

LOGIA

A JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGY



MARY & LUTHERANS

HOLY TRINITY 2010

VOLUME XIX, NUMBER 3

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 that 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 that we confess as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

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THE ART ON THE COVER is a colored woodcut showing Mary, the Mother of our Lord, in the circle of the disciples at Pentecost, illustrating Acts 1:14, 2:1 "All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers," and, "When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place." (ESV)

The image is from *Das Plenarium oder Ewangely buoch* Basel, 1516. Courtesy of the Richard C. Kessler Reformation Collection, Pitts Theology Library, Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

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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
LSB	<i>Lutheran Service Book</i>
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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SHAKEN but NOT DESTROYED

*"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed;
perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned;
struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8-9).*

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Mary and the Pope

Remarks on the Dogma of the Assumption of Mary

HERMANN SASSE

Translated by Matthew Harrison



Prof. Dr. Theol. Hermann Sasse
41 Buxton Street
North Adelaide, South Australia
Invocavit (February) 1951

Dear Brothers in the Office!

Time and again at various points in the history of the church, in spite of all the divisions, in spite of the confessional differences that reach right to the heart of the faith, it becomes evident that some unity of Christianity does exist. The proclamation of the dogma of the bodily assumption of Mary into heaven in the Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* of 1 November 1950 was felt as an event by all of Christianity, Roman and non-Roman alike, which affects all churches, and all Christians.¹ And rightly so! For this dogma is either true or false. Either it really is “divinely revealed dogma, that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever-virgin Mary, after the completion of the course of her earthly life, was taken body and soul into heavenly glory,” or this assertion is blasphemy against God. Either it is actually the vicar of Christ who declares in this doctrinal assertion directed at all of Christianity that anyone who “denies or casts doubt” has defected from the “divine and Catholic faith” or the correct faith (who else could pronounce such a dogma as revealed by God and demand its acceptance at the cost of eternal life?) or it is the Antichrist who speaks here, the Antichrist who in this “last,” “evil” time, the time in which Christianity on earth awaits the *parousia* of her Lord, has sat down in the temple of God, in the church of Christ, and seeks to deceive the faithful, and bring about apostasy from the correct faith. *Tertium non datur.*

In view of the importance this decision claims for itself for the eternal fate of millions of men, the declaration denies that it deals with only a human error, as can happen to any theologian. Nor can it be an errant decision of an ecclesiastical doctrinal court, accomplished *optima fide*, as such have occurred ever and again in the course of church history. No, what happened on 1 November 1950 in Rome, with a public display of all the earthly authority and glory of the worldwide Roman Church, and the celebrations which occurred previ-

ous to this date around the globe in the Fall in the north and in the Spring in the south, is one of the greatest signs of our times. Something would have been lacking in the picture of our apocalyptic time if in the holy or unholy year 1950 there had not been proclaimed from the mouth of a wise, indeed, great, and in his own way, pious pope, one of those “powerful delusions” (2 Th 2:11), which with a super-human power seeks the perdition of the souls of men. This explains why on that All Saints’ Day, all of Christianity shuddered and that the new dogma of the Roman Church also deeply excited the Protestant world. What does this mean for us? We will seek to make this clear as we treat of the connection between the Marian cult and Mariology and the institution and theory of the papacy. For in this connection resides one of the greatest mysteries of modern Catholicism, with which our church throughout the world has to carry on discussion.

-1-

Church history demonstrates that the Marian cult originally had nothing to do with the papacy. *The veneration of Mary arose in the East, the papacy in the West.* The Eastern Church, the home of the veneration of Mary and the place where it was really cultivated, is thoroughly antipapal. Thus vehement anti-papalism can be bound up with vehement veneration of Mary, as is the case with many theologians of the Eastern Church. In the East and indeed in all Eastern churches, Mary is invoked in the mass, while the Roman mass mentions Mary and speaks of her intercession; she is however, not directly addressed. The famous liturgiologist Gregory Dix [1901–1952] says of the Marian festivals:

In Rome none of the five great festivals of our Dear Lady are older than A.D. 700. At that time the festivals of the Purification, the Annunciation, Assumption and Birth of Mary were taken over by Pope Sergius I, a Syrian from Byzantium. The Immaculate Conception developed as a festival and doctrine in the west first in Anglo-Saxon England, in the early eleventh century, on the basis of an older and different form of Byzantine origin.²

BLP Nr. 17: Maria und der Papst: Bemerkungen zum Dogma von der Himmelfahrt Mariae (North Adelaide, Invocavit, 11 Feb. 1951). LuBl 3.17 (1951) Beilage. Reprinted in In Statu Confessionis 1:205–17. Feuerhahn Bibliography no. 283. MH.

1. Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (St. Louis: Herder, 1957), 2331.
2. Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1947), 376.

It is common to treat the Council of Ephesus of 431, with its condemnation of Nestorius and the proclamation of the dogma of Mary as the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, as the proper beginning of the Marian cult in the church.³ And this is correct to a certain extent, insofar as this event introduced the great surge of the veneration of Mary. But it is also the case that this cult played no lesser role where the *Theotokos* was rejected. Nestorius [died ca. A.D. 451] did not differ from Cyril [of Alexandria ca. 376–444] on the veneration of Mary, and the Nestorian Church, which condemned the Council of Ephesus, is in her liturgy and her hymns, if not the classical church, then at any rate, a prominent advocate of the Marian cult. For this reason it is also completely incorrect to make the designation of Mary as the Mother of God responsible for the Marian cult, as is occasionally done. The veneration of Mary began already in the fourth century. The later ever-recurring interpretations of Old Testament passages as types of Mary (for example, the earth from which Adam was formed, the burning bush, Gideon's fleece, the closed gate in Ezekiel) are found in the great Syrian church father Ephraem, who was born circa 306. He already taught the complete sinlessness of Mary (Jesus and Mary alone of all men are sinless: "For in you, Lord, there is no blemish, nor any stain in your mother" *Carm. Nis.* 27, written ca. 370).

The oldest prayers to Mary available to us are as late as the beginning of the fifth century:

All of us in this world look to you and await from you the hope of salvation, O Lowly One! Beseech and weep for us all so that our souls will be redeemed from the wrath to come. Acquire for us grace through your intercession, pure and holy Virgin, always weep for us so that we are not lost because of our wickedness. O Blessed One, intercede for us when you implore your only begotten, who sprouted forth from you, that he have mercy upon us for the sake of your holy prayer. O Holy One, plead with your only begotten for the sinners who take their refuge in you!⁴

Already about the same time *the legend that after her death Mary was taken up into heaven* was circulating in several different versions. Already at the end of the fourth century Epiphanius⁵ discussed the matter when he asserted that the accounts regarding Mary's end could be proven neither correct nor incorrect. These now ever more elaborate legends place this end either in Jerusalem or in Ephesus, and consequently point to Palestinian-Syrian and Asia Minor origins. The *Liber de transitu Mariae* (*Book on the Passing of Mary*) follows the first tradition, the "Book of John the Theologian regarding the departure (*Koimesis*, which is also the name of the festival in the Greek

Church) of Mary" follows the Ephesian tradition. The Coptic Church developed a particular legend according to which the body of Mary first crumbled into dust, then after 206 days arose and was borne into heaven by an angel host.⁶ John of Damascus⁷ makes use, in a homily for the *Koimesis* Festival, of a particular form of the Jerusalem tradition (*In dorm. B. V. Mariae Hom.* 2, 18) and the Roman Breviary regards it as a patristic authority. The West took over from the East all theological assertions regarding Mary, including the legends (this is first evident in Gaul, and in a *contestatio*, that is, a Preface of the Gothic Missal in the sixth or seventh century, and in the same way with Gregory of Tours, *Libri miraculorum* 1, 4 and 8). And indeed, in the East the Syrian Church appears to have been the origin of the Marian cult.

It is completely incorrect to make the designation of Mary as the Mother of God responsible for the Marian cult.

This is of course not to say that Mary played no role in the piety and theology of the Western church. Quite to the contrary! Already in the second century we find in the Priscilla Catacomb in Rome the depiction of Mary with the child and the prophet Isaiah, the oldest of the many depictions of Mary in the West. At the same time Justin⁸ in Rome, and Irenaeus⁹ in Lyons, were developing the beginnings of a Mariology, as they expanded the Adam-Christ parallel to Eve-Mary. We may also assume that the invoking of the martyrs, as we have in their nascent form in the rhetorical conclusion of the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas (ca. 203), was also soon expanded to Mary, to which Luke 1:42, 48 could already give inducement. But leaving completely aside the fact that the well known theologians came from Asia and brought their theology from there with them, it must be said that these beginnings are indeed not what we find in the fourth and fifth centuries in the East as the Marian cult, and which then began its triumphal march over the Western world.

-2-

What is this Marian cult which arose in the century between the first [Nicaea 325] and the third [Ephesus 431] Ecumenical

3. Denzinger, *Catholic Dogma*, 111–12.
 4. *Ausgewählte Schriften der syrischen Kirchenväter: Aphraates, Rabbulas and Isaak von Ninive*, trans. Gustav Bickell (Kempten: Kösel, 1874), 260–61. This prayer is from Rabbulas von Edessa.
 5. Epiphanius, ca. 315–403, Bishop of Salamis, Cyprus. Highly regarded for monastic asceticism, piety, self-denying care for the poor and zeal for orthodoxy. LC, p. 272. MH.

6. Friedrich Heiler, *Urkirche und Ostkirche* (München: E. Reinhardt, 1937), 490.
 7. John of Damascus, ca. 675–ca. 750. Monk in a monastery near Jerusalem, priest, hymnist. LC, p. 430. MH.
 8. Justin Martyr, ca. 100–ca. 165. MH.
 9. Irenaeus, d. ca. 200 A.D., saw and heard Polycarp; succeeded Pothinus as Bishop of Lyons 178. Opposed Gnosticism and other heresies. LC, p. 419. MH.

Councils in the Church of the East, first in Syria, then also in Asia Minor and Egypt, and already before 431 had conquered the entire East, inside and outside the borders of the empire? It is a real cult, not merely one form of personal devotion with private exercises. It is an emerging religious practice in distinct forms, gaining ascendancy in all circles of the church, and also in its public divine service. If one can define Christianity, as it conclusively advanced since the time of Constantine [ca. 280–337], as the Christ-cult which suppressed all the other cults at that time, then this Christ-cult was now expanded through the Marian cult, and more generally through the cult of the saints. Churches began to be built in honor of the Mother of the Redeemer, such as Santa Maria Maggiore¹⁰ in Rome in 352, the oldest church dedicated to Mary in the West. In the consciousness of the masses, which now streamed into the church from paganism, Mary, the apostles, and martyrs took the place of the old gods.

It has often been noted that there is a religio-historical [*religionsgeschichtlicher*] correspondence between the popular uprising in Acts 19:23 ff. and the scene at the Council of Ephesus.

That Ephesian mob, which waited for hours before the church where the council [of Ephesus] was held, fifty years earlier, had still done homage to the great mother goddess Artemis, whose world-famous shrine was the pride of that city. It was Chrysostom (d. 404) who finally put an end to the Artemis cult. And this mob, which, after the condemnation of Nestorius, ran through the streets crying, “The enemy of the Holy Virgin is conquered!” were the descendants of that silversmith Demetrius, who according to the Book of Acts (19:27) stirred up his fellow citizens against the Apostle Paul: “The temple of the great goddess Diana will be regarded as nothing and she who is worshipped in all Asia and the rest of the world will be robbed of her majesty.” And this mob, which on the evening of 22 June 431, broke out in the joyous cry: “Honor be to the great, exalted, glorious Mother of God,” were the descendants of those Ephesians who not quite four centuries earlier had cried out through the city for hours: “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” (Acts 19:28, 34).

Thus Friedrich Heiler describes the noteworthy parallel.¹¹

The Marian cult was the *Christian replacement for the cults of the great female deities*, which played such a great role in the life of pre-Christian pagan humanity. These were the cults of the holy virgins and divine mothers, the Babylonian Ishtar, whose cult had already forced its way into Israel, the Syrian Queen

of Heaven, the great mother of Asia Minor, the Egyptian Isis, whose favor in the West is testified to by the long use of the name “Isidor” among Jews and Christians. But unfortunately it was not only a Christian replacement for a pagan religion, it was likewise a *pagan religion in Christian guise*. The Marian cult is the last of the great cults of a female divinity, which made its way from the Orient into the Roman world, since in the second Punic War Rome had adopted the cult of the *Magna Mater* of Asia Minor. The triumph of the veneration of Mary

The Marian cult is the last of the great cults of a female divinity.

in the Christendom of the East and the West is based upon the fact that in it lives genuine, deeply religious paganism—for all paganism, which is really genuine, is deeply religious—the religion of the natural man. The natural man is religious. For religion is of the essence of man. This does not mean that man has the correct relation to God. It is precisely as a religious being that man is an enemy of God, the real God. For his religion is indeed the attempt to lay hold of what is God’s, to make a god in a way that pleases him. In the natural religion man forms a god according to his desires, his needs, according to his image. But such an idol is, however, the image of the female deity. The woman as virgin, as wife [*Gattin*], as mother becomes the image of God, as the natural man constructs it. The mother is the original image [*Urbild*] of mercy. Thus in Hebrew the word “*rechem*,” [ר ח מ] which originally designated the womb, signifies “mercy,” even the mercy of God (for example, Is 63:15). Thus it happens that in the pagan religions the deities of mercy are conceived of as mothers. The only deity of the ancient Greek-speaking world of whom the word *agape* was used, which word in the New Testament designates the love of God, is Isis. In the Holy Scriptures the mercy of a mother is expressly ascribed to God the Lord: “I will comfort you as a mother comforts her son” (Is 66:13; compare 49:15). And in the Bible where the relationship between God and his faithful is described as the archetype of bridal or marital love, there God is the husband and his people, his church, the wife (Hos 2:20; Eph 5:23 ff.; Rv 21:2; 22:17).

The natural man of all ages, however, perverts God’s order. Because he does not acknowledge God as the Lord, and would rather make God subject to him, thus the need for a feminine deity is of the essence of the natural, fallen man. If we may venture to say so, the veneration of Mary rests on this fact. From a purely human perspective, or to judge on purely aesthetic grounds, the veneration of Mary is one of the most beautiful things in the Christian religion. Are there any more “beautiful” hymns than the Marian hymns like those of the German Middle Ages? Is there anything more poetic than the Marian prayers of the Roman Catholic Church? What profound poetry

10. The celebrated basilica on the Esquiline Hill was founded by Pope Liberius (352–366). According to medieval tradition the site was chosen by the Blessed Virgin, who one August night left her footprints in a miraculous fall of summer snow. This legend was formerly celebrated in the Feast of Our Lady of the Snows. Largest of the some eighty churches in Rome dedicated to the Virgin. ODCC, p. 1454. MH.

11. *Die Gottesmutter*. Sondernummer der *Hochkirche*, 1931, 184–85.

is found in the Marian legends, especially in the legends which form the basis for the dogma of the assumption of Mary? How beautiful is this death in contrast to the crucifixion of Jesus, or the martyrdom of the apostles! Distraught with longing for her divine Son, she died in the presence of the apostles. Her body was buried, but transfigured to glory and borne upward to heaven. Here all the terror of death is overcome, here there is nothing more of the physical torment and God-forsakenness of the death by crucifixion. It is death in complete blessedness. No, it is no longer death at all, just as this life was no longer the life of a sinful man. The departure of Mary is the fulfillment of a perfect life. It is the *apotheosis* [deification] of the man who rises above the angels into a divine life. What Christ is in Arianism, the first of all created things which rises to divinity, that is Mary in Catholicism.

Is it then an accident that the deeply rooted desire for the divine man created the apotheosized man in Mariology after the defeat of Arian Christology?

Is it an accident that the classic text of Arian Christology, the passage regarding the preexistent *sophia* (Prov 8:22 ff.) has become one of the most important Marian lessons (8 December and 8 September), and has led to the treatment of Mary as the heavenly wisdom? If Arianism is the Christology of Greek paganism, is it then an accident that the deeply rooted desire for the divine *man*—in distinction from the *God*-man—in Greek paganism, created the apotheosized man in Mariology after the defeat of Arian Christology? Here lies the most profound essence of the Marian cult. Here lies the secret of the power that the veneration of Mary has over men. Christians who have come out of the Catholic Church to Protestantism, without having overcome the paganism which is still rooted in Catholicism, through a fundamental conversion, will never lose their homesickness for Mary. And the modern man, who is no longer a Christian, may well appreciate the Marian cult. Indeed, he has an open or secret longing for it, though he radically rejects the Christian faith. The conclusion of Goethe's *Faust* is characteristic of this.

-3-

If the Marian cult is thus to be understood, then it is clear why it is such an immense power and why it refuses to die. The human soul is not, as Tertullian [*ca.* 155/60–*ca.* 220/30] thought, by nature Christian. It is pagan, and it is the *anima naturaliter pagana* [the soul which by nature is pagan], which this cult needs. Therefore neither can it be refuted on reasonable grounds. As is the case with all paganism, the veneration of Mary reaches right

into the very fundamentals of life, which are not finally based upon or refuted on rational grounds. A glance at a multitude praying the rosary already demonstrates that we have to do with an irrational event. Nor must the profound recognition of the Bible be forgotten, that behind all paganism there are super-human spiritual powers. No man has ceased to think the "*Eritis sicut Deus*" (You shall be like God; Gn 3:5) of himself. This is why it is also such a hopeless undertaking to refute the veneration of Mary on the basis of the complete unbelievability of its historical assertions. The assumption of Mary is not rendered uncertain for any Catholic because there is no historical proof for it, or that its historicity may only be made plausible. Every Catholic theologian, indeed, every educated Catholic, knows just how weak is the historical basis behind the new dogma. And the pope knows this, too. This is why his bull is completely silent regarding the legends of the *Transitus* and the *Koimesis*. Another, stronger weapon is needed to refute the veneration of Mary and the dogmas which produced it.

We will speak of this later. Here we have to mention yet another basis for the power and the living force of the veneration of Mary, and this leads us to its other side, which must not be forgotten. The Marian cult is *Christianized* paganism, a paganism which lives, closely bound up in a form of symbiosis with the Christian faith, and from which it draws ever-new power. It is as though the super-human powers which stand behind the pagan religions (1 Cor 8:5), after the collapse of the pagan cults and myths, had taken refuge in the Christian religion. The veneration of Mary draws its strongest power from the faith in Christ with which it is bound together. For the Catholic Christian of the East and West the veneration of Mary is the veneration of Christ. Mariology is a necessary consequence of Christology. Thus it is dealt with in dogmatics as an appendix to Christology. The Catholic Church knows no stronger argument for the veneration of the Mother of God than to point out how in Protestant Christianity with Mariology, Christology, and with the veneration of the Mother of God, faith in the Son of God has pursued the same course of collapse. Has not the Catholic Church in fact become the strongest refuge of orthodox Christology and doctrine of the Trinity?

The Protestants treat the dogma of the immaculate conception of Mary as the flip side [*Dublette*] to the dogma of the virgin birth of the Lord, and the new dogma of the *assumptio* of Mary as the analogy to the doctrine of the *ascensio* of the Lord. And they draw the conclusion from this that the Catholic doctrine elevates Mary at the cost of her Son. The Catholics, however, are justified in pointing out that it is not Catholic but rather Protestant theologians today who, completely undisturbed in their capacity as teachers of the church, publicly contest the virgin birth of Christ and the ascension of Christ, as they have been confessed by the church from the beginning, and characterize them as myths. And it certainly is not Pius XII [1939–1958] and his cardinals who are dissuading Christian people from belief in the incarnation, the Triune God, and the miracles of the Bible. In which churches then has the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, actually been more fervently invoked than in the churches in which the rosary is also prayed? We Lutheran theo-

logians must face such questions, just as we cannot avoid the question of how it has come to be that the cross, the one-time sacrifice of Christ on Golgotha, has come to play a greater role in the actual faith and thought of the community in the church of the sacrifice of the mass, than in the faith and thought of many churches which call themselves “Evangelical.”

It cannot be said that belief in Christ demands the veneration of Mary, or that understanding the sacrifice of Christ demands the sacrifice of the mass. It is rather the case that in the cult of Mary and in the sacrifice of the mass clandestine paganism has wed itself most intimately with Christian thought, and forced itself into the very church of Christ. In the words of the Bible and the Reformation, the Antichrist has actually been seated in the church of Christ. There, where the Supper of Christ is actually celebrated, there the “horror” of the sacrifice of the mass has been swallowed. There, where the God-man is actually proclaimed, believed, and invoked, there and nowhere else the creature deifies itself in the form of man climbing to divinity. This is the unspeakable tragedy of church history. All this, which we Evangelical [Lutheran] Christians perceive as pagan and antichristian in Catholicism, this has occurred indeed not merely in one confessional church which is separated from us. For it has occurred there in the one holy church of God, which is indeed also there as certainly as the gospel and the sacraments of Christ are there. Because and insofar as it has occurred there, these things have significance for all of Christianity. No pagan Madonna cult outside of Christianity would concern us. No matter how grandiose it were, it would be no danger to the Christian faith, and it would finally have no power in world history. But a Madonna cult in which the mother of the Lord is the Madonna, is a power in the world. If the Madonna of Lourdes or of Fatima were not identified with Mary, if these fantasies or demonic beings [*Wesen*] were, as in corresponding cases in the ancient world, treated as independent divine beings, they would mean nothing to us. It is this identification which gives significance to the cult of Lourdes and the cult of Fatima, because they legitimize them with the authority of the gospel. As is the case in every church, so also the Roman Church does not live from her errors, but from her truths. The fearful thing in her history is this: these truths have been used to justify those errors.

-4-

If the Marian cult is, according to our conviction, essentially Christianized paganism, how could it have forced its way into the church? Which theological error opened the doors to the church for it? Its admission cannot be based only upon the psychological and religious needs of the natural man. The new [papal] bull provides an indirect answer to this question, as it seeks to give basis for the new dogma. First of all, it is astonishing what an insignificant role the Holy Scriptures play in the thin [*langen*] constitution as compared to the encyclical of Pius XII, which is filled with biblical citations. The passages which are mustered for the doctrine of the assumption of Mary are from the *Ave Maria* (Lk 1:28) and the reference to heaven in Revelation 12; a few Old Testament passages, namely Psalm 132: “Arise, O LORD, and go to thy resting place, thou and the

ark of they might” [RSV]; and two passages from the Song of Solomon, “Who is the one coming up from the wilderness, like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense with all the fragrant powders of the merchant?” (3:6) [RSV]; “Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?” (8:5) [RSV]. Already in the Middle Ages these passages were typologically applied to the assumption. Here we remember that the Ark of the Covenant is an older type of Mary. Furthermore, Isaiah 60:13 is cited, “I will make the place of my feet glorious,” which Antonius of Padua¹² interpreted to mean that the divine Redeemer bedecked his beloved mother, from

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whom he had received his human nature, with glory. Antonius is cited word for word. He remarks on this passage, “You have here the clear confirmation that the Blessed Virgin was taken up in the body, which was the abode of the feet of the Lord.” It must indeed be said that never has a dogma been defined with weaker scriptural basis. In fact, it cannot be deduced indirectly from even one passage of Scripture.

And the situation is no better with the proof of tradition. The pope produces it as he makes his modern case. His circular letter to the bishops, entitled *Dieparae Virginis* of 1946, directed to all bearers of the episcopal office the question whether they judged that the bodily assumption of Mary into heaven could be defined as dogma, and whether they, along with their clergy and people, desired the definition. The fact that the question was almost unanimously affirmed proves the presence of the tradition. “Thus we have in the universal agreement of the legitimate teaching authority of the church a certain and firm proof that the doctrine is a divinely revealed truth, which must be firmly believed by all children of the church.” As testimony for the presence of this tradition in the past are introduced the churches that have been dedicated to Mary assumed into heaven, the biblical evidence of her assumption, the patron saint status of the Mother of God assumed into heaven over cities and countries, the rosary and the Festival of Mary’s Assumption with its liturgies. There then follows a plenitude of witnesses since late antiquity, among which the apocryphal writings with their legends are not mentioned. It is noteworthy that the pope,

12. St. Antony of Padua, 1188/95–1231, Franciscan friar born in Lisbon. With the approval of St. Francis he was appointed lector in theology to the order. ODCC, p. 81. MH.

just as in the case of his encyclical on the liturgy (*Mediator Dei*¹³) treats the liturgy not as source, but rather as witness, of the Catholic faith. Thus dogma ever stands above cultus as its regulator. The bull is not able to bridge the chasm that yawns between the earliest descriptions of the *assumptio* and the New Testament, or the early church. The only historical argument for the dogma is the consideration that the church never tried to find the physical relics of Mary. Thus the last member of the procession, which has gained ever more momentum in recent centuries, must now assent to the total [dogma]. In fact, there is in Catholicism no “pious opinion” that enjoys such overwhelming assent as the doctrine of the assumption of Mary. No one in the Catholic world doubts this, therefore (that this is the meaning from the proofs of tradition) one can assume that one deals here with a tradition that is a genuine tradition in the sense of Trent.

That Christ is the New Adam is taught in the New Testament. But the NT knows nothing of a new Eve.

But from whence came the gravity of this pious opinion, which could now be elevated to the level of dogma? Why does the entire Catholic world believe in it? It is not the scriptural basis. That is practically nonexistent. Nor is it the evident antiquity of the tradition that makes the doctrine so evident to the Catholic. Its evidence is found in this: It is a necessary conclusion. The constitution points to the correspondence with the other Marian dogmas, particularly the dogma of the immaculate conception, the pronouncement of which in 1854 set in place the impetuous desire for the new dogma. It was hoped that its pronouncement would be made already by the Vatican Council of 1870. Just as it appeared evident to the average Catholic Christian that the Lord Christ, after her death, would take the body of his dear mother immediately to heaven, and not simply surrender the body that had given birth to him to decay, so also for theologians the complete sinlessness of Mary follows the privilege that her body could not simply be left to decay. Then the proof put forth by the pope concludes by his drawing the conclusion:

All these proofs and considerations of the holy fathers and the theologians rest upon the Holy Scriptures as their final basis. They, as it were, place before our eyes the holy Mother of God, as she is most closely bound together with her divine Son, and even shares his fate. Consequently it

appears impossible to imagine that she, who conceived, bore, nursed, and held Christ upon her breast was separated from him after this earthly life in her body, even though not in soul. Since our Savior is the Son of Mary, could he, who perfectly fulfilled the law of God, do anything other than honor his beloved Mother, just as he honored his eternal Father? And since it lay in his power to vouchsafe to her this great honor that she be spared the corruption of the grave, we have to believe that he actually acted in this manner.

It is remarkable that then immediately follows the reference to the final source of such conclusions, which is nothing other than a false conclusion. The pope cites the doctrine of the fathers of the second century regarding Mary as the

New Eve. Although subordinate to the New Adam, still she is most closely bound up together with him in the struggle against the hellish enemy, which, as promised in the protevangel, finally ends in the most perfect victory over sin and death . . .

Here what will be the next “conclusion” is already indicated: the formal definition of the doctrine already advocated in countless liturgical and theological documents regarding Mary the *mediatrix omnium gratiarum* and the *coredemptrix* [mediatrix of all graces and co-redemptrix]. With this doctrine Mariology would be completed in the way Christology has been completed since Chalcedon. But at the same time it is clear where the source of such false conclusions lay, which points the way for Mariological dogma. *It is a false interpretation of Scripture.* That Christ is the New Adam is taught in the New Testament. But the New Testament knows nothing of a new Eve. It was a clever bit of dalliance when Justin (*Dial. c. Tryph.* 100) and Irenaeus who followed him (*Adv. haer.* 3,22.4) in their recapitulation doctrine drew the parallel: the obedient virgin Eve and the obedient Virgin Mary; Eve under the tree in paradise, Mary under the cross. Thus Mary became *cooperatrix*, collaborator in the act of redemption [*Mitwerkerin an der Erlösung*]. Thus Justin already places her “*Fiat*” over against the disobedience of Eve. And Irenaeus develops the thought further, which then became the basis of all Mariology in the churches of the East and the West, the basis of all that which we designate as Catholic Christianity in opposition to the *sola gratia* and the *sola fide* of the Reformation:

Just as the marvelous fact that in Mary not God alone, but also creaturely powers . . . have had a causal participation in the work of redemption . . . so Mary’s is not merely a personal connection to the Son of God and a personal salvation, but much more than that a salvific connection to the “many,” who through her son have been redeemed. Along with the Redeemer she bore also the redeemed. Thus she is the mother of the believers. The Catholic knows not merely a Father, but also a Mother in Heaven [Karl Adam, *Das Wesen des Katholizismus*, 6th ed., 1931, p. 141–42].

13. Denzinger, *Catholic Dogma*, 2297.

Man as his own co-redeemer: This is the secret of the veneration of Mary. To be sure, Mary ever takes the subordinate position. As the immaculate one who receives, she is the object of divine grace. Her assumption is no *ascensio* — also the Roman Church reads in her Bible that no one shall ascend (*ascendit*) to heaven but the one who came down from heaven (Jn 3:13 ff.; Eph 4:9) — rather *assumptio* (which the ascension of Christ also is, according to Acts 1:11, but is yet more). Mary is only the *co-redemptrix* alongside and under the *redemptor*. But she is *co-redeemer*.

-5-

When the Marian cult is thus understood, then its *connection with the papacy* is clear. The veneration of Mary originated from the church that as yet knew of no papacy. And it can exist where the pope is rejected. But the papacy has meant immeasurably much for the development of this cultus. It is the popes who made the Marian dogma *dogma*. For the Eastern Church has no Marian dogma in the strict sense. It has produced the cultus: the invocation of the holy Virgin, the praise of the *Theotokos* [the God-bearer] in the hymns of the liturgy. It produced the Marian festivals, above all the Purification of Mary and the Annunciation, which are properly speaking, still Christ festivals, then the birth and assumption of Mary. It produced the Marian legends and a Mariological explication of the biblical texts. The honorific titles for Mary, the biblical figures and types, indeed, practically the entire theology of the Marian cult stems from the Eastern Church. The doctrines of the immaculate conception and of the assumption are as much at home there as the view of Mary as *Mediatrix*, which appears in the Coptic liturgy.¹⁴ The pope has scarcely ever taught anything regarding the Mother God which has not long been believed and taught in the Eastern Church. Only there it has not yet become dogma, and indeed, never will become dogma. This means above all that in the church of the East a decree of belief can never be proclaimed like that of 1 November 1950, which demands, upon the loss of eternal salvation, that the bodily assumption of Mary be believed as much as the ascension of Christ and the other great articles of the ecclesiastical *Credo*.

But why did the papacy espouse this Mariology in such an emphatic manner, especially in recent centuries? One need only consider the increase of the Marian festivals in the ecclesiastical calendar, the new cult of the heart of Mary, and the cults of Lourdes and Fatima, in order to grasp that there is something for consideration here other than a religious custom or a personal predilection of the more recent popes, in particular, those who bear the name Pius. It would be quite interesting indeed to consider the cult of Fatima from this viewpoint, as to both its religious-historical and its political sides. But this cannot happen here. Suffice it to say that the present pope, in a way similar to Pius IX [1846–1878], has a very personal relationship to this cult, in which for him is found also the key for unlocking the

world-political problems of the struggle against Bolshevism. For Mary is the protectress of the church and the conqueress of the satanic powers according to the *protevangelium*, as the Roman church interprets Genesis 3:15 of the Vulgate, “*ipsa conteret caput tuum*” [“She shall destroy your head”].

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The final basis for the Mariological interest of the Papacy lays deeper. M. Joseph Scheeben [1835–1888], the most significant German advocate of the Vatican Council [*Vaticanums*], once juxtaposed both the great dogmas of the nineteenth century, the dogma of the immaculate conception of 1854 and the dogma of papal infallibility of 1870, as *truths which are mutually complementary*. He likened them to bright stars which illuminated the heavens of the nineteenth century: “the Virgin born without blemish as the star of grace, the Morning . . .”¹⁵ The passage is quoted verbatim here because it provides insight into the speculative treatment of such dogmas in Roman theology. The truth of the statement is in the acknowledgement of the deep connection between the doctrine of Mary and the doctrine of the pope. The doctrine of the *Vicarius Christi* and the infallible teaching office is an expression of that natural religion that ascribes to man that which can only be said of the God-man Jesus Christ. Therefore they both belong together, the *coredemptrix* and the *Vicarius Christi*, the Roman view of Mary and of the pope.

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In conclusion, honored brothers, we may and must comment regarding what we have to do in view of the situation created by the new dogma. This situation is recognized by the fact that the papacy has begun to make use of the full authority that the *Vaticanum* gave to it. For the first time, eighty years after that council, an *ex cathedra* decision [*Kathedralentscheidung*] has been rendered as it had been foreseen in that council. Thereby a beginning has been made. The new dogma which will now be impetuously advanced, and toward which already much has taken place, is the doctrine of the *Mediatrix*, a dogma which not a few Catholics, especially in Germany, fear, because they

14. C. A. Swainson, *The Greek Liturgies* (Cambridge: University Press, 1884), 382.

15. *Die theologische und praktische Bedeutung des Dogmas von der Unfehlbarkeit des Papstes*, in Scheeben's periodical *Das oekumenische Konzil vom Jahre 1869* 2 (1870): 510.

do not yet see how it can be reconciled with belief in the *one* mediator of the New Testament. Perhaps the solemnity with which the much less harmless (for Catholics) dogma of the assumption of Mary was pronounced is explained by the desire to defer a much weightier decision.

What is the task of the Lutheran Church in this situation? First of all, it is certainly rejection. For what is said here is indeed said for the entirety of Christianity and for all times. The Roman Church must and will stand by this decision to the end of time. It is therefore quite appropriate that non-Roman Christians speak very plainly what it has to say. When Lutheran bishops protest against this new dogma it is their right and their duty. But they will only be credible if they first remove the log from their own eyes, namely that fearful *laissez faire* with which they face the loss of doctrine in their own church. With what right does a church in which only a hopeless minority still maintains the Lutheran doctrine of the sacrament presume to criticize Catholicism and its sacramental system in the name of the Lutheran confession?! How can theologians who deny the virgin birth and ascension of the Lord discuss the assumption of the Virgin Mary with Rome? We are well aware of the fact that dogma in the Evangelical [Lutheran] Church occupies a position different from that in the Roman Church. We are well aware that all of us can only begin with the prayer: "I believe, dear Lord, help my unbelief!" (Mk 9:24) We know that we must have the kind of patience with men who have difficulties with the church's confession, as God—so we hope—has patience with us. But in this regard, we must be clear that we as members and pastors of the Lutheran Church can only speak with Rome as our fathers did at the time of the Reformation: on the firm basis of the confession of the entire holy church of Christ, the confession of faith in the Triune God, the God-man Jesus Christ, the articles of the divine majesty, which are not in contention (SA I; BSLK 415.1), as Luther put it. If we have given up these articles, then we no longer belong in chairs of theology, in the pulpit and in church government. For we have first of all to become once again humble students of the catechism, as Luther still was as an old doctor. How will one who does not confess the spiritual realities of the believing and confessing church of the gospel, which actually lives from the word and sacrament, face the powerful spiritual and intellectual realities of the Roman Church?

In this is stated our *proper theological task*. It does not suffice merely to *reject the Roman claims*. As certain as since the days of the apostles, genuine polemics, the struggle against heresy has been part and parcel of the expression of the living church, so it is certain that the rejection of heresy is only the flip side of the confession of *pure doctrine*. The new Roman dogma cannot be faced with the weapons of the human intellect. The more or less enlightened man, who today converts to or sympathizes with Rome for political reasons, will swallow almost everything the pope places before him to believe. What sacrifice is offered more easily everywhere in the world today than the sacrifice of the intellect! What a fine brotherhood exists today between the American Freemasons and Rome [both of which exist] on similar bases. The weapon with which the new Marian dogma

may be opposed with any consequence is alone "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," Ephesians 5:17. But this sword is only at the disposal of the church that lives entirely in the word of God. Is the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of today, are the churches which call themselves Lutheran today, *churches of the word*, churches of the *sola scriptura*, as was the Church of the Lutheran Reformation? Have we not heard from theologians, even bishops, who call themselves Lutheran, very questionable words regarding tradition, as another form of the word alongside the Scriptures?

With what right does a church in which only a hopeless minority still maintains the Lutheran doctrine of the sacrament presume to criticize Catholicism and its sacramental system in the name of the Lutheran confession?!

"*This means God's Word shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel*" (SA II, 2; BSLK 421.23). Do we really understand this statement of the Reformer from the Smalcald Articles in its entire depth? If we did understand it then we would also understand what these same Smalcald Articles teach regarding the Antichrist, the man in the church who sets himself in the place of Christ. Let us be anxious, dear brothers in the Office, that our church remains a church of the word, a church of the *sola scriptura*, or becomes this once again where it is in danger of forsaking the Scriptures. This is the great responsibility that we bear in every one of our sermons, in every hour of instruction which we conduct. Of course we cannot guard the word on the basis of our own strength. The Lord of the word, the *Dominus Scripturae*, he, the *Verbum Incarnatum*, must keep us in his word, as the church implores. God has revealed himself in his word. And if we do not remain in his word then we cannot but create other gods before him.

This is the teaching which the history of the Marian cult demonstrates. *The veneration of Mary at its very deepest essence is finally the deification of man*. In it man cannot bear it that God alone, God's Son alone, became man, is his Redeemer. So he places himself as his own co-redeemer. What this means and whence it leads is illustrated by the history of one of the most celebrated Marian churches of the West—the pope himself gives us this indication when he includes the temples dedicated to Mary in his proofs from tradition. In the place of an ancient pagan holy place (similarly in Rome the *Santa Maria sopra Minerva*) in Paris was built the Cathedral *Nostrae Dominae*. In

it Thomas Aquinas was promoted to *Magister*. In it the great teachers of scholasticism prayed and preached, who taught that amazing Catholic synthesis of nature and grace, reason and revelation, and human preparation for the reception of grace and divine redemption, that cooperation of the human will with divine grace, for which the Holy Virgin is the great paradigm. Is it an accident that in the same Church of Notre Dame, during the French Revolution, that religion was evidenced that since then has become the sharpest opponent of the Christian faith and a substitute for the faith of their fathers for many millions of men throughout the world: belief in man and his reason? At that time the Temple of Reason was raised up in the old Marian church, and in it was enthroned a not so holy "maiden" of the Parisian opera, as the "Goddess of Reason," and she let herself be marveled at in the speech for the occasion as a "masterwork

of nature." Did this fearful scene perhaps have a deeper meaning? Did it not demonstrate what perverse path man comes to when man is placed beside God, reason next to revelation, nature next to grace? On the day reason ejects revelation from the temple, man places himself on the throne of God and reveals, after he has rejected grace, his true nature. This is all possible in a Marian church. These possibilities lie dormant in the church of Christ, and become reality when Christianity forgets that the word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel. *Verbum solum habemus*. We will hold to the word of God.

In the bond of faith, greetings as we approach Eastertide,

Yours,
Hermann Sasse LOGIA


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Semper Virgo: A Doctrine

DAVID P. SCAER



IN ITS CONFRONTATION WITH early twentieth-century liberalism, Fundamentalism designated Jesus' virgin birth as one of the four necessary beliefs. Some self-styled confessional Lutherans have gone one step further in raising the hypothesis of the *semper virgo*, that is, Mary's perpetual virginity, near to the level of doctrine. It qualifies as a question of biblical interpretation and not a doctrine. What Luther and the Lutheran fathers said about this question may be of historical interest but is not determinative.

Since Bishop John Spong and the now popular Bart Ehrman, in the tradition of radical biblical criticism, deny Jesus' virgin birth because they consider it to be something added to the gospel message late in the first century, Mary's perpetual virginity has hardly been a matter for serious discussion. The *semper virgo* means that after giving birth to Jesus, his mother refrained from sexual relations with Joseph. Not only was Jesus conceived *ex Maria virgine*, but she remained so for the rest of her life. The highly fanciful second-century *Protoevangelium of James*, which combines and expands the Matthew and Luke birth narratives, is the first known document to offer the idea. It gained momentum with the Roman Empire's recognition of Christianity as a legal religion. Martyrdom as a certain way to heaven was replaced by asceticism, which included celibacy, and Mary was held up as an example to be followed. Virginity became the new martyrdom.

All this was not a pressing issue in my seminary days, but the matter came up in an assignment to teach the Epistle of James. As with all biblical books, its authorship had to be addressed. Possible authors were the elder son of Zebedee, the son of Alphaeus, or one who is simply called James, or James the brother of Jesus, or the son of Mary, or someone pretending to be any of the three. Luther took this route and saw the author as one posing as the son of Zebedee. Yes, Luther could be wrong. The overwhelming evidence pointed to the eldest of Jesus' four younger brothers.

In the strictest sense this James was not a half-brother, because Jesus had no human father. "Uterine brother" best expresses their relationship. Five boys, including Jesus and James, all had the same mother. James is named along with the other brothers, Joseph, Simon, and Jude, and the unnamed sisters

(Mt 13:55–56) and they are found in the company of Mary, who is identified as Jesus' mother (Mk 6:3). At the wedding of Cana, Jesus' mother and his brothers are present, but his brothers are not named (Jn 2:12). The salutation of the last of the catholic epistles, "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James," corresponds with Matthew and Mark, and indicates that James and Jude were brothers and hence Jesus' brothers. On top of this, James is explicitly called the brother of the Lord (Gal 1:19) and takes precedence over Peter and John as a pillar of the church (Gal 2:9). Like Peter, he also merited a separate appearance of the resurrected Jesus (1 Cor 15:5, 7).

Proponents of the *semper virgo* hypothesis cite the cross scene in which Jesus commits his mother to the care of the beloved disciple (Jn 19:26–27), assuming that she has no one else to provide for her, but this can hardly be the case. After Jesus' ascension she appears in the assembly of believers with his brothers (Acts 1:14). Even if these were Joseph's sons by a previous marriage, her step-children, or Jesus' cousins, her nephews, she was not abandoned. All four evangelists, assuming that Acts was written by Luke, speak of Mary and place her with Jesus' brothers, and one Gospel also places her with his sisters. She is also that Mary who stands at a distance from the cross and is identified as "the mother of James and Joseph" (Mt 27:56).

Denying that Mary had other children requires an explanation for how those who were called Jesus' brothers and sisters were related to him. No one questions that in some sense they were family members. Eastern Orthodoxy generally saw them as cousins, as members of Jesus' extended family. In Roman Catholicism they were seen as Joseph's children from a previous marriage. Proponents of the *semper virgo* hypothesis offer four scenarios, all complex, to explain Jesus' relationship to those who are called his brothers and sisters, but they are not agreed on which one is right.¹ Least satisfactory is the hypothesis that they were first cousins, simply because in the same Gospels, *adelphos*, the Greek word for brother, is used of the relationship of Peter to Andrew and James to John, who were real brothers.

Seeing these brothers and sisters as Joseph's children is not without problems, the first of which is an argument from silence: there is no suggestion that he was a widower and entered into the marriage contract with children—at least six children.

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1. Richard Bauckham offers three helpful charts. *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990), 19–23.

This would mean that Mary already had to come to terms with becoming the step-mother to six children, the older of whom would likely have been close to her age, before becoming the mother of the Lord, the *theotokos*. When Jesus speaks of how his mother, brothers, and sisters will be replaced by those who do the Father's will, he has an ordinary family, what we would call a nuclear family, in mind (Mt 13:46–50). His disciples and followers become his brothers and sisters, not his cousins. In preaching the gospel the apostles are his brothers, not his cousins (Mt 28:10, 16–20).

Whether Mary remained semper virgo or had children by Joseph is an open question.

While the appearance of the *semper virgo* hypothesis can be explained and traced historically, several factors may explain the current interest. It may come from a romanticism that desires to revive the faith of a pristine church in which this was a settled view. Reasons for recent interest in the *semper virgo* are theological; it is what is called a *theologoumenon*. This means that although the biblical support is not foolproof, there are theological reasons for it. In this case it is subliminal conviction, perhaps unrecognized by the mostly married, Lutheran proponents, that celibacy reaches a higher level of sanctity than the married life. Paul can be counted on for support for remaining single rather than living the married life, not because he saw a higher virtue in celibacy, but because it allowed him more time to care for the churches.

The *theologoumenon* argument, the one taken from theology, can be taken in another direction, if the starting point is the *homo factus est*. Jesus did not become a human being in a morally neutral sense, but he was burdened with sin and lived in a sinful environment. He did not live in what our Evangelical friends would call “a Christian family,” as if after Eden such a family ever existed. His own family thought he had lost his senses (Mk 3:21). Part of his humiliation is that they rejected him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house” (Mt 13:57).

The *semper virgo* cannot in any sense be regarded as a doctrine or even a pious opinion, especially if the opposing view is seen as unequal or lacking in piety. Proponents of one or the other view cannot be seen as more pious than others, but it may be that the piety of one person may account for current interest in the *semper virgo* hypothesis.

I recounted above how, in having to identify the author of the Epistle of James, the issue came up for me. Interest was rekindled—or better, inflamed—by an article in *Lutheran Forum*,

“The Ever-Virgin Mary: Johann Gerhard to the Present,”² to which in the same periodical I responded with “*Semper Virgo*: Pushing the Envelope.”³ The writer of “The Ever-Virgin Mary” expressed his dissatisfaction that the perpetual virginity of Mary, the *semper virgo*, was regarded as only an acceptable historical or even a probable belief. Its denial was an error brought on by the *sola scriptura* principle.

We must recognize the error of denying the perpetual virginity of Mary which stems from that [*sola scriptura*] principle, and return fully to the bosom of the historic Church, built by Christ himself, and called the “pillar and foundation of truth” by the Apostle. For apart from her, there is no salvation.⁴

Shortly after the publication of this article, the author resigned his pastorate of Epiphany Lutheran Church in Dorr, Michigan, to join the Eastern Orthodox Church, which, as he says, was for him the pillar of truth outside of which there is no salvation. With this conviction he had no choice but to abandon the Missouri Synod for the lush, verdant banks of the Bosphorus. Having already plotted his course, he was less than fully forthright in allowing publication of an article in defense of *semper virgo* that pretended to give the Lutheran view with the inclusion in the article's title of these words, “Johann Gerhard to the Present.” By citing the account of Jesus entrusting his mother to John, and Revelation 12:1–6 as a reference to Mary as the embodiment of the church, he showed he has not completely abandoned what for him has become the detested *sola scriptura* principle.

Part of his argument is that unless Mary had no relations with Joseph, she could not have completely given herself to God. Really? If she took care of Jesus' cousins or Joseph's children, would we say that she did not give herself completely to God? We could argue that it was her God-given vocation as a mother to have other children, but that would be Luther's doctrine of vocation. Following the logic that having children is an obstacle in giving oneself totally to God, all Christians (or at least some) should avoid marriage or abandon it. All of this has a Platonic aroma that the world of spirits is better than the world of flesh and bodies, that is, the world in which the incarnation took place. The writer of “The Ever-Virgin Mary” article remained unconvinced by the other arguments of Gerhard and the other Lutheran fathers that churches in the Eastern Orthodox communion may not be the foundation of the truth.

Whether Mary remained *semper virgo* or had children by Joseph, some of whom rose to prominence in the early church, is an open question and cannot be proclaimed as doctrine. For me the New Testament evidence supports the latter position and there matters will rest.

2. Charles R. Hogg, Jr., “The Ever-Virgin Mary: Johann Gerhard to the Present,” *Lutheran Forum* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 36–39.

3. David P. Scaer, “*Semper Virgo*: Pushing the Envelope,” *Lutheran Forum* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 24–28.

4. Hogg, “Ever-Virgin Mary,” 39.

Just one last point. Dale C. Allison has performed a marvelous service with his three-volume commentary on Matthew and more recently his *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present*. As a careful scholar he takes no firm position on this matter, and that is the way it should be. But in a footnote in the chapter entitled “Divorce, Celibacy, Joseph,” he comments on Matthew 1:24–25,

“When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until [ἔωϋς] she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.” Allison says that the word “ἔωϋς need not entail the resumption of sexual relations, . . . the First Evangelist nonetheless would surely not have chosen such an expression if he thought Mary ‘ever virgin.’” We wait for an answer on this one. **LOGIA**

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Mariology of Luther's *The Magnificat and That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*

VOLDEMARS LAUCINS



IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, theological reflections on Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, have been of great interest both at intraconfessional levels¹ and in ecumenical discussions.² This interest has prompted Lutherans and scholars interested in Lutheran theology to examine the evidence found in relevant sources for Lutherans: Scripture, the Confessions and historical documents.³

The present article analyzes two of Luther's most important Mariological works—*The Magnificat*⁴ and *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*—to determine their general message and their approach to Marian teaching and to compare the results of this examination with the parts of the Book of Concord written by Luther (the catechisms and the Smalcald Articles).

Luther was neither a dogmatic nor a systematic writer with a “coherent system that a professor would publish or deliver to students”;⁵ therefore a sort of hierarchy among Luther's works is a helpful instrument in case of variations or even contradictions in them.

There are certain criteria that scholars use to distinguish among the works of Luther.⁶ His authoritative works include those that examine the whole of theology or some specific theological thought in depth and importance, such as his catechisms and the Smalcald Articles, as well as *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, *The Bondage of Will*, exegeses of scriptural books, and others. Comparing these with *The Magnificat* and *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* aims to clarify Luther's views expressed in his works of supposedly lesser systematic value and of less importance in Luther's heritage and the Lutheran tradition against the context of his more significant and systematic works.

THE MAGNIFICAT

Luke 1:46–55, the *Magnificat*, was among the most beloved Scripture passages for Martin Luther from his childhood.⁷ His explanation of it is considered to be Luther's most important Mariological work,⁸ and it is among the most cited and referenced in illustrating Luther's attitude towards Mary.⁹ However, it is also called “a poetic confession of justification *sola gratia* and *sola fide*.”¹⁰

Although Luther's explanation of the *Magnificat* encompasses many of his theological thoughts and is a brilliant scriptural exposition, it cannot be listed among his most important works as it does not possess Luther's self-attested notion of exceptional importance, nor does it develop some of Luther's basic theological convictions or examine its relation to other theological subjects.

Introduction to *The Magnificat*

Martin Luther examined the text of the *Magnificat* for his Lenten sermons of 1520.¹¹ He worked on the printed version in

1. More than 100,000 Mariological titles were published during the first sixty years of the twentieth century (Heikki Räisänen, *Die Mutter Jesu im Neuen Testament*, 2nd ed. [Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1989], 9).
2. See George H. Anderson, Joseph A. Burgess, Francis I. Stafford, eds., *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1992); Alain Blancy, Maurice Jourjon, and Groupe des Dombes, *Marie dans le dessein de Dieu et la communion des saints*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Bayard, 1999); Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Mary, Mother of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004); Raymond E. Brown and others, eds., *Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978); Dwight Longenecker and David Gustafson, *Mary, a Catholic-Evangelical Debate* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2003); and others.
3. Cf. Hans Düfel, *Luthers Stellung zur Marienverehrung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968); Beth Kreitzer, *Reforming Mary: Changing Images of the Virgin Mary in Lutheran Sermons of the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996); Heikki Räisänen, *Die Mutter Jesu*; Walter Tappolet, *Das Marienlob der Reformatoren* (Tübingen: Katzmann Verlag, 1962); and so forth.
4. [Ed.] For clarity, *The Magnificat* denotes Luther's writing; the *Magnificat* denotes the Lucan text.
5. Hsia R. Po-chia, ed., *Reform and Expansion 1500–1660*, *The Cambridge History of Christianity* 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 18; foreword of Albert Brandenburg in Martin Luther, *Das Magnifikat* (Freiburg: Herder, 1964); cf. foreword of Jaroslav Pelikan in Timothy F. Lull, ed., *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), xi.
6. Lull, *Basic Theological Writings*, xiff.; Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 225 ff. Cf. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: Eine Einführung in sein Leben und sein Werk*, (München: C. H. Beck, 1981), 131–32.
7. Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1954), 27.
8. Foreword to *The Magnificat*, WA 7: 539; Lohse, *Martin Luther*, 142.
9. Anderson, *The One Mediator*, 236.
10. Heiko A. Oberman, *The Impact of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 235.
11. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483–1521* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), 387.

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Wittenberg from November 1520 until March 1521,¹² when his work was interrupted by the Diet of Worms. He finished in the second half of May and/or beginning of June at the Wartburg.¹³ The completed work was printed at the end of August or the beginning of September. Writing his explanation of the *Magnificat* took a considerably long time, so much so that Luther felt guilty,¹⁴ and referred by way of excuse to “the troublesome quarrels of many adversaries [that] have repeatedly interrupted it” (WA 7: 544; AE 21: 297).

The foundation of this work is the “promise” (*nu lange zeit vorherheissen*) (WA 7: 544; AE 21: 297). The focus is on the exposition of how the *Magnificat* describes the person and the role of the prince or king, that is, the ruler and “those in authority” (WA 7: 544 ff./601 ff.; AE 21: 297 ff./356 ff.).

Luther’s *The Magnificat* has clear structure with visible divisions and subdivisions:

- ◆ The words of the dedication without a separate title.
- ◆ Renumbered verses from Luke 1:46–55.¹⁵ Luther most likely followed the custom of the time and translated these passages directly without referring to some existing translation or to his own elaborated German translation.¹⁶ There is, however, evident influence also from the Vulgate.¹⁷
- ◆ Introductory words (*Vorrhede und eingang*), serving as well as the initial part of the work (without a title in the American Edition).
- ◆ 1st verse 46.
- ◆ 2nd verse 47.
- ◆ 3rd verse 48.
- ◆ 4th verse 49.
- ◆ 5th verse 50.
- ◆ “The First Work of God, Mercy.”
- ◆ “The Second Work of God, Breaking Spiritual Pride,” 6th verse 51.
- ◆ “The Third Work, Putting Down the Mighty,” 7th verse 52.
- ◆ “The Fourth Work, Exalting the Lowly.”
- ◆ “The Fifth and Sixth Works,” 8th verse 53.
- ◆ 9th verse 54.
- ◆ 10th verse 55.
- ◆ Closing words, without particular title (Epilog in the American Edition).

The title for *The Magnificat* comes from the first word of Luke 1:46–55 in the Vulgate: “*magnificat anima mea dominum*,”¹⁸ in that way giving another indication of the influence of the Vulgate.

The very term *magnificat*¹⁹ for Luther is “*grosz machen, erheben, viel von ihm halten*” (“to make great, to exalt, to esteem one highly”) (WA 7: 553; AE 21: 307). To describe the *Magnificat*, Luther uses words like *heiliges Lied, geistlich reinesz heilsamsz Lied, heiligen Lobesang, Lied, Lobszang, kostlich Gesang*, (sacred hymn, sacred, chaste, and salutary song, sacred hymn of praise, canticle, hymn of praise, precious canticle)²⁰ or just *the Magnificat*.

Theological themes in The Magnificat

This overview cannot start without mentioning Luther’s constant look at and return to God.

The work bears the heading “Jesus,” as Luther also begins his letters,²¹ and this praise starts in the first pages: “He is called the Creator and the Almighty,” and continues:

show Himself a true Creator, and thereby make Himself known and worthy of love and praise;

It (faith) also comes to experience the works of God and thus attains the love of God and thence also songs and praise of God, so that man esteems Him highly and truly magnifies Him. . . . My whole life and being, mind and strength, esteem Him highly (WA 7: 547, 548, 554; AE 21: 299, 301, 307).

The most important subject Luther deals with is *theo*-logy, the description of God. This theme, also largely involved in the context of praise, deals with the Trinity and the separate persons of the Trinity. He speaks about God’s work, how his differs in comparison to human efforts. For example, God is the one who looks at the despised, abandoned, and humbled human and works in them (WA 7: 546 ff.; AE 21: 299 ff.). The work he is doing is love and charity.

The other important theme is false and true Christianity viewed from various perspectives. He begins with “impure and perverted” believers in God (WA 7: 556 ff.; AE 21: 309 ff.). Among the false and true attitudes, Luther deals with power and might, an examination which leads him to issues concerning rulers, lords, or princes, that is, to questions related to the church and the society of the time (WA 7: 578, 583 ff.; AE 21: 332, 337 ff.).²² Within this context Luther also discusses the matter of *just war* and the necessity of rulers to do what “profit[s] the whole mass of his subjects rather than any one portion” (WA 7: 584; AE 21: 338).

12. The general preface is dated 10 March 1521 (WA 7: 545; AE 21: 298). It would signify the day when the first part of *The Magnificat* would be ready for publishing, which was initially started on 19 March (WA 7: 538).

13. Lohse, *Martin Luther*, 137.

14. However, throughout this time he has also meanwhile written other works (see Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 197).

15. Omitted in the English edition. This omission would be unnoticeable if Luther did not make reference to it in the epilog (AE 21: 357), which leaves confusion about the numeration.

16. See WA DB 6: 212–15, Martin Luther, *Das Magnifikat*, 52, footnote 7; and 101, footnote 21; Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther’s World of Thought* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2005), 228.

17. Bornkamm, *Luther’s World*, 225 ff., Martin Luther, *Das Magnifikat*, 57, footnote 7; 76, footnote 8; 101, footnote 21; 111, footnote 42; 112, footnote 43; and so forth.

18. Martin Luther, *Das Magnifikat*, 31, footnote 2.

19. In Greek, “*megalunei*,” “make great.” Luther translated it as “*erhebt*” in the translations of 1522 and 1546 (cf. WA DB 6: 212, 213).

20. WA 7: 545, 546, 549, 553, 554, 555, 572, 578; AE 21: 298, 299, 302, 306, 307, 326, 332.

21. Martin Luther, *Das Magnifikat*, 31, footnote 1.

22. Cf. “The God of the state is the God of the *Magnificat*, who exalts the lowly and abases the proud” (Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 242).

The highest of all God's works is the Incarnation (WA 7: 595 ff.; AE 21: 349 ff.). Although this plays a large role in *The Magnificat*, the very fact that it is the culmination of the main theme of praise to God obliges one to pay close attention to it.

Among the other matters Luther touches upon is the question of the soul,²³ a reflection on the saints in general, a pastoral encouragement to confession, a reflection on Christ, believers in the Old Testament, disobedience, and others. A certain polemical element is present in *The Magnificat* as well. Some theological themes possess catechetical features that are much clearer in Luther's catechetical works and catechisms (WA 7: 570–71; AE 21: 324–25).²⁴

Mary is an exemplar of true humility.

According to Luther, the most important issue is seen in verses 50 and 51, where the “chief content is gathered up” (WA 7: 602; AE 21: 357),²⁵ namely, false and true Christian attitudes in those who rule. All the other themes, including Mariology, are of secondary importance.

Mariology in *The Magnificat*

Luther uses different titles for Mary, such as *hochgelobte Junckfrau Maria*, *heilig Junckfrau*, *zarte Mutter Christi*,²⁶ *gemein*, *armen Burgersz Tochter*, *schlechts Megdlin* (blessed virgin Mary, holy Virgin, tender Mother of Christ, poor and plain citizen's daughter, simple maid) (WA 7: 546, 548, 549; AE 21: 299, 301). Apart from calling her by name, which is not the most frequent way he addresses her, Luther uses two predominant titles in slight variations: *Junckfraw* (virgin)²⁷ and *Mutter Gottis* (mother of God).²⁸ The latter prevails over any other. Luther does not hesitate in using this title because of the biblical foundation for it.²⁹

However, there is a title Luther uses cautiously in order “to keep within bounds and not make too much of calling her

‘Queen of Heaven’ (*Konigin der Himel*).” The term is “true enough . . . and yet does not make her a goddess” (WA 7: 573, 574; AE 21: 327).³⁰

Luther refers several times to those lines in the *Magnificat* that offer biographical information about Mary.³¹ He deduces all the statements he makes for Mary's condition of life from several words in the *Magnificat*, especially the “low estate” of verse 48.³² He makes no reference to noncanonical or apocryphal literature.

Luther describes Mary and her life.

Even in her own town of Nazareth she was not the daughter of one of the chief rulers, but a poor and plain citizen's daughter, whom no one looked up to or esteemed. *To her neighbors and their daughters she was just a simple maiden, tending the cattle and doing the housework*” (WA 7: 549; AE 21: 301).³³

This is a conclusion he later reaffirms.³⁴ At the same time, Luther makes the point that Mary comes from the descendants of King David: “The stem and root is the generation of Jesse or David, in particular the Virgin Mary” (WA 7: 549; AE 21: 301 ff.).

Mary is the teacher who instructs in Luke 1:46–55; but she is even more than a teacher. Mary speaks the truth not only in terms of relating information or fact; rather, she does it properly, in the right order. This makes her the first preacher of the incarnation after the annunciation narrative.³⁵

So, when she sings, she does not do this for herself, but for all of us. What she wants is to extol God, and the source and the foundation of her song is God alone via the Holy Spirit. Because of all of this, Mary is not merely instructing; she is preaching the comforting promise of God. That is her message: giving glory to God.

The other important role of Mary is her example in showing the difference between false and true attitudes in Christianity. She is an exemplar of true humility. She is the one who has experienced the work of God—who regards the lowly—and she praises him for it.³⁶ The great things happening to her did not change her: “she remains the same.” In this regard Mary is similar to other great exemplars in biblical history: David, Peter and Paul, Mary Magdalene, and others.

The role of Mary in the history of salvation finds its most succinct description in the exegesis of the last two verses (54, 55) of the *Magnificat*. At this point the song had reached its “chief thing,” the incarnation. Mary plays a singularly “unique” role

23. In Greek “ἡ ψυχὴν.” Luther translates it as “Seel.”

24. See the catechisms concerning the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer in the Small Catechism (Kolb-Wengert, 357) and the Large Catechism (Kolb-Wengert, 449–52).

25. See Düfel, *Luthers Stellung*, 113, 114; Kreitzer, *Reforming Mary*, 52; foreword of Brandenburg in Martin Luther, *Das Magnifikat*, 19.

26. As Luther was a strong supporter of the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon, the use of “mother of Christ” bears no connection with support of Nestorian teaching, as it might look at the first glance.

27. WA 7: 546, 549, 556, 559, 560, 561 (*zerte junckfraw*), 563, 564, 565, 568, 569, 570 (*selige jungfraw*), 571, 572, 599, and so forth.

28. WA 7: 548 (*zerte mutter Christi*), 549, 554 (*heilig mutter*), 555, 558, 564, 568, 569 (*seiner mutter, selige mutter gottis*), 572 (*gottis mutter, 9x*), 575, 576, 577, 578, 581, 590 (*dieser mutter*), 592, 595, 597, 599 (*zerte mutter*), 601 (*seiner lieben mutter*), 602, and so forth.

29. Presentation of Daniel Olivier in Martin Luther, *Le Magnificat* (Paris: Nouvelle cité, 1983), 13 ff.

30. See Tappolet, *Das Marienlob*, 22.

31. WA 7: 548–49, 559–60, 564; AE 21: 301–2, 312–13, 317.

32. AE 21: 312, in the Greek text “τὴν ταπεινωσιν” ‘humility,’ in Luther's translation “*nichttikeit*” (WA 7: 559); see the translation of the 1522 edition “*nidrickeit*,” and of 1546 edition “*elend*” (WA DB 6: 212, 213).

33. Luther holds to this explanation also in other works (see Kreitzer, *Reforming Mary*, 31).

34. WA 7: 559–60, 561, 564, 567–68; AE 21: 312–13, 314, 317, 321.

35. Kreitzer, *Reforming Mary*, 47.

36. WA 7: 546; AE 21: 299, and so forth; see James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 166.

with “no equal,” because she was “a woman, a virgin, of the tribe of Judah,” and in that way was the “one of his (Abraham’s) daughters” to bear the Seed, Jesus Christ. She is the prophesied virgin through whom Christ will enter the world. And she became the “cheerful guest chamber and willing hostess to so great a Guest.”

Because of this work of God through Mary, “she also kept all these things forever.” She rightly prophesies that “all generations will call me blessed.” Thus the history of salvation shows that people have “crowded all her glory into a single word”: Mother of God.

Mary is an example for God’s work in human beings and their response to it, that is, their piety.

An examination of Mariological boundaries looks right away to the opening of *The Magnificat*, which begins with an intercession to Mary: “May the tender Mother of God herself procure for me the spirit of wisdom profitably and thoroughly to expound this song of hers. . . . To this may God help us.” A similar note concludes the work: “May Christ grant us this through the intercession and for the sake of his dear Mother Mary!”

These prayers may send a serious signal. None of them, however, are directed solely to Mary without turning to God. Luther’s language, “procure for me,” and “through intercession and for sake of his dear mother Mary,” has its roots in late medieval praxis, but he speaks it from an emerging evangelical mindset. It is no longer congruent with the Roman piety of the time.³⁷

The Magnificat offers several instances where Luther explores the theme of the virgin mother (*Almatheme*).

First, there is the discourse in the preface, which places Mary in the social context of her home town and society, with its sole mention of Mary as virgin and mother.

Second, Luther returns to the matter after his description of the piety of Mary in which he notes that “she does not desire herself to be esteemed; she magnifies God alone and gives all glory to him. She leaves herself out and ascribes everything to God alone, from whom she received it.” Here and in the following paragraphs the title “Mother of God” is a sign constantly pointing to God: “She lets God have his will with her and draws from it all only a good comfort, joy, and trust in God.” It is not from her, but “through the work God had done within her.”

Third, a little later there comes another short mention of the virtue of the Mother of God, who “clings only to God’s

goodness” and “neither takes pleasure nor seeks her own enjoyment in it.”

Fourth, the *Almatheme* is methodically developed with the exegesis of verse 48. Luther starts again with the lowliness of Mary and rehearses the work of God that leads to her exaltation, again, all as the result of God’s action. “She gloried . . . only in the gracious regard of God.”

Fifth, Luther’s admiration for the ability of the holy virgin to point to nothing “except her low estate” and through that “to know God aright” introduces a more profound description about Mary on the basis of verses 48 and 49. This provides the most extensive and important section of *The Magnificat* for Mariology through its frequent focus on Mary herself:

- ◆ Luther notes that “Mary begins with herself and sings what he (God) has done for her. Thus she teaches a twofold lesson. First, every one of us should pay attention to what God does for him,” and second, that “she teaches us that everyone should strive to be the foremost in praising God by showing forth the works he has done to him, and then by praising him for the works he has done to the others.” Thus Mary is an example for God’s work in human beings and their response to it, that is, their piety.
- ◆ Luther next picks up the theme of Mary herself. It is because God “regarded her” that this forms “all the rest” to depend on, because “for this one thing alone, that God regarded her, men will call her blessed.” In doing so, these people (Christians) will “give all the glory to God as completely as it can be done.” However, by so doing, “not she is praised thereby, but God’s grace towards her. In fact, she is despised, and she despises herself in that she says her low estate was regarded by God.”
- ◆ This leads to the conclusion, “What do you suppose would please her more than to have you come through her to God . . . and learn from her to put your hope and trust in him.” For “she does not want you to come to her, but through her to God.” In that regard she is like other beautiful examples of salvation history, “David, St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Mary Magdalene, and the like” (WA 7: 569; AE 21: 323).³⁸
- ◆ Luther then turns to the timeless value of the historical event that happened to Mary: “There will never be a time when she will not be praised” with “the honor that is her due,” the only exception being the “wicked Christians” who “blaspheme her or scorn to call her blessed” (WA 7: 570; AE 21: 324).
- ◆ With the statement that the Mother of God has a “unique role in the whole of mankind, among which she has no equal,” Luther leads the reader to another level of the *Almatheme* in his *The Magnificat*. The glory of the work of God in Mary is “crowded . . . into a single word, calling

37. Düfel, *Luthers Stellung*, 134.

38. It would sound rather strange in this context to find Mary to be the first teacher of the gospel (*premier docteur de l’Evangile*) (presentation of Olivier in Luther, *Le Magnificat*, 10).

her the Mother of God" (WA 7: 572; AE 21: 326).³⁹ In this sequence Luther reaches the zenith of his Mariological definitions with statements like "she was without sin," and "we ought to call upon her," with a little direction to the other saints as well: "Thus also all other saints are to be invoked."

- ♦ However, these statements do not stand alone. Therefore, to quote them outside the broader context would probably give a misleading impression, because these assertions are framed in the God- and Christ-centered statements mentioned above. For example: "Mary also freely ascribes all to God's grace, not to her merit . . . grace (that) was far too great for her to deserve it in any way. . . . She says her low estate was regarded by God, not thereby rewarding her for anything she had done. . . . Never in all her life did she think to become the Mother of God, still less did she prepare or make herself meet for it." Mary, Luther summarizes, "does nothing, God does all." In this way he shows his understanding and teaches how Mary's calling in daily life itself shows a dramatic move away from many medieval treatments of the saints.

Sixth, after these arguments Luther refers to Mary only briefly and does not develop the *Almatheme* further with the exception near the end of the description of the "very greatest of all God's works—the Incarnation of the Son of God." There Luther traces very briefly the salvation history in the Old Testament from Abraham and God's promise to him concerning the Seed to come.

Seventh, in the more developed Mariological part of *The Magnificat* (the material under "fifth" above) Luther explicitly turned against false Mariology and even Mariolatry. Here Luther stresses again that there is not "any merit in her, but solely . . . by reason of his grace."

The false admirers of Mary are rejected: they neither find in her nor desire from her "anything of high degree," and turn her into the one with "nothing to be despised, but only great and lofty things." As a result they compare "us with her instead of her with God," and "they deprive us of her example, from which we might take comfort; they make an exception of her and set her above all examples. But she should be, and herself gladly would be, the foremost example of the grace of God" (WA 7: 569; AE 21: 323).⁴⁰

This is where Luther expresses his caution about the title "Queen of Heaven." This line of thought ends with the illation

that "now we find those who come to her for help and comfort, as though she were a divine being, so that I fear there is now more idolatry in the world than ever before." A similar statement follows later that "Mary does not desire to be an idol; she does nothing, God does all."

Throughout the examination of the *Almatheme* in *The Magnificat*, one can see that in his statements concerning Mary Luther stays within the boundaries drawn by the Scriptures. Nevertheless, his stance is twofold.

He extols the work of God to and through Mary and he admires the unique role attributed to Mary by God alone. However, there are at least two instances where Luther follows a more exaggerated pattern, and apparently is positioning himself according to medieval piety rather than the evidence of the Scriptures. However, when these statements are seen in both the narrower context of their location and the broader context of *The Magnificat*, their interpretation demands that they should be viewed in the milieu they have been placed and not outside it.

This is where Luther expresses his caution about the title "Queen of Heaven."

Some authors see in *The Magnificat* Luther's turn from the external and bodily veneration of saints to the inner or "true veneration of the saints" when "God is venerated in the saints"⁴¹ (although the work begins with a kind of invocation of Mary, throughout it Mary is only "the model for believers" and "the example of God's action"⁴²) and therefore Luther's Mariology already is connected to and even subordinated to his "doctrine of justification."⁴³ Another view concerning *The Magnificat* (in the words of a Roman Catholic author) is that "it fails to do justice to her exalted virtues or to her position as the advocate of Christendom before the throne."⁴⁴

Conclusion

Mariology is not the main focus of *The Magnificat* nor does *The Magnificat* define Luther's position with respect to Roman Catholic Mariology.⁴⁵ To call *The Magnificat* the gospel coming from Mary rather than Jesus does not reflect its essence.⁴⁶ The

39. Luther writes "into a single word" (*in einem wort*), which has its closest connotation with the Greek title for Mary of *theotokos* rather than any other Marian term that could be translated as "gottis mutter" used here by Luther. This can be regarded as quite strong evidence for indicating a reference to the Council of Ephesus (431) and its decision and for the christological intention of the term in Luther's teaching. See AE 21: 326, footnote 26.

40. See "does not make her a goddess who could grant gifts or render aid, as some suppose when they pray and flee to her rather than to God" in WA 7: 573 ff.; AE 23: 427 ff.

41. Brecht, *Martin Luther, 1483–1521*, 153.

42. *Ibid.*, 387.

43. Hartmann Grisar, *Martin Luthers Leben und sein Werk* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1926), 210; Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, 166.

44. Grisar, 210 (*sic*; this is a Roman Catholic author writing before Vatican II).

45. Albert Greiner's preface to Luther, *Le Magnificat*, 6.

46. David Olivier's presentation to Luther, *Le Magnificat*, 9.

Almatheme statements reflect both scriptural teaching and the heritage of church history. The message of *The Magnificat* itself requires examination both in the context of the work itself and all its theological thoughts.

THAT JESUS CHRIST WAS BORN A JEW

Although *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* is considered to deal more with questions concerning the Jewish people,⁴⁷ Luther wrote it to inveigh against accusations that he denied the virgin birth. Though one has to conclude that this work does not belong among the body of writings by Luther that are of primary importance, it is still worthy of analysis.

Introduction to *That Jesus Christ Was born a Jew*

During the imperial Diet in Nürnberg (1522) rumors were circulating that Luther was teaching that Jesus was a natural son of Mary and Joseph, and was in that way denying the virginity of Mary before and after Jesus was born.

Luther sides with Jerome with respect to the virginity of Mary before and after the conception of Jesus.

That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew was written in the first half of 1523. Presumably, the writing itself started not long after Luther's expressed intention to do so in a letter to Spalatin (22 January 1523), but the date of publication of the first edition is not exactly known (WA 11: 307; AE 45: 198). Luther indicates at the beginning: "I am compelled to answer these lies. I thought I would also write something useful in addition, so that I do not vainly steal the reader's time with such dirty rotten business."

Luther dedicated *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* to a baptized Jew named Bernard (originally Rabbi Jacob Gipher from Göppingen). Not much else is known concerning Bernard apart from the fact that he lived in Schweinitz and that Luther had participated in the baptism of Bernard's son in March 1523.⁴⁸ This work, which belongs to the early phase of Luther's works, also shows care, openness, and interest to adherents of the Jewish belief (Judaists).

The *Almatheme* in *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*

Luther uses various titles for Mary in *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*. She is called a *Jungfraw* (virgin), but Luther uses the title *Mutter Gottis* much more often. When Luther writes

about Isaiah 7:14 he comments on the term "virgin" and compares it to *Magd* (maid). His comments will be dealt with in the following paragraphs surveying the Old and New Testament in the work.

In this work there are only some indirect hints to Mary's biography and nothing apart from the information that is rather clearly expressed by the Scriptures. At least two facts can be mentioned: the assurance that Mary is a descendant of Abraham through David's line and that she was married to Joseph, but that their marriage was not consummated.

In addition to answering his accusers, Luther intended that his writing serve to evangelize "Judaists" and "win some Jews to the Christian faith," especially on the basis of the Old Testament. The Old Testament evidence starts with Genesis 3:15, the *protevangelium*, where "Christ is promised for the first time." There Christ is described as the "seed of the woman." The "woman" is his mother, that is, Mary. This is "the first passage in which the mother of this child is described as a virgin." Moreover, the term "seed of the woman" signified for Luther that there would be no male involvement; rather, the seed would come "through a special act of God." On the basis of the *protevangelium* all Old Testament believers trusted this "blessed seed of the woman" and "were sustained through faith in Christ, just as we are" and, as a consequence "they were true Christians like ourselves."

The argumentation continues with Genesis 22:18. There again mention is made of God's promise and "seed" that will bring his blessing to the Gentiles. Here Luther again finds Mary's virginity and purity mentioned. Luther finds support in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians (4:4), where Paul also speaks of Christ being "born of a woman" and explains it as a reference to the virgin birth, where "no one but a woman was involved" and "no man participated."

Luther turns briefly to 2 Samuel 7:12–14 and notes that "the whole passage must refer to Christ." Yet he does not go into detail, for "it is too broad and requires so much in the way of exegesis" (WA 11: 320; AE 45: 206).

The most extensive treatment of the matter is made in connection with Isaiah 7:14.⁴⁹ There the main concern of Luther is to argue that the term *alma* (young woman) is synonymous with *bethula* (virgin), or *parthenos*, as the Septuagint renders it, and as it is consequently translated in Matthew 1:23. This discussion is elaborated by Luther elsewhere, too.⁵⁰

Luther not only believed, but also tried to prove that Isaiah 7:14 is about Mary, and he firmly stated that the evidence of the Old and New Testament supports the virgin birth.⁵¹ Although current philological understandings of *alma* do not agree,⁵² *alma* was even clearer than the term *bethula* would

47. WA 11: 325; AE 45: 213; Lohse, *Martin Luther*, 100, 117.

48. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defending the Reformation, 1521–1532* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 113.

49. NRSV, God speaks to the prophet: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman (LXX: virgin) is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." See 1.1.2. on Is 7:14.

50. For Luther's other polemic references WA 42: 144, 145. See Tappolet, *Das Marienlob*, 20; Düfel, *Luthers Stellung*, 212, and so forth.

51. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532–1546* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 347.

52. Brown, *Mary in the New Testament*, 92.

be for Luther, because scriptural evidence describes a young, unmarried woman without sexual experience (WA 11: 322; AE 45: 208, 209).⁵³

Luther sees in Matthew 1:23 and its reference to Isaiah 7:14 a clear affirmation of the virginal conception of Christ by Mary. Luther's certainty is based on Matthew and Luke, "for God the Holy Spirit speaks through St. Matthew and St. Luke" and therefore "we can be sure that he understands Hebrew speech and expressions perfectly well." In a more detailed comparison of the two terms *alma* and *bethula*, Luther argues that the use of *alma* is even better than *bethula*, because *alma* is always at the same time the virgin or woman without a previous sexual relationship; and *alma* "includes not only the virginity, but also the youthfulness and the potential for childbearing." Luther additionally declares that to dispute the matter is ridiculous in view of the facts already mentioned.

The catechisms and the Smalcald Articles are especially important for evaluating Luther's Mariological convictions.

In examining Matthew 1:18, 25, Luther sides with Jerome with respect to the virginity of Mary before and *after* the conception and birth of Jesus (WA 11: 323 ff.; AE 45: 210 ff.).⁵⁴ In this regard he analyzes the force of ἕως (until) in the phrase "and [Joseph] knew her not *until* she gave birth" as only stipulating Joseph's abstentions from sexual intercourse in the time before the birth. Luther saw no inference that "Mary, after the birth of Christ, became a wife in the usual sense; it is therefore neither to be asserted nor believed" (WA 11: 323 ff.; AE 45: 210 ff.).⁵⁵ For Luther, both the Old and the New Testament evidence contains a clear message of the way Jesus was to be conceived in the womb of a virgin and born of a virgin. In addition, Mary remained perpetually virginal.

53. See the recent confessional Lutheran Old Testament introductions and exegesis: Horace D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1979), 203; Uuras Saarnivaara, *Can the Bible be Trusted?* (Minneapolis: Osterhus, 1983), 393; Andrew E. Steinmann and others, eds., *Called to be God's People* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 511, 512.

54. Luther used the argumentation of Jerome to defend the perpetual virginity of Mary challenged by the scriptural references to Jesus' brothers (Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 118).

55. See WA 42: 179, where Luther elaborates the scriptural use of the [d'y: / (γινωσκω) "to know," in a way similar to the tradition of the early church (Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation* [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963], 13). However, many confessional Lutherans do not feel obliged to follow Luther in this matter because of the weakness (or even lack) of scriptural evidence for it (John Schaller: *Biblical Christology: A Study in Lutheran Dogmatics* [Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1981], 92).

The boundaries of Mariology in *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* make Luther's attitude toward Mary clearer. Comparing this work to *The Magnificat*, one can observe that *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* offers no evidence of Marian piety in Luther such as regarding her as intercessor.⁵⁶

The most important reason why Luther wrote this work is to answer the question of the virgin birth or Mary's virginity before the conception and during the pregnancy, which was the chief accusation against Luther. Although equal importance is given to the perpetual virginity of Mary, it is elaborated much less than the questions pertaining to the virgin birth of Jesus. This is due to the fact that the virgin birth of Jesus, due to the virginity of Mary before the conception and during pregnancy, is easier to establish than her perpetual virginity because "the Scripture stops with this, that she was a virgin before and at the birth of Jesus" and "after the child is born they (evangelists) dismiss the mother."

The intention is to invite discussion with the Jews, and for that purpose only the Scripture (and predominantly the Old Testament) is used. Because of the lack of direct Scripture evidence for the perpetual virginity, it is mentioned just a few times throughout the work.

Another important aspect of the work is its rebuke to and description of unbiblical and even unchristian Mariologists. This surfaces in rather short but sharp sentences:

Now just take a look at the perverse lauders (*verkereten preyßer*) of the mother of God. . . . These stupid idolaters (*unverstendigen goßen*) do nothing more than to glorify only the mother of God . . . and practically make a false deity (*abgott*) of her.

This is Luther's reaction to those who do not comprehend the God who gives, and Mary who through his giving obtains.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the work *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew* was written in order to answer the accusations and reject the false claims precisely in regard to Luther's teaching about Mary, it deals surprisingly little with her. It is impossible to find developed statements and well-elaborated arguments on this theme. In fact, it does not even make specific claims regarding Mary, apart from the biblical facts concerning her. Therefore, although the work itself was intended as a response to accusations regarding the christological aspects concerning Mary, it focuses on Christology itself and only briefly touches questions more directly pertaining to Mary.

**ALMATHEME IN LUTHER'S WORKS INCLUDED
IN THE BOOK OF CONCORD**

The catechisms and the Smalcald Articles are especially important for evaluating Luther's Mariological convictions and his teaching and beliefs, due to the fact that each of them takes a

56. See WA 7: 545–601; AE 21: 298–355.

very special place in Luther's heritage. They belong among Luther's core works both in Luther's self-evaluation and also from Luther research.

The Catechisms

Luther's catechisms play a very important role in Lutheran identity because the Small Catechism, together with the Augsburg Confession, is the most widespread Lutheran confessional document approved in different church bodies adhering to the Lutheran heritage.⁵⁷

Luther considered education a very important part of Christian preaching. It was customary for him to dedicate time to the basic catechetical themes, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer as early as 1516, especially during Lent.⁵⁸

Luther mentions Mary only in connection with Jesus Christ's humanity.

Starting from the first years of the Reformation Luther had elaborated different devotional materials. Among these were expositions of the Psalms (1517), several sermons (1519), and expositions of some basic parts of the Christian teaching (the Lord's Prayer, 1519 [WA 6: 9 ff., 20 ff.]). To address the needs of the laity Luther had published *Eine kurze Form der Zehn Gebote, eine kurze Form des Glaubens, eine kurze Form des Vaterunsers* (Short Form of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer) in 1520 based on his previously prepared sermons with catechetical themes.⁵⁹ This booklet speaks about Mary in dealing with the Creed and its witness concerning Jesus: "*reynen jungpfrawen Marien*" (WA 7: 217). These writings served as a replacement for Roman prayer books (AE 43: 6).

Throughout the initial phase of the Reformation people were desperately lacking simple devotional literature. The devotional booklet of 1520 served as the point of departure for Luther's more expanded private prayer booklet (*Betbüchlein*), which was intended, along with his postils created at the Wartburg (WA 10, II: 331) and compiled in 1522 (with a revised edition in 1525), for catechetical use.⁶⁰ It is probable that Luther was motivated to write such a piece by the first evangelical prayer book edited by Georg Spalatin, in which he felt it necessary to add the *Ave Maria* (as Spalatin had done) to the other catechetical material;

however, the warning not to replace God with Mary is found next to the *Ave Maria* (WA 10, II: 344, 345).⁶¹

This booklet was so popular that it had at least nineteen editions in the first four years, and many more after that. Over time there were other additions made to these editions, including parts of the Bible translated by Luther. Nevertheless, the importance of this prayer book diminished after the appearance of the Small Catechism in 1529, which eventually took the place of the booklet (AE 43: 7).

The Large Catechism was written as the pastors' and laypersons' instruction book covering the very basics of Christian theory and praxis, "designed and undertaken for the instruction of children and the uneducated people" (WA 30: 129; Kolb-Wengert, 383).

Considering its influence on a wide circle of pastors and laypersons, one might be surprised that Luther dedicated an insignificant part to Mary. She is mentioned in the introduction and second preface, where the key articles of the Christian faith are listed. Her name appears in the twelfth paragraph of this preface, and in the Apostles' Creed: "born of the Virgin Mary" (*geboren aus Maria der Jungkfrauen*) (WA 30: 130; Kolb-Wengert, 384).

The next place where Mary is mentioned is in the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed. Once again, she is just briefly touched upon with the text "born of Mary the virgin" (*geboern von der Jungfrawen Maria*) (WA 30: 185; Kolb-Wengert, 434). The following explanation contains the last mention of Mary in the Large Catechism, where Luther speaks of her again rather briefly "born without sin, of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin" (*von dem heiligen geist un der Jungfrawen on alle sunde empfangen und geboren*) (WA 30: 186, 187; Kolb-Wengert, 434). Despite the opportunity these references opened to elaborate more on the *Almatheme*, Christ is the sole focus for Luther here.⁶²

Luther wrote the Small Catechism at the end of 1528 and the beginning of 1529.⁶³ It was mainly intended as a visual and educational aid for teaching purposes and was initially published not in a booklet or any other handy size but rather as posters for schools and churches. Surprisingly little attention is paid to Mary in the Small Catechism. She is mentioned exclusively with the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed. There she is found in the text of the Creed "born of the virgin Mary" ([on tablet:] *geboren von der jückfrowen Maria*/ [in booklet:] *gebaren van der Junckfrouwen Maria*) (WA 30: 248)⁶⁴ and in the explanation of it in the following paragraph: "born of the virgin Mary" ([on tablet:] *von de jückfrowen Maria geborn*/ [in booklet:] *van der Junckfrouwen Maria gebaren*) (WA 30: 249).⁶⁵

The Small Catechism contains additional appendices concerning the daily prayers, household duties, marriage, and baptismal booklets. None of them contain any mention of the

57. Günther Gassmann and Scott Hendrix, *Fortress Introduction to the Lutheran Confessions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 19, 37, 185 ff.

58. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther, 1521–1532*, 273.

59. WA 7: (194) 204–29; Pēteris Vanags, *Luterāņu rokasgrāmatas avoti: Vecākā perioda (16. gs.–17. gs. sākuma) latviešu teksti* [Latvian Texts from the Earliest Period: 16th–early 17th Century: Sources of the Lutheran Manual] (Rīga: Mantojums, 2000), 327.

60. Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen, eds., *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 1.

61. See Düfel, *Luthers Stellung*, 141.

62. Düfel, *Luthers Stellung*, 268. See similar Mariology in *A Booklet of Laity and Children*, the work of an unknown author most probably from Wittenberg in Kolb and Nestingen, *Sources and Contexts*, 5.

63. Kolb-Wengert, 311. See Gassmann and Hendrix, *Fortress Introduction*, 18.

64. See another publication of the same year, 295, and from year 1531, 365.

65. See another publication of the same year, 295, and from year 1531, 365, 366.

mother of Jesus Christ and therefore will not be within the scope of this article.

Mary is mentioned exclusively in direct connection with Jesus Christ and, more particularly, his true humanity. Although Luther's catechisms stand in the legacy and context of medieval Christianity where the *Ave Maria* was part of the core — together with the Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer⁶⁶ — in his most significant works written for the sake of Christian teaching and praxis Luther mentions Mary only in connection with Jesus Christ's humanity (birth of woman, virgin). As he put in his Small Catechism some other parts from the Roman Breviary, like the morning and evening prayers and grace at table,⁶⁷ it appears that his omission of the most influential prayer to Mary (*Ave Maria*) was intentional,⁶⁸ and as such it sends signals about Luther's attitude towards Mariology.

The Smalcald Articles

The Smalcald Articles were written at the demand of the elector of Saxony for a possible council in Mantua (planned for 1537). In addition, after Luther's confession concerning the Lord's Supper (*Bekennntnis vom Abendmahl Christi*, 1528 [WA 26: (241) 261–509]), the elector wished to have and be able to present Luther's personal teachings systematically along with the general theological direction of the whole movement.

For an evaluation of Luther's theological views, the Smalcald Articles play a very important role, mainly because Luther himself has called it his theological deposition and testament or "testimony and confession" (*Zeugnis und Bekennntnis*).⁶⁹ The same viewpoint is found in the first imprint of the Smalcald Articles (1538), where Luther again qualifies them as "*mein zeugnis und bekenntnis*" (WA 50: 160).

There is one aspect to be kept in mind concerning the authorship of the Smalcald Articles. The document itself was Luther's teaching; however, it was elaborated by a group of theologians (Philipp Melancthon, Justus Jonas, Nicholas von Amsdorf, Caspar Cruciger Sr., and so forth) assisting Luther. In this way it bears both Luther's personal beliefs and the theological characteristics of the Wittenberg theologians.

Mary is mentioned twice in the Smalcald Articles. The first and more important reference is made in the first major part of the articles, "articles of the divine Majesty" (*Hohen Artikeln der gottlichen Majestät*), which deal both with the Trinity and the separate persons of the Godhead. After the definitions of the Trinity, Luther takes up the Person of Jesus Christ and states:

Daß der Sohn sey also Mensch worden, das er vom heiligen Geist on menlich Zuthun empfangen und von der reinen heiligen Jungfraw[en] Maria gep[b]orn sey (WA 50: 197, 198).⁷⁰

That the Son became a human being in this way: he was conceived by the Holy Spirit without male participation and was born of the pure, holy virgin Mary.

The reference made to Mary follows the New Testament teaching and the confession of the early church. For Luther (and also for his coworkers) it would be impossible to speak about the humanity of Christ and omit mentioning Mary.

A rather important piece of evidence, although without mentioning Mary by name, is the theme about the invocation of the saints added to the Second Article of the Second Part (concerning "the office and work of Jesus Christ"). Due to the fact that it is not found in Luther's own notes and appears in the printed edition along with the other parts (WA 50: 210, 211), as well as in reports of some discussions, some think that it was introduced into the work by the group helping Luther with the Smalcald Articles (*BSLK*, xxiv).

The added word semper is lacking in the German original written by Luther.

Nevertheless, this considerably smaller section in the work forms an integral part to it and Luther has approved it as his together with the whole document. This section could be defined as rather harsh in its attitude towards the invocation of saints as it characterizes this practice as "one of the abuses of the Antichrist" and defines it to be in "conflict with the first, chief article," calling it "idolatry" (WA 50: 210; *BSLK*, 424, 425; Kolb-Wengert, 305, 306). The section encourages intercessory prayer by Christians, but to call upon the saints in heaven "is neither commanded nor recommended, has no precedent in the Scripture, and — even if it were a precious possession, which it is not — we have a thousand times better in Christ." (WA 50: 210; *BSLK*, 424; Kolb-Wengert, 305).

The other marginal note in the Smalcald Articles is a reference taken from the prenatal narrative of Luke 1: . . . *noch ohn Mariä Stimm (Johannes, der Täufer) in seiner Mutter Leibe sprang.* [. . . nor did he (John the Baptist – V.L.) leap in his mother's womb without Mary's voice.]⁷¹ This reference is a textual illustration by Luther and is of no consequence for Mariological content or its evaluation in Luther's works.

Before turning to the conclusions, there is one further relevant note to be made concerning the references to Mary in the Smalcald Articles.

66. Gassmann and Hendrix, *Fortress Introduction*, 43.

67. Lull, *Basic Theological Writings*, 490, 491, footnotes 3 and 5.

68. Gassmann and Hendrix, *Fortress Introduction*, 43.

69. *BSLK*, SA preface, 4, 409; Kolb-Wengert, 295, 298; cf. Gassman and Hendrix, *Fortress Introduction*, 42.

70. Square brackets show the difference of text added/changed in the print edition compared to Luther's notes.

71. Reference to Lk 1:41–44 (*BSLK*, 456; Kolb-Wengert, 323).

Frequently in (confessional) Lutheran circles a reference is made to the perpetual virginity attributed to Mary in the Smalcald Articles. It comes from the Latin translation of the Smalcald Articles, where in the “articles of the divine Majesty” (*Hohen Artikeln der gottlichen Majestät*) the first part of the above-mentioned fourth point has an addition “*ex Maria pura, sancta, semper virgine nascetur*.”⁷² The added word *semper* is lacking in the German original written by Luther, both in his notes and the published document (WA 50: 198). The translation prepared by Nicolaus Selnecker was done before the printing of the Book of Concord (1580). Although it is credible enough, it was done after Luther’s death (1546). Nevertheless, the Latin addition is more important in the context of the Book of Concord, where both languages are considered to be of equal importance. This addition, however, cannot play a significant role for analyzing Luther’s works.

Conclusion

The Catechisms and the Smalcald Articles occupy a very important place in the evaluation of Luther’s general theological convictions and beliefs. In fact, they held a very important place in the life of Luther himself and for following generations of Lutherans. Despite the fact that Luther was not a systematic or dogmatic theologian, these works are among the most systematic works by Luther, a fact that increases their value to discern various questions, Mariology included.

None of them bears other messages concerning Mary than the rather necessary notices of her, primarily in the context of Jesus’ humanity. They convey the “essential minimum of Mariology” necessary for Christology, particularly with respect to the humanity of Jesus Christ, but there is nothing more than that. There is no sign of medieval Marian piety or praxis. Ev-

erything revolves around Jesus Christ and salvation provided by his vicarious sacrifice on the cross for the sinner.

In the broader context, Luther’s Mariology is derived from his scripturally based Christology and is an important instrument of this doctrine whenever one returns to Christology, and in particular to Jesus Christ’s humanity. For this mission and role in salvation history Mary deserves a respected place among biblical figures and in the teaching and reflection of every Christian.

On christological grounds, Martin Luther did not spare honor and praise for the one that had carried God in her womb. Luther called Mary “Mother of God,” using a title that was given to Mary at the Council of Ephesus (431).⁷³ For Luther this term was christological.

For Luther Mariology is an adjunct and subordinate to Christology and plays no other role.⁷⁴ Denial of Christ as the son of Mary is equal to rejecting him as the Son of God (WA 42: 110). Overly exaggerated praise to Mary was something Luther was well aware of. Thus, for Martin Luther Mary could not be entitled to more trust and confidence than Christ,⁷⁵ because Christ, and not Mary, is our Mediator.⁷⁶ Sometimes Luther was inconsistent in this regard, both in general lines and in particularities (for example, immaculate conception).⁷⁷ He set borders, but sometimes crossed them himself. For this reason, Luther’s works and separate expressions contain both honor to God’s mercy coming through Mary, with her praising the God who did it, and happiness for Mary as the person to whom it came. LOGIA

72. Lull, *Basic Theological Writings*, 502, footnote 3.

73. AE 21: 326, footnote 26; Beth Kreitzer, “Luther Regarding the Virgin Mary,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 17 (2003): 250, 259 ff.

74. Blancy and Jourjon, *Marie dans le dessein*, 30, 31.

75. Oberman, *Impact of the Reformation*, 243.

76. Tappolet, *Das Marienlob*, 98 ff.

77. Blancy and Jourjon, *Marie dans le dessein*, 30, 32. See the foreword of Albert Brandenburg in Martin Luther, *Das Magnifikat*, 25: “mit einzelnen Lutherzitate kann man viel, wenn nicht alles beweisen, ohne daß man der Wahrheit des Gesamtverständnisses nahekäme.”

COME LET US PLAY GOD

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A Lutheran Understanding of Ethics

The Mind of the Maker

Dr. John T. Pless

Professor, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN

Session II

The Right to Live

It Is Good That You Are Here

Dr. Robert Weise

Professor, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO

Session III

The Right to Die

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Dr. James Bachman

Dean of Graduate Studies, Christ College, Irvine, CA

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The Pauline Phrase “Obedience of Faith” in Aquinas and Luther

DANIEL B. GALLAGHER



THE EXPRESSION “obedience of faith” (*hupakoç pisteòs*) plays a key role in Paul’s Letter to the Romans. The entire body of the epistle can be considered as an inclusion between two occurrences of the phrase: at the beginning of the letter in Romans 1:5, and at the end of the letter in Romans 16:26. In light of its importance, the phrase has generated a great deal of discussion about its precise meaning in its original scriptural context.¹ The expression has become paradigmatic for understanding faith in Roman Catholic theological circles because of its appearance in a crucial passage of the *Divine Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*, promulgated at the Second Vatican Council.² Its inclusion in the *Divine Constitution* was due partly to influential Protestant theologians such as Karl Barth, for whom obedience was a pivotal concept for the proper understanding of faith.³

My present task is to provide an overview of the ways in which Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther used the phrase “obedience of faith” in their respective corpuses. By considering the work of these theologians, I hope to draw attention to some particular ways of interpreting the phrase that antedate the twentieth century. A comparison of these two figures with twentieth-century theologians is beyond the scope of this paper. However, an examination of their respective treatments of the phrase provides a glimpse of the type of biblical exegesis characteristic of the medieval and Renaissance periods and lays the groundwork for a comparison with twentieth-century theology.

Contrary to common opinion, there are several similarities in the methods used by Aquinas and Luther for interpreting the Scriptures, though their respective theological results differ significantly. Whereas Aquinas emphasized that a correct understanding of the natural virtue of obedience was primary to an understanding of the theological virtue of obedience, Luther accents the role of the Holy Spirit in eliciting and perfecting man’s obedience. Consequently, while Aquinas draws special attention to the role of the human will in the act of faith understood as obedience, Luther highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing about obedience in the believer justified by faith.

Looking at each of these theologians in turn, I will begin with an overview of their respective interpretations of the phrase “obedience of faith” in Paul’s Letter to the Romans, and

then examine how they treat the phrase “obedience of faith” in other *loci* of their respective works.

AQUINAS

The paradigmatic definition of faith according to Thomas Aquinas is found in Hebrews 11:1 rather than the Letter to the Romans. Strictly speaking, the notion of “obedience” plays only a peripheral role in Aquinas’s mature understanding of faith, but the notion is by no means absent from his discussion of faith as a supernatural virtue, particularly in its relation to hope and charity. Obedience understood specifically as a virtue is treated more fully within the context of the natural virtues rather than the theological virtues.⁴

Aquinas’s interpretation of “obedience” in Romans 1:5 is striking insofar as he does not attach obedience to the knowledge of God in the sense of *scientia*.⁵ Obedience, both as a natural virtue and as the “obedience of faith,” arises primarily from the faculty of the will rather than the intellect. Grounded in the will, the proper object of obedience is the willingness to act according to the precepts laid down by another.⁶ In article 4 of the *Secunda Secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas asks whether in faith one must believe *aliquid explicite*. Romans 1:5

1. See Don B. Garlington, “The Obedience of Faith in the Letter to the Romans: Part I, The Meaning of *hupakoç pisteòs*,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990): 201–24, and “The Obedience of Faith in the Letter to the Romans: Part II, The Obedience of Faith and Judgment by Works,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 47–72.
2. “*Deo revelanti praestanda est ‘oboeditio fidei’* (Rom 6:26; cf. Rom 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5–6), *qua homo se totum libere Deo committit ‘plenum revelanti Deo intellectus et voluntatis obsequium’ praestando et voluntarie revelationi ab eo datae assentiendo*” (*Dei Verbum*, no. 5).
3. See Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 26–35.
4. See *Summa Theologiae (ST)* II–II, question 104, article 2, ad 2.
5. In reference to the role of the intellect in the act of faith, Aquinas prefers the terms *obsequi* and *obsequium* (Joseph Henchey, “La formula ‘in obsequium’ nel linguaggio di S. Tommaso,” *Angelicum* 69 [1992]: 453–70).
6. The obedience of faith, therefore, is not elicited by a necessity of reason, but rather from a free act of the will. “*In his obedientia locum habet quae voluntarie facere possumus. His autem quae sunt fidei voluntate consentimus, non ex rationis necessitate, cum sint supra rationem, nullus enim credit nisi volens*” (*Super epistolam ad Romanos*, Chapter 1, *lectio* 4).

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is introduced as an objection insofar as the virtue of obedience does not depend upon any explicit content in its exercise.⁷

For the presence of genuine obedience, so the objection runs, it is enough for a person to be in a state of readiness to believe rather than to have accepted a specific objective content leading one to obey God. In the response to the objection, Aquinas does not deny that the virtue of obedience, insofar as it is situated in the will, prescind from a necessitating objective content, but he argues that the content of the objective precept constitutes the object of obedience *per accidens vel consequenter*.⁸ For Aquinas, though the content of divine revelation may in itself compel the intellect, it does not necessitate the response of faith. Rather, the dignity of the human person as a possible believer resides in the capacity to respond freely to God who reveals himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

In Article 3 of Question 4 of the *Secunda Secundae*, Aquinas again introduces the phrase from Romans 1:5 as a possible objection to the idea that charity is the formal principle of faith.⁹ He notes that the will seems to be the human power most proper to faith, and that the virtue most proper to the will in the case of faith is obedience. His response is most interesting in that he distinguishes obedience from the act of faith, a tendency present in much of the exegetical work on Romans 1:5 of the twentieth century.¹⁰ Aquinas answers the objection by asserting that there are virtues such as obedience that antecede the act of faith and which in turn are themselves formed by charity.¹¹ Hence there is no basis for denying charity as the form not only of faith, but indeed of all the other virtues.¹²

In the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas again cites Romans 1:5, this time in response to the objection that Christ himself had faith.¹³ Despite the obscurity of this article

and the ongoing debate concerning the possibility and nature of Christ's faith, this passage is important for understanding Aquinas's interpretation of Romans 1:5 for two reasons.¹⁴ First, Aquinas links the virtue of obedience and its role in the act of faith with the invisible realities toward which both are directed. The merit of faith springs from obedience to God insofar as those things to which the human being assents are invisible. Second, in this passage Aquinas relates Romans 1:5 to its christological counterpart in Philippians 2:8. The argument in the objection is that Christ's obedience was of such a perfection that, though it was not an obedience of faith (for all things were visible to Christ from the moment of his conception), he was able to teach his apostles about faith because of his perfect knowledge of its object demonstrated through his obedience unto death. Consequently, Aquinas interprets the obedience of faith in Romans 16:26 as objective. He asserts that God's *praeceptum* (*epitagmēn* in Romans) is precisely to bring about obedience to the faith.¹⁵

I have already alluded to the key parallel between Romans 1:5 and 16:26. Aquinas was also well aware of a second parallel between Romans 1:8 and 16:19, and his interpretation of "faith" in Romans 1:8 implies that Paul, though well aware of the alacrity with which the Romans first accepted the message preached to them, fears that the obedience concomitant to their faith may be in danger.¹⁶ The faith of the Romans was of such a type as to be exemplary to those who are "inferior." Their faith, however, was imperfect insofar as some members of the community allied their obedience to false teachers, and some were disobedient to the teaching concerning freedom from Jewish ceremonial laws.

In his comments on disobedience in Romans 5:19, Aquinas introduces a distinction between internal and external acts of obedience and disobedience. He refutes the objection that the first sin of man was more that of *superbia* rather than *inobedi-*

7. "... bonum fidei in quadam obedientia consistit: secundum Rom 1:5. ... Sed ad virtutem oboedientiae non requiritur quod homo aliqua determinata praecepta observet, sed sufficit quod habeat promptum animum ad obediendum. ... Ergo videtur quod etiam ad fidem sufficiat quod homo habeat promptum animum ad credendum ea quae ei divinitus proponi possent, adsque hoc quod explicite aliquid credat" (ST II-II, 5, 3).

8. "... virtus obedientiae proprie in voluntate consistit. Et ideo ad actum obedientiae sufficit promptitudo voluntatis subiecta praecipiente, quae est proprium et per se obiectum obedientiae. Sed hoc praeceptum vel illud per accidens vel consequenter se habet ad proprium et per se obiectum obedientiae" (ST II-II, 5, 3, ad 3).

9. "... forma est principium rei. Sed principium credendi ex parte voluntatis magis videtur esse obedientia quam caritas: secundum illud ad Rom 1:5. ... Ergo obedientia magis est forma fidei quam caritas" (ST II-II, 3, 3).

10. See Glenn N. Davies, *Faith and Obedience in Romans: A Study in Romans 1-4* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 30.

11. "... etiam ipsa obedientia, et similiter spes et quacumque alia virtus possit praecedere actum fidei, formatur a caritate ... et ideo ipsa caritas ponitur forma fidei" (ST II-II, 4, 3, ad 3).

12. See ST II-II, 23, 8.

13. "... meritum fidei consistit in hoc quod homo, ex obedientia Dei, assentit istis quae non vidit; secundum illud Rom 1:5 ... obedientiam autem ad Deum plenissime habuit Christus: secundum illud Phil 2:8 ... et sic nihil ad meritum pertinens docuit quod ipse excellentius non impleret" (ST III, 7, 3, ad 3).

14. See Dario Vitali, *Esistenza cristiana: fede, speranza, e carità* (Brescia: Querennia, 2001), 178-98; Franco Giulio Brambilla, *Gesù autore e perfezionatore della fede, in La fede de Gesù* from the *Atti di Convegno di Trento, 26-28 Mary 1998*; George E. Howard, "On the Faith of Christ," *Harvard Theological Review* 60 (1967): 459-65; George E. Howard, "Romans 3:21-31 and the Inclusion of the Gentiles," *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (1970): 223-33; George E. Howard, "The Faith of Christ," *Expository Times* 85 (1973-74): 212-15; Markus Barth, "The Faith of the Messiah," *Heythrop Journal* 10 (1969): 363-70; Arland J. Hultgren, "The pistis Christou Formulation in Paul," *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1980): 248-63.

15. "Unde secundum praeceptum aeterni Dei, qui scilicet aeterno proposito ea quae vult temporaliter facit, quod quidem praeceptum Dei ad obediendum fidei est in cunctis gentibus, id est, ut omnes obediant fidei" (ST III, 7, 3, ad 3). "... (Paulus) ponit ipsum fructum, dicens in obedientiam Gentium, quasi dicat: Gloria mea haec est pro eo quod feci Gentes fidei obedire" (*Ad Romanos*, Chapter 15, lectio 2).

16. "Commendantur autem Romani de fide, quia fidem de facili susceperant, et in eadem firmiter permanebant ... nondum tamen perfectam fidem habebant, quia aliqui eorum praeventi erant a pseudo apostolis ut crederent legis caeremonias evangelio iugendas" (*Ad Romanos*, Chapter 15, lectio 2).

entia by stating that disobedience is nothing other than the earliest inkling of *superbia*. The root of *superbia*, man’s refusal to submit himself to divine decrees, is nothing other than disobedience understood as an internal act.¹⁷ Aquinas concludes by noting that just as the observation of laws pertains to obedience, the transgression of them pertains to disobedience, and the imperfection of the former is made perfect through the perfect obedience of Christ to the law of the divine decree (Phil 2:8).¹⁸

The subjective dimension of obedience is developed further by Aquinas through an explanation of “masters” and “merits.” It is in the very act of obeying that a person manifests his master. To each master, in turn, belongs a specific and unique merit. The one who obeys sin, therefore, becomes its servant in the very act of obeying, and death is its proper and distinctive merit. In obeying God, a person becomes not so much a servant of God (which we are made through grace), but rather a slave to obedience itself; for the more we obey God, the more we will be inclined to obey him.¹⁹

The role of obedience in Aquinas’s theology of faith is specified by his developed teaching on natural virtue and habit. Obedience, though it pertains primarily to the faculty of the will, is initiated through a direct experience of the objective content of faith (that is, God’s revelation as expressed in the Creed). The natural virtue of obedience is a necessary condition for the act of faith, but, because it is a supernaturally infused virtue, faith itself perfects and surpasses natural obedience insofar as it falls under the formal aspect of love.²⁰ Thus Aquinas seems to take the expression “obedience of faith” as the expression of a preliminary and imperfect stage in the act of believing. “Obedience” refers to a relationship between persons rather than to a relation of the believer to a body of doctrine; however, “obedience” does not capture the essence of that relationship which is brought to perfection only in love.²¹

LUTHER

For Martin Luther, obedience is implanted in the human person by the grace of God through the action of the Holy Spirit. It is not so much the preliminary virtuous disposition of the person to accept what God commands as it is the divinely given

capacity of the individual to accept God’s will, regardless of whether the intellect finds the objective content of revelation compelling or not.

In the Wittenberg lectures of 1515–1516 on the Letter to the Romans, the expression “obedience of faith” is by no means taken by Luther to be programmatic of the epistle, but rather as a clarification of how Paul expects his message to be received not only by the Roman community, but by all who hear the gospel message. Jared Wicks notes that, rather than Romans 1:5 and 16:26, the classic passages in which Luther presents his key theological ideas on faith are to be found in Romans 1:17 and 14:23.²²

*It is here that seeds are planted for
a theology of attitudinal obedience
that grew to maturity in Karl Barth.*

Luther’s comments on Romans 1:5 consist in a contrast between faith and wisdom, by which he demonstrates that Paul desires his message to be received through the power and the authority of the word (AE 25: 5). Obedience as an attitude of openness to accept whatever God has planned for us emerges from Luther’s important gloss on Romans 4:3. Abraham exemplifies the dispositions of readiness and steadfastness that are characteristic of the attitude of faith. It is here that seeds are planted for a theology of attitudinal obedience that grew to maturity in Karl Barth.²³ The theme of self-abandonment,²⁴ while not directly linked to the scriptural passages on faith in Luther’s lectures on Romans, also prefigures the identification of self-abandonment and faith that played such a central role in the work of Bultmann.²⁵

In a lengthy commentary on Romans 12:3, Luther includes within the notion of faith developed thus far the subjugation of fleshly desires leading to an absolute fiducial notion of faith (AE 25: 5). Luther here employs the novel expression “obedience to the spirit.” His immediate concern in the present context is the variety of gifts imparted to those who have faith. This passage is noteworthy because it posits the Spirit as the object of faith and for its use of the simile of the principdom to illustrate the different modes of obedience present within the church:

17. “*Sed dicendum est quod, sicut ibidem dicitur (Eccl 10:14), initium superbiae facit homines apostatate a Deo, quia scilicet prima pars superbiae consistit in hoc quod homo non vult subiici praeceptis divinis, quod ad inobedientiam pertinet*” (Ad Romanos, Chapter 5, lectio 5).

18. This is one of the few passages that seem to weaken the subjective aspect of obedience Aquinas has advocated in other places. The divine law or decree stands not only between the believer and God in the act of obedience, but Jesus himself is labeled obedient insofar as he completes the divine decree, the perfect knowledge of which he already possesses. See ST III, 14, 6.

19. “*Qui vero obedit Deo, efficitur huius obedientiae servus: quia per assuetudinem obedienti, mens eius magis ac magis obediendum inclinatur et ex hoc iustitiam perficit*” (Ad Romanos, Chapter 6, lectio 4).

20. ST II–II, 4, 3.

21. ST II–II, 23, 1; 23, 3; 23, 6.

22. Jared Wicks, *Man Yearning for Grace: Luther’s Early Spiritual Teaching* (Cleveland: Corpus, 1968), 107.

23. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1953), IV/1: 164–77, 205–8, 231–58.

24. Wicks, *Yearning for Grace*, 118–23.

25. See Rudolf Bultmann, “Glossen im Römerbrief,” *Exegetica* 24 (1950): 59–71.

For faith is nothing else than obedience to the Spirit. For one man is obedient and believes in this respect, and another man in another respect, and yet all of us are in the one faith. Thus there is one obedience to the prince but still different methods of obedience, so that no one can presume to adopt the method of obedience of another to the neglect of his own method and there be confusion in the city and sedition and rebellion (AE 25: 5).

Much later, Luther returns to this idea of obedience to the Spirit when commenting on an obscure passage towards the end of the Book of Genesis in 49:12. Commenting on Jacob's parting address to his sons, Luther discerns a reference to the promise of Christ who is to come (AE 8: 254). Christ, who is the "Shiloh," is to be obeyed with that obedience of faith mentioned in Romans 1:5 and 10:16. Luther writes that "the kingdom of Christ consists in the obedience of faith, and Paul also calls that very thing the promise of the Spirit" (AE 8: 254). The relationship between obedience and the Spirit explains both the preaching of the word and its acceptance. As is apparent to Luther in the Acts of the Apostles, neither of these is possible without the power of the Spirit. The Spirit impels the missionary zeal of those called to preach the word, and compels those who hear it to accept it in obedience. It seems that by citing both Romans 1:5 and 10:16 in this context, Luther testifies to the fact that the word, if not accepted through the power of the Spirit, ends up being refused all too readily. Obedience comes through the work of the Spirit, "given through Christ to all who hear the Word of Christ and believe in Him" (AE 8: 254).

Luther concludes that "the righteousness of Christ and of the Christian is one and the same, united with each other in an inexpressible way."

Within his lectures on Romans, there is evidence that Luther allows for the interchangeability of "obedience" and "faith" when he adds the genitive *fidei* to obedience in a gloss on Romans 16:19 (AE 8: 130). In his *Commentary on Hebrews* (1517–1518), Luther more openly states that "faith is obedience" (AE 29: 223) as he dwells at some length on the full christological significance of Hebrews 10:5. He strives to harmonize the varying translations available to him. In particular, when he cites Romans 1:5, Luther attempts to reconcile Jerome's "but Thou hast dug out my ears" translated from the Hebrew with the Septuagint's "but a body Thou hast prepared for me" (AE 29: 221). After considering the philological reasons for each translation, Luther effects the reconciliation by equating the Body of Christ perceived by the eyes with the Word of Christ heard by the ears

through a passage from the Gospel of Mark about the healing of a deaf man (Mk 7:34). The opening of the man's ears, brought about through the "ephphatha" uttered by Christ, is nothing other than the opening which "causes one to be obedient and believe" (AE 29: 221). Luther concludes that "what the Septuagint has said about Christ's own body, this the Hebrew text says about the mystical body of Christ" (AE 29: 221). In this single text, Luther not only clarifies the inseparable unity of obedience and faith, but also underlines how Christ's *ephphatha* and the preaching of the word are both aimed towards the obedience which is faith.

Other instances of the expression "obedience of faith" in the American Edition occur in his treatment of baptism in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), in which the phrase expresses the command to act in God's name in administering the sacrament of baptism (AE 36: 63); in his *Sermon on the First Epistle of Peter* (1522), in which true obedience to the word is distinguished from the corrupt usurpation of false obedience by church authorities (AE 30: 30–31); and in his interpretation of a prophetic utterance which predicts the obedience of the Gentiles to confound the disobedience of the Jews (AE 20: 197).

Romans 5:19, on the other hand, does not seem to play an important role in Luther's development of faith as obedience. He uses the passage to support his arguments concerning original sin, but does not refer to the implications of the verse for understanding faith within the disobedience/obedience couplet (AE 25: 296–97). Luther later returns to 5:19 in a *scholium*, by which he demonstrates the presence of a clear doctrine on original sin in this section of Romans (AE 25: 302). He understands verse 19 as not much more than a repetition of the idea expressed in the previous verse. His purpose of illustrating the doctrine of original sin urges him to focus on the contrast between the "one" and the "all" in those verses rather than on their respective compliments. Consequently, the disobedience spoken of in Romans 5:19 is simply another way of expressing the "sin" in Romans 5:18.

Luther nonetheless turns his attention to the trespass/righteousness and disobedience/obedience couplets in Romans 5:18–19 when commenting on Galatians 2:15–16 (AE 27: 222). Connecting the Pauline notion of justification in Galatians to the disobedience/obedience couplet in Romans 5:19, Luther perceives a direct correspondence between obedience (*hupakoç*) and righteousness (*dikaïosunç*). From this and the passage in Galatians, Luther concludes that "the righteousness of Christ and of the Christian is one and the same, united with each other in an inexpressible way" (AE 27: 222).

The accent is placed more heavily on the "obedience" found in Romans 5:19 in Luther's sermons on the Gospel of John (AE 22: 138). Commenting on John 1:16, Luther turns to Romans 5:19 to show how obedience, impossible for us after Adam's sin, is made possible for us through the obedience of Christ. Luther mentions the parallel text of Philippians 2:11 to underscore the death of Christ as the full disclosure of this perfect obedience. Compared to the two previous passages from Luther, this sermon of 1537 draws attention away from disobedience in order to focus more sharply on the subsistence of obedience in Christ.

Charis in John 1:16 is identified with *dikaïosunç* in Romans 5:18 (AE 22: 138). Both are once again related to the work of the Holy Spirit in the obedience of faith: “The Father takes delight in us for Christ’s sake, and through Christ we receive the Holy Spirit and are justified” (AE 22: 239). The obedience of Christ is the source of the grace and justification for the human person. Luther does not explain at this juncture how the obedience of Christ becomes the source of man’s obedience of faith, but it is clear from the gloss on Romans 5:19 that only by grace is Jesus Christ able to obey in a way we are incapable of because of original sin (AE 22: 238).

Unlike Aquinas, Luther contextualizes the phrase “obedience of faith” within his overarching theology of justification so prominently present in his interpretation of Romans 1:17 and its implications for Romans 5:19. To be justified is to become obedient, and to believe is to be justified. The natural virtue of obedience so prominent in Aquinas’s analysis of faith is of little importance to Luther. Rather, putting one’s faith in God entails a gift of obedience from the Spirit empowering that person to accept God’s divine will unconditionally. Thus whereas in Aquinas the supernatural accent was placed on faith, in Luther it is placed on obedience. In short, whereas in Aquinas obedience leads to faith, in Luther faith leads to obedience.

CONCLUSION

Neither the Thomistic position nor the Lutheran position needs to be accepted at the expense of the other. Indeed, much of the biblical scholarship in Romans during the twentieth century opts for a translation of *hupakoç pisteôs* in Romans 1:5 as a genitive of apposition, rendering such translations as “believing obedience” and “the faith that is obedience.”²⁶ If Paul’s intent was to employ *hupakoç* by way of analogy to help his audience better grasp the essence of the faith they had received, perhaps Aquinas’s understanding of the phrase more closely approximates the original meaning. If Paul’s intent was to shed light on the attitudinal disposition of his audience brought about by the work of the Spirit through faith, perhaps Luther penetrates the theological core of the term more acutely. In both cases, the interpersonal and relational aspects of faith are brought to the fore, and in both cases, faith is understood as a continuous and enduring act of the human person under the grace of God. We can only hope that the Pauline notion of obedience will root the theology of faith more deeply in sacred Scripture for all Christian traditions, and continue to foster mutual dialogue among those traditions in the years ahead. **LOGIA**

26. See C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 50.



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Proclamation and Communication in Lutheran Worship Resources

BRIAN HAMER



ONE LUTHERAN PUBLISHER ADVERTISES two worship planning resources side by side in its 2004–2006 catalog: *Proclaim: A Guide for Planning Liturgy and Music* and *Creative Worship for the Lutheran Parish*. Each resource is based on the lectionaries in *Lutheran Worship*, available on diskette or in a ring binder, compatible with most English Lutheran hymnals, and priced in the same range. However, a review of the contents of each resource reveals two different approaches to worship. *Proclaim* provides reflections on the Scripture lessons, listings of the propers, hymn suggestions based on the lessons and the theme of the day, and recommendations for musical repertoire. *Creative Worship* also offers suggestions for hymns and sacred music, but it also provides alternative forms of the propers and ordinaries, claiming to focus the congregation's attention on worship and to build variety into the service.

This article will explore the theological divide in Lutheran doctrine and practice as it is embodied in the Lutheran worship resources *Proclaim* and *Creative Worship*. The first sections of the article will discuss the differences between proclamation and communication, highlight the liturgical legacy of Luther with special focus on his use of hymn paraphrases, and describe the purpose and contents of *Proclaim* and *Creative Worship*. This will lay the groundwork for an analysis of these two Lutheran worship resources based on William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White's *Elements of Style*, O. C. Edwards's *Elements of Homiletic*, and Aidan Kavanagh's *Elements of Rite*.

ST. PAUL VS. THE CORINTHIAN SOPHISTS

St. Paul's conflict with the sophists of his day is a good starting point for comparing communication theories with divine proclamation. The sophists' movement in Corinth brought many of the members of the Corinthian congregation under the spell of polished rhetorical performances ("wisdom of the word," 1 Cor 1:17) as the sophists (from *sophia*: wise, skillful [men]) established themselves as professional thinkers and accomplished orators. As virtuoso public speakers with large followings, the Corinthian sophists were often hired as ambassadors, tutors, administrators, and teachers.

According to historian Bruce W. Winter, the influence of a sophist on a particular town began with an initial visit during

which the sophist gave an example of his rhetorical eloquence. The sophists, always competitive, were anxious to impress their audience by projecting a positive image of themselves, playing on the emotions of the hearers, and convincing their audience of the truth of their arguments. The sophist wished to attract not only young and educated men, but also a wider constituency who might pay to hear his orations in a larger meeting if he passed his preliminary test and received an endorsement from the community. Winter summarizes the possibilities of failure and success which awaited a sophist in his initial visit to a community:

In reality the sophist was on trial, for the citizens who heard him determined his success or failure in that city, the possibility of the latter being high. But those who met with success reaped its fruit: an enhanced reputation and pecuniary gain.¹

St. Paul would have nothing to do with the wisdom of the world and presents a radical critique of the cultural mores of the sophists in 1 Corinthians 1–4. Winter summarizes three critical issues that separated Paul from the Corinthian sophists: status, imitation, and boasting. Paul addressed the Corinthians' self-perception in contrast to their proper status in Christ (1 Cor 1:4–6, 30; 4:8–13). Their status as believers was a gift of God, not an achievement of human eloquence. Paul then redefined imitation, or following, as discipleship in Christ in contrast to loyalty to the sophist tradition (1 Cor 1:10–16; 3:18–23; 4:10–17). Man is on trial, not God or his faithful messengers. Finally, Paul dismissed sophistic boasting in light of certain Old Testament passages which found their fulfillment in Christ (1 Cor 1:17–31; 3:18–23; 4:6–21). The only entity worthy of Christian boasting is the cross of Christ, in spite of its humble status before the world.²

To be sure, St. Paul in no way denies that he is a skillful orator or even a well-educated scholar by secular standards. But the sophists' art of success was antithetical to the word of the cross (1 Cor 1:18). There can be no peace between secular communication theories and divine models for proclamation any more than

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1. Bruce W. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 151.
2. *Ibid.*, 179.

there can be peace between the ways of this world and the cross of Christ. In the spirit of John the Baptist, the faithful preacher must decrease, that Christ and his gifts may increase.

LUTHER VS. KARLSTADT

Paul's conflict with the Corinthian sophists is somewhat parallel to Luther's conflict with his one-time colleague, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt. Both conflicts focused on the difference between divine wisdom and human ingenuity. Luther's circumstance narrowed the focus to the validity of the means of grace. For Karlstadt, the means of grace in general, especially the sacraments, were much too objective and external to warm the human spirit. Luther replied that salvation must come from outside ourselves through the divinely appointed Spirit (preaching), water (baptism), and blood (Lord's Supper), as per 1 John 5:5–8. Luther described Karlstadt's desire to talk about the cross apart from the means of salvation in *Against the Heavenly Prophets*:

With all his mouthing of the words, "Spirit, Spirit, Spirit," he tears down the bridge, the path, the way, the ladder, and all the means by which the Spirit might come to you. Instead of the outward order of God in the material sign of baptism and the oral proclamation of the Word of God he wants to teach you, not how the Spirit comes to you but how you come to the Spirit. They would have you learn how to journey on the clouds and ride on the wind. (AE 40: 147)

To highlight the external role of the gospel, Luther properly distinguished the winning of salvation on the cross from the giving of salvation in the preached gospel:

We treat the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But He has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once and for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world. (AE 40: 213–14)

Karlstadt, however, indicated in his reply to Luther's essay that he was uncertain about the efficacy of the preached word:

The whole gospel of Christ . . . does not consist only of the proclamation of Christ's grace which is shown to be the forgiveness of sins. Rather it [the gospel] is much richer. For there are innumerable goods and treasures in Christ, all of which Christ has acquired for us and wants to communicate to us if we believe in him (Eph 3[:8, 17 ff.]; Ti 2).³

For Karlstadt, the preached word and sacraments were external assurances of the human capacity to merit the forgiveness of sins by contemplating the cross from a distance. Luther, however, located the presence of the crucified and risen One in visible or identifiable means: "Christ on the cross and all his suffering do not avail, even if, as you teach, they are 'acknowledged and meditated upon' with the utmost 'passion, ardor, heartfulness.' Something else must always be there. What is it? The Word, the Word, the Word" (AE 40: 212). Therefore, the believer is not directed to a literal embrace of a nonextant cross of wood in order to receive the gifts of the gospel, but to the real presence of Christ in his word and sacraments:

If now I seek the forgiveness of sins, I do not run to the cross, for I will not find it given there. Nor must I hold to the suffering of Christ, as Dr. Karlstadt trifles, in knowledge or remembrance, for I will not find it there either. But I will find it in the sacrament or gospel, the Word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness which was won on the cross. (AE 40: 214)

PROCLAMATION OR COMMUNICATION?

Exegesis and history combine in the theological discipline known as symbolics, which places two things alongside one another to compare their strengths and weaknesses. In an insightful article entitled "Lutheran Preaching: Proclamation, not Communication," Robert Schaibley discusses both the common and uncommon ground between communication and proclamation. According to Schaibley, there are some common denominators between communication and proclamation that one might call *micro-communication*: enunciation, pronunciation, voice usage, public speaking techniques, and the use of a language that the hearers can understand.⁴ But the similarities end there. Communication operates within a synergistic framework that requires the cooperation of the hearers. Proclamation works within a monergistic context, which requires the presence but not necessarily the cooperation of the hearers. Communication appeals to reflective reasoning for consent. Proclamation does not appeal to reflective reasoning because it delivers a truth which is valid in and of itself, apart from human acknowledgment.

Communication equips the hearer with epistemological power to determine his or her own truth. Proclamation is divine revelation and addresses itself to faith rather than reason. Communication makes the hearer the judge. Proclamation puts the hearer on trial. Communication fails if the hearer disagrees. Proclamation is valid whenever the gospel is spoken as the Holy Spirit creates faith in the hearts of the repentant.⁵

What is at stake in this debate between proclamation and communication? The issue cuts to the core of the gospel as it

3. Ronald J. Sider, ed., *Karlstadt's Battle with Luther: Documents in a Liberal-Radical Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 131.

4. Robert W. Schaibley, "Lutheran Preaching: Proclamation, Not Communication," *Concordia Journal* 18 (1992): 12.

5. *Ibid.*, 13.

debates whether or not the Spirit is giving the entire Christ and all his gifts in the means of grace (St. Paul, Luther) or whether the means of grace are merely external assurances or reminders of the forgiveness of sins (Karlstadt, communication). If the former, then Christ is present for his church in the preached gospel to bestow all his gifts. If the latter, then Christ is not actually present in the means of grace, leaving the church to talk about him from a distance. In the proclamation model, the gifts of Christ are actually being bestowed on the faithful in Christian worship. In the communication model, the preached word merely informs the believer of his status before God. In other words, the gospel is nothing more than a telegram of information. Schaibley describes the proclamation model:

By means of proclamation Lutheran preaching justifies! The act of justification is historically grounded in the cross and resurrection of Christ, propositionally articulated in the inspired text, and relationally connected to the faithful in Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. This same act of justification is delivered to the hearer in the proclamation of the Gospel. It happens in proclamation. The perspective of the justified is altered, reinforced, and sustained in the proclamation.⁶

Schaibley summarizes the church's need for proclamation, not communication:

The hearers need not the sound of culture, but the sound of Christ; not the discussion of the people's felt needs, but the inward stimulation of the depth of sinners' true needs; not a popular, persuasive voice, but an uncompromising prophetic voice; not the current intent of the modern mind, but the original intent of the text. In short, what Lutheran preaching needs to deliver is not "communication" but rather "proclamation."⁷

FORMULA MISSAE (1523) AND DEUTSCHE MESSE (1526)

Luther's *Formula Missae et Communionis* was written at the request of Nicholas Hausmann, Bishop of Zwickau, as a guide to purifying the Latin mass, not a new liturgical order per se. Pastors could use Luther's order as a guide to sanctify the masses already in use. Luther admitted his own reservations about publishing such a work, "partly because of the weak in faith, who cannot suddenly exchange an old and accustomed order of worship for a new and unusual one," and because of the creative license a revised order might provide to "fickle and fastidious spirits who rush in like unclean swine without faith or reason, and who delight in novelty and tire of it as quickly, when it has worn off" (AE 53: 19). Luther's intent with the revised formula was not "to abolish the liturgical service of God completely, but

rather to purify the one that is now in use from the wretched accretions which corrupt it and to point out an evangelical use" (AE 53: 20).

Luther retained the historic structure of word and meal, but omitted any false doctrine from the mass. Most of the deletions concerned the communion liturgy where "almost everything smacks and savors of sacrifice," especially the lack of supremacy given to the words of institution, tucked away in a canonical prayer "just as the ark of the Lord once stood in the idol's temple next to Dagon." Therefore, Luther set out to "repudiate everything that smacks of sacrifice, together with the entire canon, and retain only that which is pure and holy, and so order our mass" (AE 53:25-26).

If the Formula Missae shows Luther's catholic nature, then the Deutsche Messe reveals his evangelical character.

The resulting order was a sacrifice of praise in the mass rather than the Roman sacrifice of propitiation. All the historic ordinaries (*Kyrie, Gloria, Credo*, and others) were retained, as well as external compliments to the gospel such as vestments, candles, incense, and crucifixes. The changes in Luther's formula were primarily in doctrine rather than form. However, the involvement of the congregation in the service was still a point of concern for Luther:

I wish that we had as many songs as possible in the vernacular which the people could sing during mass, immediately after the gradual and also after the *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei*. For who doubts that originally all the people sang these which now only the choir sings or responds to while the bishop is consecrating? (AE 53: 36).

Luther's creative spurt of hymn writing in 1523 and 1524 set the stage for the congregational singing in the *Deutsche Messe*.

If the *Formula Missae* shows Luther's catholic nature, then the *Deutsche Messe* reveals his evangelical character. Liturgical reforms throughout Europe in the early sixteenth century generally provided for preaching in German and singing a few German hymns. This concern for the language of the people comes to the fore in Luther's reforms. Luther intended the *Deutsche Messe* for the unlearned and the young. Yet he would not abrogate or abolish the *Formula Missae*, "for in no wise would I want to discontinue the service in the Latin language, because the young are my chief concern" (AE 53: 63). The Latin liturgy should be continued where it was already in use, especially the schools and universities where Latin was a familiar dialect. Yet Luther also sought a "truly evangelical order" for

6. Ibid., 17.

7. Ibid., 13.

those “who want to be Christians” and might meet together “to pray, to read, to baptize, to receive the sacrament, and to do other Christian works” (AE 53: 63–64). Luther and his colleagues produced metrical hymn paraphrases to be sung alongside or in place of the Latin ordinaries. The resultant order retains the historical shape of the liturgy, but with more opportunities for congregational singing, both as responses to the ordinaries and even in place of some of the ordinaries.

The Deutsche Messe, then, was an expression of the gospel, but not a liturgical mandate.

One example is sufficient to demonstrate Luther’s use of hymn paraphrases. Luther’s German Mass allowed, but in no way mandated, the occasional replacement of the Nicene Creed with Luther’s creedal hymn *Wir glauben*, which is in part a reworking of an older creedal hymn and in part a newly composed hymn. The original text of the hymn appears to have been a Latin paraphrase of both the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.⁸ Luther’s poetic and metrical paraphrase gave the congregation a musical vehicle to learn and express the faith in their own tongue.

However, the long-term implications of Luther’s use of metrical paraphrases of the ordinaries may have been misunderstood. Robin Leaver enumerates three false assumptions that have led to the confusion embodied in the modern day heirs apparent to the *Deutsche Messe*. First, many have assumed that Luther intended the *Deutsche Messe* to be a definitive order, to be slavishly followed by all evangelical Lutherans. However, Leaver cautions that “this assumption both misunderstands Luther’s theology in general and his specific directions in the *Deutsche Messe* in particular.” In Lutheran theology, the divine service is founded on the grace of God and rooted in the forgiveness of sins. It does not require absolute liturgical uniformity, since rites and ceremonies need not be identical. The *Deutsche Messe*, then, was an expression of the gospel, but not a liturgical mandate. “Luther was more concerned that the Gospel principles enunciated in his *Deutsche Messe*, rather than a slavish adherence to its content and detail, should be expressed in evangelical worship.”⁹

Did Luther intend the German Mass to be a definitive order for the celebration of the Eucharist? Luther’s own comments

indicate that he regarded the German Mass as a liturgy of limited value, something “arranged for the sake of the unlearned lay folk” (AE 53: 63), and therefore serving only an interim purpose. If the German Mass or any other order were subject to abuse, then “it shall be straightway abolished and replaced by another” (AE 53: 90). Frank Senn notes that the official church orders of the territorial church supplanted Luther’s early efforts of 1523 and 1526. While these orders “drew on Luther’s liturgical models they were not slavish imitations, and Luther would have been the last person to think that they should be.”¹⁰ And Joseph Herl is certainly correct in saying that Luther, far from giving a liturgical mandate, was basically saying, “This is what we do in Wittenberg; you can take it or leave it.”¹¹

Second, some have assumed that the *Deutsche Messe* superseded the earlier *Formula Missae* and thrust Wittenberg suddenly into the use of the vernacular. However, Luther said: “For in no wise would I want to discontinue the service in the Latin language. . . . I do not agree with those who cling to one language and despise all others.”¹² The history of Lutheran worship from Luther to Bach, for instance, reveals a use of Latin and German, existing alongside one another and in alternation between Latin and German versions of the Creed (to cite but one example) on any given Sunday.

Third, it is often assumed that “the musical elements of the *Deutsche Messe* are not fundamentally integral to its liturgical form and can therefore be ignored.” However, according to Leaver, Luther was critical of attempts to produce vernacular liturgies, most notably Thomas Müntzer’s German service of 1524, a curious attempt to translate the Latin text and retain the traditional music. According to Luther, these attempts at vernacular liturgies “failed to understand the essential musical nature of liturgical worship,”¹³ as Luther himself cautioned:

I would gladly have a German mass today. I am also occupied with it. But I would very much like it to have a true German character. For to translate the Latin text and retain the Latin tone or notes has my sanction, though it doesn’t sound polished or well done. Both the text and notes, accent, melody, and manner of rendering ought to grow out of the true mother tongue and its inflection, otherwise all of it becomes an imitation in the manner of the apes (AE 53: 141).

This article will address the issue of text and tune in more detail in the forthcoming analysis of *Proclaim* and *Creative*

8. Robin Leaver, “Luther’s Catechism Hymns: 3. Creed,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 12 (1998): 80.
9. Robin Leaver, *Luther’s Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 293.

10. Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 1997), 285. Senn further notes that as a priest and pastor in the Evangelical Church, Luther himself probably used the Wittenberg and Saxon Church Orders of 1533 and 1539, rather than using his own orders of 1523 and 1526.
11. Joseph Herl, *Worship Wars in Early Lutheranism: Choir, Congregation, and Three Centuries of Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8.
12. Leaver, *Luther’s Liturgical Music*, 293–94. Leaver cites AE 53: 63.
13. *Ibid.*, 293.

Worship. For now, it is sufficient to say that Luther, far from being a liturgical hack or unscrupulous matchmaker of text and tune, took both the words and the music seriously. Celebrating the legacy of his *Deutsche Messe* is not as simple as mixing and matching readily available texts and tunes. Rather, the sons of the Reformation must give copious attention to text, tune, and context, while filtering all three elements through the catholic and evangelical sensibility of Lutheran theology.

LEIPZIG, LÖHE, AND BEYOND

Luther frequently bemoaned the lack of good German hymns that were available for liturgical use. That was 1523. After the flowering of Lutheran hymnody from 1523 through the Thirty Years' War, a plethora of strong Lutheran hymns was available that proclaimed the right gospel in the mother tongue. The Leipzig church order in the days of J. S. Bach reveals a balance between the catholicity of Latin ordinaries and the evangelical character of German paraphrases. After the Latin introit, the *Kyrie* was sung, usually alternated Sunday to Sunday between the Latin *Kyrie fons bonitatis* sung by the choir and the German *Kyrie, Gott Vater* sung by the congregation. The *Gloria* was intoned by the pastor, followed either by the remainder of the Latin text sung by the choir or *Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr* sung by the congregation. The Latin Creed followed the gospel lesson, intoned by the pastor and continued by the choir. Luther's *Wir glauben* hymn was sung between the cantata and the sermon, allowing for both versions of the Creed, but giving the more traditional and historic position to the Latin text. The rest of the liturgy followed the catholic order with the addition of German hymns, including *O Lamm Gottes*, sung during distribution.¹⁴

What of Luther's heritage in the New World? Two Lutheran agendas from the mid-nineteenth century reveal the tension in Lutheran liturgy over whether or not Luther's *Deutsche Messe*—designed largely as a temporary, catechetical, and linguistic measure—should have a permanent place in Lutheran liturgy on American soil: Wilhelm Löhe's *Agenda* (1844) and the Saxon *Agenda* (1856). Löhe was aware of Luther's principles behind the *Deutsche Messe* and realized that Luther did not intend this form to survive, but supplied it to meet a pressing need. Löhe offered the following critique of Luther's *Deutsche Messe*:

Even though Luther exceeded the boundaries of the reformational approach to liturgy with his *Deutsche Messe* (1526), and set forth on a path other than the one on which he had embarked with the genuinely reformational approach of 1523 [*Formula Missae*], his example did not prove decisive to the extent that one would have followed him wherever he went. At the very least, in a very large number of regional churches [*Landeskirchen*] one refrained from discarding anything wherein a blessing might be found. Notably, there existed too great a dearth in liturgical edu-

cation and that particular insight which was able to scan the entire liturgical field [*des großen liturgischen Ganzen*] of the early church, even among the earliest Lutherans, so that even then many an irreproachable and splendid treasure inherited from ancient times have been cast aside.¹⁵

If Löhe's *Agenda* reflects the heritage of Luther's *Formula Missae*, then the Saxon *Kirchen-Agende* (1856) reflects the heritage of Luther's *Deutsche Messe*. The 1856 book retains the historic structure of the service and the use of Western propers, but it reflects the tension between Latin liturgy and German hymn paraphrases when the church confuses the ordinary (Latin) with the extraordinary (German). The German *Kyrie, Gott Vater* was sung in place of the Greek *Kyrie eleison*. The *Gloria* was intoned by the pastor and followed by all stanzas of *Allein Gott*. The Creed was sung as *Wir glauben* and *Schaffe in mir, Gott* as the offertory. The *Sanctus* remained intact but the *Agnus Dei* was replaced with *Christe, du Lamm Gottes*.¹⁶

In an effort to unify a young church body by adopting one official worship agenda, the Missouri Synod adopted the 1856 Saxon service in convention and effectively suppressed all other *Agenden*, including Löhe's 1844 service.

Luther frequently bemoaned the lack of good German hymns that were available for liturgical use.

The Common Service (1888) embodies the primacy of the historic structure of the liturgy and the secondary place of German hymns once Lutherans in America had an English *textus receptus* of the Latin ordinaries. The entire service, now in English, remained intact according to Luther's *Formula Missae*, with no provision for hymn substitutions, although there were numerous opportunities for evangelical hymns as hymns (rather than substitutions for ordinaries) within the context

14. Carl Halter and Carl Schalk, eds., *A Handbook of Church Music* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 286–87.

15. Wilhelm Löhe, *Der evangelische Geistliche* (vol. 2) in *Gesammelte Werke*, III:2, 251 (translation by John Fenton with gratitude to Dr. Gerald S. Krispin). Quoted in John Fenton, "Wilhelm Löhe's *Hauptgottesdienst* (1844) as Critique of Luther's *Deutsche Messe*," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 64 (2000):135.

16. Halter and Schalk, *Handbook*, 292–93. There is an apparent discrepancy between Halter and Schalk's enumeration of Löhe's *Agenda* and the 1902 English translation. The former (291–92) lists possible hymn substitutions for the *Gloria*, Creed, Offertory, *Agnus Dei*, and *Nunc Dimittis*. However, the 1902 English translation only lists a possible substitution for the Creed (*Liturgy for Christian Congregations of the Lutheran Faith*, 3rd ed., ed. J. Deinzer [Newport, KY, 1902; Reprint: Repristination Press, 1993]). It is possible that Halter and Schalk are listing later innovations to the agenda.

of the service.¹⁷ Within a few decades, the Common Service was adopted by virtually every major Lutheran church body on American soil and is reflected in most Lutheran hymnals today, where the Common Service is the first liturgical port

The editors compare worship planning to a keyboard player who realizes his part from a figured bass line.

of call, with little or no mention of hymnic paraphrases in the liturgy section of the pew editions. Nevertheless, the curious use of hymnic paraphrases as substitutions for the ordinaries, originally intended primarily to transcend a language barrier, survived the sea change to English, largely because of the adoption of the 1856 *Agenda*.¹⁸ Two streams of Lutheran liturgy, the Common Service and the English edition of the *Deutsche Messe*, run side by side in Lutheran worship in America and are indicative of the contents of *Proclaim* and *Creative Worship*.

PROCLAIM

*Proclaim: A Guide for Planning Liturgy and Music*¹⁹ introduces itself to the reader by noting that the publication of hymnals such as *Lutheran Worship* has brought modifications in the church year and the addition of more lectionary readings than were used in previous hymnals. As a result of these changes, “worship leaders, pastors, and musicians alike are faced with new materials with which to plan — new propers, a new lectionary, new seasonal emphases, new hymns—a rich gift indeed! This planning guide is designed to aid in that task.” The editors compare worship planning to a keyboard player who realizes his part from a figured bass line: “The realization of the figures allows for much variety and creative input. Deviating from the figures gives a less than desirable result.” So it goes with those who plan worship: “The lessons, psalms, and hymns do not bind; rather, they free up. Planners are bound only by their insight, ambition, and inspiration.”

After a brief description of the role of church musicians in planning the service, the editors offer an overview of general liturgical resources. *Proclaim* describes the place of the Introit, Gradual, Psalm, Response, Verse, Offertory, Hymn of the Day, distribution music, and daily prayer (Vespers, Matins, and oth-

ers). Each description includes resources for further reading. For example, the section on Introits and Graduals cites works by J. Bender, P. Bunjes, W. Buszin, E. Marten, R. Petrich, and H. Willan. The editors also offer a short summary of wisdom on organizing a choral library, including a list of suggested themes for indexing. The introduction concludes with several exhaustive indices to all Scripture lessons, Psalms, and Hymns of the Day in the *Lutheran Worship* three-year series. A reproducible sample planning sheet for each Sunday gives the pastors and church musicians an easy format to list choral music, organ music, instrumental accompaniment, and participants. The introduction, which is included in each of the three volumes for the three-year lectionary, comprises nearly forty pages of resources and suggestions and is an adequate introduction to the nature and definition of Lutheran worship in its own right.

In short, *Proclaim: A Guide for Planning Liturgy and Music* is true to its title: the purpose of *Proclaim* is to guide the planning of Lutheran liturgy and music towards the proclamation of the right gospel.

CREATIVE WORSHIP

In the spirit of *Proclaim*, *Creative Worship* is also designed to be used with Lutheran hymnals that utilize the one- or three-year lectionaries in *Lutheran Worship* (LCMS), *Lutheran Book of Worship* (ELCA), and *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (WELS). But where *Proclaim* is a guide for planning liturgy and music, *Creative Worship* is a resource for building variety into the service. The introduction is an apt summary of the nature and function of *Creative Worship*:

People of all ages expect a certain amount of variety in every facet of contemporary life. On the other hand, change can be unsettling and even threatening to many people, reflecting a basic human need for consistency and ritual. This need, placed next to the expectation of variety, causes a certain tension, and a new dynamic is introduced into the worship planning process. *Creative Worship* suggests ways of creating variety in Lutheran worship forms on a weekly basis.²⁰

Since *Creative Worship* provides alternative forms for various portions of the liturgy, it will be necessary to print out at least a portion of the service in the worship folder. Therefore, the introduction to *Creative Worship* lists several advantages to printing out liturgy and hymns every Sunday, including focusing the attention of the hearers on worship, building variety into the service (especially by means of liturgical paraphrases which may be sung to familiar tunes), using the worship folder as a teaching tool on the structure of the service, and encouraging the hearers to use the folder as a take-home devotional tool.

A short introduction entitled “Using This Resource” offers a brief summary of the contents of *Creative Worship* and a few

17. Halter and Schalk, *Handbook*, 296–97.

18. *Lutheran Hymnal Project Field Test Materials 2002*, prepared by the Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (February 2002), 10.

19. *Proclaim: A Guide for Planning Liturgy and Church Music*, 2nd ed., Series A, prepared by Barry L. Bobb and Hans Boehringer (St. Louis: CPH, 1995).

20. *Creative Worship for the Lutheran Parish*, Series A, part 1: The Time of Christmas: Advent/Christmas/Epiphany (St. Louis: CPH, 2001).

suggestions for planning Lutheran worship. The editors suggest cooperation and planning between the pastor and church musician, but broaden the scope beyond *Proclaim* to include the secretary and the computer as necessary components to worship planning. The editors recommend a preliminary planning meeting with the pastor and church musician to plan the liturgy and select the music, followed by a meeting with the church secretary to edit and adapt the service via desktop publishing. Since copyright issues will inevitably arise, a list of the addresses and phone numbers of frequently cited copyright holders is included in the introduction.

In short, *Creative Worship for the Lutheran Parish* is true to its title: the purpose of *Creative Worship* is for pastors and church musicians to create worship by building variety into the service.

ELEMENTS OF STYLE

William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White's *Elements of Style* is so influential that it inspired O. C. Edwards to apply its basic tenets to preaching in *Elements of Homiletic*, and Aidan Kavanagh to apply its principles to the liturgy in *Elements of Rite*. These three volumes will serve as three guideposts to analyze *Proclaim* and *Creative Worship*.

White's contribution to *The Elements of Style*²¹ is entitled "An Approach to Style (With a List of Reminders)." According to White, the preliminary chapters of *The Elements of Style*, which are based on White's class notes under the tutelage of William Strunk Jr., are concerned with what is correct in the use of the English language: principles of usage, composition, form, and commonly misused expressions. White's final chapter addresses principles of style in writing, not so much what is right or wrong, but what is wise or unwise. According to White, the first rule of style is to recede into the background:

Write in a way that draws the reader's attention to the sense and substance of the writing, rather than the mood and temper of the author. If the writing is solid and good, the mood and temper of the writer will eventually be revealed and not at the expense of the work. Therefore, the first piece of advice is this: to achieve style, begin by affecting none—that is, place yourself in the background.²²

Placing one's self in the background stands in contrast to what White calls a "breezy manner" or the "Spontaneous Me." This style "is often the work of an egocentric, the person who imagines that everything that comes to mind is of general interest and that uninhibited prose creates high spirits and carries the day."²³

White's approach to style is, in short, to affect no style whatsoever. "Avoid the elaborate, the pretentious, the coy, and the

cute."²⁴ Therefore the young writer should "turn resolutely away from all devices that are popularly believed to indicate style—all mannerisms, tricks, adornments. The approach to style is by way of plainness, simplicity, orderliness, sincerity."²⁵

Proclaim stands in continuity with White's wisdom by its very nature as a guide for planning Lutheran worship. It allows the worship planner to place himself in the background and to achieve no apparent style by expounding the theological foundation of the Sunday lessons and offering appropriate suggestions for hymns and attendant music. The presence of a preexistent liturgical structure and text is assumed in *Proclaim*. It assumes the pastor and church musician will decrease that Christ and his gifts may increase.

Creative Worship seems to assume that the preached word in liturgy and church music is either insufficient or simply boring.

By contrast, *Creative Worship* seems to assume that the preached word in liturgy and church music is either insufficient or simply boring. Building variety into the service by way of change for the sake of change or variety *eo ipso* may not intrinsically be a sin, yet one must ask with White if it is good liturgical style. How wise is it to paraphrase the proper preface simply for the sake of making a change? To use metrical paraphrases and rob the faithful of the opportunity to pray by heart Sunday after Sunday? To affect a breezy manner in the liturgy and be carried away by the trend machine? To swap texts and tunes cheerfully even if it is what Luther called an imitation in the manner of the apes? The printing of a copyright © citation in the liturgy to credit the author of the various paraphrases is indicative of the work of an egocentric. It places the self in the foreground and is implicative of a liturgist who heard the beat of a new vocabulary and was immediately carried away.

Proclaim functions within a Christ-centered framework in which God is the judge and the sinner is on trial. *Creative Worship* operates within an anthropocentric framework in which man is the judge and the liturgy is on trial. The aim of *Proclaim* is to engender being by telling the church who she is in Christ. The aim of *Creative Worship* is to deliver meaning by challenging the intellect to keep people's attention. *Proclaim* addresses the heart and its need for repentance and faith. *Creative Worship* addresses the mind and its attention span. *Proclaim* encourages

21. William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 4th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1999).

22. *Ibid.*, 70.

23. *Ibid.*, 73.

24. *Ibid.*, 76.

25. *Ibid.*, 69.

the hearers to remember the identity and work of the Lord. *Creative Worship* wants the hearers to remember the cute and coy methods of human ingenuity that make the liturgy more interesting. *Proclaim* is faithful to the preaching of St. Paul by encouraging the pastor and church musician to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. *Creative Worship* is more akin to the spirit of the Corinthian sophists by placing the writer of the creative liturgy at the center of Christian worship to try to win the approval of the masses. *Proclaim* understands the liturgy as a divine and eternal event. *Creative Worship* understands the liturgy as merely a text printed on a piece of paper.

White advises that “in choosing between the formal and the informal, the regular and the offbeat, the general and the special, the orthodox and the heretical, the beginner errs on the side of conservatism, on the side of established usage.”²⁶ This is not to suggest that every idiom is taboo or that every accent is forbidden. Rather, “there is simply a better chance of doing well if the writer holds a steady course, enters the stream of English quietly, and does not thrash about.”²⁷ There is simply a better chance of doing well if those who plan and lead Lutheran worship enter the stream of Lutheran liturgy quietly.

ELEMENTS OF HOMILETIC

O. C. Edwards Jr. applied White’s principles to the discipline of preaching in *Elements of Homiletic: A Method for Preparing to Preach*.²⁸ In the spirit of White’s advice to achieve style by affecting none, Edwards says to the preacher: “Call attention to what is being proclaimed rather than to the proclaimer. The gospels make it very clear that there are few things more contrary to the religion of Jesus than the self-importance of religious functionaries.”²⁹ Nevertheless, “there have been so many abuses of the privilege of preaching that the *Oxford American Dictionary* can give as its third definition of preach: ‘to give moral advice in an obtrusive way.’”³⁰ This standard dictionary definition stands in contrast to Edwards’s definition of homiletics: “to preach . . . is to proclaim the good news that in Jesus Christ God has acted finally and decisively for the reclamation of a lost world.”³¹ According to Edwards, “Christian preaching has had two aspects, proclamation and paranesis, publishing the good news of Jesus Christ and spelling out its implications for daily living.”³²

If Christian preaching is proclamation, then something is actually being delivered by God through the mouth of the preacher: “In our changing social world, not as many things are delivered as used to be. When I was a boy, though, grocery orders were phoned in and brought to the house in a panel truck.” As all who have experienced personal deliveries can attest, “it is axiomatic that no one has made a delivery until the

order has been received.” Similarly, “the preacher’s responsibility is not merely to say something or even to say something religious and significant, but to say something to somebody so that they will hear it and can understand it and can act on it.” A christological issue such as the preached gospel is a matter of eternal life or eternal death: “Thus those who preach must remember that what is at stake are the lives of the persons who hear them.”³³

The point of Creative Worship is to talk about Christ from a distance.

Proclaim stands in continuity with Edwards’s *Elements of Homiletic* by helping the pastor and church musician plan a service in which the main thing is the gracious bestowal of forgiveness, life, and salvation in the preached gospel. In the tone of Luther’s *Against the Heavenly Prophets*, the editors of *Proclaim* realize that Christ could have died a thousand deaths, yet it would not avail without the preached word. Christ won and accomplished all the gifts of the gospel by giving his life into death for our sins, yet the gifts are not given from the cross. Rather, the gifts of the Second Article are given in the means of salvation: baptism, preaching, and the Lord’s Supper.

By contrast, *Creative Worship* assumes that Christ has given us the gifts of the gospel from the cross and that pastors and church musicians are simply preparing to assure the hearers of the forgiveness of sins. No wonder *Creative Worship* sometimes changes the indicative-operative form of absolution (“I forgive you all your sins”) to the simple declaration, “I announce to you the forgiveness of sins.” The difference between the former and the latter is no small matter. The traditional formula assumes the once-for-all atonement on the cross (indicative) and includes the operative verb (forgive [absolve]) that has the intrinsic power to deliver the forgiveness of sins. The latter formula, probably introduced under the guise of securing people’s attention by changing the traditional language, talks about Jesus but does not have the power to give the gifts of the gospel. This approach is more akin to Karlstadt than Luther and tends to direct the hearers to an absent cross of wood instead of Christ’s saving presence in the words of absolution.

Proclaim takes an incarnational approach to worship in which Christ is present for his church in his own flesh and blood. *Creative Worship* takes a personal approach to worship in which it is the responsibility of man to get up close and personal with one another. The point of *Proclaim* is to place the hearers in the bosom of the church where the Holy Spirit

26. *Ibid.*, 83.

27. *Ibid.*, 83–84.

28. O. C. Edwards Jr., *Elements of Homiletic: A Method for Preparing to Preach* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990).

29. *Ibid.*, 116.

30. *Ibid.*, 99.

31. *Ibid.*, 18.

32. *Ibid.*, 100.

33. *Ibid.*, 117.

preaches Christ to their ears. The point of *Creative Worship* is to talk about Christ from a distance. *Proclaim* wants to teach the historic confessions, absolutions, and creeds of the church. *Creative Worship* wants to update the liturgy to sooth itching ears. The aim of *Proclaim* is to change sinful hearts through repentance and faith. The aim of *Creative Worship* is to change the liturgy through creativity and ingenuity. *Proclaim* explores the fullness of the gospel. *Creative Worship* explores variety for the sake of variety. In short, *Proclaim* facilitates the proclamation of the gospel. *Creative Worship* accommodates the delivery of information.

ELEMENTS OF RITE

As it goes for Christ, so it goes for the church. Aidan Kavanagh applied White's principles to liturgy in *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style*.³⁴ In the spirit of White and Edwards, Kavanagh's first piece of advice is to place one's self in the background for the sake of the word (*logos*): "One should engage in liturgy so that attention is called to *logos* rather than to one's own virtuosity. Liturgical mastery will eventually be revealed, but not at the expense of *logos*."³⁵ Kavanagh relates the role of the worship leader to the reader of poetry: "The liturgical minister is not the poet but only the reciter of the poet's poem — the poet in this case being the Christian assembly past and present."³⁶

This approach stands in contrast to loose informality:

Breezy liturgical style is not characteristic of one who has attained liturgical mastery. It is usually the work of an ego-centric who imagines that whatever occurs to him or her is generally interesting and that uninhibited liturgical expression of this will create enthusiasm and carry the day. . . . The Spontaneous Me approach to liturgy produces little prayers, rambling homilies on current events, sappy hymns, and eucharists hardly distinguishable from the coffee and doughnut social hour that follows in the church hall.³⁷

Kavanagh cites the precedent for his approach to liturgy in the life of Christ:

The minister's liturgical imagination often travels faster than do the abilities of most congregations to learn new liturgical patterns or unlearn old ones. God issues *logos*, not rubrics. It is useful to remember that Jesus in the days of his flesh submitted to the liturgical style of his people and his time. He changed no ceremony in Israel but observed them all, from Passover Seder to Sabbath requirements to temple sacrifice.³⁸

One insightful quotation from Kavanagh on the task of those who lead the liturgy will serve as a hinge to analyze *Proclaim* and *Creative Worship* under the Third Article:

The primary stylistic task of the liturgist is thus not to tinker with ceremonies but to bespeak *logos* within the assembly as it enacts its spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. A liturgist who merely tinkers with ceremonies is no more a liturgist than one who merely tinkers with language is a poet.³⁹

The primary concern with *Proclaim* and *Creative Worship* is more about what is wise or unwise than what is right or wrong. Charitably suppose, for a moment, that there is no false doctrine in *Creative Worship*. With doctrinal concerns safely aside, it is often lobbied among proponents of various forms of creative worship that it is not wrong to change the liturgy by paraphrasing the ordinaries or mixing and matching different texts and tunes. This postulation is true, at least as far as it goes. It is not a sin to change "The Lord be with you / and with your spirit" to "May the Lord be with you now / may the Lord be with you, too" sung to the tune Dix. But Kavanagh reminds us that tinkering

Creative liturgies send a message that there was something wrong with the liturgy and something right with the human imagination that devised a different liturgy.

with the liturgy is simply not the task of the pastor. Mindless changes are indicative of a liturgist who does not know his heritage and is impatient with the *logos*. Creative liturgies send a message that there was something wrong with the liturgy and something right with the human imagination that devised a different liturgy during a worship committee meeting. To cite a few extreme yet real life examples, it may not be wrong to sing the text "Amazing Grace" to the tune "Gilligan's Island," "Thy Strong Word" to "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," or "Jesus in Your Dying Woe" to "It's a Small World After All," but is it wise? Kavanagh says, "Simplicity is noble." Moreover, "solemnity and simplicity are close to being the same thing, and each is native to a liturgy which is divine service."⁴⁰

The point of *Proclaim* is to teach Lutheran worship. The point of *Creative Worship* is to tinker with Lutheran worship. *Proclaim* respects the catholicity of the liturgy by assuming a

34. Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990).

35. *Ibid.*, 94.

36. *Ibid.*, 94–95.

37. *Ibid.*, 99–100.

38. *Ibid.*, 93.

39. *Ibid.*, 94.

40. *Ibid.*, 102.

preexistent liturgy. *Creative Worship* has minimal respect for the catholicity of the liturgy by departing from the norm and letting the imagination of the liturgist run ahead of congregational capabilities. *Proclaim* assumes the pastors and church musicians are the new kids on a very large ecclesiastical block. *Creative Worship* assumes the members of the worship committee are the only kids on the churchly block. *Proclaim* assumes the *logos* comes to the faithful by hearing. *Creative Worship* assumes the *logos* comes by reading. *Proclaim* retains the ordinaries to allow the faithful to learn to pray by heart. *Creative Worship* assumes the faithful will be content to pray from the heart. *Proclaim* understands the liturgy as an incarnational event. *Creative Worship* understands the liturgy as a two-dimensional text. *Proclaim* attempts to maximize the gifts of the gospel by exploring the fullness of the gospel in liturgy and hymns. *Creative Worship* attempts to minimize the gifts of the gospel by reducing Lutheran worship to its bare essentials.

A word is necessary about liturgy and culture, especially what one might call a “liturgical technopoly,” the uncritical use of technology in a worship setting. Proponents of various forms of creative liturgy seem anxious to adopt every technological trend, including overhead projectors to print hymn texts, electronic choral accompaniments, various lighting effects, and sound effects to enhance the sermon. It is often said the world is changing and the church must change with the world or die, but Kavanagh offers the following caution rooted in the unchanging identity of the *logos*: “Adapting liturgy to culture invariably results in the liturgy’s demise. Adapting culture to the liturgy is thus the only alternative, a far more demanding endeavor, but one worthy of the *logos*.”⁴¹

Kavanagh describes the Trinitarian significance of Christian worship in word and sacrament:

One steps away from a superb act of liturgy, in which one has communed palpably not only with one’s own self or one’s immediate neighbor but with the divine Persons immersed in the life of the world, changed in one’s whole address to existence itself. When one remembers, for example, all the unknown people over the past five thousand years who have loved this same vast mystery and transmitted it to one in this place and time, one is moved by the splendid pity of it all. And one is freed to associate the unassociable—the deathless, uncreated, and timeless Creator of all with the simple human creatures of bread broken and wine poured out to rejoice mortal hearts.⁴² **LOGIA**

41. Ibid., 103.

42. Ibid., 91.

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REVIEWS

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

Martin Luther



Review Essay

Luther’s Genesis Lectures and the Formation of Evangelical Identity. By John A. Maxfield. Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2008. 242 pages. \$54.00.

✦ This book transports the reader to Wittenberg University to observe the great Reformer shaping a future generation of Evangelical Lutheran pastors through his lectures on the narratives of Genesis. What would have taken ten years to witness first-hand (1535–1545) and what comprises a full eight volumes in the American Edition of *Luther’s Works*, John Maxfield summarizes for us in this succinct, well-organized, and engaging text. The particular focus, as the title suggests, is on Luther’s use of the Genesis text to impart to his young audience a distinctly Evangelical (Lutheran) identity.

Noting the skepticism of Peter Meinhold toward the published text of these lectures (Meinhold had posited a discrepancy between Luther’s own thought and that of the students who recorded and edited the lectures), the author references a growing consensus that these lectures reliably present Luther’s mature theology and are corroborated by other late-Luther writings. Jaroslav Pelikan, for example, judged them “an indispensable source for our knowledge of Luther’s thought” (6).

The first two chapters treat Luther as professor and exegete. Sensing the imminence of his death, Luther’s labors in Genesis were inspired by the psalmist: “I will sing to God as long as I live” (16). Luther is portrayed as a model of humility before the Scriptures: “We must let the prophets and apostles sit on the lectern, and we here below at their feet must hear what they say, and not say what they must hear” (12 [AE 34: 284]). This striking image of “prophets and apostles at the professor’s lectern” forms the title of chapter one, as well as the concluding sentence of the book.

As Luther leads his students through the narratives of Genesis, the trials and experiences of the patriarchs become immediately relevant to contemporary struggles in the church. During the height of the antinomian controversy, for example, Luther draws frequent parallels between the narratives in Genesis 18–21 and his debates with Agricola on the role of the law in the Christian life. Maxfield observes, “As opposed to most modern

practice, scholarly detachment was not a goal, and the worlds of the text and its reader purposefully became merged” (16).

Luther is often portrayed as a champion of humanist scholarship. Yet, “for Luther, lecturing on the Bible was not simply or primarily an exercise in philology or mere grammar—what today might be called a historical-critical or historical-grammatical exegesis of the ancient text, to be distinguished clearly from whatever present application the interpreter might seek to draw. . . . Rather, engaging Holy Scripture is itself a spiritual exercise in which speaker and hearer are both confronted by the word of God, which must be loved—that is, must become identified with one’s own experience of life and not read with scholarly detachment” (18).

The enslaved and imprisoned Joseph, for example, presents young pastors a template of the “cruciform life.” God’s purposes in the lives of his servants will often be hidden. Indeed, God “seems at first to be the devil, not God, but this is his way in governing his saints” (28). Luther’s counsel to his students was sober: “You must never hope that the world will acknowledge and remunerate your faithfulness and diligence; for it does the opposite, as [Joseph’s] example attests” (28 [AE 7: 97]).

Chapter three is titled “The Arena of God’s Play—Christian Life and Holiness in the World.” Here, Maxfield traces Luther’s “clear break with monastic traditions of Christian faith and life.” Luther does not locate God’s redeeming, sanctifying, illumining work in the cloister, in mystical contemplation removed from daily life. Rather, God works holiness among his people “in the holy office of the church (the *Predigtamt* and other offices that support this ministry of the word), in the holy household, [and] in the holy civic life of and under temporal authorities” (78).

Here, the very concept of holiness is reframed. “Luther conceives holiness . . . as a quality God works in the world he created by means of the orders he has instituted for its continuance and stability (*creatio continua*, in dogmatic terms). This stands in sharp contrast to the holiness defined in Catholic Christianity since at least the fourth century as a quality separate from the world and mediative of salvation” (79).

The summary of Luther’s thought in each of these realms—church, home, state—is full of insights, continually anchored in the Genesis narratives. One colorful example is Luther’s description of Abraham, caught between the domestic quarrelling of Sarah and Hagar. This reveals the “trials of marriage and home life,” a place of *tentatio* through which genuine wisdom

and sanctification are worked by God. These trials are present in the other orders as well (church and state), for the same purpose: “The world is a place of trials—of *tentatio*. This is precisely why the world and the holy orders God has established in it are the place where God alone creates true monks like Abraham and Sarah out of the nothingness of human sin and idolatry” (106). The call of Abraham “from the nothingness of his idolatry,” the heartbreak of Rachel over her childlessness, the sufferings of Jacob and Joseph—in all of these God is at work. “It is precisely in the midst of such despair that God is truly among his people” (127).

Thus, real knowledge of and trust in God grows from reflection on his word in the face of life. For Luther, “faith is exercised rigorously and precisely through the trials (*tentationes*) of everyday existence, while the believer clings in prayer to the word and promises of God even when all seems hopeless” (128).

The theme of struggle and conflict continues into chapter four, which describes Luther’s reconstruction of history. “Luther saw his own strife with the papal church as a conflict between the word of God and the word of Satan that had been present in the history of the church since the fall of Adam. He taught his students to expect that that conflict between true church and false church would characterize Christian existence until the end of time” (220). While building on Augustine’s characterization of history as the conflict between two cities, Luther also fundamentally altered Augustine’s view. “Luther’s division between two churches rather than between a holy church and an unholy world (or society) revolutionized the doctrine of the church in a fundamental way” (159). Instead of catholicity or unity, Luther defines the true church in terms of the word and faith.

Commenting on the Cain and Abel narrative, Luther speaks of the “humbled status and sufferings of the true church in the face of the hypocritical church’s claims and persecutions” (160). Cain’s posterity, the false church, is impressive in terms of “increase,” “numbers,” and “success”; in fact, “they place their hopes in surpassing the true church in numbers, ‘as clear proof that they had not been cast off by God but were themselves also the people of God’” (162–63 [AE 1: 316–38]). The “church of Abel” is not so grand. Indeed, Luther includes persecution and weakness as marks of the true church: “We dare not come to believe that we are not the church because our adversaries condemn us with such assurance and persecute us with every kind of cruelty; but let us establish that the cross and those verdicts are true and infallible signs of the true church” (160–61 [AE 1: 252–23]).

Maxfield’s final chapter, “The Church and the World in the Last Days,” examines Luther’s apocalyptic understanding of his own times and the future. This chapter is rich and resists summary. Robert Kolb and others are cited in discussing the perception that Luther himself was a prophet. In the Genesis lectures, Luther applies Scripture to the future of Germany, drawing from Sodom (Genesis 19) a bleak warning for his fellow countrymen and their posterity. Their sins of material greed and despising the gospel are “filling up” like those of the Amorites (Gen 15:16) and becoming ripe for judgment (205 [AE 6: 206–22]).

For Luther, his times were both a “golden age,” in which the true gospel again sounded forth in the churches, as well as the end-time period of the world’s “old age” and “insanity” (190–91). During this time of apocalyptic conflict—as they have throughout history—men and angels serve as “cooperators with the Creator” for the world’s benefit and preservation (185). This may seem thankless and fruitless work, but as with Joseph in prison (or as in a dramatic stage-play), the conclusion is often completely hidden while the story is unfolding. The gospel of the kingdom “is a doctrine that cannot be fully grasped until the very end of the story” (209). Meanwhile, like Joseph and Jacob, we do not see the face of God, but only his back. Still, “as long as this present time of God’s activity would endure . . . Luther’s students and the generations that followed them . . . could only continue to act as cooperators of God, reforming and improving the institutions of church, civil society, and the economic sphere arising from the household” (213).

In this accessible volume, John Maxfield has opened for us “a window into Luther’s lecture hall,” and the voice which sounds forth from that window offers sage counsel for pastors and Christians today. Against the triumphal boasts of every new whim and trend, promising the church and the Christian “success” like that of “the church of Cain”—and against every defeatist resignation among his people that would consign us to despair, self-pity, and slothful surrender—Luther offers a thoroughly realistic account of Christian lowliness and hope in the world. Luther summons us to energetic service in our callings—in the holy church, the holy home, and the holy society—cooperating with God and with angels. He counsels patient trust in the word and promise of Christ as we await the dawn of his kingdom and the end of suffering. “Proclaiming judgment and grace to their own generation, [evangelical Lutheran pastors] behold the back of God until that great and final day when all history will meet its end and God will show his face, revealing a new beginning” (214).

For Luther, this hope made all labors, suffering, and opposition worth bearing. Maxfield mentions, almost offhand, that Luther “broke into German here and there as he described the kingdom of Christ” (193). With what rapture the Reformer must have slipped from his academic Latin to his heartfelt mother tongue, describing the blessedness of the time of the Messiah and the final revealing of his kingdom!

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The Theology of Facts Versus the Theology of Rhetoric. By August Friedrich Christian Vilmar. Translated by Roy Harrisville with an Introduction by Walter Sundberg. Fort Wayne, Indiana: Lutheran Legacy, 2008. Paper. 127 pages.

✧ I believe that I was unaware of A. F. C. Vilmar until my doctoral studies at the University of Basel, Switzerland. It was there that I read (in the German) *Die Theologie der Tatsachen*.

At the time I was writing my doctoral dissertation on early Christian martyr texts. Along with the emphasis on the flesh in Ignatius of Antioch and the insistence of Irenaeus on the significance of particular things and events for a true knowledge of God, these materials had the effect of concentrating my mind on “facts,” “realities,” as the true subject matter for theological thinking. I found in the Scriptures more clearly than before the steadfast resistance to all spiritualizings and abstractions. From these readings, I think, I became a better Lutheran.

American Lutherans, and perhaps especially Lutherans in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, are wanting in their knowledge and appreciation of nineteenth-century Lutheranism, and most especially that associated with the nineteenth-century confessional revival. Our loyalties to Walther, perhaps also our geographic and historical separation from continental theology, have allowed us to dismiss (at least in practice) Lutheran thinkers who possess the capacity to enrich and, yes, also to critique our own paths. Vilmar is a primary example of such a “lost” father. But there are others: Claus Harms, Theodor Kliefoth, and Theodosius von Harnack, to name three. I am increasingly persuaded that we are already well into a post-Christian context in Western society (America is lagging behind in this, but is on the way too). We will need the full resonance of our ecumenical and catholic materials to confront the new challenges of such a time. Especially now in our gnosticizing, spiritualizing context, the significance of the specificity and particularity of Christian faith is crucial.

Perhaps at this very point the voice of Vilmar is needed. I think so. A great thanks, therefore, is owed to Roy Harrisville and Walter Sundberg for their translation and introduction to this important masterpiece against the abstractions and false “science” of the Enlightenment. I especially appreciated the well-written and clear introduction of Sundberg, for the target of Vilmar is not always evident in the words themselves (no doubt due to the fact that we ourselves are not in the same historical moment as Vilmar was when he wrote). Vilmar was against all abstraction in theology. Why? Because human life itself was not an abstraction. Theology must serve the reality of human existence, for that is what God the Son came to redeem and to save. By “rhetoric,” Vilmar meant the neutral examination of subject matter for the purpose of accurate description. It assumed an objectivity of the theological “scientist” who, unimpeded by any interest or faith, could speak without any commitments. Such science was, therefore, more true and accurate and more deserving of our belief. Much like the postmodernist position, such pretensions to objectivity were debunked by Vilmar. True theology was a theology of facts. “According to Vilmar ‘Facts’ are divine events that take place in space and time, in the public sphere of human historical experience, but which transcend human experience” (Introduction, 11). Such “facts” demand commitment and faith, for only then are such “facts” that occur in human life. The factual nature of Christianity is two-sided. It is objective in the sense that Christ cannot simply be collapsed into our notions of him or our experiences. Yet, “it is in human experience that real change is brought about in those committed to the Lord” (Introduction, 12).

What “facts” does Vilmar talk about? Systematic theology, church, sacraments, confession, church discipline, ministerial office, homiletics, pastoral theology. In these, and not apart from them, is the theology of “facts.” In these, and not apart from them, does God reveal himself as the One who redeems in the person of Jesus Christ. Here, then, is a vigorous doctrine of the reality of the church in those things that constitute the life of the Christian. Given modern propensity toward spiritual inwardness (called faith or something else), the emphasis of Vilmar is today much needed.

Vilmar is not without his complications. He is oft derided for his “authoritarian” understanding of ordained ministry. Certainly he was suspicious of democracy. But in 1848 there was good reason to be suspicious of the populace who, as it might have seemed, were everywhere in the streets. (In American history one might think of Alexander Hamilton, who also was skeptical of “pure” democracy, especially in view of the French Revolution.) So Vilmar: the office of pastor proceeds directly from Christ, who is “behind the exercise [of the office], is active in it, and himself goes in advance of it” (107; quoted Introduction, 20). “Only from this certainty flows our total fearlessness and absence of regard for person . . . our power through Word and Sacrament to gather the community from out of the new heathenism . . . the power to descend into a soul in which the arch foe has set up his dwelling. . . . The congregation cannot do this” (107–8; Introduction, 20). Sundberg says that Vilmar’s doctrine is “despotic” and “dictatorial” (Introduction, 22). Yet Sundberg recognizes that Vilmar has something to say to the contemporary American context:

The American church is in a crisis of leadership and doctrine. This crisis appears to be beyond the ability of the average, well-meaning gathering of lay people in synod convention or assembly to solve, especially when they are hammered year after year with proposals to change fundamental teaching in order to conform to the cultural imperatives of the day. Lay people appear especially vulnerable to arguments for change that emphasize tolerance and openness. This is the ideal situation for a “theology of rhetoric”—just as Vilmar describes it—to step in and make appeal to the popular will. The theology of rhetoric uses tolerance and openness to wear down the opposition and manipulate votes. . . . Any traditionalist Protestant in a mainline denomination, especially a pastor, who recoils at the way scripture and creed are misused and debased by bureaucratic and academic elites who seek to exploit them in order to impose a secular agenda knows how telling Vilmar’s description of the theology of rhetoric is. (Introduction, 22)

If this description of our own context rings a bell, then this book is for you. We all know what “secular agendas” Sundberg probably has in mind. However, there are lesser agendas, which have equally been manipulated on the assumption that with the people exists all church authority. Tolerance, openness, user-friendliness—these are the names that often divest the

traditional doctrines and forms of their inherent significance. Choice—that is the abstraction of our own day. Vilmar at least says to us: Stop and think again.

There are other writings of Vilmar also worthy of an English translation. I will mention here his *Dogmatics*, his commentary on the Augsburg Confession, and his wonderful book *On the Apostolic Office*.

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At Home in the House of My Fathers: Presidential Sermons, Essays, Letters, and Addresses from the Missouri Synod's Great Era of Unity and Growth. Compiled, translated, and annotated by Matthew C. Harrison. Fort Wayne, Indiana: Lutheran Legacy Press, 2009. \$19.95.

☞ Among the clamor of the emergent church movement with its makeover of Christianity and the boastful proclamation of pastors and church officials alike that “it’s not your grandfather’s church,” a quiet movement has spread through the church. In the early years of the twenty-first century “the most vibrant and serious field of Christian study” is that of the church fathers (*First Things*, November 2006, 15). Anecdotal evidence suggests that this revival is happening along generational lines, with the younger generations rediscovering their heritage, as the Boomer generation, in particular, seeks something new. This church father study revival is not limited to those fathers of the first five centuries but has extended to cover the fathers of various confessional movements, including Lutherans. The most recent book in the Lutheran tradition from this rediscovery of the church father movement is Matthew C. Harrison’s *At Home in the House of My Fathers*.

Harrison’s *At Home in the House of My Fathers* is a massive tome of more than eight hundred pages, containing nearly one hundred essays, addresses, or sermons. In many cases for the first time, translations of works primarily by the first five presidents of the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod are made available to readers of English. The book also compiles many works from various sources that are difficult to obtain or are hidden away in the vaults of Concordia Historical Institute in St. Louis, Missouri. These works by C. F. W. Walther, Friedrich Wyneken, Heinrich Schwan, Francis Pieper, and Friedrich Pfotenhauer span ninety-one years of the Missouri Synod’s history. If this volume were produced for a jubilee celebration of the synod, a subtitle of the book might have read, “One hundred essays for Missouri’s first hundred years.” The sheer weight of the book, both literally and figuratively, is impressive. It is also surprising that a synodical publishing house, seminary, or any other official entity did not produce this book. Rather the book is primarily the work of one individual and an independent press.

An 800-page book can be intimidating to any reader, be it the scholar, interested churchgoer, or busy pastor. The physical layout of the book is very reader friendly. Despite its size, the volume is not cumbersome to hold. The type is clear and of sufficient size not to require a magnifying glass to read. The layout and design is crisp without distracting the reader. There is a timeline at the front of the book showing when each author held office as synodical president. Photographs of each president mark the beginning of each section. The approximately ninety-page report of the Walther and Wyneken trip to Germany is broken up with several period pictures and photographs to help illustrate pertinent items mentioned in the text. The book also contains helpful footnotes and annotations explaining or clarifying various items in the text. These refinements greatly increase the accessibility of this book to both the casual reader and the scholar alike.

With nearly one hundred pieces by several different authors covering almost a century, something of interest can be found for all. Many of the pieces give the impression of having been written yesterday. Topics include many of the issues that have afflicted the Lord’s church since St. Paul worked with the congregation in Corinth, ranging from ecumenical concerns, lay preaching, clergy depression, divisions, confessional allegiance, worship and song, stewardship, and more. What is most helpful is not the discovery that the church in the past suffered from many of the same afflictions that she does today, but rather, the Scriptural, confessional, theological, and pastoral way in which men approached the problems. We would do well to follow in their path. Essays by C. F. W. Walther include “On Luther and Lay Preachers,” “Counsel to Remain in a Corrupt Church: Make Them Throw You Out!,” “Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod,” “Methodist Hymns in a Lutheran Sunday School,” and “The Fruitful Reading of the Writings of Luther.” In an essay titled “On the Spiritual Priesthood and the Office of the Ministry,” Friedrich Wyneken writes, “We will not tolerate it that the souls freed and purchased by the blood of Christ be brought again under the yoke of any little Lutheran pope.” Heinrich C. Schwan asks, “Are the best years of the Synod behind us?” Francis Pieper writes on “The Offense of Divisions in the Church.” Friedrich Pfotenhauer bids “Encouragement for Lonely Preachers and Teachers.” In our age of church growth Pfotenhauer addresses “How Did We Grow?” He also warns, “God’s Co-Workers Do Not Lust for Power.” With a synodical convention approaching for the Missouri Synod in 2010, one cannot get more prescient than Pfotenhauer’s synodical address from 1923 on “Avoiding Political Factions in the Church.”

All of these church fathers realized the peril and threats that the gospel faced in their day, and addressed these concerns both faithfully and pastorally. They were deeply aware that historically a church body was rarely blessed to retain the pure doctrine of the gospel for more than a generation or two. They sought to remain faithful individually and as a church body by repenting and believing the faith handed down to them by their fathers. When expounding 1 Thessalonians 5:20, “Do not despise prophecy,” C. F. W. Walther said, “Do not despise the

writings of the old faithful church fathers. . . . Otherwise you disobey the Holy Spirit” (Synodical Conference Essay, Cleveland, Ohio, August 1884). May we too be at home in the house of our fathers who handed us the faith.

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Baptism: Three Views. Edited by David F. Wright with contributions by Sinclair B. Ferguson, Anthony N. S. Lane, and Bruce A. Ware. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009. Paperback. 200 pages.

☞ In spite of their differences, Evangelicals constitute a closed society to which Lutherans and Roman Catholics need not apply—especially in the matter of baptism, as Daniel G. Reid says, writing in the introduction, in place of the now deceased editor (12). I am not so sure that the three diverse views of believers’ baptism, infant baptism, and “dual-practice baptism” are all that diverse, since for Evangelicals baptism or its lack is not crucial for salvation. So this is kind of a fun book. One position is as inconsequential as another. The writer of “dual-practice baptism,” an unknown phrase in my vocabulary, hedges his bets on whether or not to baptize infants. No matter what, you win—or is it lose? The article supporting infant baptism takes over Calvin’s arguments that baptism is an outward sign of membership in the covenant, in which children from the Old Testament up through the new were included. Of course membership does not require faith, at least not at the time of baptism, or baptism itself. Birth into a Christian family places the child in the covenant and aces out inherited sin. This is reason enough to distance ourselves as fast as possible from the Geneva reformer and his covenants. There are others. The proponent of the “only adults need apply for baptism” view points out that baptizing infants mixes the unregenerate with the regenerate (50). One cannot beat that argument if baptism is only a sign of the covenant and does not really change anything in the child—or, for that matter, in baptized adults. After each essay the other two contributors respond, followed by a response from the original essayist. Fair enough, but the final response only repeats the original arguments. Again, this is a fun book with Evangelicals arguing over something that does not really matter. They are still all members of the closed society of Evangelicals and welcome at each other’s altars, even though they call them tables and do not use them that often.

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Briefly Noted

Wilhelm Löhe: Erbe und Vision. Edited by Dietrich Blaufuß. Gütersloh, Germany: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009.

☞ This volume contains papers presented at the meeting of the International Löhe Society in Neuendettelsau in July 2008, on the 200th anniversary of the Bavarian pastor’s birth. The essays range from treatments of Löhe’s pastoral theology and missiological and liturgical work, to the historical context of his work and his influence in the twentieth century. Authors include Manfred Seitz, Thomas Schattauer, Christian Weber, Klaus Raschzok, John T. Pless, Wolfhart Schlichting, Dietrich Blaufuß, Rudolf Keller, Jobst Reller, Lothar Vogel, Hans Schwarz, Jürgen Albert, Theodor Strohm, Craig Nesson, Martin Lohrmann, and Dean Zweck.

The Knights of Rhodes. By Bo Giertz. Translated by Bror Erickson. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishing, 2010.

☞ Bishop Bo Giertz knew that faith itself is an adventure into unknown territories and on paths uncharted. This novel, set in the turbulence of an emerging new world in the sixteenth century, is a saga about the resilience of faith, a faith that “overcomes destiny.” A potent story unadorned by shallow sentimentalities, *Knights* invites readers to ponder the goodness of a God who engages human beings with all of their frailties and foibles as instruments of his service.

Treasures Old and New: Daily Readings From the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. By John C. Jeske. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009.

☞ Prepared by a veteran Old Testament professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, this book lends itself well for daily meditation by seminarians and pastors. There is a brief (1–3 verses) passage from an Old Testament text in Hebrew, then from a New Testament text in Greek, with grammatical notes, and a short reading from the Lutheran Confessions.

The Theological Autobiography of Hans Schwarz: A Multi-Cultural and Multi-Denominational Christian Ministry. By Hans Schwarz. Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009.

☞ If John Wesley claimed the world as his parish, then Hans Schwarz may claim that the world is his classroom. German-born and educated with solid Lutheran grounding at Erlangen under Walter Künneth, Schwarz’s calling as a teacher of theology brought him to the United States, where he taught at the Evangelical Lutheran Theological Seminary in Columbus (now

Trinity Lutheran Seminary), and then back to Germany, where he would fill the chair of Protestant Theology at the University of Regensburg, while also serving as an adjunct Professor of Systematic Theology at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina. Along the way, Schwarz could be found lecturing in numerous settings in Asia and Australia. Perhaps the title of his 2005 book, *Theology in a Global Context*, best describes his contribution.

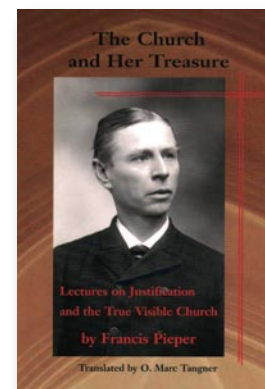
If the geography of Schwarz's work has been global, the scope of his work has been wide-ranging indeed. In addition to books on traditional theological topics (creation, the doctrine of God, Christology, sacraments, ecclesiology, eschatology, and the place of evil) and the *loci* on the word and eschatology in *Christian Dogmatics* edited by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, Schwarz has written on Luther, Löhe, and world religions. Influenced by Karl Heim (1874–1958), Schwarz would engage theology in dialogue with the natural sciences and philosophy. While his Lutheran foundations are clearly visible in his work, his influence has reached widely into ecumenical circles as was indicated by his being awarded an honorary doctorate from the Orthodox faculty of the University of Oradea in 2001 and the Great Cross of the Romanian Orthodox Church by the Patriarch Teoctist in 2003. His ecumenical involvement has not dulled his ability for critical engagement, as witnessed by his signing the statement of protest issued by German theologians against the *Joint Document on the Doctrine of Justification* and his service on the theological advisory board of Word Alone.

Reading *The Theological Autobiography of Hans Schwarz* brought back good memories of my time in his classes at Trinity. I learned a few things that were happening at my *alma mater* but were generally concealed from students at the time, especially the episodes with James Schaaf and Harold Zietlow, who were casualties in the merger that would form Trinity. I am now pleased to work with my former teacher as a colleague in the International Löhe Society. Apart from this personal note, *The Theological Autobiography of Hans Schwarz* offers perceptive insights into many of the personalities that have exercised influence in German theology in the last part of the twentieth century: Künneth, Thielicke, Pannenberg, and Moltmann. The story of his childhood years in Nazi Germany is moving. The wide field of his influence can be seen in the number of Eastern European, Asian, and North American students who contributed to a festschrift presented to Schwarz on the occasion of his 70th birthday in 2009 under the title *Doing Theology in a Global Context*, edited by Craig Nesson and Thomas Kothmann. Written in a lively style, peppered with good humor, and illuminating personal glimpses, *The Theological Autobiography of Hans Schwarz* reflects the life of a diligent scholar, a committed churchman, and a man of unpretentious piety.

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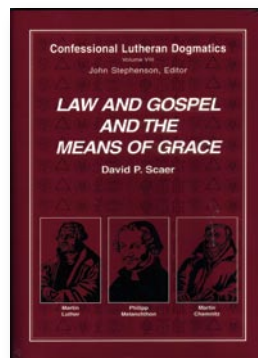
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SHORT STUDIES AND COMMENTARY

WHEN FAITH LOSES ITS VIRGINITY

It is a theological insight of Dr. Luther that “as soon as reason and the Law are joined, faith immediately loses its virginity.” Here Luther recognizes how easy it is for the faithful to find themselves slipping into the way of the law. In fact, he observes that in a Christian’s life the gospel is “a rare guest” but the law is “a constant guest” in our conscience. Instead of seeing the greatness of the forgiveness of sin Luther observes that we are even unaware of the danger of losing the gospel. Luther left us this warning in one of his Table Talks (1531):

There is no man living on earth who knows how to distinguish between law and gospel. We may think we understand it when we hear a preaching, but we are far from it. Only the Holy Spirit knows this. Even the man Christ was so lacking in understanding when he was in Gethsemane. An angel had to comfort him. Though he was a doctor, yes from heaven, he was strengthened by the angel. Because I have been writing so much and so long about it, you’d think I’d know the distinction, but when a crisis comes I recognize very well that I am far, far from understanding. So God alone should and must be our holy master.

We learned of the distinction between law and gospel in confirmation classes. We have studied it further at the seminary. Daily we attempt to distinguish properly between them in the work of the *Predigtamt*. But these words humble us so that we may speak with Luther in his Great Galatians lectures: “When a man has finished, he is just beginning.”

As we keep learning this important doctrine we do not do so for ourselves, but for the sake of the church. Pastoral care was behind the thinking of the confessors of the Formula of Concord when it teaches that the distinction between law and gospel, which is called “a particularly glorious light,” not only needs to be preserved (FC SD v, 1) but “must continually be taught in the church of God with all diligence . . . until the

end of the world” (FC SD v, 24). Why does it say so? Because the confessors learned from Luther that when such a distinction is lost, “the merit and benefits of Christ are easily obscured” and Christians are robbed of true comfort (FC SD v, 27). “Faith loses its virginity.”

*Noamichi Masaki,
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THE RESURRECTION PROMISE

Johann Spangenberg, “Sermon 15,” from Fifteen Funeral Sermons, 1553, translated by Ken Sundet Jones, Grand View College, Des Moines, Iowa.

All flesh wears out like a garment, for the old decree is, “You must die.” Just like the green leaves on a beautiful tree, some fall away, some grow again. Thus, it also happens for people. Some die, some are born again (Sirach 14).

In this passage, the Holy Spirit works through Jesus Sirach like an artistic painter, masterfully molding us for the death and resurrection of humanity as no painter can do, grasping both death and resurrection in various plants of the earth and saying, “Just as the green leaves, and so forth.” It is as though the Spirit wants to say, “Dear human, how much grain do you see growing in the ground, how many flowers in the meadow, how many herbs in the garden, and how many leaves in the forest? That is how many living signs and displays of the resurrection of the dead you have. If you see a farmer sowing his grain in the field and a gardener planting his herbs in the garden, and if you see how the leaves on the trees grow and fall away in the forest only to return in the spring, then you see the wonder and work of God. You can learn about death and resurrection from these things.”

The Holy Spirit is such a fine and masterful artist that he crafts a picture of life out of all the things the world regards as death. He shapes death and resurrection for us out of such lowly things as grains, kernels, and other seeds, flowers and leaves, so that we might confess that it is not dying and ruin when we die and are buried in the earth, but it is instead being sown and planted.

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Thus, in the midst of sweet summer the whole world and even the dear angels in heaven desire that on the Last Day we should arrive in such fine and beautiful raiment, for God can make a huge, glorious tree out of a dead seed, and bring forth a beautiful new plant from a grain of wheat tossed into the earth. How much more of this kind of work can he do with us, since he doesn't just toss us into the soil to leave us there to go to ruin eternally?

Instead we must decay and gain a better body. On the Last Day, we must be raised again from the dead and live eternally, just as Christ our Lord spoke of the grain of wheat in John 12: For if a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains a single grain. But where it dies, it will bear much fruit. It is like a small, barren, lonely grain of wheat that is thrown into the soil, rots and nevertheless finally comes alive again: a tiny shoot breaks forth, then a stem emerges, an ear grows on the stem and contains many kernels.

It happens the same way with the body, the flesh: it dies and is buried, decomposes, decays, and perishes in a variety of ways, is resurrected again and emerges and lives again in an inexpressible clarity and magnificence. For the righteous shine in the kingdom of God like the sun (Matthew 13) and will live eternally with God. They will no longer feel any sin, nor fear any death, for they will have eternal joy and blessedness. Death will be completely swallowed up and there will be no crying, no more pain. The future eternal life will be the kind of life in which we are saved from the devil, death, sin, hell and from every calamity. We will live forever in eternal light and clarity, in true knowledge of God, and will rejoice and exult forever in eternal joy and blessedness.

Now, because our dear fellow brother, name, loved our Lord Jesus Christ and his holy word in this life, and also depended on the same thing that is provided in the most significant sacrament and testament, he was severed from the past and sown into the earth, becoming a grain of wheat in his natural or temporal death. We should not doubt, but be certain, that in Christ Jesus God has graciously adopted him, which in our hearts we ourselves desire and pray that God may grant. Thus, God also wants to give us the means by which we might persist in faith, love, hope, and patience to the end and, at last, take part in eternal life with Christ. Amen.

THE ROAD THAT LEADS HOME

(Excerpts from "Not All Evangelicals and Catholics Together," *Christianity Today* 53, no. 11 [November 2009]: 19–20.)

Over the past decade, justification has become one of the most hotly debated doctrines at conservative Protestant theology conferences and in the catalogs of highbrow Christian publishers.

The long debate over how Protestants should view the Roman Catholic Church has received several jolts of intensity in the past fifteen years. The group Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) touted a 1994 statement, "The Gift of Salvation," in which several prominent Roman Catholics affirmed "justification by faith alone." The unofficial statement predated an official agreement between the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999, called "The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." The [Roman] church allowed that anathemas the Council of Trent delivered in the mid-1500s do not apply to Protestants who agree with the joint declaration.

But Protestants' internal disagreement over justification has complicated matters. A Presbyterian Church in America committee reported in 2007 that reformulations of justification (especially two views known as the Federal Vision and the New Perspective on Paul) fall outside the bounds of historic Presbyterian confessions.

The committee's study of the New Perspective [on Paul] focused largely on N. T. Wright, the Anglican bishop of Durham and a prolific biblical scholar.

Another bombshell hit in May 2007, when Francis Beckwith, then president of the Evangelical Theological Society, reverted to Catholicism. The Baylor University philosopher has since published an account of his journey, titled *Return to Rome*.

Beckwith told *Christianity Today*, ". . . I have met several former evangelical Protestants who have told me that Wright's work in particular helped them to better appreciate the Catholic view of grace."

Taylor Marshall went even further. . . . He said Wright's work shifted his assumptions so he could understand the Council of Trent's position. Marshall does not believe Wright holds to the full Catholic view. But he said Wright's critique led him to conclude that the Reformer's departed from Scripture by teaching "forensic justification through the imputed alien righteousness of Christ."

Marshall said he speaks with new Catholic converts every month, about half of whom have been "deeply influenced" by Wright. "If you buy into Wright's approach to covenantal theology, then you've already taken three steps toward the Catholic Church. Keep following the trail and you'll be Catholic," said Marshall, who blogs at *PaullIsCatholic.com*.

Wright himself finds strange the notion that he is leading people to Rome.

Chris Castaldo studied under Wright for a semester at Harvard Divinity School. He identifies several reasons why Wright's Pauline theology might lead Protestants to consider the merits of Catholic teaching. Like Catholics, Wright emphasizes the positive contribution of "works" in salvation, worships in a liturgical church, and places the church's call to social justice in the foreground.

AN ESCHATOLOGICAL LAW & GOSPEL! PART TWO

The following is an essay delivered by Dr. Steven D. Paulson (Professor, Systematic Theology, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN) to the 2007 Word Alone Convention. It is entitled: "How to Preach Galatians—Law and Gospel, not Acceptance and Inclusion." Part One was included in LOGIA Forum, 19:1.

So when I say to you, "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel—not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed!" (Gal 1:3–9), you know what this means: sin prefers another gospel. But there is no other gospel. What is the gospel then? It is the story of Christ, that he is the Son of God, became a man, suffered and died at the hands of sinners, was raised from the dead, and sits at the right hand of the Father ruling a new kingdom and judging the old. That is, in the cross Jesus defeated death, the devil, and our own sinful self, and now seeks to bring this benefit to you. To do this he sends a preacher, who uses word and sacrament. Paul takes us through this in Galatians this way:

For I, through the law, died to the law. Why then the law? The law was *added* because of transgressions. Is the law then against the promises? By no means! But Scripture consigned all things to sin—in order to give what was promised *to faith in Christ*.

The Alternative View

Is this somehow not any longer our teaching? Unfortunately your new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) document leaves you with a series of contrary inferences or suggestions about Scripture and its authority instead:

- Scripture is not clear, at least on matters of everyday life like sexuality.
- Scripture is not one. It is many things, many writings to many people at many places and times. It is a jumble of "cultures."
- Scripture needs not just one interpreter but many since everyone has different experiences and so different "lenses." Therefore Scripture is an eye book, not an ear book.
- Finally, and this is what we must take up today: it teaches you that law and gospel are not distinguished by the Holy Spirit and applied to you.

The conclusion of this sort of thing is to say, in light of all the confusion about sexual experiences and Scripture's words, we must appoint a committee that represents the various teachings in the ELCA and thus deliberates about all the various experiences and comes to some conclusion. The conclusion they reach is clear enough: we disagree about how the law treats matters of sexuality. Then, they conclude from this that only disagreements about the gospel are church dividing, not disagreements about the law. This last statement is true enough. But the committee, after all its deliberations, assumed that all we have is a disagreement about the law regarding sex practices or "identities" (p. 15). This itself would be problem enough, I suppose, but unfortunately what we really have operating here as shown in their treatment of Galatians is that we have an actual disagreement about the gospel. At the very least we can be thankful to the committee and its hardworking members for concluding one thing: everyone in the ELCA (and beyond) should sit down and read Paul's letter to the Galatians.

The New Attack on Law and Gospel: Covenant Theology

The committee has been taken up into something beyond its own control. The great humanistic impulse swirling around the early reformers would not rest with its refreshing reforms of catholic Christianity. It is now being used, mostly through its Bible exegetes, to tell you that "Luther's interpretation of Paul" is simply wrong. This is a sideways way of saying something worse: the distinction of law and gospel is false. If this were only a matter of criticizing Luther, it would remain in the halls of universities where it couldn't do much harm. But this attack has spilled out all over. It amounts to telling the Holy Spirit that his work is over and done with it and we can take it from here. This we cannot abide and unless we lay it bare the ELCA will continue to blunder as it enters its new commitment to read Scripture.

The new proposal (that is not really new) coming from biblical experts that has bewitched so many Lutherans today is this: the gospel is not justification of the ungodly as forgiveness of sins on account of Christ's cross. Instead, gospel is a matter of whether Christianity as a religion, or "the church," is exclusive or inclusive. This comes out of a problem that emerged immediately in the Reformation itself in the person of Zwingli; it is called today "Covenant Theology." For adherents to this theory, "gospel" concerns who is in and who is out of the community of true believers. Therefore justification is really a matter of "church," not Christ and his cross. One of the favorite playgrounds for this theory is Paul's letter to the Galatians, which they then interpret very differently than Lutherans. They say that circumcision was purportedly not about adding a law to the gospel, who is Christ alone. It was rather about who gets *entrance* into the covenant of Israel or not. Their key words for "gospel" are then *access* and *inclusion*. Put bluntly: gospel is gaining access to church. The church is a covenant community whose main concerns are who is included and who excluded. Anyone who presents a barrier to another's full

inclusion or refuses *welcome* into the church is therefore opposed to the gospel by this very act or deed.

Just think of it. This rejection of law and gospel replaces Christ with a new gospel described as full, unrestricted, unobstructed, unlimited, free, limitless acceptance. When this is achieved the communal effect is to celebrate. But there is a problem hovering over this joyous description. Eventually this group that speaks endlessly about community and togetherness, loses interest in actual *inclusion* into the particular group called the Christian church. This happens not because it loses interest in inclusion, but it loses interest in the particular *group* assembled by Christ's word. After all, what do you do when you invite and welcome someone into the church and they don't want to come in? Well, you accept that too! You accept self-selected nonacceptance so that all are ratified in their own selections of where they want to be. So ends the glorious proclamation of the gospel in the empty and vapid world of "acceptance." The mission of inclusion is a short-lived *mission* though, as we see, it can be very demanding and forceful for a short time. It is shameful to me that these kinds of people are more fervent than I when it comes to preaching "their gospel."

But Paul was right when this began to happen in the churches of Galatia. There is no other gospel than preaching Christ and him crucified. Acceptance into the group simply equates law and love in the form of acceptance. The law is then divided up into two types, bad and good. Bad law means *restricted access*, and the main example given is the Jews who only allowed certain people going through certain covenant rituals like circumcision to come in—this is why the Jews had a good community, but were faulty in terms of fulfilling the whole law. After all, they restricted access to the Torah or those elected by God giving them the law.

On the other hand, good law means unrestricted access to the community shaped by the law of love. After all, why would Gentiles want access to the community of Jews who are otherwise isolating themselves? Because the Jews are God's elect! But what does it mean to be elect? It means God gave the Jews a covenant law with the sign of circumcision. What is so good about the law? It is summed up in one word: love.

What has happened here in this little theological experiment? The gospel = unrestricted inclusion = welcome = entrance = church = community of loving, accepting people = law (after all, the law is summed up in one word: Love). This is the problem with attacking the proper distinction between law and gospel. There is no other gospel! Then what happens to the new proposal? The gospel is mistaken for the law!

This is a very old problem that Paul is dealing with in Galatia. Its symptoms are these:

- Jesus is sidelined (except as example).
- The church takes his place, as the present "part" of Jesus searching for its missing head.
- The church becomes the human act (aided no doubt by grace) of inclusion.
- So faith mixes with love.
- The tree is mixed with its fruit.

- And law and gospel are mixed with only one conclusion possible: the gospel itself is silenced and the law alone remains.

Americans, like the old Galatians, have been especially susceptible to this way of thinking. Thomas Jefferson tried it this way: Moses was good because he taught people to love. But he only applied it to one tribe, the Jews. Jesus is better than Moses because he taught that the law should be applied lovingly and universally to all people—that is, Jesus *universalized the law!* My, what have we come to? In this way of thinking the law is not a problem because of what it demands. It simply has been too exclusively applied to too few. The law among Jews became exclusive. The solution is Christ, who applies the law to everyone. Isn't this what Paul meant when he said, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal 5:14)? I wish I didn't have to go any further, but this bewitching theory has become the regular option for most everyone today, including our own Lutherans. We have to watch the series of things that happen once gospel becomes law.

- To be Christ is to be the universal applier of the law and so includes everyone. Thus the law is fulfilled and thus the law is eternal. Thus the law of love is the gospel.
- In this gospel of acceptance (that is really only a self-made law), baptism replaces circumcision's Jewish exclusiveness as the sign of universal acceptance into the community of love.
- In order to do this the law itself must be abrogated (stopped) in one sense and universalized in another.
- Law is abrogated, overcome, over and done with in the one form of "orders of creation," which place distinctions even into bodies or certainly into the "structures" of life. Only the "material" of creation is good (cells and atoms), but the fall or sin is what imposes difference between creatures like that between Jew and Gentile (which was an artificial attempt to impose difference into the flesh by means of circumcision), or between slave and free (the Greek way of life that makes some people free in the *polis*, and others their supporting but unfree servants), and *especially no "male and female."*
- When Paul says "new creation," he therefore is taken to mean, the structures or "orders" or estates of creation into which God calls for the sustaining and production of more life—are destroyed by the gospel by which you are brought into the group.
- The creatures themselves do not die (no death), but what binds their wills from the outside—heteronomy—dies.
- Death here is only applied to the "natural law" so that image of God as male and female, for primary example, is destroyed, and that image is an external ordering or structure—Paul is then taken to mean by this that Genesis 1:27 is brought to an end in the newly structured church.
- God's gospel is getting rid of any offices, orders, or natural law in creation.
- But now that the external laws are removed, the church comes in, in its power of moral deliberation. And the gospel means the church can and should make up its own new laws by which to structure the loving community.
- Freedom then becomes *the ability to make new laws!*

- Moses was great. He gave us the law of love. Jesus is better because he applies it to everyone. He accepts them into the universal group that is going about making better structures for fuller expressions of love than existed in the exclusive groups that preceded, like the Jews.

They Have Made a Shipwreck of Their Faith

The Problem with “Moral Deliberation”

This group wants to convince you that if you take up the issue of sexuality in relation to the law (instead of their newly minted description of the gospel), then you are the false apostles adding “old law” to the open, accepting gospel. You are circumcisers. But this group is the modern *pseudo Apostoloi*, pure enthusiasts, adding to Jesus Christ and his cross the proposition of another gospel: one, universal law of love that makes us into accepting acceptors who accept our own unacceptability and that of others. Is this who Christ has become? They have, in the words of 1 Timothy 1:19, “made shipwreck of their faith.” In the end, they are Gnostic, anticreation idealists, seeking a utopia on earth that is hostile to the entire first article of your creed. Then they reduce Christ to a new Moses, an example, rejecting the crucified, and becoming pure spiritualists—enthusiasts who attempt to make of the gospel a vision of the church as a covenant community of accepting acceptors. They become a social contract theory.

Who has bewitched you! Who wants to make of the gospel a law? Who wants to make the church and its entrance rites, that is baptism, into an act of acceptance into the group of holy? It is not this or that misguided individual or poor exegete who has done this, it is the cosmic and humanly undefeatable power Paul simply calls *flesh*. But the Spirit, in whom we must and will walk, does not raise up carpers, people poking away at the preachers of the gospel, people who “agree to disagree” on this matter of biblical interpretation. The Holy Spirit does not create a community of dissension made up of people of multiple cultures who nevertheless have learned how to be cultural relativists as if that were the gospel! This finally will be of no help to a troubled conscience of any sort, and so we ought to have true compassion and love for people in great difficulty. There is only one remedy to being bound in sin and that is the forgiveness of sins on account of Christ. It is justification by faith alone.

These folks have been proposing that true freedom is freedom from the natural law since at least the time of Hegel. But Hegel at least had the good sense to make the state the institution of God that would provide the necessary cohesion of love in the form of new laws that truly included the disparate individuals who wandered lost in life. The church doesn’t even have this much sense any longer. They have decided that what really keeps them from being free is some outside imposition on the will that can and must be removed. Specifically they have zeroed in on the natural law as the root of their problems. Instead, listen to Luther in his Galatians Commentary on Galatians 5:14 (“whole law is summed up . . .”):

All people have a certain natural knowledge implanted in their minds (Rom 2), by which they know naturally that one should do to others what one wants done to one’s self. This principle and others like it, which we call the law of nature, are the foundation of human law and of all good works. Nevertheless, human reason is so corrupted and blinded by the malice of the devil that it does not understand this inborn knowledge, or, even if it has been admonished by the Word of God, it deliberately neglects and despises it. . . . In addition, the human reason and flesh, which resists the Spirit in the saints (in the wicked, of course, it has dominant control), is naturally afflicted with Pharisaic superstitions and, as Psalm 4:2 says, “loves vain words and seeks after lies”; that is, it would prefer to measure God by its own theories rather than by his Word and is far more ardent about doing works that it itself has chosen than about doing those that God commands. (LW 27: 53–54)

And further: “The whole world . . . cannot estimate the value of even one tiny truly good work, because it does not measure works or anything else on the basis of the Word of God but on the basis of a reason that is wicked, blind, and foolish” (LW 27: 56).

The sinner’s preference is always for “self-chosen works.” But since it has become rather evident that the state or government is not up to this task, as Hegel and the Germans once dreamed, an even worse suggestion is floating out there. It is frightening that the community of the church in its imaginary act of “moral deliberation” in the form of church basement meetings pouring over this ELCA material or in blue ribbon committees of the finest theologians known to the church like the one that produced this material (with all good intention!), is able to supply the new, creative structures needed for the Christian life lived in Christ’s new kingdom. And on what basis do they make this claim? They direct us to their rallying cry: “The Spirit is doing a new thing!” So, like a true spiritualist they say, “We have a new law, better than the creator could accomplish the first time around. It is based on a new gospel that will get outsiders to become insiders and so grow the church.” Beware of such superstitious, religious-sounding good works.

What We Teach

Since this is not the gospel, what do we teach, then? What is the gospel? What does the law do? The basic argument of Galatians goes like this:

- There are two kinds of righteousness: active and passive.
- Why are they so hard to distinguish? Because we are captive to the flesh.
- The righteousness of Christ comes by faith alone. It is an applied righteousness that is not generated or owned by us.
- Faith comes through the office of preaching law and gospel, both true words of God.

- This makes two worlds, as it were: old and new that concerns our whole existence, not parts. That means the repentance is total, not partial, and involves us in no less a translation from the flesh to the Spirit than our own death and resurrection.
- We live by faith, not by sight, thus as theologians of the cross.
- This faith is active in good works as a good tree produces good fruit.
- And so we have our two basic teachings: Faith alone in Christ alone. And from this comes love of neighbor (and so the teaching of good works follows that of faith). At this point we could return to the remarks I began with concerning how to proceed with an issue that concerns the working of the law in this old world both among those who are Christians and those who are not.

Of course these assertions have been difficult to hold, teach, and confess since the devil himself dislikes them immensely and our old sinful self fights against its death with every ounce of effort. Unless we become clear about what has happened in this church to the understanding of such a basic letter as Paul's to the Galatians, we will not make any headway regarding how to live together as sinners redeemed by Christ himself and alone by no other way than the cross itself. Bewitchment means we were caught off guard. We didn't understand that this was happening until one day it showed up with all the trappings of something that looks like official teaching of the church. It sounds pious. It sounds religious. It sounds like gospel.

But the gospel of Christ crucified is our only authority and by it we are truly freed for freedom, no less, not for some other lofty sounding goal—even so great as “the neighbor.” You can be assured that good works will come and they will not be for you. They will in fact be for the neighbor. But this is not your new religious goal in life. Spiritualism is always a terribly slippery eel to fight. But there is no other gospel to run to and the one we have is so precious that we don't have to go looking elsewhere. With such freedom comes boldness to say “no” to such confusion that we are receiving in the mail. So even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a contrary gospel than what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!

In his own commentary on Galatians, Luther noted that “it is difficult and dangerous to teach that we are justified by faith without works and yet to require works at the same time. Unless the ministers of Christ are faithful and prudent . . . who rightly distinguish the Word of truth (2 Tim 2:15), they will immediately confuse faith and love at this point. Both topics, faith and works, must be carefully taught and emphasized, but in such a way that they both remain within their limits” (AE 27: 63).

When the gospel is clear then also works become clear: “I come forth into another kingdom, and I perform good works whenever the opportunity arises.” Here there are a whole series of offices that open up opportunity to the neighbor like preacher, parent, politician, and servant. Here one can even speak of obedience, submission (but only after one has refused

any submission to the law). Obedience is a result of the gospel. It is not the gospel even in Christ. Here no better command is given than “love your neighbor as yourself.” The pattern to follow is not a book of laws but what you do when loving yourself. Luther reminds us that the loveliest of all books about laws is right in your own heart. The subject of love is set: my neighbor (a most lovable object indeed), and nothing better can be done in this old world than love since “it is neither called forth by anything that someone deserves nor deterred by what is undeserving and ungrateful.”

One of the greatest acts of love is “teaching the erring; comforting the afflicted; encouraging the weak; . . . bearing with his rude manners and impoliteness; putting up with annoyances, labors, and the ingratitude and contempt of men in both church and state . . . etc.” (AE 27: 56). This should not become mere ideas or values like acceptance, so that we lose our Christ, and our neighbor, and have only the cold words of the law in “letters and syllables.” Jesus says to us: “Persevere in the doctrine of faith, which you have received from me. Afterwards, if you want to do good works, I will show you in one word the highest and greatest works, and the way to keep all the laws: . . . love” (AE 27: 59).

This is the shortest and longest theology at once: shortest in words: faith, then love. It is the longest in practice since it is wider, longer, deeper, and higher than the whole world. That means there will be plenty for you to do.

But here Paul gives a caution: “If you bite and devour one another, take heed that you are not consumed by one another” (Gal 5:15)! Remember that the source of schism is not God's word of law regarding sexuality. It is the attempt to make another gospel. And that we must teach against. “The commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor’ makes the same requirement, namely, that you not submit to your flesh.” One does not come without the other. Loving neighbor is not done by submitting to flesh. If you remember that much you will have enough to pierce through this bewitchment that has grabbed hold of the church.

ON THE OFFICE OF THE KEYS, ABSOLUTION, AND CONFESSION

From Harless' Magazine; reprinted in Der Lutheraner 4 (January 11, 1848). Translated by Christian C. Tiews, Associate Pastor, Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The Son of God became incarnate in order to redeem mankind from its sin and punishment. This is why the premier and next fruit of his work of salvation, which he completed by taking on human nature, is to forgive us our sins.

Our sins are forgiven when we believe in him—that is, in the One who appeared. In the same way, the fathers of the old

covenant received the forgiveness of sins by believing in their future salvation.

For this reason both the Old and New Testament teach unanimously that forgiveness of sins was—and continues to be—received through Christ. The apostle Peter, who most certainly understood the word of the prophets, says explicitly: “To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43).¹ When the Son of God, on whose salutary future the fathers had focused their faith, truly appeared, he had already been given the name Jesus. Because—as the angel said—“he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21).

Recognizing the true sacrificial offering in [Jesus], John the Baptist pointed to him, saying, “The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” [The Baptist] prepared the way for him by absolving the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the Jewish countryside who had come to him and confessed their sins (Mt 3:6). [John] baptized them, which forgave their sins (Mk 1:4). The Lord himself clearly testifies why he appeared, when he says that he came to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 26:28). After his resurrection he calls repentance and forgiveness of sins the fruit of his passion and resurrection. This is the main point of his sermon to the nations (Lk 24:46–47).

Thus the forgiveness of sins is the story and the glory [literally, “the core and star”] of apostolic preaching. This makes the gospel a joyful message. At Pentecost St. Peter preaches “Repent!” (Acts 2:38), “and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. . . . He has appeared to take away our sins,” says John (1 Jn 2:2, 5).

And every Epistle of Paul overflows with a confession of rock-solid faith and joy regarding the grace that Christ provides—[Christ’s] foremost achievement. This grace links together all of Paul’s Epistles, as on a golden chain. Pointing to the cross, as if with his finger, Paul states that in Christ “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Eph 1:7). Describing the glory of the new covenant—and specially of the office of the high priest—over and above the old covenant, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews testifies from the outset (Heb 1:3) that “he is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” . . . that he purified our sins through himself.

But not only did our Savior Jesus Christ purchase the forgiveness of our sins. He also taught that he appeared for our salvation, so that our sins would be forgiven. Furthermore he occasionally truly distributed and attributed to individuals the forgiveness of sins which he had wrought.

To sin is to break the divine law. Only God, who gave the law, can by his own power forgive sins. This is why the scribes are correct when they ask, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mk 2:7).

It is precisely by forgiving sins that Christ proves his eternal divinity and the authority over everything that has been given to him, even according to his human nature (Mt 11:27; 28:18). With this perfect authority that he possesses, he speaks to the paralytic, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” And when numerous scribes, who believe that Christ is only a regular human being, regard this [statement] as blasphemy, he confirms his authority to forgive sins by performing a miracle: “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home” (Mk 2:10–11).

In the same way, he forgave the paralytic and [also] the sins of the sinful woman in the home of Simon the Pharisee. She truly repented and showed her remorse by shedding tears. And she demonstrated her faith by wetting the feet of the Lord Jesus with her tears of remorse. She had found mercy in the eyes of the Lord even before receiving absolution because he said, “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven” (Lk 7:47). But in order that she would know for certain that her sins were forgiven, he forgave her in a way that could be discerned externally, by saying to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” But the people dining with her muttered to themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” Once again confirming his authority to forgive her, he repeated to the woman that she had received his mercy when he said, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Lk 7:36 ff.).

In a similar way Zacchaeus, too, was forgiven by the Lord. Zacchaeus’s words, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold,” are his confession. [Here Zacchaeus] expresses his remorse, faith, and obedience. And the words of the Lord, “Today salvation has come to this house,” are [the man’s] absolution. [These words] let him know for certain that he, too, is one of the lost whom the Son of Man came to seek and save (Lk 19:2 ff.).

Without a doubt, the Lord made use of his power to speak sinners repenting of their sins “into life” even more frequently [than is recorded]. [In fact,] “the world itself could not contain the books” that could have been written [about these miracles] (Jn 21:25). Executing the task of a high priest, part of the visible administration of [Christ’s] prophetic office was truly to allocate to repentant souls the forgiveness of their sins. Conversely, he retained the sins of those who did not repent or believe when he called out to the unbelieving Jewish crowd, “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins” (Jn 8:24).

But he was chiefly sent to proclaim good news to the poor, heal crushed hearts, proclaim liberty to the captives, recover sight to the blind, and set at liberty those who are oppressed (Lk 4:18). Through him the word of the prophet was fulfilled, “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench” (Mt 12:20). According to his human nature

1. All English Bible quotations in this translation are ESV, unless indicated otherwise.

as well, he was anointed with the Holy Spirit in order to proclaim the good news. He received a learned tongue so that he would know how to speak to the weary² at the right time.

After completing his work of salvation, the Lord proceeded to his glory—visibly lifted up and taken from the sight of his followers in a cloud (Acts 1:9). From that point on, he chose not to exercise his power to forgive sins in a visible way, although—according to his prophecy—he is [still] invisibly present in his church until the end of the world. Yet he did not take absolution—that is, the consolation of the grace of the gospel—with him from earth [into heaven]. Neither did he take from us his external allocation of the forgiveness of our sins [when he ascended], nor did he deprive us of the gift that he received for humans—even for the rebellious ones (Ps 68:19). Rather, he founded the office of reconciliation, which he passed on to the household by his means of grace.

After ascending into the heaven of heavens—and in order to fulfill all [prophecies]—he is still invisibly present and efficacious in his church, even though we cannot see him. He has appointed countless [men] to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. This equips the saints for the work of the ministry, in order to build up the Body of Christ (Eph 4:12; 1 Cor 12:28). The same love that moved him to forgive repentant sinners [also] moved him to pass on to his disciples the authority that his Father had given him, along with all the teachings collected in the New Testament. The risen One said to his disciples, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld” (Jn 20:21–23).

As Augustine says, these words of Christ are more certain than the edicts and diplomas of any king. Just as Christ is the envoy of the Father, so the disciples are the envoys of Christ. The gifts that he received from the Father for his mission of salvation for us are passed on from him to the disciples. In order to fulfill his mission, he equips them with the Holy Spirit—with the breath of his mouth and from the never-ending fullness of his divinity. According to his human nature, he was anointed by the Father with the Holy Spirit—without limit. As Lord of the church he passes on to his disciples—his servants—the power to forgive sins or to withhold forgiveness. On account of [Christ’s] work of salvation this power was given to him from his Father, yet as the Son of God he also possessed this power from the beginning.

He no longer has this visible power himself, [now] that he has removed himself from the visible presence. Yet in order to console the souls who are hungry for grace—and who at the same time are also timid—and in order to terrify people who are secure, yet remain unrepentant—he gives this power to his disciples. He enables them to forgive sins and also to withhold

forgiveness because the Lord himself works with them and through them—even though he is invisible (Mk 16:20).

Being authorized to forgive sins is not the same as being authorized to preach the gospel—which [the disciples] were enabled to do shortly after being called.³ For it is one thing to teach through whom and how one can attain the forgiveness of sins, yet it is another thing actually to communicate that forgiveness. The preaching of the gospel goes to all humanity indiscriminately. But the forgiveness of sins is only given to the repentant. [Now] that Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father, this authority is given to his disciples, just as he forgave sins when he walked on the earth.

For just as the Father sent him, he sends [his disciples]. He has authorized them to act on his behalf, to act as he would because they have received the Holy Spirit. They are the tools through which he himself—that is, the Savior who is always present in his church—wishes to continue to delegate the authority to forgive sins, to which he is entitled. When [the disciples] forgive sins or retain them, it shall be as legal—as efficacious—as if Christ himself were to speak it. For they do it in Christ’s name and on his behalf. If the forgiveness of sins only meant preaching the gospel and if withholding the forgiveness of sins meant you are announcing divine punishment, then the words of Christ would mean nothing. [But] when you preach the gospel to people, you are preaching the [gospel of Christ]. And when you announce God’s wrath to people, you are announcing to them [the wrath of God].

3. Translator’s note: this Bible verse (Mt 16:7) doesn’t seem to fit. Perhaps the author meant Mk 3:14?

WHEN JESUS IS NO LONGER JUDGE BUT SAVIOR

Luther reflects in 1530/31 on how it used to be with Mary and himself before the gospel comes clear. Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, AE 23: 57–58.

In the papacy we heard a far different message about Christ. There they tried to bring us baptized people to this Man [Christ] by means of laws and all sorts of good works. Christ was depicted as a grim tyrant, a furious and stern judge who demanded much of us and imposed good works as payment for our sins. There is a shameful and blasphemous picture or painting of Judgment Day in which we see the Son on his knees before the Father, showing him his wounds, and St. John and Mary interceding for us at the Last Judgment, the mother showing the Son the breasts he had sucked. . . . Such paintings should be put aside; for they have been used to frighten people’s consciences and to make them think that they must fear and flee from the dead Savior, as though he

2. According to Mt 11:28 (NIV).

wanted to drive us from him and avenge our sins. This makes us reluctant to go to him . . . for the pope's intention was to drive the people to Christ with good works, by which they were to atone for their sins. Thus they were to say before God's judgment seat on the Last Day: "Behold, Lord Christ, this is what I accomplished: I fasted so much, and I performed these good works and those good works." And in case this was not sufficient, the people learned to say: "Dear Mary, step forward in my behalf! Dear St. John, St. Peter, and Paul, come to my aid!" That is preaching the devil and not Christ; that is driving and chasing the people away from Christ. In that way Christ was removed from the sight of poor sinners; yes, thus he was taken from their hearts.

MARY SINGS A MAGNIFICENT SONG

From a sermon preached on Luke 1:46–55 by Rev. Michael Albrecht at a women's missionary rally sponsored by the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church in India on 11 January 2008.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus,

How old do you think Mary was when she gave birth to Jesus? I know there are some people who believe Mary was a young teenager. They have their reasons. But there is another question: How old do you think Mary was when she sang her *Magnificat*? It is a magnificent song. Mary has given a masterpiece of poetry to the Christian church. As she sings her song, we hear the music of the gospel. Are we searching for a praise song to sing in our churches today? Mary's *Magnificat* is the perfect praise song.

How did Mary compose this magnificent song? Did she get caught up in some kind of spiritual ecstasy? Did she simply blurt it out without any preparation? Or did she sit down and compose this song very carefully? Was it something like a pastor sitting at his desk and writing a sermon? We do know that Mary was a thoughtful person. St. Luke says it two times: Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Let's take a closer look at Mary's song. Does it sound like it was written by a young teenager? We can hear many echoes of the Old Testament in Mary's song. It sounds something like the song Hannah sang after she gave birth to Samuel. Mary's song would fit very well into the Old Testament book of Psalms.

In the first part of Luke 1 we are told that the angel Gabriel came to Nazareth. Gabriel had good news for Mary: The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you, therefore the holy One who shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God. What a blessing! No one else in the history of the world—before or since—has ever been honored in this way. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the only one who can properly be called "the mother of God."

But at the time it must have seemed like a mixed blessing. She was betrothed to Joseph the carpenter. The Child she was carrying was not his. No doubt the wagging tongues and itching ears of Nazareth were working overtime! When Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant, he had in mind to divorce her. Is that what you would expect to happen to the mother of God? No wonder she decided to get out of town.

A short time later, Mary went up into the hill country of Judea to visit her relative Elizabeth. Both women were pregnant. Each of them was carrying a little baby boy in her womb. Elizabeth was six months further along than Mary. As soon as Elizabeth heard the sound of Mary's voice, little baby John the Baptist jumped in her womb.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta had a memorable comment on this; she said the first person to welcome our Lord Jesus to earth was an unborn baby, who welcomed our Lord while he was still an unborn baby. Isn't that marvelous?

St. Luke says Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

This was not just emotional exaggeration. Elizabeth was not merely caught up in the mood of the moment. No, St. Luke specifically says she was filled with the Holy Spirit. That means we can take Elizabeth's words at face value. Elizabeth wondered, "Why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

It is good to remember that both Elizabeth and Mary were Old Testament Jews. Elizabeth calls Mary the mother of my Lord. Mary's Child is the LORD, who appeared to Moses at the burning bush. There he revealed his name, I AM, to Moses. So Mary is now the mother of I AM. But Mary is not the mother of God the Father. She is not the mother of God the Holy Spirit. She is the mother of God the Son. He is "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father." He is God and Mary is his mother. That is important because that is how God chose to become Man. Our Savior and Redeemer is Emanuel, God with us.

Now obviously "the mother of God" does not belong on the same level with God the Father. Mary does not belong on the same level with her Son. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are God. Mary is not God. And Mary is the first to admit that. After Elizabeth calls her the mother of my Lord, Mary sings a magnificent song. The first words out of her mouth are these: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in *God my Savior*. Mary confesses that she needs a Savior just as you and I do.

That is why we do not pray to her. She is not God. Prayer is to be offered to God alone. But it is possible to honor Mary without blaspheming God. As we keep on listening to Mary's *Magnificat*, we hear her say, "Behold, from now on, all generations shall call me blessed." Her prophecy has come true, has it not? Right up to the present day, especially in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, Mary is regularly called "the Blessed Virgin." Which suggests the question: Do we Lutherans also call her blessed?

Of course we do. For hundreds of years the *Magnificat* has been a part of our Vespers liturgy. Every time we sing the *Magnificat* we call Mary blessed—just as she said we would. And Mary repeatedly gives God all the praise and glory. “He that is mighty has done great things for me; and holy is his name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation.” God does it all. Mary is blessed because she receives the benefit of all that God has done. That is why Mary praises him. So we praise him, too.

Here is the glorious paradox that lies at the heart of our Christian faith: Mary magnifies the Lord and rejoices in God her Savior. God the Father in heaven is not the only One she is praising. No, she is also praising the tiny, helpless fetus in her own womb. Mary says, “He has shown strength with his arm.” At that moment his tiny arm is like a matchstick. The only thing he can do with his little arm is to lift his tiny thumb to his own mouth. But Mary knows she cannot worship God the Father without at the same time worshipping God the Son. She praises Jesus, who is growing and twisting and turning and stretching and kicking inside of her. Mary worships this little unborn baby who is totally dependent upon her. He eats the food she eats. He breathes the air she breathes. Like all other pregnant mothers, she lives “for two.” Mary worships him. Mary praises him.

Martin Luther has taught us to sing a mighty hymn of praise: “With might of ours can naught be done; soon were our loss effected. But for us fights the Valiant One, whom God himself elected. Ask ye who is this? Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord, and there’s none other God.” In other words, we cannot worship God the Father apart from his only begotten Son. We cannot chop God up into three different pieces and then worship only one of the pieces. It boggles the mind, but by the grace of God we believe it. That is what we have in common with Mary.

Elizabeth says it this way: “Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!” Just think about that for a moment. For the past six months Elizabeth has been living with a man who has not been able to say a word. As you know, her husband Zechariah was a priest. He had been offering incense in the Temple one day when the angel Gabriel appeared to him to tell him that he and Elizabeth were going to have a child in their old age. Because Zechariah found that virtually impossible to believe, he lost his ability to speak until his son John was born. After six months of Zechariah’s silence, Mary came to visit Elizabeth. She must have been overjoyed just to have someone to talk to. Maybe there is a veiled reference to her husband when she says to Mary: Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!—unlike this husband of mine who did not believe what the angel Gabriel told him.

What exactly was it that Mary believed? What had the Lord said unto her? Through the mouth of the angel Gabriel the Lord said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you; therefore the

holy One who shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God.” Mary believed that! Mary’s response to Gabriel was: “Be it unto me according to your word.” Martin Luther says that this is just as great a miracle as the incarnation itself. Mary believed what the angel Gabriel said to her.

There is a lesson here for you and me today. Mary is called blessed because she believed what the Lord said to her. The same holds true for us. At the beginning of the Sunday service you confess your sins to God. Then you listen to the absolution. God says to you, “I forgive you all your sins.” And you believe that word of God. You say “Amen.” You could also say, Be it unto me according to Your word. And you are blessed.

It is really very simple. But it can be so simple that it is hard to believe. Jesus was born for me? My sins are forgiven? That is why we need to hear it over and over again: “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” That was God’s gift to Mary two thousand years ago. That is God’s gift to you today.

The same thing happens when you receive the sacrament. You hear those precious words, “Take and eat, this is the true body of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, given into death for the forgiveness of all of your sins.” You know and believe that the word the Lord speaks to you will be accomplished. As you receive Holy Communion, God actually forgives all your sins. And you are blessed.

So what do you think? Can a young teenage girl compose such a magnificent song? One way to think about this is to remember the story of Palm Sunday. Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey. The children greeted him with a song of praise: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” The chief priests and the scribes did not like that song. They asked Jesus, “Do you hear what the children are saying?” Jesus quoted Psalm 8: “From the lips of children and infants You have ordained praise.”

We cannot say for sure how old Mary was when she sang her *Magnificat*, but we do know this for sure: the Holy Spirit came upon her, and the power of the Highest overshadowed her; therefore the holy Child who was born of her is the very Son of God.

So this is our theme for these three joyous days: “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name,” Hebrews 13:15.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Brief articles may be submitted for consideration in LOGIA FORUM by sending them to Rev. Michael Albrecht, 460 W. Annapolis St., West St. Paul, MN 55118. When possible, please e-mail your work to us in Microsoft Word (Doc) or RTF formats to malbrecht@saintjameslutheran.com Because of the large number of unsolicited materials received, we regret that we cannot publish them all or notify authors in advance of their publication.

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