human life is generally called an "abortion." Many people were worried that these drugs and devices were "abortifacient"—things that end the life of an unborn human being. Manufacturers recognized that this thinking could interfere with the marketability of the drugs or devices and felt a need to reassure the public that contraceptives did not cause abortions.

The solution to the problem of public concern about whether or not contraceptives caused early abortions was developed in 1965 by the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG),⁷ which is heavily financed by the contraceptive drug industry. ACOG acknowledged that the term *abortion* is understood to be the ending of a pregnancy. Everyone knows that pregnancy begins at conception. But ACOG recognized that the term *conception* had no scientific definition. (The scientific definition for the beginning of any organism, including human beings, is "fertilization"—the moment of sperm-egg fusion.) So, ACOG decided to legally define the word *conception* as "the completion of implantation."⁸ Now, legally speaking, pregnancy begins at conception, but conception is an event that takes place ten days to two weeks *after* fertilization.

⁷ "Terms Used in Reference to the Fetus," American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists *Terminology Bulletin* 1 (1965).

⁸ ACOG, "Facts are Important," June 12, 2014. www.acog.org/-/media/Departments/Government-Relations-and-Outreach/FactsAreImportantEC.pdf?dmc=1&ts=20160722T1510227981. Note that ACOG commits many logical fallacies in this document, and also includes some factually inaccurate statements, such as the timing of fertilization which actually takes place in milliseconds, not twenty-four hours. See footnote 3. Rachel Benson Gold, "The Implications of Defining When a Woman Is Pregnant," *Guttmacher Policy Review* 8 (2005), www.guttmacher.org/about/gpr/2005/05/implications-defining-when-woman-pregnant.

Using the ACOG definition of conception as the beginning of pregnancy, the accusation against contraceptives as abortifacient is easily dismissed. Since abortion is defined as the ending of a pregnancy and since pregnancy does not begin until the completion of implantation, then legally, drugs and devices that kill an embryo *before* implantation is complete, cannot be classified as abortifacients.⁹ Voila! Problem solved!

Thus the term *abortifacient* is rendered meaningless in discussions about most contraceptive mechanisms of action. But the fact remains that some drugs, devices, and surgeries labeled as “contraceptive” can and do have actions that harm or kill embryos. Thus the difficult moral question for faithful couples is not whether or not a contraceptive is abortifacient but whether or not the contraceptive is *embryocidal*—does it have an action that can kill an embryo if the embryo is formed during the use of that contraceptive drug, device, or surgery?

The Concept of Efficacy of a Contraceptive

In order to determine whether or not some drug or device works as a contraceptive, scientists see if the user has a positive pregnancy test at the end of the cycle in which she used that particular contraceptive drug or device [i.e., day 28 of her cycle]. That positive pregnancy test is the detection of the hormone “beta hCG” made by a living embryo that implanted in her womb a week before. If no beta hCG is found, then the contraceptive worked. But, *how* did it work? This is the core of the huge controversy surrounding contraceptives. Day 28 of a woman’s cycle is two weeks after an embryo is created. Did something happen during the first twelve days of an embryo’s life to make the embryo not able to survive to produce a positive pregnancy test?

There are three reasons to consider the environment of embryos conceived during the use of a contraceptive:

⁹ The ACOG acknowledges the distinction between fertilization and the ACOG definition of conception and the implications on the difference in their recent press release on personhood amendments: “Although the individual wording in these proposed measures varies from state to state, they all attempt to give full legal rights to a fertilized egg by defining ‘personhood’ from the moment of fertilization, before conception (i.e., pregnancy/ implantation) has occurred. This would have wide-reaching harmful implications for the practice of medicine and on women’s access to contraception, fertility treatments, pregnancy termination, and other essential medical procedures.” See www.acog.org/About-ACOG/News-Room/News-Releases/2012/Personhood-Measures.

1. All contraceptive drugs, devices, and surgeries “fail” at a certain rate.¹⁰ As noted in a recent paper: “Unintended pregnancies occur with all contraceptive methods, including IUDs. This provides incontrovertible evidence that fertilization and implantation can occur, albeit rarely, with modern methods of contraception.”¹¹
2. The fact that pregnancy can happen with all contraceptive drugs and devices proves that embryos can be and in fact are created during the use of all contraceptive drugs, devices, and surgeries, because all pregnancies begin with creation of an embryo.
3. When that embryo is created, the contraceptive drug, device, or surgery will create a certain environment for the embryo that either helps or hinders that embryo’s life. Understanding the way contraceptive methods work in the woman’s body makes clear the environment that the embryo will face during the beginning of his or her life.

Quantifying the extent of embryo destruction or survival during the use of a particular contraceptive method requires knowing how often eggs are released during the use of a particular contraceptive method, how often those eggs are fertilized, producing embryos, and knowing the environment the embryo will face in the woman’s reproductive tract. The question to be answered: Is there likely to be an increase in embryo death for women using a particular method of contraception when compared to embryo death in women not using any method of contraception?

How often are eggs released on a particular contraceptive?

Researchers can easily answer this question, because the place in the ovary where an egg grows—the follicle—is easily seen by ultrasound. The follicle ruptures to release the egg, and this rupture is also easily seen by ultrasound. So it is very easy to determine how often eggs are released during a normal cycle (normal is about 60

¹⁰ “Failure rate” is a particularly negative term. Each of those “failures” is a unique human being, made in the image of God. Each “failure” is an embryo that has survived the conditions inside his or her mother’s womb caused by the contraceptive; survived to the point of being able to be recognized as a pregnancy. The remainder of this essay will consider what conditions the embryo faces in his or her mother’s womb when a couple uses a particular kind of contraceptive.

¹¹ Roberto Rivera, Irene Jacobson, and David Grimes, “The Mechanism of Action of Hormonal Contraceptives and Intrauterine Contraceptives Devices,” *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* (1999): 1263–69.

percent ovulation rate¹²) and compare that to how many are released using a particular method of contraception.

How often are those eggs fertilized, producing embryos, and is there an increase in embryo death for women using a particular method of contraception when compared to embryo death in women not using any method of contraception?

This is a more difficult question. Currently it is not known even how often embryos are formed in natural cycles without contraception, because there is no direct scientific test for fertilization and embryo formation. If a reliable test for fertilization inside a woman's body were developed, it would be simple to determine the rate of fertilization to pregnancy in normal women and then compare that normal rate with the rate of women using various methods of contraception. But money for contraceptive research comes from contraceptive manufacturers, and the answer to this very important question would likely not be financially profitable. There is a tremendous need for funding the basic research to find a marker for fertilization¹³ in order to directly answer the question of the effect of contraceptive methods on embryos.

Although a direct test for fertilization occurring inside a woman's body is not currently available, there is an indirect way to provide a crude estimate of embryo formation. For an embryo to form, an egg must be released. Researchers can measure egg release. When an embryo survives through implantation, the woman will have a positive pregnancy test. Researchers routinely measure the number of positive pregnancy tests at the end of a cycle. This gives a ratio of egg release (ovulation) to pregnancy ratio.

In one hundred normal women not using any kind of contraception, sixty of those women will release eggs in any given cycle. That gives a normal ovulation rate of 60 percent. In one hundred sexually active couples who do not use any contraception, eighty-five of those couples will be able to achieve a pregnancy within a year. These facts yield a normal monthly ovulation to yearly pregnancy ratio of 60 percent/eighty-five pregnancies in couples using no contraception.

If contraceptives have no effects after an egg is released, then the ovulation to pregnancy ratio should be the same whether or not a woman is using

¹² Jerilynn Prior, Marit Naess, Arnulf Langhammer, and Siri Forsmo, "Ovulation Prevalence in Women with Spontaneous Normal-Length Menstrual Cycles—A Population-Based Cohort from HUNT3, Norway," *PLoS One* 10, no. 8 (2015), <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0134473>.

¹³ See www.melisa-institute.org. The MELISA Institute is actively seeking an easily usable test for women to determine when fertilization occurs in order to facilitate the best environment for early embryonic life, and to allow for healthy interventions at the beginning of life. This fertilization marker would also clearly answer the question of whether or not embryos are harmed during the use of contraceptives.

contraception. It would be expected that she would *ovulate* less frequently than women not using contraceptives, all other things being equal, but should ovulation occur, then fertilization of the released egg should occur at the same rate regardless of the use of contraception. The normal ratio of ovulation to pregnancy (60 percent ovulation/eighty-five pregnancies) should be maintained.

If it were true that there were no other effects of a contraceptive drug, device, or surgery other than preventing egg release, then measuring the degree to which that contraceptive method prevented egg release should reliably predict the number of pregnancies (i.e., “failure rate”) in a year. For example, if the contraceptive method results in reducing ovulation by half (i.e., 30 percent ovulation rate) and if that contraceptive drug or device only works by preventing ovulation, the result should be forty-three pregnancies at the end of the year. If there are fewer pregnancies, then the drug or device must work in ways other than preventing ovulation to explain the reduction in pregnancies. Many hormone-based contraceptives have large discrepancies between ovulation rate and the rate of expected pregnancies, leading researchers to conclude that other mechanisms of action must be at work.

What are those other ways that a contraceptive might use to prevent a recognized pregnancy test at the end of a woman’s cycle? There are five points where a contraceptive drug or device can interfere with the human reproductive system and prevent the woman from having a positive pregnancy test on day 28 of her cycle:

1. Prevent the ovary from making and/or releasing an egg
2. Prevent the sperm from meeting the egg in the tube
3. Prevent the embryo from surviving the passage through the tube to the lining of the uterus
4. Prevent the embryo from implanting in the lining of the uterus
5. Prevent the embryo who has already implanted from surviving to day 28.

If a contraceptive drug, device, or surgery worked only by mechanism number 1 or number 2, then no embryo would be formed. Action at points 3–5 will kill embryos. But many methods work by interfering at several different points in the reproductive process. The more points of interference, the more “effective” the contraceptive.

For example, the drug Ella (ulipristal) was approved by the FDA as an “emergency contraceptive.” The manufacturer claims that Ella works as an emergency contraceptive by delaying egg release from the ovary for up to five days.

And Ella does work this way. But Ella works by this mechanism *only if* taken several days *before the woman releases an egg*.

What the manufacturer *does not mention* is that Ella can also prevent a positive pregnancy test if taken *after* egg release. It is obvious that Ella cannot possibly prevent the release of an egg that has already been released. So, what is the mechanism by which Ella “works” after egg release?

Ella (ulipristal) is a second generation of the abortion drug RU-486 (Mifeprex). Both drugs are “hormone-blockers”/“anti-hormones.” Both drugs effectively block the actions of natural progesterone. Without sufficient progesterone, an embryo is unable to implant in the womb, and will also die after implantation due to the uterine lining not sufficiently nourishing the embryo. Ella is as effective in blocking progesterone as is the abortion drug RU-486.¹⁴ Yet, Ella is called an emergency contraceptive because that is the indication for which the manufacturer sought approval from the FDA.

For faithful couples to make an informed decision regarding the use of Ella or any other method of contraception requires the couple to have basic information about how those methods are known to work. The documented fact that all contraceptive drugs, devices, and surgeries “fail” to prevent pregnancy at a certain rate proves that embryos can be and in fact are created during the use of all contraceptive drugs, devices, and surgeries, because all pregnancies begin with the creation of an embryo.

When that embryo is created, the contraceptive drug, device, or surgery will create a certain environment for the embryo that either helps or hinders that embryo’s life. The important question facing faithful couples is: When embryos are created during the use of a certain method of contraception, is there any reason to suspect that the particular method creates conditions inside the mother’s body that will make it more likely that these embryos will die? The unique way each contraceptive method functions determines whether an embryo “unintentionally” created will find his or her mother’s body a safe haven or a hostile environment.

Contraceptive Methods: Evaluating the Risk to the Embryo

There are basically five different methods currently used to avoid a positive pregnancy test at the end of a woman’s cycle: (1) Fertility Awareness Based Methods [FABMs], (2) Barrier methods, (3) Hormone-based methods, (4) IUDs, and (5)

¹⁴ Jerry Reel, Sheri Hild-Petito, and Richard Blye, “Antioviulatory and Postcoital Antifertility Activity of the Antiprogestin CDB-2914 When Administered as Single, Multiple, or Continuous Doses to Rats,” *Contraception* 58, no. 2 (1998): 129–36. (During development of the drug ulipristal, the original experimental names for ulipristal were CBD-2914, VA2914, HRP2000, or RTI 3021-012.)

Emergency Contraception. Some methods work exclusively by preventing fertilization and have no effect after fertilization. Some work by sometimes preventing fertilization and sometimes making it difficult or impossible for the embryo to survive. Some methods will directly kill the embryo. Many methods work by a combination of all three. We will look at these five methods from the least to the most harmful for the embryo.

1. Fertility Awareness Based Methods (FABMs)

Based on the biological fact that the egg can only be fertilized during the twenty-four hours after egg release, FABMs time intercourse so that sperm are not present during the twenty-four hours after the egg has been released. Since sperm can live in a woman's reproductive tract for up to five days, the timing of intercourse takes into account sperm survival times. The details on these methods are easily available online,¹⁵ and space does not allow a full discussion here of details. But a brief review below will help with understanding of their effects on embryos conceived during the use of FABMs.

Most women have many physical signs that the egg is beginning to mature and getting ready to release. One example is a woman's vaginal mucus, which is produced in direct response to the amount of natural estrogen produced by the follicles in the woman's ovary during the first half of the cycle. When the follicles are small, very little estrogen is produced, and the woman has very little mucus. As the follicles mature, more natural estrogen is produced, resulting in more clear mucus. Since sperm live up to five days in the woman's reproductive tract, the beginning of clear mucus formation is the signal to avoid intercourse. When an egg is about to be released, copious amounts of clear vaginal mucus are produced. Within two days after ovulation, the consistency of the mucus changes from clear to white and sticky, due to progesterone now produced by the corpus luteum of the ovary after egg release. This change happens more than twenty-four hours after egg release, when the egg is no longer able to be fertilized. So, intercourse after this time under normal circumstances does not result in embryo formation.

Embryos formed during the use of FABMs do not face any increased risk of death. There is no interference with the woman's reproductive tract. The embryo will not face any interference with transport through her fallopian tube, or interference with implantation, or interference with the ability of the ovary to make progesterone to support the early pregnancy. Fertility Awareness Based Methods pose no risk to embryos.

¹⁵ See www.factsaboutfertility.org.

2. Barrier Methods

Like Fertility Awareness methods, barrier methods work by trying to prevent the sperm from reaching the egg when the egg can be fertilized. However, unlike Fertility Awareness methods, this prevention is accomplished by putting up a barrier to sperm transport. This barrier can be temporary (condom, diaphragm, cervical cap) or permanent (male vasectomy, female tubal ligation, or tubal occlusion). The location of the barrier is key to identifying whether or not there is potential harm to the embryo.

In general, reversible barrier methods and vasectomy in men are fairly safe for the embryo. These methods do not affect the ability of the ovary to release an egg, because there is no known hormonal interference with the processes of reproduction in the woman's body. Egg release is not affected, LH surge is intact, and the ovary can produce normal amounts of progesterone during the luteal phase of the cycle. The lining of the womb matures normally, and if an embryo reaches the womb, these methods are not known to interfere with implantation.

However, permanent female sterilization procedures place barriers inside the woman's fallopian tubes, which result in permanent damage that increases the risk that any embryo conceived will not be able to successfully travel through the tube to the womb. This damage to the tube increases the risk that the embryo will implant in the tube (ectopic pregnancy), further discussed below.

2a. Reversible Barrier Methods

Condoms, diaphragms, and cervical caps provide a temporary physical barrier that seals off sperm from entering the womb, preventing the sperm from being present when the egg is released. However, sperm are mighty swimmers, and can frequently escape from these barriers. So, most of the time these methods are used with a spermicide; a chemical designed to kill sperm (cream, foam, or gel) in order to kill sperm managing to escape the barrier.

There was some concern in the past that these spermicides might cause an increase in birth defects, by damaging sperm instead of killing them. This would theoretically allow a damaged sperm to fertilize the egg. Some small reports indicated a possible increase in various birth defects after the use of spermicides, but large studies did not find an increase in birth defects in children born to parents who used spermicides for contraception.

2b. Permanent Barrier Methods: Vasectomy

A vasectomy is a permanent male sterilization procedure that severs the tube (vas deferens) that connects the place where sperm is made with the place where sperm is stored. Since no sperm can reach the storage place, no sperm can be released. Most of the time, vasectomy completely blocks sperm from being released

in the seminal fluid. However, occasionally the cut ends of the vas can find each other and a connection can be formed that again allows sperm to pass into the seminal fluid. Since vasectomy only affects the supply of sperm, and does not affect anything in the woman's reproductive tract, there is no known harm to embryos conceived when the vasectomy fails.

2c. Permanent Barrier Methods: Tubal Occlusion Procedures

The fallopian tubes in a woman can be closed in a number of different ways, including surgically removing a piece of tube, burning the tubes, applying clips from the outside, or applying occlusive material to the inside of the tube. All of these procedures close off the tube completely (most of the time) and prevent sperm from penetrating past the point of obstruction. However, occasionally sperm do penetrate past the occlusion and fertilization can happen. When an embryo is formed in a woman who has had tubal sterilization procedure, the embryo often has great difficulty travelling through the tube, past the area of occlusion. When the embryo is still in the tube at the time he or she is ready to implant, then implantation happens in the tube instead of in the womb.

Pregnancies diagnosed in women with previous tubal sterilization procedures are rare (5/1000) but when pregnancies do occur, the embryo is frequently implanted in the tubes (ectopic pregnancy). An ectopic pregnancy in the fallopian tube is a life-threatening problem for women because, as the pregnancy grows, the tube cannot stretch enough so, at some point, the tube ruptures and the woman can easily bleed to death. To date, there is no accepted procedure to replace the ectopic pregnancy into the womb.¹⁶ So embryos implanted ectopically will die, and sometimes the mother will also die from internal hemorrhage unless the ectopic pregnancy is surgically removed. When ectopic pregnancies are diagnosed, the treatment is to surgically remove the embryo or part or all of the tube.

Summary

Barrier methods work primarily by preventing sperm transport to the egg. Most barrier methods have not been shown to interfere with embryos after fertilization,

¹⁶ There are three case reports of successful attempts at transfer of an ectopic pregnancy: (1) C. J. Wallace, "Transplantation of Ectopic Pregnancy from Fallopian Tube in Cavity of Uterus," *Surgery, Gynecology & Obstetrics* 24 (1917): 578-9; (2) Landrum B. Shettles, "Tubal Embryo Successfully Transferred in Utero," *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 163 (1990): 2026-7; and (3) J. M. Pearce, "Term delivery after intrauterine relocation of an ectopic pregnancy," *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 101 (1994): 717-18. (However, the Pearce article was retracted in 1995.) Two case reports do not in themselves provide enough information about the risks, and attempts at tubal transfer to date must be considered experimental. The Watson Bowes Research Institute (<http://watsonbowesresearchinstitute.org>) is seeking funding for research in ectopic transplantation.

nor do they prevent implantation in the endometrial lining. The exception is permanent sterilization procedures which involve the woman's fallopian tubes. Fallopian tube sterilizations carry an increased risk that any embryos created will implant in the damaged portion of the tube (ectopic pregnancy), a life-threatening condition requiring surgery.

3. Hormone-Based Contraceptives (Artificial Hormones and Hormone Blockers)

Hormone-based contraceptives include those drugs and devices that interfere with the ability of the woman to release eggs and prepare her body to nurture an embryo. This broad group includes two major categories: artificial hormones and hormone blockers/anti-hormones.

Artificial Hormone Contraceptives: The artificial hormone category includes common birth control pills, mini pills, shots, vaginal rings, patches, and any other way of getting artificial hormones into a woman's circulatory system in sufficient quantities to interfere with the natural cyclic release of her own hormones.

Anti-hormone/Progesterone Blocker Contraceptives: The anti-hormone/progesterone-blocker category includes two drugs—the abortion pill mifepristone (RU-486, Mifeprex), used commonly overseas as an emergency contraceptive, and the second generation abortion drug ulipristal (Ella, Ella-One) approved in the US as an emergency contraceptive.

All hormone-based contraceptive drugs and devices, whether they are artificial hormones or progesterone blockers, work by disrupting the symphony of natural hormone release and response that causes egg release and also prepares a woman's body to receive and nurture an embryo. This disruption occurs by targeting the release and function of two natural hormones in a woman's body: the hormone LH and the hormone natural progesterone.

Recall from the earlier section about normal physiological processes of reproduction, that the "LH surge" is the trigger that causes the egg to be released from the ovary. Recall also that the amount of LH in the LH surge determines the number of cells in the follicle that will later go on to produce progesterone. So the amount of LH in the LH surge, and the amount of progesterone produced later in the luteal phase of the cycle are directly related.

The hormone progesterone is responsible for causing the embryo to travel down the tube into the womb, and for preparing the lining of the womb to receive and continue to nourish the embryo through the first part of pregnancy. So, both LH and progesterone in perfectly timed amounts are necessary for normal embryo

survival. Blocking or decreasing either of these hormones has significant ramifications for the embryo.

All hormone-based contraceptives work primarily by interfering with the release of LH from the brain.¹⁷ The various artificial hormone combinations and the progesterone blockers cause one of three things to happen with LH:

1. Hormone-based contraceptives can cause very little LH to be released. If there is very little LH released, then no egg release will happen. If the egg is not released, then it cannot be fertilized, and no embryo would be formed. If hormone-based contraceptives always prevented the release of an egg, then there would be no concern about harm to embryos. But since we know for certain that women can become pregnant while taking hormonal contraception, we know for certain that some eggs are released and we know for certain that some embryos are formed.
2. Hormone-based contraceptives can allow enough LH surge to allow the egg to be released, but not enough LH surge to change very many cells in the corpus luteum to be able to later produce progesterone. (This situation of insufficient LH surge happens naturally in a disease called “luteal phase deficiency,” which is a cause of recurrent miscarriage. Treatment of LPD involves giving natural progesterone as a supplement throughout the luteal phase of the woman’s cycle, and throughout the first few months of her pregnancy.)

¹⁷ ESHRE Capri Workshop Group, “Ovarian and Endometrial function during hormonal contraception,” *Human Reproduction* 16, no. 7 (2001): 1527–35. See also Rachel Steward, Alexander Melamed, Anna Granat, and Daniel Mishell Jr., “Comparison of Cervical Mucus of 24/4 vs. 21/7 Combined Oral Contraceptives,” *Contraception* 86 (2012): 710–15 quoted here: “*The main contraceptive effect of combined oral contraceptives (COCs) is inhibition of the midcycle lutenizing hormone (LH) surge to prevent ovulation. However, several studies have shown that the percentage of ovulatory cycles in women using low-dose COCs ranges between 1.5% and 16.8%. With this high rate of ovulatory cycles in women taking COCs, we would expect the pregnancy rate with COC use to be much higher than the perfect use failure rate of 0.3% were there not other effective mechanisms of contraceptive action in addition to ovulation inhibition. Another potential mechanism of contraceptive action is the suppression of follicle-stimulating hormone secretion during the follicular phase of the cycle, thereby preventing follicular maturation; however, follicular development has been shown to occur in 23%–90% of cycles in women using COCs. There are also many progestin-related mechanisms that likely contribute to the overall efficacy of the combined contraceptives, such as thickening of cervical mucus, impairment of tubal mobility and peristalsis, and effects on the endometrial lining, making it less suitable for implantation.*”

Hormone-based contraceptives can allow eggs to be released, but in this situation of “break through ovulation,” the LH level is most often abnormally low, mimicking LPD.¹⁸ If an embryo is created under these circumstances, the corpus luteum will not make enough progesterone to allow for the correct travel time through the tube, or allow for correct preparation of the mother’s womb for implantation, or allow for the lining of the womb to nurture the growing embryo through the first part of his or her life. This action of the hormone-based contraceptive causes embryos to die. An abnormally low LH is a common occurrence for the 3 percent to 40 percent of women who release eggs on the birth control pill, and in women who release eggs after taking progesterone blockers.

3. In some women who take artificial hormone contraceptives, the LH surge may not be affected much at all. In this case, an egg will be released normally, and the corpus luteum of the ovary will make normal amounts of progesterone. If an embryo is formed under these circumstances, the ovary will form a normal corpus luteum and produce a normal amount of progesterone. This is the situation for most women who become recognizably pregnant using artificial hormone contraceptives, and then go on to carry that pregnancy to term.

However, progesterone-blockers kill embryos after implantation. Both RU-486 and Ella directly destroy both the corpus luteum and the place where the embryo implants. Thus it is very rare for an embryo to survive¹⁹ during use of progesterone blockers such as RU-486 or Ella because of direct actions on the corpus luteum and the lining of the womb.²⁰ That is why both RU-486 and Ella are so “effective” as contraceptives.

¹⁸ L. B. Zapata, M. W. Steenland, D. Brahma, P. A. Marchbanks, and K. M. Curtis, “Effect of missed combined hormonal contraceptives on contraceptive effectiveness: a systematic review,” *Contraception* 87, no. 5 (2013): 685–700, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4322904/pdf/nihms653707.pdf. Quoted here: “. . . among women who did ovulate, cycles were usually abnormal (i.e., low progesterone levels, small follicles and/or poor cervical mucus).”

¹⁹ Donna Harrison and James Mitroka, “Defining Reality: The Potential Role of Pharmacists in Assessing the Impact of Progesterone Receptor Modulators and Misoprostol in Reproductive Health,” *Annals of Pharmacotherapy* 45 no. 1 (2011): 115–9.

²⁰ Reel, Sheri Hild-Petito, and Richard Blye, “Antioviulatory and Postcoital Antifertility Activity of the Antiprogestin CDB-2914 When Administered as Single, Multiple, or Continuous Doses to Rats,” *Contraception* 58 no. 2 (1998): 129–36. (During development of the drug ulipristal, the original experimental names for ulipristal were CBD-2914, VA2914, HRP2000, or RTI 3021-012.)

How often are eggs released during the use of hormone-based contraceptives?

The answer depends on a host of different factors, including when in her cycle the woman takes the drug, how much she weighs, whether or not she has taken any drugs that interfere with the hormone-based contraceptive, exactly what kind of hormone-based contraceptive she is taking, and more. But, in general, when researchers study one hundred women who are using birth control pills as hormonal contraception, somewhere between 2 percent and 40 percent of those women will have follicle rupture (ovulation) each cycle.²¹ Compared to the rate of follicle rupture in women not using contraception (60 percent) a 2–40 percent rate of rupture predicts that there should be around three to fifty-seven pregnancies each year

in that one hundred women using hormonal contraception. But in one hundred women who use birth control pills as hormonal contraceptives there are one to four pregnancies each year. That fact has led researchers to conclude that hormonal contraceptives likely work in some ways other than just preventing egg release.

What other ways could hormonal contraception work?²² In addition to interfering with the LH surge, artificial hormone-based contraceptives can affect the ability of the tube to transport the embryo. Some hormonal contraceptives that use only progestins (the “mini-pill”) can slow down the tube, increasing the likelihood that the embryo will implant in the tube instead of in the womb. Anti-hormones such as RU-486 and Ella can speed up the tubal transport, causing embryos to reach the womb before the embryo is capable of implanting.

Hormone-based contraceptives can also directly interfere with the growth and development of the lining of the womb, which can hinder or prevent an embryo from implanting in the lining. Both tubal interference and direct interference with the growth and development of the lining of the womb can cause embryos to die. These mechanisms of action have been called euphemistically “interception,” “endometrial contraception,” and “contra-gestation.”

Once the embryo has implanted, artificial hormone-based contraceptives do not dislodge the embryo or lead directly to embryo death. In contrast, progesterone blockers—RU-486 (mifeprex) and ulipristal (Ella)—can directly destroy the embryo by directly blocking the action of progesterone in the womb. So, both RU-486 and ulipristal can both prevent implantation and can cause abortion after implantation.

²¹ See footnote 18. Reisman, *Sexual Sabotage*, 45.

²² See footnote 18.

Both RU-486 and Ella can also directly destroy the corpus luteum of the ovary,²³ so that it cannot make progesterone to support the early pregnancy.

In summary, there are significant concerns about how hormone-based contraception works. Although frequently, these drugs can prevent egg release, when egg release does happen and embryos are formed, the additional effects of the hormone-based contraceptives make implantation and embryo survival much less likely. For couples who care about never causing harm or death to their embryonic children, hormone-based methods are not a safe option.

4. IUDs: Intrauterine Devices

It has been known for hundreds of years in the veterinary world that inserting something into the womb of an animal will prevent that animal from being able to carry a pregnancy to term. The IUD is a piece of metal or plastic of various different shapes placed inside a woman's womb that sets up a chronic inflammation inside the womb. The 2008 international working group on IUDs published this remarkably honest comment: *"There is sufficient evidence to suggest that IUDs can prevent and disrupt implantation. The extent to which this interference contributes to its contraceptive action is unknown. The data are scanty and the political consequences of resolving this issue interfere with comprehensive research."*²⁴ An embryo created during the use of an IUD would have very little chance of implanting in the inflamed endometrial lining,²⁵ and embryos who do not implant die.

But, inflamed wombs bleed easily. So, to improve the bleeding problem, IUD manufacturers started adding artificial hormones to the IUD, hoping to shrink the lining of the womb so that it would not bleed constantly. These artificial hormones also thicken the mucus of the cervix and slow down the movement of the woman's fallopian tube.

It has been claimed recently by those marketing IUDs that the hormonal IUD (Mirena) prevents the egg from being released from the ovary. While there is some slight decrease in egg release for women in the first year on Mirena, after a year of Mirena use, follicular rupture rates are similar to the follicular rupture rates of women who are not using any contraception, which are similar to the rates

²³ Yuval Yung, Ettie Maman, Libby Ophir, Nirit Rubinstein, Eran Barzilay, Gil Yerushalmi, and Ariel Hourvitz "Progesterone Antagonist, RU486 Represses LHCGR Expression and LH/hCG Signaling in Cultured Luteinized Human Mural Granulosa Cells," *Gynecological Endocrinology* 30 no. 1 (2014): 42–7.

²⁴ ESHRE Capri Workshop Group, "Intrauterine Devices and Intrauterine Systems," *Human Reproduction Update* 14 no. 3 (2008): 197–208.

²⁵ ESHRE Capri Workshop Group, "Intrauterine Devices and Intrauterine Systems," *Human Reproduction Update* 14 no. 3 (2008): 197–208.

of copper IUD users.²⁶ So preventing egg release cannot possibly be the major mechanism of preventing a recognizable pregnancy in Mirena IUD users.

Those marketing Mirena IUDs also claim that the progesterone component prevents sperm from coming into the womb by thickening cervical mucus. There may be some cervical mucus thickening with progesterone IUD use, but, after a few years, cervical changes disappear. “The presence of good cervical mucus was observed in 69% of the ovulatory cycles studied in the LNG-IUD users. This indicates that effects on cervical mucus cannot be the main mechanism of action of the LNG-IUDs”²⁷ In fact, both sperm and embryos have been found in the tubes of Mirena and other IUD users, providing direct evidence that sperm can be and are present when eggs are released and that embryos²⁸ can be and are formed during the use of IUDs. In addition, about 1 in 125 IUD users become pregnant with the IUD in place. For these women, the pregnancy is most often ectopic (where the embryo implants in the tubes) because embryos who make it to the uterus cannot implant. If the embryo does somehow manage to get through the tube and manages to implant in the womb, the trouble is not over. Intrauterine pregnancies which happen with an IUD in place frequently miscarry, become infected, and die, or deliver very prematurely.²⁹ The chronic inflammation from the IUD disrupts the entire course of a pregnancy for those embryos who do manage to implant in the womb.

In summary, the IUD is designed to work by killing embryos. Any couple who cares about survival of their embryonic children should avoid the use of an IUD.

5. Emergency Contraception

Emergency contraceptives are all capable of killing embryos; the more effective the emergency contraceptive, the more likely it is to kill embryos. Any emergency

²⁶ I. Barbosa, S. E. Olsson, V. Odland, T. Goncalves, and E. Coutinho, “Ovarian Function after Seven Years’ Use of a Levonorgestrel IUD,” *Advances in Contraception* 11 no. 2 (1995): 85–95. “In the regularly menstruating LNG-IUD users, according to progesterone levels, 93% of the cycles were ovulatory but just 58% of these ‘ovulatory’ cycles showed normal follicular growth and rupture.”

²⁷ I. Barbosa, et al, “Ovarian Function after Seven Years’ Use of a Levonorgestrel IUD,” 85–95.

²⁸ Maria Ortiz and Horacio Croxatto “Copper-T Intrauterine Device and Levonorgestrel Intrauterine System: Biological Bases of Their Mechanism of Action” *Contraception* 75 (2007): S16–S30.

²⁹ American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, *Practice Bulletin* 121 (July 2011), reaffirmed 2015. Available at: www.acog.org/~media/Practice%20Bulletins/Committee%20on%20Practice%20Bulletins%20-%20Gynecology/Public/pb121.pdf?dmc=1.

contraceptive that works *after* egg release must be capable of killing embryos. There are four methods commonly used for emergency contraception:

- A. Single-dose progestins (Plan B and Next Choice)
- B. Single-dose progesterone-blockers RU-486 (mifepristone, Mifeprex) and ulipristal (Ella, Ella-One)
- C. IUDs placed during the luteal phase
- D. “Menstrual regulation/menstrual extraction” (i.e., early abortion)

A. Single-Dose Progestins (Plan B, Next Choice)

Progestins are artificial hormones that resemble natural progesterone, but do not have all the actions of natural progesterone. Plan B works poorly as an emergency contraceptive because it does not have much effect after fertilization. Plan B can delay the release of an egg if taken several days before the LH surge. But, if Plan B is taken immediately before the LH surge, egg release will still happen, but the LH surge will be decreased, causing a luteal phase defect as discussed above.

If a woman has already released an egg and takes Plan B, there seems to be little if any effect on her embryo. Single-dose Plan B after egg release probably does not affect either progesterone production or implantation.

B. Anti-hormones/Progesterone Blockers

As discussed previously, Ella (ulipristal, Ella-One) is a second generation abortion drug identical in action to the abortion drug RU-486. Ella can prevent the egg from being released, if taken several days before the egg is about to be released. However, if taken on the day of egg release or after, Ella directly kills the embryo by blocking the action of progesterone to prepare the lining of the womb for implantation, by directly destroying the tissues in the womb that respond to progesterone and nourish the implanted embryo, and also by destroying the corpus luteum of the ovary that makes progesterone to sustain the early pregnancy.

C. The IUD

The IUD is also very effective as an “emergency contraceptive” because the IUD destroys the ability of the womb to allow for implantation by setting up a chronic inflammation inside the womb. If the embryo has already implanted, the IUD will dislodge the embryo, causing an induced abortion.

D. “Menstrual Extraction”

This term is a euphemism for surgically removing the lining of the womb. If the embryo has not yet implanted, then removing the lining will prevent the embryo from implanting. If the embryo has already implanted, then this procedure is an early elective abortion.

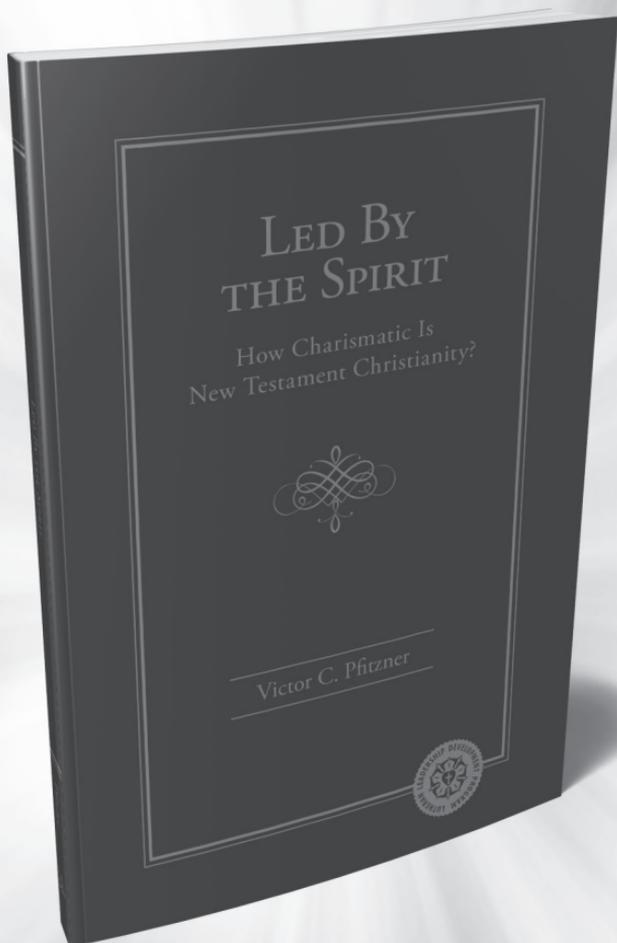
In summary, any emergency contraceptive that is effective after egg release must work by killing embryos. This includes Ella, the IUD, and “menstrual extraction.” Plan B is a very ineffective emergency contraceptive that can delay egg release if taken several days before the release of an egg. But, if Plan B is taken immediately before the release of an egg, Plan B can lead to the death of the embryo by decreasing the LH surge and inducing a luteal phase defect.

Conclusion

Each one of the five different contraceptive approaches outlined above results in a particular environment inside the woman’s womb. Since embryos can be and are created during the use of each of these methods, it is important for couples to understand the basics of each approach, in order to make informed decisions about the risks that their embryonic children will face when created during contraceptive use. For couples who care about never doing harm to their embryonic children, this article will serve as the beginning of a discussion about available methods of spacing children. However, for Christian couples many questions remain; questions about the integrity of the body, the meaning and purpose of the one-flesh relationship, and radical trust in God’s promises of sufficiency and provision. These deeper theological issues will remain at the heart of any discussion about the procreation and care of children in a faithful marriage.

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Theological Observer

The History and Goal of the Concordia Commentary Series

“In the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1).¹ The divine Word is the means by which God spoke the creation into existence. Adam’s transgression against the Word plunged the world into sin and death, but God in his grace nevertheless calls fallen men and women to faith and bespeaks them righteous on account of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh (John 1:14). The eternal Word of Christ, committed to writing by the prophets and apostles as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit, is the foundation and lifeblood of the church, the sole source and norm of the Christian faith and life. The gospel alone enlarges the kingdom of God by bringing forgiveness, life, and salvation to the world of sinners, among whom we are the foremost (cf. 1 Tim 1:15–16). We are saved by grace alone and through faith alone (Eph 2:8–9), “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). I believe the Concordia Commentary series is one of the corporate “good works” God prepared for the current generation of confessional Lutherans to “walk in,” confident that the Lord who has begun this “good work” “will bring it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6).

The idea for the current Concordia Commentary series was first verbalized in 1989 as editors Rev. Dr. Christopher W. Mitchell and Rev. Bruce A. Cameron mused over the dusty holdings in the Concordia Publishing House library.² They soon broached the topic with Rev. Dr. Stephen J. Carter, vice president of CPH at that time, and later, CPH president (1995–2001). Carter immediately recognized both how audaciously ambitious the project would be and how “eager, determined, and passionate,” in his estimation, the young editors were to pursue it. He identified the series as a “legacy” that we could leave for the benefit of future generations. In spring 1990, Carter conferred with Mr. John W. (“Jack”) Gerber, CPH president (1986–1995), who directed the finance department to draw up a projection of the costs.³ After a couple years of planning, the series was formally launched on July 7,

¹ All Scripture translations are by the author.

² The author has collected many original documents from the early years of the series. The present article draws on them and on presentations (written, delivered orally) to various groups at venues that included the two seminaries and International Center of the LCMS. A shorter article, complementary to this one, was published with the title “A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture” in *The Lutheran Witness* (September 2019), 20–22.

³ Research projected that the series would cost about \$2 million. Gerber determined that this could not be funded internally, but would require an outside donation.

1992. CPH pledged to produce a commentary series that is faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, employs the best of modern scholarship, and is eminently useful for pastors in their ministries. Thus the commentaries are to be Lutheran, scholarly, and evangelical in service to the church's ministry and mission. CPH's original press release (July 7, 1992) states this goal, along with the optimistic initial estimate of its scope and timeframe:

On July 7, 1992 Concordia Publishing House embarked on a 15-year project⁴ to produce and publish a 30-volume⁵ scholarly commentary on the entire Bible. The Concordia Commentary will be a careful exegetical and theological commentary on the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts of Scripture. . . . The purpose of the commentary is to fill a vital niche currently occupied by few other works. Drawing on diverse areas of biblical scholarship, including philology, archaeology, history, linguistics, and theology, the Concordia Commentary will focus primarily on Scripture's *kerygma*—the evangelical proclamation emanating from God's Word that calls people to faith in Christ Jesus and empowers them for Christian service and ministry. This commentary will examine individual texts from the perspective of the whole canon, treating both testaments as a unity centering on the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah. The history of God's people, from Israel to the apostolic church and including the contemporary church, is relevant as the historical manifestation of God's working through his Word. Theological themes in the text, such as grace, mercy, covenant, temple, sacrifice, priesthood, Messiah/Christ, apostle, baptism, Lord's Supper, mission, and parousia, will be highlighted and matrixed into the whole of biblical theology. . . .

While generally conservative in matters of isagogics and reverent in tone, the commentary will relate the message of Scripture in a fresh, joyful, and invigorating manner, emphasizing the unity of all believers in Christ, their mission to the entire world, and their responsibilities in both church and society. The perspective will be international and transdenominational.

Why undertake a commentary series? This question was posed from the start within CPH and whenever the proposal was set before others in the church's ministerium. A response, at first oral, and then written, was developed in 1990–1993, beginning with a theological rationale and then addressing logistical considerations.

⁴ During the planning in 1990–1992, the CPH editors estimated that the series would take twenty years to complete, but the CPH president persuaded the team to aim for fifteen years in the public communications in 1992.

⁵ Earlier drafts of the press release stated that the series would be twenty-six volumes or twenty-six to thirty volumes, but the final version stated the number as thirty.

Jesus Christ comes to us through his word, bringing us life and salvation. We describe that doctrinally by saying that the Lutheran Church is the church of *sola Scriptura*. Therefore the proper interpretation of the Scriptures is of the highest priority. The Formula of Concord states, “We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”” (FC Ep Rule and Norm 1).⁶ That formulation remains just as true today as it did in 1580. If we are to be the Christian Church, the body of Christ and his disciples, we must abide in his word; through the word alone shall we know the truth that frees us from our sins, from death, and from the devil (John 8:21–59). The church’s mission is carried out through the faithful proclamation of the word. Bible commentaries that are true to the Scriptures fortify the teaching of the church’s doctors, the preaching of her pastors, and the Bible study of all the faithful, even as the books themselves, often in ways unforeseen, carry the gospel to the ends of the earth.⁷

The Lutheran Church, and Concordia Publishing House in particular, has a long record of publishing sturdy doctrinal works. However, in previous decades of the twentieth century substantive exegetical publications were not copious. The best Lutheran commentary sets were the Old Testament series by Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch (originally published in German in the 1850s–1870s) and the New Testament series by Richard C. H. Lenski (from the 1920s–1930s).⁸ In contrast, the twentieth century witnessed the proliferation of competing series from diverse perspectives, many of them Reformed, some nominally Lutheran, a few Roman Catholic. Academic series often were predominately secular and suffered from critical methodologies that were, to a lesser or greater degree, inimical to the Christian message of the Scriptures themselves.

The thirtieth convention of the LCMS, held in Fort Wayne in 1941, recommended that CPH undertake the publication of a Lutheran Bible commentary series.⁹ Toward this end, three volumes ensued in the 1950s with the series title

⁶ Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 464. See also FC Ep Rule and Norm 2; FC SD Rule and Norm 3.

⁷ At gatherings such as the Society of Biblical Literature, the author is often amazed by the international professors, pastors, and leaders from other church bodies, and from underground associations of Christians from all over the world, who seek out these books to take home.

⁸ There were other significant Lutheran volumes, such as the commentaries by Herbert C. Leupold, but those covered only a fraction of the biblical canon.

⁹ A quotation is provided in William F. Arndt, *The Gospel according to St. Luke* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), vii.

“Bible Commentary”: Dr. Theodore Laetsch penned *Jeremiah* (1952) and *The Minor Prophets* (1956),¹⁰ and William F. Arndt wrote *The Gospel according to St. Luke* (1956). These were hefty expositions that engaged the original languages with theological depth appropriate for serious exegetes such as pastors. In 1956, William F. Arndt asked:

Does the issuing of a new commentary on the Scriptures need a defense? Books of interpretation, be they ever so excellent, can never be considered final. “The Word of the Lord endures forever,” but the books written about it constantly have to be revised, rewritten, brought up to date, and improved. . . . In addition, it is reasonable to assume that if in a church body a new commentary on the Scriptures appears, this event will be a means of stimulating Bible study in the denomination. Is there anything more desirable in a church than the study of the Holy Writings, the fountain of divine truth, the source of the Gospel of salvation, the rock on which our faith rests, the basis of wisdom for resolving our individual and social problems?¹¹

That “Bible Commentary” series was put on hold later in the 1950s when CPH decided to publish the Luther’s Works series and did not have the resources to maintain both series simultaneously. In the 1960s, CPH resumed the effort to publish a series, now titled “Concordia Commentary.” Five volumes were published in 1968–1970, and none thereafter.¹² This series became a casualty of the doctrinal controversies that culminated in the walkout in 1974, whereupon some authors (and editors) exited the LCMS.¹³ Unlike the previous academic volumes designed for learned clergy, the commentaries in this second effort were intended to reach two different audiences, pastors and laity alike, but in the estimation of many they did not adequately reach either. Lay readers found them cerebral while clergy considered them superficial because of their brevity and neglect of the original languages.

¹⁰ Dr. J. A. O. Preus II once remarked that Laetsch was not deemed by his contemporaries to have been the preeminent LCMS exegete of the era, but because he wrote two commentaries he became one of the most influential, whereas others, who may have been more talented but did not write, did not have as lasting an impact. Preus impressed upon me that the same would hold true for our generation: those who write commentaries will guide the church for generations whereas those who do not will not.

¹¹ Arndt, *The Gospel according to St. Luke*, vii–viii.

¹² Volumes published by CPH bearing the series title “Concordia Commentary” were *1–2 Samuel* by Ralph D. Gehrke (1968); *Jeremiah and Lamentations* by Norman C. Habel (1968); *Acts* by Robert H. Smith (1970); *Romans* by Martin H. Franzmann (1968); and a combined volume covering 1–2 Timothy and Titus by H. Armin Moellering and Philemon by Victor A. Bartling (1970).

¹³ See Lawrence R. Rast Jr., “Forty Years after Seminex: Reflections on Social and Theological Factors Leading to the Walkout,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 80.3 (2016): 195–215.

The need for a new academic Lutheran exposition remained unmet. In 1990–1991, CPH research¹⁴ found that about 65 percent of LCMS pastors owned and used the New Testament series by Lenski (1920s–1930s) and about 40 percent the Old Testament series by Keil and Delitzsch (1850s–1870s). No other series was owned by more than 10 percent of our pastors. They told us that they simply did not trust the theology in any other series. Yet those venerable series were not without their weaknesses. Their layout is essentially a massive, run-on text, and their philology is dated.¹⁵ When one author (or two) with limited areas of expertise attempts to cover the entirety of a Testament, the writer may be prone to repeat himself, wax eloquent on topics within his specialty, and skip issues outside his purview. The Concordia Commentary series seeks to surpass those predecessors by selecting the best scholar for each biblical book, providing collegial guidance through the editorial team and the synodical process of doctrinal review, and publishing the material in a tripartite organization, comprised of the author’s translation, textual notes on the original languages, and theological exposition.

On October 30–31, 1990, the LCMS Advisory Committee on Church Literature, meeting at CPH, devoted considerable discussion to the presentation by Bruce Cameron to revive and redo the Concordia Commentary series. The four-page presentation stated that this would require the “commitment of the church at large and CPH to a 20-year project,” at a cost of 1.5 to 2 million dollars, with “a strong, hard-working editor” and ten to fifteen authors, and it outlined three schemes to cover the biblical canon in twenty-six, thirty-one, or thirty-five volumes. A summary of the meeting was included in a letter written by Carter on November 27, 1990, addressed to LCMS President Dr. Ralph Bohlmann, John W. Gerber, Richard Kapfer, Alan Harre, Daniel Preus, and Dean Wenthe, noting the “generally favorable reaction” to the plan, which “could give new impetus for theological research and discussion” and provide a “proactive approach to advancing Confessional Lutheran theology in today’s world.” Bohlmann responded with a letter on December 13, 1990: “I wish to commend you and CPH and the Committee” for this “imaginative and far-reaching project,” which “certainly would have great benefit not only to our LCMS pastors, but to theological literature throughout the world.”

The idea gained momentum that winter. Notes prepared by Cameron for the advisory committee meeting on February 4–5, 1991, record the support of Dr. J. A.

¹⁴ A survey was sent to LCMS pastors by Bruce Cameron, and the results were analyzed in a twenty-two-page document by Donald L. Brown (of CPH) dated November 4, 1991.

¹⁵ For example, Keil and Delitzsch often rely on Arabic etymologies. Now we have the benefit of more Northwest Semitic writings, such as the Ugaritic texts, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Likewise, the discovery of Greek papyri and advances in the field of linguistics have greatly improved our understanding of the language of the New Testament.

O. Preus II, who frequented the hallways of CPH in conjunction with the publication of his translations of Melancthon and Chemnitz.¹⁶ The present author recalls him saying, “If this is done well, it will keep the church firmly grounded in the Scriptures for generations.” When told the estimate of the costs, he replied nonchalantly, “If that’s what you need, I can get it for you.”¹⁷ A series of meetings along with letters and phone calls ensued in 1991, during which time agreement was reached to invite Dr. Jonathan F. Grothe, president of Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary (St. Catharines, Ontario), to serve as general editor and Dr. Dean O. Wenthe, professor (and later president) of Concordia Theological Seminary (Fort Wayne), to be associate editor.

Dr. Carter stressed that if we were to embark on this project, we had to be sure we could finish it, which required forecasting the costs (contrary to the man in Luke 14:28–30)—and not just monetary costs. Did we have enough superb exegetes in confessional Lutheran church bodies to author the volumes so that we could finish the series within a generation? Did we now (unlike the 1970s) have sufficient theological unity and agreement in exegetical method? Could we count on support from LCMS institutions (e.g., the synodical praesidium, seminaries, and CPH) for the duration of the project? Could adequate funding be secured? Confidence grew that affirmative answers could be given to these four crucial questions. The proposal was finally approved by the CPH Executive Board on February 20, 1992, and by the CPH Board of Directors on March 19, 1992.

This stage of the planning culminated in a meeting at CPH on April 15, 1992, that included J. A. O. Preus and Rev. Lawrence Burgdorf.¹⁸ On June 30, 1992, Preus

¹⁶ Dr. Preus translated the *Loci Theologici* of Martin Chemnitz, published in two volumes by CPH in 1989. His translation of Melancthon’s *Loci Communes 1543* was published by CPH in 1992, and his book on Chemnitz, *The Second Martin*, in 1994. Preus remarked that he expected that most of the things he had done during his presidency would be forgotten, but he would be remembered as the man who translated these enduring works of doctrinal theology into English. (Later the Chemnitz translations were republished as part of the series Chemnitz’s Works, currently ten volumes, and a second edition of his work on Melancthon is titled *The Chief Theological Topics: Loci Praecipui Theologici 1559*.)

¹⁷ Separately, in 1990 Debb Andrus, a colleague in the editorial department of CPH to the present day, had encouraged this author to initiate conversations with Lawrence Burgdorf, based on the years in which her husband, Rev. David Andrus, served as associate pastor of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Overland, Missouri, where Burgdorf was the senior pastor. During conversations with Burgdorf in 1990–1991, the present author did not know that he was precisely the same person Preus had in mind. The author kept Burgdorf up to date with the progress of the proposal as it moved through the CPH administration to the CPH board of directors with feedback from many outside CPH. At the luncheon on July 7, 1992, Burgdorf recalled what he termed, with a wink, the “evangelical persistence” of the CPH editor in these conversations.

¹⁸ This was in what was known as “the old board room” in CPH. We were well prepared and had rehearsed our presentation, but after offering to pour Burgdorf a cup of coffee, we discovered that none of us had remembered to fill the coffee pitcher. Preus, on his part, leveraged his

and Burgdorf flew to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to meet with Marvin M. Schwan, who approved of the project upon their recommendation. A luncheon was held at the Missouri Athletic Club in downtown St. Louis on July 7, 1992, attended by CPH executives, leaders from the LCMS International Center and LCMS Foundation, and the editorial team (Grothe, Wenthe, Cameron, and Mitchell). Burgdorf presented the pledge from the Marvin M. Schwan Charitable Foundation to provide funds spread over the years 1992–1999.¹⁹ This was one of the last large pledges personally approved by Mr. Marvin M. Schwan, who died unexpectedly of a heart attack less than a year later.²⁰ About a year after that, Jacob A. O. Preus II was called to eternal rest.²¹ Thus it would seem that God had “prepared beforehand” that these two saints, baptized believers in Christ, should “walk in” their vital roles during their appointed time to enable the commencement of the “good works” necessary for the Concordia Commentary series (Eph 2:10).

The “walk” along the way to the inauguration of the series had not been without its challenges. New (or renewed) ideas, no matter their merit, typically encounter a certain amount of institutional inertia or resistance.²²

As part of the effort to gain the support of the church, CPH had sent the youthful editors Cameron and Mitchell to propose the commentary series to each of the LCMS seminaries and plead for their support, and particularly to recruit seminary faculty to be authors. The entire faculty of Concordia Seminary was invited to a meeting on April 29, 1991, in Pritzlaff Hall; five attended.²³ In separate

relationship by reminiscing about his years as a professor at Bethany College in Mankato, Minnesota, during which time Burgdorf and also Marvin M. Schwan had been his students. Later, on another occasion, Preus remarked that Schwan had been an unremarkable student whose talents became obvious only later when he, as a shrewd businessman, made astute decisions that resulted in the rapid growth and enormous success of Schwan’s Sales Enterprises, Incorporated.

¹⁹ The two-page pledge, dated July 7, 1992, describes it as a “fifteen year project,” which it had become at the urging of Gerber, who was impatient with the original estimate of twenty years. (A year later, Gerber suggested that we consider shortening the duration to twelve years.) The pledge includes two provisions for possible scenarios that could potentially have cut off funding at some time during the years 1992–1999. “One of course is death,” that is, “a simultaneous death of two principals.” The other possibility was “financial reversals” at the company. The foundation fulfilled its pledge in full. Moreover, the foundation has graciously exceeded its pledge by continuing to provide support to the present day.

²⁰ He died on May 9, 1993, at age 64.

²¹ He died on August 13, 1994, at age 74.

²² In 1990, a CPH marketing manager told me, “Pastors do not buy or read books.” On November 12, 1991, the CPH Director of Congregational Resources distributed a two-page memo to the CPH president and vice presidents advising that work cease on the commentary project: “the research data was inconclusive” for this “private project of Carter/Cameron/Mitchell” and “a large loss will result to our church body.”

²³ Dr. Horace Hummel expressed vigorous support for the project. Other attendees were Drs. Andrew Bartelt, Paul Raabe, Louis Brighton, and James Voelz.

discussions, some were skeptical whether any such ambitious project emanating from CPH could meet with success.²⁴ The presentation to Concordia Theological Seminary (Fort Wayne) on April 29, 1991, was well attended; the interest was keen but far from unanimous.²⁵ Drs. Arthur Just Jr. and William Weinrich each wrote a robust follow-up letter of support, for which CPH was grateful.²⁶

Preliminary talks had also taken place in other settings with prospective authors. CPH compiled a “short list” of authors who were thought to be willing and able to finish their books in a few years, and a “long list” of others expected to take longer. The first meeting of the commentary editorial board (Grothe, Wenthe, Cameron, Mitchell, and Carter, *ex officio*) was on July 8, 1992 (the day after the public launch), by which time the “short list” had expanded and included estimated dates of completion. An advisory committee was also recruited to help guide the editorial board by providing input from clergy throughout the church.²⁷ The editors and advisors met with the first round of authors at CPH on February 17–18, 1993, to discuss the theological vision and ecclesiastical purpose of this Lutheran series as well as the practical and logistical aspects of how these books would be written, edited, and submitted to the LCMS doctrinal review process for publication. The second round of authors, five in all, two from outside the LCMS, met with the editorial board at CPH on October 14–15, 1993.

From the start of the initial planning, the hope was that the series would include authors from other confessional Lutheran church bodies around the world, and we were making some progress in that direction. The list of potential authors swelled to include a number from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and

²⁴ Cf. John 1:46. A memo dated November 25, 1991, conveying the sentiments of a seminary president, states, “There is no expression of an overwhelming need for a series which justifies the expenditure of time and money CPH is considering.” Moreover, “This project should not take money from the establishment of faculty chairs” nor “drain energy from the Synod’s Stewardship Board efforts in behalf of the seminary.”

²⁵ One professor asked why a Lutheran Bible commentary would differ from a commentary written by an exegete of any other denomination. Another senior professor slept soundly through our presentation.

²⁶ In addition, Dr. Norbert Mueller, interim president of Concordia Theological Seminary, wrote two letters to Carter, dated February 22, 1991, and November 7, 1991, that were hopeful yet concerned that hermeneutical differences between faculty might curtail the effort. The relationship between verbal prophecy and typology was a hot topic at that time.

²⁷ The advisory committee first met (together with the editorial board) on September 15, 1992, comprising Richard Kapfer (district president of the Iowa District—West) as the convener; parish pastors Gerhard H. Bode Sr., Ulmer Marshall, Michael Newman, and Paul Shoemaker; retired district president Arnold Kuntz; John F. Johnson, president of Concordia Seminary; Daniel Mattson of LCMS World Missions; and Prof. Glenn Reichwald of Bethany Seminary (ELS), Mankato, Minnesota, whom this author recalls as one of the most energetically outspoken advocates of the project.

the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), and from farther abroad.²⁸ LCMS President Alvin L. Barry corresponded with President Carl H. Mischke of WELS and President George M. Orvick of ELS in the effort to recruit authors from their church bodies.²⁹ The editorial board flew to Milwaukee on June 1, 1993, to meet at Northwestern Publishing House with professors from WELS and ELS, particularly faculty of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. The conversation was constructive. Some authors from WELS and ELS have signed on.³⁰

Dr. Arthur A. Just bravely volunteered to work diligently so as to become the first to finish a commentary manuscript, aiming to complete his exposition of Luke by 1996. The contractual agreement anticipated one volume of five hundred pages, but by 1995 it became apparent that Just had written enough material on the first half of Luke to fill one volume. The editorial board had to make a key decision that (unbeknownst at the time) would affect many later commentaries: either request that the manuscript be halved in length (which would take additional time and labor, and deprive the church of priceless treasure) or respect the depth of the author's scholarship and publish it in full for the benefit of the church (which would also enable the first volume to be published promptly). The latter option was chosen, and set the pattern for the volumes on the other Gospels and many other biblical books.³¹ The decision also solidified the niche that would characterize the whole series. It would be a scholarly series that devotes considerable attention to the texts in their original languages as the foundation for profound and extensive theological reflection. Subsequent decades have shown that this is the kind of series that provides maximum benefit to the church and her pastors.³²

To announce the imminent publication of Just's *Luke 1:1–9:50* (1996, 447 pages), CPH put together a sixteen-page "Sampler," mailed to pastors in early 1996, that highlighted the distinctive features of the series; provided photos and

²⁸ By March 11, 1993, the list of potential authors had grown to three pages long and included fourteen from WELS and ELS. Also included were some from the Lutheran Church of Australia, the Lutheran Church—Canada, and one from Korea.

²⁹ The letters from Barry to them are dated October 27, 1992.

³⁰ At the present time (2020), WELS authors (and their forthcoming commentaries) include Dr. Mark Braun (Judges), Prof. Thomas Nass (Joel), and Dr. Kenneth Cherney (Exodus). Prof. Adolph Harstad (ELS) finished his commentary on Joshua (2004) and is completing a forthcoming commentary on Deuteronomy.

³¹ The commentary on Matthew by Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs comprises three volumes. The exposition of Mark by Dr. James W. Voelz occupies two. Dr. William Weinrich has finished one volume covering John 1:1–7:1, and anticipates two further volumes.

³² Thus, the current Concordia Commentary series is akin to, but more extensive than, the "Bible Commentary" series published by CPH in the 1950s and is to be differentiated from the brief volumes in the "Concordia Commentary" series of 1968–1970.

biographies of the first round of authors, the editorial board, and the advisory committee; and contained some pages from that commentary.

The editors crafted a lengthier expression of the theological presuppositions, goal, and methodology of the series, published as the “Editors’ Preface” in *Luke 1:1–9:50* (pp. xi–xvi) and in every subsequent volume (occasionally modified). It answered its rhetorical question with four convictions:

What may a reader expect from the Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture?

The purpose of this series, simply put, is to assist pastors, missionaries, and teachers of the Scriptures to convey God’s Word with greater clarity, understanding, and faithfulness to the divine intent of the text. . . .

First in importance is the conviction that the content of the scriptural testimony is Jesus Christ. The Lord himself enunciated this when he said, “The Scriptures . . . testify to me” (Jn 5:39), words that have been incorporated into the logo of this series. The message of the Scriptures is the Good News of God’s work to reconcile the world to himself through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Under the guidance of the same Spirit who inspired the writing of the Scriptures, these commentaries seek to find in every passage of every canonical book “that which promotes Christ” (as Luther’s hermeneutic is often described). They are Christ-centered, *Christological*.

As they unfold the scriptural testimony to Jesus Christ, these commentaries expound Law and Gospel. This approach arises from a second conviction—that Law and Gospel are the overarching doctrines of the Bible itself and that to understand them in their proper distinction and relationship to each other is a key for understanding the self-revelation of God and his plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. . . .

A third, related conviction is that the Scriptures are God’s vehicle for communicating the Gospel. The editors and authors accept without reservation that the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments are, in their entirety, the inspired and inerrant Word of God. The triune God is the ultimate author of the Bible; every word is inspired by the Holy Spirit, who did also, at the same time, make use of the knowledge, particular interests, and styles of the human writers. . . .

A fourth conviction is that, even as the God of the Gospel came into this world in Jesus Christ (the Word Incarnate), the scriptural Gospel has been given to and through the people of God, for the benefit of all humanity. . . . The living context of Scripture is ever the church, where the Lord’s ministry of preaching, baptizing, forgiving sins, teaching, and celebrating the Lord’s Supper

continues. Aware of the way in which the incarnation of the Son of God has as a consequence the close union of Scripture and church, of Word and Sacraments, this commentary series features expositions that are *incarnational* and *sacramental*.³³

The two volumes on Luke each required a full year of editorial labor (before their publication in 1996 and 1997) because of the steep learning curve for everyone involved. None of the authors had ever written, nor had any of the editors ever edited, a Bible commentary. Internal processes had to be developed within CPH to accommodate the size and complexity of these books, which dwarfed many of the other publications of this era. A like amount of time was required for editing the commentary on Revelation by Dr. Louis Brighton, published in 1999, but only nine months for the fourth volume, on 1 Corinthians, by Dr. Gregory Lockwood, published in 2000.

Dr. Jonathan F. Grothe was the general editor from 1992 until 1999. Dr. Dean O. Wenthe served as the associate editor from 1992 through 1999, when he became the general editor, and remained so into 2016, and he displayed *fides heroica* throughout his tenure. Julene Gernant Dumit (M.A.R.) has been the CPH copy editor and production editor for the series since its inception. Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs, one of the first authors recruited, served on the editorial board as the New Testament editor from 1999 into 2012, when he stepped aside from editorial duties due to his workload, which included the writing of three superb volumes on the Gospel of Matthew (2006, 2010, 2018). Dr. Curtis P. Giese, author of the commentary on 2 Peter and Jude (2012) and the forthcoming volume on James, joined the editorial board in 2011 and has served as the New Testament editor since 2012.³⁴

After a hiatus,³⁵ the publication of books resumed, apace, in 2003 with the appearance of *Colossians* by Paul Deterding and then *The Song of Songs* by Christopher Mitchell. The pace of two volumes per year, finally achieved

³³ Quoted from pages xi–xii of the first printing (1996) of *Luke 1:1–9:50*, by Arthur A. Just Jr. In subsequent years, the “Editors’ Preface” has itself been edited and slightly expanded. Whenever a volume is reprinted the “Editors’ Preface” is updated to be the current version.

³⁴ The present author, who has served at CPH since 1989, first had the title of “Contributing Editor” (1996–1999) and then became “Old Testament and CPH Editor” (2000–present), but has always had the same role of editing every book for publication.

³⁵ No volumes were published in 2001 and 2002. To safeguard the reputation of the series and publicize its continuance, the Editorial Board as of 2000 (Wenthe, Mitchell, Gibbs) sent out a four-page newsletter titled “Concordia Commentary News” (Summer 2000), which reiterated the purpose of the series and gave biographies of the editors and twenty-seven authors. As a follow-up, in January 2002 a two-page letter was sent listing the four volumes in print, five forthcoming volumes, and a full list of the thirty-one then-current authors and their biblical books.

in 2003,³⁶ was a goal stated in the original press release in 1992, and has, by the grace of God, continued to the present day, when thirty-seven volumes are in print (totaling 26,462 pages). We intend, with the help of God, to continue to publish two more per year until the completion of the seventy-four volumes envisioned for the series. As of 2020, we have a total of more than forty authors, including professors in the LCMS, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the Lutheran Church—Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil, and the Lutheran Church of Australia.³⁷

To help show that this is not an insular enterprise to benefit Lutherans alone, but part of the church's worldwide mission, we began soliciting endorsements for the back covers of the dust jackets and the web pages starting in 2014. We ask authors to identify esteemed academic colleagues around the world, including some outside of Lutheranism and from renowned universities, to write brief commendations, from their perspectives, that demonstrate the broad appeal of the series. These first appeared on *Galatians* by A. Andrew Das and *Isaiah 56–66* by R. Reed Lessing, both from 2014.

We give thanks to God for the era of theological unity, the prosperity of resources, and the joyful participation of everyone involved that have enabled this series to thrive over the decades. To be sure, each of the editors and authors is *simul iustus et peccator*, and all we have done is far from perfect. We could have been more efficient in the past if we had known then what we (think we) know now. Nevertheless, we believe a plethora of “good works” have been accomplished solely by the grace of God as we have “walked in” the opportunities that God “prepared beforehand” (Eph 2:10). The ultimate value of the effort will become evident only at the great assize on the Last Day (1 Cor 3:10–15). It is fitting to conclude with the same Scripture passage (Rom 16:25–27) quoted at the end of the “Editors’ Preface” in every volume:

Now to him who is able to establish you by my Gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, by the revelation of the mystery kept secret for ages past but now revealed also through the prophetic Scriptures, made known to all the nations by order of the eternal God unto the obedience of faith—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen!

Christopher W. Mitchell

Concordia Commentary Editor, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO

³⁶ A third volume, *Leviticus*, also has the copyright date of 2003, but it was released in January 2004.

³⁷ For a full list of published authors and their volumes currently in print, and for updates about authors of forthcoming volumes along with additional information about the series, see cph.org/commentary.

Walter Arthur Maier II
(June 14, 1925–October 24, 2019) in memoriam

With a ministry in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod spanning over sixty years, Walter A. Maier II had an impact on its congregations, in its synodical life, and at our seminary that is unmatched in time and service. He remained active as a



professor at Concordia Theological Seminary until a few years before his death on October 24, 2019. When he was called to teach New Testament studies at the seminary (then in Springfield, Illinois) in the fall of 1965, his name appeared in the seminary and synodical publication as “Walter A. Maier Jr.,” a reminder that he was walking in the footsteps of his father, who was the founder and longtime speaker of *The Lutheran Hour*. When one of his sons, another Walter A. Maier, joined the faculty in 1989, he then was more often known as Walter A. Maier II. This is hardly an incidental matter, since historians researching

the synod’s publications will likely find more references to “Jr.” appended to his name. It is a reminder for future generations that he perpetuated the scholarly evangelical and missional legacy of his father, who even after he died in January 1950 was the face of the Missouri Synod as no one else was.

Being brought up on the campus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, where his father was professor of Old Testament, Maier received his theological instruction there. In the same year of his seminary graduation, 1949, he received a Master of Arts in Greek Classics from Washington University, also in St. Louis. This would equip him for teaching New Testament, particularly Romans, which was his deepest love. Upon graduation, he was called to a congregation in rural upstate New York. From there, he went to Levittown, Pennsylvania, outside of Philadelphia, a community that was established to accommodate the burgeoning suburban population. He was well suited to serve a congregation that was growing by leaps and bounds. His third call was to Hope Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, and while there he also served as an instructor of religion at Concordia College in that city.

Through his contacts with the Lutheran Laymen's League, J. A. O. Preus II, who had become seminary president in September 1962, learned of Maier's preaching gift and teaching skills, and proposed his name to the board of regents for a position on the faculty in New Testament, a position into which he was installed in September 1965. The proximity of Springfield to St. Louis allowed Maier to earn first the Master of Sacred Theology degree and then the Doctor of Theology degree in 1970, both at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. He was the ideal professor in that he had both lengthy pastoral experience in a variety of situations and scholarly qualifications. Maier had a facile mind and delivered his lectures rapidly. In order to preserve what he had said, students collected notes from his lectures, which were passed down from class to class. There were three different versions of the lecture notes, some of which are still on the shelves of pastors. Rather than taking notes, students would follow along in his printed lectures, sometimes making comparisons among the versions. During his faculty tenure, he served as chairman of the department of biblical studies, academic dean, and assistant to the president. For many years, he served as a member of the synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations and as a synodical vice-president.



The death of Walter's father on January 11, 1950, just four months following Walter's ordination, left a lasting impression on both him and his younger brother Paul, who then was a student at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and became a noted writer and scholar. This was a legacy that both sons, Walter and Paul, were determined to continue. And continue it they did, as now Walter's son Walter A. Maier III serves as a professor at our seminary, and his other son, David Maier, serves as president of the Michigan District of the LCMS. Walter A. Maier II is survived by his wife, Leah. They were married on August 27, 1951, making their marriage one of nearly seventy years. They are remembered by both his colleagues and students as the most elegant of hosts. Funeral services were conducted at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne, a founding congregation of the synod.

Institutions are held together by the longevity of the service of their most notable members. Walter A. Maier II is a permanent part of the structure that is called Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.

David P. Scaer

“Claiming Christian Freedom to Discuss Abortion *Together*”

Under this title, the Summer 2019 issue of *Lutheran Forum*³⁸ offered an article detailing how women using the principle of Christian freedom might respond in those states where the legislatures have passed or will likely pass such severe restrictions on abortion that abortions will not be done at all. For some time, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has drifted toward mainline Protestantism in adopting the ordination of women clergy, which in comparison to abortion, now seems a minor issue, but of course it is not. Women’s ordination opened the door to the ordination of practicing gay pastors and the blessing of same-sex marriages. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and predecessor synods of the ELCA used to work toward common goals. In that bygone age, the *Lutheran Forum* could take on the role of a mediator in letting all sides of an argument be heard. With this essay, it has abdicated this role.

Amy Carr and Christine Helmer, joint authors of “Claiming Christian Freedom to Discuss Abortion *Together*,” push the needle further to the left, if indeed this is possible. For some time, the ELCA has funded insurance coverage for abortions for its church workers including female pastors, a practice that its presiding bishop sees as a positive good. But this is not a good, especially for the child.

Carr and Helmer cover the waterfront in providing sociological, biological, and theological arguments, easily recognizable as Lutheran, that pregnant women clergy should keep the option of abortion open. A usual argument is that women have freedom over their own bodies, though for the record their bodies remain intact and the child’s body is mutilated to death. Uniquely, Carr and Helmer set a woman’s decision to kill the unborn child or to let it live within the context of “Christian freedom.” Luther, Gerhard, Spener, and Bonhoeffer are said to have used “the resources of tradition and their intellectual acumen to engage others in meaningful discussion of topics.”³⁹ So argument for or against abortion is no longer settled by “You shall not murder,” but by historical ways of reasoning that these theologians never intended to be used in this way.

Carr and Helmer delve into what a woman’s “right to choose” means. This can only be resolved by understanding a “relationship” that includes “a ‘village’ of family, friends, healthcare, day care, and educational opportunities, churches, infrastructure that guarantees clean air and water, and cultural and sports centers.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Amy Carr and Christine Helmer, “Claiming Christian Freedom to Discuss Abortion *Together*,” *Lutheran Forum* 53, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 48–51.

³⁹ Carr and Helmer, “Discuss Abortion,” 48.

⁴⁰ Carr and Helmer, “Discuss Abortion,” 51.

So whether a child lives or not is determined by what can be expected in his or her future, including an adequate soccer playing field and a healthy environment. Lacking these, the door is open to abortion. The authors then tackle the question of what is meant by “the unborn child.” Viability determines when someone is a human being and when they are not, and a child who has failed to get beyond the first twenty-three weeks after conception is better referred to as a zygote or fetus and is open game for the abortionist’s scalpel. “Without legal access to safe abortion, more women suffer.”⁴¹ Without pro-life advocates, the unborn will suffer. But there’s more. “Even when adoption is an option there are compelling physical, practical, and existential reasons for women to choose to avoid the ordeals of continuing a pregnancy.”⁴² Now comes “the question [of] whether in faith we should support laws premised on an abstract ideal of purity with regard to the sanctity of the life of the unborn.”⁴³ Since life is never perfect, abortion is just the way things are. Since we live in a real world, we can legally support what we otherwise do not like. Deciding to abort or not “involves listening for the nudging of the Spirit, who speaks in a particular context—not as didactic rule-maker, but as One who actively conforms us to the mind of Christ.”⁴⁴

Wow! There goes the law and here enters a new creation where the unborn can be killed. Carr and Helmer call for “intellectual seriousness” and “meaningful discussions,” which means that they enter the arena of public opinion with their minds already made up that they are not against abortion.⁴⁵ Amy Carr teaches at Western Illinois University. Well known among Luther scholars, Christine Helmer is a professor in Germanic studies at Northwestern University with an adjunct position in teaching religion. Her most recent book, *How Luther Became the Reformer* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), traces the story of how early twentieth-century German theologians constructed the myth of the “here I stand Luther.” After reading it, some might restrain their gusto in singing “A Mighty Fortress.” I will not. It might be the time for her fellow Luther scholars to question her placing abortion under Luther’s concept of Christian freedom, or perhaps ask what his concept of Christian freedom means. For Helmer, what is existentially contemporary context trumps an outmoded concept of the law as the will of God. Her concept of “it takes a village” to determine what to do takes us back to a former presidential candidate.

David P. Scaer

⁴¹ Carr and Helmer, “Discuss Abortion,” 49.

⁴² Carr and Helmer, “Discuss Abortion,” 49.

⁴³ Carr and Helmer, “Discuss Abortion,” 50.

⁴⁴ Carr and Helmer, “Discuss Abortion,” 50.

⁴⁵ Carr and Helmer, “Discuss Abortion,” 48.

The Law Is Good

The following sermon was preached on September 17, 2019, in Kramer Chapel at the beginning of a catechetical series on the Ten Commandments. The sermon is included here in connection with recent discussions on the abiding place of the law in the lives of Christians, both to accuse them of their remaining sinfulness and to instruct them in holy living, and on the atonement as requiring Christ's perfect fulfillment of the law.

Sometimes, I'd rather plug my ears and shut my mouth. Because people do not want to hear it, we would rather not say it. But the truth sets free. The law is good, and it is eternal. "Blessed is the man . . . [whose] delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Ps 1:1-2).⁴⁶ Here the psalmist speaks of the *Torah*, the truth in all its fullness. The law and the gospel are really not so far apart. What is the gospel but the law fulfilled on our behalf?

To the one caught in sin, the law looks menacing, as it must. But the opposite of love is not wrath, but indifference. A God without wrath is not more loving, he is apathetic, deaf to the cries of injustice.

"You shall have no other gods before me" (Exod 20:3). This commandment indicts the pagan, but it also indicts us when we devote ourselves to money, popularity, reputation, and the pleasures of the body, whether active on a Saturday night or asleep on Sunday morning.

Where will we find the good place? Is it gathered around our golden calf? Is it to live under the illusions of the rich fool? Or would we rather dwell in the house of the Lord, singing hymns to the one who loves us?

Are we prone to curse? Perhaps, but such speech, given free reign, pollutes the air. And if we forget the Sabbath, we harm only ourselves. Going to church can seem a drag. But afterward, like the gym, you feel better. Which is to say, we were created to live in God's presence.

What is the law? It accuses the pagan, so also those of us who know better. But the law is also what I want. It is a better place. Go to Walmart, and see a kid mouthing off to his mom. Look out at a world where fathers are absent, leaving children in houses that are not true homes. From this vantage point, the Fourth Commandment looks better every day.

Thou shall not murder. Perhaps in rage, anger, vengeance, or pure selfishness, murder may seem the answer. But such a world is ugly, even horrifying. If you are

⁴⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV[®] Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version[®]), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

not from Fort Wayne, you should know that we now live in the epicenter of our nation's fight for life. Dr. Klopfer, who put to death some 40,000 children here in Fort Wayne and South Bend, himself died this past year. In his home were found the remains of some 2,246 bodies. We have now our Mengele, our Auschwitz. That is not the world I want to live in. And when we see such things, we cannot simply say "gospel, gospel, gospel." We have to meditate upon the price that Christ paid, stand at the foot of the cross, and gaze at the wrath that he rightly suffered on our behalf.

Thou shall not commit adultery? No doubt, the fruit is tempting, but it hides a poison pill. Look what the sexual revolution has done to our people, to our children, confused and abandoned. And, of course, the sixth commandment bleeds into the fifth; no amount of penicillin can make it better.

Thou shall not steal? We all want more. And who will notice if we skim off the top? But then many restaurants, many businesses are forced to close because employees take a little here, a little there. Sadly, many church workers are caught with their hands in the offering plate. But where do we want to live? In neighborhoods where every house is like a bank vault, and every door must be bolted and chained? Is it nostalgia to long for former days, where cars and houses had no need for locks?

Thou shall not bear false witness. Sure, gossiping is fun. It can feel good to speak ill of others, to think ourselves superior. But then we know the pain of having others whisper about us. And really, such talk leaves a residue, both on the one who speaks and on the one spoken against.

Thou shall not covet. Is there anything harder to take than the success of a friend? Misery loves company, and your joy turns me a shade of green. But why? What a wretch of a man I am to feel this way! Would it not be better to live in a world where we are happy for the success of others?

Yes, I want a better world. A world as Luther positively describes in the Ten Commandments hymn. A world fulfilled in the Beatitudes of Christ's life. A world anointed with the Spirit's fruits of charity, love, kindness, and patience. That means that I must let that law indict me, recognizing that I am part of the problem. But it shall not always be so. To live according to these commandments is to live a life of love eternal. It is the life of Christ lived for me, in perfect obedience to the law, but not simply as a past event, but as a life he gives to us even now.

In this life, the law does not cease to indict us. But in Christ, we see it from a different vantage point. The true Isaac, Abraham's Son, has been sacrificed for us. We have been redeemed out of the Egypt of our sin and death. And in this death, he does not put an end to the law, but establishes it.

Walk among the pagans, and feel the heaviness of the air. Or come to the chapel, filled with the incense of prayer. The world celebrates death; come instead to chapel teeming with new life in the faces of seminarians and their wives and many children. See kindness and generosity at the food and clothing banks. Experience encouragement and joy and the mutual consolation of the brethren. Sin remains. In each one of us. We know that. The devil still prowls among us like a lion (cf. 1 Pet 5:8). But we also know that Christ makes all the difference, and we would be ingrates not to notice.

When we grumble, wishing we were back in Egypt, we slap ourselves and say, “What were we thinking?” The golden calf is just a hunk of metal, nothing compared to our living God. Like new converts, we rejoice that we have been freed, that the old ways are soon to pass away, to be buried, and never again rise. We see that the law does not bind us, as with chains of the tyrant, but that we are willingly held close to the Lord and tied to one another in bonds of charity and love, the law’s fulfillment.

Peter J. Scaer

Prayerfully Consider

“Maybe I could be a pastor...”
“Maybe I could be a deaconess...”



Prayerfully Consider Visit

This is a three-day event for men and women of all ages to contemplate the vocations of pastor and deaconess. Explore the campus of CTSFW, engage with students and faculty, and experience rich fellowship and worship. Find more information at www.ctsfw.edu/PCV.

Christ Academy College

At this four-day event, undergraduate men and women experience for themselves what seminary life is like. Come sit in on classes, get to know professors and students, and worship with the CTSFW community. More information is available at www.ctsfw.edu/CAC.



Whom Shall I Send?

The Lord Jesus sends pastors to local congregations and all nations to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, and deaconesses embody Christ's mercy throughout the world. The Gospel lives and endures through tangible means of grace, and the need for pastors and deaconesses continues. Refer promising young and mature men and women to CTSFW. Call us at (800) 481-2155 or email Admission@ctsfw.edu.

Book Reviews

Additional book reviews are available online
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Gerhard, Johann. *On Good Works*. Theological Commonplaces XX. Edited by Joshua J. Hayes, Benjamin T. G. Mayes, and Aaron Jensen. Translated by Richard J. Dinda. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019. 368 pages. Hardcover. \$59.99.

The publication of *On Good Works* is the thirteenth in the current series from CPH, a series that continues to exemplify high-quality translations, editorial helps, and physical products. In addition, this volume is of particular interest because of its extensive coverage of the topic “good works,” unmatched by any other Lutheran treatment in English. Gerhard begins the volume by addressing the various kinds of good works, but devotes most of his attention to the question of the *necessity* of good works and the *merits* of good works. His comprehensive treatment of these questions, grounded thoroughly in Scripture, carefully distinguishes in what manner the Bible teaches the necessity and merits of good works from misunderstandings, errors, and false teaching.

Good works are not necessary in order to attain righteousness before God and salvation. This is impossible, for one who lacks righteousness cannot do the good works that would be needed to make him righteous. Nor are good works necessary in the sense of compulsion; they are not to be forced out of the unwilling—indeed, they cannot be. Rather, good works are necessary in a cause-effect relationship. That is, good works necessarily come forth from the person who is good, who has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit in Christ. More than this, however, good works are necessary in relation to God’s will: good works are not arbitrary, but align with and conform to God’s will. This is to say that God’s commands are good and people ought to strive to pursue them.

The question of merits is not a major point of discussion in Lutheran theology today, as Lutherans agree that works merit nothing for salvation. However, the topic was hotly debated with Roman Catholics in Gerhard’s time, and interesting insights can be gleaned from Gerhard’s presentation. For example, the question of non-salvific rewards is rarely addressed today, yet Gerhard gives considerable attention to it. He distinguishes between “essential” rewards, those offered freely in the Gospel, from “accidental” rewards, particular rewards given to the pious according to their works and suffering (115). Rewards are given in accordance with works, yet these works do not merit eternal life. Eternal life is given as a free gift, through the

merits of Christ, even while those who receive eternal life through faith will experience different gifts and rewards in their state of eternal life. Indeed, some accidental rewards and accidental punishments are received even in this life. Gerhard importantly points out that where his opponents have interpreted some passages to say that eternal life is the reward of good works, these passages in fact express that good works bear testimony to faith, and that salvation is given freely through this faith, while other, accidental, heavenly rewards will be given in accordance with the works (187–193; Ps 62:12; Matt 16:27; Luke 6:38; Rom 2:5–6; 1 Cor 3:8; Gal 6:8; Rev 22:12).

A final chapter addresses the question of the loss of faith through sin, popularly known as “mortal sin,” but which Gerhard helpfully labels “sins against conscience.” Not all sin drives out faith and the Holy Spirit, for faith and the Holy Spirit abide to forgive sin. But the person who sins and fails to repent, but believes acceptance of sin abides along with faith and the Holy Spirit, has actually cast out the Holy Spirit and lost faith.

As with the other volumes in this series, this book should have wide appeal, both to those who want to read carefully Gerhard’s account of good works, and also to those who would use it as a key scriptural reference on the topic.

Gifford A. Grobien

Kilcrease, Jack, D. *The Doctrine of Atonement: From Luther to Forde*. Foreword by Roland Ziegler. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2018. 183 pages. Softcover.

Gerhard Forde’s writings are found on the shelves of some LCMS pastors. Critiquing Forde’s doctrines of the law and the atonement is Jack Kilcrease, a member of the synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations. Customarily when Lutherans speak of Christ’s death for sins, they have in mind a doctrine of that atonement that Christ offered himself to God as a sacrifice for sins. For late Luther Seminary professor Forde (d. 2005), Christ’s death is not a propitiation for sin, but God “make[s] a unilateral decision to forgive sin without any fulfillment of the law” (115). God speaks and it is done without atonement. Law for Forde does not belong to God’s essence, but is existentially understood “as a concrete reality within human experience” (106–107). In a bait and switch maneuver, justification by faith is put in the place of a doctrine of the atonement, which was understood by Luther, the Confessions, and the classical seventeenth-century Lutheran theologians as an act in which God offers up Christ as an atonement for sin, and in turn, Christ offers up himself (26–65). Kilcrease lays the groundwork for his critique of Forde by laying out the current Lutheran theological climate in taking to task George Lindbeck’s claim that doctrines have no truth claims and so they are no more than statements that “regulate how communal discourse

and practice operate” (5). This means that each church body has its own way of expressing the truth.

In chapters 3 and 4, Kilcrease challenges Forde’s proposals that his views are those of Luther, the Confessions, and the seventeenth-century Orthodox theologians who “held to the doctrine of penal substitution as a corollary of the proper articulation of the doctrine of justification” (65). For Forde, justification does not depend on atonement, but is accomplished by preaching. Chapters 4 and 5 are both titled “Modern Rethinking of the Lutheran Doctrine of Atonement.” The first is subtitled “Moderate Revisionists,” surveying the views of Werner Elert, Gustaf Aulén, and Gustaf Wingren. The second is subtitled “Radical Revisionists,” surveying the views of Wolfhart Pannenberg, Robert Jenson, and Eberhard Jüngel. Following his analysis, Kilcrease gives the “Evaluation,” based on “The Confessional Lutheran Paradigm” (23–25). In chapters 6 and 7, Kilcrease addresses how Forde came to his views on law, atonement, and justification.

Our readers may have already come across Forde’s views as early as in 1984 set forth in the section entitled “The Work of Christ” in the Jenson-Braaten *Christian Dogmatics* (2:11–104). A critique by now vice-president Scott Murray followed in 2002 in CPH’s *Law, Life, and the Living God* (123–133). Forde’s influence can be seen in the more recent book *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology* (1:9–11). Forde’s arguments are more theologically than biblically presented, and when he resorts to the biblical references, he readjusts them to support his view that Jesus did not see his death as atonement. The earliest proclamations contained in Acts do not refer to Jesus’ death as atonement. Those that do in Acts and the Gospels, along with Jesus’ prediction of his death and its value as propitiation, were read back into the Gospels under the now-discounted later Hellenism. (Recall that centuries before Jesus lived, Palestine was Hellenized.)

In the foreword to Kilcrease’s work, Concordia Theological Seminary Systematics Department Chairman Roland Ziegler writes, “The doctrine of vicarious satisfaction had never been without its detractors” (ix).

David P. Scaer

Perrin, Nicholas. *Jesus the Priest*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. 368 pages. Softcover. \$32.00.

If Jesus is a prophet, a priest, and a king, which of those offices is most important? This second in a planned trilogy of books expands on Perrin’s 2010 *Jesus the Temple* in centering the identity of Jesus on his priesthood. You may be uninterested in or opposed to *ranking* the offices of Christ, but Perrin’s contention is that prophecy and kingship are subsumed in the priesthood Jesus exercises. He

wants to redirect historical Jesus research toward Jesus' relationship to holiness, away from the abstractions of liberal Protestantism native to that subdiscipline.

The reader will find several obstacles to profiting from this intriguing project. The first hurdle is the baggy, chatty style Perrin employs, reminiscent of his mentor, N. T. Wright. Perrin's diffuseness is prolific in the creation of strawmen, piling rhetorical questions on top of anachronistic words such as "hero" for Jesus, but it is unsuccessful in clarifying his meaning. Like Wright, he bemoans "post-Enlightenment" presuppositions that he presupposes his readers have but holds himself responsible only for clarity and precision in his historical Jesus research methodology, not for his articulation of Western intellectual history.

The methodology of historical Jesus research is the second and much larger hurdle. One feels great sympathy for Perrin's obvious effort to present a maximal picture of the messianic claims and priestly work of the historical Jesus. Yet each time Perrin plays within the rules of historical Jesus research, mentioning that this or that passage is "highly probable" or rejected only by the "most radical of skeptics," one wonders what the reward could be for playing this game. The logical circularity of historical Jesus research with its purported grasp of "authentic" and "inauthentic" Jesus tradition apart from any measure of authenticity external to the Gospels is unquestioned.

This desire to play the game of historical Jesus research exists strangely alongside a completely uncritical acceptance of rabbinic evidence. Perrin does not engage the historical criticism of the Talmud that Jacob Neusner pioneered. Evidence from the Talmud Bavli, produced in the Persian Empire in the sixth and seventh centuries AD, is called forth as support for points Perrin is making about first-century AD Palestine. Why not accept the historical criticism of the Talmud? Historicizing the varieties of ancient Judaism would likely obliterate vague entities Perrin conjures up such as the "ancient Jewish mind" and the inchoate group of "ancient Jewish readers."

The book is valuable for its various close readings of Gospel pericopes, especially Perrin's correlations of Old Testament texts such as Ezekiel 36 and Daniel 7 with the teachings and works of Jesus in the canonical Gospels. If you buy the book, skip around for the strictly exegetical sections, where Perrin has riches in store for any reader. Walk around the hurdles, unless you want to try clearing them, and enjoy the rest.

Adam Koontz

Bennema, Cornelis. *Mimesis in the Johannine Literature*. Library of New Testament Studies 498. New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017. 246 pages. Hardcover. \$114.00.

Recent academic scholarship on the Gospel of John has been hesitant, even resistant, to the idea that this Gospel has an ethic, that is, that this Gospel gives an account of a way or manner of life that is true to the human project as such. One significant reason for this understanding of John's Gospel has been the common view that John's Gospel arises from an early Christian sect, something like the Qumran sect, which is withdrawn from the world of men and lives according to a special "ethic" true to its own unique and special community. Fortunately, that view is giving way to a more realistic and historically factual interpretation of John's Gospel as central to the Christian movement, albeit of a different articulation than that, say, of Paul.

Within this context, *Mimesis* by Cornelis Bennema comes as a very welcome book indeed. It is Bennema's contention that his book is the first full study of the concept of "imitation" in Johannine studies. He begins with a survey of recent studies on the ethics of John's Gospel and of a renewal of interest in the subject (1–22). Yet, the specific idea of "imitation" has been lacking, and it is Bennema's intention to make good this deficit. Indeed, "imitation" is a pervasive theme in the Johannine literature, claims the author (23). Concluding his introduction on previous and contemporary studies on ethics in John, Bennema gives his own working definition of *imitation*: "person B represents or emulates person A in activity or state X [in order to become like person A]" (25). Bennema explains the brackets: "this relates to the believer—Jesus and believer—God mimesis . . . rather than the divine Son—Father mimesis." He continues: "In relation to the believer—Jesus mimesis, for example, Jesus (person A) functions as a virtuous role model who sets the example (activity or state X) for the believer (person B) to imitate in order to become like him (person A)" (25–26). Thus, mimesis "consists of creative, cognitive, volitional actions for which a person is responsible rather than a mindless cloning for which one might not be held accountable" (21).

The strength of Bennema's book lies in his second chapter in which he, with admirable thoroughness, identifies and analyzes the various "mimetic expressions" in the Johannine literature. His statistical summary of these expressions, with corresponding charts, is helpful, as is his distinction between "performative" and "existential" mimetic expressions and his evaluation of the "mimetic strength" each expression possesses. By "performative," Bennema means those expressions that correlate one action in view of another (e.g., John 15:9: "As the Father has loved me, also I have loved you"). By "existential," he means those

actions that correspond to a state of being (John 17:11: “That they might be one as we”). Other chapters discuss more specifically the “divine mimesis” (Son—Father), the “believer—Jesus/God mimesis” (the longest chapter because this mimesis is the most common in the Gospel), the place of mimesis in Johannine ethics (central and based on the dynamics of “family ethics”), and “mimetic empowerment” (“relational empowerment,” “mnemonic empowerment,” and “the Spirit”).

There is much to learn from Bennema’s linguistic analysis, and, no doubt, the idea of mimesis is not an easy one to conceptualize, let alone that of what motivates one toward imitation. However, there are very serious weaknesses in Bennema’s presentation. I will mention two that are *methodological* and one that is *theological*.

First, it is true that the *idea* of mimesis is not a uniquely Christian idea. Yet, it is quite questionable whether a general idea of mimesis suffices to interpret John’s discourse of the Son imitating the Father and the believer imitating Jesus. Thus, Bennema treats Johannine mimesis as though it is merely another instance of common human psychological and volitional action. Thus, in discussing the claim that mimesis is an event arising of memory as empowerment, Bennema adduces modern theory of human memory. Conclusion: “Many of the events recorded in John’s Gospel are emotionally and sensory-charged incidents that would have forged personal event memories in the minds of the disciples” (182). One need not deny that apostolic memory was human in every way, but would the evangelist admit that such memory was open to psychological analysis? One may well doubt it.

Another example: In his discussion of the place of mimesis in Johannine ethics, Bennema adduces Aristotle’s ethics as “an heuristic framework for understanding Johannine ethics” (144–147).¹ He notes that for Aristotle “happiness” (εὐδαιμονία) is the goal of human life and is acquired through virtue and discipline. When, then, Bennema claims that “in the Johannine literature, ζωή is the closest equivalent to εὐδαιμονία so that, for John, the ultimate end (τέλος) people should pursue for nothing but its own sake is ζωή” (144), one can only wonder where Jesus has gone, who claims that he is the way, the truth, and the life. To be sure, Bennema affirms that “there is ζωή in Jesus” and that he “makes it available to people,” but the very language distinguishes between “life” and the person of Jesus.² That is a serious christological problem. The conclusion: “In sum, when we look at the Johannine

¹ To be sure, Bennema does not claim that John intentionally draws on Greco-Roman morality (144).

² Bennema can speak of ζωή as “the highest moral good which people can attain when they enter into a relationship with the Father and Son” (146). That “life” is a christological *name* in John’s Gospel is wholly unnoticed. The underlying problem here is that Bennema thinks of “life” as a quality that the Father and Son *share*: “ζωή denotes the divine, everlasting life that the Father and Son share and that defines them” (145; also 72).

writings through the lens of Graeco-Roman virtue ethics, we see that ζώή is the Johannine equivalent of εὐδαιμονία” (147). Johannine Christology has disappeared.

Second, the latter point leads to another observation. It is remarkable that a study on mimesis (which I agree is central to John’s Gospel) never appeals to Old Testament narrative, most especially the *Torah* and its repeated exhortation to obey God’s commandments as the virtual definition of Israel as God’s people. Some mention of Psalm 119 (LXX Psalm 118), a long hymn concerning the law, might have been of interest in such a study as this.

Third, the major weakness of Bennema’s presentation lies in its implicit trinitarian and christological ideas. These are not affirmed explicitly, but they arise from the definition and understanding Bennema adopts for mimesis. Frankly, the problems in this are pervasive. I will refer to only one instance, but one repeated often. Generally put, Bennema’s notion of mimesis relates the Father and the Son/Jesus as *external* to each other, and the same *external* relation also of the believer and Jesus. Even when Bennema discusses “existential mimesis,” there is a constant slide from the “existential” to the “relational.” For example: “The expression ‘person A being “in” person B’ indicates closeness of relationship rather than that person A exists or resides physically in person B” (129; this is a discussion of John 17:21).³

The problem of externality becomes especially acute in Bennema’s discussion of John 5:19. The question is, how does mimesis between the Son and the Father occur? Here Bennema speaks of a “dualistic worldview” or “two spatial locations.” The Father resides in heaven, and so “this must be the place where he operates and shows everything to the Son.” But the Son is on the earth, so “how is Jesus on earth able to observe the Father’s actions and hear the Father’s words in heaven? The answer lies in the uniqueness of the incarnation.” Bennema mentions one possibility only to discard it as inferior: The one who came to earth and took on humanity is “in the unique position” to tell what he has seen and heard. “This could suggest that prior to his incarnation, the Father showed the blueprint of work to the Son, who subsequently carried it out on earth” (73). How such an understanding can possibly do justice to the trinitarian confession of the Nicene Creed, one cannot imagine. But the accepted solution is not good either: “Jesus on earth has a continuous access to heaven, so is in constant communication with his heavenly Father, and that this dynamic is realized by means of the Spirit” (75, also 76–77). Here Jesus is depicted as a visionary. What he is not, nor can be, is the eternal Word of God in *person*. As we noted above, Bennema’s definition of mimesis includes that which is cognitive

³ One sees in this quotation the ontological division Bennema is making between the physical and the spiritual. That division has been the christological “bugbear” for all “low” christologies and pervades Bennema’s whole argumentation.

and volitional. When such notions, understood in human terms, are applied to God, this is the result: “The Spirit would be expected to provide Jesus specifically with revelatory wisdom and knowledge to carry out his messianic ministry. This would include being informed about the Father’s work, which Jesus will then carry out on earth” (76). We have here an adoptionistic Christology in modern form that, in turn, renders trinitarian thinking into a mere heavenly classroom.

To his credit, Bennema seems aware that his talk of “participation” and “relation” is very imperfectly related. For further research, he mentions “the relationship between mimesis and theosis,” that is, how it is that believers “do not only imitate Jesus’ example but also his very being” (204). I hope that he undertakes the project. But if he does, he might wish to consider whether patristic reflection on the hypostatic oneness of the man Jesus with the divine Son, and, in turn, the essential and natural unity of the Son and the Father are not worthy of his study rather than Aristotle and modern psychologists. Might I suggest he start by reading the *Commentary on the Gospel of John* by Cyril of Alexandria.

William C. Weinrich

Honeycutt, Frank G. *Sunday Comes Every Week: Daily Habits for the Busy Preacher*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2019. 160 pages. Softcover. \$19.99.

This book was written primarily for recent seminary graduates who need to help their congregations understand the primary role of the pastor as the preacher of the word. Frank Honeycutt, a retired ELCA pastor with more than thirty years’ experience in different parish settings, wants the novice pastor, who tends to be extra-busy those first few years, to develop daily habits of sermon study and writing throughout the week in order to build a healthy pastoral identity and to educate the congregation concerning the pastor’s *raison d’être* (84). Because preaching can be difficult and exhausting work, which is never easy, Honeycutt helps the novice pastor to understand that there are no homiletical shortcuts in the preaching task. He states: “The truth is that a faithful preaching process shapes the entirety of one’s ministry for the long haul. The spiritual habits we develop throughout the week . . . ground us in the very disciplines that have nourished pastors in their callings for centuries” (85).

Not wanting his weekly homiletical task to seem too regimented or legalistic, Honeycutt believes that his process of writing a sermon, although it may not work for all pastors, will provide the necessary “habits” for those starting out. He considers the lectionary (for him the three-year cycle) a “tremendous gift” so that the novice preacher stays with large chunks of the Bible and learns to preach on the whole council of God and not on his own whims or desires. Even if the pastor has Monday

(dubbed the “Listening” day) off, he advises the novice pastor to choose the text he will preach on the following Sunday and to come up with a single sentence to describe the sermon’s aim. Too bad he didn’t suggest the Collect of the Day as the starting point. By starting this way, says Honeycutt, the text begins its “percolation and marination” through the week.

Tuesday is the “Hearing” day. The pastor needs to get out of the church building for regular prayer as he focuses on his chosen text. Getting away from the church building the author deems crucial as a “fresh perspective” and “creative realities” are sought. With no distractions and mind and spirit focused, with a few note cards, the pastor can begin to raise questions about the text. Here on Day 2, the pastor begins to discern the truth, tenor, and tone of the text. Honeycutt sees the real importance of involving his own parishioners in the writing task. From young to old, homebound and hospitalized, he feels his people should be included in the sermonizing process, making them feel included as he raises these questions.

Wednesday is “Exegeting” day. Honeycutt doesn’t want the preacher to rely upon commentaries too early in the week, but now they can be utilized, but sparingly. He likes to construct sermons more from the people he meets than the books he reads. He feels it very important that he preaches from an understanding from different viewpoints. In so doing, he regularly befriends skeptics, atheists, and agnostics and sees them as “helpful preaching allies.” Sadly, throughout the book, he makes no mention of consulting the original languages in the homiletical task.

Thursday is “Naming” day, where the pastor now distills all his notes and observations so that a tightly worded (twelve words or less) theme statement is developed. Friday is “Writing” day. Honeycutt strongly believes that the pastor should carve out an uninterrupted four-hour period for writing. He did this faithfully on Fridays for thirty-one years. A manuscript is still important as each word and phrase is tested and tried. By speaking to many throughout the week, he constructs his sermon with “artful and measured language,” always keeping the “outsider” in mind. He typically reads the draft aloud three times (with changes made during each oral reading) before setting it aside the next morning. Some time is spent on Saturday to rehearse and revise. Sunday is the “Offering” day where much advice is given on the delivery.

There is much jam-packed into this small book. I would recommend this book to seminarians and novice pastors. There are no shortcuts in sermon preparation and faithful listening. By faithfully preparing and delivering sermons, pastors are modeling faithful discipleship for the congregation, and, over time, helping them to “fall in love with God’s life-changing Word” (126).

Reviews Published Online at: www.ctsfw.edu/ctq/reviews

Senkbeil, Harold L. *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart*. Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2019. 312 pages. Hardcover. \$21.99. (Joel G. Koeppe).

Crisp, Oliver D. and Sanders, Fred. *The Christian Doctrine of Humanity*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018. 250 pages. Softcover. \$34.99. (Jonathan G. Lange).

Abernethy, Andrew T., ed. *Interpreting the Old Testament Theologically: Essays in Honor of Willem A. VanGemeren*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018. 352 pages. Hardcover. \$49.99. (Ryan M. Tietz).

Books Received

- Beale, G. K. *Redemptive Reversals: And the Ironic Overturning of Human Wisdom*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2019. 208 pages. Softcover. \$14.99.
- Beitzel, Barry J., editor. *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation*. Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2019. 792 pages. Hardcover. \$39.99.
- Boring, M. Eugene. *Hearing John's Voice: Insights for Teaching and Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2019. 288 pages. Softcover. \$29.99.
- Burr, David. *The Book of Revelation*. The Bible in Medieval Tradition. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2019. 424 pages. Softcover. \$65.00.
- Cadoré, Bruno. *With Him: Listening to the Underside of the World*. London: Bloomsbury, 2019. 224 pages. Softcover. \$18.00.
- Cole, Graham A. *Against the Darkness: The Doctrine of Angels, Satan, and Demons*. Foundations of Evangelical Theology. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2019. 272 pages. Hardcover. \$40.00.
- Henry, Carl F. H. *Basics of the Faith: An Evangelical Introduction to Christian Doctrine*. Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2019. 440 pages. Hardcover. \$20.99.
- Letham, Robert. *Systematic Theology*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2019. 1072 pages. Hardcover. \$50.00.
- Maier, Walter A. III. *1 Kings 12–22*. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019. 752 pages. Hardcover. \$59.99.
- Ortlund, Gavin. *Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals: Why We Need Our Past to Have a Future*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2019. 224 pages. Softcover. \$21.99.
- Salkeld, Brett. *Transubstantiation: Theology, History, and Christian Unity*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 288 pages. Softcover. \$29.99.
- Thomas, Derek W. H. and John W. Tweeddale, eds. *John Calvin: For a New Reformation*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2019. 608 pages. Hardcover. \$40.00.



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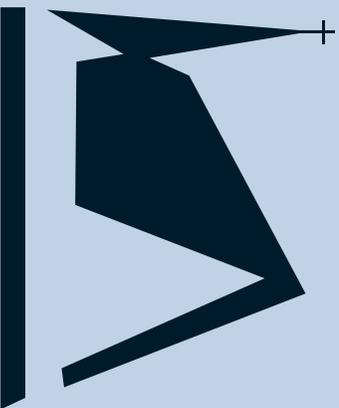
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