

LOGIA

A JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGY



JUSTIFICATION AFTER JDDJ

EASTERTIDE 2005

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εἴ τις λαλεῖ,
ὡς λόγια Θεοῦ

LOGIA is a journal of Lutheran theology. As such it publishes articles on exegetical, historical, systematic, and liturgical theology that promote the orthodox theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. We cling to God's divinely instituted marks of the church: the gospel, preached purely in all its articles, and the sacraments, administered according to Christ's institution. This name expresses what this journal wants to be. In Greek, ΛΟΓΙΑ functions either as an adjective meaning "eloquent," "learned," or "cultured," or as a plural noun meaning "divine revelations," "words," or "messages." The word is found in 1 Peter 4:11, Acts 7:38, and Romans 3:2. Its compound forms include ὁμολογία (confession), ἀπολογία (defense), and ἀναλογία (right relationship). Each of these concepts and all of them together express the purpose and method of this journal. LOGIA considers itself a *free conference in print* and is committed to providing an independent theological forum normed by the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. At the heart of our journal we want our readers to find a love for the sacred Scriptures as the very Word of God, not merely as rule and norm, but especially as Spirit, truth, and life which reveals Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life — Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore, we confess the church, without apology and without rancor, only with a sincere and fervent love for the precious Bride of Christ, the holy Christian church, "the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God," as Martin Luther says in the Large Catechism (LC II, 42). We are animated by the conviction that the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession represents the true expression of the church which we confess as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

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THE COVER ART is from *Passional Christi und Antichristi* (1521) and depicts the pope demanding servitude from the Emperor. Based on Luther's anti-papal polemic expressed in his three major Reformation writings of 1520, the *Passional* compares the true Passion of Christ with the mocked passion of the antichrist, which is no passion at all. Thirteen pairs of woodcuts show Christ's suffering while the pope receives all kinds of good things. For example, Christ is shown washing the disciples' feet, while the pope receives homage from rulers at his feet; Christ cleanses the temple, while the pope sells indulgences; Christ is counted among the poor, while the antichrist seeks worldly pleasure.

The series was completed by Lucas Cranach the Elder in his workshop, and was originally published by Johannes Rhau-Grunenberg in Wittenberg. It later went through other editions and reprints in Latin, French and the Low German dialect.

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FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

AC [CA]	Augsburg Confession
AE	<i>Luther's Works</i> , American Edition
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
Ep	Epitome of the Formula of Concord
FC	Formula of Concord
LC	Large Catechism
LW	<i>Lutheran Worship</i>
SA	Smalcald Articles
SBH	<i>Service Book and Hymnal</i>
SC	Small Catechism
SD	Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord
SL	St. Louis Edition of Luther's Works
Tappert	<i>The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church</i> . Trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert
Triglotta	Concordia Triglotta
TLH	<i>The Lutheran Hymnal</i>
Tr	Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
WA	<i>Luthers Werke</i> , Weimarer Ausgabe [Weimar Edition]
Kolb-Wengert	Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., <i>The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church</i> (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

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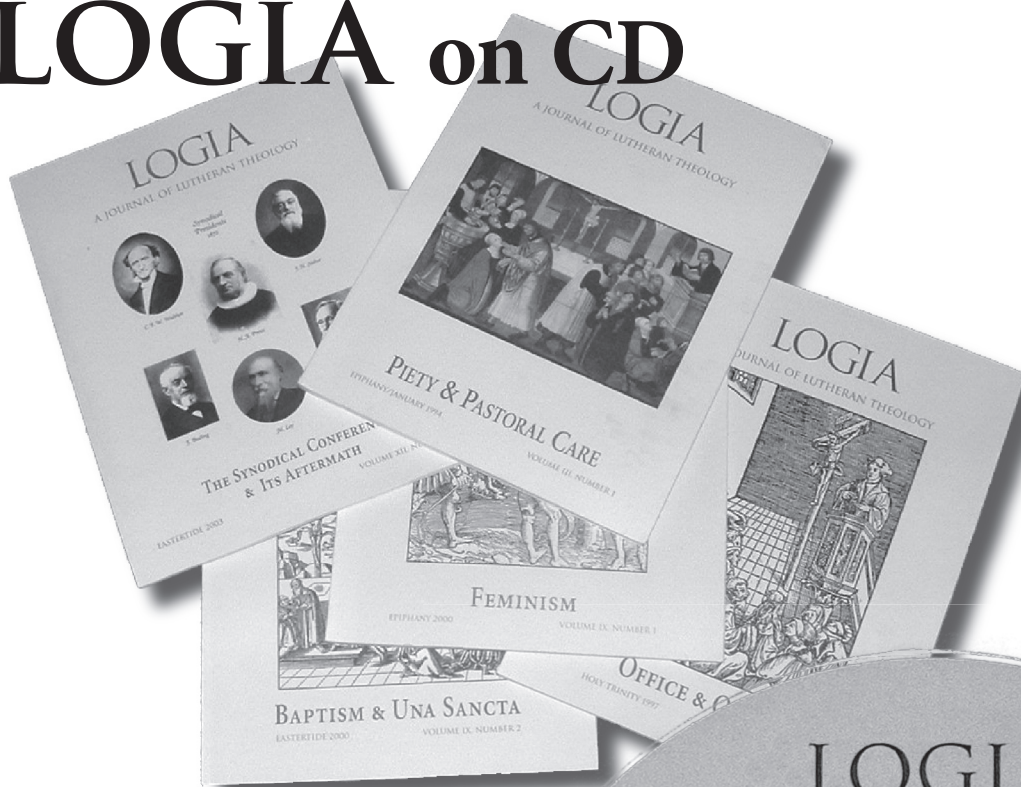
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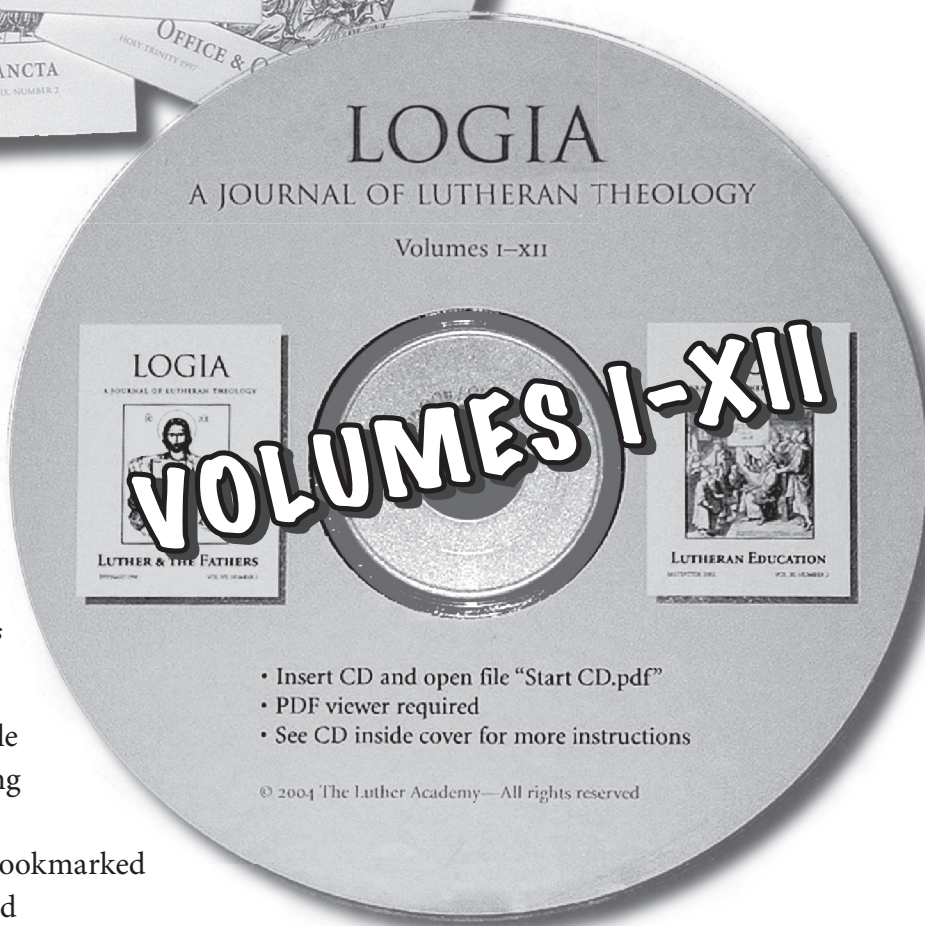
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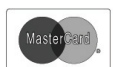
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Justification and Holy Scripture

Sola fide et sola Scriptura

ARMIN WENZ



IT HAS BEEN OFTEN EMPHASIZED—with different motivations—that there is no article *De sacra scriptura* in the Lutheran Confessions. Even the Formula of Concord with its statement that Scripture is the sole judge of all doctrine (FC SD RN, 3) does not really fill this apparent gap. It only expresses explicitly the unanimous presupposition which is shared by all Lutheran confessions. This explicit hint of the Formula of Concord reveals, however, that when we approach the Scriptures we are drawn into the same situation as the one who is being justified. In hearing the Scriptures we experience God's eternal judgment.

When the confessors of Augsburg expounded the teachings of the preachers in Lutheran territories, they did so not only before the earthly authorities who asked them to account for their doctrine, but they did so first and foremost before Christ's judgment seat. "[Christ] will one day judge these controversies," writes Melancthon in the preface of his Apology (Ap Pref, 19; cf. SA Pref, 9).¹ The utter seriousness of this situation also becomes apparent when the confessors showed that they were only able to expound the doctrines which are necessary for salvation by sending prayers from the bottom of their hearts to heaven. Remaining faithful to the divine truth that they had discovered was not seen by these theologians as something they were able to accomplish by their own virtues, but as something that can only be asked for and received from God himself.²

The only reason why the confessors could stand such perils of confession was their certainty of salvation based on the authority and clarity of Holy Scripture alone. Their intention was to expound the preaching and teaching of the Lutheran pastors as it was actually taking place in their territories on the basis of the divine and holy Scriptures (Latin, *ex scripturis sanctis et puro verbo Dei*; AC Pref, 8). Their confession is, at the same time, their submission to the writings of the Old and New Testaments by which they want their preaching and teaching to be either verified or falsified.

When we look at what the confessions say about Holy Writ and what they say about justification, there is one common as-

pect that cannot be overlooked: God's judgment. For the confessions, the authority of Scripture is identical with the authority of the triune and justifying God.³ Justification in all its aspects is the answer to the question: "In what sense is Holy Scripture the sole judge of all doctrine and faith in the church?"

It comes as a surprise, then, that the Confessions get along without an article *De scriptura sacra*, because what the Confessions say about Holy Writ, they say when they arrive at the heart of theology, that is, at the doctrine of justification. Consequently the most explicit and thorough expositions on the nature of Holy Scripture can be found in the articles on justification and confession. If a proof is still needed for the inseparable connection between the so-called "formal and material principles"⁴ of Scripture and justification, it may be seen by the fact that the most important hermeneutical passages in the Lutheran confessions are found in Melancthon's article on justification in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Ap IV) and in Luther's Article about confession in the Third Part of the Smalcald Articles (SA III, viii). All important distinctions which are fundamental for a Lutheran hermeneutic and doctrine of the Scriptures are expounded in these parts of the confessions, where justification is the issue. These distinctions are law and gospel; Old and New Testament; spirit and letter; and Scripture and tradition. If it is true that the principles of *sola scriptura* and *sola fide* are inseparably connected, the essential aspects of justification must be reflected in these distinctions concerning Holy Scripture.

THEOLOGICAL DISTINCTIONS concerning Holy Scripture according to the Lutheran Confessions

Law and Gospel

All Scripture ought to be distributed into these two principal topics, the law and the promises. For in some places it presents the law, and in others the promise concerning Christ, namely, either when [in the Old Testament] it promises that Christ will come, and offers, for His sake, the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal, or when, in the Gospel [the New Testament], Christ Himself, since He has appeared, promises the remission of sins, justification, and life eternal. (Ap IV, 5)

Reading through Article IV of the Apology, or Articles V and VI of the Formula of Concord, one realizes that the distinction

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of law and gospel is not a timebound late medieval concept or hermeneutical method, but nothing less than a summary description of what is happening throughout the Scriptures and what happens through the Scriptures when God's word hits human beings: *mortificatio et vivificatio* (killed and resurrected). Man is being killed through God's law, which renders him responsible for his guilt before God. And man—only after having been killed—is made alive through the gospel,⁵ which is the remission of sins, that is, the justification of the godless sinner for Christ's sake and by faith alone. What the confessors do when they expound the doctrine of justification is nothing less than the continuation of this divine work in the present time. *Unversa Scriptura* kills and makes alive. This is what justification is all about.

The distinction of law and gospel is not a timebound late medieval concept or hermeneutical method.

Fabula de te narratur (the story is about you). That is the efficacy of holy Scripture through God's law and God's gospel. Here we realize that it is not us who understand, explain, or even transform Scripture, but it is Scripture which understands, explains, and transforms us. As Luther put it: *nota, quod Scripturae virtus est haec, quod non mutatur in eum, qui eam studet, sed transmutat suum amatorem in sese ac suas virtutes* (Note, that in the Scriptures virtue is this: it is not changed into the one who studies it, but it changes the one who loves it according to itself and its virtues). Luther also writes: "Holy Writ is the subject of the church's interpretation and thereby of myself."⁶ This is because the Holy Spirit creates faith and the church through the Scripture.

Scripture does not say, "God kills someone and he makes someone alive." But it says, "God kills Adam and together with Adam and all mankind he kills you and me. Since God's law and curse killed Christ in our stead, and because Christ was raised by the power of God's Spirit, the triune God will make you alive together with Christ through his saving word and sacraments." He does so once and for all through baptism; he does so continually also in the Christian church through the preaching of the gospel—which is governed by the distinction of law and gospel—and through the sacraments, through absolution and holy communion. God does this as long as the new man in Christ still must relate to and struggle with the old man.

The Old and New Testament⁷

According to the Confessions the distinction between Old and New Testament is not identical with the distinction between law and gospel, but the complex relationship of the two

testaments is shaped by this distinction between law and gospel. In other words, Christ, the savior of mankind, binds the salvation of the heathen in his gospel to the revelatory book of a foreign people. He is that savior for mankind only as the fulfillment of the writings of God's testament for Israel. The heathen people need to acknowledge that their salvation does not originate in their native religiosity but in God's revelation to Israel. These foreign writings receive their universal relevance in the life and proclamation of Christ. The Son of God is not only the true exegete of the Father (Jn 1:18), but as the Messiah he is also the only true exegete of the Scriptures of the Old Testament (Lk 24:27, 45; Jn 5:39). Christ is at the same time the goal and end of the mosaic law and the fulfillment of the prophetic promises.

In the light of Christ two ways of reading the Old Testament struggle with each other, a struggle which is most relevant for justification. One way of reading the Scriptures or listening to God's word is that of works-righteousness. Here the Lutheran confessors see themselves fighting the same struggle as the prophets in the Old Testament and as Christ against the scribes and pharisees. The atoning sacrifice of Christ reveals the prefigurative ing of the ceremonial law of Moses, including the role of the priesthood and the sacrifices, as well as the condemning character of the moral law in the decalog. Only Christ is the fulfillment of the law and the promises; only he brings the curse of the law to an end. Only he institutes sacraments which are no longer merely figurative, but which are effective and performative, granting Christ's righteousness, the Father's forgiveness, and the Spirit's holiness to godless sinners. Christ therefore makes an end to all ways of reading Scripture that sees it as a kind of handbook that gives mankind rules guiding them to a better life. In Article IV of the Apology Melancthon writes: "Our eyes are to be cast far away from human reason, far away from Moses upon Christ, and we are to believe that Christ is given us, in order that for His sake we may be accounted righteous" (Ap IV, 296/175).⁸

The way Christ binds his church to the Old Testament has a threefold relevance for justification. First, every man has to learn that it is a foreign, external word which judges and justifies him, not a word he can know or tell himself by his own virtues or abilities. Second, for the sake of the salvation of both Jews and heathen, this external word given in the Old Testament must be understood and preached in the light of Christ. Every approach to the Bible—both the Old and New Testament—which emancipates itself from the christological approach would be nothing less than a relapse into a humanist, rationalist, or works-righteous approach. Scripture would then be no longer the record of the Gospel promise, but rather a book supplying the theory for man's efforts to improve himself and the world. Scripture would then no longer reveal man as God's enemy who has to surrender before God, but would be only an appeal to man's good morals. This would be the kind of moral "revelation" we find in the Quran or in the Communist Manifesto.

Third and finally, the Old Testament is not only what some have called the "monotheistic conscience of the church." It also is a reminder that the gospel of Christ is not proclaimed in a way that ignores the creational conditions of human life. Our

sin which is revealed through God's law and which is forgiven through the gospel is no mere abstraction, but it is something which is concrete in our daily life in the orders of creation.⁹ This can be seen in the Old Testament narratives, for example, of Abraham or David. The new obedience which flows from justifying faith does not take place in a vacuum, but in the concrete relationships to which God the Creator has called us and which he himself guards and protects in the Decalog.

Spirit and Letter

After discussing the gospel, baptism, communion, and the office of the keys in the Smalcald Articles, Luther reiterates that these are the basic means through which justifying faith is created, according to Article v of the Augsburg Confession. He does so by repeating the anti-Enthusiast decision of this very same fifth article, which Oswald Bayer rightly calls the most important article of the Augsburg Confession.¹⁰ Luther's steadfast emphasis, over against the Enthusiasts, is on the external word which precedes both faith and the indwelling of the Spirit:

And in those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word, in order that we may [thus] be protected against the enthusiasts, i.e., spirits who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word, and accordingly judge Scripture or the spoken Word, and explain and stretch it at their pleasure, as Muenzer did, and many still do at the present day, who wish to be acute judges between the Spirit and the letter, and yet know not what they say or declare. (SA III, VII, 3).

It is therefore true that for Luther the spoken word, that is, the orally proclaimed gospel, is the very foundation of faith and the church, if this spoken word is the "preaching of the scriptures" (SA III, VII, 6), that is, if the Scriptures are the source and even the "acting subject" of the oral proclamation. There is therefore a clear criteriological association between Scripture and the spoken word. Scripture is the sole source and rule of the church's proclamation of the gospel. The inseparable connection and identity between God's Spirit and the letter of Holy Writ is not accidental, something which only happens from time to time. This identity is preliminary to faith and not a result of faith.

This latter point has to be emphasized against a very common Barthian misunderstanding of Augsburg Confession v which, unfortunately, has become very dominant even among Lutheran theologians.¹¹ Neither man's practical nor his theoretical reason is in a position to judge God's written or spoken word. The proclamation of the Scriptures brings about both faith and unbelief in those who listen. This is the mysterious work of the Spirit, who creates faith where and when God wants in those who hear the gospel (AC v).

The close and inseparable connection of Articles IV and v of the Augsburg Confession, as well as Luther's anti-Enthusiast excursus in his article on confession in the Smalcald Articles,

show that the doctrine of "justification by faith alone" indeed has immediate hermeneutical consequences. The necessity of dismissing works-righteousness for the sake of the purity of the gospel is one side of the coin. The necessity of dismissing Enthusiasm as defined by the Confessors is the other side of the same coin. Even the believer cannot claim that because he has the Spirit he can judge between the Spirit and the letter. This claim would put the subjectivity of the faithful in the place of the external word of Scripture. This is true whether the basis of this claim is the self-conscience of the believer, as in radical Pietism, or the alleged rationality of the believer, as in Enlightenment-theology.

Justification can only be kept free from all disastrous human interference if we acknowledge the divine gifts and the effective means of Holy Scripture and the sacraments.

Let me conclude this part by pointing to some remarks which Luther makes in his Large Catechism, interestingly enough in the parts on baptism and the Lord's Supper. These remarks belong to the important anti-Enthusiast parts of the Confessions. Concerning the forgiveness of sins, Luther asks:

For what would we otherwise know about it, that such a thing was accomplished or was to be given us if it were not presented by preaching or the oral Word? Whence do they know of it, or how can they apprehend and appropriate to themselves the forgiveness, except they lay hold of and believe the Scriptures and the Gospel?" (LC v, 31)

This presupposes the validity not only of the sentence: "But whoever does not believe it has nothing" (LC v, 35), but also of the sentence, "that faith must have something which it believes, that is, of which it takes hold, and upon which it stands and rests" (LC IV, 29).

Thus justification can only be kept free from all disastrous human interference if we acknowledge the divine gifts and the effective means of Holy Scripture and the sacraments. Even here, in the relation between the Scriptures and the sacraments, there is a priority. Scripture alone tells us how God wants us to receive his saving grace in the sacraments. The certainty of our salvation in Christ therefore is bound to the clarity and efficacy of the written word of God.

Scripture and Tradition

Justification is God's effective work for man's salvation through law and gospel. Whenever God's word becomes audible

or visible for mankind, a thoroughgoing and manifold conflict is the consequence. It is a conflict between law and gospel, but also between man's practical and theoretical reason and God's word. This conflict takes place in the existence of every believer as a conflict between the old and the new man. This conflict has an ecclesial dimension. It is the conflict between church and pseudo-church (Latin: *vera ecclesia—falsa ecclesia*). It is a conflict between Christ and anti-Christian human inventions, that is, inventions that make Christ's or the Spirit's work at least partially superfluous. This is the context for the twofold relation between Scripture and tradition that again is to be seen in analogy to an important relation concerning justification, the relation between faith and works.

Justification and Scripture are two aspects of the judging and saving work of the triune God.

The first relation between Scripture and tradition can be termed as the critical-destructive relation. This is the case when tradition takes a form that is contrary to the message of Scripture, even if this is meant to be a supplement for the apparent deficits of the biblical message. It is true that the Lutheran Confessions take a very critical, even destructive, approach over against human traditions. But they do so not for the sake of opposition but for the sake of the purity of the gospel. Only traditions that obscure the *doctrina de gratia et iustitia fidei* (the doctrine of grace and justification by faith), that obscure the *praecepta Dei* (the teachings of God), and that lead Christian consciences into despair are criticized and removed.¹² What is at stake here for Lutheran theologians is nothing less than the certainty of salvation, as well as the certainty of God-pleasing sanctification in the works which have God's commands. Such truly pious works stand in contrast to those works which good-willing pharisaic humans have invented in order to enhance their piety autonomously. In this respect, one can say that the conflict between Scripture and tradition is identical with the conflict between God's gospel and law-based human righteousness, between the imputation of the external righteousness of Christ and the zeal of religious man to pass God's judgment by his own righteousness.

Practically this conflict is taken on by the Reformers, when they reduce the flood of human thoughts and works in the church to what is ordered by God himself in the Scriptures. This conflict has two further aspects in the Lutheran Confessions. It plays a prominent role in the conflict between true and false understanding of the Bible, as well as in pastoral care of the tempted souls.¹³ In both cases man has to be drawn away from his misconceptions, or false preconceptions about God and salvation, and he has to be confronted with God's law and

God's gospel in their biblical, christological clarity. He has to be drawn away from his works-righteousness to the pure gospel of Christ.

The second relation between Scripture and tradition is what I call the "critical-sanative" relation. This is with analogy to the Formula of Concord's thesis, *sola fides (iustificat), et tamen nunquam est sola* (faith alone justifies, but it is never alone; FC SD III, 41). Even though Scripture is the sole basis of faith and of the church it does not stay alone, but ignites the church's and the believer's response in their confession. This confessional response makes the difference between the *ecclesia vera* (true church) and the *ecclesia falsa* (false church).¹⁴ This is one aspect that separates the Lutheran view from the fundamentalistic and the neoprotestant understanding. It is an expression of the fact that Christ's person and saving work, the justification of the sinner for Christ's sake, is the key to Scripture.

Therefore only faithfulness to the Scriptures, that is, apostolicity of doctrine, can guarantee the catholicity of the church. Scripture creates what someone has called a permanence of truth¹⁵ throughout the ages. As faith is not hostile towards works but is rather "critical" in both senses of the word, so is the relation of Scripture and tradition. Concerning justification, Scripture alone tells us the theological and historical context of this act of the Holy Spirit in the Bible story. The story starts in creation, then continues to the fall, the election and judgment of Israel, the incarnation of the Son of God, his death and resurrection, the Spirit's sending, even unto Christ's second coming for the last judgment.¹⁶ It is Scripture alone which authentically hands down to all generations the *mandata et promissiones* (the commandments and the promises of Christ). These are the words to which the Spirit has bound himself for his saving work: the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Scripture alone, when preached and confessed publicly, brings forth the saving faith in Christ and the community of saints, justified sinners, in all generations. We could as well exchange Scripture with the Holy Spirit in all these sentences. *Sola scriptura* grammatically is an *ablativus instrumentalis*, meaning that the triune God brings about our salvation through the writings of his called and inspired prophets and apostles. Everything which is necessary for our salvation we find in the Scriptures *and* we receive through the Scriptures.

Conclusion: Scripture as Canon and Sacrament

If it is true that justification is not one Christian doctrine among many, but that it represents the totality of the Christian faith and of theology, the very close relationships between justification and Scripture are no longer a surprise. Justification and Scripture are two aspects of the judging and saving work of the triune God. In the light of the distinctions we have discussed, the Scripture, for the sake of the purity of the gospel and the reliability of our salvation, must be seen as both *canon and sacrament*, as both *authority* (*auctoritas scripturae*) and *effective means of grace* (*efficacia scripturae*), as both *inerrant divine truth and infallible divine power*.

Holy Writ is uniquely competent in questions concerning God and our salvation because of its *christological contents*,

proclaimed by those true prophets and apostles which were called by God himself; and it is a uniquely performative message because of its *pneumatological power*¹⁷ since the written proclamation of the apostles cannot be separated from the Spirit's work. The Holy Scriptures therefore are nothing less than the ongoing pentecost-miracle, as Martin Kähler once wrote.¹⁸ In a world where many voices become audible, where truth and error form an inseparable mish-mash, God's highest gift to mankind is the sure foundation which the Spirit has laid for us in the unchanging writings of the prophets and the apostles. It is God himself who verifies and falsifies our theology, who destroys our errors and establishes our faith and theology, through the infallible word of the Scriptures.

THE CHANGE OF PARADIGMS IN MODERN LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

Today the insights of Luther and the Lutheran confessions about the authority and power of Scripture are challenged by two movements. These movements are in many respects closely related to each other. The first challenge comes from Lutheran theologians who are engaged in the ecumenical dialogue especially with Rome. The second and even more powerful challenge comes from Lutheran theologians who, in their engagement with the "contextualization of the gospel," call for a change of paradigms in Lutheran theology.

The Challenge through the New Consensus with Rome

In recent years, a number of joint statements of Lutheran and Roman-Catholic theologians, both in the United States and in Germany, have appeared on justification as well as on the authority of Scripture. Here again we discover a close analogy between justification and Scripture. The very same theologians who had been the driving forces behind the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, adopted in 1999, have achieved and published a far-reaching consensus also on the question of scriptural authority which is planned to be their next step!

On justification, the consensus was reached by understanding the apparently opposed positions of the past as complementary aspects of a higher truth common to both parties. In this way, each side could discover positive, or even correcting, aspects in statements of the other side. This method of interpreting former contradictions as complementary aspects (German: *Komplementärmethode*) turned out to determine even the contents of justification. One can summarize this by saying that through this method the inherent logic of the Roman-Catholic understanding of "justification as a process" could survive.¹⁹

However, the fate of the Lutheran dialectic of law and gospel was quite different. What used to be totally opposed acts of God turned into a smooth development. Instead of being killed and being made alive, "justification" according to the *Joint Declaration* now means a step-by-step improvement of the human condition. The relation of *fides et promissio* (faith and promise) as the critical principle of justification has been integrated into, and finally superseded by, a continuous justifying process in which certainty of salvation cannot really be reached. This means that the *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura* principles of the Reformation have also been absorbed, dissolved, and superseded.

The *Joint Declaration's* description of this justifying process, as having a human and a divine side which are inseparably connected, has its parallel in the traditioning process of the church. This is the concept about which consensus has been reached in the joint dialogue about "Scripture and tradition." By claiming that the Lutheran *sola Scriptura* principle and the Roman principle of tradition are two complementary aspects, and thus comprise both the written and oral traditions of the church, the Lutheran principle is again removed! From the perspective of the theologians in dialogue, however, the Lutheran principle is transformed on a hermeneutically responsible level, because Protestant theology since the Enlightenment has claimed to have discovered that, historically-speaking, no distinction can be made between the Scriptures and their preceding and succeeding traditions.

On justification, the consensus was reached by understanding the apparently opposed positions of the past as complementary aspects of a higher truth common to both parties.

Reinhard Slenczka writes concerning the German statement *Lehrverurteilungen—kirchentrennend?*, which has become one of the most prominent steps on the way to the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*:

The concept of the history of tradition plays a decisive role in this joint statement, which helps to overcome the previous difference between the scriptural principle and the principle of tradition.²⁰

The theological faculty of Göttingen in an enlightened moment some years ago was courageous enough to make the otherwise almost unheard claim in their judgment of this same statement:

If everything is tradition, nothing which has been passed on to us can be criticized. . . . The claim of the Reformation that such criticism indeed might be necessary under certain circumstances also is integrated in the process of tradition and thereby denied. The highest judge in matters of faith then will be the actual manifestations of the church's life in the course of history.²¹

The partners in the dialogues were not irritated by this criticism. The solution for the problem of subjectivism has been an even farther-reaching convergence in the Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue on the controversial questions of Scripture

and tradition. Since the traditioning process has not only preceded, but also followed the Holy Scriptures in time, there is according to the consensus-theologians a continuing dialogue necessary between theological science—especially the exegetical theologians—and the ecclesial teaching office which should somehow represent, or at least take into account, the whole history of the church's living tradition. In German this is called the *Wirkungsgeschichte* [ed. *pace* Hans-Georg Gadamer]. It is no surprise that in this way the submission to the papacy, as the ruling head of the church, is no longer beyond imagination for some Lutherans, as long as the pope does not forget that all tradition has to be accepted by the church. If the pope is willing to listen to the *sensus fidelium* (the consciousness of the faithful), the papacy finally appears to be gentle enough for these democracy-minded Protestants.

Postmodern Lutheran constructivism starts out from the presupposition that it is impossible for the traditional Lutheran theology to face the challenges of proclaiming the gospel in a globalised and pluralistic world.

A thorough investigation of these joint statements²² shows, however, that almost none of the indispensable distinctions of the Reformation concerning the Scriptures survive this kind of convergence unharmed. The correlation of law and gospel turns into a timebound Lutheran concept and thus is irrelevant for today. The sufficiency of Scripture is only taken in a quantitative sense and does not extend also to the efficacy of Scripture.²³ The inseparable connection between the Spirit and the letter is suspended. Thus, as Reinhard Slenczka points out, Scripture becomes in the joint statements a mere “gnoseological principle.”²⁴ Scripture thus conceived is not active and creative in and of itself, but it presents mere signs that point us to realities far beyond the written words. With Oswald Bayer, we might call this the “signification-hermeneutical approach.”²⁵

In these joint statements, the understanding of the Scriptures, as well as of faith, becomes a complementary process in which God and man work together for the better. The canonicity of the Scriptures here can only mean that they are the *starting point* of all theological reflection. They have some dignity because of their historical priority. But Scriptures, in this view, are neither the *sole judge* of all doctrine nor the *effective sacrament* which create faith, and which constitute and reveal the difference between faith and unbelief. Thus the Roman-Catholic promise that the pope will utter nothing without asking the church is *no consolation at all*. Luther in the Smalcald Articles

already realized that what the Pope proclaims, he proclaims together with, and not without, his church.²⁶ The partners in dialogue have not really escaped what Luther saw as the omnipresent trap of enthusiasm!

The Change of Paradigms in Postmodern Lutheran Constructivism

Postmodern Lutheran constructivism starts out from the presupposition that it is impossible for the traditional Lutheran theology to face the challenges of proclaiming the gospel in a globalised and pluralistic world,²⁷ because this same traditional Lutheran theology is the result of a timebound contextualization, dependent on the assumptions of the post-Constantine age.²⁸ Only if Luther's theology is deconstructed can the gospel be freed from all time-bound constraints and thus be reconstructed or contextualized for people of our times.²⁹

A prominent example of this is Volker Stolle's recent book *Luther und Paulus*. Stolle combines the classical historical-critical approach, which presupposes the concept of the “history of tradition,” with the linguistic-intertextual approach, also known as rhetorical criticism or reader-response criticism. As the theologians in dialogue with Rome turn the method of the history of tradition into a dogmatic principle, so Stolle does the same with the helpful method of intertextuality. For Stolle not only describes interdependencies and contrasts between the biblical texts and the texts of later exegetes throughout the ages. This could still be done on the basis of the *sola Scriptura* principle. Just as the canonical principle in the dialogue with Rome is extended to cover also the post-apostolic tradition of the church, so also in Stolle's approach the canonical principle is extended to the never-ending process of communication and growth of texts. This is known as “intertextuality,” that is, the correspondence between the authoritative but still variable biblical texts and their ever-changing groups of readers.³⁰

“Intertextuality” in Stolle thus takes the place of the “history of tradition” in the Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue. They are both a new canonical principle: open, variable and multi-perspective. The efficacy of the message and its relevance is something the reader has to take care of by constituting new texts, and that he can do only in a very timebound manner as Luther did for his age.³¹ For the age of globalization, this means that we have to bring the pluralism of the different biblical witnesses into an open dialogue with the pluralism of ideas and religions in our age. Accompanying this demand is the renunciation of the perennial nature of dogmatic assertions.

We see a similar transformation of Lutheran theology in Stolle as we saw in the dialogue with Rome. The distinction of Scripture and tradition is explicitly dismissed as impossible.³² The distinction of law and gospel is not seen as something which is happening throughout and through the Scriptures, but as a time-bound principle which Luther invented as a result of his personal biography and his medieval penitentiary thinking.³³ This, of course, has enormous consequences for the understanding of what justification is all about. According to Stolle, it is not so much about “forgiveness of sin,” an event which takes place in the context of the last judgment, but it is rather about the new resurrection and life in the Spirit. Stolle explicitly denies the

principle of *simul iustus et peccator* (simultaneously righteous and sinner). He argues against the understanding of justification as a forensic event.³⁴ At the same time, Stolle directs his polemics against the anti-Enthusiast decisions of the Reformation. “Harsh” is a mild word to describe his criticism of the Lutheran Confessions’ view of the close relation between the Spirit, word, and the sacraments.³⁵ Here again disregard for the efficacy of the Scriptures through law and gospel inevitably leads to disregard for the means of grace. The high esteem that Luther—or a modern scholar like Albrecht Peters—could show for confession or absolution, according to Stolle, is not appropriate to St. Paul’s message, but is due to their own personal experience.

If one considers Stolle’s arguments in the light of Scripture as canon and sacrament, one arrives at this conclusion: that there is an inverse relationship between the importance of Scripture and the importance of the interpreter. Where the Scripture is considered less effective and relevant—and the interpreter less sinful—the more important and relevant becomes the word of the modern de-constructing and re-constructing interpreter. The result is the same as in the Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue. If the word cannot do it, the teaching office has to take care of the word’s efficacy and relevance. There it is the papal magisterium; here it is the magisterium of the historical-critical or intertextual interpreter. The result in both cases is a donatistic elite, “which in charismatic self-guidance emancipates itself from the average people and does not allow [itself] to be verified or falsified according to any dogmatical basis.”³⁶

Summary: The New Paradigms as Surrogates for Scripture

If God through law and gospel kills, and then makes alive what he has killed, there is at least one continuity in the new Lutheran theology of changed paradigms. The one who deconstructs will always try to reconstruct. This shows very clearly that the change of paradigms really is a change of subjects. What used to be God’s prominent work through the Scriptures now becomes the prominent work of the theologian or of the church. Not the message, word, or text changes and transforms the reader, but the reader transforms the text and constitutes new and more relevant ones. At the same time, Scripture is no longer the ruling subject, but merely an object in the hands of the Spirit-guided interpreter. Therefore even though there are differences between the two approaches examined above, close parallels concerning the authority of Scripture cannot be overlooked.

First, the canonical principle is maintained terminologically, but at the same time it is broadened, not only comprising the canonical texts as such, but also the traditioning process of the church here (Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues) or the process of intertextuality there (Stolle). One might ask why the Fathers of the Early Church established the biblical canon in the first place.³⁷ Gnostics and other heretics claimed divine authority for their books, or even for their de-constructed and re-constructed bibles (like Marcion), attempts which all could be justified today as results of processes of tradition or intertextuality.

Second, if you suspend the efficacy and self-interpreting power of the Scriptures, gnoseological problems then become the prime concern. How can modern interpreters and preachers make the message understandable, plausible, evident, bear-

able for modern man? If the efficacy of Scripture through law and gospel has been terminated, it is up to us to transform the biblical text into a human practice or human response. The vital concern of justification then is no longer the forgiveness of sins, but the opening up of new horizons in global society.³⁸ In the ecumenical dialogues, the unity of the church is no longer expected from the word and the sacraments in their authenticity and purity (AC VII), but the issue is about horizons in the dialogues of the theologians, who lovingly prove that they want to understand each other and who refuse to make any condemnations. The only condemnations that remain are targeted at those who still think that the exclusivity of faith and Christ is a prominent mark of the saving gospel.

What used to be God’s prominent work through the Scriptures now becomes the prominent work of the theologian or of the church.

Third, the christological clarity and unanimity of the Scriptures, of both testaments, is replaced by a basic hermeneutical pluralism, ascribing the same right to many ways of understanding the Scriptures—with or without Christ! This leads to an explicit renunciation of exclusive dogmatic statements, or leads to dogmatic statements which have no basis in the Scriptures, but in the personal experience of the pious and good-willing interpreter. In both cases, the presupposition is the same. If the message of the text is ambiguous or variable in principle, then we need an authoritative institution which tells us the actual or practical relevance. Either we resort to a professional interpreter whose authority is somehow evident, or we resort to the *sensus fidelium* (the consciousness of the faithful) or the *vox populi* (voice of the people) to open up horizons for everybody. The difference between these two choices is not really important, for on both sides, the certainty of salvation no longer plays a prominent role. The aim is either a visible all-inclusive unity of the church in this world, or to enable the church to make more profitable contributions for the evolution of mankind in the age of globalization. In both cases, the last judgment is no longer seen as the primary context for understanding either justification or Scriptural authority and efficacy.

One has to counter these “changes of paradigms” with the claim that Lutheran theology, as expounded by Luther and the Lutheran Confessions, does not need to be afraid of the reproach that, because of her intolerant exclusiveness as represented in the *sola Scriptura* principle, she has an inimical attitude over against tradition (which includes intertextuality) or over against good works. The *sola Scriptura* and the *sola fide* are not *hostile* over against tradition and good works, but they are *critical*. From the viewpoint of the Reformation, everything

depends on how the multiple relations of “Scripture and tradition,” “faith and works,” “Christ and the church” are determined. The *sola Scriptura* principle is derived from the insight discovered in the Scriptures, that there are false traditions, false works, and false exegeses of the Scriptures from the beginning of the church. To cut off tradition or to preach against good works *per se* has never been a serious option for the Lutheran Reformation. But the question has been and still is: How can we discern true and false doctrine, true and false tradition, true and false works?

The sola Scriptura therefore is a necessity, as long as we need Christ’s Spirit, who promises to create our faith and build the church through these very same means that Christ has instituted for us.

For this reason the *sola Scriptura*, that is, the distinction of Scripture between tradition, is a logical and theological necessity for the sake of the purity of the gospel and for the certainty of salvation for those who put their trust not on their works, or their own ability to understand the Scriptures, but on Christ and His Spirit alone and thereby on his instituted sacraments, including the Scriptures. The *sola Scriptura* therefore is a necessity, as long as we need Christ’s Spirit, who promises to create our faith and build the church through these very same means that Christ has instituted for us. It is a necessity as long as we still live in the church militant.

EPILOGUE—FOREIGN WITNESSES

If the very foundations of Lutheran theology are challenged from within the European and American Lutheran Churches, it might be permitted to give heed to two voices from outside those domains. Here are voices from abroad, and from a member of a non-Lutheran denomination, which nevertheless exhort us not to lose hope and give up the Lutheran church. They say that she still has excellent contributions to make, even to our world of globalization and ecumenical contacts. Sometimes foreign observers have a much sharper view of the needs of our churches, or rather, they may have a higher esteem of the treasures of Lutheran theology than those who take it for granted, or who are somewhat saturated and indifferent.

Swiss Reformed theologian and pastor, Bernhard Rothen, at a theological consultation on “Justification and Responsibility for the World” thirteen years ago at Neuendettelsau reminded the assembled Lutheran theologians of an insight which is most relevant for our hermeneutics. Rothen pointed to the fact that in the Augsburg Confession the second topic after the Trini-

tarian article is about original sin. He also noted that in the Formula of Concord the second topic after the proclamation of the *sola Scriptura* again is about original sin. Rothen made the fitting comment:

Where in modern theological literature the hermeneutical problem is abundantly expounded, the Lutheran Confessions on the one hand with astonishing brevity talk about the central (Trinitarian) dogma . . . and on the other hand they confess the sole means of theological understanding. Each time this positive statement is followed by naming what endangers or even disables our understanding: original sin. Instead of stabilizing and justifying their confession with the help of a positive relation to the world, the difference to the world is emphasized and the confession is put into polemical relation to experience of life. Thus justification of the sinner is not only named as some external contents, but it is presupposed in form and method: the right of the (biblical) text lies *extra nos* [outside of us], totally in the word of Scripture, and its use and efficacy remains totally dependent on the faithfulness of the one who has given this word.³⁹

This observation is in accordance with the hermeneutic not only of Luther and the Confessions, but also of Lutheran orthodoxy as it has been expounded in recent research. From Flacius to Calov, the reflection on original sin is one of the presuppositions for an appropriate biblical hermeneutic.⁴⁰ It is the anthropological side of the *sola Scriptura* principle and indispensable in order to avoid what Rothen calls Pelagianism in understanding.⁴¹ We could call it a “Pelagian hermeneutic.”

At the same theological conference at Neuendettelsau, Naaman Laiser from Tanzania presented the following words of exhortation for the promoters of contextual theology in the Northern hemisphere, when he stated his objections by recalling the serious word of St. Paul in Galatians 1:8: “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” Laiser’s intention was, in his own words:

to assert that indigenization and contextualisation must not be allowed to become tools for the replacement of the message of the text, or for the changing of it to suit either the times or the circumstances and convenience of man (Gal 1:8). Indigenisation and contextualisation must aim at the integrity of the message. . . . They must strive to avoid direct or indirect expression of such unbelief as comes to the message of the text from the outside of it. . . . Indigenisation and contextualisation have a direct bearing on the clarification of the fact that if justification is not to be only talk, its basis, the Scriptures, must remain free from human contamination, and face man in their unpretentious simplicity.

Again, he asserted:

If indigenisation and contextualisation are allowed to influence the message of the text then, to a lesser or greater

extent, the message of the text is bound to change, and the possibility for the rise of a new gospel could not be ruled out.

The African theologian was very aware of the context we theologians from the North and the West live in, when he clear-headedly stated:

From Flacius to Calov, the reflection on original sin is one of the presuppositions for an appropriate biblical hermeneutic.

Countless examples exist in Western biblical scholarship which suggest, in the end, the denial of various doctrines which the Church has held in the past. What will hinder interpretation of this nature from leading directly to syncretism in the case of the younger Churches as well?"

Laiser concludes:

The authority of Scripture cannot and should not be relativised or compromised by the context of the declaration of the message of Scripture. . . . Indigenisation and contextualisation must rather seek to preserve the integrity

of justification through such clear communication of the message as will in no way compromise its authority, its otherness, its consequentiality, and its persistence. The presumption to change the message is a deception! . . . When indigenisation and contextualisation become ends in themselves, then the message of Scripture ceases to be our primary concern. The word justification loses meaning. The Justifier no longer really retains relevance. . . . To persist in such folly is not only unforgivable; it could deserve punishment.⁴²

We may conclude in stating that Scripture alone—*sola Scriptura* as the critical judge over against all human traditions and exegeses—will guarantee that the justification of the godless sinner remains God's work alone and that the church remains Christ's church alone. Where the Scriptures are integrated into a traditioning process as source for the proclamation, we arrive at a change of subjects. Christ then is not the ruling head of the church. His word and sacraments then are not external to the church and foreign to the world, first to be heard and then to be proclaimed faithfully, but they are replaced by the "self-reflection" of the church and the world. This way the purity of the proclamation of the gospel, which comprises both law and gospel, is lost. We arrive at that strange mixture of antinomianism and legalism that plagues our time since the Enlightenment or even since the Fall. The church then remains nothing but an enterprise of good-willing people, shaped and created in the image of her surrounding society. *Sola scriptura*, however, grants us the freedom and frankness of the Spirit and protects this freedom against any misuse by sinful man's bad—or good—intentions. **LOGIA**

NOTES

1. For more evidence in the confessions, see Armin Wenz, *Das Wort Gottes—Gericht und Rettung. Untersuchungen zur Autorität der Heiligen Schrift in Bekenntnis und Lehre der Kirche*, Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie, Bd. 75 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 17, n. 25.

2. Wenz, *Das Wort Gottes*, 17, n. 26.

3. Oswald Bayer, "Die Autorität der Schrift als Autorität des rechtfertigenden Gottes selber" in *Autorität und Kritik: Zu Hermeneutik und Wissenschaftstheorie* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991), 51.

4. Finnish Lutheran theologian Timo Laato has suggested a nowadays unusual but nevertheless theologically reasonable relation between *forma* and *materia*. According to Aristotelian philosophy the *forma* shapes and determines the otherwise imprecise *materia*. As a result in Lutheran theology, Scripture is the *materia* which is determined by justification as the *forma*; ("Römer 7 und das lutherische simul iustus et peccator," *Lutherische Beiträge* 8 [2003]: 212, n. 1). Oswald Bayer also points to the unfortunate distinction between Scripture as the formal principle and justification as the material principle which, according to him, was invented by August Twisten (*Autorität und Kritik*, 51).

5. Since this is the case in the Augsburg Confession, it is beyond imagination how a Lutheran theologian of our day could arrive at conclusions concerning Luther's theology of justification such as this: "Das strenge Entweder-Oder zwischen Tod und Leben bei Paulus wird bei Luther zum Genesungsprozess eines Halbtoten" (Volker Stolle, *Luther und Paulus. Die exegetischen und hermeneutischen Grundlagen der lutherischen Rechtfertigungslehre im Paulinismus Luthers*, Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte, Bd. 10 [Leipzig: Evangelische Ver-

lagsanstalt, 2002], 166; see also below, note 28).

6. Bayer, *Autorität und Kritik*, 53; Bayer quotes Luther's *Dictata super Psalterium*, WA 3:397, 9–11.

7. Wenz, *Das Wort Gottes*, 41–53.

8. "Procul a ratione humana, procul a Moise reiciendi sunt oculi in Christum, et sentiendum, quod Christus sit nobis donatus, ut propter eum iusti reputemur" (*BSLK*, 218, 39–41).

9. Ulrich Asendorf, "Rechtfertigung im Alten Testament, gezeigt am Beispiel Abrahams," in *Rechtfertigung und Weltverantwortung: Internationale Konsultation Neuendettelsau 9–12. September 1991: Berichte und Referate*, ed. Wolfhart Schlichting (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1993), 37–57; also Hartmut Günther, "Allein die Schrift—Nötige Bemerkungen zum Verständnis der Heiligen Schrift und zum Umgang mit ihr," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 16 (1992): 63.

10. Oswald Bayer, *Leibliches Wort: Reformation und Neuzeit im Konflikt* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992), 38.

11. For the close connection between AC I and AC v, see Wenz, *Das Wort Gottes*, 236: "Also decisive is the coherence of AC I and AC v concerning the subjectivity of the Spirit, which in AC I is determined as divine in concordance with the doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church, against an Enthusiast understanding, in which the Spirit is understood as something human or creational. . . . Either the sentence 'fides creatura verbi' is true or the sentence 'verbum creatura fidei' is true. There is no neutral middle ground between these alternatives which are represented by the Reformation and 'neo-protestantism.' Not faith constitutes, verifies, or authorizes the word, but the word has its validity before our acceptance and even without it. The word alone brings about faith and the church" (trans. A. Wenz).

12. Wenz, *Das Wort Gottes*, 60, n. 43.
13. *Ibid.*, 62–72.
14. See Kurt Marquart, “Hermann Sasse and the Mystery of Sacred Scripture,” in *Hermann Sasse: A Man for our Times?*, ed. John R. Stephenson (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1998), who writes, “The church, as Sasse always insisted, is gathered by God not round a noncommittally ‘open Bible,’ but round the Confession, that is, the rightly understood and proclaimed Bible.”
15. See Carl Heinz Ratschow, *Der angefochtene Glaube: Anfangs- und Grundprobleme der Dogmatik*, 5. Aufl. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag Mohn, 1983), 208: “Die Ständigkeit der Wahrheit des verbum Dei actuale wird in der Tradition wahrgenommen und ermöglicht” [“The permanence of truth of the actual word of God is perceived and realised in tradition”].
16. Wenz, *Das Wort Gottes*, 41–44.
17. For the inseparable connection between performance and competence of the word as well as the sacraments, see Bayer, *Leibliches Wort*, 39, 66, 307. According to Bayer, it is the task of theology to analyze the performance of the effective word and to explicate its actual competence (308).
18. Martin Kähler, “Die Bibel das Buch der Menschheit” (1904), in *Zur Bibelfrage* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1937), 259, quoted in Johannes Wirsching, *Glaube im Widerstreit: Ausgewählte Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1999), 3:67.
19. See the thorough examinations of the respective documents by Gottfried Martens, “Ein ökumenischer Fortschritt? Anmerkungen zur ‘Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre,’” *Lutherische Beiträge* 3 (1998): 164–187; Gottfried Martens, “Der Rettungsversuch: Zur Unterzeichnung der ‘Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre’ in Augsburg,” *Lutherische Beiträge* 4 (1999): 263–275; and Gottfried Martens, *Die Rechtfertigung des Sünders—Rettungshandeln Gottes oder historisches Interpretament? Grundentscheidungen lutherischer Theologie und Kirche bei der Behandlung des Themas ‘Rechtfertigung’ im ökumenischen Kontext*, Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie, Bd. 64 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).
20. Reinhard Slenczka, “Evangelische Hermeneutik von Schrift und Bekenntnis. Am Beispiel der Arbeit der Gemeinsamen Ökumenischen Kommission über die gegenseitigen Lehrverurteilungen im 16. Jahrhundert,” *Materialdienst des Konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bensheim* 38 (1987): 112: “Eine entscheidende Rolle bei dieser Verständigung spielt die traditions-geschichtliche Betrachtungsweise, über die die herkömmliche Differenz von Schrift—und Traditionsprinzip vermittelt wird.”
21. “Wenn alles Tradition ist, kann nichts Überliefertes mehr kritisiert werden. . . . Die Behauptung der Reformation, daß eben dies u. U. nötig sei, wird ihrerseits in den Traditionsprozeß aufgehoben und damit verneint. Letztinstanz des christlichen Glaubens werden damit die faktischen Lebensäußerungen der Kirche im Laufe der Geschichte.” in Dietz Lange (for the Göttinger Theologische Fakultät), *Überholte Verurteilungen? Die Gegensätze in der Lehre von Rechtfertigung, Abendmahl und Amt zwischen dem Konzil von Trient und der Reformation—damals und heute*, (Göttingen, 1991), 16.
22. For a review of the American statement, see Harold C. Skillrud, J. Francis Stafford, and Daniel F. Martensen, ed., *Scripture and Tradition, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue*, 9 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1995); see my review in *LOGIA* 11, no. 4 (Reformation 2002): 54–56; for a review of the German statement, see W. Pannenberg and Th. Schneider, ed., *Verbindliches Zeugnis*, 3 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992–1998); see my essay: “Verbindliches Zeugnis? Die Autorität der Heiligen Schrift im evangelisch-lutherisch/römisch-katholischen Dialogue,” in *Sana doctrina: Heilige Schrift und theologische Ethik*, Kontexte, Bd. 37 (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2004), 50–83.
23. See Lange, *Überholte Verurteilungen?*, 15, regarding the statement *Lehrverurteilungen—kirchentrennend?*: “Die Heilige Schrift gilt als Summe verbindlicher Aussagen und nicht so sehr als lebendiges Wort, d. h. als Zeugnis von Gottes geschichtlichem Handeln für uns, das überzeugt und Gewißheit schafft” [“Holy Writ is seen as sum of

binding sentences and not so much as living word, that is, as witness to God’s historical deeds for us, which convinces and creates certainty (of faith)”; and n. 4, “die Suffizienz der Schrift wird quantitativ gefaßt, als gewißheitsschaffend gilt sie nicht; in klassischer Terminologie: Es ist keine Rede von der ‘efficacia’ der Schrift, diese Dimension spielt keine Rolle” [“the sufficiency of Scripture is understood in terms of quantity, not as creating certainty; in classical terminology: there is no mention of the *efficacia scripturae*, this dimension does not play any role”].

24. Reinhard Slenczka, “Geist und Buchstabe,” in *Verbindliches Zeugnis*, ed. Pannenberg, 3:107–134; with a summary on p. 135–137); see also Reinhard Slenczka, “Schriftautorität und Schriftkritik,” in *Verbindliches Zeugnis*, ed. Pannenberg, 1:315–334; and Wenz, *Sana doctrina*, 77, n. 65.

25. Oswald Bayer, *Autorität und Kritik*, 54.

26. “Verbindliches Zeugnis?” in Wenz, *Sana doctrina*, 69–70.

27. See Carsten Burfeind, “Einheit in Differenz: Kirche als differenzierte Gesellschaft,” *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 19 (1995): 215–216, which states: “Diese neue Problemlage des 20. Jahrhunderts, in der sich alle einperspektivischen Systeme oft erschrocken und gelähmt wiederfinden, ist die zunehmende Pluralisierung der Welt. Dieser Pluralisierung aber kann und soll sich auch die Kirche nicht entziehen, wenn sie denn Gottes Wort in ihrer Zeit und für ihre Zeit zu Gehör bringen will. Wenn die SELK nicht lernt, vielperspektivisch zu denken, wenn sie nicht lernt, daß Einheit Pluralität nicht ausschließt und nicht ausschließen darf, weil wir in einer pluralen Welt leben, dann wird sie an ihrer eigenen Stabilität zerbrechen.” Even though Stolle (see note 28) does not quote this essay, which was published under his auspices in *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche*, it is obvious that his approach is dependent on or at least in accordance with Burfeind’s diagnosis and solution which represents the mainstream of today’s German Protestantism.

28. See Stolle, *Luther und Paulus*. This book by a theologian from the Independent Evangelical-Lutheran Church (SELK) cannot be ignored, since its claim is nothing less than the destruction of Luther’s theology and the reformulation of justification for the age of globalization. For a criticism of the book, see the issue of *Lutherische Beiträge* 8, Nr. 4 (2003), with essays by Timo Laato, Hermann Sasse, Christian Möller, and a review of Stolle’s book by Reinhard Slenczka. Also see my essay, “Wider die alten und neuen Antinomer: Über ‘Paradigmenwechsel’ im Luthertum,” in *Sana doctrina*, 337–356.

The quotes from Stolle’s book in the footnotes have not been translated here. The English translation of some of Stolle’s quotes is taken from the review by John R. Stephenson in *LOGIA* 13, no. 3 (Holy Trinity 2004): 41–43.

29. “Ein Diskurs, der Luthers Paulinismus mit Paulus selbst neu ins Gespräch bringt, führt notwendig zu einer Destruktion des lutherischen Sinnganzes, eröffnet damit aber zugleich neue Perspektiven für eine Rekonstruktion des Evangeliums, das damit keineswegs verloren geht, sondern neu ins Spiel kommt” (Stolle, 438). [“A discourse which brings Luther’s paulinism into a dialogue with Paul himself necessarily leads to a destruction of the entire Lutheran [edifice of] meaning, but at the same time opens up new perspectives for a reconstruction of the gospel, which is by no means lost in the process, but comes freshly into play” (review by Stephenson, 41).]

30. “Der Text bleibt selbst auch fortwährenden Veränderungen unterworfen” (Stolle, 18); “Indem der Text . . . in seine fortlaufende Geschichte eingebunden ist, bleibt er grundsätzlich unabgeschlossen. . . . Im Kommunikationsprozeß zwischen ‘Urtext,’ Überlieferung und Leser ist dieser ‘Urtext’ nicht nur eine Konstante, sondern zugleich auch eine Variable im Beziehungsgeflecht mit anderen Texten.” (Stolle, 19); “Der biblische Text entwickelt—wie andere Texte auch—seine Wirkung nicht als Produkt eines autonomen Autorensubjekts, sondern indem er in Diskursen zur Sprache kommt und sich in Prozessen neuer Textkonstruktionen einmischen kann” (Stolle, 19); see also Stolle, 479.

31. “Der Mensch kann aber doch seinen geschichtlichen Bedingtheiten niemals entfliehen, sondern auf Gottes umgreifendes und zugleich kontingentes Wort immer nur mit seinen eigenen prozessu-

alen, geschichtlichen Erkenntnissen, Empfindungen und Entscheidungen antworten" (Stolle, 469). ["A person can after all never escape his own historical conditioning, but can only ever respond to God's embracing and at the same time contingent word with their own process-bound, historical perceptions, feelings, and decisions" (review by Stephenson, 42).]

32. "Eine grundlegende Unterscheidung zwischen Schrift und Tradition, wie sie die Reformation proklamiert hat, ist mithin nicht durchführbar. Die Schrift selbst ist Tradition und ist unabhängig von Tradition nicht zugänglich" (Stolle, 478, n. 180). ["A fundamental distinction between Scripture and tradition, such as the Reformation proclaimed, is consequently not feasible. Scripture itself is tradition and is not accessible apart from tradition" (review by Stephenson, 42).]

33. "Wenn etwa der 'Selbstwiderspruch des Wortes Gottes als Gesetz und Evangelium,' eine aus dem lutherischen Bekenntnis erhobene Grundprämisse, als unabdingbar für ein theologisch angemessenes Verstehen der heiligen Schrift erklärt wird, werden die in der Bibel zusammengefassten Schriften unter ein exegetisch höchst fragwürdiges, nur aus der späteren Wirkungsgeschichte heraus verständliches, anachronistisches Kriterium gestellt" (Stolle, 16). ["If the self-contradiction of the Word of God as Law and Gospel, . . . a fundamental premise lifted from the Lutheran confession (is seen as indispensable for a theologically appropriate understanding of Holy Scripture), the writings gathered together in the Bible (are placed) under a highly questionable, anachronistic criterion that can be understood only in terms of the later effects [of the sacred texts]" (review by Stephenson, 41).]

34. "Die einem forensischen Gerechtigkeitsverständnis zuzuordnenden Kategorien Sünder und gerecht im Sinne Luthers bedeuten eine Engführung gegenüber der Gottesgerechtigkeit im paulinischen Verständnis. Gottes heilschaffende Gerechtigkeit besteht nach Paulus in neuer, von Gnade bestimmter Lebensgabe (Röm. 6, 14)" (Stolle, 230); "Ein forensischer Anschauungshintergrund kann die Eigenart dieser eschatologischen Offenbarungstat nicht erfassen" (Stolle, 200);

also see Stolle, 388.

35. Concerning Luther, Stolle laments: "Der heilige Geist wird nicht zum eschatologischen Angeld des neuen Lebens, sondern bleibt an das *verbum externum* gebunden" (Stolle, 366); "Im antischwärmerischen Komplex wird die Bedeutung des einen Geistes . . . deutlich verdrängt; der Geist wird in Wort und Sakramente eingebunden. Weitere Fragen ergeben sich aufgrund der gestaltenden Kraft der Kirchengeschichte: Das öffentliche, institutionalisierte Amt existierte im Neuen Testament noch nicht" (Stolle, 394); also see Stolle, 305–306, 342, 351, 434.

36. See Armin Wenz, "Weg und Bedeutung der altkirchlichen Christologie nach Johannes Wirsching," *Lutherische Beiträge* 9 (2004): 188, n. 30, including a quote from Johannes Wirsching.

37. For the ecumenical relevance of Luther's *sola Scriptura* principle, especially in light of the canonical decision of the early church, see the excellent essay by Johannes Wirsching, "Sola Scriptura: Martin Luthers Schriftprinzip in seiner ekklesiologisch-ökumenischen Bedeutung," in *Glaube im Widerstreit: Ausgewählte Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1999), 3:30–67.

38. See Stolle, 480.

39. Bernhard Rothen, "Die Rechtfertigung des Sünders: Voraussetzung und Zweck des theologischen Urteils," in *Rechtfertigung und Weltverantwortung*, ed. Schlichting, 91.

40. See the excellent study by Volker Jung, *Das Ganze der Heiligen Schrift: Hermeneutik und Schriftauslegung bei Abraham Calov*, Calwer Theologische Monographien, Reihe B, Bd. 18 (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1999), which covers not only Calov, but also other Lutheran hermeneuticians from Flacius to Dannhauer; see my review of the book in *Lutherische Beiträge* 9 (2004): 250–255.

41. See Bernhard Rothen, "Die Rechtfertigung," 94: "Pelagianismus in der Erkenntnis."

42. Naaman Laiser, "The Authority of Scripture Provides the Basis for the Integrity of Justification," in *Rechtfertigung und Weltverantwortung*, ed. Schlichting, 59, 60, 62, 64–65.

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Certainty of Salvation

GOTTFRIED MARTENS



“Pastor, no one today really understands what the doctrine of justification is actually all about, anyway. All these arguments are the mere hairsplitting of theologians. We should be happy that the church could agree upon the formulations on this subject, so let’s not seek to find flies in the ointment.”

PERHAPS YOU HAVE ALSO BEEN CONFRONTED by such objections as you expressed yourself critically on the recent agreement of the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church concerning the subject of the doctrine of justification. Yet those who object in this way are not so much concerned with the text of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* itself. Instead, in the case of such objections a general misunderstanding concerning this article, upon which the church stands or falls, comes to expression. And when we attempt to answer such objections, perhaps we also notice just how difficult it is for us to comprehend precisely and formulate intelligibly what we are ultimately concerned about on this issue. In other words, what is so decisive for us on the issue of justification that we are not prepared to submit to any compromises on this point?

In this essay I will attempt to deal with and expound upon the subject of justification from the perspective of certainty. There are a number of reasons for this. First, Luther’s Reformation discovery transpired on the basis of this question of certainty. The realization as to what the certainty of salvation (*Heilsgewißheit*) actually means and whereupon it is based was of such decisive importance to Luther, that he could assert that he actually only became a Christian through it (see WBr 1, 217.62 [Nr. 100]). Second, the question of certainty makes it possible to recognize readily the decisive differences in the point of departure of Lutheran and Roman Catholic thought. With respect to the question of justification, one can comprehend the weaknesses of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* from this perspective. Third, with the question of certainty one is dealing with an eminently practical and pastoral question of great significance, one with which we are repeatedly confronted in our parish work. Consequently, I want to unfold this subject

of justification in four steps and at least in a rudimentary way endeavor to discuss the following:

1. Luther’s Reformation discovery.
2. The discussion of the question of certainty in the doctrinal statements of the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches of the sixteenth century.
3. The discussion of the question of certainty in some more recent ecumenical convergence and consensus documents.
4. The discussion of the question of certainty in the context of proclamation and pastoral care.

I

For many years a consensus existed within Luther studies that dated Luther’s Reformation discovery, his so-called “tower experience,” sometime between the years 1512 and 1514. A substantial indicator for this early dating was, naturally, the Reformer’s lectures on the book of Romans from the years 1515 and 1516. In these lectures the theme of justification was explored intensively, and not merely within the framework of what was usual at the time, since Luther already speaks here of the *iustificatio passiva* and the meaning of faith for justification. He also speaks of man as being placed *extra se*, that is, as being torn away from himself in the act of justification. Furthermore, intensive christological references also become noticeable in these lectures. However, near the end of the 1950s, Ernst Bizer, who was followed most significantly by Oswald Bayer, refuted this early dating and the interpretation of the Romans lectures that were tied to it. Instead he proposed 1518, perhaps even 1519, as the year of Luther’s Reformation discovery.¹ Consequently even the 95 Theses, which according to a later tradition were nailed by him to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, were not yet an expression of Reformation, but pre-Reformation theology. The cries of protest against this later dating and the conjoined reinterpretation of Luther’s pre-1518 writings were soon muted and since then other Luther scholars have substantiated the legitimacy of Bizer’s and Bayer’s thesis.²

Wherein lies the decisive difference between Luther’s lectures and writings before 1518 and his writings beginning in 1518 and 1519? In the earlier texts of Luther the relationship of word and faith is defined in completely different terms than in the later texts beginning in 1518. In the lectures on the Epistle to the Romans, for example, the “external, oral word is the word

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of judgment, which demands and produces a relinquishing of the hearer,” a constant *accusatio sui* (self-accusation). Grace does not hold a position as a “different word” (*ander Wort*) over and against it; rather, grace is met alone in this judgment itself, which embraces grace within it, that is, it is easily transformed into it. For the early Luther, grace can therefore only be experienced as hidden under its opposite. Judgment and grace are thus unified in their verbal impact upon man. Only in their effect *within* man do they “separate,” albeit “only as two impulses of a simple movement, whose unity consists of the confession of sin and prayerful petition.” It is in this sense that a person renounces himself and becomes nothing, that is, that he is torn away from himself, from his possibilities and abilities and placed *extra se* (outside of himself) and yet, still not in a way that he thereby can be certain of his salvation. On the contrary, since a person finds himself in a state of a constant *exinanitio* (emptying), he is for this reason not even allowed to be certain of his salvation.³

It is decisive that the word of absolution proceeds in the way of an articulated word, for in this way the will of God is unequivocally determined and established.

The corresponding references to Christ are defined by this context. In Christ the “*via negationis* (way of negation) upon which the entire man is led in repentance, his self-renunciation and flight from worldliness . . . is archetypically embodied. In him one’s own cross and suffering can be concretely viewed in its most extreme intensity and its foundational sufficiency investigated.” It is in this sense that the miraculous inner conversion of negation to affirmation, of death into life is sought. “The acceptance of recurrent cross and suffering” is therefore at the same time, “the existential [point] that binds Christ and the Christian together.” The task of the word in this context is to lead those who hear and read “into devotional contemplation and to mediate a concrete living impression, which immediately imprints itself upon the soul. In this way the Christian is equally [conformed] to his archetype.”⁴

Yet Luther comes to define the relationship of word and faith very differently beginning in 1518. From this point on the word of judgment and grace are no longer one; instead, a second, completely different word is added to the word of judgment, the word of forgiveness. The shift from judgment to grace no longer occurs within the Christian in a constant motion, but is established upon an external, perceptible word located in the sacramental declaration of absolution. The point of departure for this radical perspective of Luther’s, at which he arrived af-

ter a long struggle, is Mt 16:19, the promise of Christ whereby what is loosed on earth is also loosed in heaven.⁵ As Oswald Bayer has pointed out, Luther now came to understand the pronouncement of the *ego te absolvo* (I absolve you) in the sense of an “*opus operatum*”⁶ in the best sense of the word. “*Potestas Clavium operatur verbo et mandato dei firmum et infallibile opus*” (The power of the keys works by the word and mandate of God, as a certain and infallible work—WA 1,631.35f [Thesis 24]). Luther comes to write these words in his disputation *Pro veritate inquirenda et timoratis conscientis consolandis* (For the sake of the true investigation and consolation of terrified consciences) circulated in the early summer of 1518, in which Luther’s new outlook comes clearly to the fore for the first time. It is decisive that the word of absolution proceeds in the way of an articulated word, for in this way the will of God is unequivocally determined and established. God’s will announces itself not merely in general within his promise, but makes itself available within it; indeed, God defines himself in the truest sense of the word in this *promissio* of the absolution. The *promissio* is in this sense a legally binding promise with an immediate effect; it is not merely a distant promise (*Verheißung*), nor merely declaratory, but effective.⁷

From this new perspective of the sacramentality of the word, that is, from the *promissio*, Luther now also defines faith completely differently. In his lectures to the Romans Luther still equated it with the *contritio interior*. Faith is thus a movement that is directed toward the word, rather than called forth by it. Nor is this motion even actually directed to the word as such, but that to which the word points. In this earlier context the external word as such and its factual condition is actually not so important or decisive. After all, God ultimately acts in hiddenness and not through the pledged word of salvation as such. However, it now becomes decisive for Luther that God acts through the promissory word of salvation as such, through which the *ministratio* of the word of absolution functions, so that the word is no longer to be understood as a sign of what is absent (*signum absentis*) [in a neo-Platonic, Augustinian sense—*trans.*], but as a sign present in the thing itself (*signum praesentis rei*). For this reason faith is now no longer essentially an existential attitude of people, but is itself generated by this promise of forgiveness. Nor does faith address itself to the existential orientation of people, but solely to God’s word of salvation, which effects what it says. Against Cajetan Luther emphasizes with great perspicuity and acuity that faith is *fides specialis de praesenti effectu* (a specific faith arising from a present effect), whereby this present effect (*effectus praesens*) is engendered through the promise of forgiveness found in the word of absolution.⁸ Correspondingly, faith cannot be made problematical by the disposition of the receiver, that is, the hearer. Rather, faith subsists in the word. Word and faith constitute an indissoluble unity, whereby the order of operation remains clearly recognizable. It is the word that engenders faith. In Luther’s own words: “*Fides autem est nihil aliud quam illud, quod deus promittit aut dicit, credere. . . . Ideo verbum et fides necessario simul sunt*” (Faith is therefore nothing other than to believe what God promises and speaks. . . . Behold, the word and faith are necessary at the same time—WA 2,13.18–20).

From this point of view two things are clear and decisive for Luther. Faith is and remains bound to the factual necessity of the word of salvation in absolution, the *ego te absolvo* (I absolve you) of the forgiveness of sin. Faith cannot exist independently apart from it as a *fides generalis* (general faith). Secondly, it becomes clear that the question of the certainty of salvation does not just constitute one isolated question among many, nor that the certainty of salvation represents merely one specific attribute of faith, rather faith as to its essence is the certainty of salvation. It is precisely this that Luther came to recognize as his Reformation discovery, and precisely this that proved to be the decisive line of fracture with the Roman Catholic Church⁹—as even Cajetan had already come to understand in 1518, for this is how the cardinal came to express himself when Luther presented him with the view of faith as the certainty of salvation, “This means establishing a new church.”¹⁰ At this juncture we might note that according to St. Matthew, the promise of the power of the keys and the promise of building the church upon the rock, Peter, are intrinsically connected, and this is precisely how Luther himself saw the matter.

I do not yet want to draw any conclusion for ecumenical dialogue at this point, but am merely seeking to point out how relevant this decisive realization of Luther’s is even for today, and how little this realization is actually apprehended and understood these days. Thus, for example, I repeatedly encounter this pre-Reformation understanding of Luther’s in the realm of Pietism, in which faith is essentially understood as an existential attitude that does not direct itself specifically to the *opus operatum* of the orally preceding word of absolution, but to a large degree remains essentially in the mode of confession of sin and prayer for forgiveness, whereby the certainty of salvation is simultaneously and repeatedly called into question. “Have I now truly repented?” “Do I really feel myself freed from guilt?” In fact, has not faith to a large extent degenerated into an “existential [attribute] of a believing existence” (*Existential einer gläubigen Existenz*)¹¹ even within modern Protestantism, precisely because the assertion that faith subsists in the word of absolution “*ego te absolvo*” is, to a large extent, currently regarded as nothing more than an exotic relic of theological history? It is no wonder that the debate concerning the subject of justification at the plenary assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Helsinki in 1963 repeatedly made reference to the supposed Reformation question of Luther, yet came to twist it and no longer fully understand it, and finally misinterpreting it to the extent that one truly could no longer speak of faith as a “*fides specialis de praesenti effectu*” (a specific faith arising from a present effect).¹² For reasons such as this, it is needful for us to return to the actual content of Luther’s Reformation discovery in the contemplation of the subject of certainty.

II

In light of the significance that Luther himself ascribes to the subject of certainty, it is no accident that the subject of the certainty of salvation (*Heilsgewißheit*) is repeatedly addressed and dealt with in the Lutheran Confessions. In his exposition of the articles in the Apology, where the topic of justification is given by comparison the most thorough and comprehensive

treatment in the Lutheran Confessions, Melanchthon again and again proceeds from the perspective of man afflicted by sinful temptation, who is raised to a new life through the effectual promise of the *promissio praesens* (present promise) of the *remissio peccatorum* (forgiveness of sin).¹³ In the Lutheran Confessions the subject of “justification” is therefore repeatedly anchored in confession, that is, in the promise of absolution, and developed from this perspective. Correspondingly, the essence of faith is repeatedly developed on the basis of this source in the appropriation of forgiveness. The decisive mark of the *promissio*, the promise of the forgiveness of sin, is, at the same time, its un-conditionality: “*Et haec promissio not habet conditionem*” (and this promise does not have any conditions), Melanchthon comes to emphasize in Ap IV, 41 (*BSLK*, 168; *Kolb/Wengert*, 126). Precisely this distinguishes the gospel as *promissio* from the proclamation of the law, which repeatedly casts the listener back upon his own work. Its validity and efficacy is definitely not dependent upon the actions of man. Just as important for the understanding of *promissio* in the Lutheran

Faith as to its essence is the certainty of salvation. It is precisely this that Luther came to recognize as his Reformation discovery.

Confessions is the fact that it does not merely provide information concerning the facts, but that it actually effects something by being given out, namely regeneration (*regeneratio*), that is, faith. Despite the fact that Melanchthon circumscribes the event of *regeneratio* or *vivificatio* with seeming psychological terminology, he is truly not concerned with psychologizing the act of justification, and certainly not anchoring the reality of justification in the subjective experiences of man. This would ultimately have the abiding uncertainty of man as a consequence. Rather, with these apparently psychological terms Melanchthon seeks to circumscribe the event of justification precisely as an event which man receives passively. Consequently, this manner of depiction actually serves to underscore the efficaciousness of the words of promise.¹⁴ This word does, in fact, establish a new reality and brings the hearer into a new relationship with God. In other words, it does not merely inform the hearer about something that is in itself already valid even independently of this event. Instead, it creates something new, namely faith. However, because faith is the result of the word of absolution and subsists within it alone, it conversely cannot also be analyzed as to its origin nor diagnosed as to its status. It is far more notable that Melanchthon deals with the event of justification substantially under the banner *quomodo contingat fides* (how faith comes into being—Ap IV, 61 [*BSLK*,

172; Kolb/Wengert, 130]). Yet in doing so, he did not go beyond the description of the correlation of word and faith. This correlation of *promissio* and *fides*, indeed, this event of *mortificatio* and *vivificatio* through the dual activity of God in law and gospel remains the foundational state of a Christian throughout his entire life. It does not merely have a once-and-for-all meaning

***Doctrine is also pledge, not teaching
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in the sense of a conversion experience or a conversion event, but remains the foundational experience of a Christian from which he cannot ever emancipate himself.

Since the promise of forgiveness in the word of absolution itself works the new reality of salvation and by these exact means simultaneously works faith, it thereby also becomes clear that any kind of work by a Christian cannot be wedged between faith and *promissio*, which in turn could call into question the certainty of faith that is rooted in the *promissio*. The reality of justification lies solely and alone in the word, not in some disposition of a Christian in whatever manner it may be described. This reality cannot be diagnosed from the perspective of their effects upon the Christian. That faith consequently also *is* the certainty of salvation in the Lutheran Confessions, because it is the *fides specialis* (special faith) that directly addresses the specific promise of forgiveness, repeatedly becomes clear in the statements of the confessional writings. This is seen in the reflexive formulations of the content of faith, in which the promise of forgiveness is simultaneously and directly mirrored. Faith applies the promise of the *ego te absolvo* or the pledge of the *pro me* to one's own existence.¹⁵

I would again like to answer clearly the question as to how the subject of the certainty of salvation is dealt with in the Lutheran Confessions on the basis of two quotations. In Ap IV, 119, Melanchthon writes:

Moreover, there needs to be a teaching in the church from which the faithful may receive the certain hope of salvation. For the opponents give bad advice when they command people to doubt whether or not they have obtained the forgiveness of sins. How will their people, who have heard nothing about this faith and who assume that they must doubt whether or not they have obtained the forgiveness of sins, sustain themselves when dying? Furthermore, the gospel, that is, the promise that sins are remitted freely on account of Christ, must be retained in the church of Christ (Kolb/Wengert, 139–140).¹⁶

In this quotation it first of all becomes clear how Melanchthon uses *doctrina*, *evangelium*, and *promissio* quasi-synonymously. Doctrine is also pledge, not teaching “about” something, but an enacting word that works the certainty of salvation. Consequently Melanchthon brings this *status controversiae* to a head. The real question is if we need to doubt “whether or not they have obtained the forgiveness of sins” (*utrum consequamur remissionem peccatorum*), that is, whether the words of promise in absolution work *ex opere operato* or not. For Melanchthon, everything depends upon this. Even as he focuses the essential meaning of this question *in morte*, that is, the trials in the face of death, he makes incisively clear that in the question of the certainty of salvation one is not dealing with idle speculation, but much more with the very issue of Christian existence, pure and simple.

In Ap IV, 345, Melanchthon's understanding of reality becomes recognizable.

For in civil courts and in human judgment, what is of right or of debt is certain, and mercy is uncertain. But the matter is different with respect to God's judgment; for here mercy has a clear and certain promise and command from God. For the gospel is properly that command which enjoins us to believe that God is propitious to us for Christ's sake . . . and this faith produces sure hope, because it relies upon the Word and command of God. If hope would rely upon works, then, indeed, it would be uncertain, because works cannot pacify the conscience, as has been said above frequently.¹⁷

On the one hand, Melanchthon here describes what it means that the reality of justification, in distinction to all human ontological approaches, subsists concretely in the *promissio dei* (promise of God). On the other hand, he describes the indissoluble coordinates of word and faith in a twofold manner. First, he determines the gospel to be in parallel as *promissio* and as *praeceptum fidei*. The words of promise call forth faith, which for its part, that is, in its reflexive determination, makes clear the promissory character of the *promissio*. Second, he emphasizes that the certainty of salvation leans so heavily and unequivocally upon the *verbum* (word) and *mandatum dei* (mandate of God), that any support for certainty sought in human activity and the attempt to diagnose it is excluded. Here we see how Luther's Reformation discovery is thus properly and accurately incorporated in the confessional writings.

In stark contrast, certainty of salvation is dealt with very differently at the Council of Trent.¹⁸ First of all, it is quite obvious in the examination of the Tridentine doctrinal decrees that this subject as such does not in the same way play as central a role in the depiction of the justification event, as we have just observed in the Lutheran Confessions. Trent simply does not proceed from the experience of the dual action of God in law and gospel that leads a person to the unconditional pledge of forgiveness in the word of salvation in absolution, but describes justification much more as a drawn-out, observable, and describable process. At the beginning of this process grace stands as what transfers people “in whom no merits exist”

(*nullis eorum existentibus meritis*) into the position where they can turn to God and cooperatively follow through the subsequent process of *praeparatio ad iustificationem* (preparation for justification) all the way to *iustificatio ipsa* (justification itself) through the active use of the *liberum arbitrium* (free will). One cannot speak of the “certainty of salvation” for the Christian in this context for a variety of reasons. For Trent, the word is understood to be substantially information; hence its power to effect what it says does not come into view. The word for Trent correspondingly has its function only within the process of *praeparatio ad iustificationem*. In this process, the path leading from the comprehension of existential appropriation through to Christian activity is described. It is here that the reception of the faith-content of the word finds its place. One step along this path is therefore described as “*credentes, vera esse, quae divinitus revelata et promissa sunt*” (believing [it] to be true, that they are divine revelations and promises).¹⁹ Faith is therefore a comprehending and acknowledging movement toward the word, not called forth through the word. Simultaneously, faith is a presupposition for the actual event of justification, which then results through baptism; however, it is not possible to speak of the word as a sacramental means of salvation for Trent.

The word is thus otherwise determined and apprehended in its function and power to accomplish what it says than in the Lutheran Confessions. It is therefore no wonder that faith itself has a totally different sense and function for Trent than we have come to observe with Luther and Melancthon above. For Trent faith is precisely not the expression for the entire act of justification, but describes merely one clearly defined “incremental function” (*Teilfunktion*)²⁰ of the process of justification. On the one hand, this faith is, as was already mentioned, substantially the recognition of revelatory truths and therefore has its function in the preparation for justification. On the other hand, faith is one of the theological virtues which is poured into *iustificatio ipsa* (justification itself), yet receives its essential being primarily through *caritas* (love), and if left to itself does not have the capacity to bring about unification with Christ. As *virtus* faith is, however, also still essentially the action of man. With the Tridentine *instrumentarium* it therefore is completely out of the question to set faith in contrast with works and to comprehend faith as a receiving medium according to its essence, whereby it is precisely a “non-work” (*Nicht-Werk*).

For this reason Trent comes to approach the question of the certainty of salvation largely with a lack of understanding. The council dismisses the question essentially as a theoretical epistemological problem and accordingly negates it. The issue is that “*nullus scire valeat certitudine fidei, cui non potest subesse falsum, se gratiam Dei esse consecutum*” (no one can know with a certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God).²¹ A *scire* (to know) is therefore notably contested, since the idiosyncratic and existential character of *fides* does not even come into view at Trent. At the same time Trent does, however, precisely name the decisive point of separation from the Reformation position in this context. The issue is whether or not I can actually assert myself to be justified on the basis of the pledge of absolution, that

is, whether or not the general gracious will of God, as it has come to be revealed in the cross and resurrection of Christ, actually meets me in the concrete pronouncement of salvation in absolution. This is categorically denied by Trent. The actual crux of the gospel for Luther and the Lutheran Confessions is explicitly rejected. Therefore, according to Trent, I cannot and am not allowed to assert that I am actually justified, let alone be certain of my salvation in view of the last judgment. Behind this rejection of the assertion of the possibility of being cer-

The issue is whether or not I can actually assert myself to be justified on the basis of the pledge of absolution. This is categorically denied by Trent.

tain of salvation stands a completely different understanding of faith, which for Trent is essentially not trust in the promise of salvation by God, but the already mentioned process-oriented understanding of justification, according to which justification is a life-long process in which man actively participates. In the face of human *infirmitas* and *indispositio* any certainty about the verdict of the final judgment is out of the question. *Iustificatio* and *acceptatio* in the final judgment must be clearly distinguished from each other, according to Roman Catholic doctrine. They do not, as Luther asserts, converge in the words of absolution.²² Behind this there naturally stands an ethical motivation. Trent takes a firm stand against the *inanis haereticorum fiducia* (vain confidence of the heretics) and imputes to the *haereticis* that they “rest in faith alone” (*in sola fide quiescere*). The Christian is not allowed to be certain of his salvation because he would otherwise no longer endeavor to do good works or acquire merits, which are credited to him in the final judgment of God. Doubt and fear serve precisely to this end, namely, as essential motivators for the works of Christians. The most that can thereby be allowed him and be permitted is a *spes salutis* (a hope of salvation), which notably is not directed to the present word of salvation, but the generally gracious will of God. The assertion of a certainty based on faith remains a heresy for Trent, which draws the verdict of an anathema upon itself.²³

III

How does one now begin to proceed so as to surmount this fundamental disagreement with respect to the question of the certainty of salvation in more recent ecumenical documents? I will proffer three answers and will seek to elaborate upon them more broadly on the basis of a number of documents, even though I am here naturally unable even to approach a depiction of these documents within their general context.

1. In these documents the final judgment of God is largely obscured, or at the very least made completely innocuous. By the obscuring of the eschatological dimension in the justification event, the question of the certainty of salvation is itself settled.
2. The “real dialectic” (*Realdialektik*) of the dual action of God in law and gospel is marginalized as a Lutheran curiosity. In its place, and without any further reflection, the Roman progressive description of the justification event is accepted as the basis of the common presentation. On this foundation the question of the certainty of salvation can likewise be entertained as merely a somewhat exotic and unique Lutheran topic.
3. The reference of faith to the concrete, bodily word of absolution is to a large extent obscured. Instead, faith references itself vaguely to a general salvific will of God and can therefore take on sheer existential features in the presentation. The actual point of the “certainty of salvation” (*Heilsgewißheit*) for Luther and the Lutheran Confessions is no longer comprehensible on the basis of this background.

This methodology became readily apparent at the end of 1983 in a document published in the U.S. entitled “Justification by Faith.”²⁴ In this document agreement on the question of the certainty of salvation is sought by means of drawing upon the thesis of Otto Hermann Pesch and others, according to which the “central concern” (*Sache*) in Luther’s assertion of certainty of salvation for the Christian could be expressed on the Roman Catholic side with the concept of “hope” and the certainty of hope (*Hoffnungsgewißheit*).²⁵ Faith is repeatedly explained by the term “hope” in the document. Foundational for the assertion of this convergence of Lutheran certainty of faith (*Glaubensgewißheit*) and Roman Catholic certainty of hope (*Hoffnungsgewißheit*) is, naturally, the progressive understanding of justification. But this concept of a “certainty of hope” renders the framework of the dialectic of law and gospel to be nonsensical. It doubtless has become abundantly clear that Luther naturally meant something altogether different by the certainty of salvation, and Pesch’s thesis does not rescind what the Council of Trent decidedly decreed concerning the Lutheran understanding of the certainty of salvation. At the same time, the other two approaches for a solution presented above can be observed in “Justification by Faith” as a means to disarm the problem of certainty of salvation. The certainty of faith, of which the American document speaks, in general consistently refers to a knowledge of the goodness and mercy of God, not to a concrete pledge of salvation. In this context there is virtually no talk of the judgment of God.²⁶

We can observe a similar methodology in the document entitled *Lehrverurteilungen—kirchentrennend? (Doctrinal Condemnations—Church Divisive?)*.²⁷ In this document the appeal is also made to Pesch’s thesis concerning the convergence of the certainty of hope and faith. Furthermore, the final judgment of God is to a large degree left out of the picture, and one presumes that one is able to pass quickly over the question of the salvation of man in this final judgment of God. One is content with the rather facile discovery that “the unconditional trust

in the mercy of God here and in the final judgment” is “no longer a problem for current Catholic theology.”²⁸ However, one ought to note that behind this rather hasty formulation stands the understanding that trust is directed to the mercy of God in general, so much so, that according to Vatican II, it would be virtually impossible even for an upright heathen or atheist to go to hell.²⁹ That this God can also speak very differently in his law, so that a trust in this God can become a real problem, is also not in any way discussed.

The decisive question as to who or what ultimately saves me in the final judgment of God, which is, in the final analysis, nothing other than the question of whether I can be certain of my salvation—this question is quite intentionally not answered.

This document very intentionally reaches back especially to a progressive approach in the description of the justification event. In order to reach agreement on the question of the certainty of salvation, subjective factors of doubt are juxtaposed with objective factors of certainty, whereby faith, in its existential execution, is to direct itself exclusively to these certainty factors. Yet even disregarding the fact that the concrete word of absolution is not mentioned here as such a factor of certainty, and that the discussion deals with God’s word of promise in general—whatever the content of this promise might be *in concreto*—any such juxtaposition and equivocation of factors of certainty and uncertainty within faith is naturally and categorically out of the question according to a Lutheran understanding. That the elimination of “a lack of fear with respect to the loss of grace”³⁰ should be construed as a specific Lutheran concern, as the ecumenical document states, can only be truly asserted from a Roman Catholic presupposition that knows or understands nothing of the formation of faith through the physical word of forgiveness. Where the dialectic of law and gospel is not recognized as a basis for the description of the justification event, there the question of certainty of salvation cannot be properly discussed.

Nor can any other verdict be pronounced over the manner in which the subject of certainty of salvation is dealt with in the much discussed *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.³¹ Certainly a number of happy corrections in relation to previous attempts at dealing with this topic can be discovered in this document. Thus the question of the certainty of salvation is expressly singled out as one of the central is-

sues within the context of dealing with the justification event, and thereby it experiences a corresponding exposition and valuation in the main part of the document.³² In this document there also is now talk of the “effective promise of God’s grace in word and Sacrament”³³ upon which the faithful build, and so can be sure of grace. This comes much closer to what Luther and the Lutheran Confessions are concerned with. Yet, the problem nevertheless remains the same when one looks at the document more carefully. The final judgment of God is much more thoroughly muted in the *Joint Declaration* than in the preceding documents. The decisive question as to who or what ultimately saves me in the final judgment of God, which is, in the final analysis, nothing other than the question of whether I can be certain of my salvation—this question is quite intentionally not answered. That this omission is intentional is demonstrated unequivocally in the appendix with which one has sought to rescue the mutually subscribed declaration in Augsburg last year.³⁴ Here the topic of the final judgment is, in fact, dealt with, but in such a way as to ascribe to this final judgment merely the function of a jury that evaluates the equally conditional deeds of people. What role these deeds play in the acceptability of the person as such is not spelled out in any way.³⁵ With the muting of the question concerning the last judgment the question of the certainty of salvation is naturally robbed of its explosive power from the outset. In the same way, upon closer inspection, one comes to determine that in the *Joint Declaration* the progressive understanding of justification also provides the backdrop for the treatment of the question of the certainty of salvation.³⁶ I cannot offer a full interpretation of the *Joint Declaration* here, but merely show on the basis of paragraphs 34–36 how this progressive understanding affects the interpretation of the statement concerning the certainty of salvation.

After this joint confession—one should not overlook that this *Joint Declaration* is, according to its self-understanding, a confession of the church—an explanation of the confessional declaration by the two ecclesiastical dialogue partners follows. Here it becomes readily clear that the question of the certainty of salvation is understood as a specifically Lutheran confessional concern, which, however, can be shared by the Roman side, given that the presupposition of a progressive understanding of justification is shared by the Lutherans. Thus it is stated in paragraph 35: “This was emphasized in a particular way by the Reformers: in the midst of temptation, believers should not look to themselves but look solely to Christ and trust only him. In trust in God’s promise they are assured of their salvation, but are never secure looking at themselves.” Three things become noticeable here. First of all, the somewhat unmediated interjection of the experience of temptation (*tentatio*), an experience that can only be rightly understood against the dialectic of law and gospel if it is not merely to be equated with a weakness in faith or doubt, would indeed be a decisive foreshortening. Second, what is decisive in the description of the Lutheran position is missing, specifically the reference to the concrete nature of the word of absolution which brings about the certainty of salvation. Instead, the trust of the faithful is directed to Christ in general, namely, to God’s promises in whatever these might

subsist. The motion is not from the word to faith, but from the believer who moves toward Christ, namely, his promises. Finally, the dynamic of law and gospel, which is precisely what does not leave the Christian up in the air as to which of these two words of God is the final word, but leads him into certainty, is replaced by a static description, which converts this dialectic into a process. The Christian is certain of his salvation in his trust in God’s promises, even if he is never certain when he looks to himself. Even though Horst Georg Pöhlmann, in his publication concerning this subject, attempts to declare this type of presentation as truly Lutheran,³⁷ it nevertheless remains truly Tridentine. Nor is this changed by making a fine distinction between the words “certain” and “sure.”³⁸ The actual crux of the argument lays unequivocally in this, that the Christian is obligated to take into consideration the question of his own disposition in view of the certainty of salvation, an action which Luther regarded as being *the sin itself*.

The actual crux of the argument lays unequivocally in this, that the Christian is obligated to take into consideration the question of his own disposition in view of the certainty of salvation, an action which Luther regarded as being the sin itself.

That this interpretation of paragraphs 34 and 35 of the *Joint Declaration* is correct becomes very clear if one casts a glance at paragraph 36, in which the Roman view is again expressly presented. At the outset it is rather striking that trust in Christ’s word of promise is described. Indeed, this word of promise is defined as the word of absolution, with references to Matthew 16 and 18. Yet, the presentation of the Roman position immediately shifts away from what that actually would mean, to a trust in the word of promise that is described and interpreted to be a general trust in God. There is no talk of the certainty of salvation in the entire section. The presentation remains under the directive that while the Christian can depend upon the fact that God assumes his part in the justification event, one’s own weaknesses and shortcomings give occasion for an abiding uncertainty. Thus the believer can at best be certain, as it says in the conclusion, “that God *intends* his salvation,”³⁹ not however, that he actually brings about this salvation. The *Joint Declaration* does not, therefore, overcome the fundamental point of dissent staked out by the Lutheran Confessions and the decrees of the Council of Trent concerning the question of the certainty of salvation.

IV

I would like to conclude my exposition on the subject of certainty with a view toward some practical applications. How does what I have just described as the central discovery of the Reformation impress itself upon our preaching and into our actions within the church? I would like to provide three points to consider in this context.

Is Osiander not right when he points out that such a change in practice inevitably also has consequences for the certainty of salvation of the Christian, so that therewith a decisive emphasis and safe-guarding of faith is lost?

First, I have repeatedly pointed out that the certainty of salvation for Luther and the Lutheran Confessions was brought about through the word of absolution through the direct personal pledge of forgiveness. We would all like to agree completely with this. But I might ask whether I am not actually addressing a marginal phenomenon in our ecclesiastical life with this assertion, an event that simply no longer stands at the center of our church-related activity, but is only acknowledged by a small, select group. In this context I would like to refer to the experiences of the Nürnberg absolution conflict of 1533.⁴⁰ The practice of a general absolution of the congregation after the confession of the “open” or “public guilt” in the Divine Service established itself very soon after the introduction of the Reformation in Nürnberg. At first this was supposed to help relieve the congestion brought about by the great throngs of people seeking private absolution. Because of its convenience this general absolution soon enjoyed great popularity within the population, especially within the city council. Yet the Nürnberg Reformer Andreas Osiander offered vehement resistance to this practice of a general absolution. He actually managed to exclude the “general confession and absolution” from the Brandenburg- Nürnberg church order of 1533. This naturally soon led to significant anger in the city. The dispute finally ended by soliciting an opinion from Wittenberg, in which Luther and Melancthon interestingly took a stand with the Nürnberg city council against Osiander, defending the general absolution as right and appropriate.⁴¹ Johannes Brenz, on the other hand, stood on the side of Osiander with a further opinion. Naturally the Nürnberg council decided in favor of the Wittenberg opinion.

I do not consider this Wittenberg opinion to be altogether felicitous in all of its points and would contrariwise have

Osiander’s concerns be heard one more time. He marshals five points in defense of the exclusion of a general absolution.⁴² To begin with, Osiander and Brenz had excluded it from the church order so as to point to private absolution, of which little use would doubtless be made over the long-term, in view of the possibility of receiving a general absolution. Secondly, such a general absolution is not a proper preparation for the reception of the sacrament. Thirdly, only the specific absolution corresponds to the reality of our being sinners. Fourthly, the general absolution also absolves the unrepentant, which is not right. Finally, the general absolution is delivered conditionally, which is impossible according to the New Testament. But Osiander comes to emphasize especially that it is not enough for a Christian simply to believe that a sin has been forgiven him after it has been committed. Rather, the word of absolution alone, in which Christ himself speaks, is able to grant the certainty of forgiveness to faith, which can also endure in the face of temptation (*Anfechtung*). With this contrast of human reflection about forgiveness and the effective divine word of forgiveness, Osiander is doubtless raising a central Reformation concern. The Wittenberg opinion argues to the contrary, that the sermon and general absolution are able to effect certainty of salvation specifically because they are universally directed to everyone, and the Christian is therefore able to draw certainty from the fact that the promise of forgiveness applies also to him. Beyond this the Wittenbergers respond to Osiander’s critique of the conditional form of absolution with the words that every absolution has faith as its *conditio* for effectiveness. In this Wittenberg opinion, in my estimation, lies an unequivocal shift in accent over and against Luther’s original Reformation discovery, even in contrast to his own tract “Concerning the Keys,” which should indeed give us cause for thought.

We have long since lost the battle for the rescue of private absolution as a common, self-evident practice of the entire church, which Osiander still fought in Nürnberg, as gratifying as it is that personal confession and absolution is again newly practiced here and there in our congregations. Yet what I can at least observe in the congregations of our Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche (Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church), is that even less use is made of the offer of a confessional service with personal absolution with the laying on of hands. Consequently, a large part of the congregation never experiences the personal pledge of the word of absolution anymore. Are the arguments of the Wittenberg opinion truly conclusive, or is Osiander not right when he points out that such a change in practice inevitably also has consequences for the certainty of salvation of the Christian, so that therewith a decisive emphasis and safe-guarding of faith is lost? I think that it is very important that we give this some thought so that what I have sought to unfold earlier does not remain in a vacuum, and that our protest against what appears to be a church union in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* also ultimately does not remain completely theoretical and correspondingly impotent.

Second, I have repeatedly pointed out that in the ecumenical documents the question of the certainty of salvation is again and again blunted by the fact that the eschatological horizon of the

final judgment is as good as squelched. Nor are we here dealing with a strategic, tactical maneuver to overcome a delicate, theologically controversial problem. In this crushing of certainty, the current content of preaching is mirrored, in which the judgment is now only rarely mentioned. I have attempted to show elsewhere how this intentional silencing of the judgment perspective (*Gerichtshorizont*) induced the miscarriage of the plenary assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in 1963 at Helsinki on the question of a common formulation of the message of justification. Peter Brunner unsuccessfully sought to point out this decisive shortcoming in the preparations leading up to the plenary meeting, and he ultimately came to naught in his attempt to make the reference to the judgment (*Gerichtshorizont*) fit for consensus.⁴³ In this way a significant shift away from the question of the certainty of salvation in the face of the coming judgment of God to a reflection upon the question of meaning was accomplished at Helsinki. The background against which the message of justification was unfolded was no longer the decisive question that God poses to us in his judgment. Rather, it consisted in the questions which man asks of himself, namely, the question as to the meaning of life, the feeling of acceptance, and the gratification of one's need to be justified before others.⁴⁴ The mediation of a "certainty of being" (*Daseinsgewißheit*), that is, an affirmation of one's existence, takes the place of the pledge of the certainty of salvation.⁴⁵ Salvation was then essentially described in terms of the psychotherapeutic conceptual abstraction "acceptance." It was on this level that one thereby thought it possible to bring the relevance of the message of justification nearer to the so-called modern man.

Extemporaneous sermons pose a high risk for repeatedly casting the pledge of salvation into a conditional mode.

Now, this result, and the failure at Helsinki that is tied to it, would not be nearly so tragic had this form of proclaiming justification not become so firmly entrenched within the church in the mean time, so that it is actually rarely still called into question. He who speaks too clearly of the judgment is regarded as psychologically disturbed, or it is claimed that this kind of proclamation would call forth such psychological disturbances among his hearers. Conversely, one can observe the reinterpretation of justification as an answer to the attempts of man at self-justification even in the certainly well-intentioned definitive opinions from the realm of confessional Lutheranism. Yet the sensitivity as to what is actually being played out by this reinterpretation is evidently scarcely to be found. On this basis the question is also posed us as to what role this perspective on judgment (*Gerichtshorizont*) actually still plays in our proclamation, or how readily we also stand in danger of trans-

posing the results of the salvific work of Christ essentially into the realm of the First Article of the Creed. What a very concerned Peter Brunner already observed some forty years ago has lost nothing of its relevance in the mean time. In fact, to the contrary, it possesses a renewed special urgency today.

Third, I want to return again to the above-mentioned quotation from the Apology, in which Melancthon emphasizes: "*haec promissio non habet conditionem*" (this promise does not have any conditions—Ap IV, 41 [BSLK, 168; Kolb/Wengert, 126]). This is a challenge for every single sermon that we are to preach. How do we avoid darkening the gospel once again through specific conditions, which we consciously or unconsciously append to our formulations? An American pastor once told me that the reason why he works out his sermon in writing as a rule, and strictly avoids extemporaneous speaking, is because of the high risk extemporaneous sermons pose for repeatedly casting the pledge of salvation into a conditional mode—indeed, to point those who hear such sermons to themselves, to their own capacity to believe, and to their own preparedness to better their lives. We know how great the temptation is to exert more or less gentle pressure upon the congregation with the help of conditional formulas. We may even feel some of the fright of the Galatians over and against the unconditional proclamation of salvation by St. Paul, which appears to be open to far too much freedom, freedom which in turn appears all too easily to open the gate and door to libertinism. "*Haec promissio non habet conditionem.*" In this context I would like to bring to mind the tremendous opus of Manfred Josuttis, *Gesetzlichkeit in der Predigt der Gegenwart (Legalism in the Sermons of Today)*. In this work Josuttis holds a mirror before the eyes of us preachers in a clear and helpful manner, emphasizing that "in order to preserve the purity of the gospel one actually needs to test the sense of the words, even in the smallest details." For, so Josuttis comes to determine as a conclusion to his book,

"one has to a large extent forgotten the categories of the doctrine of justification, and, if appearances are not deceiving, one is ever more prepared to forget them in theology. These are no grounds for supposing that they are antiquated, and that these categories are so rarely applied on the road from exegesis to sermon in the systematic evaluation of what has become known historically does not disprove the assertion of the Reformers that one cannot even understand the Holy Scriptures without these categories. It is worthwhile to take this claim seriously. And it is worthwhile to defend this claim today . . . in order to preserve the gospel for the church of the gospel: to the end that those who are lost in our day are not cheated when they attend church, but actually are saved; and to the end that the threatened preachers do not earn eternal death for themselves."⁴⁶

May we altogether remain preserved from that of which Josuttis here writes! Instead let us be encouraged to direct our gaze completely to the pledge of forgiveness as salvation from the judgment of God, to the pledge which alone is able to bring forth the certainty of salvation! **LOGIA**

NOTES

1. See especially Oswald Bayer, "Die reformatorische Wende in Luthers Theologie," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 66 (1969): 115–150; and Oswald Bayer, *Promissio: Geschichte der reformatorischen Wende in Luthers Theologie*, Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmen-schichte, Bd. 24 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971).

2. See the overview of the discussion in the preface of Bernhard Lohse, ed., *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz, Beiheft 25 (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1988), vii–xii.

3. See Bayer, *Promissio*, 339–340; and Bayer, "Wende," 124–125.

4. Bayer, *Promissio*, 340–341.

5. Bayer, "Wende," 125, 127ff.

6. *Ibid.*, 128; see also p. 127: "Luther holds fast to the validity and infallibility of the sacrament of penance as *ex opere operato* in the phrase '*ex verbo dicto*' more energetically than had been done before him, a fact to which one has turned a blind eye (no less in Protestant circles, for which neo-Protestantism is culpable, than in Roman Catholic ones). It is a rewarding secondary aspect of the depiction of Bayer that he has led the way back to the original meaning of the oft cliché-ridden concept of *opus operatum* and thus made it fruitful for the depiction of the Luther's theology." Compare my own observations in Gottfried Martens, "Ex opere operato—Eine Klarstellung" in *Einträchtig Lehren: Festschrift für Bischof Dr. Jobst Schöne*, ed. Jürgen Diestelmann and Wolfgang Schillhahn (Groß Oesingen: Verlag der Lutherischen Buchhandlung, 1997), 311–323.

7. Bayer, "Wende," 134, n. 69.

8. *Ibid.*, 133–136; also 134, n. 69.

9. *Ibid.*, 123ff., 143–145.

10. Otto Hermann Pesch, "'Das heißt eine neue Kirche bauen': Luther und Cajetan in Augsburg," in *Begegnung: Beiträge zu einer Hermeneutik des theologischen Gesprächs: Festschrift für H. Fries*, ed. Max Seckler et al. (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1972), 645–661.

11. Peter Brunner, "Rechtfertigung heute: Versuch einer dogmatischen Paraklese," in *Pro Ecclesia: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur dogmatischen Theologie*, 2nd un-revised ed. (Fürth/Bay: n.p., 1990), 2:129.

12. See my observations in Gottfried Martens, "Glaubensgewißheit oder Daseinsgewißheit? Bemerkungen zu Auftrag und Ziel der Rechtfertigungsverkündigung der Kirche," in *Rechtfertigung und Weltverantwortung: Internationale Konsultation Neuendettelsau 9.–12. September 1991: Berichte und Referate*, ed. Wolhart Schlichting (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1993), 171–179.

13. See my observations in Gottfried Martens, *Die Rechtfertigung des Sünders—Rettungshandeln Gottes oder historisches Interpretament? Grundentscheidungen lutherischer Theologie und Kirche bei der Behandlung des Themas "Rechtfertigung" im ökumenischen Kontext*, Forschungen zur systematischen und ökumenischen Theologie, Bd. 64 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 23–50.

14. Martens, *Rechtfertigung*, 34–39.

15. Martens, *Rechtfertigung*, 412.

16. "Et oportet in ecclesia exstare doctrinam, ex qua concipiant pii certam spem salutis. Nam adversarii infeliciter consulunt hominibus, dum iubent dubitare, utrum consequamur remissionem peccatorum. Quomodo in morte sustentantur se isti, qui de hac fide nihil audiverunt, qui putant dubitandum esse, utrum consequantur remissionem peccatorum? Praeterea necesse est retineri in ecclesia Christi evangelium, hoc est, promissionem, quod gratis propter Christum remittuntur peccata" (*BSLK*, 184).

17. "... in foro et iudicii humanis ius seu debitum certum est, misericordia incerta. Sed alia res est de iudicio Dei. Hic enim misericordia habet clarum et certam promissionem et mandatum Dei. Nam evangelium proprie hoc mandatum est, quod praecipit, ut credamus Deum nobis propitium esse propter Christum. . . . Et haec fides parit certam spem, quia nititur verbo et mandato Dei. Si spes niteretur operibus, tunc vero esset incerta, quia opera non possunt pacare conscientiam, ut supra saepe dictum est" (*ApIV*, 345–346 of the *BSLK*, 226. *Kolb/Wengert* omits this section, which is found only in the quarto edition. It is found, however, in section 224–226 in the *Triglotta*, the

source of the quotation in the text above).

18. See what follows below my observations in Martens, *Rechtfertigung*, 68–86.

19. Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum: definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum / Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und Kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1991), 1525–1526.

20. Wilfried Joest, "Die tridentinische Rechtfertigungslehre," *Kirche und Dienst* 9 (1963): 41–69; 64.

21. Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, 1534.

22. Cf. to this point Heiko A. Oberman, "'Iustitia Christi' und 'Iustitia Dei': Luther und die scholastischen Lehren von der Rechtfertigung," in *Der Durchbruch der reformatorischen Erkenntnis bei Luther*, ed. Bernhard Lohse, Wege der Forschung Bd. 123 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), 413–444, especially page 436. See also Martens, *Rechtfertigung*, 83ff.

23. Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, 1533, 1563.

24. See my observations in Martens, *Rechtfertigung*, 240–273.

25. Otto Hermann Pesch, "Die Rechtfertigungslehre Luthers in katholischer Sicht," in Ulrich Kühn and Otto H. Pesch, *Rechtfertigung im Gespräch zwischen Thomas und Luther* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1967), 74. This was incorporated in the article "Justification by Faith," for example of Avery Dulles, "Justification in Contemporary Catholic Theology," in *Justification by Faith*, ed. H. George Anderson, Joseph A. Burgess, and T. Austin Murphy, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue, 7 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 275.

26. See the evidence provided by Martens, *Rechtfertigung*, 264–265.

27. Karl Lehmann and Wolhart Pannenberg, eds., *Lehrverurteilungen—kirchentrennend? Ökumenischer Arbeitskreis evangelischer und katholischer Theologen*, vol. 1, *Rechtfertigung, Sakramente und Amt im Zeitalter der Reformation und heute*, 3. Aufl., Dialog der Kirchen, Bd. 4 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1988). To the following, please note my observations in Martens, *Rechtfertigung*, 273–321.

28. Lehmann, *Lehrverurteilungen—kirchentrennend?*, 57, 16–18.

29. Hermann Sasse, "Offener Brief an Herrn Landesbischof D. theol. Hermann Dietzfelbinger, München," in *Lutherische Blätter* 20 (1968) Nr. 94, 83; see also Gottfried Martens, "Hermann Sasse und die römisch-katholische Kirche," *Lutherische Beiträge* 5 (2000): 171–196, especially 194–195.

30. Lehmann, *Lehrverurteilungen—kirchentrennend?*, 62, 13.

31. The German text of the *Joint Declaration* used here is printed in *Lutherische Beiträge* 3 (1998): 151–163; cf. Gottfried Martens, "Ein ökumenischer Fortschritt? Anmerkungen zur 'Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre,'" *Lutherische Beiträge* 3 (1998), 164–187. Hereafter the abbreviation GE [for *Gemeinsame Erklärung*] will be used, since it reflects the German text of the *Joint Declaration* that was used in the writing of this paper. Since citation is by paragraph number, references can be readily located in a published version of the English text.

32. GE §§ 34–36.

33. GE § 34.

34. See the "Gemeinsame offizielle Feststellung des Lutherischen Weltbundes und der Katholischen Kirche," reprinted in *Lutherische Beiträge* 4 (1999): 259–262; further to this point see Gottfried Martens, "Der Rettungsversuch: Zur Unterzeichnung der 'Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre' in Augsburg," *Lutherische Beiträge* 4 (1999): 263–275.

35. Martens, "Rettungsversuch," 271–272.

36. See the critique of the "Stellungnahme der Selbständigen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche zur 'Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre' (Römisch-katholische Kirche—Lutherischer Weltbund)," reprinted in *Lutherische Beiträge* 3 (1998): 188–195, especially 190.

37. Horst Georg Pöhlmann, *Rechtfertigung: Die gegenwärtige kontroverstheologische Problematik der Rechtfertigungslehre zwischen der evangelisch-lutherischen und der römisch-katholischen Kirche* (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1971), 290ff.

38. This is attempted by Horst Georg Pöhlmann, "Trennt die Rechtfertigungslehre wirklich noch die Konfessionen? Kritische Anmerkungen zu der Streitschrift von Jörg Baur 'Einig in Sachen Rechtfertigung?'" in *Einig in der Lehre von der Rechtfertigung! Mit einer Antwort an Jörg Baur*, ed. Heinz Schütte (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 1990), 37–38.

39. GE § 36 (emphasis mine).

40. See my comments in Gottfried Martens, "Ein uberaus grosser unterschied: Der Kampf des Andreas Osiander gegen die Praxis der allgemeinen Absolution in Nürnberg," in *Festhalten am Bekenntnis der Hoffnung: Festgabe für Professor Dr. Reinhard Slenczka zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Eberhard Hahn and Christian Herrmann (Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 2001), 145–164.

41. WBr 6,527–530 (Nr. 2052) See also Martens, "Unterschiedt," 160–161.

42. The text of the opinion is printed in Andreas Osiander, *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Gerhard Müller and Gottfried Seebaß (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1983), 5:422–490; see also Martens, "Unterschiedt," 155–160.

43. Gottfried Martens, "Die Frage nach der Rettung aus dem Gericht: Der Beitrag Peter Brunners zur Behandlung der Rechtfertigungsthematik vor und bei der iv. Vollversammlung des Lutherischen Weltbundes in Helsinki 1963," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 13 (1989): 41–71.

44. Martens, *Rechtfertigung*, 151–155.

45. Martens, "Glaubensgewißheit," 173–174.

46. Manfred Josuttis, *Gesetzlichkeit in der Predigt der Gegenwart*, Studien zur praktischen Theologie Nr. 3 (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1966), 78, 120.

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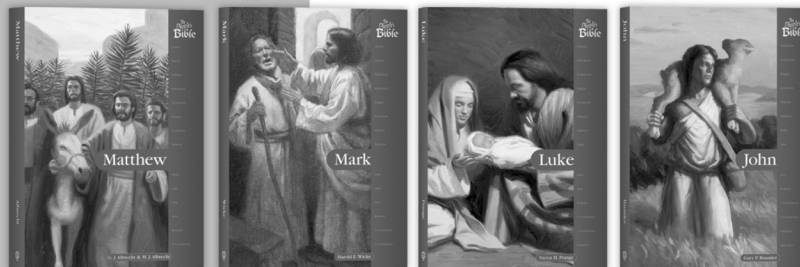
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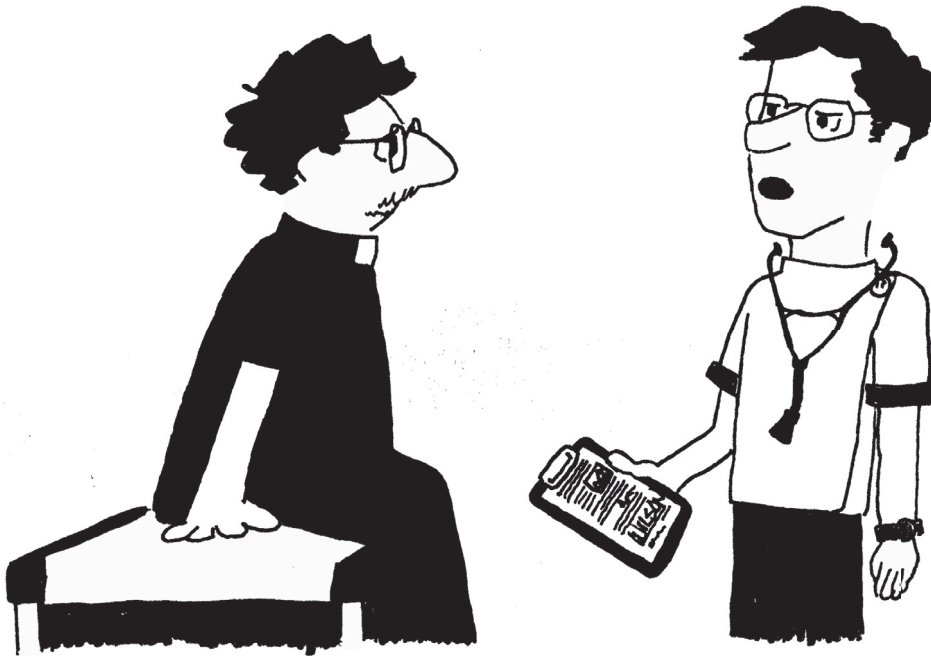
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In Statu Confessionis: Origins and Development

ALBERT COLLVER



WHEN DR. LUTHER STOOD BEFORE the emperor and the Christian princes at the Diet of Worms in 1521, it is reported that he said, “Here I stand, may God help me, Amen.”¹ Luther spoke the Lord’s statutes before kings, and he was not put to shame. He made a faithful confession, not fearing the consequences. Rather, Luther feared God more than he feared men. There at Worms Luther made a confessional stand for his Good Shepherd, who led him to safe pasture. The Lord did not require his confession in blood, and Luther lived to confess another day. This is perhaps one of the most famous confessional stands in the history of the Lutheran Church, and it has served as inspiration for countless others.

Luther’s bold, confessional stand before the Emperor no doubt encouraged the bold confession of Matthias Flacius during the Adiphoristic Controversy. This controversy began after Charles v defeated Elector John Frederick of Saxony on April 24, 1547. He was defeated in part because he was deceived by his nephew Maurice, the Duke of Saxony. As a result of this deception, John Frederick was captured and sentenced to death, a sentence that was latter commuted. John Frederick was imprisoned and forced to resign as the Elector of Saxony. His nephew, Maurice, was appointed the Elector of Saxony. With the temporal defender of the Lutheran Confession in prison, Charles v endeavored to restore the Roman Catholic faith to the Holy Roman Empire. On May 15, 1548, Charles v proclaimed the Augsburg Interim as the law of the land. John Frederick rejected the Interim, preferring death to forsaking the gospel. Under the Interim, hundreds of Lutheran pastors were banished, imprisoned, and executed for remaining faithful to the Augsburg Confession.²

Charles v encouraged Elector Maurice to enforce the Augsburg Interim in his newly acquired Saxon territory. Maurice faced two problems: he did not entirely agree with the Augsburg Interim; and he knew it would be very difficult to enforce it in Saxony. To solve this problem, Maurice gathered some theologians to cobble together a compromise document that came to be known as the Leipzig Interim. This document glossed over, but did not eliminate, the Augsburg Interim’s more glaring errors and offenses. Yet the failure to eliminate doctrinal errors

did not spark the controversy; rather, it was the document’s re-introduction of Roman ceremonies. The Interim re-introduced private masses, the sacraments of Penance, Confirmation, and Extreme Unction, the Roman Canon of the Mass, exorcisms, and other ceremonies that had fallen out of usage after the Reformation. To most people, the changes mandated by the Interim appeared to be unimportant. They seemed to be matters on which a compromise could be built.

Matthias Flacius among others refused to accept the Interim. Flacius complained that the Interim was guilty of what Oliver Olson calls “salami tactics.” Flacius writes, “They begin with changes from the smallest and afterward climb to the highest and every step they sing this song, ‘what does this matter?’ ‘what does that matter?’ . . . Since the common people do not distinguish important from unimportant matters, any change at all would be perceived as yielding.”³ Flacius argued that these unimportant matters—these *adiaphora*—could not be accepted under the threat of persecution. He “admonished and encouraged the Lutheran pastors to be steadfast in confessing the truth, and to stand by their flocks as true shepherds.”⁴ A pastor must preach the pure gospel no matter what the consequences. Bente reports that Flacius summarized his argument with the words, “Nihil est adiaphoron in statu confessionis et scandali,”⁵ that is, “Nothing is an adiaphoron in the state of confession and scandal.” The Formula of Concord, Article x takes up Flacius’s position, and thus it would seem that the principle of *in statu confessionis* was born in the Lutheran confession.

FORMULA OF CONCORD X

It would seem that if one wanted to study the confessional principle of *in statu confessionis*, the place to turn would be Formula of Concord, Article x. Nearly every Lutheran writer on the subject, credits Article x as the source of the teaching.⁶ Even the Reformed know that *in statu confessionis* belongs to the Lutheran tradition.⁷ Joachim Guhrt, a Reformed author, confidently quotes the Epitome, even inserting and italicizing the phrase *in statu confessionis* in place of the English translation.⁸ It would seem that nearly everyone knows that the terminology and the doctrine of *in statu confessionis* is Lutheran from its earliest days. It should then be a simple matter to establish the doctrine and to find examples within the Lutheran tradition of *in statu confessionis* being practiced.

The first and most important place to look for the principle of *in statu confessionis* is Article x. According to the Epitome, the

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chief question is “whether in a time of persecution and in case of confession . . .” The German text reads, “Zeit der Verfolgung und im Fall der Bekenntnis”; the Latin text reads, “persecutionis tempore et in casu confessionis” (BSLK, 814). The German *Fall* and the Latin *casus* are interchangeable. Both words translate as “case” or “situation.” What is readily apparent is that we do not find the word *status*. If we turn to the Formula of Concord Solid Declaration Article x, paragraph 10, not only is *status* absent but so too is *casus*. The Solid Declaration is able to make its point without using the elusive phrase. Despite the many assertions that Formula of Concord x is the source of *in statu confessionis*, the term simply is not found in the Epitome or in the Solid Declaration of Formula of Concord x.⁹

As has been rightly noted, the absence of a phrase does not necessarily indicate the absence of a doctrine. Although Article x does not provide us with the phrase *in statu confessionis*, this fact alone does not exclude the possibility that it is the source of the doctrine represented or carried by that phrase. Before it can be determined whether or not Article x teaches what is commonly understood as *status confessionis*, it must be noted that the “official” text of the Article x, both the Epitome and the Solid Declaration, is the German text. The Latin translation is only of secondary importance when it comes to interpreting the text. The Latin text is in a way a commentary on the German text. The Formula of Concord as a whole employs Latin terminology in the German text when those terms are technical terms or when there are no good German equivalents. When a Latin word or phrase appears in the German text, it is immediately followed by a German translation or interpretation.¹⁰ Since the phrase *in casu confessionis* from the Epitome does not appear in the German text, or at all for that matter in the Solid Declaration, it is not considered a technical term by the authors of the Formula of Concord. This means that the authors of the Formula of Concord most likely did not intend for the phrase *casus confessionis* to carry any special weight or to summarize the entire article. At the time of the Formula of Concord, the term *casus confessionis* carried no independent weight; how it was understood was governed by the context in which it was used.

In the immediate context of Article x, the case of confession (*in casu confessionis*) is in a time of persecution. Although persecution could be defined rather broadly, the Formula of Concord clearly has in mind persecution by the government. Elaborating on this, Flacius wrote, “A government no matter which, has not the authority to forbid a pastor to preach the pure doctrine.”¹¹ In the historical context this article addresses, the government by means of the Interim put a limit on what the pastor could preach and teach. The government put a muzzle on the proclamation of the gospel. It backed up this law with the threat of punishment and the sword. In this context, the left-hand kingdom is interfering with the right-hand kingdom.

Notice that the controversy described in Article x does not involve a battle within the right-hand kingdom. A faction within the church is not fighting another faction, for the church has no authority and no power to back up its threats in the temporal, left-hand kingdom. No matter what a church body can do to a pastor professionally, it does not have the power to arrest,

to throw into jail, to banish, or to kill. The Church of Rome did not banish, persecute, and sometimes kill Lutheran pastors; rather it was Charles v and his agents. Granted Charles v was doing the bidding of Rome, yet had he refused, Rome would have had no recourse beyond idle threats. When the left-hand kingdom interferes in the right-hand kingdom, one must obey God rather than men, with the recognition that there will be temporal consequences for those actions, perhaps even including persecution and death. The phrase *in casu confessionis* in the Epitome, therefore, cannot be understood apart from its immediate context. The case for confession is linked inseparably to persecution, particularly persecution initiated by the government. In the Formula of Concord, Article x is not so much speaking of a protest within the church (as *in statu confessionis* is often understood today) as much as it describes a faithful confession made in a time of persecution by the government.

When there is a case for confession, it is a situation the person has no control over. It is a situation in which a person finds himself, not a situation into which he has placed himself. The act of confession is brought on because of the circumstances in which the person finds himself. Martin Schloemann, commenting on such a circumstance wrote, “There is therefore nothing self-assertive about the confession, nothing of the overheroic character that many academic or synodal (and sometimes other) utterances on *status confessionis* tend to attribute to it.”¹² This means that a case for confession is not so much about deciding to make a bold confession as it is finding oneself in a situation where there is no other option but to confess. Schloemann uses the example of Luther at Worms to illustrate his point. When Luther described himself at Worms, he spoke of trembling with fear. Luther was afraid to make his confession, but he found himself in a situation where he could do no other. In contrast to Luther’s self-portrait of trembling and fear, nineteenth-century paintings of Luther at Worms portray him defiantly and heroically confessing the faith before the Emperor. For Schloemann this is the difference between the Formula of Concord’s understanding of a case for confession (*casus confessionis*) and the view of *status confessionis* as it has been frequently portrayed in the twentieth century.

THE ORIGINS OF THE TERM IN STATU CONFESSIOINIS

Since the term *in statu confessionis* does not occur in the Formula of Concord, the search must continue elsewhere. Martin Schloemann, who was quoted in the previous section, has done the most complete study available on the origins and development of the term *in statu confessionis* in his article, “The Special Case for Confessing.” We will make extensive use of his research in our quest for the term.

After the Article x, the term *in statu confessionis* is linked to Matthias Flacius more than anyone else. After all, Flacius was at the heart and center of the Adiaphoristic Controversy. In an earlier citation, Bente quotes Flacius speaking the phrase “in statu confessionis.”¹³ In another place, Bente quotes Flacius as saying “in casu confessionis.”¹⁴ Which citation from Bente is correct? Did Flacius utter both? Unfortunately for Bente there is no evidence that Flacius ever spoke the phrase “in statu con-

fessionis.” The evidence for Flacius uttering “in casu confessionis” appeared in the nineteenth century.

In his book, *Matthias Flacius and His Times*, Wilhelm Preger quotes Flacius as saying, “Nothing is adiaphoron in the case of confession and scandal.”¹⁵ Schloemann shows that Preger produced this quotation by extracting it from another quotation by Flacius.¹⁶ It is not a direct quotation, but rather a conflation. It is accurate to say Flacius said *in casu confessionis*.

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Nevertheless, after the publication of Preger’s book citations crediting Flacius with inventing both *in casu confessionis* and *in statu confessionis* appeared many times over. Most of these citations do not reference a particular work by Flacius nor do they credit Preger as the source. Bente was not alone in attributing both phrases to Flacius. The same quotation as found in Preger’s book appears in a footnote in *BSLK* (1057, n. 2) and in a footnote in *Kolb/Wengert* (637, n. 312), as well as in many other places.¹⁷ While Preger’s particular quotation may be a composite from different Flacius sources, Hans Christoph von Hase credits Flacius with coining the phrase “in casu confessionis” in 1548.¹⁸ No doubt the authors of the Formula of Concord were aware of Flacius’ expression and chose to utilize it in Article x. Such usage does not make the term a technical term, nor does it indicate that *casus* is interchangeable with *status*.

Apart from a few works of Flacius and the Formula of Concord, the phrase *in casu confessionis* rarely if ever appears, nor does it merit comment until the mid-nineteenth century, which was around the same time as the publication of Preger’s book. *Status confessionis*, if it were a central Lutheran doctrine, is strangely missing. In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, there is some evidence for the term *status confessionis*.¹⁹ With the rise of the Prussian Union, some Lutherans adopted the term *Bekenntnisstand* (state of confession).²⁰ *Bekenntnisstand* translates into Latin as *status confessionis*. Despite the increasing use of *Bekenntnisstand* among confessional Lutherans, its Latin rendering did not enter into widespread usage until the first third of the twentieth century, when it becomes a technical term.

IN STATU CONFESSIONIS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the twentieth century, there are multiple ways *in statu confessionis* is used. The term makes a few incidental appearances in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It seems to be derived from the concept of *Bekenntnisstand*, which de-

veloped from the church’s struggles with the Prussian Union. In the twentieth century, *status confessionis* becomes a technical term, carrying its own freight as a theological concept. Yet *status confessionis* does not behave as a technical term, in that it does not have a “fixed and definite content.”²¹ Rather, the term is one that evokes strong passions whose content is determined by each individual speaker and hearer. Now such a description may sound too post-modern for our liking, yet in many ways, the use of *status confessionis* in the late twentieth century is the ultimate post-modern expression.

In a general sense, the use of *status confessionis* today conveys the idea of a strong protest prompted by a threat to the gospel (gospel is used here in a very loose sense). The *status confessionis* is invoked when the conscience of a church body, a congregation, a pastor, or an individual is troubled by a threat to the gospel. *Status confessionis* is the sort of term that is known and understood by everyone, while at the same time being a mystery to all as a relic of a forgotten history. Thus, it is the perfect post-modern term, divorced from its history and its original context, with the ability to be shaped into anything its user desires. This might make one ponder how helpful the term is today.

Helpful or not, the term *status confessionis* has two main usages in contemporary parlance. One usage comes from Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe, and those churches aligned with the Lutheran World Federation. The other usage comes from those churches in Germany that resisted the Prussian Union in the nineteenth century, and from the churches in America that belonged to the Synodical Conference.

STATUS CONFESSIONIS AMONG THE GERMAN LUTHERANS

Despite the few incidental and early occurrences of *status confessionis*, the term did not reach prominence until the 1930s and 1940s. The events in Germany prompted the call for the church to make a faithful confession regarding the so-called “Jewish question.” In the spring of 1933, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reluctantly called for the Lutheran churches to go *in statu confessionis*. Others among the confessional Lutherans made an appeal to the *Bekenntnisstand*.²² The state government required the church to introduce anti-Jewish measures and forbade it from proselytizing Jews.²³ Many theologians felt that the “Jewish question” was an *adiaphoron* that did not directly concern the churches since it was a political matter. Bonhoeffer disagreed. He wrote, “Confession and church order are equal *in statu confessionis*.”²⁴ Bonhoeffer argued that the present situation in Germany was similar to the one St. Paul faced in dealing with the variety of churchly offices in Pauline congregations and those in Jerusalem. He stated that when Paul opposed Peter to his face in Galatians 2:11, his opposition to Peter was a case of *in statu confessionis*. This situation in Germany led Bonhoeffer to go beyond Article x that deals with the left-hand kingdom interfering in the right-hand kingdom. If Article x is considered the first dimension of *in statu confessionis*, Bonhoeffer developed a second dimension that allowed the church to become involved in politics, in ethics, and in social issues that were not, strictly speaking, churchly matters or con-

cerns. He did not believe that one church could go it alone, and thought all Protestant churches would have to act together.²⁵ Eventually, the idea of *status confessionis* was played out in the Barmen Declaration of 1934.

Some Lutherans continued to argue that the church could only lodge a protest against the state in matters that directly affected church doctrine. Bonhoeffer's cousin, Hans-Christoph von Hase, whose work was cited earlier, argued that such a limited view could only deal with matters that the Lutheran Confessions had directly addressed. Events and situations had arisen, such as the Nazis' racial laws that the Confessions did not envision. He believed that Flacius's teaching on *casus confessionis* provided Lutherans with a resistance doctrine. Olson notes: "[Von Hase] announced the Flacian doctrine to his fellow Germans at the last possible moment, in the last theological work the Nazis permitted the Göttingen firm of Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht to print, in 1940."²⁶

Although the book was published in 1940, von Hase indicated in the foreword that the book had been completed for some time. Bonhoeffer had been intimately familiar with von Hase's work. It is not known who exerted greater influence over the other—Bonhoeffer or von Hase. Von Hase's book did expand the definition of what could be considered as a matter of confession. He wrote, "The expression, *casus confessionis*, should not be confused with the later expression, *status confessionis*. The *casus confessionis* is an event, the struggle for the gospel, which comprehends everything—teaching and confession, the articles of faith and 'adiaphora,' and the involvement in life itself."²⁷

Once the status confessionis was expanded to cover "involvement in life itself," the door was opened for the church to protest against all sorts of things.

Once the *status confessionis* was expanded to cover "involvement in life itself," the door was opened for the church to protest against all sorts of things. In the late 1950s, the Lutheran church of Germany entered into *status confessionis* over nuclear weapons because "weapons of mass destruction have to do with the affirmation or denial of the gospel itself."²⁸ In the 1970s and early 1980s, the Lutheran World Federation went in *status confessionis* over the issue of apartheid.²⁹ An article titled *1984: Orwell and Barmen* celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Barmen Declaration and encourages Christians to look for social and political issues that the church can protest *status confessionis*. The article suggests apartheid, nuclear weapons, the war in Grenada, and the United States' engagement in Central America as potential *status confessionis* triggers.³⁰

In 1999, Harold Brown called for the church to enter *status confessionis* over life issues such as reproductive technologies and how we treat people before they are born and when they are aged.³¹ In the Spring of 2004, Craig Nessen, a professor at a seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, urged Lutherans to declare the matter of world hunger a *status confessionis*.³² Equipped with Bonhoeffer's and von Hase's definition of *status confessionis* a person can declare himself or urge churches to enter into *status confessionis* over their favorite political, ethical, and social causes. A Presbyterian author recently suggested the need to go beyond *status confessionis* and enter into what he calls *processus confessionis*, that is "a committed progressive recognition, education, and confession . . . regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction."³³ There seems to be no end to the sorts of issues that might prompt one to enter into *status confessionis*.

STATUS CONFESSIONIS AMONG THE REFORMED

Karlheinz Stoll wrote that the theological clarity of the Barmen Declaration brought a new understanding to *status confessionis*.³⁴ The Barmen Declaration did more than bring a new understanding to *status confessionis*; it also gave the term to the Reformed Church.³⁵ It seems that Karl Barth learned of *status confessionis* from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer wrote to Barth about the "Aryan paragraph." Barth replied to Bonhoeffer's letter "by acknowledging that the *status confessionis* had undoubtedly dawned."³⁶ Shortly later, the Barmen Declaration was written. Over the next few years, Barth continued to use the term *status confessionis*. During this time, the term *status confessionis* went from being seen as an exclusively Lutheran term to a common term belonging to all Christians.

In some ways, one might argue that the term *status confessionis* now belongs more to the Reformed than to the Lutherans. The issue of *status confessionis* has not been addressed in any Lutheran dogmatics textbook that we are aware of. There is no *locus* on *status confessionis* in Lutheran dogmatics texts. No Lutheran has incorporated the concept of *status confessionis* into the *corpus doctrinae*. On the other hand, Karl Barth has written about *status confessionis* in his *Church Dogmatics*. Barth seems to have had a great influence on defining what is commonly understood today as *status confessionis*. For instance, Lutherans and Reformed alike state that one can only enter into *status confessionis* temporarily.

Karl Barth in his *Church Dogmatics* writes, "The *status confessionis* is not, then, a permanent position. If a man tries to be a permanent martyr, he can never be one at all, because he obviously does not see that martyrdom or witness is an act that can be realized only on the basis of a special summons in a special situation. One cannot bring about or construct this situation; and therefore one cannot try to be a martyr. One can only be ready to be made a martyr. And we can count on it that such situations will arise and be recognized."³⁷ Two of Barth's points are commonly repeated, namely that *status confessionis* is not a permanent position, and that one cannot help but enter into that state when the circumstances warrant. Oesch, who defined *status confessionis* for Lutherans in America in the late 1960s, makes almost the same points as Barth.³⁸

Barth's influence on *status confessionis* has been greatly felt. He helped expand the use of the term into an activist tool. The most that could be said for the Article x and *status confessionis* is that Article x described a situation where the left-hand kingdom interfered with the right hand-kingdom. It seems that initially the "Jewish question" may have been such a situation. However, Barth expanded the concept of *status confessionis* to engage all sorts of social and political situations that an individual, congregation, or church body felt was a hindrance to the gospel. When an individual, congregation, or church body found something which caused them to declare *status confessionis*, the protester essentially was using the right-hand kingdom to dictate to the left-hand kingdom how things should be in the world. Rather than the left-hand kingdom interfering with the right-hand kingdom, this move allows the right-hand kingdom to interfere with the left. Such a shift is consistent with Reformed theology but foreign to Lutheran theology. With the help of Karl Barth, Lutherans and the Reformed could join together with joint declarations of *status confessionis*. The best that could be said of Barth's view of *status confessionis* is that it, like Article x, recognizes that the state of confession is prompted by the actions of the left-hand kingdom. Yet, the view of the Synodical Conference will shift its focus from the left-hand kingdom, exclusively to the right-hand kingdom.

THE SYNODICAL CONFERENCE

The churches of the Synodical Conference developed in a different context than the churches in Germany. In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the confessional churches' struggle against the Prussian Union shaped the understanding of *status confessionis*. These struggles, at least in part, involved the State dictating to and interfering with the church. In the American context, the State more or less left the churches alone. In a country free from government interference in church affairs, *status confessionis* developed quite differently. Among the churches of the Synodical Conference, *status confessionis* came to be understood as a protest one makes within the right-hand kingdom. In other words, a portion of the right-hand kingdom (an individual, a congregation, or even a church body) would declare *status confessionis* against a different group within the right-hand kingdom. In this rather bold move, the left-hand kingdom no longer plays a role in the *status confessionis*. This is a significant departure from what the Formula of Concord originally described.

Just as the term *status confessionis* was used incidentally in the late nineteenth century in Germany, the term also sporadically appeared in America among Lutheran groups. There is some evidence that Francis Pieper spoke of a "state of confession" in 1889 in connection with his essay, *The Difference Between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches*; however, the term does not appear in the document itself and apparently came up in a question and answer session after the paper's delivery.³⁹ There is not enough data to indicate what Pieper meant by a "state of confession." Another occurrence of the term was previously cited. In 1921, Bente attributes the phrase *in statu confessionis* to Flacius in his "Historical Introductions."⁴⁰ In

1943, Theodore Graebner writes that when there is a controversy, we must distinguish between those in fellowship with us and "those who are *in statu confessionis*."⁴¹ Since the term is not defined, the reader presumably will understand what the author intends. The Graebner quotation nicely demonstrates the shift that has occurred in the usage of *status confessionis* among the Synodical Conference. In this quotation, it is apparent that two church bodies, congregations, or individuals are *in statu confessionis* against each other. The parties involved are both from the right-hand kingdom.

Barth expanded the concept of status confessionis to engage all sorts of social and political situations that an individual, congregation, or church body felt was a hindrance to the gospel.

Despite the sporadic appearance of the term in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the term did not enter into widespread usage in American Lutheranism until the late 1950s and early 1960s, which is after the time the term became popularized in Europe. How much the European usage of the term influenced the American Lutherans cannot be stated with certainty, yet it is quite probable that the European usage influenced the American usage. It is commonly thought that Hermann Sasse instructed the American Lutherans about *status confessionis*. According to Schloemann, despite the title of his collected works, *In statu confessionis*,⁴² Sasse never used the term.⁴³ Rather Sasse spoke of *casus confessionis* in keeping with the language of the Lutheran Confessions. The title for Sasse's collected works was given by the publisher and was not his own.⁴⁴ Although Sasse writes a great deal about confessing, despite the title of his collected works, he does not specifically address the topic of *status confessionis* using that term, nor does he indicate how one is to implement such a stand.

In fact, the phrase *in statu confessionis* appeared as the Synodical Conference was breaking down. It seems that as fellowship was lost between former members, the bodies entered the intermediate state of *status confessionis* before fellowship was broken for good. One example of this is found in the formation of the Concordia Lutheran Conference, which consisted of a small group of pastors and congregations who broke away from the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in 1957. In an essay by Bloedel explaining the rationale behind *status confessionis*, the author gives a brief history of the term. He writes that the historical material concerning "status confessionis" is

so indefinite and vague as to the meaning of the term and its implications that one is not amazed at all the confusion which has centered itself around this term. The essayist must declare at the very outset that he does not know where, when, or how this term, “status confessionis,” originated.⁴⁵

While the author should be commended for admitting he does not know “where, when, or how” *status confessionis* originated, it is rather amazing, that after admitting his ignorance, he then goes on to explain what it means and how it should be implemented. The author suggests that the first appearance of the term was in the *Proceedings of the Synodical Conference of 1875*. In the *Proceedings*, a question was asked whether one can have fellowship with a pastor who belongs to a church body that tolerates chiliasm. The author quotes the following answer, “such fellowship [would] be permitted when such a member were [sic] found in the confessional state (in *statu confessionis*).”⁴⁶

The text of the *Proceedings* do not use the phrase *in statu confessionis*, but rather *Bekennnißstand*.⁴⁷ This confirms our suspicion that, by the late nineteenth century, *Bekennnißstand* and *statu confessionis* were functioning as near synonyms.

The most pregnant occurrence of the term *in statu confessionis* in LCMS history happened after the LCMS voted to enter into full fellowship with the American Lutheran Church (ALC) at its 1969 Convention in Denver. This caused the Confessional Lutheran Church of Finland to break fellowship with the LCMS in 1970.⁴⁸ It prompted the Evangelical Lutheran Church Synod of France and Belgium to declare themselves,

“In *statu confessionis*” with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod [sic]. . . . By “status confessionis” [sic] we mean a provisory suspension of our former fraternal fellowship with the LCMS, that is with all those pastors and members of the LCMS who accept and condone the present practice of unionistic fellowship with the ALC or otherwise, until with God’s help such evil practice has come to a halt.⁴⁹

The justification for this action is not explained; rather, it is asserted. In an article bearing the title “The Last Days of the Late, Great Synod of Missouri,” John Warwick Montgomery speaks of pastors and congregations declaring themselves *in statu confessionis*.⁵⁰ Many of these protesting pastors and congregations joined the Conference for Authentic Lutheranism that became the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism.⁵¹

During this time of turmoil in the LCMS, articles defining *status confessionis* and describing how to implement it appeared by W. M. Oesch,⁵² Curtis A. Peterson, and Alvin E. Wagner.⁵³ The end of Wagner’s paper had a worksheet titled “My Statement of Confessional Protest (Status Confessionis)” that the reader could fill out or use as a model for his own statement. Since most of the papers are very similar in the material covered, only Oesch’s paper will be considered here.

Oesch wrote fourteen theses to explain the difference between *status confessionis* and selective fellowship. Those entering into *status confessionis* were often accused of practicing

selective fellowship by their detractors. Thus, it was necessary for those practicing *status confessionis* to have a defense against the charge of selective fellowship. His paper describes the origins of *status confessionis* and tells the reader how to implement it. He states that *status confessionis* is a “public protest of the strongest possible kind.”⁵⁴ Its purpose is to declare a church body to be heterodox when the possibility still exists to reverse that situation. The justification for declaring *status confessionis* is Article x.

Status confessionis is implemented by

not exchanging pulpits with those of one’s own church body who propagate or support error . . . by not participating in the celebration of Holy Communion with errorists. . . . It also means refraining provisionally from participating in activities by which error is promoted or supported.⁵⁵

Although Oesch and others provide guidelines on how to implement *status confessionis*, they do not indicate the source of their guidelines. As was previously indicated, some of the guidelines are traceable to Karl Barth. Although all of these papers claim to explain the origins of *status confessionis*, other than merely asserting a connection between what they propose and Article x or Flacius, there are no data to support their claim. Careful study of the issues seems to have been set aside by emotion and the desire to take action.

Three years after the Denver Convention, the LCMS prepared for another convention in 1971. Because a significant minority of pastors and congregations declared themselves *in statu confessionis*, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) prepared a theologico-historical definition of the term. The CTCR wrote, “The phrase *in statu confessionis* can probably be traced back to the Adiaphoristic Controversy and the Tenth Article of the Formula of Concord.” Please note that the CTCR does not claim to know the origins of the term *in statu confessionis*; the CTCR thinks it is probably from Article x. In the next paragraph the CTCR continues:

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations is not aware of any synodically approved definition of the term *in statu confessionis* for our time. The commission is of the opinion that the term is quite generally employed in the current usage of our church to declare that an individual or congregation is in a state of protest because it holds that a particular teaching, practice, or action of the church against which the protest is lodged is contrary to the word of God or endangers the gospel. Used in this sense, the declaration that one is *in statu confessionis* is not tantamount to the breaking of fellowship. If, however, the circumstances which called forth the protest are not corrected in due time, the implication is that the protest will lead to the severance of fellowship relations. (Adopted by the CTCR, April 1970)⁵⁶

With this statement the CTCR defines the term *in statu confessionis* as a state of protest for an aberration in doctrine or

practice. The CTCR also notes that entering into such a state does not break fellowship with the Synod; however, such a state cannot be permanent. Notice that similar themes continue to reappear from document to document. It seems that the CTCR did not carefully study the issue for themselves, but rather adopted commonly accepted notions about *status confessionis*.

Armed with the CTCR statement from 1970, the 1971 Convention passed a resolution that said, “Resolved, That congregations and individuals who are in a ‘state of protest’ remain entitled to all benefits and privileges of synodical membership.”⁵⁷ With this resolution, the Synod officially permitted its pastors and congregations to enter into a state of confession against the Synod with no fear of recrimination or removal from the membership of the Synod. More than that, a member of Synod who is in a state of protest can retain an elected office and vote in convention. Presumably, this resolution is still in effect today. Even though this resolution provides protection for a pastor (or for a congregation) who declares himself *in statu confessionis*, it also affords the District and the Synod the opportunity to ignore those in protest since there is no violation of the Constitution and bylaws of the Synod. Thus, entering into *status confessionis* may not have a salutary effect for anyone involved.

CONCLUSION

The issues surrounding *in statu confessionis* are not as simple or easy as one might first think. When research for this paper began, it was thought that it would be relatively easy to establish the Lutheran origins of *status confessionis* with concrete historical examples and discussions on the topic by prominent Lutheran theologians. Once the historical origins were discovered, it was assumed that the paper would focus on time-honored ways to implement *status confessionis*, should the need arise. What we found instead was four hundred years of silence. Much of what was assumed about *status confessionis* either could not be supported by the data or was entirely lacking in data. The term itself is ambiguous and is open to bending and redefinition as the speaker and hearer see fit. The term is no longer associated (if it ever was) with the Lutheran Confessions, but, thanks to Karl Barth and others, has become common property with the Reformed and, as such, does not have a precise usage. This causes one to wonder if the term is helpful to the Lutheran confession.

The Formula of Concord, Article x, does indeed describe a case for confession in the midst of persecution by the state. It seems that the confessors had in mind a rather limited scope. The struggles of the church over against the state in German lands and in particular with the Nazi regime brought about the expansion of a questionable concept to include a protest against the state for political and ethical reasons, rather than, strictly speaking, theological reasons. Bonhoeffer had in mind a corporate confession of protest. Karl Barth morphed Bonhoeffer’s corporate protest into an individual protest. Barth altered the direction by putting the church in a position to dictate to the state in accord with Reformed theology. The churches of the Synodical Conference completely removed

the left-hand kingdom from the equation, instead applying the term to an intra-church conflict. This last application is perhaps further afield from what the Formula of Concord described than even Karl Barth’s version.

In light of the foregoing, a *status confessionis* protest against a church body does not seem to be a tenable option to those who take the Lutheran Confessions seriously. A better way is that of Dr. Luther and countless other saints who gave a good and faithful confession in the place and situation the Lord called them to do so. The faithful confession was made until it could not be tolerated by those who opposed the truth any longer. This is the key. How does one know when a church body is unreformable? A church body is unreformable when the true confession is no longer tolerated. By this, we do not mean to indicate merely a lapse in the practice of the true confession, but the snuffing out of the voice of the true confession. As long as the gospel is confessed in truth and purity, there is the opportunity to hear the gospel’s call. When the true confession is silenced definitively and permanently from a place either by force or by the power of the sword, that is, by the abuse of the left-hand kingdom, or through institutional and ecclesiastical measures, then there is no hope of reform.

A status confessionis protest against a church body does not seem to be a tenable option to those who take the Lutheran Confessions seriously.

Lest we are tempted to conclude there is no hope too readily, we ought to consider what those who have gone before us endured for the sake of the gospel. In Acts, Stephen, who belonged to the Office of the Seven, confessed the gospel until his hearers literally could not bear to hear more. After he proclaimed that he saw the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God, the text reports, “But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him” (Acts 7:51 RSV). Imagine that: the people literally plugged their ears so they did not have to hear Stephen’s confession. Talk about a co-mingling of the left- and right-hand kingdoms. Stephen was thrown out of the synagogue, that is, excommunicated, and then taken by the very same people and stoned to death. The people had to plug their ears to block out the sound of Stephen’s confession and when that didn’t work they silenced it permanently by stoning him to death.

We can be thankful the two kingdoms presently are not co-mingled in our situation. In fact, it is difficult to come up with a historical example when the silencing of the true confession did not involve the force and power of the left-hand kingdom.

The worst that we can receive is the institutional death-penalty of removal from office or the removal of a congregation from Synod. It should also be kept in mind that the isolated and occasional removal of a faithful pastor for proclaiming the truth (as tragic as that is) is not yet an indicator that the church body is unreformable. There are perhaps church bodies in America where reform is impossible. In other denominations, one hears of pastors and congregations being removed from their respective denominations for boldly confessing the truth and for rejecting the errors in their church bodies. Soon some of these denominations may be without a single faithful voice in their midst.

When the true confession is silenced definitively and permanently from a place by the abuse of the left-hand kingdom or through institutional and ecclesiastical measures, then there is no hope of reform.

With a single word, the Lord can and does raise the dead. As long as the true confession remains, there is hope. Until there is no hope, one is called to confess the truth in the place the Lord has called him to serve. This certainly does not mean error is tolerated. The way error is dealt with is by exposing it to the light of truth. And that proclamation of truth may well evoke a reaction similar to Stephen's hearers in that they stopped up their ears and took measures to remove the truth confession from their midst. A confessor does not have to remove himself from a situation; rather those who can no longer tolerate the truth will do it for him—one way or another. This follows the example of Dr. Luther who continued to confess the truth to Rome, until he was removed by excommunication. Then Luther shook the dust off his feet and burned the Pope's Bull of excommunication. Quoting Judges 15, Luther said, "As they did to me, so I have done to them" (AE 31, 395). Until such a time occurs when our voice is silenced, we are called to confess the truth of the gospel.

Our calling is not to take the easy way, or to protect the gospel from abuse (as if the gospel needed protection from us). The gospel always suffers just as our Lord Jesus suffered. So too, the bearers of the gospel will suffer for proclaiming it faithfully. Our pious desire to protect the gospel from indignity and abuse and our sinful nature's desire to avoid suffering can cause us to remove ourselves from a place before the Lord has finished having use of our confession. Our call is to give a faithful confession and to travel the lonely way until the Lord reveals our path and delivers us to our destination. **LOGIA**

NOTES

1. "Luther at the Diet of Worms, 1521," AE 32, 113. Luther appeared in Worms a few days after Misericordias Domini Sunday. He had been excommunicated some four months earlier on January 3, 1521.
2. F. Bente, "Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church," in *Triglotta*, 98.
3. Oliver K. Olson, *Matthias Flacius and the Survival of Luther's Reform*, Wolfenbütteler Abhandlungen zur Renaissanceforschung, Bd. 20 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002), 113.
4. Bente, "Historical Introductions," 109.
5. *Ibid.*, 103.
6. *Ibid.* See also James W. Tauscher, "What Do You Mean: 'In Statu Confessionis?'," <http://reformationtoday.tripod.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/tauscherstatu.pdf> presented at the Fall Pastoral Conference, South Central District, Immanuel, Fort Worth, Tex., 22 Oct. 1990: "The purpose of this paper then is to examine that term to understand its meaning, its original use in the Confessions"; Alvin E. Wagner, "In statu confessionis (A State of Confessional Protest)," <http://reformationtoday.tripod.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/wagnerprotest.pdf> presented at the Conference of Authentic Lutherans, North Hollywood, Calif., 19 Jan. 1975: "The concept of *status confessionis* was first propounded in Article x of the Formula of Concord"; and W. M. Oesch, "Status Confessionis and Selective Fellowship," trans. J. Val. Andreea, *Sola Scriptura* 1, no. 4 (Jan./Feb. 1971): 19–24. Several other sources could also be cited.
7. Eugene Teselle, "How Do We Recognize a *Status Confessionis*?" *Theology Today* 45 (April 1988): 73: "The term *status confessionis*, and the doctrine associated with it, belong to the Lutheran tradition."
8. Joachim Guhrt, "Status Confessionis: The Witness of a Confessing Church," *Reformed World* 37 (1983): 302: "The Formula of Concord, the authorized collection of Lutheran Confessions, affirms this conception: 'In statu confessionis such items are not *adiaphora* if it is a matter of the truth of the Gospel and of Christian freedom' (FC Ep x, 2)." If one actually looks at the text of the Epitome, the phrase Guhrt quotes does not appear in the text.
9. For a similar example see J. A. O. Preus III, "Justification by Faith: The Articulus Stantis et Cadentis Ecclesiae," in *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Gerald S. Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Dearborn, Mich.: The Nagel Festschrift Committee, 1990), 264–82. On p. 267 Preus writes, "The statement that justification by faith is the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* does not appear in the Confessions."
10. An example of this can be found in FC VII, 38, where the German text has the Latin phrase *in usitatam* in the text. It is immediately followed by an interpretation of that phrase in German. In this instance, *in usitatam* is a technical term that does not have a readily available German equivalent.
11. Bente, "Historical Introductions," 109.
12. Martin Schloemann, "The Special Case for Confessing: Reflections on the *Casus Confessionis* (Dar es Salaam, 1977) in the Light of History and Systematic Theology," in *The Debate on Status Confessionis*, ed. Eckehart Lorenz (Geneva: Department of Studies, The Lutheran World Federation, 1983), 53.
13. Bente, "Historical Introductions," 103: "Nihil est *adiaphoron* in statu confessionis et scandali."
14. *Ibid.*, 110: "Nihil est *adiaphoron* in casu confessionis et scandali."
15. Wilhelm Preger, *Matthias Flacius Illyricus und Seine Zeit* (Erlangen: Theodor Bläsing, 1859), 1:109: "Nihil est *adiaphoran* in casu confessionis et scandali."
16. Schloemann, "Case for Confessing," 50: "The phrase appears to have been adopted by Wilhelm Preger who—converting it into a thesis—extracted it from an earlier quotation: '*Contra verissimum est, nihil esse adiaphoron in casu confessionis et scandali, quorum utrumque jam cum istis mutationibus est conjunctissimum.*' . . . Here they object that these are intermediate things and one should not quarrel or run into danger for trifles. On the contrary, the truth is that nothing is an intermediate thing in the case confessing and scandal."
17. Olson, *Matthias Flacius*, 115. Olson gives Flacius's *In These*

Strong Words as his source.

18. Hans Christoph von Hase, *Die Gestalt der Kirche Luthers: Der casus confessionis im Kampf des Matthias Flacius gegen das Interim von 1548* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1940), 61: "Darum prägt Flacius den Begriff des 'casus confessionis' und formuliert das Wesen dieses 'Falles des Bekennens.'"

19. Schloemann, "Case for Confessing," 55. Schloemann lists Schilber using the term in 1855 and Vilmar in 1860.

20. *Ibid.*, 54–56.

21. D. J. Smit, "A *Status Confessionis* in South Africa?" *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 47 (June 1984): 21. "The expression is in fact not a technical term with a fixed and definite content, but one which must be understood in the light of the few occasions in history when it was used or when similar expressions played a part."

22. Schloemann, "Case for Confessing," 57: "In the period preceding the church's struggle and during its initial stage, Dietrich Bonhoeffer used the phrases (*in statu(s) confessionis*) only in connection with the Lutheran tradition and at first with some hesitation. Elsewhere in the Confessing Church that arose out of efforts to maintain the confessionality of the alliance of churches in Germany, the appeal was initially to the *Bekennnisstand*."

23. Guhrt, "Status Confessionis," 302.

24. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1959), 2:270: "Bekennnis und Ordnung der Kirche sind in *statu confessionis* eins."

25. Guhrt, "Status Confessionis," 302. "He discovered a second dimension of the *status confessionis*. . . Discrimination and persecution to minorities in society can lead to a *status confessionis*. Therefore it was evident to Bonhoeffer that the church has under certain circumstances to act in politics but for such action a decision of a general Protestant council was necessary."

26. Olson, *Matthias Flacius*, 114.

27. *Ibid.* From Hase, *Die Gestalt der Kirche Luthers*, 61, n. 64: "Der 'casus confessionis' als der Fall des Bekennens darf mit dem späteren Ausdruck 'status confessionis' nicht verwechselt werden. Der 'casus confessionis' meint ein Ereignis, den Kampf für das Evangelium, der alles, Lehre und Bekennen, Glaubensartikel und 'Mittelding,' ja den Einsatz des Lebens umfaßt."

28. Guhrt, "Status Confessionis," 304.

29. Henry P. Hamann, "Apartheid and (the) *Status Confessionis*," in *A Lively Legacy: Essays in Honor of Robert Preus*, ed. Kurt E. Marquart, John R. Stephenson and Bjarne W. Teigen (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1985), 40: "At Dar-es-Salaam in 1977 a statement on apartheid by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) called all its member churches to declare themselves to be in a *status confessionis* in relation to apartheid, and very recently, in Budapest, two Lutheran churches of the LWF were excluded on the grounds that they had not acted according to the decision of 1977."

30. Robert McAfee Brown, "1984: Orwell and Barmen," *The Christian Century* 101, no. 25 (August 15–22 1984): 771–74.

31. Harold O. J. Brown, "Status Confessionis," *Touchstone* 12, no. 3 (May/June 1999), viewed 10 August 2004 at <http://www.touchstonemag.com/docs/issues/12.3docs/12-3pg36.htm>.

32. David L. Miller, "Hungry for Confession," *The Lutheran* 17, no. 2 (Feb. 2004), viewed 18 October 2004 at <http://www.thelutheran.org/0402/page58.html>: "Our forgetfulness makes a proposal from Craig Nesson significant. Associate professor of contextual theology at Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, Nesson urges Lutherans to make addressing the scandal of hunger a core component of Christian faith and identity. He says we should declare it a matter of *status confessionis*."

33. "Reformed Confessions and Confessing Church: An Outlook Interview with Milan Opocensky," *The Presbyterian Outlook* 21 May 2001, 18 October 2004 <http://www.pres-outlook.com/milano.html>.

34. Karlheinz Stoll, *Status Confessionis: Das Bekenntnis des Glaubens zu Jesus Christus im Zeitalter der atomaren Gefahr*, Zur Sache, Heft 24 (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1984), 43: "Die

Theologische Erklärung von Barmen und die neuerliche Auseinandersetzung um den *status confessionis*."

35. Teselle, "How Do We Recognize," 73: "The term *status confessionis*, and the doctrine associated with it, belong to the Lutheran tradition. The Reformed never had occasion to take precisely the same stand."

36. Smit, "A *Status Confessionis*," 24.

37. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III, 4, *The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. A. T. MacKay et al. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 79.

38. Oesch, "Status Confessionis," 22–23: "Such a state dare never be accepted as permanent (church within a church) on pain of wounding consciences, loss of doctrinal sensitivity, denial of truth and growing hypocrisy. . . . It is clear from the preceding theses that entering into *status confessionis* is not a matter of choice, but is obligatory."

39. P. Bloedel, "The Nature of a True State of Confession, Especially on the Part of a Church Body," <http://www.concordialutheran-conf.com/clc/confession1957.cfm> presented at the Convention of the Concordia Lutheran Conference, 25 August, 1957. It is quite likely since the questions and answers took place in German that the word *Bekennnisstand* was used instead of the Latin phrase *in statu confessionis* (more on the interchangeability of the terms later).

40. Bente, "Historical Introductions," 103: "Nihil est adiaphoron in *statu confessionis* et scandalii."

41. Theodore Graebner and Paul E. Kretzmann, *Toward Lutheran Union* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943), 71: "Regarding the *persons* involved in controversy we must certainly distinguish between those who are in fellowship with us, those who are seeking fellowship with us, those who are *in statu confessionis*, those who differ from us although accepting the organic foundation (the Scriptures), those who are officially committed to a heterodox position, and finally those who are enemies of fundamental Christian truth."

42. Hermann Sasse, *In statu confessionis: Gesammelte Aufsätze von Hermann Sasse*, ed. Friedrich Willhelm Hopf, 2 vols. (Düsseldorf: Die Spur, 1975–1976).

43. Schloemann, "Case for Confessing," 68: "The title of the collection of papers by Hermann Sasse *In statu confessionis* (1966) represents something of a contrasting approach, though the wording owes more to the publisher than to Sasse who himself spoke of *casus*." The private letters of Hermann Sasse to Tom Hardt indicate his use of *casus confessionis* and *status confessionis*. In a letter to Hardt, Sasse writes, "I am convinced that a firm stand against female priests was a *casus confessionis*." Toward the end of the same letter Sasse writes, "Since six years I am *in statu confessionis*. I cannot receive Holy Communion in my congregation or at the Pastors' Conference." The letters are from Hermann Sasse, Tom Hardt, Stockholm, "Sasse Correspondence," September 17, 1959. A few more examples of such usage can be found in Sasse's private correspondence. What is important to note is that Sasse preferred to use the term *casus confessionis* because it is the language of the Lutheran Confessions. It is also important to note that he only speaks of *status confessionis* in private correspondence. He did not publicly use the term, nor did he compose a treatise describing how to enter into such a state. Special thanks to the Rev. Dr. Ronald Feuerhahn, Professor of Historical Studies at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, for providing us with copies of Sasse's letters from his personal collection.

44. Sasse, *In statu confessionis*, 1:5–6. The foreword explains the title of the book: "Was Hermann Sasse seit vier Jahrzehnten durch Wort und Schrift gelehrt hat, sind fast ausnahmslos Worte 'in statu confessionis,' gewonnen aus Gottes Wort und aus dem lutherischen Bekenntnis, geprüft an den Erfahrungen der Kirchengeschichte, angewendet auf die Entscheidungen des 20. Jahrhunderts, geformt unter der ständigen Nötigung, die der Kirche von ihrem Herrn abgeforderte und zugleich geschenkte *Confessio* in dem *Status* unseres Ortes und unserer Zeit zum aktuellen Bekennen werden zu lassen. . . . Der Herausgeber, mit dem Verfasser seit Jahrzehnten 'in statu confessionis' verbunden, gedenkt jenes alten Wandbildes der Pfarrkirche zu Mühlhausen (Oberfranken), in der auch D. Sasse wiederholt als

Kommunikant und als Prediger zu Gast war." ("What Hermann Sasse has taught for four decades in speaking and writing are, almost without exception, the words 'in statu confessionis'—derived from God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions, tested against the experiences of church history, applied to the decisions of the twentieth century, formed under the constant urgency to let the confession which was demanded of, and at the same time given to, the Church by her Lord become, in the 'status' of our place and our time, contemporary confessing. The publisher, with whom the author has for decades been bound 'in statu confessionis,' remembers that old picture of the parish church at Mühlhausen [Oberfranken], in which also Dr. Sasse repeatedly visited as communicant and as preacher"—A special thanks to the Rev. Benjamin Mayes of Our Savior in Grand Rapids, MI, for providing the translation of this quotation.)

45. Bloedel, "The Nature."

46. Ibid.

47. *Verhandlungen der vierten Versammlung der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Synodal-Conferenz von Nord-America zu Cleveland, Ohio, vom 14. bis zum 20. Juli 1875* (St. Louis: Synode von Missouri, Ohio u. o. Staaten, 1876), 24. "Nur dann könnte es geschehen, wenn ein solches Glied im Bekenntnißstand sich befindet."

48. "Confessional Lutheranism in Finland," *Sola Scriptura* 1, no. 6 (May/June 1971): 21: "For this reason, the Confessional Lutheran Church of Finland resolves that she can no longer be in church fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. . . . Unanimously adopted by the special convention of the Confessional Lutheran Church of Finland at Helsinki, April 11, 1970."

49. "Reactions to Denver," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 67 (1970): 66.

50. John Warwick Montgomery, "The Last Days of the Late, Great Synod of Missouri," *Sola Scriptura* 1, no. 6 (May/June 1971): 22: "Even now, many pastors and congregations of the Missouri Synod (in-

cluding the undersigned) are declaring themselves in statu confessionis—in a state of protest against the toleration of error and false doctrine in the church body."

51. Clarence Damschroeder, "A New Federation For Authentic Lutheranism," *Sola Scriptura* 1, no. 6 (May/June 1971): 10.

52. Oesch, "Status Confessionis."

53. Wagner, "In statu confessionis."

54. Oesch, "Status Confessionis," 23.

55. Ibid.

56. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Convention Workbook* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 39.

57. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Convention Proceedings* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 153.

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Because Lutheran Youth Want to be Lutheran



Two Principles for an Extended Conversation Regarding Genuine Lutheran Teaching and Scholarship

GREGORY SCHULZ



IN A PUBLISHED REVIEW OF George Marsden's 1997 *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* I wrote, "What is needed to make this a discussion of Christian rather than religious scholarship is . . . scholarship on the topic of scholarship from thinkers with roots somewhere other than in Rome or Geneva—say, with roots in Wittenberg." Where can twenty-first century professors turn for a distinctly Lutheran and scholarly view of teaching and scholarship? Consider Søren Kierkegaard's 1844 *Philosophical Fragments*.

Fragments seems only to get mentioned from time to time, here and there. In the introduction to the 2002 edition of his popular *Socrates Meets Jesus* Peter Kreeft cites this particular work of Kierkegaard as *the* comparison between history's two greatest teachers, in which Jesus is the heart of the Judeo-Christian tradition and Socrates is the core of classical Greco-Roman culture.¹ (Kierkegaard's comparison, according to Kreeft, ranks right up there with Paul's Acts 17 guest lecture to the philosophy sub-faculty of Athens University in the first century.) But whereas Kreeft only alludes to Kierkegaard, I am recommending Kierkegaard as an exegetical resource for a scholarly consideration of Lutheran teaching and scholarship in our century.

Kierkegaard's *Fragments* is a less familiar piece of the great Dane's work, generally viewed as batting practice for his great *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, but it opens with a question guaranteed to grab the attention of those of us who teach: "How far does the Truth admit of being learned?" In other words, "Is it ever possible to learn the Truth?"

From that perennial question *Fragments* proceeds to assess the educational presupposition of *the* Western teacher, Socrates, according to the Socratic Method. The irony is fun, but it is the studied contrast between Socrates as a teacher of truth with our Lord himself as the teacher of truth that makes *Fragments* so engaging. Let me explain in a nutshell what I have garnered from Kierkegaard's fragment of philosophy.

Working from the theoretical structure of *Fragments* I am proposing two principles for teaching and scholarship—for a thick Lutheran view of teaching and scholarship that is "rooted in Wittenberg." One of these principles appears very near the surface as we begin reading *Philosophical Fragments*. A verbatim quotation from *Fragments* yields a principle concerned

with *teaching*: "God loves the learner." The other principle requires some conceptual archeology of *Fragments*. Working as a contemporary professor in the wake of the twentieth-century's intellectual attention to human language I am going to construe scholarship as a matter of language—a matter of the language we have inherited and the language which we regularly use for our professing. This second principle is concerned with *scholarship* and is a quotation from the Apology of the Augsburg Confession: "God is not apprehended, except through the Word" (Ap IV, 67).

My paper starts to sketch these principles. As you can tell from my title, it is offered as a beginning to a long conversation. Nevertheless, I hope that you will see it as being practical for the purposes of discussion. Its concreteness reflects existential sensibilities such as we can learn from Kierkegaard. "Existential" means (in my working understanding, anyway) "a clear-headed attentiveness to our human experience as it really is." It will take each of us working in terms of his area of expertise to make the teaching and scholarship of our respective disciplines authentically Lutheran. This too is an existential sensibility, something we can know in a clear-headed manner only from within the Lutheran (that is, confessional) experience. Let me begin with a Lutheran principle for learning taken from *Philosophical Fragments*.

PRINCIPLE 1: GOD LOVES THE LEARNER

Fragments begins with that perennial teacher's question, "How far does the Truth admit of being learned?" or "Is it ever possible to learn the Truth?" As Søren Kierkegaard mentions, this is a Socratic question around which at least four Platonic dialogues (*Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Meno*, and *Euthydemus*) orbit. The passage from *Meno* (around Stephanos, line 80) is a classic presentation of the *aporia* or pedagogic puzzle regarding virtue and knowledge: How can we know what we do not know? You may recall that this is the spot where Socrates leads Meno's uneducated slave to discover that he "already knew" geometric proofs though he had never previously been taught. Incidentally, his notion that knowledge is innate is the very thing that leads Plato to posit the preexistence of the soul. It is one way of accounting for this pre-school knowledge that we all appear to have. Better known as Plato's doctrine of recollection, this is a working thesis that teaching is a sort of memory recovery process. As Kierkegaard notes, on the Platonic understanding "thus the Truth is not introduced into the individual from without,

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but was with him all the time.” This notion of innate knowledge does not, however, hold up to closer scrutiny. Kierkegaard suggests a multifaceted objection to Socrates or, more accurately, to Plato’s view of learning.

The first aspect of the Kierkegaardian objection to the Socratic assumption of innate knowledge is that it is perplexing, the way Zeno’s paradoxes of apparent motion are momentarily perplexing (think of Achilles being allegedly unable ever to catch up to the turtle in their race, or of the arrow in flight that cannot logically be moving). “From the standpoint of the Socratic thought every point of departure in time is *eo ipso* accidental, an occasion, a vanishing moment. The teacher himself is no more than this. . . . In the Socratic view each individual is his own center, and the entire world centers in him, because his self-knowledge is a knowledge of God.”² For Plato, the teacher seems to be merely an occasional feature of an essentially autonomous and spontaneous learning process. He is, it would seem, a facilitator of the moment and not a teacher at all in any meaningful sense of the word. But as we consider steadily this (teacher-less) learning moment, a deeper difficulty emerges.

For Plato, the teacher seems to be merely an occasional feature of an essentially autonomous and spontaneous learning process.

The second aspect of the Kierkegaardian objection to the Socratic assumption that everyone already has the truth within himself is an existential objection. Once we return to real existence and think beyond the freeze-frame, slice-of-life example of that slave boy in *Meno*, what Kierkegaard calls “the Socratic difficulty about seeking the Truth” dawns on us: On Plato’s hypothesis that truth is innate, how can one ever account for the transition from ignorance to knowledge? If virtue or knowledge is just a potentially recoverable memory, then what? It begins to look as if learning is not learning at all, but a quantum event with no significance whatever. (“If you can read this bumper-sticker, don’t thank anyone.”)

Not only is learning a random event and therefore empty of significance, the process of learning reveals a facet of reality glossed over by Socrates and Co.: The learner is *guilty* by dint of his ignorance. A human learner does not begin in a condition of innocent ignorance; he begins *in error*. Not to believe the truth when the truth is innate and therefore available is not innocent ignorance; it is malfeasance. Of course, things are also pretty bad for the aspiring teacher. The Socratic teacher is just an impersonal occasion for the learner to discover innate truth, never a motivation. (“I don’t effect anything; I teach.”)

Look at it this way: Kierkegaard insists that we ask what makes a learning moment a learning *moment*. “Moment” entails movement. In the case at hand this movement—the learn-

ing moment, which necessarily cannot be parsed down into a motionless moment, as this would be nonsense—involves an individual’s transition from “being in a state of error” to being “in the Truth.” So who or what is the Prime Mover here? As it turns out, Kierkegaard tells us that the mover or movers obviously cannot be teachers in the Socratic or classic Western tradition. Such occasional teachers, recall, cannot account for the movement from error to truth. So the learner is stuck. Either he is simply in a state of error or he has moved into a state of knowing the truth—which means that he knows all along how guilty he is for having once been in a state of error!

But there is, as Kierkegaard explains to the great relief of learners and teachers and human beings everywhere, a genuine teacher who fits the bill to a capital “T.”

Now if the learner is to acquire the Truth, the Teacher must bring it to him; and not only so, but he must also give him the condition necessary for understanding it. . . . But one who gives the learner not only the Truth, but also the condition for understanding it, is more than teacher . . . He would find it necessary not only to transform the learner, but to re-create him before beginning to teach him. But this is something that no human being can do; if it is to be done, it must be done by God himself.

In this case the teacher turns out to be an occasion for learning in a meaningful way inasmuch as he, God, “must have endowed [the learner] with the condition for understanding the truth.”³ God the teacher is the “thick” or necessary occasion who prompts the learner to recognize that he is in a state of error. He is also an occasion to set the learner free from his past condition with a freedom that he (the learner) demonstrably cannot secure for himself. In this way God the teacher charges the present moment “with significance,” so to speak, inasmuch as this divine teacher is his Savior and Redeemer who frees him even from his self-inflicted bondage and guilt.

Let us pause to analyze what we have learned. Kierkegaard’s argument looks something like this: (1) A learner is a person who has moved from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge. (2) This transition from ignorance to knowledge is part of our human experience. (3) Further, it is a desirable aspect of our human experience. This is why the learning moment is significant for us human beings. (4) But the fact that the learner begins in ignorance means that he begins in error and is deprived of this state of knowledge. (5) Further, ignorance or being in error means being in active opposition to the truth, making the person in the state of ignorance guilty (not merely uninformed) before the God who is good. (6) On the Socratic understanding, then, the learner’s initial state of ignorance cannot be the result of an act of the God. (7) Nevertheless, according to (1) the learner does learn. (8) Therefore—and this is Kierkegaard’s hypothesis—the genuine teacher who moves the learner from ignorance to knowledge is then God himself “who gives the learner not only the Truth, but also the condition for understanding it.”⁴ This sounds very much like a highfalutin paraphrase of Ephesians 2 tailored to fit as formal philosophy of education.

“But is the hypothesis here expounded thinkable?”⁵ I think that Kierkegaard’s hypothesis of God as *the* Teacher is thinkable and sayable, but only from within, so to speak. Only a learner, “a person who *has moved* from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge” (see my definition in the first point of Kierkegaard’s argument) is able to think it. This “view from within” is a view from within language. Since the hypothesis is sayable we know that it is thinkable. I do return to this notion of understanding-from-within in a while, but first let me wrap up my analysis of Kierkegaard’s treatment of the learning moment itself.

In effect Kierkegaard treats the learning moment, the transition from being in a state of error to being in the truth, as a law-and-gospel moment. This description of the learning moment may seem to imply that Kierkegaard is figuratively applying his (religious) understanding of learning to a (secular) Western view of education, but this is not the case. For Kierkegaard it is all religious, always. His concern with learning is with ultimate Truth, not with the acquisition of data or skills. As Jesus is the Truth for Kierkegaard, genuine learning involves the move from the error of sin into a personal, individual relationship to the Truth himself. His educational theory thus begins with a philosophical criticism of the stagnant condition of the learner in Plato’s cave (leaving the learner culpably ignorant and unable to move himself into the truth). Ultimately, it culminates in the fresh mountain air of *justification* where the learner knows himself as simultaneously saint and sinner, as he truly exists.⁶

To summarize Kierkegaard’s hypothesis so far: We have seen that according to Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments* the Socratic professor is an occasional teacher in a wholly impersonal sense, a disposable feature of the learning moment which *somehow* takes place with or without him. But for Kierkegaard God is the Teacher who occasions the learner’s movement from bondage to error into freedom in the Truth by providing both the Truth and the condition for the learning moment. Yet there is still something more to Kierkegaard’s educational theory, a concomitant Lutheran feature to which we now turn. I have in mind the Lutheran obsession with Christ, his two-natured person, his real presence, with the fact that the historic Christ comes to us today as he always has, namely through the means of grace.

Philosophical Fragments does not simply establish a concept of the learning moment in terms of the Lutheran article of justification; it also embodies a winsome understanding of the One who justifies us, that is, of the personal Truth (traditionally capitalized in the older English translations of Kierkegaard). The opening of *Fragments*, the portion we have surveyed to this point, is what Kierkegaard calls “A Project of Thought” in which he first raises that question, “How far does the Truth admit of being learned?” in order to present and critique the classical Western view of teaching and learning—the view that the teacher is nothing but an incidental occasion for learning. After that opening, Kierkegaard presents a discussion of “The Antecedent State,” “The Teacher,” and “The Disciple,” which is his criticism of the Platonic theory of education. This part culminates with Kierkegaard’s view that God, who alone provides the law and gospel moment, is the bona fide occasion for learning (a movement away from sin and into the Truth) to take

place. So far, so good. So far, we can remain merely professional bystanders to Kierkegaard’s learning hypothesis.

But now comes further evidence of the Lutheran genius of *Fragments*. There is this remarkable feature of the work, something Kierkegaard calls “An Essay of The Imagination” in which he invites us to picture a noble “king who loved a humble maiden.”

In truth, the whole argument against occasional Socratic teachers and for God as the only genuine Teacher who occasions learning serves as a preface to his second chapter, this winsome parable of true love titled “The God as Teacher and Savior: An Essay of the Imagination.”⁷ The parable is told from the standpoint of a wise king who deeply loves a commoner, a “humble maiden.” Above all things, the king wants his beloved to be happy all her life. Being in love and being wise and not at all domineering—knowing (a) that “unhappiness in love comes from the lovers’ inability to understand one another,” and (b) that the maiden’s personhood could not survive his one-sided decision to make her into something she is not—the king of the parable humbles himself in order to live out his love for the maiden.

In effect Kierkegaard treats the learning moment, the transition from being in a state of error to being in the truth, as a law-and-gospel moment.

It is this parable—generally ignored in the literary and philosophical analyses of *Fragments* as far as I can see—that presents us with a distinctly Lutheran principle of teaching. The principle has to do with Christ and with Truth. I teach this notion of Truth to my students as the *hypostatic theory of truth*, but Kierkegaard’s parable and running commentary puts it into a more attractive form.

“Men sometimes think that this might be a matter of indifference to God, since he does not stand in need of the learner. But in this we forget—or rather alas! we prove how far we are from understanding him; we forget that *God loves the learner*.”⁸ Kierkegaard says this as part of his Essay of the Imagination, this parabled retelling of Philippians 2.

I think that his insight resonates with an older Christian claim regarding the learning of the truth. The older formulation is Gregory the Great’s (540–604) *Veritas non cognoscitur, nisi amatur* (The Truth is not known unless it is loved). This may be an occasion for us to consider what we as professors mean when we profess “the truth” in the course of our course work. There are several versions of “truth”; it is a familiar catalog in philosophy classes, at any rate.

Here is a thumbnail sketch of the three truth theories I teach in my philosophy courses: First, there is the coherence theory of

truth which maintains that a statement is true if it coheres with other statements or axioms within a given system. I use geometric theorems as an example of coherence theory. Second, there is the correspondence theory of truth which claims that propositions are true if (and only if) they correspond with the facts of the world as it is. My example for correspondence theory is sometimes Aristotle, sometimes the early Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*. Third, there is the pragmatic theory of truth which essentially recommends that we never mind whether our beliefs cohere or correspond, but instead agree that the only question is whether our belief helps us to achieve more important outcomes such as civility and happiness. For pragmatic theory I like to talk about William James or refer to Richard Rorty.

Beyond the three common theories of truth, there is the hypostatic theory. Though there are resources available for developing this from the ground up as a philosophical theory⁹ of Kierkegaard's argument in *Fragments*, I will present this fourth theory as a straightforward biblical and Lutheran understanding of the Truth, plain and simple.

Jesus does not offer merely to provide access to the truth or simply to serve as a teacher of the truth; he declares that he is the Truth.

The hypostatic theory of truth follows from Jesus' words in John 14:6, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." Jesus does not offer merely to provide access to the truth or simply to serve as a teacher of the truth; he declares that he *is* the Truth. He is Truth incarnate, nothing figurative about it. In the careful christological language of the Christian church as preserved and promoted by Lutheran theology (for example, in Martin Chemnitz's *The Two Natures in Christ*) we are used to speaking of the *hypostatic* or personal union of the divine and human natures in the person of our Lord Jesus. Hence, the hypostatic theory maintains that Jesus is the personal embodiment of truth: everything has been created by him and for him. This leads to a further realization about our existence as Lutheran teachers: We teach in communion with the Truth himself. Insofar as we are teachers, we cannot be (Socratic) occasions. Rather, as Lutheran teachers we always are "profess-ors," redeemed persons whose vocation is to profess Jesus as the only teacher who in truth ever creates learners. Although I have been speaking of the hypostatic theory of truth as if it were on a par with the other truth theories, in fact it is not. It is a first principle. There is nothing on which it can rest or anything by which it can be warranted or certified. It is absolutely foundational.

Lutheran teachers know the truth from the inside out, as it were. We know experientially (that is, through the experience of word and sacrament in our lived lives as saints and sinners)

that "God loves the learner." By virtue of our continuous communion with the Truth himself, we are disabled as Socratic teachers and are hence unable to teach the love of our respective subjects (art, music, literature, equations, paths and processes, and so forth) as ends in themselves. For Lutheran teachers as Lutherans (I would like to say "For Lutherans *qua* Lutherans," if that does not sound too esoteric) the academic disciplines are never ends in themselves. Our teaching is inevitably of a piece with our worship.

To linger for the moment at the theoretical level: we could say that our teaching flows from the state in which we as learners ourselves (persons who have been moved from a state of error into a state of the truth) find ourselves. For us, knowing and teaching the truth about things necessarily follows from our being already in an intimate believer's relationship with Jesus, the Truth. It cannot be otherwise.

Think of C. S. Lewis's "Meditation in a Toolshed" and the difference between *looking at* the shaft of light and *looking within* the light. Lewis describes his experience of being in a toolshed and looking first *at* a sunbeam streaming in through a chink above the door, and then moving into the shaft of light and looking *within* the beam: "Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw . . . green leaves moving on the branches of the tree outside that and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences." Lewis goes on to contrast the experiences of a young man in love with a girl, with a scientist's description of the young man's love for the girl "from the outside." Think of teaching our students from within the gospel, knowing universal justification (all have sinned, all are justified) by experience, knowing God the Truth from within our existing relationship with him as the king who humbled himself and became obedient to death for us.

So Kierkegaard's teacher, God himself, has brought us *within* the light. What are the consequences of this for our teaching? The dominant view of teaching in the Western tradition is, I will say, *homoiousian* (that is, what is taught is taken to be something *like* the truth); Lutheran teaching is *homoousian* (that is, what we teach is always done within our living relationship with Jesus who *is* Truth in the flesh)—an integration of Christology and pedagogy, of faith and classroom practice.¹⁰

But at this juncture I have already begun talking about how to articulate this Kierkegaardian, Lutheran, hypostatic, God-loves-the-learner principle of teaching over the long haul as members of a faculty and of a community. This brings us to a principle of Lutheran *scholarship* (how we professors profess publicly beyond our individual classrooms), which I would like to develop for our consideration from the very language of Kierkegaard's *Fragments*.

PRINCIPLE 2: GOD IS NOT APPREHENDED, EXCEPT THROUGH THE WORD

I think there is a superficial reason that *Philosophical Fragments* does not receive much scholarly discussion: it is Kierkegaard's vocabulary. Following his argument against the Socratic teacher being an occasion for learning, Kierkegaard presents

his Lutheran Christian hypothesis (that only God is the teacher of truth) with these words: *sin, Savior, Redeemer, Judge, fullness of time, a new creature, conversion, repentance, and new birth*. In the main, the biblical vocabulary has, for the past three centuries or so, been regarded as the mark of people dismissively referred to as “fundamentalists.” People who use such (religious) language in academic circles are regarded much as students who use poor grammar: uneducated. Contemporary scholars may be inclined to think of Kierkegaard merely as a religious author with a penchant for archaic vocabulary. But let me suggest that Kierkegaard is in fact addressing an intellectual error that had been introduced to the scholarly world of his century. Kierkegaard is, I believe, “introducing” Christian vocabulary into his educational hypothesis in view of the fact that Hegel (1770–1831) and his followers had embarked on a program to delete Christ and Christian vocabulary from scholarly and intellectual conversation.

It is miles outside the margins of this paper for me to develop this in any detail, but perhaps a paragraph or two will be sufficient for my point here. Hegel’s breakthrough work is his 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*, an immensely intricate work that seems to me to tread upon the equivocal impressions we have when we hear the word “spirit” (English) or *Geist* (German). In church “spirit” or *Geist* brings to mind God the Holy Ghost. At school “spirit” evokes notions of school spirit. In lofty academic environments “spirit” or *Geist* can refer to an epoch’s flavor, its *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times.

Now Hegel, embarrassed by Christianity’s intellectual claims and actively skeptical about the truth of the Bible besides, traffics on this ambiguity in our usage of “spirit” and *Geist* and in essence sets out to transcribe the content of the third article of the Christian creeds into a form more palatable to the academic community.

Hegelian ontotheology [that is, Christian theology translated into a philosophy of human being] contends that the shared content of theology and philosophy is truth or God, and that this content can be known, but also that the dominant form of this knowledge encapsulated in the Christian metanarrative is seriously deficient. Thus Hegel undertook a speculative re-description of the narrative, oriented to the Trinitarian self-manifestation of God in “moments” or “epochs” that can also be grasped in logical or conceptual form as the foundational structure of reality itself . . . Spirit is not an aspect or person of the divine Trinity but the Trinity as such and as a whole, considered as an encompassing act or process of creating, communicating, consummating.¹¹

Kierkegaard’s opposition to Hegel’s project is clear from Kierkegaard’s writings—from particular comments he makes *vis-à-vis* Hegel and from his own philosophical replies to pivotal Hegelian terms such as “moment.” Just contrast Kierkegaard’s argument regarding the learning *moment* earlier in my paper with the characterization of Hegel’s idea of *moment* in the last quotation just above.

In effect, Hegel endeavors to carry out a deconstruction of the traditional Christian metanarrative and in its place pro-

pose a newfangled rationalistic logic which assumes that, like your suitcases being manhandled behind the scenes at an airport, words such as “Spirit” and “God” can be emptied of their content and replaced with arbitrary meanings. But words are not suitcases; they are words—and frankly, the deep grammar of human language as it really is, is quite resistant to this sort of baggage manhandling.¹² Witness the intelligibility of Kierkegaard’s vocabulary in *Fragments. Sin, Savior, Redeemer, Judge, fullness of time, a new creature, conversion, repentance, and new birth* make perfect sense in the human conversation and cannot in the last analysis be culturally recast—not that scholars with postmodern convictions do not make such attempts today, of course.

Kierkegaard is in fact addressing an intellectual error that had been introduced to the scholarly world of his century.

Kierkegaard’s verbal response to Hegel gives me the chance to say something about our Lutheran response to the postmodern scholarly agenda. As a preface, here is an anecdote about the importance of definitional clarity in academic conversations.

A few years ago I presented a paper as part of a Society of Christian Philosophers conference at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The conference topic was “God and Evil.” One of the keynote speakers was introduced as “the finest Christian gentleman it has ever been my privilege to know.” The speaker himself approached the podium and began by telling us, “Actually, I prefer to describe myself as a genial atheist.” Now, the fact that we can appreciate the mistake made in introducing an atheist as a Christian demonstrates, I think, two things about words and definitions. First, even scholars who make a living by teaching definitions can bollix up significant words. And yet, language is not emptied of its meaning—otherwise the atheist speaker would not have said anything and we in the audience would not have smiled when he did. Second, we need to expect more precision in how we represent our world-views and our faiths to one another. It is one thing to settle for a derived understanding of “gentleman”; it is something else to agree to a meaningless understanding of “Christian.” Take the definition of “Lutheran”—as in *Lutheran* scholarship—for instance.

Lutheran scholarship is (by the definition I am recommending) *confessional*, which is to say that scholarship becomes Lutheran by virtue of its *language*. The Confessions we confess are written documents. The word of God which makes the Confessions what they are is the written word of God. So to begin with, his at-home-ness with the Confessions makes the Lutheran professor uniquely sensitive to abuses of language—and

uniquely equipped to speak against the incredible postmodern assertion of “incredulity toward all metanarratives” (Lyotard). Let me begin to develop this in more detail.

I will develop the importance of this linguistic or Lutheran-means-confessional understanding by proceeding from (a) our subscription to the Lutheran Confessions (which I take to be a given for Lutheran professors) to (b) a practical and scholarly application of a principle for Lutheran scholarship taken from the central article on justification (the same article that we found to be at the center of Kierkegaard’s educational philosophy in the earlier part of this paper).

Lutheran scholarship is (by the definition I am recommending) confessional, which is to say that scholarship becomes Lutheran by virtue of its language.

In order to move from a personal theory of teaching (“God loves the learner”) into a consideration of the public habit of Lutheran scholarship let me stipulate that human beings are beings who use language, and further, that the kind of beings we are is shaped by our use of language. I take this stipulated understanding of language and human beings to be the foundation for my strong view that Lutheran scholarship is necessarily informed by the Confessions.

It is the language of the Lutheran Confessions that provides the criteria for assessing scholarship as *Lutheran* scholarship. The professor who has subscribed to the Confessions says as much in the rite of installation. In the Lutheran colleges and Lutheran seminaries where I have studied or taught, the professors have publicly subscribed to the Book of Concord of 1580. The original subscribers to the Augsburg Confession promised, “By the help of God’s grace we, too, intend to persist in this confession until our blessed end and to appear before the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ with joyful hearts and consciences.”¹³ This unqualified subscription is echoed in the promise made today by the Lutheran professor who, at his installation, expresses unreserved acceptance of the canonical Scriptures and the Confessions and promises to teach in line with them. What does this mean?

I have heard it said that Lutheran professors are obligated “to listen to Jesus and not to the Confessions.” But what sense does this make in the context of confessional subscription? Perhaps it means that a professor is obligated to present Jesus in the way he sees fit, according to his best private judgment. But what is the point in claiming the right to a private, idiosyncratic presentation of the Lord and his gospel? Such an objection to the Confessions can be answered, of course. It can be met with an

appeal to professional integrity. Presumably, our confessional subscriptions are not merely words we recite in order to get tenure; we mean what we say. A promise is a promise—and this promise clearly announces the form and content that our professing will embody. Or, I would think that the objection can be met with an argument similar to Socrates’ argument for loyalty to the Athenian laws as we have it in *Crito* (that is, the argument that a citizen or a professor at some point once gave his informed consent to the constitution or confessions under which he lives in his *polis* or in his Lutheran institution and is therefore obligated either to abide by the law or go into voluntary exile). One can be a “Christian teacher” or “Christian scholar” without the Confessions. But our concern here is with being *Lutheran* teachers and scholars.

Likely the unspoken obstacle to joyful and robust adherence to the Lutheran writings is a professional antipathy or insouciance toward the Confessions. You see, confessional subscription assumes two things: (1) an initial study of the Confessions such that the scholar has come to the point of wholehearted agreement with their entire doctrinal content before he utters the promise to teach in line with the Confessions, as well as (2) the habitual reading and studying of them as part of one’s professional growth in order to keep on doing what was promised: teaching in line with the Confessions. The argument I am proposing will, I hope, offer some encouragement toward (2).

I will say that in the language of traditional logic the Lutheran Confessions are a *necessary condition* for Lutheran scholarship. By this I certainly do not mean to say that Lutherans cannot do scholarly work—even “outrageous Christian scholarship” (Marsden)—without the Confessions, but my concern is to develop a meaningful definition of genuine *Lutheran* scholarship. A scholar who is a genial atheist ought not to be introduced as “a fine *Christian* gentleman.” In a similar way, scholarship that is in itself fine or even generically Christian ought not to be presented as *Lutheran* scholarship, as if there are no *differentia* (differences). In order to recognize the distinct contributions of Lutheran scholarship, then, we will have to consider the very medium in which we carry out our scholarly work. That medium is language.

I see my claim (that Lutheran scholarship entails an informed and ongoing subscription to the Confessions) as an argument from language. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), who by the way read and admired Kierkegaard, writes that language is our *Lebensform*, our form of life. Human beings are beings who use language. The way in which we use language in turn shapes who we are. Now, we sometimes say that tradition is itself an argument. This is the case in a non-trivial way for the Lutheran professor and the Lutheran Confessions. The Confessions (and, to an important but lesser degree, all of Luther’s doctrinal writings, see FC SD VII, 41) are the Lutheran *Lebensform*. The Confessions are both an archive of orthodox Lutheran language and they are the living language that in turn shapes who we are. Let me unroll the carpet of this argument a turn or two (as Kierkegaard quips in *Fragments*).

The doctrinal section of the Augsburg Confession—“the more elastic and less abrasive” confession which, practically speaking, most informs Lutheran theology¹⁴—ends with this

statement: “This is the *Summa* of the teaching in our churches . . . which accords with the pure Word of God and Christian truth. As this teaching is clearly grounded in Holy Scripture and additionally does not stand opposed to the catholic Church—or even the Roman church, as can be seen in the church Fathers’ writings—we submit that our opponents cannot sustain their objection against us regarding the articles detailed above” (my translation of the German). So, the language of the Lutheran Confessions is demonstrably the language of the holy Christian church. This, presumably, is crystal clear to Lutheran professors who subscribe to the Confessions.

As I explained in the first part of this paper, Lutheran teachers and professors know that learners are loved by God. This knowledge—this point is not developed by Kierkegaard—must be based on universal justification, a Lutheran distinctive. Universal justification maintains that *all* have sinned and that *all* are justified by God’s grace in Christ. One may feel loving toward some learners some of the time, but the Kierkegaardian conviction that God loves each and every learner is not an accidental occurrence. In the world as it is, love for the learner is a *disposition* and as such involves heart *and* head. Scholarship rightly expects that heartfelt rationales be articulated for others to consider. Christian scholarship expects in addition a Christian rationale. Lutheran scholarship expects, above and beyond this, a rationale in the language of the Lutheran faith. Hence my observation that Kierkegaard’s principle of the learner is Lutheran. It rests ultimately on the centerpiece article of justification.

Justification is not the only content of the Confessions, of course. But as with justification, the confessional points are, article for article, developed from the language of Holy Scripture. Furthermore, these Scripture-derived articles are thick with references to the written patrimony of the universal church. God is in the doctrinal details of these creeds and other confessions. But in order to partake of this tried and true language—the language which defines us as Lutheran Christians—we must be using the language of the Confessions and Lutheran theology as we think and talk and write and “do scholarship.” Justification is a daily existential reality for Lutherans. The same can be said for all the articles of our faith.

Please understand: I do not have the expertise to say what scholarship in the language of the Confessions means exactly for Lutheran scholarship in other disciplines beyond theology and philosophy, my own bailiwicks. But I know enough to say that being a current subscriber to the Confessions is a *sine qua non* for Lutheran scholarship. This is the case for me in my philosophical scholarship, for example.

The way Luther and the Confessions speak about the bondage of the human will informs my philosophical writing on the topic of the will. What Luther and the Confessions say about revelation and about human nature shape my presentations regarding epistemology and philosophical anthropology and psychology. I can have a book published on the problem of evil by a Lutheran publishing house (*The Problem of Suffering*, Northwestern), but for it to be Lutheran scholarship it must congrue with Luther and the Confessions. I sometimes tell my students that they cannot “get” Plato’s *Republic* from Cliff Notes or my

lectures; it has to be read in order to be experienced and only then can it be appropriated. It is the same with the Confessions. They must be read and inwardly digested for us to figure out what Lutheran scholarship in our respective fields means. But before we head off to our “Confession of the Month Club” (it is funny that this is funny), let me say a word about the grammar of the Lutheran Confessions.

Being a current subscriber to the Confessions is a sine qua non for Lutheran scholarship.

The Lutheran Confessions, orbiting as they do around the article of justification (I will not speak here of “the *sola* system of the Confessions”), are passionately christological. Christ is their center of gravity. The Lutheran grammar is *loving* because it is *Christian*, existentially. Justification as the *Hauptartikel* (chief article), the law and gospel matrix, the firm insistence on knowing God only as he wants to be known in word and sacrament—these and all the Lutheran distinctives of the Confessions—comprise a living grammar that can charge our scholarship with *significance*. Can one ever know the ultimate truth? Does a historical happening two millennia ago have anything to do with us on the far side of the temporal divide? Yes, according to confessional Lutheran scholarship.

This orientation to Christ as it is taught to us in the language of the Confessions is experienced by persons in real life (as saint and as sinner, in error and in the truth). This is the (as existentialists say) *authentic* human existence which Kierkegaard explicates and explores in his *Fragments*. This is what makes Lutheran scholarship empirically credible. This orientation to Christ creates that scholarly disposition that makes Lutheran scholarship Lutheran.

This is not to say that every professor who identifies himself as Lutheran and refers now and then to Christ or Christology is performing Lutheran scholarship, however. Lutheran scholarship entails more than “a mere acquaintance with words” (Heidegger). “The Lutheran Confessions” and “christological” cannot be deployed as present-at-hand aphorisms. The sum and substance of the Confessions and of the real presence of the Christ whom they proclaim must mold the professor’s scholarship. I am not sure of an appropriate metaphor here, but perhaps we could say that the Confessions “rifle” the Lutheran scholar’s scholarship, imparting to it a Christ-centered spin so as to keep his research and writing always on target. Now let me bring this language argument to a conclusion in terms of a particular principle for Lutheran scholarship drawn from one of the Confessions.

The principle is from Article IV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, an article on justification: “But God cannot

be treated with, *God cannot be apprehended, nisi per Verbum (except through the Word).*” This principle yields a number of consequences for contemporary Lutheran scholarship. Here is one.

To be Lutheran, scholarship must be thoroughly verbal. “God cannot be apprehended, *nisi per Verbum* (except through the Word).” *Nisi per Verbum* can initially be translated “except verbally.” There is a Herculean task facing Lutheran scholars today. It is the interpretative task. How do we, in the wake of postmodernity, apprehend God in the respective disciplines? Come, let us reason together: The means and methods of most academic disciplines are data, graphs, calculations, icons, and symbols. These are non-verbal. Our task is to connect these things with the gospel. It would be disingenuous for a Christian “liberal arts” faculty, for example, not to establish or fail to maintain this connection between our disciplines and the gospel of Jesus Christ. But the gospel is verbal. It would be impious to expect the gospel to be translated into the idiom of our disciplines (recall Hegel’s project); rather, our disciplines must be interpreted in terms of the gospel.

To be Lutheran, scholarship must be thoroughly verbal. “God cannot be apprehended, nisi per Verbum (except through the Word).”

This means that our discipline-specific scholarship must rise to the level of natural language discourse, to begin with. There can be no “private language” here, as if our analyses and syntheses could be kept to ourselves—if, that is, what we do is to be counted as scholarship in any sense of the word. At a minimum, scholarship (in order to be scholarship) has to be public, open to discussion by others, at least within a given discipline. But the demands of Lutheran scholarship exceed this minimum requirement for publicity. We cannot remain absolutely in the ghettos of our particular disciplines in order to do Lutheran scholarship. A *sine qua non* of Lutheran scholarship is that what we do must be *homooousian*, transparently contiguous with ultimate truth. Jesus is the Truth. His word is truth. Therefore Lutheran scholarship will *express* this contiguity.

To conduct ourselves, as Kierkegaard puts it, in the truth and not in error, Lutheran scholarship will, as I have recommended, reflect a hypostatic understanding of truth. As far as I can see, this means that, in addition to rising to the level of natural language discourse to count as scholarship, Lutheran scholarship carries the further demand for natural language discourse in light of the traditional language of the Confessions. Perhaps it will turn out that this is too strong a claim outside the humanities and the social sciences. It would be good to hear from Lutheran professors in the natural sciences and disciplines

that deal with matters on an abstract level on this very point. My expectation is that, though putative aspects of theoretical scholarship cannot themselves be put into natural language for technical reasons, still the tenets, the goals, and the *raison d’être* of the discipline can be discussed in natural language. And, should it develop that scholarship in a given discipline is not amenable to natural language discourse, then the reason for this needs to be verbalized (in natural language). For the sake of discussion I will say that I cannot see how it is possible to assess scholarship as Lutheran scholarship without this verbalization I have been recommending. One way or another, I believe that the development of any idea of Lutheran scholarship carries with it an inescapable linguistic implication.

One implication of the realization that we apprehend God and the truth *verbally* is that we need to do a great deal more writing and in-depth discussing among ourselves regarding *Christian* (that is, *Lutheran*) teaching and scholarship in the realms of our particular disciplines. *The Atlantic Monthly* (October 2000) reports that every faculty member at Wheaton College, Illinois, is regularly required to produce a thirty- to fifty-page paper demonstrating that he or she can approach his or her specific discipline from a Christian perspective. For the Lutheran faculty member, approaching one’s discipline from a Christian perspective has a tighter focus: the professor needs to demonstrate that he can approach his discipline from a confessional Lutheran perspective. You or I may be teaching from a Lutheran perspective, but how do *we* know—together as faculties and as part of the church and of the academic community—and, how do *we know* that we are doing Lutheran scholarship unless we begin to hash it out in writing? “You don’t know what you know until you write it out.”

“God is not apprehended except through the Word” means further that we as Lutheran scholars must be verbal in the sense of being devoted to the Word of God incarnate with Lutheran rigor. Lutheran scholarship is of a piece with Lutheran worship life. Scholarship is worship. I recently heard Bill Wainwright, distinguished professor of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, explain that the various traditional arguments for the existence of God were not produced to be arguments for the existence of God at all, but were crafted by Anselm and Aquinas and the others as *acts of worship*. An act of worship cannot be an act of worship unless it congrues with God’s word. “God cannot be apprehended, *nisi per Verbum* (except through the Word).” John’s gospel tells us, “In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God . . . The Word became flesh and tabernacled for a while among us.” The Latin translation of “Word” in John 1 is *Verbum*, the same word used in our confessional principle. In Philippians Paul writes about this Word “who humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him and gave him the name above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow—in heaven, on earth, and under the earth—and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” Jesus the Word is the teacher, the king who humbled himself, of Kierkegaard’s *Fragments*.¹⁵ Our confessional principle is part of an article that is all about our lived faith in this Jesus who has justified us. We must become in our professional work what

we are by God’s grace: Christians, Christian scholars working from a Lutheran perspective.

I have employed Søren Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments* as an occasion to offer two principles for developing a philosophy of Lutheran teaching and scholarship. In part one I set out a principle of Lutheran *teaching* that follows from Kierkegaard’s existential commitment to the individual learner in terms of the central Lutheran article of justification: “God loves the learner” is the principle derived from Kierkegaard’s consideration of the learning moment in actual human experience. The learning moment turns out to be a law-and-gospel movement for the learner. He moves from being in error (bondage to sin) to being in the Truth (that is, being in Christ, Truth incarnate). According to Kierkegaard’s hypothesis God is *the* teacher who provides both the truth and the conditions for moving into this truth. In part two I provided a principle of Lutheran *scholarship* drawn from the Lutheran article of justification: “God is not apprehended, except through the Word” (Ap iv, 67). On the basis of the assumption that language (which essentially defines us as human beings) shapes our human being I argued that genuine Lutheran scholarship, the vocation of interpreting our specific disciplines truthfully in the light of Jesus the Truth, is necessarily conducted in the language of the Lutheran Confessions. These Confessions, being scriptural and replete with citations from catholic Christian tradition, shape us (but only as we continue to read and study them) into scholars who focus our scholarship ultimately on Christ himself as a collegial activity of our worship.

But this paper is not meant to be an intellectual artifact. It is my desire that it would serve Lutheran faculties as something of a push to be more lively and serious about becoming *Lutheran* teachers and scholars. With this in mind, I would like to conclude for now with a few words from “Depth and Desire,” a lecture to the freshmen of St. John’s College given a few years back by Eva Brann. “The spirit of the college is invested in seriousness, a certain kind of seriousness—not dead seriousness but live seriousness, you might say. This serious shows itself on many occasions: in deep or heated conversations in the noon sun or at midnight, in marathons of effort and in the oblivion of sleep, in devoted daily preparation and in glorious goofing-off, in the willingness to try on opinions and in the need to come to conclusions. What does your school do to induce this very particular kind of seriousness? . . . A lecture ought to be the temporarily final word, the best a speaker has to give you at the moment. It should not matter whether the surface of the speech is brilliant or drab, as long as it is a deliberate and well-prepared opening of the speaker’s heart and mind to the listeners. As such it carries authority. These authoritative occasions are obviously important to the life of the school.”¹⁶ A professor is an occasion for learning. A Lutheran professor is an occasion for learning via the means of grace, the “visible Word,” as Augustine has it. Speaking from one occasional professor to others, I hope that this has been an occasion of lively seriousness for you—perhaps even something to be the occasion for many more deep and heated conversations regarding Lutheran teaching and scholarship. **LOGIA**

NOTES

1. Peter Kreeft, *Socrates Meets Jesus: History’s Great Questioner Confronts the Claims of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 3.
2. Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. David Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 13.
3. *Ibid.*, 17–18.
4. *Ibid.*, 18.
5. *Ibid.*, 24.
6. A comment on another of Kierkegaard’s works (his 1845 “On the Occasion of a Confession”) makes an appropriate footnote for the thought experiment of *Fragments* that we have been considering: “The Lutheran doctrine of justification—*simul justus et peccator*—is renewed in the existential situational mood and its eloquent insistence on precisely this ‘moment.’” For more *about* the religious import of Kierkegaard’s existentialism let me recommend the W. H. Auden introduction to *The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1999). For the opportunity to immerse yourself *within* Kierkegaard’s existential grasp of our human situation let me recommend the third chapter of *Fragments*: “The Absolute Paradox: A Metaphysical Crotchet,” p. 46–60 in the version cited.
7. Kierkegaard, 28–45.
8. Kierkegaard, 34 (emphasis mine).
9. See Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of Truth*, trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 55–62. See also Patrick Reardon, “Truth is Not Known Unless It is Loved,” *Books in Culture* (September/October 1998) at www.christianity.net/bc/8B5/8B5044.html.
10. Florensky, 60.
11. Peter Hodgson, ed., *G. W. F. Hegel: Theologian of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 7.
12. See also Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997), 20–44.
13. David Scaer, *An Introduction to the Method and Practice of Lutheran Theology* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1990), 3.
14. *Ibid.*, 12.
15. See Kierkegaard’s winsome paragraphs on Jesus, 39–45.
16. Eva Brann, “Depth and Desire,” in *Everyone a Teacher*, ed. Mark Schwehn (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 369–370.

SALVE LECTORES LOGIAE!

EDITORES VESTRI CUM DOLORE
ERRATUM OPERIMENTI
PROXIMI LOGIAE VIDERUNT,
VIZ., ARTICULUS STANITS (SIC)
ET CADENTIS ECCLESIAE. QUID
DICERE POSSUMUS? BARBARI
INEPTI TYPOGRAPHICUM PRELUM
NOSTRUM CEPERUNT.

HEU! DIREPTI SUNT ET STATUS
QUO ANTE RESTITUTUS EST.

VALE. UTINAM MODO
SUBIUNCTIVO SEMPER BENE
UTARIS!

(See page 72)

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Resolution 3-08A, the Service of Women in the Church

An Historical Overview

DAVID O. BERGER



At the closing session of the 2004 synodical convention of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), Resolution 3-08A was introduced to “affirm the conclusions” of a decade-old report issued by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR): “The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices” (*Convention Workbook* 2004, 458–461). Whatever one may think of the substance of the report first issued in 1994 (five theologians on the CTCR at the time issued a Dissenting Opinion (*Workbook*, 462–464)—a document which merits attention but which appears to have been overlooked at the convention),¹ subsequent events reflect, if not an actual defect in or ignoring of synodical polity, surely a less than thorough follow-through on a synodical resolution.

When the CTCR issued the report in 1994, it was disseminated in an unusual manner. Rather than being published in the standard booklet format, it appeared as an insert in the *Reporter*, along with the Dissenting Opinion and a frank, but evangelical, letter from President A. L. Barry. The letter (see page 51), which says much about the process, was printed only in the December 1994 *Reporter* and is not included with the other relevant documents on the CTCR web page (address below). Both Dr. Barry’s letter and the Dissenting Opinion were relegated to the “Official Notices” section of the *Reporter*.²

The unorthodox mode of publication may have made for greater than usual initial distribution, but it limited the convenient availability of the report for long-term study and analysis. Its subsequent appearance in the 1995 *Convention Workbook* seems to be its only other manifestation in print. Even when, several years later, it was included as an e-document on the CTCR web page, there was little to draw attention to its availability via the new medium. (It may finally appear in booklet form, as the CTCR intends to reissue the report along with the imminent guidelines for practice.)

THE FIRST TRY: “SERVICE OF WOMEN . . .”

Already at the synodical convention in 1995, however, it was clear that the CTCR report on women’s service was not about to be affirmed or commended. Rather, Res. 3-06A (1995) directed the CTCR to continue to study the two documents (the Report and Dissenting Opinion) “in consultation with the faculties of the

seminaries”—a clear charge, on the face of it: more time and more input from theologians entrusted with preparing pastors for the church. The complete 1995 resolution (*Convention Proceedings*, 1995, p. 120) is highly recommended as background reading. No evidence exists, however, of any substantive, post-convention formal discussions of the documents at either seminary, initiated either by the CTCR or by the faculties. Subsequent CTCR pre-convention reports in the *Workbooks* for 1998, 2001, and 2004, while referring to Res. 3-06A (1995), mention no specific communication with or requests to the seminary faculties regarding further corporate study of the documents. In fact, after the first three years, in 1998, there was still lack of agreement in the CTCR “as to how best to proceed in giving this assignment [of continued study on the report in consultation with the seminary faculties] the highest priority.” (*Workbook* 1998, p. 50) The convention report of the CTCR in the 2004 *Workbook* refers to three “responses” to the 1994 document on women’s service, suggesting that passive waiting for individual responses may ultimately have served as the default mechanism for carrying out the directive of Res. 3-06A. Thus, it appears that Res. 3-06A was never actively or systematically implemented. One must assume that the three responses received careful consideration, even if they ultimately had no effect on the content of the report. Thus, the documents had lain all but dormant for nearly a decade.

There is little purpose in trying to affix blame for the apparent lack of follow-through on Res. 3-06A (1995), although the lapse in polity serves as a valuable lesson for future such resolutions. In any case, one wonders why the report, which surely was perceived as important at that time, suffered from relative neglect for so long. It is also worth noting that questions on women’s roles in the life of the church did not, after 2000 years of church history (or even 150 years of synodical history), suddenly arise as a theological issue, that is, from new insights in biblical exegesis or from a more careful reading of the Lutheran Confessions. Rather, these questions (cf. the CTCR report on woman suffrage, 1969) emerged from the mid-twentieth-century American and Western European social/cultural milieu, most notably the highly visible and politicized feminist movement. (Historically, the LCMS has been behind the curve in reacting to such pressures.) Given that feminism as a social/political movement has not faded away, it is strange indeed that the 1994 Report and Dissenting Opinion had lain in relative neglect for nearly a decade, only suddenly to reappear—unchanged—on the docket for the 2004 convention, the foundational issues yet to be addressed (see

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“aside” below). While the hierarchy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has perfected the art of interminable discussion on a controversial issue until they get the “right” result—for example, its study on (homo)sexuality—we in Missouri apparently prefer to wait until the climate seems propitious and then to re-submit a controverted document for action.

A PERTINENT ASIDE ON A RELATED ISSUE

Another action of the 1995 convention is also relevant: Res. 3-10 (*Proceedings*, 1995, p. 123). This resolution directed the CTCR to “coordinate a comprehensive study of the scriptural relationship of man and woman, together with the faculties of both seminaries.” The intent seems to have been to come to grips with the foundational scriptural issues that underlie such practical matters as were dealt with in the 1994 report. Five years later, in May of 2000 and again in November, the St. Louis seminary faculty received drafts of a paper, “Male and Female in the Image of God,” written by Dr. Nathan Jastram. The faculty were urged to read the drafts and respond individually directly to the CTCR. Several sent individual responses, and the exegetical department, at least, may have responded corporately. At Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, a similar procedure was followed. In the meantime, however, the CTCR decided not to adopt the Jastram document (*Workbook 2004*, p. 72). There is, however, light at the end of this tunnel. The document, or a revised version of it, should by now have appeared in the January 2004 issue (publication delayed) of the *Concordia Theological Quarterly*.

THE SECOND TRY: “SERVICE OF WOMEN . . .” —STILL NO “SLAM DUNK”

The convention minutes for July 15, 2004, regarding the discussion of and vote on Res. 3-08A to affirm the conclusions of the

1994 CTCR report reveal that the outcome was anything but a consensus—not even a “collective understanding of synod,” to use an ecclesiastical neologism. In fact, over 200 delegates requested to have their names recorded as voting in the negative—an uncommon occurrence that demonstrates the depth of disagreement. The discussion was both complicated and contentious. A substitute resolution (*Workbook 2004*, Ov. 3-97, p. 194) reflecting a position distinctly at odds with the resolution on the floor was proposed, but failed to be accepted for consideration (the Behnken rule), an early sign that it would not be smooth sailing. The substitute resolution summarized some of the history recounted in this essay, noting that the concerns expressed by the theologians in the Dissenting Opinion had not been addressed, and proposed a specific method to deal with the unresolved issues. After several motions to end debate and a ruling from the chair that another proposal to replace wording also constituted a substitute motion (the Behnken rule again), the resolution to affirm the conclusions of the report finally came to a vote and passed by a slim margin of 576-520. No doubt, some of the negative votes represented the position that the pastoral office should be open to women. (Cf. *Convention Workbook 2004*, Memorials 3-92 to 3-95.) That the resolution spoke only to the conclusions leaves open the question of whether the conclusions are adequately supported in the body of the report.

OF TASK FORCES AND GUIDELINES

Making the picture even more interesting for the life of the synod is a step taken after the convention to appoint a task force “to create guidelines for congregations and District constitution committees to follow in revising congregational constitutions and bylaws to permit women to hold congregational offices so long as their assigned responsibilities do not include ‘distinctive

ADDENDUM

An Addendum in the 1995 *Convention Workbook* (“Theological Documents,” p. 317) included the following model clause for use in congregational constitutions. First issued in 1970, it was apparently requested of the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) after the passing of Res. 2-17 on woman suffrage at the 1969 Denver convention. It was reprinted in the 1995 *Workbook* in connection with the proposed action on the 1994 CTCR document, “The Service of Women in Congregational and Synodical Offices.” Is the new task force likely to recommend anything significantly different from the CCM model supplied in 1970 and 1995? That the CCM model clause was not recycled in the 2004 *Workbook* along with the 1994 CTCR report at least suggests that changes are planned. Comparison will be interesting.

PRIVILEGES OF WOMEN

Women who have reached the age of _____¹ may hold voting membership in the congregation and serve as officers and as members of boards and committees as long as these positions are not directly involved in the specific functions of the pastoral office (preaching, the public administration of the sacraments, church discipline) and as long as this service does not violate the order of creation (usurping authority over men). Accordingly, they shall not serve as pastor, as a member of _____,² as chairman or vice-chairman of the congregation, or as chairman of _____.³

The Commission on Constitutional Matters

1. The age given shall be at least the majority age established by state law.
2. Here shall be listed the board of elders or corresponding board directly involved in the functions of the pastoral office.
3. Here the congregation may list at its discretion those major policy and decision-making boards or standing committees, if go any, whose chairmanship the congregation might wish to restrict to men.

functions' [sic (of the pastoral office?)] or 'public accountability for the function of the pastoral office'" (from the president's "Pastoral letter to pastors of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, August 31, 2004"). That the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) had provided, already in 1970, a model clause (see Addendum on page 50) for constitutions regarding offices that may be held by women. The CCM's model (*Workbook* 1995, p. 317) is quite clear and, assuming one agrees with the substance of the relevant CTCR reports, suggests appropriate latitude for restricting certain offices to men.

What conclusions may be drawn regarding the use of the appointed task force, which consisted only of synodical officials and staff (defensible though the choices may have been) and not a single full-time parish pastor or seminary theologian?³ Several possibilities come to mind:

1. Either Res. 3-08A (2004) or the conclusions of the 1994 CTCR report, or both, lack clarity in their implications for practice.
2. Congregations and parish pastors would be unable, on their own, to interpret the resolution and document for use in constitutions and bylaws.
3. Theologians who teach pastors and future pastors are not to be bothered with practical matters.
4. An agenda will be promoted, regardless of the documented lack of agreement on the substance of the issue.

In any case, the guidelines of an appointed task force will serve as the last word on the practical application of a CTCR document and a synodical resolution, a recipe for trouble.

It should be noted that the procedure itself was out of the ordinary. The usual approach would be to "task" an existing entity—the CTCR or the CCM—with the work. If a task force is employed, it would normally provide a preliminary report to members of synod, write another draft on the basis of the responses, and bring its recommendations to a synodical convention for action.

OF CONTINUING CONFUSION

A synodical news release (October 14, 2004) on the task force unwittingly cast a glaring spotlight on contradictory assumptions at the highest levels of synodical officialdom. In the article the synodical president notes the importance of guidelines "for the sake of *maintaining unity of doctrine and practice* in all the districts of the Synod" and to "*prevent widely varying interpretations* of such phrases as '*the distinctive functions of the pastoral office*' and '*public accountability for the pastoral office.*'" On the other hand, the executive director of the CTCR assures readers that "if congregations do not want to implement the provisions of the resolution, *they are free not to do so*" [emphases added]. There may be some way to reconcile these two points of view, but more likely they simply reflect the tension inherent in synod's advisory nature and its congregational polity. If fundamental agreement on an issue is lacking, task force guidelines will not achieve the elusive unity. The result? We simply "agree to disagree" (to walk in different directions), as has been the case with woman suffrage—not a healthy situation.

LETTER ON THE CTCR REPORT from Synod President A. L. Barry from the December 1994 *Reporter*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings to you in the name of our coming King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

At its November meeting, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations adopted a report titled: "The Service of Women in Congregational [and Synodical] Offices." It also voted to print the report in this issue of the *Reporter*. When the vote was taken to adopt the report, some of the professional theologians on the CTCR voted against it, noting several concerns with the document. They informed the CTCR that they would be submitting a minority report. Their minority report [titled "Dissenting Opinion . . ."] follows this letter. Undoubtedly a brief word of explanation is in order as to why the minority report is being presented to the Synod in this way.

During its November meeting, I had twice encouraged the CTCR not to adopt a report in haste if there was still significant division in the CTCR over the report's content. I also once again shared with the CTCR certain concerns I had with the report. After the report was adopted, I sent a memorandum to the CTCR's executive director requesting that the CTCR not print the report until it had an opportunity to process the minority report being submitted, in accordance with the guidelines the CTCR had agreed to operate with in spirit. Further, I asked that if the CTCR decided to print the report in the December issue of the *Reporter*, that it also include both the customary letter from the synodical president as well as the minority report. The CTCR's executive committee considered these requests and decided to decline them. I deeply regret this decision.

Feeling that in all fairness the church needs to have before it for study purposes not only the CTCR document adopted by the majority, but also the concerns expressed by the minority, I have asked the editor of the *Reporter* to print in the "Official Notices" section of the *Reporter* both this letter and the minority report. This will allow Synod the opportunity to study carefully both these items at the same time. This will be especially helpful in light of the fact that in some respects the CTCR report suggests a modification in the present position of the Synod.

My prayer is that our Synod will carefully study both the new CTCR document and the minority report. May God the Holy Spirit keep us faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions as we proceed into the years ahead, in order that we might be a blessing both to our own people and also to those who do not yet know the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

With kindest personal regards,
Dr. A. L. Barry
Jude 24–25

STILL NO RESOLUTION ON AN IMPORTANT ISSUE OF PRACTICE

One might, on the positive side, observe that “guidelines” could serve some purpose. For example, would a clearly stated guideline help to settle such contentious questions as whether women may assist at distribution of the Lord’s Supper? An earlier CTCR document (“Theology and Practice of the Lord’s Supper”—1983) suggests that the practice should be avoided merely because it might offend, prefacing this caution with a remarkably waffling subordinate clause: “While some [?] might argue that assisting the presiding minister in the distribution of the elements is not necessarily a distinctive function of the pastoral office.” On the other hand, the affirmed 1994 document on women’s service in the church states that intrinsic to the office of the pastor is “the public administration of the sacraments,” citing the Augsburg Confession (xxviii, 5): “the power of bishops [pastors] is a power of God to . . . administer and distribute the sacraments.” Thus, the “some” in “some might argue” (above) really have a disagreement with the Augsburg Confession and, by extension, the Formula of Concord (vii, 83–84). At their best, the guidelines could affirm for synodical practice what the Confessions already state clearly. In the end, however, as opinions, reports, resolutions, and guidelines multiply, the risk of inconsistencies and confusions is bound to increase. (You cite your source; I’ll cite mine.) It is the way of bureaucracy to cultivate an irenic posture and strive to satisfy all parties.

ON THE MAKING OF POLITICO-ECCLESIASTICAL SAUSAGE: A RELEVANT ASIDE

The process of an organization’s formulating such documents and resolutions can be complicated and problematic as well as revealing. For example, in acting on Res. 3-03A (2004) on fostering “peace, harmony, and trust” in the synod, convention delegates rejected amendments that would have required district presidents “strongly [to] urge the pastors and congregations of Synod to follow the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and the practice of Synod as articulated in the doctrinal resolutions accepted over the years by Synod in convention . . . and to discipline those pastors and congregations that, following patient and evangelical counsel, refuse to follow the Holy Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions and the practice of the LCMS” (*Proceedings* 2004: 30,129). What did 681 delegates say in rejecting these words? (519 voted for the amendments.) That the synod is not to follow Scripture and the Confessions and synodically accepted standards of doctrine and practice? Most likely not. That walking together in doctrine and practice

is incompatible with “peace, harmony, and trust”? We may be getting closer. Details of doctrine and practice may easily be misunderstood as divisive, and thus inimical to peace and harmony, rather than as their real foundation. Lest one conclude that the language about “doctrinal resolutions” and “practice of the LCMS” was the sticking point, the final form of Res. 3-03A says nothing about following standards of any kind. Rather it urges “living in love” and developing “materials on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions and *portions* of Scripture” [emphasis added] to foster “peace, harmony, and trust” and a “renewed understanding of distinctive Lutheran doctrines. . . .”⁴ Motherhood and (a synodical recipe for) apple pie, one might say. Those who voted for the resolution no doubt felt they had done something good and useful for the synod. Indeed, a veneer of peace and harmony may be readily achieved in the absence of dealing with the hard issues and of agreeing upon the details of “walking together.” Trust is another matter.

BACK TO THE BASICS

It would be disingenuous to claim that we, as a synod, are “walking together” on the scriptural teachings on the service of women in the church or on the relationship between male and female, the necessary foundation for agreement on the former. It is more accurate to say that the concord the synod once enjoyed has deteriorated into discord, and thus the “Whereas” of Res. 3-10 (1995) apply today: “It is apparent that confusion exists in the Synod, as well as in our culture, regarding the relationship of male and female.” The confusion is all too clearly reflected in a number of memorials in the 2004 *Convention Workbook* (cf. 3-86 to 3-100), as well as in *Workbooks* for several previous conventions. One hopes and prays that the rush to apply to practice a narrowly approved resolution affirming (after nearly a decade of neglect) the conclusions of a controverted CTCR report will not lead to the same level of contention that resulted from a premature and erroneous application to practice of a report of discussions of the fellowship study commended by Res. 3-07A (2001). A good deal of spadework on “male and female in the image of God” remains to be done. That the work is culturally driven need not be a negative if the process helps to clarify the distinctions between the church and our relativistic, post-modern culture. If we fix our eyes and hearts on the Scriptures and Confessions, with the clear understanding that the questions we are dealing with arise from ever-shifting social and cultural pressures (and, to be sure, from practices in other church bodies), we are less likely to be “blown in the wind” or to be caught up in unnecessary controversies. **LOGIA**

NOTES

1. There is no evidence in the minutes that the Dissenting Opinion was specifically discussed at the 2004 convention, though it’s reasonable to assume that the large number of negative votes reflects at least in part the concerns expressed in that opinion. According to Res. 3-06A (1995), the Dissenting Opinion was also to be studied “in consultation with the faculties of the seminaries.” It is also at least worth remarking that the Response to the Dissenting Opinion (prepared by the executive committee of the CTCR in early 1995) did not appear in the *Convention Workbook* along with the other two documents. Possibly it would have all been too confusing for the delegates.

2. <http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=515>

3. The faculty of Concordia Seminary submitted a resolution in No-

vember 2004 requesting that “either the composition of the task force or its schedule of activities and timetable, or both, be modified to allow for wider input into the formation of guidelines. . . .” It was submitted too late; the deed had already been done. The new guidelines were ready.

4. Given the previous experience with the 1995 Resolutions, the implementation of the “Resolveds” in Res. 3-03A (2004) bears watching: “Resolved, That the Council of Presidents along with the St. Louis and Fort Wayne seminaries be asked to develop materials . . . for use in congregations. . . .”; “Resolved, That the [COP] be asked to lead those under their care to a renewed understanding of distinctive Lutheran doctrines . . . and their applicability to the current issues.” Having accomplished all that (not a given), how will the results be assessed?

REVIEWS

“It is not many books that make men learned . . . but it is a good book frequently read.”

Martin Luther



Review Essay

The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert; translated by Charles Arand, Eric Gritsch, Robert Kolb, William Russell, James Schaaf, Jane Strohl, Timothy J. Wenger. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.

[This review originally appeared in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, March 2004, Volume 44, No. 1, 139–145. It is reprinted here with permission of the LSQ.]

☛ The appearance of the newest translation of the Book of Concord into English was a welcome event. This translation joins a long line of translations of the confessional writings into English—the Henkel, Jacobs, Triglotta, and Tappert editions. The first two are little used; the third remains the chief source for many; the last was widely used, but found some dissatisfaction among those who cared about the correctness of the text. Now those who value the confessional writings have a new text to examine.

Kolb/Wengert is a welcome addition to scholarship. So far, the translation seems to stand the test of accuracy: a readable translation in language that avoids the folksiness of many modern retractions. For some, the use of gender-neutral language, even when the text does not use it, will be too much of a concession. But by and large, it appears that the translation will win wide approval for its readability and accuracy.

The new translation incorporates a critical apparatus much better than Tappert. Kolb/Wengert avoids misleading, interpretive notes like Tappert’s note 4, page 31 on AC v, which makes an assertion not demanded by the text; or note 4, page 591, which fails to note that the document which provides a list of presumptuous questions was in fact a Philippistic document. One complaint this reviewer has always had about the Triglotta text is the lack of textual notes accompanying the text, with all pertinent information restricted to Bente’s introduction. Improving the tradition of Tappert, Kolb/Wengert translates the Latin and German texts of the Augustana side by side in an easy-to-follow layout. A critical apparatus accompanies all of the confessional writings, but with an added help in the Formula of Concord where parts of the text are keyed as to their

origin in the predecessor documents—Andreae’s Swabian Concord, Chytraeus’ and Chemnitz contributions to the Concord, the Maulbron Formula, the Torgau and Bergen books. The introductions to each of the writings are sparing, but adequate for the general reader of the confessional writings. This reviewer has used the Kolb/Wengert text in a course offered to third- and fourth-year BA students, where the reading met a good reception even from the easily discouraged, which would seem to commend the translation as one readily accessible to laypeople.

A major criticism of the basic editorial principle employed has already been leveled against the new translation in a review appearing in the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (“The New Translation of the Book of Concord: Closing the Barn Door After . . .” by Roland F. Ziegler, April 2002 [vol. 66, no. 2]). Ziegler points out that the principle for the text on which the new translation is based is enunciated by the editors in the foreword: “This translation employs as its basis the earliest complete edition of every document (with one exception)” (ix)—that being the Apology, more on which later.

That creates a problem. The various confessional writings were not, in any systematic, regular manner adopted as official confessions of the Lutheran Church at the time that they were written. The Augustana was. It was read in German, and both German and Latin copies were from the beginning regarded as equally official and representative of the Reformation doctrine. No general gathering, however, adopted the Apology and the Catechisms. Luther’s Smalcald Articles were signed by those who agreed with it at Smalcald; it was presented to some, but not the south Germans, who would not have been able to agree with it; Melancthon’s Tractate was officially adopted at Smalcald, but over the next decades, it came to be regarded as an appendix to the Smalcald Articles, sometimes supposed to have been written by Luther, and other times by “the scholars.” Nicolas Selnecker’s 1580, unofficial, Latin translation of the Book of Concord even contained a Latin translation of the German translation of the Tractate—so long forgotten as it was that it was written originally in Latin.

The only officially adopted confessional writings before 1577 were the Augustana and the Smalcald Articles/Tractate, when the Formula of Concord was published. The Formula enumerated the accepted confessional writings in “The Comprehensive Summary” and the Formula was then adopted, and signed by 8,000 theologians. The “Summary” specified the unaltered

Augsburg Confession and the Apology published in 1531. All of the subsequent writings were taken to be defenses and explanations of the faith expressed in the Augustana, so that nothing new was said in the later writings than had already been said in the foundational confession presented at Augsburg. That included Melanchthon's Tractate, which was requested by the Elector precisely because nothing critical had been said about the papacy in the Augustana. Three years later, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, and in commemoration, all of the confessions were assembled together, in German text and translation.

The text of the confessions is not as the text of the Bible. (Dr. Sigurd Ylvisaker reported that when he was in Leipzig from 1907 to 1910, a Lutheran student from the Eastern United States asked one day about the unique belief of the Midwestern Lutherans that the Book of Concord was verbally inspired.) So the standard practiced among students of the biblical text that the closer to the autograph the more authentic the text is hardly applicable in the question about the text of the *Bekennnisschriften*. Certainly, more than a few monstrosities are created in that case—shall the Small Catechism be printed on placards that might be hung by the dinner table? Is the entire Lutheran Church obligated to follow the Marriage Booklet and Luther's Baptismal Booklet—with its double exorcism, and so on? Certainly, there was good reason for the 1584 *Liber Concordiae* to drop those very theological and beautiful services—especially in light of AC VII's insistence that we do *not* demand uniformity of liturgical forms.

Nevertheless, the text does matter, and Melanchthon himself may be the one responsible for making the text matter so much. A great deal of the furor from 1546 to 1577 had to do with Philipp's tinkering with the text of the Augustana (and Apology). And in spite of the resurgence of a Melanchthonian spirit in modern Lutheranism, the fact remains that the Formula of Concord was the result of a long polemic over who was the true interpreter of the Augustana—Luther or Philipp. Consequently, when a decision had to be made, it was not merely a flip of the coin, but a confessional issue that texts with which Philipp had tinkered had to be restored to their original form. No Lutheran who takes the confessions seriously can be oblivious to the fact that in the Formula of Concord, Luther is repeatedly upheld as the true teacher and interpreter of the Augustana, and that the Book of Concord effectively sets aside Melanchthon's *Corporae Doctrinae*.

The text of the Augustana seems at first to be a simple matter—but on further reflection emerges as more complex. It was the Augustana that Melanchthon had tampered with most extensively, and the Formula specified that the text should be the original text of 1530—"the First, Unaltered Augsburg Confession, delivered to the Emperor Charles v at Augsburg in the year 1530, in the great Diet" (FC Summary Content, 3; *Triglotta*, 777). Unfortunately, the editors of the Book of Concord did not quite get what they were shooting at: the *editio princeps* has come to be Melanchthon's 1531 Quarto edition of both the Augustana and Apology. But later scholars recognized that more authentic was the Mainz manuscript. However, J. T. Müller in his 1847 edition noted that in spite of the fact that the latter text

was more authentic, all textual errors were easily corrected "so that we have no reason to surrender the text received by the Church and to accept another in place thereof" (tr. Bente, 21). The bottom line is that the 1580 and 1584 editions of the Book of Concord had an inferior text of the Augustana, but a scholar such as Müller was restrained enough not to depart from what had come to be regarded as the authoritative texts of the Confessional writings, the 1580 German and the 1584 Latin texts.

The Apology is a more significant issue. The Apology was written during the summer of 1530, but was not published until 1531. Then, three different forms of it appeared. One, from its size, is called the Quarto edition, published in May, 1531. A revision of the Quarto was published in September, 1531, and is referred to as the Octavo edition. A third is a German translation by Justus Jonas. The history of the former texts especially is confusing. It does not seem that any doctrinal issues hang on differences between these texts. The 1580 German edition of the Book of Concord used the Jonas text, which is distinguished by being something of a paraphrase of the Latin text. Selnecker's 1580 unofficial Latin text used the Octavo edition, from September, 1531. This was a text which Melanchthon had "tweaked," though no deviations were introduced. By the time of the Book of Concord the lessons of Philippism had made a deeper impression on the Concordia theologians, and when Chemnitz and Chytraeus prepared the 1584 edition, they returned to the May, 1531, Quarto edition.

As it turns out, the Octavo edition is not a vehicle for Melanchthon's perfidy. As the editors claim, rightly I think, Luther himself had a hand in improving the later text (*Kolb/Wengert*, 108, 109). Nevertheless, by 1584, the editors were concerned enough about the continuing effects of Philipp's influence, that fearing his hand in the Octavo edition, they reverted to the earlier—inferior it turns out—edition, which they presumed was free of Melanchthon's hand.

Some textual questions can be raised about the Small Catechism, but apart from the question of the Marriage and Baptism booklets, no significant variations are found.

Some questions, of course, can be raised about Melanchthon's Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope. It was written at Smalcald, in Latin, at the behest of the Elector. The Augustana, for some clear and valid reasons, had reined in any rhetoric regarding the Pope. At Smalcald, Melanchthon had dissented from Luther's strong language concerning the papacy in his articles; then, for inexplicable reasons, Philipp was asked to write an addendum to the Augustana on the papacy, and, as is known, he came on like gangbusters, radically altering his previous position. Unlike Luther's articles, Melanchthon's treatise was signed by all of those present. Bente suggested that Veit Dietrich's German translation was the version signed, but it appears rather that it was a *copy* of the Latin original. However, the Dietrich German translation was what gained currency in the intervening years, and by the time of the Formula the Tractate was regarded as an appendix, not to the Augustana, but to the Smalcald Articles, was attributed to "the scholars," not Melanchthon, and was known only in a German translation.

Thus, in the 1580 Book of Concord, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope was printed in German, as though that

were the original, and was attributed to “the scholars,” and not to Philipp. To make matters worse, when Selnecker published his 1580 Latin edition (later noted by himself as “privately published”) he included a *Latin translation* of the German translation, apparently unaware of a Latin original text. Only in the 1584 text of the Book of Concord, did the original Latin text appear; but not even then was Melancthon credited as author.

As is the case with the Apology, this issue does not affect any dogmatical issues. However, we can cite one case where there is a significant textual variation. In Tr 10, the German text has: “*das Predigtamt vom gemeinen Beruf der Apostel herkommt und ist nicht,*” not, “*daß alle dieser einigen Person Petri Beruf oder Bestätigung haben.*” That expression is absent from the Latin, and one might argue that since it was not Melancthon’s intention to say that, it is not legitimately a part of the Confessions. However, it is the German text that was published in 1580 as an authoritative confession of what was taught by the Lutherans.

So, the question remains, what is the authorized text of the Lutheran confessional writings? If such a question depends on the mood of the scholars who examine every newest shred of evidence to determine what was the intention of the writers of those documents, the quest will be endless and doomed to relativism and trendiness. The fact is that the Book of Concord was published as a German text in 1580, with names affixed, and as a Latin text, worked out by the chief writers of the Formula in 1584, and those texts are quite certain. We can regard them as the authoritative texts.

When the Triglotta translation was produced, it handled cases where there was a difference in the authoritative texts by translating the secondary material in brackets. Ziegler points out that in the Kolb/Wengert translation, the principle of the oldest, most original text leads the translator to insert the “filioque” in brackets. The Triglotta translation indeed inserts material found in the German Apology but not the Latin in brackets, and the Tractate example given above is accorded the same note: “[that the office of the ministry proceeds from the general call of the apostles and that it is not necessary for all to have the call or confirmation of this one person, Peter, alone.]” (Triglotta, 507). The first example, putting “filioque” in brackets is absurd; the latter is certainly sensible. And the statement belongs to our confession no less than the text without it.

So, what of highly respected, and greatly admired scholars like Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, along with their associated translators? Does that mean that their work counts for nothing? I used their text a year ago in a Confessions course, and will use it again, next term. It is eminently readable. I suspect that I will carry it with me for the rest of my professional life. But the *Göttingen Bekenntnisschriften* and the Triglotta will remain my most used texts (who can not like all that white space in the Triglotta?).

If there were no other virtue in Kolb/Wengert than highlighting the textual issues, it would be a worthwhile study text indeed. And it will be so used. In the meantime, one can fuss a little and suspect how much more useful it would be if, for example, it printed the Apology in parallel columns with the Quarto and Octavo texts both readily available, or if it followed

the Triglotta tradition of using brackets to translate the controverted texts (not including the filioque text in that category).

All in all, we commend Kolb/Wengert. Time will tell how well the translation itself wears. One must suspend judgment on that for a while; only after considerable use, can it be deemed successful or not. The text, however, and the principles behind the text can be judged at this point, and they are found a little wanting.

On balance, however, we commend Kolb/Wengert as a useful text of our confessional writings. We can only wish that this text would be subordinate to reading the confessions in the Latin and German, where textual issues, but not translation issues remain.

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Sana Doctrina: Heilige Schrift und theologische Ethik. By Armin Wenz. Kontexte: Neue Beiträge zur Historischen und Systematischen Theologie, Bd. 37. Frankfurt am Main, etc.: Peter Lang, 2003. 368 pages.

☛ This collection of essays builds on Wenz’s theological dissertation, *Das Wort Gottes—Gericht und Rettung*, published in 1996 (reviewed in *LOGIA* 12, no. 2, 48–49). Most of the essays were written after this date. As the subtitle suggests, they have a dual focus, the doctrine of Scripture and ethics.

The first part of the book, devoted to the doctrine of Scripture, lays out the scriptural basis for any ethical decision in the Christian church. From the very beginning Wenz points out that these decisions never happen without conflicts, as the biblical history of the prophets and of Christ himself clearly shows. Scripture itself leads into such conflicts of authority which ultimately have to do with the First Commandment. Modern Protestant theology seeks to neutralize the authority of Scripture in many and various ways. This by-and-large successful attempt finds a powerful ecumenical ally in the principle of tradition set forth by the Roman Catholic Church, as the author points out. If Scripture is just the first stage of some continuous “development of ideas,” then it cannot be the critical vis-à-vis of the church it is for the Lutheran Confessions. Then the Spirit is located, not in the Scriptures, but in history, in the inspired community (church), or in the inspired individual (exegete, believer). As Wenz shows, the Confessions of the Lutheran Church remain relevant in these ongoing conflicts and provide helpful spiritual clarity.

Of special interest is an essay on one modern German Bible translation (similar to the *Good News Translation*) marked by rationalism and legalism. Here the author shows that translating the Bible is by no means a simple philological exercise. It requires scriptural integrity. It requires in particular an appreciation of the Scriptures as God’s efficacious word in which he is present and in which he presently acts. If this understanding is lacking in the translators then the “understandability” of Scripture will be the ultimate hermeneutical principle, its “translation” into some contemporary jargon the ultimate goal.

The “holy” in Holy Scripture gets lost. As Wenz points out, understanding Scripture is a pneumatological problem, that is, it has to do with the chasm between the holy God and sinful man that can only be overcome by God’s Spirit who speaks in Scripture. As the Bible shows, Jesus was not better understood by his contemporaries simply because he shared their “culture.” In this context, the author offers some clarifying remarks concerning Luther as translator, which are of course highly relevant for “cross-cultural” evangelism and “contemporary” worship styles.

Wenz concludes the first part with an essay on the doctrine of orders of creation as set forth by two Erlangen theologians, Paul Althaus and, especially, Werner Elert, and as elaborated on by theologians like Oswald Bayer of Tübingen. As Wenz reasserts, God is to be served in the three “holy orders” of family, state, and church. These orders are not cultural suggestions or options of merely transitory significance; they are divine mandates that were established to retain man in his being God’s creature, for his own good.

Ethical applications of these foundational insights obviously abound. Interestingly, they are very similar on both sides of the great pond. Wenz opens the second part by analyzing the German (or Western) society. Following the German sociologist Gerhard Schulze, he describes it as “experience society” (*Erlebnisgesellschaft*). This society unsuccessfully seeks to satisfy its insatiable hunger for life in ever more sophisticated events and experiences of consumption in order to avoid dealing with death. Clearly, the *homo incurvatus in se ipso* (man turned in upon himself) is at work under glitzy new masks. The Lutheran Church has helpful alternatives to offer: not enthusiasm-generating, euphoric event-style celebration experiences that even increase the hunger (experience-generated faith), but truly enriching experiences of God’s creation, even of consumption, in the context of the liturgy of the divine service, especially in the sacraments (faith-generating, hidden experience of the living God in law and gospel). Out of this breaking-up of man as he by nature is turned in on himself grows a new relation to creation as a whole: in faith, it would be received again, not as a means to satisfy our insatiable needs, but as a place of ascetic service in the freedom of the children of God according to God’s word of the Bible.

Wenz’s further ethical applications deal with abortion in the context of the “two-kingdoms-doctrine”; the specific dignity of mothers; and homosexuality.

The book under review is rounded off by a detailed discussion of V. Stolle’s book on Paul and Luther (reviewed in *LOGIA* 13, no. 3, 41–43, by J. Stephenson) under the perceptive heading “Against the Old and New Antinomians.” Antinomianism is the attempt to formulate a non-dialectical form of Christianity, that is, a Christianity without life-long repentance, a Christianity without baptism—in a word, a Christianity that makes sense to secure unbelievers. Wenz indicts Stolle’s work as yet another version of this currently popular transmutation of the Lutheran *simul* into the Antinomian *olim—nunc*: once sinner, now righteous. The cross is not at the center of this theological paradigm anymore; incarnation and resurrection have replaced it. An interesting aside: On Reformation Day 2004 Armin Wenz was

installed as pastor of St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche (SELK) in Oberursel, Germany, where Stolle continues to teach New Testament theology at the SELK seminary.

A final observation concerning the title of the work, *Sana Doctrina*, “sound” or “healthy doctrine” (cf. Ti 1:9, ethically important: 1 Tim 1:10). As title for a book that, at least in part, deals with ethics, this might come as a surprise: Doesn’t ethics have to do with solving human problems or conflicts? Doesn’t only systematic theology deal with “doctrine”? These understandable questions could suggest the following: theology can be taught, it is “theory”; ethics are generated in a practical trial-and-error process, which for Christians takes place under the guidance of the Spirit. Wenz’s book is precisely about this, because biblically this dichotomy is not true. Certainly, applications change; but God’s law is as unchangeable as God’s gospel. Both are unequivocally revealed in the Scriptures, God’s own word. The Lutheran dogmatists of the orthodox period recognized and honored this by treating ethics within their *dogmatic* systems, that is, when they discussed the Decalogue.

All in all, a highly commendable work of clarifying boldness and instructive reflection that continues right along the lines once for all drawn by the “biblical history of conflict.” It is also an encouraging work because it can lead the Lutheran reader in America out of inner-ecclesial frustrations, not into the boundless chaos of modern ecumenism, but into the ordered space created and granted by God’s word and the Lutheran Confessions.

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Ecumenical Luther: The Development and Use of His Doctrinal Hermeneutic. By Richard P. Bucher. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003.

✦ Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod pastor Richard P. Bucher’s self-identified task was to come to grips with the question of what is necessary for unity. He sought to identify exactly what “all the articles of faith” are. As it is written: “We also believe, teach, and confess that no church should condemn another because the one has fewer or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other has, when otherwise there is unity with the other in teaching and *all the articles of faith* and in the proper use of the holy sacraments, according to the well-known saying, ‘Dissonantia ieiunii non dissolvit consonantiam fidei,’ ‘Dissimilarity in fasting is not to disrupt unity in faith’” (FC Ep x; *Kolb/Wengert*, 516). He did not find an answer; at least, he did not find a list. But he did find a dissertation topic and a doctoral degree in theology from Boston University. This book is a modification of that dissertation.

His dissertation topic was a study of how Luther dealt with issues of unity. The answer? Doctrine. His thesis is that Luther had a deliberate way, albeit implied and not explicit, of determining what is doctrine. He calls this Luther’s doctrinal hermeneutic. He writes:

Luther's doctrinal hermeneutic was composed of two interpretive canons that he applied to the teaching in question to determine whether it was an article of faith: a scriptural canon and an evangelical canon. In its most basic sense, the scriptural canon stated that a necessary doctrine must be based only on Scripture, not on human words. The evangelical canon in its basic form posited that only a teaching necessary for salvation could be an article of faith. (12)

This thesis is defended by Bucher mainly in Luther's discussions with Rome and the Sacramentarians. Tongue-in-cheek, he calls these "ecumenical" dialogues. Specifically, he looked at Luther's letters to the Unity of Brethren (chapter 3), his meeting with Zwingli in the Marburg Colloquy (chapter 4), and his deathbed confession and desire for a council with Rome as found in the Schmalkald Articles (chapter 5). That is not the only material Bucher consults or cites, but it is his most persuasive and arguably also the most interesting.

Bucher sees Luther's hermeneutic develop and become more nuanced over time and in response to particular errors and controversies. The fully developed hermeneutic is given in chapter 2 under the heading "The Case for Luther's Doctrinal Hermeneutic" beginning on p. 28.

He posits that for Luther, in order for a teaching to be an article of faith it must first of all be based on Scripture. He calls this the first canon. But for this to be really true, it must be more than simply based on Scripture. It must be a passage from the canon (thus purgatory is out). And it must also be the right passage. To be the right passage it must be a clear passage, not a figurative passage. It must also be teaching or a command and not an example. It must not be from the Mosaic law. And, finally, it must be for all people, as opposed to some peculiar command given to a Biblical figure in a specific circumstance. Next the right passage must be rightly interpreted, that is to say, it must be interpreted by Scripture. Suffice it to say that whatever that means, at minimum it means that it cannot contradict other passages in the Scripture. And finally we must understand the Scriptures according to their natural, literal, and grammatical meanings (28-48).

The second canon is simpler. For a teaching to be an article of faith it must also be of the gospel. It must be necessary for salvation or necessary to make one a Christian and it must free consciences (48-57).

Lest all this sound like the twentieth-century American fad of numbered hermeneutical principles for Biblical interpretation, Luther did not use this to interpret Scripture. He used it to define what was necessary for unity. To place it into the negative, he used this to determine what would be divisive or forbid fellowship. He was using these principles to determine what the articles of faith were. One definition of an article of faith is that if it is denied or corrupted, fellowship is destroyed. Unlike the various lists of hermeneutical principles for Biblical interpretation Luther's purpose is to free consciences. This means also that only those teachings that qualify are binding. Anyone who makes a pious opinion binding, even if it is from tradition and even if it is not contradicted in the Scriptures, violates the gospel; he returns men to bondage. The teaching that

St. Mary remained a virgin throughout her life, for example, is assumed in the Confessions. But it is not an article of faith. It is not contradicted by the Scriptures, but neither it is based on the Scripture. For Luther it cannot then be an article of faith. It is a matter of pious opinion, his own opinion being that the tradition is correct. But no man can make this necessary for unity. It does not make a Christian. It is not of the gospel. To claim that it is so when there is no passage in all of Holy Writ to substantiate it and no point of doctrine that hangs upon it is to bind consciences and violate the gospel. Unlike the hermeneutical principal fad, Luther was not seeking by these canons to constrict us into orthodoxy, setting up rules and a modern day midrash for us to follow so that we never speak the Divine Name in vain or understand a passage differently than our teachers. Instead, Luther was defining what is the minimum that is required for us in our fallen state to be truly united. He was not claiming that all opinions are equal. He was merely distinguishing between what is necessary, what is tolerable, and what is divisive. In the final analysis, what is necessary is what it has always been: Christology.

Thus the bodily presence in the Lord's Supper is not a trivial detail for Luther when he argues against Zwingli in "That These Words of Christ." He is arguing about who Christ is. He states, "It is our belief, of course, as the Scriptures teach us, that our Lord Jesus Christ is in essence and by nature true God, and 'in him the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily,' as St. Paul says in Colossians 2[:9]. Thus, apart from Christ there is simply no God or Godhead at all" (chapter 5, note 192, p. 197). It seems that David Scaer was not the first one to claim that all theology is Christology, nor was he the first to be mocked for it or even ignored.

In that same document Luther describes what unity demands: "If we are to practice Christian unity with them and extend Christian love to them, we must also love and be satisfied with, or at least tolerate, their doctrine and behavior" (quoted by Bucher, 113). Luther cannot do that with Zwingli. Zwingli's teaching on the Lord's Supper is against the Scripture (first canon) and denies the incarnation (second canon). But for those who agree on all the articles of faith we must "be satisfied with, or at least tolerate, their doctrine and behavior," even if we know they are technically wrong.

Throughout the book, Bucher makes a good case for Luther's doctrinal hermeneutic. He proves his point with Luther. It is a bit repetitive, but it is understood that this was written, in the first place, as a dissertation. But Bucher is not satisfied there. He wants to bring this kind of dialogue to the modern ecumenical table and makes some charges against that movement in his final chapter. Here I think Bucher misses the obvious (or maybe Concordia Publishing House just would not print it): We are not ready. The concept is good. But this kind of clear thinking and distinction, this understanding of what is truly essential and what are pious opinions, needs to be turned inward first. The Missouri Synod needs to define what is necessary for unity within our own synodical fellowship. We need to address the questions of what is essential. Is it tolerable to be a member of Renewal In Missouri, to sign That They May Be One, or to have a tabernacle in the church? Is it necessary to confess that the papal office is the fulfillment of the Anti-Christ or that St. Mary

remained a virgin to her death? Where are the lines and what is at stake?

Here Bucher's discovery could make the greatest contribution. He gives us the description to begin some Schmalkald articles for our Synod, the beginnings of the list for which he longs. If that task was taken up and completed, if we, like our fathers before us, could truly unite on the basis of doctrine, then we could go to the ecumenical table and have something to say.

Finally, the book is good. It is worth the \$30 CPH wants. We need more Luther scholarship and if the book is a bit repetitive, the footnotes are rich with Luther quotes and citations. In a year full of popular Luther biographies and dramas, CPH should be commended for printing this. I hope our pastors buy it and read it. Even more, I pray they begin to think in this very Lutheran way.

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The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters Volume II (1941–1976). By Hermann Sasse. Translated by Matthew C. Harrison. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003, 471 pages. \$21.95 (cloth).

✦ Born twenty-three years after Wilhelm Loehe's death, Hermann Sasse (1895–1976) stood in the tradition of Loehe and transmitted that legacy to the twentieth century. Sasse, a son of the church of the Prussian Union, came to understand himself as a confessing Lutheran while on a study leave at Hartford Seminary in the 1925–26 academic year. It was while he was in the United States that he came to read Loehe's *Three Books About the Church* and it is this book that Sasse credits for turning him toward Luther and the Lutheran Confessions. Sasse would eventually leave the Prussian Union and become a member of the Bavarian territorial church, the church in which Loehe had been a pastor. And like Loehe, Sasse would find himself in conflict with the officials of that body. After a teaching career at Erlangen (where Loehe had also studied), Sasse would immigrate to Australia in 1948 to accept a post on the faculty of Immanuel Seminary (later renamed Luther Seminary) in Adelaide, a school that had historical ties to Neuendettelsau. Like Loehe, Sasse had a passion for the doctrine of the Lord's Supper and its place in the life of the congregation. Sasse, like Loehe, was a churchly theologian with a heart for faithful missionary proclamation in the world. Both men held a high (but not "high church") view of the pastoral office and both were concerned with maintaining Lutheran identity grounded in the marks of the church (AC VII).

The essays in this volume come from the time of World War II through the end of Sasse's life in 1976. An earlier volume contains materials from 1927 to 1939, as well as a biographical sketch of Sasse's life. Another volume is anticipated that will contain Sasse's "Letters to Lutheran Pastors." *The Lonely Way Volume II* provides readers with essays and letters reflective of the range of Sasse's work. Four of the twenty-seven entries have to do with the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Three

treat the doctrine of the ministry. Two of the writings examine Luther's significance for modern Christianity. Several deal with inter-Lutheran and ecumenical issues. The remaining essays address liturgy, women's ordination, and early church views of abortion. All of the pieces in this collection reflect the depth of Sasse's scholarship and piety, his knowledge of church history ancient and modern, and his far reaching ecumenical ties both to the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed churches. He served as honorary president of Inter-Varsity Fellowship in Australia. Letters and conversations with his close friend, Herman A. Preus of Luther Seminary, are frequently noted.

Sasse champions the liturgy for the sake of the church's dogma. This leads him to take a critical position over against the liturgical movement. Arguing that a real renewal of liturgy is needed, Sasse writes "Liturgy and Confession: A Brotherly Warning Against the High Church Danger" (299–322) in 1959. In this treatise, Sasse is critical of St. Louis's Arthur Carl Piepkorn and his associates who published *Una Sancta*. A Lutheran liturgical movement, Sasse opines, ought to be anchored in "the saving message of the justification of the sinner by faith alone" (314). Sasse chides the formulators of the 1958 *Service Book and Hymnal* for importing an Anglican eucharistic prayer into the Lutheran rite, pointing out the weaknesses of Gregory Dix's approach to liturgical theology. At the heart of his criticisms of the liturgical movement is Sasse's fear that dogmatic content is lacking. The *lex credendi lex orandi* must also be reversible. "The liturgy defines doctrine only if doctrine defines the liturgy" (301).

Questions of church and ministry also engage Sasse. Sasse notes that both Rome and the Reformed see the ministry as an *ordo* whereas Lutheranism understands the "office as mandate" (120). Thus the office of the ministry is seen in terms of the gospel rather than law. Forms of church government—congregational, episcopal, synodical, presbyterial—are matters of human, not divine, law (122). Sasse offers a critique of Anglicanism from the perspective of Article VII of the Augsburg Confession: "There is no hint in Holy Scripture at a *successio apostolica*. The *successio* is a venerable tradition, an adiaphoron which, however, ceases to be an adiaphoron if it is used to *obscure* the doctrine of Scripture on the true unity of the church" (274). For Sasse, the unity of the church is found in the one Christ. Individuals or whole churches may apostasize from the one church, but the essential unity of the church cannot be destroyed anymore than it can be achieved.

This collection is entitled *The Lonely Way*. The title accurately characterizes Sasse's life. Like Loehe before him, Sasse was not easily at home in the Lutheranism of his day. He was critical of what he viewed as doctrinal indifference and unionism in the Lutheran World Federation. He was never completely at home with the Missouri Synod's old doctrine of biblical inerrancy or the formulations of Franz Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics*, but neither did he see the emerging "moderate" movement as offering a more substantial theology.

Sasse's essays and letters give us a glimpse into the life of world Lutheranism in the middle years of the last century. His polemics could be harsh, perhaps too harsh for ecumenically sensitive twenty-first century ears. Nevertheless the hard edge to

his theology was prompted by his love for the confession of the gospel—a confession that unites and divides. Truth and heresy were not quaint relics of a bygone era for Sasse: “Just as a man whose kidneys no longer eliminate poisons which have accumulated in the body will die, so the church will die which no longer eliminates heresy” wrote Sasse in 1969 (190). Sasse wrote eloquently of the *theologia crucis* and so he knew that the church lives a cruciform existence. The theology of the cross made it possible for Sasse to work with patience and hope in the midst of disappointments over church politicians who had use for theology only as a tool for their programs and plans. So he writes “The sect cannot wait, for it must have everything at once, for it has no future. The church can wait, for it does have a future. We Lutherans should think of that” (328). Sasse’s legacy gives us much to ponder as we look to that future.

Historical annotations by Ronald Feuerhahn add to the usefulness of this attractively done volume.

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BRIEFLY NOTED

The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church—Volume 5: Moderation, Pietism, and Awakening. By Hughes Oliphant Old. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004.

☛ This is the latest installment in Old’s massive treatment of the history of preaching. In this present volume, Old tells the story of the eighteenth-century pulpit, with forays into the homiletical contributions in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Spanish California (Franciscan friars), Romanian Orthodoxy, and the Russian Orthodox Church. The bulk of the book is devoted to the preachers of Pietism, Methodism, Puritanism, Scottish Calvinism, and Evangelical Anglicanism. Old does a masterful job of chronicling the sermonic and theological diversity of this period.

Proclaiming the Christmas Gospel: Ancient Sermons and Hymns for Contemporary Christian Inspiration. Edited by John D. Witvliet and David Vroege. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004.

☛ This little volume contains excerpts from sermons of Jerome, Augustine, Leo the Great, Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, Wyclif, Luther, and Calvin on the incarnation. Each sermon is accompanied by a hymn or carol reflecting the theme of the sermon.

Luther Digest—Volume 12. St. Louis: The Luther Academy, 2004.

☛ This annual abridgement of recent Luther studies organization articles in this issue under five headings: Scripture, the Pastoral Luther, Trinity, Special Issues, and Luther in Historical Context. This helpful tool will serve to keep both scholars and pastors informed of significant, new research in various dimensions of Luther studies.

One Incarnate Truth: Christianity’s Answer to Spiritual Chaos. Edited by Uwe Siemon-Netto. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002.

☛ These short essays by a variety of theologians, historians, journalists, and other leaders comment on theological, ethical, social, and philosophical trends within the world of postmodernism in light of the Christian faith. Originally published as part of the United Press International’s “Christ and Postmodernity Series,” these entries are arranged according to the church year. As with any collection of this type, the quality is mixed. On the whole, however, this collection is engaging and stimulating. This book could well be the focal point for an adult study group.

The Last Things: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Eschatology. Edited by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.

☛ The editors note “The twentieth century will be remembered in the history of theology for its rediscovery of the centrality of eschatology in the message of Jesus and early Christianity. But it reached no consensus on the shape and meaning of eschatology” (vii). This volume seeks to contribute toward clarifying the place of eschatology in biblical studies, systematic theology, and church life from an ecumenical perspective. The lead essay by Wolfhart Pannenberg lays out the task of Christian eschatology as the articulation of communion with God beyond death. Carl Braaten calls for a “recovery of apocalyptic imagination” in preaching and theology, noting that “biblical apocalyptic speaks about the powers behind the scenes—Satan, demons, angels good and bad, principalities, dominions, thrones, elemental spirits of the universe, the Dragon and the beasts” (17). Robert Jenson sees the end of eschatology as deification: “our life with God will be our being taken fully into his own life” (41). The essays by Paul Hanson, Arland Hultgren, and John McGuckin deal with biblical themes. David Novak examines law and eschatology as a “Jewish-Christian intersection.” Philip Krey provides a study of Luther on the Apocalypse. Physicist/theologian George Murphy looks for clues to eschatology in the natural sciences and vice versa.

The Ruins of the Church: Sustaining Faith in an Age of Diminished Christianity. By R. R. Reno. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002.

☛ Reno, an Episcopalian lay-theologian teaching at Creighton, offers this book “to provide spiritual guidance to Christians seeking faithfulness within increasingly dysfunctional churches” (13). Ten of the eleven chapters in this book were originally published as articles in journals or delivered as addresses at conferences. Hence this book addresses an array of issues ranging from Radical Orthodoxy to liturgy to homosexuality in the Episcopal Church. These thoughtful essays encourage a critical intimacy with the churches even amidst the ruins brought on by faithlessness and apathy in those in places of leadership.

Rethinking Peter Singer: A Christian Critique. Edited by Gordon Preece. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

☛ Four Australian scholars provide a rigorous and well-researched response to Princeton University’s Ira W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics, Peter Singer. This book provides an accurate summary of Singer’s philosophical presuppositions and his seemingly contradictory ethical conclusions, that is, Singer advocates abortion and human infanticide and yet is a champion of animal rights and other environmental issues.

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SHORT STUDIES AND COMMENTARY

LUTHER ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

But the fact that you, like the Turks, the Jews, and the devil, believe that God created all things—this is not the knowledge of God. Nor is this knowledge your belief that Christ was born from a virgin, suffered, died, and rose again. No, you have the true knowledge of God when you believe and know that God and Christ are your God and your Christ. This the devil and the false Christians cannot believe. Thus this knowledge is nothing else than the true Christian faith; for when you know God and Christ in this way, you will rely on Him with all your heart and trust in Him in good fortune and misfortune, in life and death. Evil consciences cannot have such trust, for they know no more about God than that He is a God of St. Peter and all the saints in heaven. But they do not know Him as their God; they regard Him as a jailer and an angry judge.

To have God is to have all grace, all mercy, and everything one can call good. To have Christ is to have the Savior and Mediator who brought us to the point that God belongs to us, and who acquired for us all mercy from Him. You must weave this together in such a way that Christ becomes yours and you become His. Then you have a true knowledge. An unmarried woman can say, of course: “This is a man.” But she cannot say that he is her man. Thus we can all say, of course, that this is a god; but we cannot all say that He is our God. For we cannot all trust in Him and take comfort in Him. To this knowledge also belongs what Scripture calls the *facies et vultus Domini*, that is, the countenance of the Lord about which the prophets have much to say. He who does not behold the face of God does not know Him but sees only His back, that is, an angry and cruel God.

*Luther, Lectures on 2 Peter, 1523
AE 30, 152.*

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A LIVING FORCE—CONGREGATIONS

An enormous responsibility is placed upon our office today. Humanly seen and humanly speaking, [we bear] the entire responsibility for the future of our church in Germany, and that means the responsibility for the maintenance of the pure preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments in accord with their institution. Christian governing authorities had once taken upon themselves the protection of the Evangelical [Lutheran] Church. This happened in the hour of greatest need, when in the age of the Reformation the legal spiritual authority, the German episcopate, had rejected the Gospel and thus become heretical. For three hundred years, the Christian territorial lords more or less faithfully exercised this office of protection, until in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it became an anachronism, empty talk, naked rule of power of the modern state over the church. In the century between 1817 and 1918, between the establishment of the United Prussian State Church and the end of the rule of the territorial princes, the church nearly perished. Indeed it was, in broad areas of Germany, drawn into the process which was disintegrating the old civil-ecclesiastical-legal institutions. And there it was actually destroyed and remains only as a ruin.

In place of the territorial lords, *church governments* arose, allegedly independent from the states. But neither have been able to protect the Church of the Lutheran Reformation. This is true not only of the leading entities of the Old Prussian Church, whose repeated solemn assurances that they desired to protect the confessions of the Reformation, at least in the case of the Supreme Consistory, could no longer be explained by the ignorance of its members. This is true also of the government of the Lutheran territorial churches [*Landeskirchen*] which were drawn into an all-too-great dependency upon Berlin and after 1933 were not strong enough to free themselves from this dependency and to proclaim a confessionally faithful Lutheran Church of Germany.

In saying this, it is not our intention to call into question the personal confessional faithfulness and the good intentions of individual members of these church administrations. We speak here of the institutions, whose thought, will, life, and actions are something quite different than the thought, will,

life, and actions of the individuals that sustain them. And the theological *faculties*, which should be sustainers of Lutheranism, have not only completely forsaken the church, they have actually become its graveyards. They could not but become such as institutions of the modern, nonsectarian and anticonfessional state. No matter how significant the faithful teachers and witnesses of Lutheran theology in the nineteenth century on the three Lutheran faculties which were still *de jure* Lutheran (Leipzig, Rostock, and Erlangen) and on the other faculties were for our church, they accomplished what they did as individuals and quite often as very lonely men. Aside from the *Martin-Luther-Bund* with its special work and concern for the diaspora, the Lutheran *associations* which have existed to assist in times of need, times of the greatest life and death dangers our church has faced, are no longer real protectors of the Lutheran confession. Harless, Kliefoth, Luthardt, and other founders of the General Evangelical Lutheran Conference of 1868 would be very troubled by the development of the Narrower Conference in the last decades. It has not only banished itself to inaction, but at all great turning points of church history in our time, it has been silent. And if it did speak it said nothing. And neither can the Lutheran Church of Germany expect any help from the place where her very heart beats, where it still proves itself a living force—the *congregations of the church*. There are still in many regions of Germany, often precisely where we least expect it, Christian congregations in which Luther's catechism is a living possession of faith. Baptism, Supper, and Absolution are still taken as seriously as they were in the times of the fathers. Indeed, we have gripping testimony of how in our time entire congregations have found their way home from the shallow religiosity of neo-Protestantism to the faith, the confession, and the liturgy of the fathers. But these congregations are a scattered diaspora in confessionless churches or churches estranged from their confession. No Lutheran Church government accepts them. They quietly bear witness to their faith and life. But in the loud market of church political activity, their voice is not heard, nor does anyone wish to hear it. They themselves need protection; they cannot be protectors, least of all at a time when entire congregations are torn asunder overnight by the terrors of aerial warfare.

Thus remains the Lutheran office of the pastor. Where the secular protections of the church have been forever destroyed, where the church governments cannot help—despite any good intentions of their members—where the old societal organizations of Lutheranism leave us in the lurch, where the congregation is too weak, there the Lutheran office of the pastor remains, the *ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta* ["ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments"], just as Article v of the Augustana teaches us to understand it. Consequently, it remains God's unsunderable commission to us. God wills also today that the Gospel be preached to people "plainly and purely," the real Gospel, not that which the great men of our age maintain is the Gospel: the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not a message of human religion. We are not charged with preaching "the accursed religion of Christians" (Zinzendorf), this mixture of

faith and unbelief, weakness of faith, and theological diletantism, whose shallowness the world sees through more clearly than we. We are to preach the real message of the real (not a corrected) NT of the One who is literally our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption, and our peace [paraphrase of 1 Cor 1:30].

God desires that after the pious human "I"—consciously or not—was the object of the sermon for so long, now again his dear Son, the Crucified and Risen One, and he alone, be the content of the sermon. He desires that the justification of the sinner through faith alone be preached as the *evangelium aeternum* ["eternal Gospel"]. He desires through the simple preaching of this Gospel and through the unpretentious Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Holy Supper to build the church on earth as the body of his Son. And just as in the Sacrament of the Altar the true body and the true blood of Jesus Christ in, with, and under the elements of the bread and wine are really present and dispensed to all who come to the Table of the Lord, in the same way God desires to make the external Word of our preaching, be it ever so simple, the bearer and instrument of the Holy Spirit. Because we know this, we therefore know that God will also preserve and sustain the Lutheran office of the ministry today. And we know that it is his will and commission which will do so, and not our desire or the force of our personality.

But we know more. Where God's *commission* is, there also is his promise. Every promise which God has tied to the faithful performance of the office of the means of grace is still valid today. Even in this time of divine judgment, there is no moratorium on grace. His Word shall not return void [Is 55:10–11].

Hermann Sasse

Circular Letter 3 To Westphalian Pastors 1944
The Lonely Way, volume 2, CPH, 142–145.

H. RUHLAND AND THE LUTHERAN TERRITORIAL CHURCHES

Forty Theses on How a Confessional Lutheran, According to Scripture and Conscience, Should Conduct Himself in and Over Against a Lutheran Territorial Church which has Fallen into Corruption. Dresden: Justus Naumann, [1870].

Translator's Introduction

H. Ruhland was a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastor in Pleasant Ridge, IL. These theses were prepared by him and published by the Lutheran pastoral conference of St. Louis, Missouri. The theses are here translated, with Bible references (but without the very helpful testimonies for each thesis from the Confessions, Luther, and other teachers of the church, and without final quotes from Luther) for the benefit of confessional Lutherans who are trying to decide what to do within an LCMS which has "fallen into corruption." Not all of

Ruhland's theses may be applicable in the present day, but the wisdom he brings forth will be valuable in any case.

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Thesis 1. A confessional Lutheran is bound with his conscience in the holy word of God in such a way that he gives unconditional faith and obedience to the word as to the divinely revealed, eternal, and only, infallible, and saving truth and highest norm of all doctrine and all life, and with his whole heart hates, rejects, and condemns everything which contradicts it, without exception, as false, ungodly, and pernicious. *Proof texts:* Jn 17:17; Ps 119:160; 2 Tim 3:15–16; 2 Pt 1:19; Dt 4:2; 2 Cor 2:17

Thesis 2. A confessional Lutheran is most undoubtedly convinced in his conscience from God's word that the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church are the completely pure and unfalsified presentation and explanation of the divine word and will. They are therefore his own confession of faith and creed (*Symbolum*) and the *norma normata* according to which he wants to have doctrine and practice tested and established, as agreeing with the Scripture. Therefore he can also consider no one a confessional Lutheran who regards any doctrine of this confession as non-binding, and must hate, reject, and condemn everything which contradicts this confession as unbiblical, unlutheran, false, and pernicious.

Proof texts: 1 Cor 1:10

Thesis 3. A confessional Lutheran knows that he is bound by God's word and his conscience both to avoid most carefully each and every false doctrine and spiritual fellowship with false-believing churches, and diligently to seek and faithfully to preserve the fellowship of confession and love with those who are of the same pure faith with him according to Scripture and creed (*Symbol*).

Proof texts: Mt 7:15; 2 Cor 6:14–18; Rom 16:17; 2 Jn 8–10; Rv 14:9–11; Rv 18:4; Jer 15:19; 2 Tim 1:8; Eph 4:3–5.

Thesis 4. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is, among all particular churches, the right-believing one, that is, the one in which the gospel is preached purely and the holy sacraments are imparted according to the gospel; and only those are true Lutheran particular and local churches (congregations), in which the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church confessed in the symbols is acknowledged and publicly holds sway.

Thesis 5. Particular churches, in which the Lutheran Symbols are still officially authoritative, but are not everywhere accepted in their true sense due to a lack of doctrinal discipline; and are not everywhere respected as binding norm of doctrine and practice; in which moreover this or that anti-scriptural or anti-confessional false doctrine and practice has entered, spread and been tolerated; in which, as a consequence

of an anti-scriptural and anti-confessional constitution, the individual congregations and congregation members have been completely or partially robbed of the exercise of their churchly rights—these are particular churches which have fallen into corruption, but have ceased to be parts of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as little as a sick member has ceased to be a member of the body.

A proof of this is the *Congregation at Corinth*. . . . 1 Cor 1:2. Cf. also v. 4–7, and 2 Cor 1:1.

Thesis 6. Even a local congregation, found within an Evangelical Lutheran particular church, in which [congregational] errors in doctrine and practice which contradict the word of God arise, and through ignorance or negligence are tolerated, has not thereby ceased to be a Lutheran congregation, as long as the church's symbols are publicly accepted by her as norm of doctrine and practice, and all her deviations from it in doctrine and practice, when shown to her, are not stubbornly affirmed and defended.

Proof texts: Acts 20:30; 1 Cor 2, 4–9; cf. Thesis 5.

Thesis 7. Particular and local churches in which, on the other hand, the authority of the Lutheran symbols is *fundamentally* abolished, either completely or partially (that is, their binding authority in doctrine and practice is *explicitly* nullified); or in which a different [symbol] is determined as the explanation and application intended by its authors and by the church accepting it, as being constitutionally binding; or in which one or more anti-confessional, false doctrines are established constitutionally and a corresponding practice or doctrinal arbitrariness or union is formally introduced and made to hold sway, or even when the pure Lutheran doctrine and practice is not at all, or not alone, authorized, or is characterized as corrupt, is suppressed, and persecuted—such particular and local churches have ceased to be true Lutheran churches and congregations, whether they retain the Lutheran name or not.

Proof texts: Rom 16:17–18; Gal 5:9; 2 Tim 2:19 (17–18); 1 Tim 5:22

Thesis 8. A confessional Lutheran can and may belong to a particular or local church as a member only as long as it can be seen rightly [or, officially] as a part of the right-believing Lutheran Church, or at least as long as his fellowship with her does not include any defamation of the pure confession.

Proof texts: Ps 26:4–7; 2 Cor 18:8; 2 Tim 2:12, 19; 2 Cor 6:14–18.

Thesis 9. A confessional Lutheran can be in fellowship even with a Lutheran particular church which has fallen into corruption without, for that reason, ceasing to be a member of the right-believing church.

Proof texts: The letters of St. John to the seven congregations of Asia Minor (Revelation 2 and 3).

Thesis 10. As little as a confessional Lutheran has the right and power to join an Evangelical Lutheran territorial church which has fallen into corruption without a call, so little does he have the right and power, without further ado, to dissolve the

fellowship which already exists and to separate from it. In the first case he denies the truth; in the second, love.

Proof texts: Gal 5:9; Mt 6:13; Sirach 3:27; 1 Cor 1:10; Revelation 2 and 3.

Thesis 11. A confessional Lutheran can, nevertheless, only remain with an uninjured conscience within a Lutheran particular church which has fallen into corruption if he carefully withholds himself from all participation in false doctrine and practice and from church fellowship with the promoters of the same.

Proof texts: Mt 5:13; 2 Cor 10:4–5; 1 Tim 5:22; Ps 26:4–7.

Thesis 12. A confessional Lutheran may not flee from the troubles and dangers which happen to him due to his connection with a corrupted Lutheran particular church, but he must rather bear them as his cross and prove himself in them as in the battle especially appointed for him (*als in dem ihm einmal verordneten Kampfe*).

Proof texts: Ps 116:10; Ez 2:6–7; Mt 10:22, 28, 38; Jn 16:1–2; 10:12; 1 Cor 6:6–7; Heb 12:1–2; Rv 2:10; 1 Kgs 19:13–18; 2 Cor 11:23–33.

Thesis 13. A confessional Lutheran, for the sake of God and of conscience, must renounce and withdraw from every church body in which the marks of the right-believing church, the pure word and sacrament, can no longer be found, and he is for this reason not a sectarian or separatist, any more than Luther, who renounced and withdrew from the papacy.

Proof texts: Dt 13:1–3; Mt 7:15; Rom 16:17–18; 1 Cor 11:19; 2 Cor 6:14–18; Gal 5:6; Ti 3:10–11; 2 Jn 10–11; Rv 18:4.

Thesis 14. A confessional Lutheran can be in the situation of rightfully separating from a local congregation without, for that reason, having to give up his fellowship with the Lutheran particular church to which that congregation still belongs as a worthless member, but not vice versa.

Thesis 15. By “territorial churches” (as opposed to the free church) is understood those particular churches within the geographical borders of a state whose highest government has been removed from it and transferred into the hands of the territorial government.

Thesis 16. Now concerning the right conduct of a confessional Lutheran within a corrupted Lutheran territorial church in particular, he must first of all bear in mind that he should and can rightly criticize, successfully attack or defend, and reasonably approve or accept in doctrine and practice only that which he, according to the rule of the word of God and our symbols, has judged as true or false, right or wrong in an *undoubtedly clear and certain way*.

[Footnote: Here, however, such a Lutheran must certainly consider what serious sins self-caused uncertainty and unclarity and negligent investigation in divine and spiritual things are; how it is much rather God’s commandment, his high calling as a spiritual priest, and the great danger in which he stands which make it a holy duty for him to renounce all corruptible human authority, and—through prayer and diligent study of the Holy Scripture, the Confessions, and the right-

believing teachers of our church, especially Luther—to awaken and increase the gift of his own judgment and testing. Although, since these gifts are distributed unevenly even among sincere Christians, more must reasonably be required from one than from others, and in general more from the servants of the church than from other members of it.]

Proof texts: Jas 1:6, 8; Rom 14:23; Eph 4:11–14; Phil 1:9–10; Jn 4:41; Acts 17:11; Ps 119:130; 2 Tim 3:15–17; Lk 12:48.

Thesis 17. If there are a large number of wrongs in doctrine and practice within a corrupted Lutheran territorial church, a confessional Lutheran, concerning his correct conduct in this matter, has to make it a rule to attack not a more remote error, but a nearby error; not the finer points, but the most obvious wrongs; not this or that constitutional error or mistake of practice, but the root of all wrongs and the mother of all abominations, *the false doctrine*, and especially false doctrine dealing with justification *first of all*. He must also press, with all firmness, for doctrinal unity and unity in all articles of the faith without any unionizing or concessionizing with those who believe differently.

Proof texts: 1 Cor and Gal in their totality; 1 Cor 2:1; 3:1–3; 2 Chr 30 (esp. v. 18–19).

Thesis 18. Concerning the particular calling, in which a loyal Lutheran who belongs to a Lutheran territorial church which has fallen into corruption stands, he must recognize as a correct principle, among the dominant wrongs, to give his testimony first of all against those wrongs which touch his conscience and which fall within the borders of the circle of his calling. In doing this, one must again distinguish between the servants and other members of the church, in that the former—as watchers, shepherds, and teachers—have a wider circle of calling than the latter, and have the duty, at an even higher level, to watch over purity of doctrine and practice beyond the borders of a local congregation.

Proof texts: Prov 26:17; Sirach 3:24; 1 Cor 5:12; Ti 1:5

Thesis 19. Above all, therefore, a confessional Lutheran of the territorial church is in duty bound by Scripture and conscience to see to it that within the congregation to which he belongs (as concerning first of all the salvation of himself and his family) everything takes place according to the gospel and pure confession, and he must rebuke and avoid everything which is contrary to the same. He can therefore recognize, hear, and support as his pastor (*Seelsorger*) only such a preacher who conducts his ministry according to Scripture and Symbol. He must not allow a single doctrine which has been recognized as false and spiritually harmful to be expounded and propagated unrebuked. If there is a pastor in the congregation who expounds one or more false doctrines, or one who does not administer the holy sacraments exactly according to the institution of Jesus Christ; or one who, not from weakness, but as a principle observes an unevangelical or tyrannical practice which will destroy the congregation; or a syncretist or unionist who, even if he currently teaches purely and edifyingly in general, not only for his own person

and in other places, but also within his congregation introduces, justifies, or even wants to have pulpit and communion fellowship with heterodox people (*Irrgläubigen*) tolerated; or finally a preacher who is and wants to remain a member of a secret society (lodge brothers)—in this case Scripture and conscience demand from a confessional Lutheran that he himself or through others rebuke such a preacher according to Christ's order and, if this rebuking remains fruitless at the first and second step, that he no longer hear him, as a false teacher, that he warn the congregation of him, and then press for investigation corresponding to suspension with the church authorities. If the church authorities do not want to enter into this matter, a loyal Lutheran would have to seek the latter course of action from the congregation (as the original possessor of all spiritual power within its borders). Only if this step was to remain unsuccessful could he declare and execute publicly his resignation from the congregation and seek membership or communion fellowship with another orthodox congregation.

Proof texts: Jn 10:1–5; Eph 5:12; See also the verses under thesis 13: 2 Cor 6:14–18; Ti 3:10, and 2 Jn 10.

Thesis 20. Unevangelical or unconscientious practice—for example, lack of personal announcement for confession, of church discipline or the execution of the same without scriptural participation of the congregation—still does not give a confessional Lutheran cause to separate from the same, as long as such a practice is not explicitly supported by a false doctrine and defended. Nevertheless, he must testify and protest against it, and in case of necessity bring charges against the guilty pastor with the church's supervisory officers and with the congregation. From preachers who, to the offense of the church and the world—yet with an otherwise pure confession—lead a publicly wicked life and persist therein unrepentantly, a loyal Lutheran must separate, but only after he has unsuccessfully demanded the removal of these things.

Proof texts: Mt 13:24–30; Eph 4:27; 1 Tim 3:6–7.

Thesis 21. A confessional Lutheran cannot belong to a congregation in which there are several pastors unless all of them reveal themselves as confessional. If, however, the orthodox pastor with a part of the congregation, while separating themselves completely from all worship fellowship and especially communion fellowship with the heterodox part of the congregation and their preacher, assert themselves aside from them and testify against him publicly and expressly, then a confessional Lutheran could certainly receive the holy Supper from the former. It is also irreconcilable with the conscience of confessional Lutheran military personnel to take part in the worship services of false-teaching or united chaplains [that is, members of a union church, a church with mixed confession], and especially to take part in their celebration of the Supper. If they are commanded to do this, they must in this case absolutely refuse to obey, no matter what the danger.

Proof texts: 1 Cor 10:18, 21; cf. Mt 7:15; Rom 16:17; 2 Cor 6:14; Gal 5:9; Ti 3:10, 11; 2 Jn 10, 11.

Thesis 22. If there are bad, rationalistic song-books being used in a congregation, a confessional Lutheran must distinguish between a case where the pastor intentionally introduced or kept them, and a case where the pastor is only temporarily tolerating them, having previously protested, and is using only the better parts (if there are any). In this case, a confessional Lutheran must only join himself to the pastor's protest and work for the total removal of these books. In the other case, however, a confessional Lutheran, after fruitlessly testifying against the books, must separate himself from the congregation as from a heterodox congregation.

Proof texts: Ps 89:2; Col 3:16; Mt 12:36.

Thesis 23. If there are rationalistic, heterodox, or united [that is, union church] catechisms and other books which contradict the pure doctrine being used in church and school, and if these are acknowledged and were brought into use by the teacher, then a confessional Lutheran, if his rebuke remains fruitless, must remove his children from the instruction of the teacher, as of a false teacher, and provide for their education elsewhere. This is also the case if the teacher is proven to explain God's word and pure books falsely, or if he is a wicked man.

Proof texts: Dt 6:6–7; Mk 10:14; Eph 6:4; 2 Tim 3:15–17; Mt 18:6; Acts 19:19.

Thesis 24. If the pastor tolerates without protest, and especially if he acknowledges and approves of, the work of a heterodox or wicked teacher, or the use of heterodox teaching books, then a confessional Lutheran must regard this pastor as a hireling and a disloyal shepherd. And if the latter is the case, he should regard him as a false prophet and in this case separate himself from him and the congregation, if either rebuking him does not work or his removal does not succeed. (See texts and testimonies from thesis 23.)

Thesis 25. It is impossible for orthodox parents to have their sons educated as pastors or teachers at, or even to allow them to attend, high schools [*Gymnasien*], universities, or teachers' training schools [*Schullehrer-Seminarien*] in which manifestly heterodox professors (especially if they are atheistic) are employed.

Proof texts: Mt 7:9. See also the texts from thesis 23.

Thesis 26. When there are vacancies, a confessional congregation and every qualified member of it must strive so that the congregation's *votum negativum* (the right to refuse a nominated preacher) be left alone and respected by the consistory of the territorial church or the patron of the church. The appointment of a pastor or teacher who is known to be heterodox, wicked, or unqualified for his office must be thoroughly refused.

Proof texts: 1 Cor 3:21, 23; 7:23; Acts 1:15–26; Jn 10:5; Mt 7:15; 2 Jn 10, 11.

Thesis 27. Although a confessional Lutheran must realize that Christ has given the highest judgment to the church and that he has vested every Christian congregation with the full

possession of the same and with all spiritual power within its borders, and although he, therefore, recognizes and laments in the current state church system a diminution of this divine institution and order, and also should testify against the deep injuries of the state church constitution and work for its removal, nevertheless it is fitting that he, while preserving his right and his Christian freedom in his conscience through confession [*Bekennntniß*], respect the order of things which still obtains, for the sake of love and peace, observe it regarding the exercise of certain rights of the spiritual priesthood, and accommodate himself patiently to all church constitutional regulations as long as nothing thereby is demanded which goes against his conscience.

Note: This is by no means to say that a confessional Lutheran can approve of the theory according to which the territorial ruler is seen as the territorial bishop *jure divino* (according to divine right).

Proof texts: 1 Cor 3:21–23; Mt 18:18–20; Jn 20:22; 1 Cor 10:23; Jn 18:36; Mt 23:8; Lk 22:25–26.

Thesis 28. Every confessional Lutheran also has, as far as his influence reaches, the calling, right, and obligation to cooperate for the best of the entire church and especially to press for the introduction of stricter doctrinal discipline as a congregational delegate to synods, as member of a conference or church board, or as leader or assessor of a consistory.

Proof texts: Ps 102:15; Rom 14:19; 1 Cor 2:15; 6:2; 12:7; 12:24, 26; 1 Pt 4:10. (See also Acts 15:22ff.; 21:22; 1 Cor 5:1ff.; Col 4:17.)

Thesis 29. No confessional Lutheran can or may take part in such so-called Lutheran synods, church conventions, and conferences in which also professed non-Lutherans are given equal rights, suffrage, and voice with Lutherans. Likewise he cannot and may not belong to or support societies and associations which serve religious purposes if they do not serve the Lutheran church alone.

Proof texts: Ps 26:4–5; 1 Tim 5:22; 2 Cor 6:14–18; 1 Tim 6:3–5.

Thesis 30. As certain as it is that a confessional Lutheran should with resoluteness fight the dominant errors in the territorial churches and defend the truth of the gospel, and also for it suffer with perseverance what must be suffered, nevertheless he should also make every effort to fight this fight in no other way than with the spiritual weapons of his warfare, and not to incite unnecessary hostility by means of an unwise, uncalled, and carnal conduct, in which the good confession is put to shame and the good cause is harmed.

Proof texts: 2 Cor 10:4–5; 1 Cor 2:13; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 2:24; 2 Cor 6:3; 1 Pt 4:15.

Thesis 31. In reference to their duty toward their congregations, confessional Lutheran pastors must consider above all that “*Salus populi suprema lex est*” (the salvation of the people is the highest law). They must thus keep their eye steadily on the salvation of the souls committed to them as the highest and last end of all their labor in the word, and must work with total exertion of all of their gifts and powers for the attain-

ment of the same. And they especially have, in this threatening state of affairs, this high duty: to preserve their congregations from the corrupting influences of the unbelieving and false-believing spirit of the times—as much as they can through God’s grace—by means of the pure preaching of the gospel (namely, on justification); to awaken, encourage, and preserve thorough knowledge of the Lutheran truth certain conviction of the scripturality of our confession, love for it, loyal co-confession, and finally a truly evangelical life in the same; thereby to shape the congregation into a healthy, Lutheran congregation of Christians; and first and foremost, without respect of person, and calmly, over the judgment of the world and of the false church in its midst, to testify against those errors and injuries which threaten the congregation the most. Therefore he can and may, among others, distribute the holy Supper only to orthodox Lutherans, but not to persons simply as members of the territorial church.

Proof texts: 1 Cor 1:21; 1 Tim 4:16; 1 Cor 9:22; 10:32, 33. (See also 2 Tim 2:10). 1 Cor 4:1ff.; Acts 20:28; Heb 13:17; 2 Tim 4:1–2, 5; Mal 2:7; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Cor 2:2; 1:23; Eph 4:11–13; Ti 3:14.

Thesis 32. If a pastor of the Lutheran territorial church is disrespected and persecuted due to his ministerial and confessional fidelity, he may not for this reason lay down his office, but is bound by God’s word and his conscience to remain at his post until either the congregation or the church officials drive him away or depose him.

Proof texts: Ez 2:6–7; 2 Tim 2:3, 5; 1 Pt 2:19.

Thesis 33. A confessional Lutheran pastor must, to be sure, consider the consistories of the territorial churches as ecclesiastically superior to himself *jure humano* (by human right), and must respect their rules, insofar as they do not go against Scripture and conscience, for the sake of love and peace. But he also has the obligation, insofar as he considers himself at all called to be active in writing, to uncover the deep injuries of the state church organism in public writings and to help put a stop to all encroachments of the consistories against Scripture and Symbol.

Proof texts: 1 Cor 9:19; Rom 14:19; 1 Cor 2:15; 12:7.

Thesis 34. It would be against all love and wisdom if a confessional servant of the Lutheran church would insist on immediate dissolution of the state church and abrogation of the consistorial constitution, much less if he could help to bring about a revolution of churchly constitution in an impetuous, demagogic manner. His calling is rather to reduce the injuries of the dominant constitution as much as possible and for that purpose to work at synods and especially in elections so that the leadership of the church is entrusted to confessional men and so that the congregation’s *votum negativum* is preserved.

Proof texts: 1 Cor 10:32–33; 13:4–5; Gal 5:13; 1 Pt 2:16. See also the texts under thesis 30.

Thesis 35. As long as the order of things remains as it is, a confessional Lutheran pastor in a territorial church is never-

theless bound to submit to the appropriate ecclesiastical officials all those internal and external affairs of his congregation which they have reserved to themselves for examination, decision, or confirmation. Nevertheless, their decision or confirmation can be binding for him only insofar as it does not contradict the word of God and the confession of the church, and is not injurious to the welfare of the congregation (for example, anti-scriptural decisions in matters regarding marriage, church discipline, and excommunication; abrogation of confessional ceremonies; separation of school from the church; among others). All unchristian and un-Lutheran decisions of an ecclesiastical authority, all bylaws by which one's oath of office is damaged, one's ministerial fidelity in doctrine and practice is hindered and broken, and the conscience is burdened must, for a true Lutheran preacher, be null and void. He must publicly and specifically protest against it and allow himself, for the sake of God, to be cast out from office and bread, to be penalized with fines or limitations of freedom, to be hated and called a heretic, but in this case he cannot obey.

Proof texts: 1 Cor 4:1; Gal 1:10; Acts 5:19; 24:15–16 (see also Heb 13:18); 2 Cor 6:4ff.; 1 Pt 2:19; 2 Tim 2:11–12.

Thesis 36. Since it is irreconcilable with the shepherding and watching fidelity of Lutheran servants of the church and school to work together with unbelieving or false-believing preachers or teachers (whom Holy Scripture calls “wolves”) in a congregation or school, therefore the former cannot take a call which would lead them into any official cooperation with the latter sort of preachers and teachers. Moreover, they must solemnly [*feierlich*] protest to the church officials or congregation against the appointment or toleration of such “wolves” in their congregation and allow themselves to be removed from office rather than to have collegial dealings with them. Only if, within the external boundaries of the parish, an actual separation of the orthodox part of the congregation from all worship fellowship with the false-believing part of the congregation can be shown and claimed, and thus the unity of the congregation is only a nominal unity and leads to nothing other than the common use of one church, can and should a conscientious Lutheran pastor remain. This holds true likewise for a teacher, insofar as the school of the orthodox part can exist in complete independence from the school of the other part.

Proof texts: See under thesis 29.

Thesis 37. A confessional Lutheran preaching or teaching candidate cannot, even at the decree of the consistory, take over an office which is to be transferred to him against the express and unanimous will of the congregation. Likewise he cannot and may not allow himself to be called to take the place of a pastor or teacher who, with the agreement of the respective congregation, was wrongly (*unrechtmäßig*) driven out or removed from office.

Proof texts: Mt 10:12–14; 2 Cor 13:10; 1 Pt 4:15; Mt 7:6; 1 Tim 5:22.

Thesis 38. If the congregation wants to keep a confessional pastor and he has reason to fear the installation of a false teacher, he cannot leave his congregation at the mere decree of the consistory or patron, but only as a result of the use of raw violence. And if under these conditions only a part of the congregation should want to keep him and validly [*ordentlich*] call him, then love and fidelity would require him to concede to their request and to stay. The fault for a schism which would result from this action of a loyal shepherd in the territorial church would then not be on his side, but on the side of the church government.

Proof text: Jn 10:12.

Thesis 39. It is impossible for a confessional Lutheran superintendent (provost or dean) to install heterodox or wicked pastors or teachers within his district or to allow their installation by others to take place without protest. If he finds these kinds of preachers or teachers already in his district, then he must demand their removal from office and, in case this should remain fruitless, he must do everything possible to limit their activity, must publicly testify against them and warn the respective congregations of them. Likewise confessional professors of theology must fight against heterodox colleagues not only in the literary field, but they must also especially warn the students of them and demand from the respective authorities their removal.

Proof texts: Rom 12:7; 1 Tim 5:22; Ti 1:5.

Thesis 40. That Lutheran (namely candidates for the ministry, and servants of church and school) would be morally wrong (*sich ein falsches Gewissen machen*) who, after perceiving the perils of conscience into which he had fallen through the conditions of the territorial church, now would want to believe that he must, under all circumstances, hold fast his connection with a territorial church. Such a one should much rather be certain that, under these conditions, he can take a call to an orthodox Lutheran “free church,” as a divine call.

Final Words

Perhaps many attentive Christian teachers [readers?] will not deny their hearty agreement with the simple principles discussed here and confirmed from the holy word of God and the testimonies of the church, but will, nevertheless, reserve the earnest fear that if these principles were carried out exactly, the territorial churches would collapse, Lutheran Christianity would be robbed of its government, and would be rendered defenseless against the evil of its enemies. To such readers even we admit not only the possibility, but even the probability of the first point; with reference to the second and third points, we remind them in the love of Christ, *that we do not at all have the task of ruling the church, but only of dealing according to the word of God and leaving government to God alone, who has promised in Matthew 16:18, “On this rock (Christ) I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” and Psalm 46, “God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her.”*

THE CONFIDENCE OF A COMPETENT MINISTER

*Ordination sermon preached at Trinity Lutheran Church, 13
June 2004, Traverse City, MI. Text: 2 Corinthians 3:4–11*

*O Spirit, who didst once restore
Thy Church that it may be again
The bringer of good news to men,
Breathe on thy cloven Church once more,
That in these gray and latter days
There may be men whose life is praise,
Each life a high doxology
To Father, Son, and unto Thee. Amen.*

Today the Lord has answered the prayer of Martin Franzmann's majestic hymn as a man is given to the church as a pastor, to be your pastor. Every ordination service reminds us that even in these gray and latter days, the Lord has not forsaken his church but sends men whose life is praise, a high doxology to the Holy Trinity. Therefore today is a day of deep thanksgiving both for the candidate and the congregation. For you, Chad, this day marks the culmination of years of study and reflection, of prayer and work. Indeed it is a time to pause in thanksgiving to the Lord who has brought you to this time and place as you recall all the people and events that have shaped your life and in the providence of God have made this day a reality. It is no less an occasion of gratitude for Trinity congregation. Now another servant is coming alongside of Pastor Zagore to share with him the pastoral office so that God's flock in this place might be cared for with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ordination day is a day not only of thanksgiving but also of anticipation. Who is this man fresh out of seminary and what will he be like? That is a question—even if it is unspoken— that might be on the minds of many of you today. And Chad, you might have some questions yourself. What will this congregation be like? Am I ready for the challenges of being a pastor?

We turn to God's word which we heard from 2 Corinthians 3:4–11, the epistle appointed to be read in the ordination service. This word of God addresses two issues for both the pastor and the congregation: *Competence* and *confidence*. Much is made these days of pastoral fitness. The pastor is rightly expected to be competent both in character and in ministerial crafts of preaching, teaching, and the care of souls. After dozens of classes, two years of field work at Zion Lutheran Church in Garrett, Indiana, and a year of vicarage at Luther Memorial Chapel in Shorewood, Wisconsin, the man who is about to become your pastor has been examined and declared competent. We may be tempted to think of that as achievement. Knowledge has been acquired. Skills have been honed. Impressive as that is, it is not yet the competency of which the Apostle speaks. Paul says, "Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our

competence is from God, who has made us to be competent ministers of a new covenant (that is, the new testament), not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life."

It is God who makes men competent ministers of the New Testament. In a few minutes your pastor-elect will make some vows. They are God-sized promises. He will pledge faithfulness to the Scriptures as the very word of God and the Lutheran Confessions as correct expositions of that divine word. He will promise to conform his teaching and pastoral work to their doctrine. He will promise to minister faithfully in all the circumstances of living and dying. He will pledge to adorn the office of the ministry with a holy life. These are the things that you can count on your pastor for. The weight and all-inclusiveness of these vows ought to cause you, Chad, to tremble a bit. Left to your own resources they would be impossible. If it depended on you it would be doomed from the beginning.

Your learning, your personality, your people skills, the strength of your Christian commitment, even your ardent desire to be a pastor are insufficient grounds. Your sufficiency is in Christ Jesus and him alone. By his gospel, he called you out of darkness to light, from unbelief to faith, and from death to life in your baptism. Now through his church, he has called you into the office of the holy ministry.

A young boy once attended an ordination service with his parents. When it came to the point of the laying on of hands, the inquisitive lad asked his father, "What are they doing now?" His dad replied, "They are taking out his brains." No, ordination does not remove your brains. But it does put your brains, your mouth, your hands, and your heart into the service of Jesus' gospel. Ordination does not make of you a different man but it does put you under orders as a servant sent by the Lord as his mouthpiece. Every thought is taken captive to Christ. Your tongue is given to speak not your words, but his words. Your hands will bless with his blessing as he uses them to baptize in his name and to feed sinners with his body and blood.

Christ Jesus carries the action of the verbs. Only when Christ does it can we be sure and certain. The Catechism's "This is most certainly true" can be said only of what Jesus does. It is not our gospel, but his, for he is the One who lived under the law for us, was put to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification. It is his ministry, for it is Christ, says the Apostle, "who has made us competent to be ministers of the New Testament." There are those who commandeer the verbs for themselves and so speak of doing the gospel. Some pastors speak of doing ministry. If we are left with the verbs, it is unsure. Luther diagnoses it as robbing Christ of the glory that belongs to him alone as the only Savior and troubled consciences of blood-bought peace.

Christ does it all. The *Large Catechism* puts it like this:

Neither you nor I could ever know anything about Christ, or believe in him and receive him as Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through

the preaching of the gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed; Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden so that no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not remain buried but be put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure, this redemption (LC II:38, Kolb/Wengert, 436).

The work of redemption is done. The death Christ died, he died for sin once and for all. Raised from the death, he lives to give life and salvation to all those who trust in him. Redemption done on the cross still needs to be delivered. The risen Lord sets that delivery in motion on Easter Evening. We heard of that in today's Holy Gospel from John 20. Standing in the upper room where the disciples were held up in fear, the Lord Jesus speaks his words of peace, showing the disciples his hands and side, and breathing on them the breath of his Spirit, he makes of these men apostles, sent ones. "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. . . . If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." With Jesus' word and Spirit, the gifts of Calvary—forgiveness of sins—are now delivered.

Paul puts the gospel in contrast with the law. The law, the written code carved in tablets of stone, had its own glory. The minister of the law, Moses glowed with its fading light luster. The law kills, but the Spirit who works in the gospel gives life. The law dispenses condemnation. The gospel dispenses righteousness. Yes, Brother Chad, you will proclaim Moses. You will preach the law in all of its severity to expose sin and put sinners to death. But you are not a minister of Moses, a servant of the old covenant with its ever-diminishing glory. You are a minister of the New Testament, put here to proclaim the forgiveness of sins in the blood of God's own Son. You are a minister of the gospel, the gospel that completely eclipses the law with its splendor. No one is ever saved by the law. It is the splendor of the law that it reveals our sin. It is the glory of the gospel that it reveals the fatherly heart of God in the face of Jesus, a heart that beats with mercy and compassion for broken sinners.

This gospel is the source of your confidence. You are delivered from the burden of a "do-it-yourself" ministry. That is only law. And the law always accuses and crushes. Today you are put into the office of the gospel. In a few minutes, we will wrap a stole around your neck. The stole is your yoke. Just like an ox was put under a yoke, you are now under a stole. But the yoke that you will bear is not the burden of the law but the yoke of Christ, the gospel. Your confidence is fixed in him and not in yourself. Remember the words of our text: "Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are competent to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God."

That was true for Paul and it will be true for you also. It all hangs on Christ. That is why Paul wrote, "For I decided to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified"

(1 Cor 2:2). Luther called it the theology of the cross. *Crux sola est nostra theologia*—the cross alone is our theology. Hidden under the shame and suffering of the cross is the splendor of God's glory to justify the ungodly, to give righteousness to the unrighteous, to bring life where there was only death. Only Christ can do that. In his good and gracious will to be our Savior, he has chosen and called you to be his instrument. And you, the good people of Trinity, rejoice today because God in his mercy has given you such a servant. Your new pastor comes to you as a gift from the ascended Christ. The Lord has put him here in your midst to serve you with his word and sacraments, to be your shepherd in Christ.

To be on the receiving end of Christ's gifts is how both pastor and congregation live. That is where God locates us today. In the confidence that it is the Lord's doing that this man, Chad Hoover, is called to be one of your pastors, you can receive him as Christ's servant for your sake, supporting him, encouraging him, praying for him, and working with him.

And it is in that confidence, Brother Chad, that you now take up the office to which you have been called, knowing that your diligence is not lost, for it is the work of Jesus Christ. He promises to be with you through it all: in those high points of unspeakable joy as you watch the word at work in sometimes unexpected ways in the lives of the people committed to your care; in those hours of monotony and drudgery that are also part of pastoral work; in times of deep sadness and disappointment, for heart break is no stranger to faithful pastors. Preaching the word in season and out of season, Christ Jesus will be with you, ever true to his promises, producing through you fruit that will abide for time and eternity. What Christ does, he does for keeps. It is permanent. The glory of his gospel never fades away in the dust of human history. Your confidence is in him for he has made you to be a competent minister of the New Testament. So "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

And so we pray in the words of the Reformation hymn-writer:

The cause is yours, the glory too.

Then hear us, Lord, and keep us true.

Your Word alone our heart's defense.

The Church's glorious confidence (Selnecker).

Amen.

*John T. Pless
Fort Wayne, IN*

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The Congress on the Lutheran Confessions, sponsored annually by the Association of Confessional Lutherans and Luther Academy, focuses on God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions in relation to current topics in the church. Volume 10 (2003), *Contemporary Issues in Fellowship*, considers the principles and practice of church fellowship from historical, confessional, and biblical perspectives. Contributions include:

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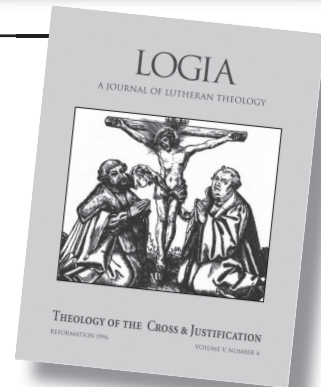
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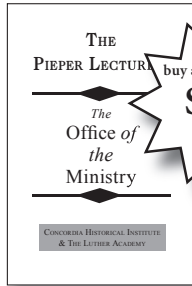
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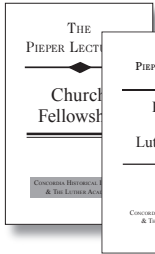
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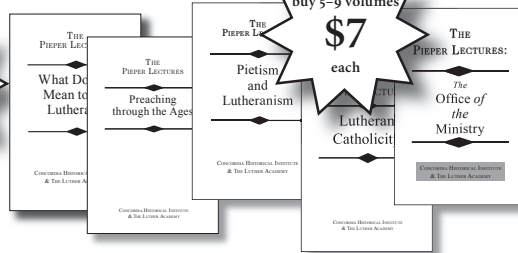
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Dear LOGIA readers,

Your editors viewed with sorrow the error of the cover of the last LOGIA, viz., Article of the STANITS and falling church. What can we say? Foolish barbarians captured our printing press, alas! They have been sacked and the former situation restored.

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