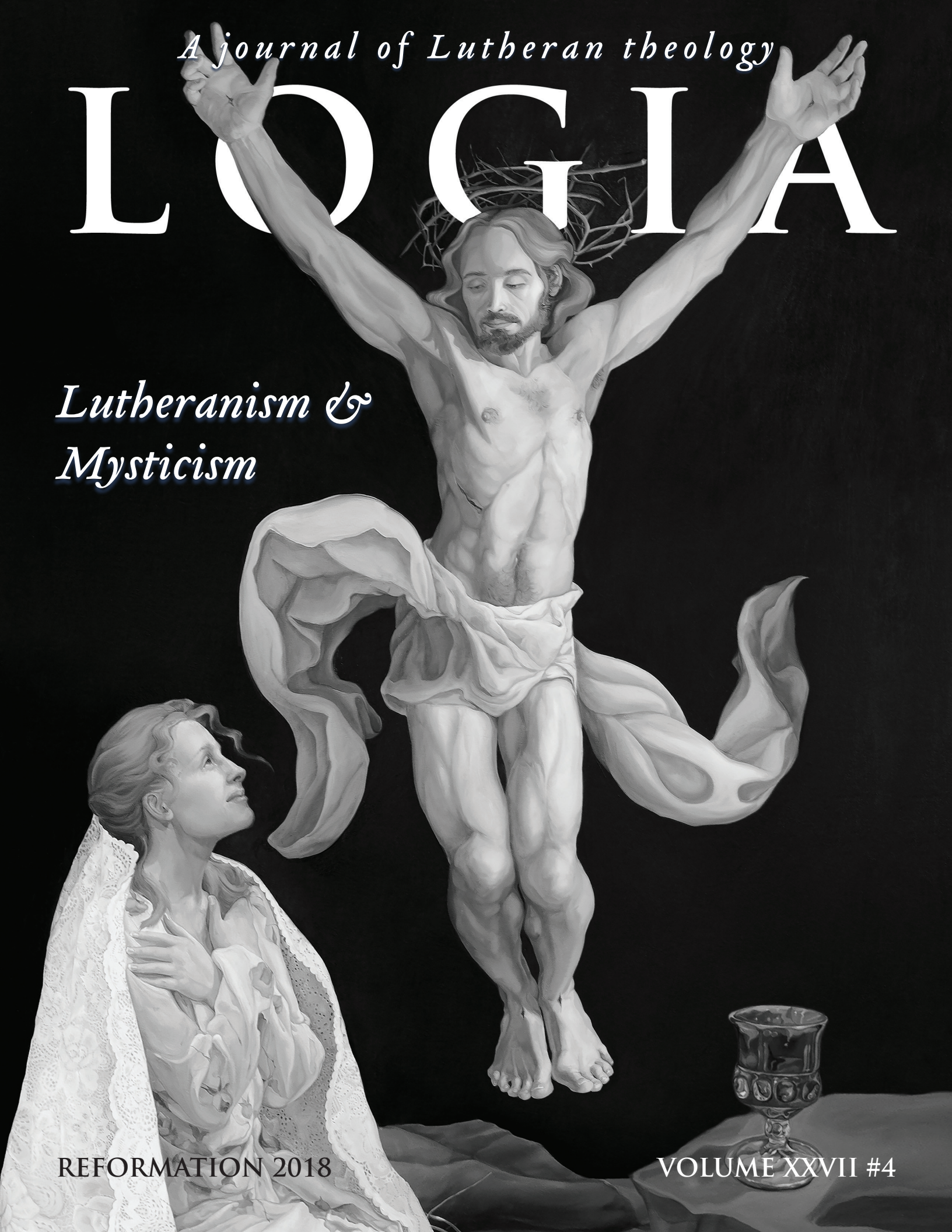
A journal of Lutheran theology

LOGIA

Lutheranism & Mysticism



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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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Cover art: "The Bride of Christ at the Foot of the Cross," by Kelly Schumacher, oil on canvas, 2014. This painting visualizes the mystical union between Christ and the Church—a subject of great interest to Luther and the medieval mystics who influenced him. The artist here replaces the traditional image of Mary at the foot of the cross with the Bride of Christ. She weeps with sorrow for her sin, but with joy for her Savior who bore them.

In creating this work, the artist drew inspiration from the hymn "The Church's One Foundation" (LSB 289). The mystical aspects are not just limited to a spiritual relationship with our Savior, but also manifest in the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, represented by a chalice. Image is copyright © Kelly Schumacher (Agnus Dei Liturgical Arts) 2014, used by permission of the artist: www.agnusdeiarts.com.

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FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

AC [CA]	Augsburg Confession
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
Ep	Epitome of the Formula of Concord
FC	Formula of Concord
LC	Large Catechism
LSB	*Lutheran Service Book*
LW	*Luther's Works,* American Edition
SA	Smalcald Articles
SC	Small Catechism
SD	Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord
SL	St. Louis Edition of Luther's Works
Tappert	*The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert
Triglotta	Concordia Triglotta
TLH	*The Lutheran Hymnal*
Tr	Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
WA	*Luthers Werke,* Weimarer Ausgabe [Weimar Edition]
Kolb-Wengert	Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).
NPNF[1]	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* Series 1
NPNF[2]	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* Series 2

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LOGIA

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REFORMATION 2018 VOLUME XXVII, NUMBER 4

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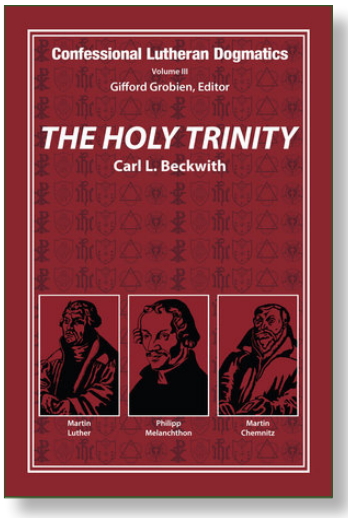

CONFESSIONAL LUTHERAN DOGMATICS

THE HOLY TRINITY

by

Carl L. Beckwith

THE HOLY TRINITY, VOLUME 3 OF THE CONFESSIONAL LUTHERAN DOGMATICS SERIES, explains the difficulties we face in confessing the Trinity in our world today and how we overcome these challenges by placing Christ and the Gospel at the center of our preaching and teaching. *The Holy Trinity* returns us to Scripture and shows how the Old and New Testaments carefully and decisively present the indivisible oneness and irreducible threeness of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Finally, *The Holy Trinity* introduces readers to the sound pattern of words used by the Fathers and Lutheran reformers to clarify and defend the trinitarian witness of Scripture. We confess, worship, and glorify the Holy Trinity rightly when we boldly proclaim the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Editor's Introduction

Lutheranism & Mysticism

Lutheranism has a long and tenuous relationship with mysticism. Luther was influenced by the mysticism of his day early in his theological career. Throughout the centuries, different sorts of mysticism have arisen to varying degrees throughout various branches of the church. Among a number of Lutherans, especially those of the former Synodical Conference, there has also been an extreme wariness toward anything associated with or smacking of the mystical. This issue of *Logia* explores the relationship between Lutheranism, mysticism, and the word. It is as timely as ever because many of mysticism's pitfalls (overemphasis on emotion, favoring direct experience over the written word, etc.) remain pervasive problems today.

Paul Lehninger's article was published in an earlier issue of *Logia*, but we are reprinting it now for a new generation of readers, with some revisions and additions, because it fits this theme well and explains well the relationship between Luther and mysticism. Lehninger outlines the affective side of Luther's theology and his relationship with Germanic mysticism. All the while, he reminds the reader that this mystical aspect of Luther's thought in no way unseats or impinges upon the centrality of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith and the Christocentric nature of Luther's work.

Timothy R. Schmeling's article reminds us where Lutheran theology is grounded, in the *sola*s. While, as Lehninger clarified, Lutheranism has perhaps underestimated or underappreciated aspects of mysticism from the church's history and Lutheran theology, Schmeling reminds us that the vitality and power of our message is rooted in the great "alone" propositions of our past, which we do well to hold steadfastly to in the present and pass faithfully down for the future.

Gregory P. Schulz's article explores the challenges posed by postmodern approaches to hermeneutics and offers what he proposes to be a pastoral, Lutheran way forward. After clearly describing the dangers posed to a biblical view of truth by postmodernity, Schulz outlines how some, in his view, have intentionally, unwittingly, or naïvely sought to utilize aspects of postmodern thought in the service of Lutheran theology and hermeneutics. He explains why he thinks such approaches fall short, doing more harm than good.

We are happy to offer this issue and hope that it will serve to highlight Luther and Lutheranism's relationship with mysticism as well as its grounding in the Truth of Scripture and in the person and work of Christ.

Wade Johnston, for the editors

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On the Cross and in the Cradle

The Mystical Theology of Martin Luther

Paul Lehninger

While different scholars highlight different emphases of Martin Luther's theology, many identify justification by faith as the heart of Luther's theology. Luther clearly stressed God's imputing Christ's righteousness to sinners, and he devoted a great deal of ink to the concepts of proclamation, testament, and promise. But although these concepts are indispensably linked to the assurance of God's grace in Christ, and therefore must continually be emphasized, this is not the whole story of Luther's theology.

Formerly in the seminary and the university, as well as in the pulpit and the pew, the affective side of Luther's theology was often divorced from what was considered the intellectual, more philosophical, side of his theology. In medieval terms, the mystic and the scholastic were poles apart, and since one had to pick and choose between the two, the mystical, affective, experiential emphases in Luther were given short shrift. But the mystical motif in Luther's theology has never been completely ignored and is still worth studying today for the edification and enrichment in the faith it contributes to the people of God. This paper will examine Luther's mysticism in its historical context. While Luther borrowed from much of the tradition that preceded him, he set his own unmistakable stamp on it and transformed it, or, better, reformed it. By subjecting the mystical tradition to the scrutiny of Scripture and a christocentric approach to theology, Martin Luther was able to weave this fine theological thread integrally into the fabric of Reformation theology in order to fashion a harmonious whole.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It is important to recognize that one cannot speak of mysticism, even Christian mysticism, "in general." Three major strands of mysticism can be distinguished before the time of Luther: Dionysian, Romanic, and Germanic.[1] While Luther never rejected any of these absolutely, at times he seems to have accepted very little indeed of Dionysian mysticism. He accepted Romanic mysticism with certain qualifications and spoke most highly of Germanic mysticism. Because it is beyond the scope of this paper even to summarize each of these forms of mysticism and then supply Luther's evaluation of them, only those aspects that are germane to Luther's assessment will be considered.

Dionysius the Areopagite was responsible for a tradition of Christian mysticism that strongly influenced the West and is still the touchstone for the Eastern Church.[2] Luther occasionally praised Dionysius. He said that while the scholastics spoke of divine secrets the way a shoemaker speaks of leather, Dionysius spoke of deep awe before the ungraspable, unreachable majesty of God, and said that not only every human word but also every human thought was too small to express the glory of God. This is what he called the "ecstatic and negative theology," which speaks of God with fear and trembling "in deep silence and stillness," of one who, when all is said and done, remains a "hidden and incomprehensible God" (WA 3:372.13).

While Luther could occasionally speak positively of Dionysian mysticism, he much more frequently criticized it, primarily because he judged it to be insufficiently concerned with and rooted in the incarnate, humiliated, and crucified Christ.[3] The "graded ascent" to heaven that this type of mysticism offered had to be discarded as long as it could put one in danger of thinking one could climb to God on one's own, or in the words of David Steinmetz, to "scamper up a graded ladder of ascent to a God who reigns in glory."[4] For Luther, the only ladder to God is the ladder provided by the humanity of Jesus Christ: "Our ladder to God is he who descended to us. We have to begin our ascent in his humility and his humiliation" (WA 2:493.12).

Here it becomes apparent that, however much Luther valued the role of religious ecstasy in the life of the Christian, it

Paul Lehninger is Professor of Theology at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, and a *Logia* Editorial Associate. This essay was presented to the WISILLOWA Conference of Pastors and Congregations on 24–25 April 2017. An earlier version of this essay was published under the same title in *Logia* 6, no. 1, pp. 5–11.

1. Bengt R. Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 120; and Erich Vogelsang, "Luther und die Mystik," *Luther-Jahrbuch* 19 (1937): 33. "Romanic" is Hoffman's term; Vogelsang speaks of "die romanische Mystik."
2. For a discussion of the influence of the Dionysian corpus in both Western and Eastern theology, see Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality"; Jean Leclercq, "Influence and Non-influence of Dionysius in the Western Middle Ages"; and Karlfried Froehlich, "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century," in Pseudo-Dionysius, *Pseudo-Dionysius: the Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (Mahwah, New York: Paulist, 1987), 11–46. There are also important analyses of the limits of Dionysius's influence on Eastern theology in John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979).
3. Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 120.
4. David C. Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1980), 127.

could only function in the context of a fundamental theological principle, that of God's initiative in the face of humankind's utter helplessness. As will be seen later, this, together with his concept of man as *simul gemitus et raptus*, led him to connect his brand of mysticism with his theology of the cross.

God's mercy and his judgment have been reconciled literally and historically in the person of Jesus.

Furthermore, for Luther the God who acts in history is both hidden and revealed. But Luther's stress on the hidden God has nothing in common with the speculative theology that became associated with the Dionysian approach.[5] Rather, Luther's concept of God as both hidden and revealed precludes speculation and underscores the role of faith. According to Erich Vogelsang,

> That leads to the third and, for Luther, decisive objection against the Areopagite: "There one learns nothing of the crucified Christ." . . . Whoever falls under this deception of the devil worships his own delusions instead of the true God. Whoever breaks through this deception into true despair before the hidden God, he is already halfway helped. But whoever in boldness, "drunk with joy, in this way means already to be sitting on God's lap," he is hard to help. These are "delusiones Satanae, qui ita fascinat sensus hominum, ut talia mendacia pro certissima veritate amplectantur" [delusions of Satan, which enchant the senses of men so that they embrace such lies instead of the most certain truth].[6]

This is also connected with his emphasis on the Christian's recognizing that God has placed him in the created world for a purpose, and that God ordinarily carries out his purpose in the believer's life as the believer lives his life in the world. Here Luther opposed the Areopagite's advice to "flee the world of perception,"[7] advice that was followed by his commentators among the monks and scholastics who fled to the inner world of their cloisters and colleges for their visions, revelations, and enlightenments. Luther recommended instead the life lived between birth and death in the observable world with its experience of familial and political needs.[8]

Luther's estimate of Romanic mysticism was much more positive than his estimate of Dionysian mysticism, although it was certainly qualified. Perhaps it can best be understood in the context of the medieval notion of *homo viator*.[9] According to this idea, the Christian is held in tension between hope and security on the one hand, and fear and unrest on the other, as he is aware of God's mercy and goodness in the past and present, and his judgment in the future. He sees Christ as incarnate in the past, experiences his grace infused into his heart in the present, and looks to Christ as judge in the future. This situation produces *Anfechtung.* The predominant medieval solution to this problem was that man's status as *homo viator* could be suspended only in proportion to the degree in which he was no longer sinful in fact. To the extent that one grew in faith formed by love, one could enter into fuller mystical union with God and experience the peace and ecstasy that were the relief from *Anfechtung* and the threat of judgment. Heiko Oberman distinguishes between Dionysian and Romanic mysticism. In the Romanic view, the Christian who is in the process of loving union with God must indeed lose his identity, but this identity is not the individuality of *homo viator* (Dionysian view), but rather the distortion of his image under the influence of sin.[10]

Although Luther shares the goal of overcoming the status of *homo viator* with the medieval mystical tradition, his means for reaching that goal is radically different. Luther sees the Christian, who is *simul justus et peccator,* not as looking back to the mercy of God and ahead to his judgment, but as simultaneously experiencing both. God's mercy and his judgment have been reconciled literally and historically in the person of Jesus Christ. This becomes a reality for the Christian by faith. Thus the radical break from the medieval mystical tradition is that the Christian knows and experiences the love of God and suspension from his status as *homo viator* while still a sinner in fact, and this is accomplished by means of faith, not love.

In more general terms, Luther objected to the lack of emphasis placed on *Anfechtung* in Romanic mysticism, and especially to the fact that while he placed spiritual *Anfechtung* in the forefront, Romanic mysticism spoke only of bodily *Anfechtung.*[11] Also, while not denying the importance of bridal mysticism,[12] Luther objected to the deep eroticism of it in the Victorines and Bernard, which he considered to be in opposition to faith.

5. There is some disagreement regarding whether later forms of speculative mysticism were (and are) true to Dionysius. See Heiko A. Oberman, "Simul Gemitus et Raptus: Luther und die Mystik," in *The Church, Mysticism, Sanctification, and the Natural in Luther's Thought*, ed. Ivar Asheim (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 27–29.
6. Luther, WA 39, 1:390.7, quoted in Vogelsang, "Luther und die Mystik," 37.
7. Ibid., 35.
8. Ibid., 36.
9. The following argument is based on Steven E. Ozment, "*Homo Viator:* Luther and Late Medieval Theology," in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, ed. Steven E. Ozment (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1971), 142–54.
10. Oberman, "Simul Gemitus et Raptus," 28.
11. Vogelsang, "Luther und die Mystik," 40.
12. Although this paper will not deal with Luther's use of bridal mysticism, the subject is certainly interesting. Luther sees it as the marriage of the Christian to Christ in faith, which involves their "joyous exchange" (*fröhliche Wechsel*) of sin and righteousness. See, for example, Luther's treatise *On the Freedom of a Christian, LW* 31:351.

He accepted it insofar as one may share in Christ's life, but asserted that one may never possess the whole Christ.[13]

Most important, Luther objected to the Romanic vision of an ecstatic union of the uncreated Word, without the medium of the external word. However, this exclusion of the external word was not the only current flowing in medieval mysticism. As Vogelsang observes:

> The critique is clear: only through the incarnate and crucified do we have entrance to the eternal, incomprehensible; only through the revealed do we have the hidden God. Nevertheless, with that the properly Lutheran word to mysticism has not yet been spoken; for Bernard and Bonaventure also spoke similar warnings and criticisms; indeed, here Luther appears simply to be speaking a customary warning of these church mystics of the Middle Ages.[14]

Luther clearly esteemed Bernard and Bonaventure and apparently was more influenced by their approach to affective, experiential theology than by that of any other theologians of the Middle Ages. He borrowed one of his definitions of mysticism from Bernard: "Theologia mystica est sapientia experimentalis et non doctrinalis" (mystical theology is experimental—or experiential—and not doctrinal knowledge) (WA 9:98.20). Of Bonaventure he stated, "Bonaventura . . . est inter scholasticos doctores optimus" (Among the scholastic doctors, Bonaventure is the best) (WA TR 1:330.1). His high esteem of these two theologians was due to their emphasis, contrary to the Dionysian school, on incarnation and cross, death and judgment: "Bernard held the incarnation of Christ very dear just as Bonaventure; I certainly praise both of them very much."[15] On another point, Luther applauds Bonaventure's approach in combining speculative and affective theology: "He had made me quite beside myself, because I wanted to feel the union of God with my soul as a union of the intellect and of the will" (WA TR 1:302.30–34).

In summary, Luther was sometimes strongly in favor of, and sometimes strongly against, Romanic mysticism. In keeping with his customary eclecticism, he accepted certain elements of the tradition, especially those set forth by Bernard and Bonaventure, without buying into the entire system. Moreover, he was able to borrow various aspects of it to suit his own purposes, as Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen notes:

> Here is repeated the hermeneutical precedent proper to Luther, that he appropriates mystical means of expression, in order to have his way with his own understanding of grace, for example, against the understanding of grace as *habitus* by the scholastics. But at the same time he interprets their [the mystics'] means of speech in the horizon of his word theology.[16]

While Luther's acceptance of both Dionysian and Romanic mysticism is qualified, his enthusiasm for Germanic mysticism is almost unlimited, especially that of Tauler and of the Frankfurter in the *Theologia Germanica*. Luther also highly appreciated Gerson, who could be considered to represent a transitional step from Romanic to Germanic mysticism. His use and regard of Gerson, according to Oberman, can be traced back through the levels of his commentaries on the Psalms to two years before the discovery of Tauler in his writings.[17] This esteem is reflected in his comments, "Gerson is the first to have arrived at grasping the point of theology; he also experienced many *Anfechtungen*" (WA TR 2:114.1–3), and "Gerson is the only one who has written about spiritual *Anfechtung*" (WA TR 1:496.7).

Luther applauds Bonaventure's approach in combining speculative and affective theology.

This emphasis on spiritual *Anfechtung,* on the necessity of despairing of oneself, and on unconditional resignation to the will of God appears to be what Luther valued most in Tauler and the Frankfurter. Regarding them he said, "I have found more of true theology in him [Tauler] than in all the doctors of all universities taken together" (WA 1:557.29), and "Neither in the Latin nor in the German language have I seen a theology which is more salutary or more in overall agreement with the gospel" (WA Br 1:79.58).

Oberman has made the point that one cannot lump together Luther, the Frankfurter, and Tauler in a generalized Germanic mysticism; there are noticeable differences between them, and it is worth remembering that Luther speaks highly of German *theology,* not Germanic *mysticism.*[18] As was true of Romanic mysticism, Luther uses the terminology of Germanic mysticism, but then redefines the terms he borrowed. Steinmetz agrees: "The only way to make progress in understanding the relationship of Luther to the mystical tradition is to discover the meaning Luther assigns to those parts of the tradition he actually uses."[19] It is indisputable that attempting to discern Luther's intent in his use of mystical terminology

13. Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 120.
14. Vogelsang, "Luther und die Mystik," 34.
15. Luther, WA 43:581.11, quoted in Vogelsang, "Luther und die Mystik," 38.
16. Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen, *Nos Extra Nos: Luthers Theologie zwischen Mystik und Scholastik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1972), 200.
17. Oberman, "Simul Gemitus et Raptus," 33.
18. Ibid., 39.
19. Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz,* 128.

and considering the context of his usage are essential procedures to follow in interpreting Luther. Nevertheless, recognizing his affinity for Tauler and the Frankfurter and establishing his points of agreement with them can help to distinguish the understanding of mysticism they shared from the more monistic nature mysticism of, for example, Meister Eckhart.[20]

MYSTICISM AS SAPIENTIA EXPERIMENTALIS

To the extent that it is possible to summarize Luther's approach to mysticism as it has been described above, we can say that Luther regarded mysticism as the experiential side of Christianity. This is supported by the fact that Luther devoted little energy to definitions of mysticism, but was content to describe it as *sapientia experimentalis.* Mysticism is the Christian's personal experience of the presence of God in his life, and although he can compare and contrast his experience with that of others and borrow their terminology to express it, much of it remains outside, above, and beyond the fields of logic and speech.

One's whole self will be engaged in justification by faith, not just the intellect.

That Luther's emphasis is on experience is clear also from the manner in which Luther related to mystical theologians. Bengt Hoffman observes:

> When we say that Luther was mystical in the sense that he recognized the presence of spiritual friends among mystics we are actually saying . . . that he found some of its expressions of immediate divine presence congenial with his own deepest experience.[21]

Luther was *in* the tradition of mysticism, but not of it. Oberman claims that Luther, whom he apparently places in the *via moderna* camp, did not value "mystical" authors such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Hugh of St. Victor so much for their mysticism as for their piety. Oberman states: "*Via moderna* and *devotio moderna* are both more strongly interested in *theologia affectiva* than *theologia speculativa,* the ascetic than the mystic, *contemplatio acquisita* than *contemplatio infusa.*"[22]

But even more closely than he related mysticism to piety, Luther integrally connected religious experience with God's gift of righteousness through faith in Christ. There is a tension between imputation and experience in Luther's theology, and the objective is definitely emphasized. Nevertheless, *Erfahrung* (experience) is clearly a part of the picture of salvation for him. The external word is meant for, and must reach, the heart and the will, where it is experienced internally. Implicit in God's words "for you" is that one's whole self will be engaged in justification by faith, not just the intellect.

But since this is a matter of faith, also *Erfahrung* cannot be circumscribed and categorized. Luther writes:

> Therefore faith in Christ is an exceedingly arduous thing, because it is a rapture and a removal from everything one experiences within and without to the things one experiences neither within nor without, namely, to the invisible, most high, and incomprehensible God. (*LW* 29:149)

Steinmetz calls this

> dumb amazement in the presence of a mystery which can be experienced but never reduced to dogmatic and rational propositions. Faith elevates the mind to rapture and ecstasy, or, as Luther insists, to supreme repose and silence as well. Faith penetrates the cloud beyond thinking and speaking where God dwells.[23]

The interrelationship between faith and experience—as well as mention of the importance of *Anfechtung,* and the inclusion of the ultimate involvement of the intellect—is expressed beautifully by Luther in his commentary on the *Magnificat* (1521):

> It is as if she said: "My life and all my senses float in the love and praise of God and in lofty pleasures, so that I am no longer mistress of myself; I am exalted, more than I exalt myself, to praise the Lord." This is the experience of all those who are saturated with the divine sweetness and Spirit: they cannot find words to utter what they feel. For to praise the Lord with gladness is not a work of man; it is rather a joyful suffering and the work of God alone. It cannot be taught in words but must be learned in one's own experience. Even as David says in Psalm 34:8: "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is sweet; blessed is the man that trusts in him." He puts tasting before seeing, because this sweetness cannot be known unless one has experienced and felt it for himself; and no one can attain to such experience unless he trusts in God with his whole heart when he is in the depths and in sore straits. Therefore David makes haste to add, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in God." Such a person will experience the work of God within himself and will thus attain to His sensible sweetness and through it to all knowledge and understanding. (*LW* 21:302–3)

20. Luther, Martin, *The Theologia Germanica of Martin Luther*, trans. Bengt Hoffman (New York: Paulist, 1980), 19–20.
21. Ibid., 122.
22. Oberman, "Simul Gemitus et Raptus," 38.
23. Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz*, 139.

Although Luther describes this mystical experience in terms as magnificent as those used by any mystical theologian, it is never the center of his focus, nor is it the stratospheric pinnacle of the believer's life. Instead, it is always part and parcel of Christian faith and life as a whole, neither exaggerated nor divorced from the rest. For this reason, it is an integral, but never overemphasized, part of Luther's theology. Oberman comments:

> It is downright dangerous to detach the mystical texture from Luther's living spirituality. . . . [I]t is much more a piece and component of his conception of the gospel in general and so encompasses his understanding of faith and justification, his hermeneutic, ecclesiology, and pneumatology.[24]

This point will become even clearer as various distinctive features of Luther's mysticism are examined below.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LUTHER'S MYSTICISM

The following factors, though not unique to Luther's mysticism, are components of a mystical theology that, as a whole, belongs to Luther alone: the central role of the means of grace, especially the word; the emphasis on the incarnate Christ versus the uncreated Word; and the theology of the cross. These will be examined in turn. Other somewhat more peripheral or less distinctive aspects of Luther's theology of mysticism may be considered along with them.

Before doing this, however, it may be helpful to examine a conceptual thread that runs through and helps unify these notions, and that is Luther's perspective of the believer as *simul gemitus et raptus* (groaning and enraptured at the same time). *Gemitus* is the religious effect engendered by God's awesomeness. God-given faith brings man into *gemitus,* in which the self knows itself as a sinner and so is radically humbled before God. This very humility is an important mark of the Christian's identification with Christ. Luther writes:

> Therefore if you look for a sign of the grace of God or wonder whether Christ himself is in you: no other sign is given you but the sign of the prophet Jonah. Therefore if you have been in hell for three days, *that* is the sign of the fact that Christ is in you and you are with Christ. (WA 3:433.2–4)

Raptus is reliance on the righteousness of Christ outside ourselves, in which we are overwhelmed by the mystical vision of Christ and experience a transformation of our affections and trust. Luther uses *raptus* similarly to *extra nos* to emphasize our passivity in justification; therefore *raptus* applies to all believers, not only those who have reached the highest plane of "high mysticism."[25]

The *locus* for Luther's understanding of the relationship between gemitus and raptus is his commentary on Psalm 116:11. It should be noted that *simul gemitus et raptus* is a part of Luther's concept of *excessus mentis* and of *ecstasis*. "Standing outside the mind" and in ecstasy are never goals in themselves, to be sought for their own sake; rather, they emphasize the soul's emptying itself of any self-sufficiency so that it may be receptive to the descent of God through grace, which activates the affective faculties of the soul. Luther states:

> *I have said in my consternation: Every man is a liar.* This is the ecstasy by which he is through faith elevated above himself, so that he may see the future blessings. Otherwise he, too, was a lying man, but when he was put in ecstasy, he transcended lying and was made truthful by faith. And therefore he sees that those whom he saw loving vanity and neglecting faith are liars, because they regard as good the things that are not. And when they are exceedingly humbled, they consider themselves to be exalted. And therefore it is wonderful how he says that he is at the same time humbled and in ecstasy, but because he knows himself humbled and wretched through the ecstasy. They, however, have not been humbled (that is, they do not acknowledge it), because they are not yet in ecstasy, but in the transitoriness of lying. (*LW* 11:408–9)

Oberman comments: It is downright dangerous to detach the mystical texture from Luther's living spirituality.

If we highlight the phrases "when he was put in ecstasy . . . he was made truthful by faith" and "They, however, have not been humbled . . . because they are not yet in ecstasy," it becomes clear that Luther is regarding ecstasy as contemporaneous with justification, forgiveness, and faith. Furthermore, there is no reason to believe that this is not the normative experience of all Christians, nor that it is arrived at by spiritual exercises or a ladder of ascent. Miikka Ruokanen observes: "In Luther's 'faith ecstasy' man does not climb up to God, but God climbs down into the darkness of man."[26] Since the initiative is God's, it also follows that one ought not seek the experience of religious ecstasy for its own sake, or even for the seemingly altruistic motive of having yet another *reason* for praising God. Ruokanen notes about Luther's mysticism that

> God is not to be praised because of what he has given us but because of what he is in himself. The ecstatic faith finds its high point in the adoration of the Holy Trinity, without

24. Oberman, "Simul Gemitus et Raptus," 21.
25. Ibid., 54.
26. Miikka Ruokanen, "Luther und Ekstase," *Kerygma und Dogma* 32 (1986): 145.

> the worshiper asking what he receives for himself through his faith. God is simply *worthy,* to be praised by all his creatures.[27]

In summary, Luther inherited a tradition of religious experience that used specific terms to define that experience. Luther uses the same terms but gives them new definitions in order for them to be consonant with what he believed to be the central teaching of Holy Scripture, faith in the promise of God. Accordingly, *simul gemitus et raptus* became all but identical to *simul iustus et peccator.* As a result Luther evidenced his genius as a reformer: he neither abandoned the tradition nor violated clear scriptural principles. As Steinmetz says, "Luther continuously fills the old wineskins of scholastic and mystical theology with a new and heady wine."[28]

The humanity of Jesus Christ is the ladder by which we ascend to knowledge of God.

A logical consequence of Luther's association of religious ecstasy with justification, faith, and forgiveness is that the proclaimed word of God plays a central role in Luther's mysticism. Since faith is a response to the proclamation of Holy Scripture, ecstasy also does not exist in a vacuum, but is called into existence through the work of God the Holy Spirit using the *means* of the external word. This ensures that true religious ecstasy is *God's* work, not man's. It also underscores that Christian mystical experience is not only affective but also cognitive. The word of God is the means that grants understanding to faith,[29] understood both forensically and experientially. Scripture, therefore, is not just to be viewed as a catalyst for the affections, later to be left behind. Instead of discarding the external word after it leads to *meditatio* and *contemplatio,* Luther recommends the reading and, we would assume, hearing of Scripture continually in connection with meditation; he says that true meditation is reading and rereading (WA 50:659.22–24). Luther is referring to the gospel in word and sacrament when he says that if Abraham had seen what we have now, he would have died of wonder and joy. In fact, Luther held the value and efficaciousness of the external means of grace so highly that he reveals that he made a compact with God not to give him visions or send an angel to him, because the Bible and the sacraments are sufficient.[30]

27. Ibid., 146.
28. Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz*, 128.
29. Ibid., 138.
30. Ruokanen, "Luther und Ekstase," 136.

The importance of faith for religious experience is perhaps Luther's strongest emphasis. In marginal notes on the mystical theologian John Tauler, Luther remarks that the truly spiritual person is the one who relies on faith (WA 9:103.37). Where earlier mystics spoke of the importance of knowledge, and especially love, in mystical experience, Luther substitutes faith. In his interpretation of Luther, Ruokanen goes so far as to say that if we attempt to approach God through our love, we will find that *amor ecstaticus* is fanatic and a demonic ecstasy of one's own passions.[31]

Faith, on the other hand, exists *extra sensum* and *contra sensum,* under conditions that actually stand in opposition to knowledge of God. For Luther the perfect "negative" theology is precisely a theology of faith, a knowledge of God in the sense of a theology of the cross *per contrarium* and not the *Dionysian per negativum.* Luther insists: "This holiness of the spirit is the scene of the sorest conflict and the source of the greatest danger. It consists in nothing else than in faith pure and simple, since the spirit has nothing to do with things comprehensible, as we have seen" (*LW* 21:304). The word of promise creates faith that then believes what is contrary to the evidence that the eye can see: the presence of God in Christ, in the church, and in the individual soul. This is true religious experience.

Faith in the face of apparent contradictions plays an important role also in Luther's understanding of the incarnate and crucified Christ, hidden and revealed, as the object of mystical contemplation. He does not seem to be surprised at all that the hidden God should lie behind the revealed God, but explains that all the things that are to be believed must be hidden in order for faith to play a role; faith deals with "things which do not appear" (Heb 11:1). A baby in a manger and a dead man on a cross do not appear to be likely starting points for learning about and experiencing God, but they are precisely where one must begin. In his table talk, Luther stated that all knowledge of God leads to errors if it does not

> begin from below, from the Word and from the history of the Incarnate and the Crucified. Begin from below, from the incarnate Son. . . . Christ will bring you to the hidden God. . . . [H]old that fast and for certain: when you receive the revealed God, he will take you along to the hidden God. (WA TR 5:5668a)

We do not construct our own ladder of ascent to God; rather, the humanity of Jesus Christ is the ladder by which we ascend to knowledge of God (WA 5:345.4–5).

This would be expected in Luther's theology. It is not by any effort of our own that we are justified; similarly, it is not by a man-centered process of purgation, illumination, and perfection that we gain access to religious experience. The work is God's from first to last, and it has the incarnate Christ as its focus from first to last, as Luther says:

31. Ibid., 143.

> "Therefore, since we are justified by faith" and our sins are forgiven, "we have access and peace," but only "through our Lord Jesus Christ." This also applies to those who follow the mystical theology and struggle in inner darkness, omitting all pictures of Christ's suffering, wishing to hear and contemplate only the uncreated Word himself, but not having first been justified and purged in the eyes of their heart through the incarnate Word. For the incarnate Word is first necessary for the purity of the heart, and only when one has this purity, can he through this Word be taken up spiritually into the uncreated Word. But who is there who thinks that he is so pure that he dares aspire to this level unless he is called and led into the rapture by God, as was the case with the apostle Paul, or unless he is "taken up with Peter, James, and John, his brother" (Matt 17:1)? (*LW* 25:287–88)

Luther further warns that it is dangerous for the Christian's goal to be the vision of the unveiled divine Majesty rather than union with the God-man:

> Begin your search with Christ and stay with him and cleave to him, and if your own thoughts and reason, or another man's, would lead you elsewhere, shut your eyes and say: "I should and will know of no other God than Christ, my Lord." . . . But if you abandon this clear prospect, and climb up to God's Majesty on high, you must stumble, fear, and fall because you have withdrawn yourself from God's grace, and have dared to stare at the Majesty unveiled, which is too high and overpowering for you. For apart from Christ, nature can neither perceive nor attain the grace and love of God, and apart from him is nothing but wrath and condemnation. (WA 28:101–2)

In fact, Luther regarded ecstatic experiences that did not exalt Christ to be demonic, ecstasies that originated from the devil.[32]

The final reason for not departing from God's revelation in Christ is that to do so is to deprecate Christ, to regard him as insufficient or lacking in some way. What God wants us to know, he has revealed in Christ; the mysteries and secret things of the mind of God that have not been revealed through him are simply not intended for us. Regarding God's will, Luther writes:

> We say, as we have said before, that the secret will of the Divine Majesty is not a matter for debate, and the human temerity which with continual perversity is always neglecting necessary things in its eagerness to probe this one, must be called off and restrained from busying itself with the investigation of these secrets of God's majesty, which it is impossible to penetrate because he dwells in light inaccessible, as Paul testifies (1 Tim 6:16). Let it occupy itself instead with God incarnate, or as Paul puts it, with Jesus crucified, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, though in a hidden manner (Col 2:3); for through him it is furnished abundantly with what it ought to know and ought not to know.[33]

Here the emphasis clearly is placed specifically on Christ crucified, not more generally on Christ incarnate. This leads to the final aspect of Luther's mysticism that will be considered, his theology of the cross.

It is dangerous for the Christian's goal to be the vision of the unveiled divine Majesty rather than union with the God-man.

To focus on Christ crucified as of central importance to God's revelation and to cling to him as the basis of one's justification and faith is to know what pattern one's religious experience will follow. It will not consist in soaring higher and higher through the ranks of celestial hierarchies by means of one's own efforts. Instead, it will be a walk with the crucified Lord. The believer does indeed desire to ascend by faith beyond this world to heaven, but it is precisely in being "caught" between heaven and earth that he identifies with Christ. Luther states: "Faith causes the heart to cling fast to celestial things and to be carried away to dwell in things that are invisible. . . . For this is how it happens that the believer hangs between heaven and earth . . . that is, that in Christ he is suspended in the air and crucified" (*LW* 29:185). If the believer is looking for religious ecstasy, he can do no better than to imitate the crucified Christ. The first ecstatic One was precisely Christ himself, when he was completely emptied and carried away on the cross and had to cry, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" This ecstasy of emptying is, according to Luther, *purissima illuminatio mentis* (the most pure illumination of the mind).[34] And so we have come full circle. The believer is *simul gemitus et raptus* as he is mystically joined with Christ in his crucifixion.

In addition, *theologia crucis* has a practical aspect. Luther's contemporaries also spoke of a *theologia crucis*. Like him, they understood it to mean that the only way to heaven was through the cross of Christ, and they also placed the emphasis on Christ *for* us rather than Christ *in* us. But they also spoke of it as lifting us out of this veil of tears, while Luther said that God

32. Ibid., 142.

33. Martin Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will*, in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. E. G. Rupp and P. S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 206.

34. Ruokanen, "Luther und Ekstase," 144.

kept us in this world to test us, and to lead us to *identify* with Christ's cross and suffering.[35] His emphasis gives this world and our experiences in it not only real value, but eternal value, and therefore motivates us to continue the struggle as we hang suspended between heaven and earth with Christ.

Martin Luther was both the most radical and the most conservative of reformers.

At the same time, we have also returned to the vital role played by faith, because God is both hidden and revealed in the crucified Christ. Only the word of God can reveal to us that the man hanging on the cross is the Son of God. That word at the same time reveals that the crucified Christ is both judgment and salvation for us; it unmasks us as sinners and, through faith in its promise, transports us outside of ourselves to God.[36] We are *simul gemitus et raptus,* and in keeping with this the *theologia crucis* cannot be a theology of ascent and access, but a theology of the word and of faith. The theology of the cross is accessible to, and conveyed to, all believers every time they hear the word of God proclaimed and receive the gospel made visible in the sacraments. Being transported "out of ourselves to God" is not for a select few, but for every believer.

CONCLUSION

Martin Luther was both the most radical and the most conservative of reformers. Any human teaching or philosophy that, intentionally or unintentionally, pushed Christ, justification by faith, and the authority of the word of God out of center stage was to be purged from the church. Not a gradual shift, but an abrupt about-face back to the roots of historic Christianity was required. On the other hand, matters of, for example, biblical interpretation or church usage that had not become entirely perverted, but into which abuse had crept, were to be retained if they could be restored to their original purity.

Luther's genius is reflected in the way he applied this principle to the tradition of religious ecstasy. Although he found much to criticize, he also recognized in it something that was clearly spoken of in Holy Scripture and that "rang true" to his own experience. His response was to take this central element of medieval theology and shape it by, and then interweave it with, his own biblical theology. He did this first of all by regarding it not as the exceptional experience of a select few who have reached the pinnacle of sanctification, but the common treasure of all who have been justified by faith, a treasure that is the foundation, rather than the fruition, of Christian life.

He then went on to recognize that if justification is completely dependent on God's initiative and man is *pure passive,* then religious experience must also be a gift of God and not an achievement based on the arduous endeavors of man. Since God regularly deals with us through means, there was no reason for religious ecstasy to be an exception, and this established the vital importance of the word. Since Christ is the center of Scripture, the only acceptable approach to Christian mysticism must be a christocentric approach. In the incarnate and crucified Christ God is both hidden and revealed; this reaffirms the central role of faith, because only by faith can the almighty God be perceived in the crucified Christ, and only by perceiving him there can we realize that our union with him is not a matter of our piercing through the fortifications of his heavenly castle, but of his descending to enter the shrine of our hearts.

Ach mein herzliebes Jesulein,
Mach dir ein rein sanft Bettelein,
Zu ruhen in meins Herzens Schrein,
Daß ich nimmer vergesse dein.[37] LOGIA

35. Oberman, "Simul Gemitus et Raptus," 42.
36. Zur Mühlen, *Nos Extra Nos*, 203.
37. *Evangelisches Kirchengesangbuch* (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1986). Translation from *TLH.*
Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,
Within my heart, that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for Thee.

Sola Scriptura

The Solas and Martin Luther

Timothy R. Schmeling

The Lutheran Confessions state, "We believe, teach, and confess that for the retention of the pure teaching concerning the righteousness of faith before God, it is particularly important to hold steadfastly to the *particulae exclusivae*" (FC Ep III, 10). As the five-hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation (31 October 2017) brings the Luther Decade (2008–17) to its long-awaited culmination, it is quite fitting that Lutherans reflect on the three Latin *solae* (anglicized as solas): "by Scripture alone, by grace alone, and by faith alone" (*sola Scriptura, sola gratia, et sola fide*). To be sure, these "Reformation Principles" or the "exclusive particles" do not represent the sum totality of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, they have long helped Lutherans confess Holy Scripture's inner core, and they remain vital for making a faithful Christian confession in the twenty-first century.

HISTORY OF SOLA SCRIPTURA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SOLAS

Before this essay can proceed any farther, one needs to understand the history of the oft-dubbed Reformation Principles. Unless this is clarified, their true significance will not be fully realized. It may come as a surprise to hear that the three Latin solas were not coined by Lutheranism. After explaining why these ecclesial terms or phrases aptly captured Pauline theology in his *Loci Theologici,* Martin Chemnitz (1522–86), a formulator of the Formula of Concord, demonstrated that the early church fathers used the exclusive particles, and what is more, they often used them in their correct biblical sense.[1] However, contemporary Tübingen church history professor Volker Leppin shows that the Latin solas can even be found in the theology of the High and Late Middle Ages.[2] Thomas Bradwardine (ca. 1300–1349), the Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote, "Man is made righteous by faith alone apart from preceding works."[3] The great Dominican scholastic Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) employed *sola Scriptura, sola gratia,* and *solo Christo* in his writings.[4] If this were not interesting enough, even the average medieval Christian could at least encounter the theology of the three solas in the propers of Gesimatide, that is, the three pre-Lenten Sundays Lutherans inherited from the Latin Church.

The fact that the three Latin solas did not originate in the Lutheran Reformation is quite significant. Even if the medieval use of them lacked a good deal of biblical precision, their medieval presence shows that Martin Luther (1483–1546) was not a revolutionary, but rather a reformer par excellence who reasserted the catholic (universal) faith of the Sacred Scriptures. At the same time, the theological confusion of the Late Middle Ages testifies to the importance of the Lutheran Reformation. It was not until the advent of the Lutheran Reformation that the proper biblical meaning of three solas would be fully restored and their hermeneutical significance elevated.

But are the Latin phrases, *sola Scriptura, sola gratia,* and *sola fide,* genuinely Reformation principles? Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia church historian Timothy Wengert writes: "Using the critical Weimar edition of Luther's works online and its search engine, one can now determine how often Luther used these phrases in all their permutations in his Latin works. The results? *Sola gratia:* two hundred times; *sola fide:* twelve hundred times; *sola Scriptura:* twenty times. Twenty times!"[5] Wengert then attempts to show that some of these

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1. Martin Chemnitz, *Chemnitz's Works*, trans. Fred Kramer and others (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008–15), 8:1006–18. See also FC SD III, 36 on the Pauline origin of the exclusive particles.
2. Volker Leppin, "Luther's Transformation of Medieval Thought: Disontinuity and Continuity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and Ľubomír Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 115–24; Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2001); Stephan H. Pfürtner, "Das reformatorische 'Sola Scriptura'—theologischer Auslegungsgrund des Thoma von Aquin?" in *Sola Scriptura*, ed. C. H. Ratschow (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1977), 48–80; Per Erik Persson, *Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).
3. Thomas Bradwardine, *De Cavsa Dei Contra Pelagivm Et De Virtvte Cavsarvm* (London: Ex Officina Nortoniana, 1618), I, 1, c. 43 (394B).
4. Aquinas, *Super Ioannem*, c. 21, 1, 6; Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis*, II, d. 26, q. 1, a. 5; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 8, a. 6 (11:134). Thomas Aquinas, *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia*, ed. Order of Preachers (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. De Propaganda Fide, 1882–).
5. Timothy J. Wengert, *Reading the Bible with Martin Luther* (Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Academic, 2013), 16. See also Timothy J. Wengert, "A Note on 'Sola Scriptura' in Martin Luther's Writings," *Luther-Bulletin Tijdschrift voor interconfessioneel Lutheronderzoek* 20 (2011): 21–31.

twenty *sola Scriptura* references do not actually support the *sola Scriptura* concept. Nevertheless, all three Latin solas are attested in Luther's writings and can be found in his contemporaries (WA 7:98–99).[6] Wengert, moreover, does not account for Luther's use of Latin or German equivalents for the solas, like "the word alone" (*solum verbum*) or "the Scripture alone" (*die Schrift allein*).[7] Even though the actual Latin phrases—*sola Scriptura, sola gratia,* and *sola fide*—are not equally represented in Luther's writings, the concepts underlying them certainly permeate Luther's thought. Some scholars have similarly argued that the Latin phrase *sola Scriptura* cannot be found in the Lutheran Confessions.[8] But all three Latin solas, their German equivalents, and underlying concepts can be found in the Book of Concord as well (FC Ep Rule and Norm, 7; Ap IV, 74–75). However, it must be pointed out that the three Latin solas do not seem to have ever appeared as a collected unit for summarizing Lutheranism in the early modern period. Rather the convergence of the three Latin solas as a Lutheran *shibboleth* or a popular shorthand for Lutheranism seems to be a nineteenth-century phenomenon.[9] After a by-no-means exhaustive investigation, the first place this author found the three Latin solas as a collective unit in American Lutheranism was on the cornerstone of the seminary of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. The cornerstone was laid by WELS President Philipp von Rohr (1843–1908) on 13 October 1892 and was later moved to the current seminary in Thiensville, Wisconsin.[10]

The three Latin solas as a Lutheran shibboleth seems to be a nineteenth-century phenomenon.

In the twentieth century, the three Latin solas were sometimes expanded into a fivefold unit, which added "Christ alone" and "To God alone be the glory" (*solus Christus et soli Deo gloria*) or an eightfold unit that added "God alone," "By word alone," and even "By experience alone" (*solus Deus, solo verbo, et sola experientia*).[11] Like their three counterparts, these too have a pre-Reformation and Lutheran pedigree.[12] For Luther, *solus Christus* was the foundation of the solas.[13] Luther, theologians, and church musicians have long concluded their works with *Soli Deo gloria* (for example, J. S. Bach [1685–1750]), but C. F. W. Walther (1811–87) may be the only one to build dogmatic lectures around this theme.[14] Unfortunately, just as Luther's *soli Deo gloria* has been misused to foster a Calvinist interpretation of him, so too, Luther's use of *solo verbo* and *sola experientia* have been misused to argue for a Neo-Orthodox understanding of his theology. In a somewhat related matter, Jena theology professor Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) seems to have been the first to refer to Holy Scripture as "the only and proper principle of theology."[15] Yet, it was the rationalist Lutheran theologian Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider (1776–1848) who first coined the distinction between the material (reconciliation/justification) and formal (Scripture) principles of church dogmatics.[16]

Since the three Latin solas are used to define all Protestants and modern Evangelicals today, it is vitally important that the original Lutheran understanding of the solas be properly clarified. The solas have often been misunderstood in a reductionist or bumper sticker–like fashion. To be sure, medieval Latin theology once confounded their meaning due in part to theological, philological, and historical deficiencies. Roman Catholics went so far as to condemn publicly the theology of the solas.[17]

6. See also WA 30, III:153 (*LW* 38:76); WA 50:359; WA 40, I:74 (*LW* 26:59); WA 30, II:636 (*LW* 35:188).
7. Wengert, "A Note," 21.
8. Arthur Carl Piepkorn, *Selected Writings of Arthur Carl Piepkorn*, vol. 2, *The Sacred Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Philip J. Secker (Mansfield: CEC Press, 2007), xxviii.
9. Scholars generally claim that it is nineteenth century, but only provide early twentieth-century evidence. Jacob Corzine, "The Source of the Solas: On the Question of Which Are the Original Solas," in *Theology is Eminently Practical: Essays in Honor of John T. Pless*, ed. Jacob Corzine and Bryan Wolfmueller (Fort Wayne: Lutheran Legacy, 2012), 51–71; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 26–27; Wengert, *Reading the Bible*, 16; Wengert, "A Note," 21.
10. Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 95, 278, n4.
11. Eberhard Jüngel, "The Justification of Sinners: The Meaning of the Exclusive Formula Used by the Reformers," in *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2014), 147–259; Michael Beintker, "Was ist das Reformatorische? Einige systematisch-theologische Erwägungen," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 100 (2003): 44–63; Albrecht Beutel, "Lutherische Theologie in den Unübersichtlichkeiten unserer Zeit: Ein Vorschlag zur Orientierung," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 103 (2006): 344–61.
12. WA 8:669 (*LW* 44:400); WA 40, I:131 (*LW* 26:55); WA 2:460 (*LW* 27:176); WA 7:51 (*LW* 31:346); WA TR 1:16; FC Ep III, 1; LC I, 4; and FC Ep VII, 42. *Sola experientia* and *Soli Deo gloria*, conversely, are not found in the Book of Concord.
13. "Ausschließlichkeitsformeln," *Das Luther-Lexikon* (Regensburg: Bückle & Böhm, 2014).
14. C. F. W. Walther, *Walther's Works: All Glory to God* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016).
15. Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, Exegesis Locus 1, Par. 1. Johann Gerhard, *Loci theologici . . .*, ed. Ed. Preuss (Berlin: Gust. Schlawitz, 1863–85). Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces*, trans. Richard Dinda (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006–). See also Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970–72), 1:116.
16. Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider's *Handbuch der Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1828), 1:46–47, which was originally published in 1814. See also Jan Rohls, *Protestantische Theologie der Neuzeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 1:390–91.
17. Council of Trent, Session 4, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 2:663–64; Council of Trent, Session VI, in *Decrees*, 2:679–81.

Yet the non-Lutheran Protestant and modern Evangelical articulation of the three solas is in many ways no less problematic. They have long vested the phrases with new and foreign meanings, all the while maintaining the theologically disingenuous, but often politically necessary, subterfuge that they are the true heirs of Luther. In contrast to Lutherans, whom they dismiss as "Formulists" or "New" and "Fake-Lutherans," they have often claimed that they are merely attempting to complete Luther's Reformation.[18] Lest one assume this notion has been scrapped in the dustbin of history, R. Kent Hughes, senior pastor at the College Church of Wheaton, Illinois, subtly softens the idea for a twenty-first-century audience in the foreword to the *Grace Alone* volume of Zondervan's new Five Solas series:

> The tour includes . . . (c) the theological development of Martin Luther midst the arcane currents of his late medieval environment and his mature understanding of justification by grace through faith, wherein the act of faith must, necessarily, be an act of sovereign grace; (d) though Luther firmly held to predestination, divisions among the Lutherans over the doctrine meant that theological reflection passed to the Reformed and became identified with John Calvin, who though he offered no innovations, adorned it with clarity, maintaining that election, predestination, and grace must only be contemplated in Christ.[19]

MARTIN LUTHER'S CONCEPT OF SOLA SCRIPTURA

The remainder of this article will turn its attention to an analysis of Luther's concept of *sola Scriptura*. I will argue that Luther's *sola Scriptura* rediscovery was not limited to the reassertion of the final, sole authority of Scripture, but also the sole re-creative (performative) power of Scripture. As the world takes note of the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, it is just as important for Lutherans to confess this so-called performative understanding of God's word as it is the sole authority of Scripture because the former is even less understood by the twenty-first century than the latter. For instance, many today defend the inerrancy of the Bible as a channel of sacred information (for example, the veracity of the six-day creation), but far fewer believe that the same word that brought forth the creation has the same power to create faith (regeneration) in a child's heart.

It should not go unnoticed that the Lutheran Reformation rose from the work of a professor of biblical theology. God's word was the very pulse of the Reformation. Luther made a number of interconnected Reformation rediscoveries, the most important of which was passive righteousness (that is, the imputation of Christ's holiness to the believer *sola fide, sola gratia,* and *sola Scriptura*).[20] This rediscovery was essentially a new definition of what it meant to be Christian, that is, what it meant to be truly human. The medieval mind understood man's relationship with God in terms of man's continually climbing his way closer to God through the performance of good works and ritual, albeit facilitated by grace (WA 7:596; *LW* 21:350). This attempt to achieve salvation through what Luther called active (proper) righteousness sent him in his early years in a tailspin in search of a merciful God. Gradually, Luther came to the realization through prayer, meditation on the Scripture, and the cross that God was an engaged, personal God, who alone could re-create the relationship that man lost in the fall. After all, man was God's crown of creation, but he remained completely dependent on his Creator—even before the fall—for everything that he possessed. What is more, man lost the image of God in the fall, becoming completely curved in on himself and enslaved to sin, death, and the devil.

God's word was the very pulse of the Reformation.

Recalling Christ's words that a bad tree cannot become a good tree by trying harder to bear good fruit (WA 7:61–62; *LW* 31:361–62),[21] Luther rediscovered in Romans 1:17 that only the imputation of Christ's passive (alien) righteousness could re-create our lost relationship with God, for only passive righteousness could restore man's humanity and make him genuinely free (WA 54:185–86; *LW* 34:336–37). The true purpose of active righteousness, conversely, was to thank God by serving one's neighbor and caring for the creation through vocations in the home, church, and society/state.[22] This new relationship with God, Luther further rediscovered, was only re-created through God's very same word that had brought the universe into being and the same word that assumes oral, written, and sacramental forms today.[23] As the passive righteousness be-

18. Bodo Nischan, "Reformation or Deformation? Lutheran and Reformed Views of Martin Luther in Brandenburg's 'Second Reformation,'" in *Lutherans and Calvinists in the Age of Confessionalism* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1999), 203–15. See also Alec Ryrie, "Afterlife of Lutheran England," in *Sister Reformations: The Reformation in Germany and England*, ed. Dorothea Wendebourg (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 213–34.
19. R. Kent Hughes, foreword to *Grace Alone: Salvation as a Gift of God: What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters*, by Carl R. Trueman, The Five Solas Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017).
20. I am indebted to the work of Robert Kolb for showing the nexus between Luther's two kinds of righteousness and the performative word. See Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther and the Enduring Word of God: The Wittenberg School and Its Scripture-Centered Proclamation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016).
21. See also WA 1:224 (*LW* 31:9).
22. See also WA 2:145–52 (*LW* 31:293–306).
23. Oswald Bayer zeros in on Luther's conception of a speech-act promise that "actually constitutes a reality" for the believer as Luther's real Reformation turning point. "The *signum* itself is already the *res*," that is, "the linguistic sign is already the matter itself."

stowed by God's performative word was challenged by pope, magisterium, tradition, and finally by church councils, Luther declared that Scripture alone was the final arbitrator of truth. Not surprisingly, the Lutheran princes made 1 Peter 1:25 the first battle cry of the Lutheran Reformation: "The word of the Lord remains eternal" (*Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum*—and quite literally placed it on just about everything.[24]

Luther declared that Scripture alone was the final arbitrator of truth.

On the one hand, the Bible was far from absent in the late medieval world of the young Martin Luther, pious Protestant fictions aside.[25] Gutenberg's invention of moveable type made book printing more accessible than ever before, albeit large Latin Bibles were still too expensive to leave unchained and the population was largely illiterate.[26] Luther encountered the Bible in the readings at mass, in Latin School, as well as in a purchased postil (model sermons) and other devotional literature.[27] Ever since the High Middle Ages, the mendicant friar-preachers of the Franciscan and Dominican orders had been trying to meet the need for vernacular preaching. Merchant families and the guilds began endowing preaching positions in the cities by the Late Middle Ages.[28] The university, religious life, and a doctorate in Sacred Scripture afforded Luther the opportunity to hear the Bible read daily, to sing the Bible in the canonical hours, to possess a red leather Bible of his own, and to master the biblical texts along with their traditional glosses. The *via moderna* (Ockhamist) school of theology that Luther was trained in, moreover, was critical of the confidence of the *via antiqua* school (for example, the Thomistic) in reason, and stressed authority (for example, Scripture) instead.

On the other hand, the Bible was also carefully regulated in the late medieval world because genuine heretics had long attempted to support their teachings on the basis of misreadings of Scripture.[29] Thus, Latin served as a check on private interpretations of Scripture, though German Bible translations existed, provided they had episcopal authorization.[30] The Bible was delivered to the laity in selections, mediated through authorized preachers (who had limited impact in the countryside) or accompanied with glosses and tales of the saints that often stressed ritual and good works. Assuming that only churchmen had vocations and that the catechism and sacraments were sufficient for the laity, the late medieval church did not equip the average Christian with the kind of education in the humanities necessary to move beyond the milk of fundamental doctrine and so live out Scripture-informed vocations (WA 6:404–69; *LW* 44:115–217). While medieval theologians assumed the inspiration of Scripture and many recognized that popes and magisterium could and had erred,[31] none had yet recognized that tradition and councils had ever erred or could depart from Holy Scripture.

In the wake of the abuses of the Avignon Papacy (1309–77) and the Western Schism (1378–1415), the Council of Constance (1414–18), driven as it was by the conciliar movement, went so far as to decree that councils (not popes) were the final interpreter of Scripture.

> The holy synod of Constance . . . declares, that legitimately assembled in the holy Spirit, constituting a general council and representing the catholic church militant, it has the power immediately from Christ; and that everyone of whatever state or dignity, even papal, is bound to obey it [council] in those matters which pertains to the faith, the eradication of the said schism and the general reform of the said church of God in head and members.[32]

However, at least two basic concepts of tradition had already developed by this time. The first conception was an older, one-

Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 52. He locates the beginnings of this new performative understanding of God's word in Luther's view of absolution as found in *On Seeking out Truth and Comforting Terrified Consciences*, 1518, WA 1:630–33. See also Luther, "Freedom of a Christian," 1520, WA 7:23–24, translated in Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 60; WA 10, 1.1:232 (*LW* 75:308).

24. See also Daniel Nathan Harmelink, ed., *The Reformation Coin and Medal Collection of Concordia Historical Institute* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016), xxxiv.
25. Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952); Susan Boynton and Diane J. Reilly, eds., The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages: Production, Reception and Performance in Western Christianity (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
26. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
27. Joachim Ringleben, *Gott im Wort: Luthers Theologie von der Sprache her* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); Willem Jan Kooiman, *Luther and the Bible*, trans. John Schmidt (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1961); M. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures* (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1944); M. Reu, *Luther's German Bible: An Historical Presentation Together with a Collection of Sources* (Columbus: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934).
28. Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, Preachers, Florilegia, and Sermons: Studies on the Manipulus florum of Thomas of Ireland (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1979); H. Leith Spencer, English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Larissa Taylor, ed., Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001).
29. Kolb, *Martin Luther*, 19–34.
30. "The Edict of Berthhold, Archbishop of Mainz (March 22, 1485) Concerning Translations from the Greek, Latin, or Any Other Language," quoted in Reu, *Luther's German Bible*, *93–*94.
31. Robert D. Preus, "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: The Early Church through Luther," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 357–82.
32. Council of Constance, Session 5, in *Decrees*, 1:408–9.

source theory that predominated in the fathers, monastics, and even the scholastics. It viewed tradition as the authoritative and faithful interpretation of a materially sufficient Scripture within the historical continuity of the church. The second conception was a later two-source theory popularized by the canonists. It viewed tradition as a distinct source of doctrine independent of Scripture.[33] By the eve of the Reformation, the popes had dramatically turned the situation around: the papal-controlled Lateran v Council (1512–17) decreed that the pope had oversight over all councils and only he could convene, move, and conclude a council. In short, Lateran v shut down conciliarism.[34] Ironically, those who were sympathetic to conciliarism but found Luther's call to return to the sole final authority of Scripture too jarring, had to capitulate to the emerging Roman Catholicism of the Council of Trent (1545–63), which permitted the second of the aforementioned conceptions of tradition and even left the papal supremacy claims of Lateran v stand![35]

As Luther zeroed in on his great rediscovery of passive righteousness through God's performative word, he was opposed by the pope, magisterium, tradition, and even councils. What would make Luther so controversial after the 1519 Leipzig Colloquy was not that he asserted *sola Scriptura,* but that he would show that even tradition and council had at times actually departed from Scripture and therefore Scripture is the final arbitrator of truth. Note further that Luther never argued that all tradition needed to be rejected. For instance, he recognized that the church fathers had often helped exegetes avoid contextually unjustified private interpretations of the Bible. Rather, he merely insisted on Scripture's sole ability to define doctrine and ultimately interpret itself. Luther's exposure to nominalism, Renaissance humanism, German mysticism, as well as his hermeneutical development all coalesced to facilitate this rediscovery. Nevertheless, Luther never presumed to take the mantle of self-imposed reformer like many of the Radical and Reformed enthusiasts (*Schwärmer*). He countered the imperial edict against him by reminding all that the church made him obtain a doctorate in theology, the oaths of which obliged him to faithfully teach the Sacred Scriptures to the church (WA 30, III:386–87; *LW* 34:103).

Since God's word is a manifestation of the eternal Word (Christ), God's word is not only the sole means of regeneration, but it is also solely authoritative, sufficient, perfect, and true (WA 46:544; *LW* 22:9; WA 40, I:379; *LW* 26:240; WA 40, III:254). This is why for Luther *sola Scriptura* is inextricably bound with *solus Christus.* After all, the fundamental canonical test for Luther was "what drives Christ" (*was Christum treibet*), although he never understood this in a gospel-reductionist fashion (WA DB 7:384; *LW* 35:396).[36] "It was not until the last half of 1519 and early 1520, in connection with his debate at Leipzig with Johann Eck and its immediate aftermath, that Luther first arrived at his *sola scriptura;* and it was not until late 1520 and early 1521 that he articulated this position in detail and depth."[37] In his 1513–1515 lectures on the Psalms, Professor Luther insisted, "[The church] is captive to the authority of Scripture and does not teach anything but the Word of God" (WA 3:261; *LW* 10:219). In contrast to the 1517 *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology,* the much milder 1517 *Ninety-five Theses,* which catapulted Luther onto the world stage and struck at an expanding means of papal revenue, really only questioned the pope's pastoral prudence. The theology of indulgences was still unclear and indulgences had not yet become dogma.[38] Still well within the norms of the day, Luther remarks in a 9 May 1518 letter to his Erfurt arts professor Jodokus Trutfetter (d. 1519) that it was his former Ockhamist teacher who first taught him that "the canonical books alone deserve faith" (*solis canonicis deberi fidem*) and that all others only merit "opinion" (*iudicium*), as Augustine, Paul, and John prescribe (WA Br 1:171).

The fundamental canonical test for Luther was "what drives Christ."

His 1518 *Explanations of the Ninety-five Theses* would begin to question papal infallibility and the historicity of primacy, but not the authority of the church itself (WA 1:582; *LW* 31:171).[39] When (the somewhat sympathetic) Dominican Cardinal Cajetan (1480–1547) pressed Luther at Augsburg on the subject of papal authority, Luther retorted, "Panormitanus, too, in his edition of the Decretals, shows that in matters of faith not only is a general council above the pope, but also any believer, provided he used better authority or reason than the pope just as Paul does with Peter in Galatians 2[:14]"

33. Heiko Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought Illustrated by Key Documents* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 53–65. Some scholars have suggested that Oberman's distinctions are problematic.
34. Fifth Lateran Council, Session 11, in *Decrees*, 1:642.
35. Council of Trent, Session IV, in *Decrees,* 2:663–65; "26 January 1564 Bull of Confirmation," in Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals,* ed. Peter Hünermann, Robert Fastiggi, and Anne Englund Nash, 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 431–33 [no. 1847–50].
36. See also David W. Lotz, "Luther and Sola Scriptura," in *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. Gerald S. Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Dearborn: The Nagel Festschrift Committee, 1990), 25–63; David W. Lotz, "The Proclamation of the Word in Luther's Thought," *Word & World* 3 (1983): 344–54; David W. Lotz, "Sola Scriptura: Luther on Biblical Authority," *Interpretation* 35 (1981): 258–73; Lewis Spitz, "Luther's Sola Scriptura," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 31 (1960): 740–45.
37. Ibid.
38. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 43. See also WA 1:228 (*LW* 31:16).
39. See also WA 1:571, 529–30 (*LW* 31:152, 83).

(WA 2:10; *LW* 31:265–66). The papal court theologian and Dominican Silvester Prierias (1456–1523) attacked the *Ninety-five Theses* in 1518. Luther opened his rebuttal with Galatians 1:8: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed" (ESV). He supported the catholicity of Scripture's sufficiency with the letter of Augustine (354–430) to Jerome (347–419), stating, "I only appeal to these books which are called canonical; I give these honor because I most firmly believe none of their authors have erred." He even posited that "pope and council could err," but he still maintained that the Roman Church "has never contradicted the true faith by any of its decrees" (WA 1:647, 656, 662).

***The emerging Radical and Reformed movements began to twist* sola Scriptura.**

Already by this time Luther's former friend Johann Eck of Ingolstadt (1486–1543) had concluded that Luther was a Bohemian heretic (Hussite). Eck set out to expose Luther as a Hussite in the city whose university was founded as an anti-Hussite school. He claimed victory at the 1519 Leipzig Debate when he got Luther to confess that the Council of Constance had erred when it condemned many of the teachings of Jan Hus (1370/71–1415).

> In rebuttal I [Luther] brought up the Greek Christians during the past thousand years, and also the ancient church fathers, who had not been under the authority of the Roman pontiff, although I did not deny the primacy of honor due to the pope. Finally we also debated the authority of a council. I publicly acknowledge that some articles had been wrongly condemned [by the Council of Constance], articles which had been taught in plain and clear words by Paul, Augustine, and even Christ himself. At this point the adder swelled up, exaggerated my crime, and nearly went insane in his adulation of the Leipzig audience. I proved by the words of the council itself that not all the articles which it condemned were actually heretical and erroneous. (WA Br 420–24; *LW* 31:322)

At that moment, Luther's confession of *sola Scriptura* had finally moved beyond the norms of the medieval Latin church. This admission was so decisive for the gospel because it meant that neither pope, magisterium, tradition, nor council could overturn the rediscovery of passive righteousness.

The 1520 programmatic writings, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, and Freedom of a Christian,* soon followed, laying out his early program for reforming the church. Next, Luther crowned his rediscovered understanding of *sola Scriptura* with a decisive refutation of the subjugation of Scripture to any interpreter following the arrival of the bull of excommunication.

> The judgments of Scripture must decide the issue, and this cannot be done unless we accord Scripture the first place [*principem locum*] in everything concerning the fathers, so that Scripture itself might be through itself the most certain, the most accessible, the most clear, serving as its own interpreter [*per se certissima, apertissima, sui ipsius interpres*], testing, judging, and illuminating every word of everyone. . . . I do not wish to be deemed more learned than all, but I wish for Scripture alone to reign [*solam scripturam regnare*]; nor do I wish it be interpreted by my spirit or that of any other man, but I wish it to be understood through itself and by its own spirit [*per seipsam et suo spiritu*]." (WA 7:97–99)[40]

All of this prepared Luther for the moment when his commitment to *sola Scriptura* would really be put to the test. At the 1521 Diet of Worms, he did not back down, he did not recant. Rather he boldly confessed:

> Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. "I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen." (WA 7:838; *LW* 32:112)

Yet Luther had hardly begun translating the Bible from his Patmos at the Wartburg when the emerging Radical and Reformed movements began to twist *sola Scriptura,* but still claimed to adhere to it. His colleague Andreas Karlstadt (ca. 1477–1541) disturbed the Wittenbergers by advancing liturgical reforms that forbade any traditions and practices that were not expressly found in Scripture. This regulative principle of worship,[41] a mark of the Radical and Reformed Reformations, undermined Christian freedom and reinterpreted *sola Scriptura* as a prohibition of the use of even good church traditions that supported the gospel. This misunderstanding of *sola Scriptura* meant that crosses, images, vestments, chant, and so forth, all had to go. Luther brought calm to the situation by articulating a key Pauline distinction in his famous 1522 *Invocavit* sermons.

> Here one can see that you do not have the Spirit, even though you have a deep knowledge of the Scriptures. Take

40. See also WA 7:722 on the gospel's bearing and rearing the church.
41. John Calvin, "The Necessity of Reforming the Church, 1543," in *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, ed. Guilielmus Baum and others (Braunschweig: C.A. Schwetschke, 1863–1900), 6:461; John Calvin, *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 1:198.

> note of these two things, "must" and "free." The "must" is that which necessity requires, and which must ever be unyielding; as, for instance, the faith, which I shall never permit any one to take away from me, but must always keep in my heart and freely confess before every one. But "free" is that in which I have a choice, and may use or not, yet in such a way that it profit my brother and not me. Now do not make a "must" out of what is "free," as you have done, so that you may not be called to account for those who were led astray by your loveless exercise of liberty. (WA 10, III:10–11; *LW* 51:74)

The Radical and Reformed misconstruing of such fundamental hermeneutical distinctions as faith and reason, spirit and letter, spirit and flesh, natural and Mosaic law, law and gospel, passive and active righteousness, the freedom and servitude of the Christian, two kingdoms, and so forth, all illustrated why Luther did not "wish [that Scripture] be interpreted by [his] spirit or that of any other man, but [he] wish[ed] it to be understood through itself and by its own spirit [*per se ipsam et suo spiritu*]" (WA 7:97–99). Of all of these interpretative disagreements between them and Luther, it may surprise one to see him charge the Radicals and the Reformed with erring on the relationship between faith and reason. They shared many of Luther's criticisms of the scholastics. Still, Luther and Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), the Swiss Reformed theologian, reached an impasse on the real presence at the 1529 Marburg Colloquy. Since Zwingli had reasoned that a finite body could not be present in more than one place, he refused to accept Scripture's teaching that Christ's body and blood are truly present in the Lord's Supper. Never lacking in rhetorical know-how, Luther drove home the point that Scripture's own hermeneutics decide doctrine (not human reason): "At this point Luther removed the velvet cloth and showed him the passage, 'This is my body,' which he had written for himself on the table with chalk, and said: 'Here is our Scripture passage. You have not yet wrestled it away from us, as you volunteered to do. We have no need of another passage'" (WA 30, III:145; *LW* 38:67).

The last way that Luther's opponents misconstrued *sola Scriptura* was the old notion that the external word was merely a springboard to some ever-expanding and new revelation of the inner word. Some even thought that the Spirit could be obtained apart from God's word altogether. Luther flat-out rejected such a cabbalistic view. Just as God's word in oral, written, and sacramental forms was the sole means of the Spirit's re-creative passive righteousness, so too there is no revelation beyond that expressed in the external word.

> In these matters, which concern the spoken, external Word, it must be firmly maintained that God gives no one his Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes before. We say this to protect ourselves from the enthusiasts, that is, "the spirits," who boast they have the Spirit apart from and before contact with the Word. On this basis, they judge, interpret, and twist the Scriptures or oral Word according to their pleasure. Müntzer did this, and there are still many doing this today, who set themselves up as shrewd judges between the spirit and the letter without knowing what they say or teach. The papacy is also purely religious raving in that the pope boasts that "all laws are in the shrine of his heart," and that what he decides and commands in his churches is supposed to be Spirit and law—even when it is above and contrary to the Scriptures or spoken Word....Everything that boast of being from the Spirit apart from such a Word and Sacrament is of the devil. (SA III, VIII, 3–5, 1)[42]

Luther drove home the point that Scripture's own hermeneutics decide doctrine (not human reason).

Despite the manifold misunderstandings of *sola Scriptura,* Luther's confidence in the power of God's word to accomplish what God desires (Isa 55:11) only grew. This never found more humorous expression than in a 1522 Sermon on the Monday after *Invocavit:* "I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word, otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept [see Mark 4:26–29], or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything" (WA 10, III:18–19; *LW* 51:77). In the remaining years of his life, Luther had the opportunity to unpack the significance of the performative nature of God's word that he rediscovered in the pivotal years of his Reformation breakthrough.

To start, Luther recognized that God's word is the life-creating manifestation of the eternal Word, Jesus Christ. "Thus we see that the Holy Spirit also has His own language and way of expression, namely, that God, by speaking, created all things and worked through his Word, and that all His works are some words of God, created by the uncreated Word" (WA 42:35; *LW* 1:47). This divine language did not merely describe reality, it brought forth all things forensically, that is, God's declaration constituted all things out of nothing. "'Let there be light' are the words of God, not Moses; this means that they are realities. For God calls into existence the things which do not exist (Rom. 4:17). He does not speak grammatical words; He speaks true and existent realities. Accordingly, that which among us has the sound of a word is a reality with God. Thus sun, moon, heaven, earth, Peter, Paul, I, you, etc.—we are all words of God" (WA 42:17; *LW* 1:21–22).

Luther explains the nature of divine language further, indicating that in God's word the linguistic sign or utterance

42. See also WA 36:500–501 (*LW* 28:76–77).

bestows that which it expresses.[43] "Here we must observe the Hebrew way of expression. For when Scripture says that God speaks, it understands a word related to a real thing [*verbum reale*] or action, not just a sound, as ours is" (WA 40, II:230; *LW* 12:32).[44] He goes on to stress how important an understanding of the performative nature of God's word is for a proper understanding of Scripture. "This manner of speaking, however, is to be found only in the sacred language. I often admonish the youth to learn it (though almost in vain), for a knowledge of it adds remarkably to the ability of explaining the Scriptures. It was taken from Moses; in the first chapter of Genesis, when he refers to establishing all things out of nothing" (WA 40, II:231; *LW* 12:32–33).

Luther emphasizes the importance of understanding the performative nature of God's word.

Luther emphasizes the importance of understanding the performative nature of God's word not only so that pastors have confidence that God's word does what it says, but also so that hearers can rest assured of the reality of their salvation.

> In Holy Scripture, however, there are real blessings. They are more than mere wishes. They state facts and are effective. They actually bestow and bring what the words say. We also have blessings of this kind in the New Testament through Christ's priesthood, which is our blessing, when I say: "Receive the absolution of your sins." If I said: "Would that your sins were forgiven you; would that you were pious and in God's grace!" or "I wish you grace, mercy, the eternal kingdom, and deliverance from your sins," this could be called a blessing of love. But the blessing of a promise, of faith, and of a gift that is at hand is this: "I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; that is, I reconcile your soul to God, remove from you God's wrath and displeasure, put you in His grace, and give you the inheritance of eternal life and the kingdom of heaven." All of these things have the power to grant you forgiveness immediately and truly if you believe, for they are not our works; they are God's works through our ministry. Accordingly, they are not blessings that express wishes; they are blessings that have the power to bestow. When I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, it is just as if I were saying: "I am snatching you from the hands of the devil and bringing you to God, and I am doing this truly and in fact." (WA 42:525; *LW* 5:140)

In his *Lectures on Jonah,* Luther calls his reader to reflect on the turn of events that God's word brought about. If God's word had such power and effect in pagan Nineveh, it will certainly do no less today. "We are taught in this account how powerful, active, and effective God's Word is. It cannot be preached in vain so that it fails to produce, and that in plain sight. If we will think about this account in terms of the power and effect of the Word, the story becomes wonderful and full of comfort" (WA 13:242; *LW* 19:4).

It is clear that Luther's insights into God's word are no less exciting today than they were five hundred years ago. There are certainly many more facets of this doctrine that a twenty-first-century Lutheran could elucidate, but a fuller analysis of *sola Scriptura* is beyond the scope of this article. Hopefully, the essay has piqued interest and provided a foundation for further study. "God's word and Luther's doctrine, shall now and evermore endure" (Gottes Wort und Luthers Lehr, vergehet nun und nimmermehr).[45] LOGIA

43. For studies on Luther and language, see Johannes von Lüpke, "Luther's Use of Language," in *Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, 143–55; Birgit Stolt, *Martin Luthers Rhetorik des Herzens* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).
44. See also WA TR 4:666.
45. See also Harmelink, *The Reformation Collection*, xxxiv; Thomas Albert Howard, *Remembering the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 25.

Nisi Per Verbum

A Disputation Concerning Postmodernism and the Pastoral Ministry

Gregory P. Schulz

A long time ago, in a cosmos far away in space-time, Heraclitus of Ephesus discovered a principle—the ultimate first principle of all created things, in fact. He named this archaic principle *the logos* in his Greek language.

Half a millennium after this discovery, a Jewish man personally beloved by God himself wrote by verbal inspiration, "The Logos became flesh and tabernacled for a while among us, and we have seen his glorious weightiness, the weightiness of the only-begotten" (John 1:14, my translation). This apostle, St. John, is believed to have written down these words in Heraclitus's town of Ephesus.

In our own day, two and one-half millennia after Heraclitus and two millennia after John, there came into the cosmos that we inhabit a French philosopher who wrote many books to convince us that language is meaningless, urging latter-day heirs of Heraclitus and John to deconstruct, that is, in his idiosyncratic terminology, utterly to dismiss the Logos in all of its iterations.

This anti-Logos, antilogic, antilanguage French philosopher is Jacques Derrida (1930–2004). The postmodernism that erupts in his program for eradicating the Logos is what I call "the Shingles Virus of Western culture." I teach philosophy students at my university that Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle founded Western philosophy in large part to provide an antidote to postmodern relativism, the "man is the measure of all things" relativism initially articulated by Protagoras (ca. 490–420 BC), a contemporary of Heraclitus (ca. 540–480 BC) and of Socrates (d. 399 BC). The three founders of Western philosophy realized that relativizing moral truth would result in the atomization of Greek civilization into myriad micronarratives and the death of human society. *Postmodernism* as a word is a recent coinage, but the phenomenon we know as postmodernism is not anything new.

In support of the understanding that postmodernism is a perennial problem or shingles-like virus albeit identified with new verbiage, think of the words of Protagoras: "Man is the measure of all things: of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not" (quoted by Plato in *Theaetetus* 152a). Protagoras was a moral and cognitive relativist, the type of philosopher who would be called in our day "postmodernist." In art history, postmodern art is the type of art that comes after distinctly modern art. In literature, postmodern novels are the sort of novels that come after distinctly modern novels. But this is not how it works in philosophy and intellectual life considered more broadly. In philosophy, postmodernism is an intellectual (or more accurately, an anti-intellectual) disposition simultaneously inimical to Heraclitus's logos, the essential feature of the cosmos and of our human being, and to John's Logos, God incarnate.[1]

A half-millennium after the Reformation, the virus of postmodernism has begun to affect the church and her ministry. It is plausible that, just as we become weak and lethargic as the result of viral infections of our own bodies, the body of Christ in the West has become weak and lethargic as the result of the most recent outbreaks of the shingles virus of postmodernism. Many of us realize that preaching toward the end of the twentieth and now into the twenty-first century has become tentative vis-à-vis the word of God and more in sync with the secularized society in which we live. There also is a malaise for the message of Christ in the pews and in the classrooms of Christian schools. It is not unreasonable to ask if this ennui in pulpit and pew may be a symptom of a raging, viral infection of postmodernism.

As another French author put it in the 1970s: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives."[2] Translation: Those who espouse postmodernism are committed ahead of time, come-what-may, to the denial of capital-T Truth or even the possibility of working toward the truth.[3] This necessarily means the denial of the truthfulness of language and the Truth incarnate. Postmodernists swear allegiance ahead of time to remain steadfast in their disbelief, no matter what. Thus, postmodernism is an aggressive contagion of incredulity.

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1. On this philosophical understanding of postmodernism, the list of postmodern philosophers of the last century or so is short enough to name them all in a book title. See Douglas Litowitz, *Postmodern Philosophy and Law: Rorty, Nietzsche, Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997).
2. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), introduction, http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Lyotard-PostModernCondition1-5.html.
3. See John 14:6, where Jesus identifies himself as *the* truth (Greek *aletheia*). Compare Aristotle's definition of truth: "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is to speak a lie [*pseudos*]; while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is to speak the truth [*aletheia*]" (*Metaphysics*, 1011b25).

There is more going on here than a blatant logical fallacy. It is not just that they are uttering a self-falsifying claim by claiming that there is no metanarrative. ("There is no such thing as truth!" is itself a claim that there is one truth, namely, the claim that there is no truth. The claim that there are no metanarratives is itself a metanarrative. And so on.) It is not simply that they deny the incarnate Logos who identifies himself as "the Truth" in John 14:6 of the greatest metanarrative ever told. The reality is that *postmodernists teach and promote the preemptive surrender of language,* the essential feature of our humanity and the means by which God reveals himself to us. For the Scriptures are language. It is language that we use to preach and to pray, to confess and to absolve. Lyotard's incredulous introductory paragraph concludes with a wholesale dismissal of the meaningfulness and authority of all language. Notice that according to postmodernism, language itself is a vanity, a vapor. Postmodernism is an assertion of Ecclesiastical proportions, a nihilism that is always engaged in denying the words of the one Shepherd (Eccl 12:11). Here again is Lyotard:

> This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors [*sic*], its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements—narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valencies specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable.
>
> Thus the society of the future falls less within the province of a Newtonian anthropology (such as structuralism or systems theory) than a pragmatics of language particles. There are many different language games—a heterogeneity of elements. They only give rise to institutions in patches—local determinism.[4]

Postmodernists atomize. The problem lies in their doomsday weapon of choice. In order to promote their denial of a logical or Logos-centric universe, which is exactly what is meant by their denial of any metanarrative or universal story, postmodernists deny the inherent meaningfulness of all language. Accordingly, their disruptive philosophy serves to support an agenda designed to keep people away from the very means or medium through which the Truth himself meets us and speaks to everyone with ears to hear (see Psalm 1 and every Old Testament passage; Romans 10:14–21 and every New Testament passage). The postmodern program is to deny the meaning of the word so that we will not pay attention to the word of God when it lies open in our hands or when it is being preached to us by our divinely called pastors (Eph 4:4–16).

It is Acts 17 all over again, only worse. The Stoics and Epicureans of St. Paul's day had to deny the very possibility of resurrection in order to make their philosophies acceptable to people. Postmodernism has more global aspirations. It seeks to deny us human beings the possibility of truth of any kind, not only the truth of the resurrection of the body.

Postmodernism is erupting within the body of Christ through the books that our pastors and seminary students are reading.

So, what is a pastor to make of books from Christian authors and Christian presses urging us to use postmodernist philosophers such as Derrida to "do church" better? What are we to do with books teaching us to sync our biblical hermeneutics with a method befitting "the postmodern world" in which we are supposed to live?

The shingles virus of postmodernism is erupting within the body of Christ. While we might assume that it is a cultural infiltration of some sort, taken in through our pores, so to speak, as a matter of record one site of infection is through the books that our pastors and seminary students are reading—books by college and seminary professors urging pastors to incorporate postmodernism into pastoral theology and practice. Consider two examples of such "postmodernism for pastors" books with a weather eye on what they are trying to sell us in order to change in our way of preaching, teaching, and the care of souls in our pastoral office, the word and sacrament ministry that God through his church has called us to be doing, in this place and time.

The first postmodernism-for-pastors author urges us to welcome postmodernists such as Derrida into the church in order to revivify the Reformation watchword, "Scripture alone!" James K. A. Smith from Calvin College has been publishing books with titles urging the emerging, radical orthodoxy church not to be afraid of postmodernism, but instead to welcome the help that he believes Derrida and other postmodernist philosophers can provide to assist in the emergence of a reformed (or Reformed) twenty-first-century church. Smith believes that the church as such has much to learn about being the church from philosophers such as Derrida, whose announced agenda was to oppose the Messiah of the Bible and to eradicate the divine, biblical mandate of marriage from the world. Professor Smith's argument in a nutshell is that a characteristic assertion from the French postmodernist can inspire a return to the truths of the Reformation.

4. Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition,* xxiv.

> Derrida. Deconstruction's claim that there is "nothing outside the text" [*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*] can be considered a radical translation of the Reformation principle *sola scriptura*.[5]

Notwithstanding Smith's efforts to make us envision "Derrida at the foot of the cross" (which is the title of Smith's next subsection in this chapter promoting Derrida's claim that there is "nothing outside the text" as Reformational), Derrida is clearly anti-Logos and anti-Messiah. He is small-*a* antichrist and a liar by apostolic standards (1 John 2:22–23).

In regard to postmodern authors such as Derrida, the contemporary philosopher Roger Scruton counsels us: "A writer who says that there are no truths, or that all truth is 'merely relative', is asking you not to believe him. So don't."[6] We in the church, pastors in particular, are in urgent need of straightforward philosophical introduction to the perils of postmodernism's pernicious, antitruth, anti-Logos, and illogical degradation of language and texts, because this entails the postmodernization of our understanding of the language and text of Holy Scripture. A writer who promotes Derrida is asking us not to believe him, so we should not. Much less should we invite him to provide seminars on how to fulfill the Reformation at mid-millennium.

The second postmodernism-for-pastors author wants us to befriend postmodernism for our regular work of hermeneutics, or biblical exegesis in preparation for preaching the word. James Voelz of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, theorizes in his *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* that meaning emanates "from several levels of signifiers" as part of his linguistic semiotics, which he promotes as a linguistic theory suitable for pastoral exegesis of Scripture.[7] As Professor Voelz writes,

> Observers from within and without may recognize a "post-modern" ring to what is here advanced. And they are right. . . . But it is the contention of this author that postmodernism, for all of its excesses, is not our enemy, but a sort of friend.[8]

What does this mean, promoting a syncing of the church's hermeneutics with "the postmodern world?" Voelz's friend-fellowship notwithstanding, in point of fact, postmodernism maintains that there is no world in the first place. It is therefore nonsensical ever to speak of a "postmodern world." For the postmodernist, there is no ordered creation, no Logos binding all things in a fundamental, Christ-centered coherence, contrary to Colossians 1:15–18. Postmodernism teaches flux and chaos. There is no postmodern world to befriend. There is only this viral contagion. So, what are the consequences of befriending postmodernism? Postmodernism is no friend to the pastor's work as biblical exegete. Postmodernism is a Mephistopheles.

With the anniversary year of the beginning of the Reformation fresh in mind, let me call for a Disputation on Postmodernism and the word of God. The summa-style headline question for our disputation could be "Whether Postmodernism is Compatible with the Office of the Ministry." The assumed answer to the questions is "No." I will account for postmodern objections and sketch a reply to their objections. For the *Respondeo* of my argument, I am going to argue for the Declaration of Dependence upon our Lutheran Confessions, something to which I subscribe without qualification and which I know all faithful pastors of any Christian denomination will take to heart. "God cannot be treated with, God cannot be apprehended *nisi per verbum,* except through the Word" (Ap IV, On Justification).

Here are four theses for our disputation and edification.

1. Language (spoken and textual) is inherently intentional. This is not known theoretically, but within the *logos*-activity of reading and writing, speaking and listening.

2. Language (spoken and textual) forms human beings ontologically. This is known in the Hebrew sense of known-by-personal-acquaintance, but is identified in the thinking of Aristotle, Luther, and Martin Heidegger as the *logos*-capability that is uniquely characteristic of the human being.

3. As language (textual first, then preached and taught), the word of God, or Holy Scripture, is (1) inherently intentional and (2) ontologically formative for human beings.

4. In addition, being the word *of God* (a genitive of origin), the Holy Scriptures are unsurpassably authoritative.

EXPOSITION OF THESIS 1

Language (spoken and textual) is inherently intentional. This is not known theoretically, but within the *logos*-activity of reading and writing, speaking and listening. By intentional I don't mean that someone wants something to happen. This is a technical term for the *aboutness* of language. Intentionality is a feature of our cognition and of our emotional being. It is the recognition that we never just cognize; in fact, we always cognize something. It is the recognition that we never just have emotional feelings; in fact we always feel love or hate or joy or *Angst* about something. For example, here is a glossary entry on emotional intentionality.

5. James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 34. Please see pages 34–42 as well. Smith continues after this quotation to protest against what he calls an uncharitable "bumper sticker" reading of Derrida and he enlists the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) in support of his case that Derrida is not a linguistic idealist. Then Smith goes on to demonstrate his contention with a brief study of the Disney movie *The Little Mermaid*. This essay is not a book review, so let me simply mention my philosophical understanding (1) that linguistic idealism is not actually the issue in Derrida's argument, and (2) that Heidegger is not a postmodernist. Nor is Heidegger's philosophy of language postmodern. Quite the opposite.
6. Roger Scruton, *Modern Philosophy: An Introduction and Survey* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).
7. James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World*, 2nd ed., Concordia Scholarship Today (St. Louis, Missouri: CPH, 1997).
8. Ibid., 11.

> *Intentionality:* That a feeling, emotion, or mood is *about* something; its objectivity. A mood such as *Angst* is *about* the world as a whole, the undefined world in which an individual is situated. This situatedness is immediate and not reducible to either cognition or volition. The "location" of intentionality is best understood as a spatio-temporal field of consciousness and intersubjective experience.[9]

The intentionality of language means that language is never "just words on a page or just sounds in the air"; it is always *about* everything or something, someone or Someone.

Postmodernists object to the inherent intentionality of language.

Postmodernists object to the inherent intentionality of language. For example, look again at Smith's advice to bringing Derrida to church to present vital symposia for pastors and church leaders. What exactly does Smith mean by portraying Derrida as a postmodernist that we should "not be afraid to take to church" because he can help the church today to rediscover the Reformation watchword *sola Scriptura,* "God saves us by Scripture alone." Quoting him at greater length, Smith writes,

> Derrida. Deconstruction's claim that there is "nothing outside the text" [*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*] can be considered a radical translation of the Reformation principle *sola scriptura*. In particular, Derrida's insight should push us to recover two key emphases of the church: (a) the centrality of Scripture for mediating our understanding of the world as a whole and (b) the role of community in the interpretation of Scripture.[10]

Smith's mention of "the role of community in the interpretation of Scripture" is in itself perfunctory and clichéd. In light of St. Peter's God-breathed words in 2 Peter 1:19–21, it is also a bit odd. But Smith's notion that Derrida's assertion that there is "nothing outside the text" can be utilized to support Reformation sensibilities and biblical theology is incoherent. Incidentally, Smith, a Reformed thinker in the tradition not of Rome or Wittenberg, but of Geneva, is exhibiting what is known as *the fallacy of composition* by assuming that Calvin's theology of Scripture is the Reformation theology of Scripture. If we were to go all in on welcoming postmodernists to church, we could write off Smith's claim as a postmodern such as Lyotard would, and point out that this is nothing more than Smith's own micronarrative, but this is serious business for us all.[11]

It is unsurprising to read what we will learn in a few pages to call an *expressionist semiotics* view of Holy Scripture from a professor at a college named for John Calvin. After all, historically only from Reformed thinkers has there been a denial of the doctrine of the efficacious external means of grace.[12] In writing about "the narrative character of our faith," Smith claims that the church, after its encounter with postmodernism, will "look different."[13] In passing, he refers to the Holy Communion as community narrative, not as the divinely instituted means of grace that it is. He depicts the Lord's Supper, in Calvinist terms, semiotically. Note his position that the Eucharist is *nothing more than* symbols and signs and semiotics, merely an expression of the church's communitarian narrative.

> While the postmodern church is a storied community centered on the narrative of Scripture, it is also a Eucharistic community that replays the narrative in deed. Further, the symbols and signs of the Lord's Supper embody the gospel for us. Because the postmodern church values narrative, it values story and as such values the aesthetic experience engendered by material signs and symbols. Put another way, because of the renewed role of story as a kind of literature activating the imagination, the postmodern church values the arts in general as an incarnational medium that embodies the story of God's faithfulness.[14]

In other words, according to Smith, word and sacrament are not the place where God himself talks to us and gives us his body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine (1 Cor 11). Rather, for Smith's postmodern church, our aesthetic imagination is the location of a community narrative that the church refers to as "the gospel." I tell you, brethren, that many will say in the church in these latter days, "Incarnation this, incarnation that," but let him who has ears get this point:

> What a theologian says about the sacraments is doubly important because it parallels what he says about Christ in the flesh. If there is no external efficacy in the one, there is none in the other. This has terribly important consequences for piety and pastoral care: it means the attention of those who long for life in Christ must be directed to

9. See my *Wednesday's Child: From Heidegger to Affective Neuroscience, A Field Theory of Angst* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 128.
10. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* 34.
11. "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives." [Translation: Those who espouse postmodernism are committed ahead of time, come-what-may, to the denial of capital-T Truth or even the possibility of working toward the truth. Postmodernists swear allegiance ahead of time to remain steadfast in their disbelief that there is in reality no logos or logic, no matter what. GPS] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, introduction.
12. Cary also sees this same spiritualizing or metamorphizing of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist in Augustine. See Phillip Cary, *Outward Signs: the Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 8; see also the chapter "New Testament Sacraments and the Flesh of Christ," especially 249–52.
13. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* 76–77.
14. Ibid.

> some more inward dimension, to something more spiritual than Christ incarnate. This is the great reason to be critical of any inward turn in Christianity and to be grateful for medieval accounts of sacraments as efficacious external means of grace.[15]

As should be clear to readers of Derrida's *On Grammatology,* and so on, although the hallmark of all postmodern writing is obfuscation (they are always trying to convince us that all texts are meaningless), Derrida's philosophy of language (in speech and in texts) can be expressed in a syllogism, a three-sentence miniargument. This is what Derrida actually maintains.

1. All language is meaningless inasmuch as it does not refer to a reality, to a metanarrative beyond its own words, or to universal truths, for example, God, ethical norms, etc.
2. Words are nothing more than semiotic traces, arbitrary ciphers or linguistic symbols available for infinite, free play interpretations according to the interests of any and every variety of community. Man is the measure of everything.
3. Thus, there is nothing that any text refers to outside itself. A text is merely of parochial interest and subject to infinite interpretations.

Derrida does not maintain that there is "nothing outside the text" because he is a postmodernist Reformer nailing *sola Scriptura* to the emerging church's door. Derrida maintains that there is "nothing outside the text" because he is a chronic, committed disbeliever, a philosophical and theological hardcore skeptic who practices methodological incredulity toward any and every coherent account of ordered reality, toward any putative *logos.*

Derrida is utterly opposed to the inherent meaningfulness of language. As a consequence, his strategy as an author is to be incessantly ironic, ceaselessly indecisive, and tiresomely "witty." Postmodernist writers are notoriously obscure in their own writings.

> That postmodernism is indefinable is a truism. However, it can be described as a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning.[16]

So, let our rebuttal of what Derrida and postmodernism bring into the church be clear and unambiguous. Derrida denies language's inherent intentionality. His statement is not Reformational any more than it is coherent. It is a nihilistic theory of language that, by a relentless chatter of incessant, pseudointellectual bullying, means to demolish the church door, the church herself, and the Lord of the church.

What is it that makes contemporary Christian authors — and perhaps many churches today — vulnerable to postmodernism? In part it is a penchant for theorizing as a substitute for reading and listening. The inherent intentionality or aboutness of language is pretheoretical. Before we define or classify language we need to listen to language.[17] Actually, I am going to argue that we cannot sit outside language in order to define it, and therefore that theorizing about language is the problem. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) advised his philosophical colleagues at Cambridge, "Don't think; look!" He meant that they should cease all their efforts to outdo one another by their theories of language and meaning and just look at the texts.

It is a nihilistic theory of language that, by a relentless chatter of incessant, pseudointellectual bullying, means to demolish the church.

This penchant for theorizing is illustrated in Voelz's book on hermeneutics, which is subtitled *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World.* Here again is how he begins the introduction to a "semiotic linguistic theory," which he presents as a confessional Lutheran hermeneutic:

> Observers from within and without may recognize a "post-modern" ring to what is here advanced. And they are right. . . . But it is the contention of this author that postmodernism, for all of its excesses, is not our enemy, but a sort of friend.[18]

The textbook itself does not actually present a coherent understanding of language or the biblical text so much as a series of preparatory lecture notes, headed with bibliographical lists unconnected with the author's various comments. Aristotle's *Categories* and Plato's *Republic* and *Timaeus* are listed under Addendum 4-B as important resources regarding "the source of conceptual signifieds and the role of language."

As a philosopher who reads and teaches Aristotle and Plato, I can report that neither one of them articulated a semiotic, "sig-

15. Cary, *Outward Signs,* 222.
16. "Postmodernism," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/.
17. "To reflect on language . . . demands that we enter into the speaking of language in order to take up our stay with language, i.e., within *its* speaking, not within our own. Only in that way do we arrive at the region within it may happen — or also fail to happen — that language will call us from there and grant us its nature. We leave speaking to language. We do not wish to ground language in something else that is not language itself, nor do we wish to explain other things [than language as it is] by means of language." Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 190–91.
18. Voelz, *What Does This Mean?* 11.

nified and signifiers," theory of language. Just the opposite. They held in practice a nontheoretical confidence in the inherent reliability of language. The Greeks originated the vocabulary that Voelz employs for his semiotic theory of hermeneutics, but they had no such theory as he advocates.[19] This is a serious problem.

It is a serious problem because if Voelz had read, really read and engaged with these Greek sources that he gestures toward, he could have saved his readers and perhaps his seminary students a lot of hermeneutical grief. As a brief excursus, pastor to pastor, let me say that this is why we pastors—especially if we are to pastor as Lutheran pastors and to teach the next generations what it means to be confessional Lutherans—need a reasonable diet of good philosophical education in what I refer to as Philosophy *Kata Christon,* in engagement with the apostolic word in Colossians 2.[20]

The Greeks originated the vocabulary that Voelz employs, but they had no such theory as he advocates.

What shall we say in response to this postmodern-friendly way of doing biblical exegesis, namely, hermeneutics via semiotic linguistic theory as our hermeneutic? Fraternizing with postmodernists amounts to Chamberlain-like appeasement. Postmodernism in the church is an indication that pastors are failing in their duty as called servants of the word. We need to relocate hermeneutics. It is a secondary discourse, contingent upon our engagement in Scripture.[21] Neither semiotic linguistic theorizing nor any other linguistic theorizing, for that matter, ought ever be presented or taught as a preamble to our pastoral immersion in the word of God.

To put this another way, we ought to debate—not about theories through which to handle Scripture hermeneutically, but—the proper disposition or stance for a faithful pastor to take toward Scripture in his exegetical labors. In the third volume of his academic trilogy on Augustine, *Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought,* Phillip Cary identifies two competing stances that a pastor could take toward the biblical text. Let us take these as two possible understandings as a Pascal's Wager for Pastors. By this, I do not mean that we need to take a gamble. I mean that we need to pick sides, here and now, and stick by our choice. The two views of language are *expressionist semiotics* and *efficacious external means of grace.*[22]

What is at issue is whether we as pastors come to our reading and study of Holy Scripture, attending to its inherent meaningfulness (that is, *nisi per verbum*) or whether we view the Scriptures as signs to be decoded according to a linguistic theory (that is, *ex hypothesi*). Adopting the means-of-grace disposition toward Scripture leads us in the direction of Gerhard Forde's argument that preaching is a sacrament: "Preaching is doing the text to the hearers. . . . Preaching in a sacramental fashion is *doing* to the hearers what the text authorizes you to do to them."[23] Adopting the expressionist-semiotic disposition toward the Scripture means that before you get into the word of God you will want to acquire expertise (or depend on a plagiarized or "borrowed expertise") in order to figure out what to do with the Bible text exegetically. The expressionist-semiotics commitment leads toward the working assumption that the meaning of the text we preach is not in the text per se but . . . elsewhere.[24] The expressionist-semiotic disposition may also lead to pastoral acedia. It is a disputation, so you cannot demur. Which approach to Holy Scripture do you choose?

By "efficacious external means of grace," Cary means what confessional Lutherans believe, teach, and confess in Luther's catechisms and in our pledged confessional statements such as Apology XII. It is what the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has reiterated many times, such as in the 1932 *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod,* which says:

> We hold with Scripture that God offers and communicates to men the spiritual blessings purchased by Christ, namely, the forgiveness of sins and the treasures and gifts connected therewith, *only through the external means of grace ordained by Him.* These means of grace are the Word of the Gospel, in every form in which it is brought to man, and the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and of the Lord's Supper.

19. "Semiotics before Augustine meant the discussion of the nature of empirical inference. Its task was to articulate epistemological connections within the sensible world rather than to link two worlds or two dimensions of being. That is why it did not occur to Greek philosophers to classify words as a kind of sign (*sēmeion*). For them signs belonged to a process of inference, not a process of expression. They served not to communicate what lies hidden in the soul [or mind] but to reveal what lies unseen in the world, as for example medical symptoms reveal an underlying condition hidden in the depths of the body or as smoke on the horizon indicates a fire that is somewhere nearby but perhaps not yet seen. . . . There are many . . . authors in the Western tradition, beginning with Augustine [who classify words as a species of sign], but none among the Greeks." Cary, *Outward Signs*, 18–19.
20. See www.lutheranphilosopher.com for the link to "Philosophy *Kata Christon:* A Pastor's Guided Introduction to Philosophy Based on Christ Himself." This six-session online video course is provided free of charge by my university and pastors involved in Doxology: The Lutheran Center for Pastoral Care and Counsel.
21. "Hermeneutics . . . cannot become a master discourse (1) displacing the learning of basic skills of interpretation, or (2) generating a claim that we must engage in it before engaging in interpretation." Brian Brock, *Singing the Ethos of God: On the Place of Christian Ethics in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 265.
22. Phillip Cary, *Outward Signs*, preface, ix.
23. Gerhard O. Forde, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, ed. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 91.
24. See Voelz, "Semiotics," which the author claims without explanation to be "broader than semantics": "*Semiotics*: the study of meaning as conveyed by all types of signifiers, both verbal and nonverbal (broader than *semantics*)." Voelz, *What Does This Mean?* 367. Note well that, on the expressionist-semiotics way of approaching the Bible, the meaning of the text is not in the text. Meaning lies wherever the semiotic theorist may choose to locate it (in "verbal or nonverbal" places), but *not in the text itself.*

> The Word of the gospel promises and applies the grace of God, works faith and thus regenerates man, and gives the Holy Ghost, Acts 20:24; Rom. 10:17; 1 Pet. 1:23; Gal. 3:2. . . .
>
> . . . [I]t is only through the external means ordained by Him that God has promised to communicate the grace and salvation purchased by Christ. . . . *Whatever activities do not either directly apply the Word of God or subserve such application we condemn as "new methods," unchurchly activities, which do not build, but harm the Church.*
>
> We reject as a dangerous error the doctrine, which disrupted the Church of the Reformation, that the grace and the Spirit of God are communicated not through the external means ordained by Him, but by an immediate operation of grace.[25]

As we have seen, linguistic theorizing is a problem, a point of pastoral vulnerability to the postmodern infection. In this connection it may be worth considering how it is that, although the medievals, in their commentaries on Aristotle and language almost invariably proceeded to produce a veritable industry of Rube Goldberg theories of language,[26] Luther (a credible candidate for the title of "The Last Medieval Churchman") did not theorize as a prolegomenon to his exegetical preaching. He took. He read. He preached. After all, God cannot be treated with, God cannot be apprehended *nisi per verbum,* except through the word.

To recapitulate this thesis concerning the inherent intentionality of language: there is an antiviral medicine (or therapy, as Wittgenstein described philosophy) for pastors as well as for theory-obsessed philosophers. "Don't think. Don't scramble to find a theory of language to carry with you into your exegetical work for preaching and teaching and caregiving. Instead, '*Tolle, lege:* take up and read!' [27] the scriptural text!" Before anything else, read and listen to the word. After everything else, read and listen to the word. Preach the word. It is from reading and hearing the word of God that we come (by empirical inference, as Aristotle put it)[28] to the efficacious external means-of-grace disposition toward the word of God.

Postmodernism is a *de profundis theory.* As the ambitious, nihilistic theory that it is, no counter theory will provide an adequate reply to such a fundamentally corrosive or viral objection to language with its inherent intentionality as Derrida and the postmodernists have mounted. The problem with theoretical understandings of real-life phenomena is that the theories, being abstract management tools, teach us to be reductive in our understanding and practice . . . leading us to be "distracted by distraction from distraction" from our reading and study of Scripture by nothing-but theories,[29] as if language and Scripture as language are nothing but semiotics.

Luther did not theorize as a prolegomenon to his exegetical preaching. He took. He read. He preached.

To establish the profoundly anti-Western agenda of postmodernism, let us put this in terms of the Logos. In the Western tradition, the way to identify the irreducibility of the meaningfulness or intentionality of language was to recognize *logos* as the first principle of language, reality, and thought.

A *first principle* is not "a good idea" or an arbitrary starting point of some sort. Nor is a first principle something that philosophers invent. First principles are discovered, not made. So, first principles are not social constructs. They are the *archai* (Greek), the artesian wells, so to speak, which account for the central phenomena of existence being the enduring and significant phenomena that they are. John 1:1, with John's deployment of the Greek term *arche,* could be translated, "In first principle terms, the Logos already was."[30]

The first principle that I am most concerned with here is the first principle of pastoral theology, *nisi per verbum* from the Apology. But in order to understand together what it means to call this a first principle, let me share with you a brief tutorial on the first principle of noncontradiction, the first principle of ethics, and the first principle of the logos.

Aristotle lights up the first principle of noncontradiction this way: "The same thing cannot be said both to be and not to be (a) for the same person or thing, (b) at the same time, and (c) in the same respect" (*Metaphysics* IV 3, 1005b19–20, my paraphrase).[31] Introducing this in class, I often invite everyone to imagine that two students at the farthest corners of the class-

25. Accessed June 2017 at https://www.lcms.org/doctrine/doctrinalposition#means-of-grace. My italics.
26. "To speak of medieval semiotics is not to speak of a precisely defined discipline besides, and distinct from, other medieval arts and sciences; it is rather to speak of a complex field of more or less — mostly more — elaborate reflections on the concept of sign, its nature, function, and classification. In order to understand the enormous extent to which such theories grew during the Middle Ages some basic formal features of the scholastic organization of knowledge has to be kept in mind." Stephan Meier-Oeser, "Medieval Semiotics," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2011 edition, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/semiotics-medieval/.
27. "*Tolle, lege* [take and read]." Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 12, para 2.
28. Aristotle, *On Interpretation* (Greek, Περὶ Ἑρμηνείας; Peri Hermeneias; Latin, De Interpretatione).
29. For an example, consider Searle's Chinese Room, a thought experiment about intentionality in regard to human intelligence versus artificial "intelligence." See Bryan Wolfmuller's interview with me regarding this Master Metaphor for Philosophy at http://www.whatdoesthismean.org.
30. "Nothing is more generally unacceptable in recent philosophy than any concept of a first principle. . . . Genuinely first principles, I shall argue, can have a place only within a universe characterized in terms of certain determinate, fixed and unalterable ends, ends which provide a standard by reference to which our individual purposes, desires, interests and decisions can be evaluated as well or badly directed." Alasdair MacIntyre, *First Principles, Final Ends, and Contemporary Philosophical Issues* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1990), 1, 7.
31. There are actually three or four versions or augmentations of this first principle. For the mention of these various texts and for a full philosophical treatment, see https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-noncontradiction/#1.

room are texting back and forth. "So Prof. Schulz isn't here today!" texts the first student. "But Prof. Schulz is here!" texts the second student. At first blush it sounds like the students are contradicting each other, but maybe not. It so happens that there are two Prof. Schulzes on our two Concordia campuses. First, then, suppose that they agree that they are both referring to the same person, namely, Prof. Greg Schulz. Second, they could text the same texts back and forth a second time, verbatim. Are they contradicting each other now? Probably not, since they may have different times in mind, say, one thinking that I am here on campus today and the other seeing that I am not in the classroom this minute. But what happens if they also agree that "here" in their texts means "here in this classroom during this class period"? Third, they could retext the exact same texts a third time, but there is one more issue to agree on. What do they each mean by saying that I "am here" today? One could mean that I am not mentally present, that I seem unprepared and befuddled, while the other means that I am physically present.

The principle of noncontradiction is a natural law for communication.

Now what happens if, having clarified (a) which person they have been texting about, (b) which time and place they have in mind, and (c) in what respect they are referring to my "being here today," they both stick with their original texts? Well, if they agree that I both am and am not here in this class room this period physically—if they in effect agree that what is true for one writer is not necessarily true for the other writer and everyone else in class feels the same way—then the gig is up. Accepting such contradictory texts as the norm would be the end of all texts—the end, in fact, of all communicating, all thinking, all writing, all person-to-person relationships. As the T-shirt says, "Gravity: It's not just a Good Idea; it's the Law." The principle of noncontradiction is a natural law for communication. It's the law. It's *Torah.* It's a first principle.

There is a first principle for ethics too. Ethics is a normative discipline, a standard-based inquiry that befits us as human beings within God's creation. The perennial, generation-after-generation question that leads us to do ethics is the question, "How *ought* we act and not act toward one another as the kind of creature or being that we are, namely, human beings?" The first principle for ethics is the principle of Good and Evil: "Do the good, avoid the evil." When C. S. Lewis argues in the three essays that comprise his 1943 book *The Abolition of Man,* that "the Innovator" always ends up depending on moral principles whenever he tries to make his case that there is no such thing as morality, he is depending on this first principle. When Nietzsche (whom I take to be "the Innovator" in *Abolition*) attacked the very concept of morality in the waning years of the nineteenth century, he titled one of his attacks *Beyond Good and Evil,* thereby expressing his intent to demolish the first principle of ethics. The principle of Good and Evil is a natural law of ethics. No Good and Evil, no ethics. It is a first principle (see also Rom 12:2–13 and 7:14–25).[32]

Heraclitus's *logos* is a first principle. I would even refer to it as "the first principle of first principles." The first principle character of the *logos* is what we read in these quotes from his surviving textual *Fragments.*

> This *Logos* holds always but humans always prove unable to understand it, both before hearing it and when they have first heard it. For though all things come to be in accordance with this *Logos,* humans are like the inexperienced when they experience such words and deeds as I set out, distinguishing each in accordance with its nature and saying how it is. But other people fail to notice what they do when awake, just as they forget what they do while asleep. (DK 22B1)
>
> For this reason it is necessary to follow what is common. But although the *Logos* is common, most people live as if they had their own private understanding. (DK 22B2)[33]

Here is another way to look at Heraclitus's discovery of this first principle or *arche.* Plato referred to Heraclitus as the philosopher of radical flux. In one of his dialogs Plato puts it this way: "Heraclitus, I believe, says that all things go and nothing stays, and comparing existents to the flow of a river, he says you could not step twice into the same river" (*Cratylus* 402a). So far, so good. But if everything, absolutely everything, is constantly changing, we could never know that everything was constantly changing. This is because we would be fluxing, so there would be no individuals to know anything. The cosmos would be utter chaos and not a coherent cosmos, so there would be no universe to know. Language would be nothing, no thing, not language at all, so there would be no way to know. If all is in flux, there would be nothing to know, no knowers and no language.

However, given that things continue to exist as the things that they are, there must be a source and explanation for their continuing identity over time. If we know the universe as an orderly and dependably consistent unitary reality, then there must be a source and explanation for our coherent knowing. This is what Heraclitus means by the *Logos. Logos* (λόγος) is both the source and fundamental order of the cosmos. In Heraclitus's hometown one-half millennium after his discovery of the

32. It is also worth noting that Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in the first line of his unfinished *Ethics*, observes that the first principle of ethics is insufficient, apart from a recognition of our insurgency in the Garden, and our need for Christ to redeem and restore the rupture of our fall. But here in Bonhoeffer too, we are likely to miss the full impact of his Christology if we are not cognizant of the first principle of ethics.

33. "DK" refers to the Diels–Kranz numbering system for the texts of the Pre-Socratic philosophers. See *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* at http://www.iep.utm.edu/diels-kr/. Italics added.

first principle of the *Logos,* St. John revealed this first principle to be a two-natured person, the second person of the Holy Trinity. The centerpiece of Heraclitus's philosophy is *l*, the logos, but postmodern philosophers, incredulous of orderliness from the get-go, glom onto the notion of flux. They are, after all, incredulous folks, so reality as it is remains beside the point. Notwithstanding postmodern incredulity, in a philosophical sense as in the biblical sense, you cannot serve two masters. You cannot have flux and chaos as your guiding principle because such a position isg36

not a position, it is nothing more than a stubborn denial of the orderliness of creation as it is. Despite all of this, postmodern philosophers love the flux dimension of Heraclitus, but they hate his philosophical claims in support of the common, universal, ordering first principle of the logos.[34]

In summary of our first thesis, namely, that language (spoken and textual) is inherently intentional, and that this is not known theoretically, but within the logos-activity of reading and writing, speaking and listening, postmodernism is a nihilistic theory of language that targets the first principle of the Logos. Without reasons, without reason, by sheer willfulness[35] postmodernism denies the intentionality or aboutness of language. The church and her pastors are vulnerable to this postmodern theory of linguistic nihilism in part because of a pervasive biblical aliteracy and in part due to a penchant in hermeneutics and the pastor's exegesis for substituting theory for the reading of the text of Holy Scripture. I recommend setting aside theory in favor of reading the word. As will become clearer in my unpacking of our second thesis, I commend to the pastor that he not distract himself with linguistic theorizing, but that he immerse himself regularly in the Psalms, "the little Bible," as Luther referred to this book, particularly Psalm 119 and its concrete précis, Psalm 19. This is the first aspect of what the *nisi per verbum* principle entails.

EXPOSITION OF THESIS 2

Language (spoken and textual) forms human beings ontologically. This is known in the Hebrew sense of known-by-personal-acquaintance, but is evident in the thinking of Aristotle, Luther, and Martin Heidegger as the *logos*-capability that is uniquely characteristic of the human being. By *ontologically* I mean that our very being as human beings is initially formed and then reformed by language. Let me indicate how Western thinking and culture—which is what postmodernism seeks to destroy utterly—has understood our human kind of being. It is also the story of the Logos.

Initially, recall what Heraclitus had said about the Logos: "This *Logos* holds always but humans always prove unable to understand it, both before hearing it and when they have first heard it" and "It is necessary to follow what is common. But although the *Logos* is common, most people live as if they had their own private understanding."

St. John revealed this first principle to be a two-natured person, the second person of the Holy Trinity.

Deeply cognizant of Heraclitus's first principle of the logos, Aristotle defined our kind of being, the *human* kind of being, as *zoon logon echon* (ζῷον λόγον ἔχων) in his *Politics,* Book 1. We are the type of being that is neither rock nor plant, but animal (see Aristotle's *De Anima*) characterized essentially as *logos*-being.

In terms of the Lutheran and Reformation understanding of the human being, consider how Luther, who had taught and translated Aristotle in his own early years of teaching, utilized Aristotle's essential definition of the human being as the first steps in his 1536 *Disputation Concerning Man* (*LW* 34:133–44). Luther agrees with Aristotle's definition of man as *zoon logon echon,* an animal type of being characterized by *logos.*

1. Philosophy or human wisdom defines man as an animal having reason, sensation, and body.
2. It is not necessary at this time to debate whether man is properly or improperly called an animal.
3. But this must be known, that this definition describes man only as a mortal and in relation to this life.
4. And it is certainly true that reason is the most important and the highest in rank among all things and, in comparison with other things of this life, the best and something divine.
5. It is the inventor and mentor of all the arts, medicines, laws, and of whatever wisdom, power, virtue, and glory men possess in this life.
6. By virtue of this fact it ought to be named the essential difference by which man is distinguished from the animals and other things.
7. Holy Scripture also makes it lord over the earth, birds, fish, and cattle, saying, "Have dominion" [Gen 1:28].

34. Postmodernism notwithstanding, it is logically impossible to say that language is in flux, according to Wittgenstein: "What belongs to the essence of the world cannot be expressed in language. For this reason, it cannot *say* that all is in flux. Language can only say those things we can also imagine otherwise" (*Philosophical Remarks*; see also David Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 160–67.
35. This willfulness is what Friedrich Nietzsche called *will to power* (German, *der Wille zur Macht*). Will to power is the means he recommends for Western civilization to continue after the Death of God, that is, the West's abolition of the God of the Bible by ignoring the Bible. Whereas Lutheran pastors proclaim the gospel by means of God's word (as Nietzsche knew firsthand; his father was a Lutheran minister), Nietzsche's Übermenschen would impart meaning to people's now-meaningless lives by means of will to power, a kind of creative vision generated from within. For the fully developed notion of his will to power see Nietzsche's 1883 *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* part 1, "1001 Goals"; part 2 (which has two titled sections), "Self-Overcoming" and "Redemption." When I say that postmodernism is willful, Nietzsche's *der Wille zur Macht* is what I am referring to.

That is, Aristotle's minimum definition of the human being agrees with Scripture. Luther goes on to argue for a fuller, biblically informed understanding of man. Luther achieves this in this thesis of the disputation:

> 32. Paul in Romans 3[:28], "We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works," briefly sums up the definition of man, saying, "Man is [the kind of being that is] justified by faith."

It is in language that we live and move and know our being.

Since this thesis is definitional, as Oswald Bayer says, we would do well to translate it as: "The human being is human in that he is justified by faith."

> The human being is human *insofar as* he is justified by faith. . . . Justifying faith for Luther is not something *about* a human being, no qualitative element, which comes only secondarily, as that which is accidental to the substance. *Hominem justificari fide* (a human being is justified by faith) is, instead, a *fundamental* anthropological thesis.[36]

In other words, while we have grown up learning to think of the human being as *homo sapiens,* on the basis of the thicker, more authoritative biblical anthropology it would be much more accurate to think of the human being as *homo justificans,* since we are the kind of being that seeks to be justified: Either we acknowledge that we are justified by God's grace alone in Christ or we spend our time of grace seeking to justify ourselves apart from Christ—an inherently undoable and unsatisfying project! Luther's development of this understanding of the human being depends on Aristotle's discovery of logos as the essential aspect of human being.

In the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger, familiar with Luther (he had a copy of the Weimar edition of Luther's works and used it), said in his seminal *Sein und Zeit,* "Man shows himself as the entity who talks. The expressing of Logos is language" (*Being and Time,* section 34). From Heidegger I learned not to think of the human being as basically a physical or animal being with the added factor of logos, but to realize that the human being is first and foremost a logos-being. After all, it is through being logos that we recognize that we are bodily beings. It is in language that we live and move and *know our being,* to paraphrase Paul in Acts 17.

There is more. From Heidegger we can come to realize that language, far from being just a tool, whether a virtual tool (postmodernism), a naturalistic tool (secular humanism) or a handy implement (Heidegger's caution), that we use to share our mental thoughts and endeavor to inform or persuade others with more or less success—rather it is the case that language is the atmosphere, the house and dwelling, of our being as humans. We don't "have language"; truth be told, language has us. In a remarkable passage Heidegger says this about human beings and language: "Language is the house of Being."[37] He elaborates by saying that language is the home we dwell in and that human beings, who think with words and who create with words, are the guardians and caretakers of this home. Language is a given from the giver of every good and perfect gift, not a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury but signifying nothing. Language is part and parcel of being human beings.

In response to postmodernism's objections to the essential logos-character of human beings, I recommend two responses. The first is an inference from the way Derrida addresses marriage. The second response is a philosophical critique of the pervasive assumption that evolutionary biology somehow proves that we human beings are not logos-creatures by nature.

> If I were a legislator, I would simply propose the abolition of both the word and the concept of "marriage" in the civil and secular code. "Marriage," religious, sacral, heterosexual value, with its procreative intent, for eternal fidelity, etc., is the State's concession to the Christian church, particularly in its monogamous dimension which is neither Jewish (this was imposed on Jews by Europeans only in the last century and among North African Jews was not an obligation as recently as a few generations ago) nor Muslim, as is well known. In doing away with the concept and the word "marriage," this religious equivocation or hypocrisy, which has no place in a secular constitution, would be replaced by a contractual "civil union," a kind of generalized, improved, flexible pact between partners without limitation to gender or number.[38]

Ignoring Derrida's factual inaccuracies, we see here the cost of reducing our shared recognition of the human being as the kind of being essentially characterized by logos to the postmodern mythology evident in Derrida's depiction of marriage as contract. This invites us to compare this postmodernist innovation with 2 Peter 1:16–2:22.

The postmodern objection to my reply to Derrida's postmodern reduction of the human being would likely be something having to do with evolutionary biology. But the evolutionary narrative (which would be unavailable to a consistent postmodernist since he would have to regard it as another micronarrative) is irrelevant to philosophical or theological anthropology.

36. Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 155–56.

37. See Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 63.

38. Jacques Derrida, "I am at war with myself," in *Le Monde,* interview, 19 August 2004.

The question at issue is not one of how we came to be the kind of being that we are; rather, the question is "What kind of being are we human beings?" [39]

Only when we have in hand a suitable real-life account of what kind of being we humans are, are we in a position to begin to ask which account of our history and origin is more plausible—a folk narrative that our type of being is naturalistic and accidental, or a narrative that claims to be from the Creator of all himself, a Creator who made such logos-beings as we are via his own Logos. But the origin discussion is not our subject here.

In summary of this second thesis, namely, that language (spoken and textual) forms us human beings ontologically and that this is known in the Hebrew sense of known-by-personal-acquaintance, but is identified in the thinking of Aristotle, Luther, and Heidegger as the logos-capability that is uniquely characteristic of the human being, we have moved on from postmodernism as a willful but not reasonable theory of language and the effects of this nihilistic theory of the church and her ministry, to a fine-grained consideration of the irrefragable reality of *logos* as the essential feature of our kind of being, that is, human being. (The critical importance of our understanding of the human being is something that Derrida's postmodernist revision of marriage brings to light in a negative manner. His revision is harmful and adolescent.) This undeletable feature of logos as the distinctive of human beings was introduced by Aristotle and accepted by Luther. Logos in the human being serves as the interface for God in the person of Christ, the incarnate Logos to affect us ontologically, or in terms of our very being.[40]

And so, *nisi per verbum* entails a thick understanding of human being in light of the *logos*. This is an indispensable understanding for the application of justification in pastoral theology and pastoral care. The care of souls is about administering the means of grace through which Christ himself comes to the soul (that is, to the body-and-soul human being), which is what we are considering together in our first, third, and fourth theses. In these theses the unofficial watchword is Luther's insistence that the gospel is *extra nos* or from outside ourselves. But in our second thesis we see the *pro nobis* or for-us work of God in terms of his point of contact. The point of contact is our (fallen but essential human) *logos*. Hence Luther's title, *Disputation Concerning Man,* or *Concerning the Human Being*. Our principled response to postmodernism is from a major article on justification, the *Hauptartikel* or thesis article of Christian doctrine in our Reformation understanding. *Nisi per verbum* is, of course, *nisi per Logos,* an indispensable aspect of justification addressing both the incarnate One and the human race for whom he was and is incarnate.

Logos in the human being serves as the interface for God in the person of Christ.

Having addressed the insufficiency of postmodernism as a theory of language and logos, and its concomitant harmfulness to human beings as the logos-beings that we are, let us have a more concrete conversation applying our disputation labors so far to pastoral practice in our remaining two theses.

EXPOSITION OF THESIS 3

As language (textual first, then preached and taught), the word of God, or Holy Scripture, is (1) inherently intentional and (2) ontologically formative for us human beings.

I have argued elsewhere that, since the word of God is a divinely instituted means of grace, it is the means through which God terraforms or *cruciforms* us as the complete, complex persons that we human beings are.

> Through our praying of these chapters [of the Psalms] of God's verbal and verbatim means of grace He *uptakes* us into his love and thus reorders our pre-lament loves, polarizing our love so that we feel and exhibit the everlasting love with which he loved us, with which we love him and with which we love our neighbors as ourselves. As Brock induces from Augustine's sermons on these psalms of lament, "For Augustine, *lament is the Christian form that shapes the affective eruption engendered by suffering.*" . . . God shapes us via the psalms of lament.[41]

For this third thesis concerning postmodernism and the word of God, I can (with blessed brevity) in effect simply underline the efficacious external means-of-grace disposition toward

39. For further philosophical and pastorally helpful items, see Wittgenstein's treatment of our *Lebensform* or human form of living together. See "Form of Life (*Lebensform*)," in Hans-Johann Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1996), 124–28. Glock stresses that Wittgenstein follows a naturalistic, nontranscendental understanding here, but this stricture is not borne out by Wittgenstein's writing.

40. That is to say, the longstanding and philosophically thick recognition that the human being is essentially known as the logos-being, recall Luther's matter-of-fact acceptance of the logos. Actually, his understanding that the human being is a logos-being accounts for his oft-mentioned observation about the difference between preaching to a human being and preaching to a donkey. The logos-being of the human being is not only the reason that the human beings in the pew can understand our preaching, it is the basis for our fittedness, if you will, for the gospel. After the insurgency at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Eden, human beings are still human beings. Read Luther's *Disputation Concerning Man*. Think of the impact of the incarnation on man. Read of the incarnation of the Logos and what it means that God became a member of the species of us logos-beings.

41. See my "Pain, Suffering, Lament," *Logia* 24, no. 2 (Eastertide 2015): 11. The interior quotation is from Brian Brock, "Augustine's Incitement to Lament, from the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*," in *Evoking Lament: A Theological Discussion*, ed. Eva Harasta and Brian Brock (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 188.

Scripture as a rebuttal of postmodernism's depredations of Heraclitus's logos and John's Logos alike.

Good poetry and great literature can change our lives. For example, "Rebellion" and "The Grand Inquisitor" in Book Five of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* can make us look at suffering and think about God and our fellow man in an entirely different way. The southern Christian author Flannery O'Connor says that good writing is not simply about abstract meaningfulness but about *experienced* meaningfulness, which is why it won't do to read a summary of a good story. You have to read the story as written in its entirety in order to experience meaning. So, it turns out that reading is a reply to postmodernism's (merely theoretical but powerfully willful) degradation of language. The Bible is not less impactful on our thinking than great literature. This reality can be denied in theory but not in its experienced meaningfulness, that is, in the reading of it. That is to say, postmodernism can persuade us of its plausibility only if we do not "take and read." But in the case of Scripture there is more to it.

The word of God as written rewrites us.

The Scriptures are text, but they are text authored by God himself, personally. Our Lutheran sensibility, not to mention the practice of the entire church of Christ for millennia, is to begin with the psalms for engaging in, and sharing the reality of, communication and communion with the personal God personally. "The Psalms press us to understand ourselves as undergoing a redemption guided by texts, in which direct conversation with God is the only constant—and thus the generative condition."[42]

> Rather than trying to answer certain preformed questions with the help of Scripture and tradition, this means that we must attempt to position ourselves within the acoustic realm of Scripture. Within this space, our attempts to listen to the will of God will constantly engender the need to listen to the voices of those who have read before us. Of course, what it is that needs to be heard and which particular insight of which thread of the Christian exegetical tradition (or of other discourses) will appear to fit within the acoustic realm of Scripture cannot be predetermined. . . . Engagement in this interpretation[43] may not leave us time to give a full account of our hermeneutical presuppositions. . . . I am not claiming that the book of Psalms contains the whole biblical witness without remainder, but it can help advance an interpretive proposal that I believe is especially promising for a contemporary church struggling with having distanced itself from Scripture.[44]

In other words, take up your Bible and read the Psalms! The word of God as written rewrites us. The Psalms redeem, rewrite, re-create, renew us in the reading and the praying of these words, words that come from God and which we speak back to him, thus making his words our words while he is carrying out an ontological makeover of our human being. In the words of the Little Bible and the other sixty-five books of the Bible God works on us ontologically as no one else can.

In summary of our third thesis, namely, that as language (textual first, then preached and taught), the word of God, or Holy Scripture, is (1) inherently intentional and (2) ontologically formative for human beings, I have reiterated the inherent intentionality of all language but in order to emphasize the means-of-grace character of God's word. This is the work that the Scriptures (and indeed Holy Baptism, the Eucharist, and confession and absolution) do to us ontologically. That is to say, the power of God's word is neither theoretical nor figurative.

"God cannot be treated with, God cannot be apprehended *nisi per verbum,* except through the word." This is not a proposition that demands our pastoral assent; it demands our pastoral commitment in word and deed to the efficacious external means-of-grace disposition toward Scripture. This means taking up the Bible and reading it for all it is worth. The Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggeman has a wonderful title testifying to the Bible as *The Word that Redescribes the World*.[45] He means by this that God remakes us by bringing us into the wider world of *God* involved with everything he has made, visible and invisible.[46]

This brings us to our fourth thesis for our disputation concerning postmodernism and pastoral ministry, the thesis that addresses the (inherently meaningful, ontologically efficacious) word of God in terms of its authorship and authority.

EXPOSITION OF THESIS 4

In addition, being the word *of God* (a genitive of origin), the Holy Scriptures are unsurpassably authoritative. This is what we have just been introducing into our contemporary Disputation Concerning Postmodernism and Pastoral Ministry: the question of authority and authorship.

As a reply to the objections of postmodernism to *nisi per verbum* or "only through the person and word of the *Logos,*" consider Johann Gerhard. My prescription for Christ's church

42. Brock, Singing the Ethos of God, 269.
43. "*Interpretation* is the use of practical tools and approaches in the attempt to come to grips with a text or context." Ibid., 264. Brock does not speak of applying theories hermeneutically, but about using practical tools such as lexicons, commentaries, creeds, and the mutual conversation of the brothers for attending to the text exegetically.
44. Ibid., 263.
45. Walter Brueggemann, The Word That Redescribes the World: The Bible and Discipleship (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).
46. Another title that will be useful in itself for sermons, Bible classes, or as a conference discussion starter is Marilyn Chandler McEntyre's 2009 *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies*.

and her pastors is Johann Gerhard's 1625 *Exegesis: On the Nature of Theology.* While a commentary on Gerhard's *Commonplace I* is not doable here, I would like to invoke Gerhard and his Aristotelian-Lutheran explanation of the authority of Holy Scripture. Gerhard was trained in Aristotle's Three Acts of the Mind and knew well Aristotle's Four Causes.

Not to be confused with innovations such as Boolean logic or sentential and algebraic logics in more recent times, the classical logic of Aristotle is deeply committed to discerning, applying, and elaborating the first principle of the Logos as a natural language logic. For Aristotle, language, mind, and cosmos are contiguous. Each of these three legs on the stool of Aristotelian philosophy bears witness to the reality of the first principle of the Logos.[47] Recall that Aristotle's bare-bones definition of the human being treats *logos* as the essential feature of our unique kind of being. *Human* beings are essentially or substantially *logos*-creatures. Luther accepted and used Aristotle in his understanding of the human being.

Gerhard knows Aristotle well, as Luther did. As part and parcel of doing his pastoral and theological work, Gerhard takes great care to define his key terms so that everyone can understand what he is talking about. He invests the first six pages of his *Commonplace 1: On Holy Scripture* to defining the term *Scripture.* He explains his terms according to the traditional Aristotelian Three Acts of the Mind.

In brief, the Three Acts exhibit the *logos*-character of the human mind according to three mental activities regarding three elements of language, each one with its own characteristic outcome. The First Act exhibits the logos-activity of *understanding* by defining each key term of the conversation or text, as a moral obligation. Its outcome is shared understanding. The Second Act exhibits the logos-activity of *judging* statements of fact to be either true or false, so it has to do with propositions or declarative sentences. Its outcome is recognition of the truth, just as Aristotle defined it. The Third Act exhibits the logos-activity of *arguing* or giving reasons in our conversations, so it has to do with the reasons given in a paragraph in support of its thesis statement. Usually this act is taught formally as the enterprise of arguing in syllogisms, but I usually plug in informal or conversational give-and-take—an *inferring and warranting,* as we say in philosophy today—so I teach this act as our logos-activity in a region where we have to "mind the gap" by responding respectfully and truthfully to whatever objections the other party raises. The Three Acts, then, constitute *logos* at work in our conversations and texts. This is why Gerhard uses it in his theology. This is why postmodernists shun Aristotle.

In view of our dispute with postmodernism's and Derrida's depredation of language—and keeping in mind the case for choosing the stance of *external effective means of grace* over and against the stance of *expressionist semiotics,* let us bring into our twenty-first-century disputation one paragraph from Gerhard's theological work to see how a major Lutheran writer employs the First Act in defining what we mean by *Scripture* with great care and scintillating clarity regarding God's authorship and authority.

Luther accepted and used Aristotle in his understanding of the human being.

> With the name "Scripture" we must understand not so much the *external form* [*formulae*] or *signs* (that is, the shapes of the letters—the acts and utterances of *writing* by which the divine revelation is put into writing—as the *material itself* or *what is designated,* and indeed the very thing that the writing denotes and signifies, namely, the very Word of God, which instructs us in the essence and will of God. Some state this in such a way that the Word of God is taken either *essentially,* as the very meaning that God expresses, or *adventitiously,* according to what has happened, which are preaching and writing. For as in every writing brought about by a cause that is understanding or intellectual, so also in this prophetic and apostolic Scripture we must consider two points: first, the very letters, syllables, and phrases that are written—the external symbols that signify and express ideas of the mind—and second, the very meanings that are, as it were, something signified and expressed by those external symbols of letters, syllables, and words. Consequently, we include both—and principally the latter—when we use the word "Scripture" here.[48]

This is the *external effective means of grace* disposition toward language and Scripture. It is the way Scripture presents itself. It is the classical Lutheran view. It is the orthodox view. Please note that, while Gerhard uses the word *signified* in his explanation of homonyms for *Scripture,* he clearly does not espouse a semiotic disposition toward the biblical text. Here is why.

Gerhard's mention of symbols and significations of Scripture is congruent with our Lutheran definition of Holy Baptism. We confess that baptism symbolizes our union with Christ in his death and in his resurrection, but also that it in fact unites us with him in his death and resurrection (Romans 6). What we reject is any claim that baptism *merely* symbolizes God's grace to us. Our confession in the catechisms, for example, is that baptism is a means of grace, not a metaphor. Similarly, as Ger-

47. That is, to the Logos as the first principle par excellence. There can be no knowing that the Logos is the Second Person of the Trinity who became incarnate for us apart from biblical revelation. But, given the biblical revelation of John's and the Holy Ghost's words in John 1, there is a retroactive christological realization as to what's going on with the Greek concept of *logos* because of the incanation of the *Logos* in the fullness of time.

48. Gerhard, 36–37.

hard says, the word of God has an external form, namely, the letters, syllables, and words that God breathed out through his writers, but the word is not *merely* a collection of (arbitrary) signs and (pointless or multivalent) signifiers. It is a means of grace, not a free-play ground for semiotic linguistic theorists. As Gerhard says with crystal clarity, "the external symbols [both] signify and express" because the word of God, the biblical text, is to be taken "*essentially* [this is the robust vocabulary of the Creed, as in the Son is of one *substance*], as the very meaning that God expresses." The word of God, the written Scriptures, are external and effective according to what happens in the preaching and writing of "those external symbols of letters, syllables, and words."

Gerhard speaks about God himself being the efficient cause of Scripture.

Voelz's work would have benefited greatly from such Aristotelian-Lutheran attentiveness to the Three Acts, as Heidegger explains in his lecture on "The Nature of Language." Our reading of theological books espousing a semiotic view of language and the biblical text necessitates it.

> What does "to name" signify? We might answer: to name means to furnish something with a name. And what is a name? A designation that provides something with a vocal and written sign, a cipher. And what is a sign? Is it a signal? Or a token? A Marker? Or a hint? Or all of these and something else besides? We have become very slovenly and mechanical in our understanding and use of signs.
>
> Is the name, is the word a sign? *Everything depends on how we think of what the words "sign" and "name" say.*[49]

As an outgrowth of his commitment to the Three Acts, Gerhard speaks about God himself being the efficient cause of Scripture. By employing this vocabulary he is assuming that his readers are classically and Lutheranly educated in Aristotle's Four Causes.[50] By saying that God himself is the efficient cause of Scripture, Gerhard is certifying that the biblical text is inherently meaningful, normative, and authoritative *because* the words of the text are God's words.

In summary to the point of our fourth thesis, namely, that as the word *of God* (a genitive of origin), the Holy Scriptures are unsurpassably authoritative, we have begun to consider Gerhard's exegetical writings. In contrast to postmodernism's dependence on obfuscation, Gerhard writes with what we could call "maximum terminological transparency." This is according to traditional Aristotelian logic practiced according to the Three Acts of the Mind. The Three Acts are in turn an antidote to postmodernism's nihilistic theory of language. Whereas postmodernism's approach to language and Scripture is willful and dismissive of the *logos* inherent in both language and human beings, Gerhard's efficacious means-of-grace confidence in language's inherent meaningfulness and logical universality is grounded in the experienced meaningfulness of reading and studying Holy Scripture for himself as a pastor.

To bring our disputation to a conclusion—at least, to bring my initial contributions to our ongoing disputation concerning postmodernism and the pastoral ministry to a conclusion—let us promise each other to immerse ourselves in the reading of the Psalms. As Eugene Peterson has helped me to realize, the word *meditate* occurs in both Psalm 1 and Psalm 2, the pillars to the temple of the book of Psalms. It is a delightful word that can mean one or the other of two types of growling. It is also an Isaiah word.

> [I]magine my delight in coming upon a phrase one day while reading Isaiah in which I found the poet-prophet observing something similar to what I enjoyed so much in my dog, except that his animal was a lion instead of a dog: "As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey . . . " (Isa. 31:4). "Growls" is the word that caught my attention. What my dog did over his precious bone, making those low, throaty rumbles of pleasure as he gnawed, enjoyed and savored his prize, Isaiah's lion did to his prey. The nugget of my delight was noticing the Hebrew word here translated as "growl" (*hagah*), but usually translated as "meditate," as in the Psalm 1 phrase describing the blessed man or woman whose "delight is in the law of the LORD," on which "he meditates day and night" (v. 2).[51]

In Psalm 1:2 the Bible reader is *hagah*ing God's word—growling and murmuring with pleasure *within* God's word. But in Psalm 2:1 the people are *hagah*ing the Messiah, the Christ—growling and murmuring *against* God's Word, the Logos-to-be-incarnate. The Jerusalem Bible translates this murmuring *against* as "this impotent muttering of pagans." Think of the *nisi per verbum* in terms of the activity of meditation or "murmuring" in the face of God's Torah as he expresses it in his words, the word of God. Whereas postmodernism urges everyone to murmur *against* the text, the Bible instructs us to murmur *within* the Scriptures. Here is the truth of it. God cannot be treated with, God cannot be apprehended *nisi per verbum,* except through the word. LOGIA

49. Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 61. My italics.
50. For textual and analytical resources on the Four Causes, see Bryan Wolfmueller's 2016 interview with me, posted at http://www.whatdoesthismean.org, part of our Ten Master Metaphors for Understanding Philosophy.
51. Be sure to read Chapter 1, "The Forbidding Discipline of Spiritual Reading," in Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 1–11.

Colloquium Fratrum

"Through the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren . . . "

Smalcald Articles III/IV

Dear Editor of *Logia*,

In the Editors' Introduction to the Eastertide 2018 issue, Jason Lane refers to two voices that emerge in the issue (5). Since my article "Speaking Like Paul and Luther" was set forth as one voice that contrasts with that of the article by Lucas V. Woodford, I hope that it is helpful to offer some brief thoughts about our differences.

It is important to affirm that I wholeheartedly agree with the description of the "receptive life" Woodford provides (38–42) in that the Christian life is received from Christ through the Spirit and lived in Christ. As I state in my article, the Lutheran Confessions "are clear in confessing that the regeneration worked by the Spirit creates a change in the Christian that impacts the way we live. It is the Spirit who always supports the inner man through the gospel so that he can struggle against the old Adam/flesh" (22). This is indeed "Christ in action in us" as Pastor Woodford sums it up in his article.

However, the difference and the problem emerges in the way Woodford frames the issue when he writes: "In short, the question being debated is whether the law, *rather than* the life of Christ and his Spirit (the gospel) at work in the believer, should be or can be used as the impetus and means to shape, evoke, create, or produce sanctified living in the believer who is simultaneously both saint and sinner" (34; emphasis mine). His either/or description excludes the law as a means that God uses to restrain the old Adam in order to enable the Christian to live like Christ. The Christian life is "Christ in action in us." Until death or the parousia, it is also "old Adam in action in us," and that is why language of paraenesis and exhortation is found in Scripture.

The Christian life is "Christ in action in us," but the Scriptures *also* use vigorous and active language directed at believers in describing what they are to do because of the gospel. Certainly, the inspired authors believed this language has a role to play in achieving this goal. I argue strongly in my article that only the Spirit can determine the use of the law (the effect on the hearer) (20–21). Yet in Formula of Concord Article VI we confess that the Spirit *can and does* utilize the law for the third use—a use defined and explained in FC VI on the basis of this apostolic exhortation. As Lutherans we need to follow this model of exhortation, confident that in doing so we are speaking to Christians in the same manner as the inspired apostolic words.

In Christ,
Mark Surburg

Dear Editor of *Logia*,

I appreciate Pastor Surburg's careful analysis and encouragement for us to be mindful of the law and its place in the life of the believer. As he notes, when comparing our two essays, there is much we agree upon, which is certainly something to celebrate. His remaining concern is the way I frame my argument, which he fears "excludes the law as a means that God uses to restrain the old Adam in order to enable the Christian to live like Christ." I affirm that God can certainly use his law to restrain; it's just that the law doesn't merely "restrain" the old Adam. It does far more than that: the law actually kills the old Adam. This is exactly what Luther's catechism sums up as the meaning and outcome of baptism, and which was the emphasis in my essay. Namely, the daily dying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new man created in Christ Jesus (by baptism) for a life of good works (Eph 2:10).

Perhaps the difference of how Pastor Surburg and I talk about the place of the law in the life of the believer can be expressed this way. Pastor Surburg speaks in terms of how God works to "enable the Christian to live like Jesus," emphasizing restraint and the obedience of the Christian, which is how the Confessions do speak in various places. That is one way to speak. But it does so in terms of emulation, that is, "live like Jesus," taking the "indicative of the gospel," as Surburg notes in his essay (15), and employing the "imperative of exhortation."

The Confessions speak another way, too. As such, I tend to focus on what actually enables one to do this living, namely the gospel as baptismally given. Even more, rather than emphasizing aspects of emulation ("living like Jesus"), the language I employ reflects baptismal imputation (justification and sanctification), which is life *in* Christ. In other words, the life of the Christian is not merely one emulating Christ, but actually living *in* Christ, who himself is at work within the believer (by his Spirit through his word of law and gospel) to make us a new creation for a life of service, love, and good works. As FC SD VI, 12 states concerning the third use of the law: "The Holy Spirit . . . combines both functions: he 'kills and makes alive, he brings down to hell and raises up.'"

Thus, I agree that paraenesis can never be neglected. In fact, I regularly employ it in my preaching and pastoral care. Of course we must speak like Luther and Paul, whether in sermons or in pastoral care. As I noted in my essay, this is not the time to soft pedal the law; far from it. However, my point is that the

law is powerless to produce the life in which faith lives by love and good works. Again FC SD VI, 11 says: "For the law indeed says that it is God's will and command that we walk in new life. However, it does not give the power and ability to begin or to carry out this new command. Instead, the Holy Spirit, who is given and received not through law but through the proclamation of the Gospel (Gal. 3[:2, 14]), renews the heart."

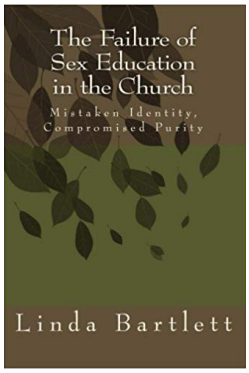
Accordingly, my contention is that the old Adam cannot be constrained or retrained to live in conformity to God's law; he cannot be reformed, he must be killed. What's needed is not merely instruction in good works, but repentance, a turning away from sin and the crucifixion of the old Adam, wherein the Christian dies to sin and lives to righteousness.

Fraternally,
Lucas V. Woodford

Reviews

"It is not many books that make men learned . . . but it is a good book frequently read."
Martin Luther

Review Essay



The Failure of Sex Education in the Church: Mistaken Identity, Compromised Purity. By Linda D. Bartlett. Iowa Falls, IA: Titus 2 for Life, 2014.

Linda Bartlett is an activist with the organization Lutherans for Life. She and her organization have done much fine work down through the years advancing the pro-life cause within Lutheran circles. In her book *The Failure of Sex Education,* she argues that sex education in public and religious institutions is the root cause of abortion and indeed the entire sexual revolution.

Bartlett's main goal is to demonstrate not only that certain forms of sexual education are harmful (something most religious conservatives could agree with), but also that sex education is an intrinsically misguided enterprise. Indeed, she repeatedly states that sex education constitutes "child abuse" (185–206). Lest the reader misunderstand her, Bartlett does allow that certain aspects of sex education can be preserved as part of biology or health classes (208). Nevertheless, for Bartlett the entire enterprise of sex education as a distinct course of study was tainted from the beginning and has had pernicious effects on American culture and the life of the church.

Bartlett makes this judgment on the basis of her interpretation of the mid-twentieth-century sexual revolution and the decline of Judeo-Christian morality. In the first half of the twentieth century, Bartlett asserts, America was a God-fearing and family-centered nation. Seemingly, people very rarely had sex outside of marriage, and there was little adultery. Knowledge about human sexuality was preserved in the collective memory of the *Gemeinschaft* and hence there was no need for sex education (33–34). The generation of men who fought in the Second World War loved and remained particularly loyal to their girlfriends and wives while fighting overseas (128, n. 150).

Of course, this portrait of pre-1960s' American life is almost entirely romantic and at variance with the facts. When the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began to keep records of venereal disease rates in 1941, the rates were considerably higher than they are today. Contrary to Bartlett's claims, in the First and Second World Wars the military faced a health crisis over the spread of venereal disease (type the words: "World War II VD posters" into Google Image to get a sense of this!). Similarly, teenage pregnancy rates were 80 per 1000 in 1950 and rose to 89 in 1960. In spite of the sexual revolution of the '60s, teenage pregnancy rates declined and have been in decline ever since (with a few exceptions), so that they are presently at 29 per 1000. This is not due to abortion, since these statistics count pregnancies, not live births. Also, it should be noted that, in spite of our culture's present sexual anarchy, abortion rates have also dramatically dropped over the previous twenty-five years.

If early-twentieth-century American society was in fact as moral and family-centered as Bartlett claims, the sexual revolution would have been a strange anomaly in American life that seemingly came from nowhere. For Bartlett, why God-fearing and chaste Americans would acquiesce to the evils of sexual anarchy is largely explained by a number of conspiracies. While one of these conspiracies actually involves a Communist plot (3–5), Bartlett is most preoccupied with the one she supposes was orchestrated by the sexologist Alfred Kinsey. According to Bartlett, Kinsey's impact is severalfold (33–58).

First, we are told repeatedly that Kinsey was a sexual deviant and a secular humanist (37, 39–40). For this reason, it is argued, Christians should reject the research of Kinsey and all the other sexologists of the mid-twentieth century's research. Using the fruits of their work to inform our knowledge of human sexuality in any way would mix the word of God with human wisdom. This is tantamount to what biblical Israel did in worshipping foreign gods and having fellowship with pagans (59–64).

Here Bartlett succumbs to what William James called the "genetic fallacy." Just because an idea or technological innovation has a bad source does not necessarily mean that it should not be evaluated on its own terms. For example, those who stood in Lyndon Johnson's inner circle have suggested that his promotion of the 1965 Civil Rights Act was based on less-than-pure motives. That being said, this tells us nothing about the validity or usefulness of the law, which most would agree was overwhelmingly good.

Bartlett also falls into other logical fallacies at this point. First, Bartlett's arguments embody the logical fallacies of *ad hominem* and poisoning the well. That is to say, Kinsey's poor moral

character is an irrelevant point. Also, the intentions behind his work (or those of any of the other sexologists) are also irrelevant. People with bad character can do good things, much as a truth is true irrespective of who speaks it. The intentions behind people's work is also irrelevant as we saw above. Even though it was the Nazis who built the German highway system for the purpose of the war effort, no one would claim that driving on these roads is morally corrupting. Bartlett connects Kinsey's sexual deviancy to his work by claiming that he manipulated statistics (a claim his four biographers uniformly reject, while admitting his numbers were considerably off due to the lack of data) to make it appear that sexual deviancy was more prevalent than it was, thereby encouraging regular Americans to think immoral behavior was normal and acceptable (128–29).

One of the major problems with Bartlett's argument is that she provides no hard data to support this assertion. For example, there is no list of surveys that suggest that Americans suddenly changed their sexual behavior in the mid-twentieth century in light of Kinsey's Report. In response to this criticism, Bartlett would probably point to the sexual revolution a decade or so later. But correlation is not causation (another logical fallacy). Moreover, historically, people have had no trouble disobeying the Sixth Commandment of their own accord. Therefore, one suspects the societal effects of any such report would be highly negligible.

The third and final dimension of Bartlett's attack on Kinsey has to do with his claim that "children are sexual from birth" (45–57). This notion apparently appears in many publications on sex education, although the author of this review had never encountered it before, despite attending sexual education classes from fifth through tenth grade. For Bartlett, this concept is in fact the key to everything. It is the reason why the sexual revolution happened and why sexual education (at least in the conventional sense) must be completely rejected as "child abuse." Nevertheless, in spite of repeatedly asserting that this concept is false, Bartlett never proves that it is.

Bartlett's main source for the significance of this idea is Kinsey's foremost critic, Judith Reisman, a conservative Jewish activist and a former singer and songwriter for Captain Kangaroo. After being let go from Captain Kangaroo, Reisman later earned a doctorate in communications. She has no training in biology or sexology. Although the reviewer had never heard of Reisman before reading Bartlett's work, some research uncovered a number of pieces of information about Reisman that may be pertinent when evaluating Bartlett's work. For example, Riesman's more serious charges against Kinsey are almost unanimously viewed as being wildly false and based on no evidence whatsoever. Reisman is also well known as a promoter of a series of other deeply strange conspiracy theories and pseudoscientific ideas.

For Bartlett, as for Reisman, this idea that "children are sexual from birth" has a number of major implications. First, if children are sexual from birth, even in a rudimentary sense, then "sexuality" must be essential to human identity. If that is the case, Bartlett and Reisman reason, then sexual immorality is justified. Why? Because presumably, that which is, is good, and to deny sexual impulses would be to deny the self, which would be evil.

Throughout the book, Bartlett asserts (though actually never demonstrates) that this is why the sexual revolution happened. The American people, who were very moral and sexually chaste before the 1960s, became sexually immoral because sex education convinced them to become as such through the doctrine of "sexual from birth." Although sex education was intended to help stave off the negative effects of human sexual behavior on the public, it in fact caused degenerate sexual behavior by convincing them that sexual self-expression was the law of human nature and could not be denied.

This explanatory model of the sexual revolution is problematic for a number of reasons. First, most human beings experience their sex drive as a felt need. Bartlett's argument seems (at least on the surface) to presuppose that human sexuality lies dormant until human beings are enticed or convinced to act out sexually. Experience, human history, and anecdotal evidence seem to suggest otherwise.

This understanding of human sexuality seems to underline a number of Bartlett's other arguments against sexual education. She claims that listening to classroom discussion about human sexuality awakens lust in young people and then leads to sexual immorality. On an anecdotal level (which is of course by no means definitive), the opposite seems to be true. Teenagers, being filled with strong sexual impulses, often approach sexual education with exaggerated interest. They do not need any education to awaken any such impulses in them. As a result of this, teenagers often find sex education deeply disappointing. Contrary to what Bartlett claims, even secular sex education tends to be informative in a very banal and technical sense, rather than titillating.

Yet another difficulty with this line of reasoning is that it misunderstands the nature of the sexual revolution and our current state of sexual anarchy. Bartlett repeatedly asserts that the main problem is that people have a "mistaken identity" and therefore think they need to act out sexually because they are "sexual from birth." Frankly, one would be very hard pressed to find many people who would speak this way if asked why they engaged in promiscuous sex. The more likely answer would be one suffused with the consumerist logic of American culture. In this mentality, sex can be pursued like other commodities as long as one's pursuit does not violate the autonomy of others.

Bartlett's idea of "mistaken identity" may have some traction with homosexuals, who have not infrequently come to justify their behavior on the basis of the notion that their sexuality is somehow equivalent to a racial identity. Nevertheless, one would be rather hard pressed to find heterosexuals who speak of their heterosexuality as a kind of identity that justifies their pursuit of sex outside of marriage. Therefore Bartlett's heuristic model has little to offer at this point.

Beyond these observations, another problem with Bartlett's argument lies in the logical fallacy of the false dilemma. Bartlett seems to posit that either sexuality is an essential part of what it means to be human and therefore immorality is validated, or it is not, and therefore people are under the obligation

to obey the law of God. It never seems to occur to Bartlett that one could in fact both affirm that humans are sexual by nature and that they need to use that sexuality in God-pleasing ways. Indeed, why would saying that people had a particular impulse from birth logically lead to a belief that they should exercise it indiscriminately? People have a natural sense of hunger from birth, but no one, not even secularists, thinks that one should eat in a gluttonous and unhealthy manner.

Beyond this fairly obvious point, since Bartlett clearly states that she accepts that all our impulses are tainted by original sin, why would it matter if children had sexual impulses? Again, even if indeed children did have such impulses that would not mean that they should use them! Moreover, the existence of these impulses would not contradict her point that God designed sexuality to be exercised within marriage, since one could simply chalk up the existence of these impulses to original sin.

Part of the problem here seems to be Bartlett's source for this particular polemic. That is to say, in taking over Reisman's argument, Bartlett has not considered her differing theological premises. As a conservative Jew, Reisman does not believe in original sin and therefore works from the assumption that whatever was created by God consequently remains whole and uncorrupted. For Reisman, if children display rudimentary sexual impulses, then it cannot be chalked up to original sin, but must in a sense represent God's will for human life. Such a fact could even be twisted to prove that the sexualization of children is justified (one of Reisman's greatest fears, in light of her own daughter's abuse!). The same could be said of the adult impulse to obtain indiscriminate sexual gratification. Nevertheless, as we have seen, even if one did accept the premise that "our impulses are good," that would suggest neither that we should always act upon them, nor seek to regulate them.

As a result, Bartlett's reasoning with regard to human sexual impulses is often somewhat contradictory and muddled. Sometimes Bartlett accepts Reisman's "what is in human nature is good" argument. Therefore, she feels it necessary to argue against the idea that "children are sexual from birth." At other points, she adds yet another line of reasoning and correctly insists that our impulses are not whole and pure but tainted by sin. However, this makes the first line of reasoning completely unnecessary to prove that people should act in accordance with God's design for sexuality (97–98).

Towards the end of the book, Bartlett contradicts herself yet again by arguing that sex education is bad because it violates the "innocence" of children by exposing them to knowledge of human sexuality too soon (202–3). Beyond the fact that the "innocence" of children is not really a biblical idea (it was invented by late Victorian children's book authors), at the very least this seems to contradict her earlier argument that everyone (including children) are subject to original sin and therefore not innocent.

In addition to her extreme dislike of the idea that "children are sexual from birth," Bartlett also believes that the notion that sexuality is essential to human life and is a "gift" are pernicious (99). First, Bartlett reasons that since not all human beings engage in sexual activity, most especially Jesus, one cannot believe that sexuality is essential to human life. Similarly, although Bartlett argues that although we will not engage in sex in heaven, we will remain human (91–99).

This is not a cogent line of reasoning. Not all humans have legs, but having legs is generally considered to be an essential characteristic of humanity. Exceptions prove the rule. Historically, most humans have engaged in sexual activity at one time or another in their lives. Even if they have not, it is a scientific fact that sexuality is hardwired into human DNA, irrespective of whether or not such hardwiring ever expresses itself through sexual activity.

Beyond this, bringing up the fact that Jesus was fully human and yet did not engage in sexual behavior is also irrelevant. For the Bible, human sexuality has both protological and eschatological dimensions. Protologically, sex is the glue that cements the male-female relationship in marriage as "one flesh" (Gen 2). It not only brings about new human beings to populate human society, but it also creates intimacy between men and women that actualizes a safe social space within which children can be brought up. Sex is actually foundational to human life. Without it, there would be no marital bond, and without the marital bond, there would be no human society or people to populate it. This is probably why God's first command to humanity was for them to engage in sexual activity: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28). Indeed, we here agree with Harold Senkbeil, who observes: "It [the sexual union] was instituted by God in the time of man's innocence as an earthly, physical expression of the eternal, spiritual unity and *harmony between the persons of the Holy Trinity"* (Harold Senkbeil, "Pastoral Care and Sex," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 79 [2015]: 342. Emphasis added).

Eschatologically, the marital relationship of mutual self-giving (expressed physically in the conjugal act) expresses itself in the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph 5). Just as the one-flesh relationship is enacted through the literal self-gift of the male in the conjugal act, so too, eschatologically, Christ gave his body on the cross to the church and continues to do so with his self-donating presence in word and sacrament (John 19:34). Indeed, Luther uses this relationship and the self-donating reality of Christ as the self-donating groom as the master image for justification in *Freedom of a Christian!* Hence, Jesus does fulfill the sexual dimension of human life, but in an eschatological and spiritual sense, rather than an earthly sense. Christ's self-donation finds its final culmination at the eschaton where we read: "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19:9). Human destiny in heaven is seen as a fulfillment of the marital bond, with its inherently sexual connotations. Seen from this perspective, Scripture defines human creational and eschatological destiny as sexual. Of course, when we say this, we do not mean "sexual" in the sense of a self-seeking impulse to fulfill lust. That is an abuse of the divine gift of human sexuality. Rather, we mean the sexual as expression of the tangible self-giving of one's very bodily nature to the other in love and self-surrender.

This of course also brings us to Bartlett's claim that calling sexuality a "gift" is problematic. She claims that Scripture does not speak in this way (99). In this, she does not take into consideration that God's statement to be "fruitful and multiply" is described by Genesis as a "blessing." Also, we are told by Scripture that "everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim 4:4). Presumably, human sexuality would fall into the category of "everything created by God" and therefore should be viewed as a gift and blessing that should be received with thanksgiving. Bartlett also states that we cannot call sexuality a gift because such a characterization as "sexual beings" gives sinful humans an implicit carte blanche to engage in sexual immorality, thereby turning from the Creator's design to the creature (99–100). Again, this does not logically follow. Any gift can be abused. A rifle given as a birthday gift can be used to rob a bank just as easily as it can be used to protect life or hunt game.

If all sex education is bad, what is Bartlett's alternative? Certainly not abstinence-based education, which according to Bartlett is aimed at little more than encouraging young people to maintain their technical virginity. Rather, Bartlett promotes an alternative course of education positively emphasizing baptismal vocation and "biblical" womanhood and manhood (220–31). Most of this advice generally is aimed at encouraging parents to be fully involved in the lives of their children and to guide them in constructive behaviors, which is all very good. Of course, none of this negates the need for providing young people with age-appropriate information about human sexuality in a world that is full of false or distorted information, much of which can lead to dire consequences.

Moreover, Bartlett must certainly be commended for putting baptismal identity and vocation front and center in any discussion of sexual morality. Nevertheless, she rather unfortunately describes such education as "purity" training. Bartlett justifies this language of purity using a number of verses, notably "For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness" (1 Thess 4:7), as well as other verses that speak of moral "impurity" or the "works of the flesh" (Gal 3:19) (159).

Certainly no one can disagree that sin makes one morally impure, especially sexual sin. That being said, it should be observed that the contrast made by these verses is not between "impurity" and "purity," but rather between "impurity" and "holiness." In these sections, Bartlett not infrequently uses the terms *purity* and *holiness* interchangeably. However, as John Kleinig has helpfully shown, "holiness" is not something human beings generate by their works, but is a unique divine attribute, which God shares with his people. A holy person lives outside of himself or herself (*extra nos*) in God's gift of holiness. Humans therefore certainly do live holy lives when they obey God's law in faith, but because they rely on God's holiness. Bartlett tends to assume in reading these verses that the "holiness" referred to are deeds lived in accordance with God's law. As Kleinig shows, even "Be holy for I am holy" (Lev 20:26) refers to God's imperative to attend to the sacramental channels wherein his holiness is to be received.

Seen in this light, the problematic nature of Bartlett's language of "purity" comes into focus. The implicit premise of this language is that since we become "impure" through the taint of illicit sexual activity, "purity" would be something we are capable of maintaining by abstaining from said activity. Although this may not be Bartlett's intention here, it is certainly the implication of such language. Nevertheless, this way of understanding sexual morality is incorrect. Although we should certainly strive to obey the law of God, we are already tainted in all our actions by sin (Isa 64:4). Preservation of purity is not an option, even if we avoid illicit sex or other sins. It is for this reason that the person of faith does not live by "purity" (an internal predicate of our being, which we preserve through right action), but by "holiness" (God's gift, which is not preserved within us, but perpetually received from outside of us). For this reason, a Christian should be obedient to the law for the aim of love and care for the neighbor, rather than as a means of maintaining "purity," that is to say, guilt avoidance.

What is even more problematic in much of Bartlett's language (though much of this is not intentional), is that she frequently contrasts being "sexual" with being "pure" or "holy" (67, 87). Again, this seems to set up a fallacious false dilemma between recognizing sex and sexuality as God's good creation and living a God-pleasing and spiritual life in faith. Bartlett is certainly correct that our identity should find its center in what God has promised in our baptism. Nevertheless, baptismal identity does not cancel other aspects of our reality as God's good creatures. Sexuality, as well as ethnicity, career, vocation, gender, and a whole host of other good characteristics of human life should be subordinated to baptismal identity, but they are certainly not canceled or denigrated by a recognition of it. Moreover, much of Bartlett's rhetorical contrast between "sexuality," "holy," and the "pure" seem to give the impression that sexuality (even that exercised in marriage) is somehow intrinsically tainting. This obviously is not Bartlett's intention, but if some of her statements are not read generously, that is the definite impression that is received by the reader.

Overall, although Bartlett's goal of taking on our culture of sexual anarchy is certainly laudatory, it nevertheless completely misdiagnoses the problem, as well as the solution. Moreover, her book misuses or ignores data. It relies heavily on a disreputable source (Reisman). Its reasoning frequently relies on logical fallacies. Even though her book helpfully emphasizes the centrality of baptismal vocation, its theology of human sexuality is at best inadequate and incomplete, and at worst harmful in its denigration of human sexuality as a part of God's gift of creation.

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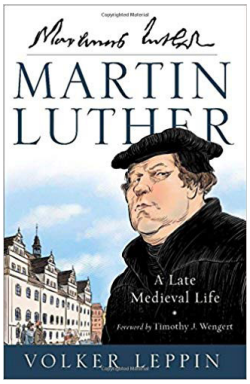
Reviews



Martin Luther: A Late Medieval Life. By Volker Leppin. Foreword by Timothy J. Wengert. Translated by Rhys Bezzant and Karen Roe. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017.

It is rare to find a scholar capable of challenging the traditional assumptions of his academic discipline while at the same time producing a readable biography of his subject. In the case of Luther biographies, Bainton, Kittelson, and Obermann stand out, but we must now add to those the biography by Volker Leppin, professor of church history at Tübingen. Originally a much larger volume published in 2006, revised in 2010, and condensed in 2013 (entitled *Martin Luther: Vom Mönch zum Feind des Papstes*), it has been translated into English to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. The result is a slender, 135-page introduction to the life and times of Martin Luther that draws selectively on the best in recent literature. Like the majority of Luther biographies, Leppin proceeds chronologically through the reformer's *curriculum vitae,* addressing the most pivotal and debated events in a simple, almost pastoral style.

Behind that veneer, however, sits Leppin's own distinctive interpretation of Luther. Leppin is an advocate for Berndt Hamm's so-called *Frömmigkeitstheologie* (theology of piety). In this view Luther and his Augustinian circle do not represent the theologies of a specific school or a religious order, but rather a more spiritual, even devotional, theology drawn from late medieval mysticism. Hamm—and, with some minor disagreements, Leppin—locates Luther's early theological influences and development in the late medieval mystical tradition of the fourteenth-century Dominican mystic Johannes Tauler or the anonymous mystical treatise *Theologia Deutsch,* which Luther published with his own preface in 1518. These sources influenced Luther's Augustinian mentor and prior, Johann von Staupitz, and through Stauptiz Luther himself.

Leppin is at his best showing just how this significant medieval tradition shaped the early Luther. He notes that one significant purveyor of *Frömmigkeitstheologie* was Johannes von Paltz, who happened to be a resident at the Augustinian cloister in Erfurt just prior to Luther's entrance, which would suggest some influence on the friars. He argues that Luther directly evoked Johannes Tauler's view of penance in his famous theses on indulgences, and that Luther's grand innovation in this mystical tradition was making its theology the "concern of academics," as he did in disputation, biblical exposition, and theological polemic (16). It was Staupitz, however, who remained most instrumental in Luther's process of appropriating a late-medieval *Frömmigkeitstheologie,* and Staupitz's Christocentric devotion continued to impact Luther well after the relationship with his former prior and confessor had lapsed. He even suggests that the new dating of Luther's trip to Rome—now more likely 1511 than 1510, and thus not an attempt to oppose Staupitz's reform of the Augustinian Hermits in Saxony, but rather to support it—resolves an apparent contradiction in their otherwise filial relationship. Ultimately, according to Leppin, the various influences in Luther's life (Staupitz, late medieval mysticism, Augustine, the letters of St. Paul) should not be pitted against one another but aggregated as the "material from which Martin developed his own convictions, and through which he set himself publicly against the received assumptions of the university world" (29).

Apart from his concentration on the late medieval sources for Luther's thought, Leppin does not shy away from controversial points, but he does so by incorporating recent literature. For instance, he casts doubt on Luther's later account of his 1505 conversion. Leppin believes the famed appeal to St. Anne makes no sense because there was no substantial cult to Anne in that area of Germany—despite what the biographies frequently say about Anne as the patron saint of miners, like the ones Hans Luther employed—and Luther never once mentioned it until a Table Talk in 1539. Similarly, he cautions against reading Luther's later criticisms back onto his early experience of the monastic life. Leppin argues that we understand Luther's personal struggles better if we place him in the context of late medieval mystical piety, which left a tension for Luther between "belief in a gracious and merciful God" and his own sense of "opposition to God" that could not be overcome through works (13). On another point, Leppin takes issue with the persistent need to identify the moment of a "Reformation breakthrough" or turning point in Luther, usually based on Luther's much later reconstruction of those events. Instead, he says, "for many years scholars have maintained that Martin's reformational insights evolved continuously over a significant period, suggesting perhaps that there may come a time when we have to give up the search altogether" (21).

Leppin's narration does not so much tread fresh ground as it does provide nuance to the traditional story. If his emphasis is different from other biographers, it may come in his belabored insistence that Luther ceased to be a central figure in the broader Protestant movement beginning as early as 1525—which the English translation regrettably terms his "Year of Climax" (*Das Kulminationsjahr 1525* in the original). Translators Rhys Bezzant and Karen Roe have produced a clean, lively version of Leppin's text with no hint of woodenness. But there are curious choices made, such as this one. That is the nature of translation work, however, and does not harm the final product too adversely. Where does Leppin's book stand in the pantheon of accessible Luther biographies by respected Reformation scholars? It is not as entertaining as Bainton or as comprehensive as Kittelson or as theologically insightful as Obermann, but it places Luther in his late medieval context far more adequately than either Bainton or Kittelson, and it is more concise and approachable than Obermann. If you have any of the others on your shelf, you should have this one, too.

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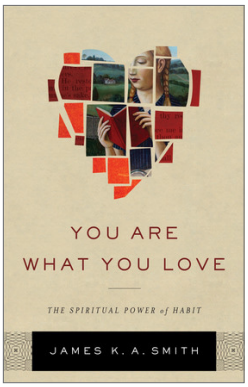

You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit. By James K. A. Smith. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016.

James K. A. Smith, an author and professor of philosophy at Calvin College, has sought to combat the ills of postmodernism with the antidote of an ancient Christian worldview. An ardent champion of liturgical worship, he was heavily influenced by Robert Webber (*Ancient-Future Worship,* 2008), which inspired his own popular *Cultural Liturgies* trilogy (2009–17). In *You Are What You Love,* Smith winsomely analyzes traditional patterns of Christian discipleship, where he argues that we must move away from the Cartesian model (humans are essentially "thinking things," *res cogitans,* or brains on a stick), where we attempt to think our way toward spiritual maturity, and move toward a more embodied discipleship centered in the Body of Christ gathered around word and table. This is achieved not through an intellectual mastery of doctrine but rather through godly imitation and repetition. Christian disciples are formed by the liturgical patterns of worship, with the end result of (re)forming our disordered "loves" and habituating a *telos* in line with the gospel.

He lays out the main argument in the first three chapters, and further develops and expounds his argument in the remaining four. The premise of the book is connected to Philippians 1:9–11, "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment . . . " That is to say, according to Smith, what you love directs what you know. This prayer is paired with what Smith calls the most fundamental question of Christian discipleship, "What do you want?" The answer to this question reveals what we love: "To be human is to have a heart. You can't not love. So the question isn't *whether* you will love something as ultimate; the question is *what* you will love as ultimate. And you are what you love" (10). Everyone has a *telos;* it is their vision of human flourishing, their idea of the good life. As Christians, the eschatological kingdom is our *telos,* and the liturgy serves to keep our compass focused on "True North." Yet, according to Smith, we are constantly faced with and immersed in rival liturgies, which seek to point us toward a different kingdom with a competing *telos.* The problem with the typical model of "thinking-thingism" is that most people function based on "automaticities," and their daily routine unfolds without much thinking at all. Thus their loves and ultimately their *telos* is the sum total of what they do, not necessarily what they think. "Your deepest desire is the one manifested by your daily life and habits" (29). After a brilliant analogy describing the liturgy of the mall and consumerism, Smith points out that many of the things with which we find ourselves engaging are "caught, not taught." No one taught us about consumerism and acquiring pretty baubles from Amazon, yet there we are. We must unlearn the disordered liturgies and allow our heart and loves to be recalibrated toward our Lord. And this takes place primarily in communal Christian worship.

Smith mixes wry humor, philosophical prowess, and the occasional self-deprecating remark to achieve a writing style that is well tuned for quick reading. As he describes how one goes about recalibrating the heart, he emphasizes that this is a process that cannot be facilitated by knowledge alone. You cannot know your way to godly habits—the kind that reshape your loves; it must be embodied in action. Amid a crushing critique of contemporary worship, Smith details the method by which God inscribes the proper loves and *telos* onto our heart; not with worship that is fresh or novel, but rather, "his Spirit faithfully attends the ordinary means of grace in the Word, at the Table" (67). And it is among the assembled Body of Christ where such (re)formation takes place, where our appetites are retrained to hunger and thirst for the things of God. God's gracious action is supreme, as the one who first loved us (1 John 4:19); we then respond. God is both subject and object, so in worship the things that *you do* in turn do something to you. The second half of the book envisions this habitual formative approach in the home, in the classroom, and in our vocations. Preachers will find his appeal to story and narrative engaging if not a bit predictable. Particularly memorable are the dichotomies of the momentous and the mundane, the macro and the micro of our habits. There is no such thing as an insignificant ritual or practice; even the most tedious aspect of our daily life is a stone by which we build the cathedral of our love, moving us toward our *telos.*

Smith is a particular fan of Aristotle, which can be problematic for Lutheran readers if we read his notion of habit in line with the scholastic notion of *habitus,* or a faith formed by love. But in and of itself this application of Aristotle is of no concern, nor is Smith's view of habit, which Lutherans have long viewed as related to sanctification or the third use of the law. Smith is also not interested in deprecating theology or the teaching of doctrine, but rather in pointing out that how one lives reflects what one believes. Otherwise, save for one Calvinistic reference to the Lord's Supper as an "existential meal" (108), there is not much in this book to which a confessional Lutheran could object. At its core, *You Are What You Love* presents the pattern and discipline of the Christian life in simple yet compelling ways. Pastors will find this book a welcome aid in helping the next generation of Christians identify the terrors of expressivism and the narcissistic Jesus club culture. Faithful Christianity is simple, but that does not mean it is always easy or fun. It boils down to making sure that the heart is aligned with God's word, aimed toward the eschaton; and this is done by daily training our loves through deliberate action and focused direction. As the Body of Christ, we are what we love.

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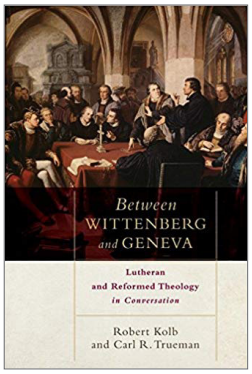

Between Wittenberg and Geneva: Lutheran and Reformed Theology in Conversation. By Robert Kolb and Carl R. Trueman. Baker: Grand Rapids, MI, 2017.

Good training in the polemics of a previous generation has the potential to leave a theologian defending against an imaginary enemy, or, surely more in the spirit of this book, conversing with an imagined interlocutor. One way that this can happen is that the conversation partner simply changes. Another is that one has learned to know the other position only through the descriptions of those who object to it, and not from those who maintain it as truth. This book does not address the former case but is quite valuable with regard to the latter. Robert Kolb, Mission Professor for Systematic Theology at Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) and Carl R. Trueman, Willam E. Simon Visiting Fellow in Religion and Public Life in the James Madison Program at Princeton University, are clear from the outset about their respective confessional commitments. Kolb writes not just for Lutherans but as a Lutheran; and the same holds true for the Reformed Trueman.

The book is divided into eight chapters, addressing "Scripture and Its Interpretation," "Law and Gospel," "The Person and Work of Christ," "Election and the Bondage of the Will," "Justification and Sanctification," "Baptism," "The Lord's Supper," and "Worship." In the body of each chapter, Kolb writes first, then Trueman. It appears that Trueman has written each chapter's conclusion as well, so it seems likely that Kolb formulated each introduction, but there is no attribution within the specific pages of the book. The authors make no obvious effort to follow a parallel outline in their half-chapters, although there is sufficient correspondence to save the reader from any irritation. Since the two confessions treat some of the topics quite differently, this is a helpful approach. One might say that the material is complex. This underscores the necessity of making careful confessional distinctions and the authors' efforts to do justice to it. Both Kolb's and Trueman's footnotes are a treasure of information about primary and secondary literature.

The book's introduction describes the need, identified by two theology professors, of a resource that could help students see what is at stake when confessional differences are marked and maintained. Trueman describes a sort of Evangelical indifference, which is alluded to by the depiction of the Marburg Colloquy on the front cover of the volume. That Luther was unwilling to give any ground in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, even at the risk of division, can seem incomprehensibly harsh, but does not, in fact, defy explanation. Although this book is probably too heady to be handed to most inquiring evangelicals to inform about the practice of pulpit and altar fellowship, it certainly contains, in neat arrangement, the information necessary to understand such theology and practice.

Trueman and Kolb are notably unaggressive. This is intentional: "[W]e wanted to [outline the Lutheran and Reformed positions] in a manner that, while not minimizing or relativizing those differences, avoided the bitterness that has often characterized such engagement in the past" (x). Their treatments are, as already described, side-by-side. One misses the interaction. But the seemingly simultaneous publication by another publisher of a book entitled *Lutheranism vs. Calvinism* makes one wonder if such things are not planned well in advance. And at any rate, the necessity of careful, clear statements of positions prior to polemical arguments is undeniably necessary.

The authors' evident expertise in and commitment to their respective confessions make this book a valuable addition to a theologian's library. For what it is worth, it will enter mine as a reference volume, helping especially to fill out the weak section on historically Reformed theology, but also providing a valued bibliography on its eight topics, and that equally well in both confessions.

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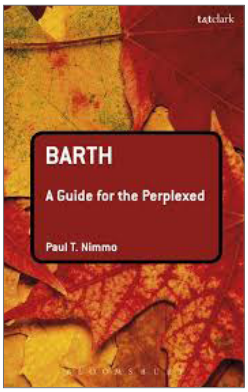

Barth: A Guide for the Perplexed. By Paul T. Nimmo. London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017.

In keeping with other volumes in this series, Paul T. Nimmo's *Barth: A Guide for the Perplexed* embodies the kind of secondary source one hopes for: one which leads its readers into an encounter with the primary texts themselves, rather than away from them. Nimmo's introductory guide to the great twentieth-century Swiss theologian provides a helpful, informative, and concise entry point for readers of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* (1932–67; hereafter *CD*). The proliferation of secondary material interpreting, contesting, enlisting, praising, and deploring Barth and his massive intellectual output is immense, and sorting through what is useful from what is not is certainly a difficult task for nonspecialists. For confessional Lutherans, sifting this material, especially in the interest of engaging Barth on specifically Lutheran grounds, can be daunting because of Barth's complex and creative relationship to the Reformed tradition. Even so, Lutherans will find a book like Nimmo's useful because of its sympathetic and positive portrayal of Barth, even though the account provided is not without its critical edge at various points. Setting the record straight in this way provides an excellent foundation on which to begin a more evaluative engagement with Barth's work from a Lutheran perspective.

Nimmo's introduction deals primarily with the life of Karl Barth but also sketches in some of the broader contours of Barth's intellectual trajectory and legacy, especially when his body of work is considered as a whole. Particularly nice in this introductory chapter is a chart that documents the structure of the *CD* (14–15). One of the limitations of this text, of course,

is that it must leave Barth's other writings to the side in order to offer an introduction to the *CD*. However, the following six chapters are a lovely overview of the four extant volumes of Barth's (unfinished) *Church Dogmatics*. Typically, Nimmo proceeds by remarking on the basic theological content of whatever part of Barth's text he is introducing, then offers his own brief comments more generally.

Consequently, Nimmo begins with Barth's prolegomena, which begin with Barth's doctrine of the word of God. Nimmo helpfully notes Barth's preference for simplicity in this regard, since Barth's theology is not centered on the establishment and deployment of a particular method but is doctrinal theology undertaken in service to the church. Thus, Nimmo rightly identifies the word of God—God's self-revelation to humanity—as the proper focus of any introduction to dogmatics. This is also where a properly Trinitarian description of God's self-disclosure must be set forth, which Nimmo admirably and effectively introduces. Next, Nimmo considers the doctrine of God, wherein Barth notably offers an ingenious, if controversial, revision of the doctrine of election, positing Christ as both its subject and object—meaning that Christ is both the electing God and the elect human being.

Barth's doctrine of creation embodies a somewhat more fraught location in the *CD*, both for its very demanding treatment of "nothingness" (*das Nichtige*) and its affirmation of sexual difference between men and women as an irreducible element of human sociality. Nimmo's introduction is helpful for curious readers, especially regarding the former of these two. He rightly articulates Barth's concern to establish an account of that which God does not will, that God rejects (that is, nothingness). Barth's description is grounded concretely in the person of Jesus Christ, not in a metaphysically adduced definition of lack or privation. Here might be an interesting place in which Luther's own understanding of divine hiddenness and its relation to the content of the cross and its proclamation could be fruitfully brought to bear in a specifically Lutheran evaluation of Barth's contribution.

The final volume of the *CD* constitutes Barth's magisterial articulation of his doctrine of reconciliation—an extended exposition of classic topics in Christology and the application of salvation (as well as theological ethics). Nimmo organizes this discussion in a staggered way so that he can capture the dialectical back-and-forth with which Barth treats christological topics alongside soteriological and ecclesiological ones. Another helpful chart (111) elucidates the logic of this approach very handily. Chapter seven involves a useful discussion of the theological ethics Barth develops throughout the *CD*, beginning with Barth's consideration of "general ethics" under the rubrics of the doctrine of God, but then also introduces Barth's reflections on "special ethics." This allows Nimmo to trace Barth's articulation of human correspondence to God's act in distinctly moral terms. Barth's doctrine of baptism in *CD* IV/4 and the separate volume on *The Christian Life,* which deals with the Lord's Prayer, figure prominently in Nimmo's account—as they should, especially given their consequence for recent advances in Barth scholarship.

The conclusion to *Barth: A Guide for the Perplexed* constitutes a brief but thoughtful set of proposals regarding the legacy and ongoing significance of Barth's dogmatic work. Nimmo rightly notes Barth's overarching christological concern throughout the *CD* as well as his corresponding desire to provide an acutely responsible way of doing theology under the conditions of modernity. Regarding Barth's ongoing significance, Nimmo traces the divergent appropriations of his work as well as the frequent dispute over the particular nature or consequence of various positions Barth takes. Postliberal and liberationist retrievals of Barth's work embody an important example of this. Finally, Nimmo offers a helpful section containing various secondary resources for further reading. Those wishing to explore the immense sea of secondary literature will find this a good place to start such an investigation.

Barth: A Guide for the Perplexed is a commendable resource for readers of Karl Barth's writings, especially students and pastors. Scholars will also want to interact with Nimmo's work because it provides such a helpful way of orienting oneself in the vertiginous vastness of the *CD*. Moreover, it offers a reliable and articulate description of the primary concepts and ideas developed therein. Lutherans reading this book will appreciate Nimmo's sensitive, careful treatment of some of the distinctly Reformed ideas developed and advanced by Barth—even while they will, no doubt, sustain their vigorous disagreement at critical points with the great Swiss theologian. This commendable volume will remain a useful resource to all those interested in Karl Barth for years to come.

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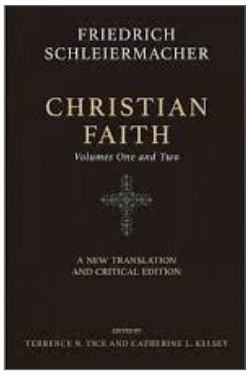

Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition. By Friedrich Schleiermacher. Translated by Terrence N. Tice, Catherine L. Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler. Edited by Catherine L. Kelsey and Terrence N. Tice. 2 volumes. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016.

Regardless of one's opinion on Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), regarded as the father of liberal Protestant theology, it is beyond question that his monumental work *Der christliche Glaube* (first edition, 1821–22; second edition, 1830–31), is one of the most important and groundbreaking works on Christian doctrine, whose historical significance is comparable with Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* and Calvin's *Institutes of Christian Religion*. Perhaps unbeknownst to some confessional Lutherans today, Schleiermacher and his *Glaubenslehre* (the popular title of *Der christliche Glaube*) were instrumental in the theological development of many of the leaders of the nineteenth-century confessional Lutheran revival. For English readers, the only translation of Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre* was the 1928 edition, *The Christian Faith,* translated by H. R.

Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart. On the one hand, the Mackintosh and Stewart translation has much to commend: first and foremost is the herculean task of translating Schleiermacher's, at times, arduous and technical theological German into comprehensible English. However, their translation suffered from many maladies, not the least of which were chiefly an inconsistent English translation of Schleiermacher's theological vocabulary and the acontextual nature of the translation, with almost no editorial aid offered by Mackintosh and Stewart. Moreover, given the significance of Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre,* and its history of revisions, and Schleiermacher's own ruminations over its structural composition, the lack of a critical edition was a major obstacle to English readers.

After nearly a century, there is a new English translation of Schleiermacher's *Der christliche Glaube,* the two-volume *Christian Faith,* translated by Terrence Tice, Catherine Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler. The Tice, Kelsey, and Lawler edition more than compensates for what the Mackintosh and Stewart edition lacked in interpretative aides. Like Mackintosh and Stewart, Tice, Kelsey, and Lawler chose the second edition of Schleiermacher's *Der christliche Glaube* (1830–31)—with fairly little reference to the first edition—but have supplemented the text with thorough and well-researched contextual information in order to aid the reader in understanding Schleiermacher's dense and complex arguments. The most helpful aid provided—chiefly the work of Tice and Kelsey—is the copious number of editorial footnotes. In place of occasional parenthetical references to the German original—as found in Mackintosh and Stewart—Tice, Kelsey, and Lawler opted for an uninterrupted text, locating all references to Schleiermacher's German in the footnotes. These linguistic footnotes are of great aid in one's effort to understand some of Schleiermacher's particular terminology. For example, in §4.2, in addressing the receptive character of the determinations of self-consciousness that result in the person feeling dependent upon another, Schleiermacher writes that there is a peculiar character "of having-been-encountered-from somewhere," which is Tice, Kelsey, and Lawler's rendering of Schleiermacher's *Irgendwohergetroffensein der Empfänglichkeit* (20 n9). Besides providing insight into the original German, all of Schleiermacher's numerous Latin and Greek quotations are translated into English, where the earlier 1928 edition had previously left them untranslated. In addition to these linguistic footnotes, the Tice, Kelsey, and Lawler edition of *Christian Faith* is replete with contextual-orientated notes that direct the reader to Schleiermacher's most pertinent texts for understanding the theological propositions of the *Glaubenslehre,* namely his theological encyclopedia, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study* (1811 and 1830), his open letter to Friedrich Lücke about *Der christliche Glaube* entitled *On the "Glaubenslehre,"* (1829), and the corpus of Schleiermacher's sermons. At times, Tice, Kelsey, and Lawler go beyond simply referencing these key works and cite the pertinent texts in the footnotes. A particularly helpful example is found in §3, where Schleiermacher famously defined piety's essence neither as a "knowing" nor as a "doing," but as "a distinct formation of feeling, or of immediate self-consciousness." (8). The editors provide extended quotations from Schleiermacher's second speech in his *On Religion: Addresses in Response to Its Cultured Critics* (1799, 1806, and 1821), where he had defined religion as the "immediate consciousness of the universal being of all finite things in and through the infinite, of all temporal things in and through the eternal" (8 n2). These contextual tools enable the reader to begin the task of a comparative analysis of Schleiermacher's thought.

At the risk of pedantry, in my opinion there are two minor changes that would have further aided this already well-crafted work. First, with over three thousand editorial notes, the majority of which are the product of the editors, Schleiermacher's own notes tend to get lost in a sea of footnotes. While the editors indicate their own notes by the inclusion of *"Ed. note,"* it is still easy to misidentify Schleiermacher's comments as the product of the editorial team. Second, in the German critical edition of the *Glaubenslehre* (*Kritische Gesamtausgabe* 1/13.1 and 2), following each new proposition (§), the editor, Rolf Schäfer, inserted an editorial outline of the proposition's subsections. Given the complexity of Schleiermacher's propositions, these propositional summaries are a valuable aid in navigating Schleiermacher's dense writing. Similar propositional outlines would have benefited the reader's entry into Schleiermacher's texts.

The significance of the contributions made by Tice, Kelsey, and Lawler cannot be overstated. Simply giving English readers an accurate and updated translation of the *Glaubenslehre* would have been yeoman's work. The inclusion of extensive footnotes and the coordination of Schleiermacher's thought throughout his theological oeuvre make the Tice, Kelsey, and Lawler edition of the *Christian Faith* a work that will help shape Schleiermacher studies for the foreseeable future. New readers and seasoned scholars of Schleiermacher alike will benefit from this superb English edition of *Der christliche Glaube.*

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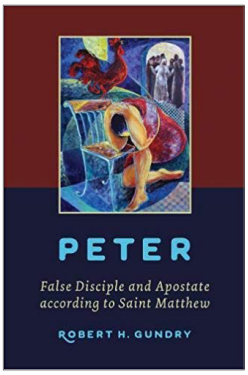

Peter: False Disciple and Apostate According to Saint Matthew. By Robert Gundry. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2015.

Since the time of the early church, St. Matthew's Gospel has generally been viewed as treating the apostle Peter favorably. Typically, Matthew is perceived as promoting Peter as not only the spokesman for the other apostles, but as the chief apostle. Indeed, since at least the time of Leo the Great (d. 461), the Roman Catholic Church has seen Matthew as the chief Gospel, largely because it supposedly established papal primacy in its sixteenth chapter.

Nevertheless, in this very short book, the liberal Evangelical exegete Robert Gundry argues that, contrary to popular belief, the first Gospel is actually quite hostile to Peter. Using

redaction criticism, Gundry argues that Matthew appropriated Mark's narrative and redacted it to portray Peter as a disciple who was very close to Jesus, but who ultimately failed in his role as disciple. Gundry further theorizes that in response to Mathew's negative portrait, the later Gospels of John and Luke attempted to do damage control by rehabilitating Peter. As a result, Peter's status as the chief apostle was cemented for the first generations of the postapostolic era, who read the perspective of these later Gospels back into the text of Matthew.

Gundry builds his case by examining Matthew's portrayal of Peter in detail and occasionally contrasting said portrayal with that of Mark. For example, in Matthew 14, after Jesus walks on water and comes into the boat, Peter is not listed among the disciples who worship Jesus and acclaim him the Son of God. Later in Matthew 16, Peter does declare Jesus to be the Son of God and the Messiah, but seen in light of chapter 14, Gundry suggests that Matthew portrayed Peter as only slowly coming to a conclusion that the other disciples had already come to long before.

In chapter 16, Gundry argues that Jesus does not actually call Peter the "bedrock" upon which he will build his church. In keeping with the parable of the house built on solid ground (Matt 7), the bedrock of Matthew 16 refers to the words of Jesus. That Peter will convey these words of Jesus ("keys of the kingdom") does not mean he is either actually faithful or will be saved. The giving of the keys only means that he can teach in accordance with what Jesus has given to him to teach. After all, the Scribes and Pharisees also have the word of God in Torah; they, therefore, like the apostles, are able to "shut the door" (Matt 23:13) to the kingdom of heaven. Since they will not be saved, neither is it certain that Peter will be!

Beyond this, Gundry observes that Jesus' response to Peter's rebuke regarding the approaching passion is quite a bit harsher than is often translated. Jesus rebukes him by calling him a "snare," suggesting that he is not merely out of order, but rather a positive force of evil. Moreover, in the ancient world, a disciple rebuking his master would have been viewed as not merely being improper, but utterly and completely unacceptable. As may be recalled from Matthew 13, Jesus states that those who cause others to sin will be thrown into darkness where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 13:41–42).

Finally, Gundry sees Jesus' betrayals by Judas and Peter as essentially on par with one another. Although Judas commits suicide and Peter does not, nevertheless both of them exemplify the betrayal and denial that false disciples are capable of committing. Peter enters the courtyard of the high priest and swears false oaths when confronted about being a follower of Jesus. Not only does he violate the Sermon on the Mount's injunction against oath swearing, but he also denies Jesus "before men," meaning that Jesus will also deny him before the Father (10:33). After Peter realizes what he has done, he goes out into the darkness and weeps bitterly, recalling Jesus' repeated warning throughout the Gospel that unfaithfulness will result in being cast into outer darkness where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Moreover, although most commentators want to see Peter's apostasy as something that is not final (unlike that of Judas), Gundry claims that in taking over Mark's narrative, Matthew quite intentionally removes the reference to Peter in the angel's command to the women at the empty tomb: "Go tell the disciples *and Peter*" (Mark 16:7). If Matthew's Gospel is taken alone, the commentator must contend with the fact that Peter is actually never mentioned again after his apostasy in the passion narrative. But would not Matthew's original audience know that Peter was rehabilitated and served an important leadership role in the early church, even to the point of dying as a martyr? Gundry thinks not. He argues that there are many cultural references in Matthew that would either not make sense, or would be useless after the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. If that is the case, then Matthew's Gospel might have been written earlier than usually supposed. This in turn suggests that it may have been written early enough that Peter's martyrdom in the Neronian persecution and complete rehabilitation in the mind of the early church would not have yet occurred.

Gundry's case is not entirely convincing for a number of reasons. First of all, much of his case depends on the idea that Matthew is redacting Mark. Conservative scholarship on the subject has noted a number of problems with Marcan priority. Since Matthew is something of a no-name among the apostles, the idea that attribution of the Gospel to him was made up by later generations is highly unlikely. This would suggest that Matthew himself was actually the author of the Gospel and consequently would not need to rely on other Gospels (such as Mark) for his material. Any similarities between materials found in both Gospels could just as easily be attributed to the fact that, as Richard Bauckham has argued, the apostles formalized and standardized the oral Gospel traditions at a very early date. Such oral traditions were likely regulated by strict communal controls, as both Kenneth Bailey and Birger Gerhardson have shown. Moreover, if the events in the Gospels actually occurred (that they did not is not infrequently a hidden assumption of form and redaction critics!), it would not be inconceivable that two authors would describe the life events or logia of Jesus in similar words. Beyond this evidence, one might point to the fact that the tradition of the early church was quite unanimous in its insistence on Matthean priority.

Within the Gospel itself, there is much evidence that Matthew did not utilize Mark. Although Matthew shares much of his material with Mark, his versions of the material are often abbreviated. This gives further proof that Matthew did not redact Mark, because (as Bultmann pointed out long ago in his *History of the Synoptic Tradition*), redaction almost invariably means adding things to a composition, rather than taking them away. In other words, if an author wishes to retell the same story, what would be the point of doing so in a more incomplete form? Why not just keep the older and more detailed account? Would the audience want less information?

Moreover, Gundry's interpretation of Peter's status as a permanent and exemplary apostate is not very convincing. First, from a literary perspective, one wonders what the point of hav-

ing two apostates (Judas and Peter) rather than just one representing unfaithful discipleship would be. In the more standard reading, Peter is an example of a disciple who sins, yet repents, whereas Judas is a disciple who sins but does not truly repent and therefore destroys himself. This account makes more sense by the measure of asymmetry.

Second, wherever Matthew was writing in the early church, it seems very unlikely that he or his congregation were unaware that Peter had in fact been rehabilitated after the resurrection and became a leader in the early church. Gundry would probably argue that what Matthew and his congregation knew was that Peter was a leader in the church and acknowledged him as a teaching authority. This would nevertheless not have meant that they would have accorded him the status of a faithful disciple. Nevertheless, there does not seem to be any evidence that there were parties in the early church who did not believe that Peter was a faithful Christian. Even in Paul's bitterest conflicts with Peter, there appears to be no suggestion on his part that Peter was not a real disciple of Jesus.

Theologically, Gundry's argument seems to be largely driven by his lack of appreciation for the *simul* of Christian existence. He does an excellent job in highlighting the fact that perhaps Matthew does not paint quite as rosy a picture of Peter as mainstream interpretation has often suggested. Nevertheless, a better reading of Matthew's portrayal of Peter might be that although he is an utter disaster as a disciple, he is nevertheless still an object of Jesus' grace and the one to whom Jesus entrusts the ministry of the word.

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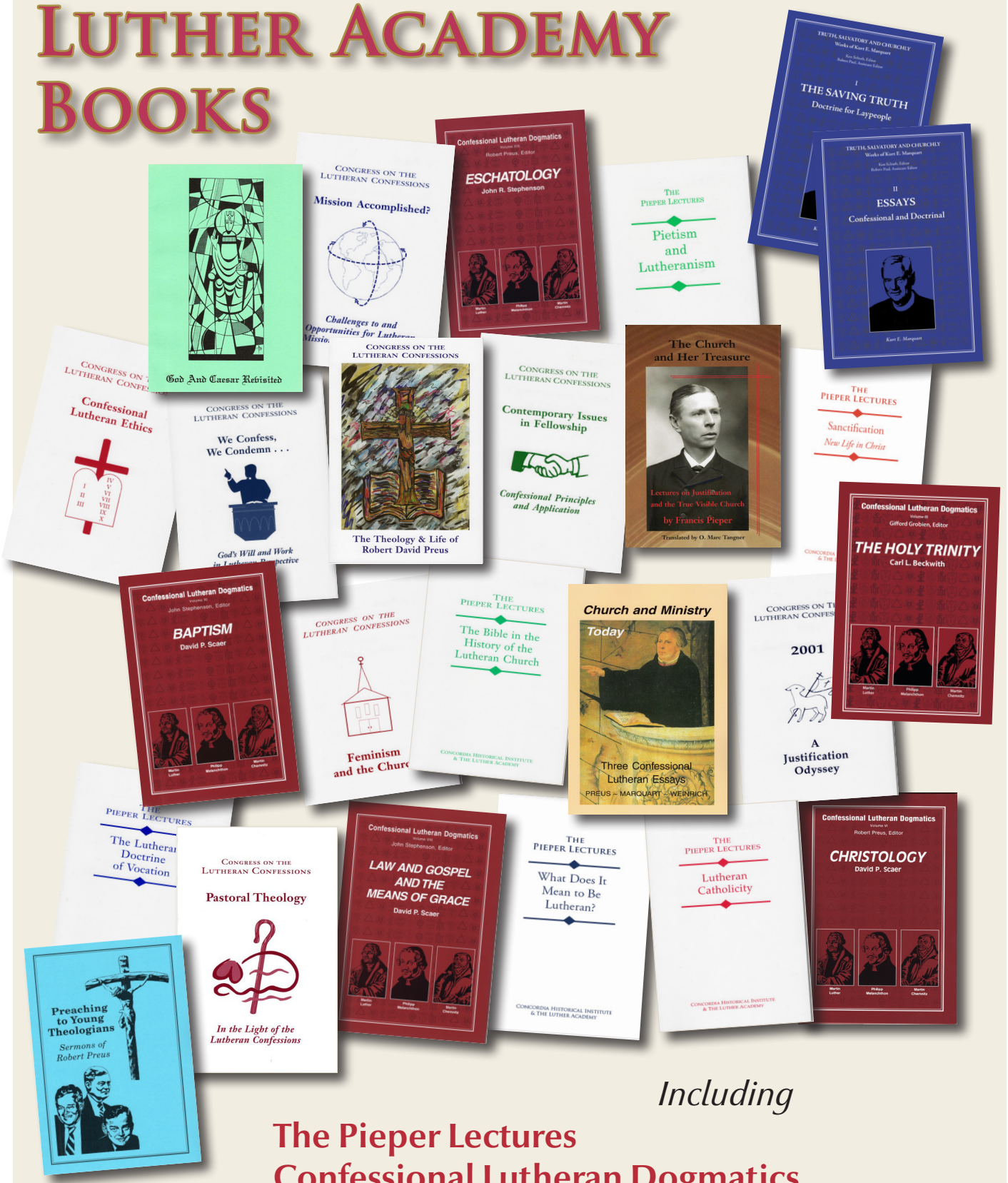
Luther Academy Books



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Bente on the Confessional Lutheran Difference!

Generally speaking, it is risky business for a Lutheran pastor to study the Lutheran Confessions for the sake of high pastoral care of his congregation. I know from long years of experience that taking what one learns from, let's say, the two catechisms or the Augsburg Confession and applying their faithful biblical teaching to the care of a congregation can be a reputational as well as a professional death sentence. Nonetheless the study of the Confessions goes on because there is a hunger and thirst for the objective, biblical truth among many Lutheran pastors as it is confessed in the Book of Concord. Friedrich Bente (1850–1930) wrote the following in his preface to the Concordia Triglotta. It's pretty dicey! Nonetheless, I dare you to read it because Bente is bang on right!

"The Lutheran Church differs from all other churches in being essentially the church of the pure word and unadulterated sacraments. Not the great number of her adherents, not her organizations, not her charitable and other institutions, not her beautiful customs and liturgical forms, etc., but the precious truths confessed by her symbols in agreement with the Holy Scriptures constitute the true beauty and rich treasures of our church, as well as the never-failing source of her vitality and power. Wherever the Lutheran Church ignored her symbols or rejected all or some of them, there she always fell an easy prey to her enemies. But wherever she held fast to her God-given crown, esteemed and studied her confessions, and actually made them a norm and standard of her entire life and practice, there the Lutheran Church flourished and confounded all her enemies. Accordingly, if Lutherans truly love their church, and desire and seek her welfare, they must be faithful to her confessions and constantly be on their guard lest anyone rob her of her treasure" ([St. Louis: CPH, 1921], iv).

The Lord Jesus Preserves His Church

Dr. Luther, in his 1539 Against the Antinomians, makes some remarkable and helpful observations.

"For Christ does not lie when he declares, 'I am with you always, to the close of the age' [Matt 28:20], and when he assures us that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church [Matt 16:18]. At the same time we are enjoined to remain awake and to do our part in preserving the light. We read, 'be watchful' for the devil is called a 'roaring lion' who 'prowls around seeking some one to devour' [1 Pet 5:8], and this did not only in the days of the apostles when St. Peter uttered these words; he does so to the end of time. Let us be guided by this. God help us as he helped our forefathers, and as he will help our heirs, to the honor and glory of his divine name forever. For after all, we are not the ones who can preserve the church, nor were our forefathers able to do so. Nor will our successors have this power. No, it was, is, and will be he who says, 'I am with you always, to the close of the age.' As it says in Hebrews 13 [:8], 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever,' and in Revelation 1 [:8], ' He who is and who was and who is to come.' This is his name and no one else's; nor may anyone else be called by that name.

"A thousand years ago you and I were nothing, and yet the church was preserved at that time without us. He who is called 'who was' and 'yesterday' had to accomplish this. Even during our lifetime we are not the church's guardians. It is not preserved by us, for we are unable to drive off the devil in the persons of the pope, the sects, and evil men. If it were up to us, the church would perish before our very eyes, and we

together with it (as we experience daily). For it is another Man who obviously preserves both the church and us. He does this so plainly that we could touch and feel it, if we did not want to believe it. We must leave this to him who is called 'who is' and 'today.' Likewise we will contribute nothing toward the preservation of the church after our death. He who is called 'who is to come' and 'forever' will accomplish it. What we are now saying about ourselves in this respect, our ancestors also had to say, as is borne out by the psalms and the Scriptures. And our descendants will make the same discovery, prompting them to join us and the entire church in singing Psalm 124: 'If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, let Israel now say,' etc.

"It is a tragic thing that there are so many examples before us of those who thought they had to preserve the church, as though it were built on them. In the end they perished miserably [Münzer for example]." (*LW* 47:117–18)

Matthew 28:19 and the Divine Gift

What is the divine gift bestowed in Holy Baptism according to Matthew 28:19? When I ask that question of sundry Lutherans, whether it is in a Bible class, youth or adult catechesis, or prebaptismal meetings with parents, the answers vary. "Forgiveness!" "Grace!" "Eternal life." Mostly, however, it is like I am in a meeting with Quakers—deadpan silence. Then I have them read the verse again and I ask the question once more. Most of the time I have to provide the answer. "The divine gift given in Holy Baptism according to Matthew 28:19 is the triune name!" It is so obvious and yet so missed. It is so ABC-ish and yet so unable to be recited or confessed.

So I keep at it. Relentlessly. Persistently. It is what pastors do! "God gives you his divine name in Holy Baptism!" Did you catch that? God gives. What does he give? His divine name! After all, to be baptized in God's name is to be baptized by God himself (LC IV, 10). He is God *for you* by giving the baptized his name! With the gifting of his divine name each person of the Trinity donates himself with all that he is and all that he has to the baptized. This is precisely why those baptized at Pentecost in the name of Jesus were also passively given forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit—"for you and for your children and for all" (Acts 2:38–39; cf. Acts 16:22; John 3:3–5; Mark 16:16; 1 Cor 6:11; Titus 3:5–8; 1 Pet 3:21). Dr. Luther sums it up well: "But the Word does it, . . . that God's name is in it. And where God's name is, there also be life and salvation" (LC IV, 26–27). In addition, regarding the gift of the divine name given in Holy Baptism, "Christians always have enough to do to believe firmly what baptism promises and brings—victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts" (LC IV, 41). Or as he teaches faithfully in the Small Catechism: "It brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the words and promises of God declare" (SC IV, 5–6).

The overall pastoral-care point is that the baptized will trust what God has given to them in Holy Baptism (his divine and saving name) and to use the gift beneficially, namely, "that we may draw strength and comfort from it when our sins and conscience oppress us, and say, 'But I am baptized! And if I have been baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body'" (LC IV, 44–45).

Sasse Dares to Use the Verboten "R" Word!

Generally speaking once again, as I have served in the holy ministry for twenty-seven years, I continue to witness faithful pastors having their calls rescinded because they utter the verboten word that John the Baptist preached (Matt 3:2), that Jesus himself preached (Mark 1:15; Rev 2:5; 3:19), that Jesus himself mandated (Luke 24:47) and that the apostles preached obediently (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 17:30; 20:21; 26:18, 20). They speak the word that simply cannot be used in pastoral care because such verbiage is considered to be legalistic. What word would that be? Do I even dare to say it? I will. I will be bold. The word is repent. *Such pastoral care is the deadly apocalyptic attack of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8; 2 Cor 3:6) on the old Adam so that through the preaching and application of the Good Friday forgiveness in word and sacrament the new man, the new creation spelled* F-A-I-T-H, *may live before God in the righteousness and purity of Jesus (see the Small Catechism's answer to the question, "What does such baptizing with water indicate?"). Repentance is the life not only of the individual Christian but also the life of the church (see thesis one of Dr. Luther's* Ninety-five Theses). *In his 6 June 1954 letter entitled "The Great Schism and Its Lessons" published in* Letters to Lutheran Pastors, *Volume 2, 1951–1956 (CPH, 2014), Dr. Sasse provides the high pastoral care geared toward* repentance *if we are willing to receive it. You are, aren't you? Of course you are! And so too the church in which we serve!*

"We must be clear about this, that the most unrepentant thing in this world is a church. Don't we know from the history of our own church how difficult it is for a church to repent, even for the church which began with Luther's first thesis, according to which all Christian life should be repentance? . . . The true repentance of the church is always the return to the Word of God. And neither Western Catholicism nor Eastern Orthodoxy is ready to make this return, to bow before the

Word of God. It is telling that when the great Russian thinkers such as Solovyov think about removing the schism, they take their decisive arguments from old churchly tradition and from speculation about the church as the Body of Christ in the sense of a continuation of the incarnation, or even from an almost theosophic speculation about 'divine wisdom,' a preexisting *Sophia,* which is then further brought into connection with the mother of God. The Holy Scripture comes into the question only insofar as it has to present the *dicta probantia* ['proof passages'], which are to be interpreted in the sense of the consensus of the fathers. And it is telling that the Orthodox, even Solovyov, have in common with Rome the incredibly deep rejection of Luther and the Reformation. Here is the deepest reason why a real turnaround, a real repentance by both churches is impossible, why even a possible union would not change anything about the situation of Christendom. For the repentance of the church is, if it is a real repentance, a return to the lost and forgotten Word. *The repentance of the church is reformation.*" (304–5)

"Does July 16, 1054 repeat itself over and over again in church history? In asking this question, we ask what the Great Schism teaches us, the churches who refer to the Reformation, and especially the Lutheran Church. It must teach us above all to understand more deeply what our Confession teaches about the church and the unity of the church, and to act accordingly in the church. The deepest hardship of our churches consists in this: that doctrine and real life aren't consistent with each other; that therefore in all decisive questions, [it is] no longer the Confession, but rather the real or alleged needs of practical ecclesiastical life which are the norm for all decisions. But thereby one door after another is opened to secularization. . . . Where the true unity of the church, the unity in the pure doctrine of the Gospel and in the administration of the Sacraments according to the Scripture is no longer understood, there it must come to this dissolving of the unity of the church of which the Great Schism is the great, warning example. . . . In that moment in which the purity of doctrine stops, in which the pure Gospel is no longer preached—and the pure administration of the Sacraments is always a part of this according to the Lutheran understanding—in that moment unity also fractures, as Luther said in that phrase (WA 31:255.5 ff.) which is quoted in the FC (SD III 6): 'where this one article (about justification) remains purely on the plan, then Christendom remains pure and quite fine and without serious problems. But where it does not remain pure, then it is impossible that one can deter some errors or problematic spirits.' The history of the church has confirmed this. . . . What the bishops, archbishops, and church presidents can simply no longer do, even if they perhaps would like to, that is what we pastors must do. That is the incredible responsibility which today is upon us. . . . The promise of the Lord belongs only to the Word of the Gospel, which will outlast heaven and earth, and to the Sacraments in which Christ is present, and to the office which preaches atonement in that it administers the means of grace, and to the one holy church which is daily commanded anew by Word and Sacrament." (308–11)

A Great Mystery

Not mysticism but mystery—the mystery of the gospel (Eph 6:19)! Discipleship has to do with a God-given mystery (Mark 4:11). So Christ's ministers, says Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:1, are mystagogues, stewards of God's mysteries who usher fellow disciples into the mystery of Christ (Eph 3:4), the great mystery of Christian piety (1 Tim 3:16).

As mystagogues they do not belong to a spiritual elite with secret knowledge and experience of spiritual matters or a higher level of religious consciousness than ordinary people. They are not spiritual highfliers who dazzle others with their superior spiritual wisdom. There is, in fact, nothing secret or obscure about whom they serve, or what they do. They work for Christ and with him in God's household, his earthly temple, the church. As ministers of Christ and his gospel they are down-to-earth stewards of God's mysteries.

As in Colossians 1:25–26, Paul here uses a picture that needed no explaining in the ancient world. The steward of a house managed it for its owner and deployed its resources for the benefit of its residents in keeping with the will of the householder. For pastors their stewardship is a matter of mystery because their divine Master is hidden from the sight of those who live and work with him. So too the heavenly resources of his earthly household! As stewards of heavenly riches they provide all the members of the household with what they need for their spiritual life on earth (Eph 3:8; Col 1:27; 2:3).

We quite commonly confuse a mystery with a secret. Even though both of them have to do with something that is hidden and unknown, a secret ceases to be a secret once you know it—like my bank balance—while a mystery remains a mystery even when you know it. It, in fact, becomes more mysterious as you are drawn further into it. Take the mystery of human life or of love! The more you experience and study them, the more you discover that they are only ever partially knowable and explicable. The more you examine a mystery, the more it escapes your apprehension and comprehension. Like living and loving, it is a matter of experience rather than mere intellectual understanding.

Like life and love, the mysteries of God are not kept secret but hidden in plain sight for all who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and a mind to understand. They are not private and esoteric, but public and available to those who have faith in Jesus and listen to him. They participate in them sacramentally, liturgically, and devotionally by their communal and personal involvement in the divine service. Their whole life is a matter of mystery.

Well, what then does the New Testament teach us about that mystery? Quite simply it revolves around God's incarnate Son Jesus and our faith in him and his hidden presence with us in the church. It is the mystery of the gospel (Eph 6:19). As such it has many dimensions. It is *cosmic* in its purpose. It has to do with God's will to reunite heaven and earth through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and join angels and human beings in a single holy community

under his headship (Eph 1:7–10). It is *historical* in its explication. The enactment of God's purpose for humanity was hidden from human eyes as a mystery through the whole of human history until its disclosure by the life, death, and resurrection of his Son and the proclamation of the gospel after his ascension (Rom 16:25–26; Eph 3:1–6). The mystery of God is *personal* in nature. It depends on Christ's presence with his disciples and their personal union with him (Col 2:1–3). The mystery of Christ is *communal* in its location. His presence and benefits are disclosed corporately to the saints in the church, the place where he resides with them (Col 1:24–27). It is therefore *liturgical* in its manifestation, for through their sacramental union with him, the proclamation of the gospel, and faith in him they have access to God the Father (Eph 5:32; Eph 3:7–12). It is *eschatological* in its orientation. Jesus is the bridge between heaven and earth for us (1 Tim 3:16). Our hope of glory depends on him and his glorification (Col 1:27; 3:1–3). So, despite its many facets, the mystery of God is both concealed and revealed, like treasure in a chest, in God's incarnate Son (Col 2:3). We have no access to it apart from him and his hidden presence with us.

Our participation in the mystery of Christ depends on four things: the proclamation of God's word, the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, receptive faith, and a clear conscience.

Through his teaching of God's word in parables in his earthly ministry Jesus disclosed the mysteries of God's kingdom (Matt 13:1–23; Luke 8:4–19) and the mystery of him as the Messianic King (Mark 4:1–25). Then after his ascension the apostles and their successors in ministry made these mysteries known through the proclamation of the gospel (Rom 16:25–26; 1 Cor 2:6–7; Eph 3:7–11; 6:19; Col 1:25–26; 4:3). God's word revealed what was otherwise hidden from sensory experience and cognitive reach. The apostles used the prophetic writings of the Old Testament to proclaim the mystery of Christ in the church (Rom 16:25; Eph 3:5). Their preaching and teaching of the gospel, now written in the New Testament, gives those who have ears to hear access to that mystery. The Scriptures of both testaments still do that as they are read and heard, expounded and received in the church to the present day. Their subject matter is the mystery of Christ.

Through the proclamation of God's inspiring word its hearers receive the Holy Spirit (Eph 3:5). The Spirit opens their hearts, so that they understand what is said and receive what is given to them by Christ. As God's word is taught, the Holy Spirit reveals what no human eye has ever seen, no human ear has ever heard, and no human heart has ever imagined; it reveals what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:6–8), because they know the love of Christ (Eph 3:14–19). Apart from the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, even those who hear God's word do not understand what is said to them and receive what is given to them by God. As Isaiah had prophesied, they neither perceive what they see nor understand what they hear (Mark 4:11–12).

The mystery of Christ depends on faith in him. It is the mystery of faith (1 Tim 3:9). Faith comes before our participation in it. Faith opens the door to the proper, transformative experience of it, because it rightly receives what is given. Faithful participation depends both on what is heard (Mark 4:24) as well as how it is heard (Luke 8:18). The gospel needs to be heard with faith in order to receive what it provides for the disciple. Apart from faith in Christ and his word, the door to the Father's house remains closed. An unbeliever has no access to the mystery of faith.

Faithful participation in the mystery of Christ depends on the reception and retention of a clear conscience (1 Tim 3:9). We do not gain access to it by the exercise of our theological understanding, our spiritual affectivity, our religious imagination, or our godly behavior. They may indeed muddy the waters for us by distorting what we hear and blocking our reception. Our reception of what Christ offers to us depends on a clear conscience, a conscience that is rightly attuned to God's word, a conscience that has been cleansed from the taint of sin by the proclamation of the gospel. It is like the still water of a crystal-clear pond that receives the bright sunlight and reflects the whole sky as in a mirror. It receives the light without obstruction and distortion. It is filled with the light of Christ rather than its own spiritual darkness. That light drives out all darkness from our hearts. Those who have a clear conscience see themselves and others as God sees them. In fact, Jesus says that those who are pure in heart see God (Matt 5: 8).

The mystery of Christian piety is indeed great (1 Tim 3:16). It is great because its focus is on the hidden presence of God's incarnate Son with us here on earth and our devotion to him in our life on earth. He brings heaven down to earth for us by his incarnation in order to bring us bodily with him into the glorious presence of his heavenly Father. In faith our lives are already now hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3–4). When he appears in glory, we who now travel with him on earth will appear with him in glory. Then the mystery of faith will become a matter of sight. That is the great mystery that we now confess as Christ's disciples!

John Kleinig

Should We Teach Objective Justification?

Lutherans teach that the doctrine of justification is the central topic of the Christian religion. It is the truth on which the church stands. When we teach justification by grace alone through faith alone for the sake of Christ alone, we often use the shorthand: justification through faith alone. Those who identify with the theology of C. F. W. Walther are accustomed to using the terms *objective justification* and *subjective justification.* Objective justification teaches that God, for the sake of the vicarious satisfaction of Jesus Christ, has justified the whole world of sinners. Since Jesus bore the sin of all, he

took away the sin of all. Christ's resurrection is God's absolution of the world.

Subjective justification is the teaching that the justification procured by Christ for all is received personally and individually only through faith in the gospel. Objectively considered, all sin of all people has been washed away. Even as Adam's disobedience makes everyone a sinner, just so Christ's obedience makes everyone righteous. Subjectively speaking, no one is righteous apart from faith in Christ. This is because faith is the only way this verdict of justification can be received.

Many have criticized the objective/subjective justification model over the years. Some say that there is a universal redemption, but not a universal reconciliation or justification. Others say that there is a universal redemption and reconciliation, but not a universal justification. This kind of argument diminishes the gospel. Redemption sets free. Reconciliation establishes peace. Justification forgives. Freedom, peace, and forgiveness all go together. If one of these is objectively and universally true, all of them are objectively and universally true.

Sometimes it is argued that if the whole world has already been justified in Christ, there is no wrath of God against sin and there is no need for anyone to receive the forgiveness of sins through faith. We who teach objective justification do not deny that God's wrath against sin is real. We certainly do not deny that apart from faith one does not receive forgiveness of sins. Only believers in the gospel of Christ may regard themselves as justified.

A popular argument against objective justification is that this teaching makes the gospel mere information and not God's power. If all sins were forgiven on Calvary, then no sins are actually forgiven today. The absolution only tells the penitent that his sins were forgiven on the cross and does not impart forgiveness to him. Again, it is contended that all are objectively justified in Christ's death, then the absolution that is spoken today is just information. It does not forgive. For (it is argued), if God forgave all sins when Jesus died, he cannot be forgiving sins here and now. He must rather only be informing us of what he did when Jesus died.

What do you think? If we hold to objective justification, do we render the absolution mere information? Do we take away from the efficacy of the word? Do we turn the means of grace into bare information and rob them of the present power of God in our lives?

The very opposite is the case. It is only when we hold to objective justification that the absolution can be certain. Indeed, no pastor could in good conscience pronounce an absolution on a penitent unless he believed in objective justification. For no man can see another's faith. On what basis can mere men who cannot discern faith in another absolve? How can he know that the penitent to whom he speaks Christ's words is forgiven? He cannot see his faith. He cannot know if he believes. But he can know that he is forgiven, since all sin was forgiven by God when Christ was handed over because of our sins and raised again for our justification!

But does this not make the absolution mere information? It is information. But there is nothing "mere" about it. When God speaks the words of his gospel, whether in the baptism of the baby, the preaching from the pulpit, the absolution of the penitent, at the altar where Jesus gives us to eat and to drink his body and blood, or in the mutual conversation and consolation of fellow Christians, the forgiveness that flows from Christ's blood is bestowed through the words spoken.

There are not two justifications: one when Jesus died and rose and the other when we hear and believe. Objective justification and subjective justification are not two justifications. There is but one justification. It is never mere information! This information is the declaration of the just and holy God that the sinner who deserves to be damned on account of his sins is instead justified by the blood of Jesus. There is no other justification than the justification by Christ's blood. The words the minister speaks bestow forgiveness. They impart forgiveness. They grant forgiveness. But the words of the Holy Spirit spoken to us today through the mouths of men do not achieve forgiveness, cause forgiveness, or effect forgiveness. That was done on Calvary. The words we hear give forgiveness.

Should I doubt my worthiness, those words will still give me forgiveness. Should I doubt the preacher knows what he is doing by speaking the absolution, those words will still give me forgiveness. Jesus took away the sin of the world! That's how I know that the gospel of the free forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake applies to me, yes, me! That's not just information. That's my salvation!

Rolf Preus

"And Mystic Sweet Communion"

Five funerals in three months! Not a new set of circumstances for me, but a bit unsettling for the young parish to which I had recently arrived. As I worked with the families reviewing Scripture readings and hymns for each service, one particular hymn was selected for three of five funerals. The hymn? It was "The Church's One Foundation."

I was struck by the selection of that hymn by three different families. Not requested were "Amazing Grace" and "How Great Thou Art." No, it was a hymn about the church and her relationship to the Holy Trinity. The hymn's author, Reverend Samuel J. Stone (1839–1900), was an Anglican clergyman and prolific hymn writer. Interestingly enough, the hymn "The Church's One Foundation" was just one of twelve hymns on the Apostles' Creed written by Stone in 1866. Kenneth Osbeck, in his work *101 Hymn Stories,* suggests that Stone composed the hymns to combat a creeping liberal and anticreedal theology in the Church of England.

Stanza five of the hymn came to mind as I contemplated the assignment to write an article for an issue titled "Lutheranism and Mysticism."

> Yet she on earth has union
> With God the Three in One,
> And mystic sweet communion
> With those whose rest is won.
> O blessed heav'nly chorus!
> Lord, save us by Your grace
> That we, like saints before us,
> May see you face to face.

How does the church on earth have union with the Holy Trinity? What is this mystic sweet communion she shares with those whose rest is won? Is it of the Hebrews chapter twelve variety? Namely, an image in the mind's eye of cheering crowds helping us through the daily grind? Is it grounded in our contemplation of "all the works thy hand hath made"? Or is it something else? Something more?

Our mystic sweet communion with the blessed Trinity is a received communion. I would suggest that it is centered in two substantial things: the received gift of Holy Baptism and the received gift of the body and blood of the church's Bridegroom in the sacrament of the altar. This communion, given by the Holy Trinity to the church, is for us as it was for those who have passed from death to life and now dwell with the Lamb at his kingdom feast that has no end.

This is a mysterious reality to be sure, yet it is not an internally directed mystery. The soul-killing force of mysticism is that it drives a person to an inward contemplation of what is really an external and objective reality. The temptation to such an inwardly focused "mystical experience" is strong. The old Adam in us is a Christless mystic. What the confessors charged in Augsburg Confession v against the Anabaptists—"who think that the Holy Spirit comes to human beings without the external Word through their own preparations and works"—could be leveled against us!

What grants comfort to a grieving spouse or child is the objective reality that we have communion, a mystic sweet communion, with those whose rest is won. This is not from yourself but a gift of God in Christ Jesus, created by his mercy and rooted in external fleshly gifts. Directing those in grief to look to internal feelings or subjective memories is a mystical travesty. Better to direct them to the objective promises of God delivered in word, baptism, and supper.

Perhaps I am reading an Anglican hymn stanza through Lutheran rose-colored glasses. But I don't think so. Our mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won is a reality granted by God's objective grace and rooted in the external/sacramental workings of the blessed Trinity.

I am reminded of a postcommunion collect prayed often in the parish I serve:

> "Gracious God, our heavenly Father, You have given us a foretaste of the feast to come in the Holy Supper of Your Son's body and blood. Keep us firm in the true faith throughout our days of pilgrimage that, on the day of His coming, we may, together with all Your saints, celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end." The baptized, having been "communed," rejoice in the mystic sweet communion that is theirs with those whose rest is won! That's a mysticism in which I rejoice!

David Magruder

The Trinity, Divine Hiddenness, and the Doctrine of Election

In the nineteenth century, it was Theodosius Harnack who rediscovered Luther's distinction between the hidden and revealed God. Harnack wrote a two-volume study of Luther's theology over a twenty-year period, largely in response to Johannes von Hofmann's claim that Luther had rejected substitutionary atonement. The study nevertheless eventually veered off to the larger question of Luther's doctrine of God and his agency within creation. Harnack's study remains magnificent, in spite of its considerable limitations (that is, its notable use of the less-than-very reliable Walch edition of Luther's works, as well as its ahistorical, overly systematic structure). In its explication of Luther's doctrine of God hidden and revealed, Harnack's work was foundational for the explorations of the theme in the works of Werner Elert, Hans Joachim Iwand, and Gerhard Forde in the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, Harnack's work does not represent a definitive explication of the theme of divine hiddenness, and there remains a great deal of scholarly debate on the topic down to the present day. One significant issue that was raised by the Reformed Church historian B. A. Gerrish in the mid-1970s was the fact that when Luther speaks of divine hiddenness he sometimes speaks of the hiddenness of God in revelation (as in *The Heidelberg Disputation*), and at others, God's hiddenness apart from revelation (as in *The Bondage of the Will*). In response to this problem, Gerrish cleverly designated a distinction in Luther's thought between what he terms "Hiddenness 1" (that is, hiddenness in revelation) and "Hiddenness 2" (hiddenness apart from revelation).

According to Hiddenness 1, God condescends to his creatures in his masks (*larvae Dei*) wherein he reveals himself. Indeed, the whole creation is a mask or channel of God, wherein he acts upon his creatures. Humans know that God is present and active in his masks because he has attached a word to them in order that he might reveal his presence and to make explicit what they can expect God to communi-

cate through the particular mask or channel. This is true of both the order of creation ("very good"; "you may eat"; "therefore a man shall leave his parents") and the order of redemption ("this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"; "this is my Body").

Hiddenness 2, or "God not preached" (as Luther terms God in *The Bondage of the Will*), exists above the masks of God. God acts upon his creatures through his masks according to many contradictory manifestations: law and gospel, wrath and love, wisdom and foolishness, weakness and glory. Although these masks manifest God in seemingly contradictory ways, he nevertheless remains unified in his eternal being above them. For this reason, humans can only see God's eternal being in this life "through a glass darkly" (1 Cor 13:12).

This of course raises the problem of election. Although God works redemption through the masks, channels, and means of the word and sacrament ministry of the church, such means have not historically been available to everyone (for example, the pre-Columbia Aztecs). Moreover, even in the realm of those exposed to the means of grace, the proclamation of the church hardens some and elicits faith in others. Therefore, since God always works through means, the mystery of divine election lies not so much in speculations about God's abstract act of predestination in eternity (as in Calvin and Barth), and more in the fact of the inscrutable rationale behind the shuffling of the divine masks wherein God manifests himself to his creatures in condemnation and grace.

Indeed, the paradox of the reality of predestination and the universality of God's grace perhaps may be found in the seeming *aporia* between God preached (that is, universal grace) and God not preached (that is, God's inscrutable eternal election, Rom 11:33). Insofar as God works all things by his hidden will, all who gain salvation only do so because he has elected them from eternity (Rom 8:30; Eph 1:4). Nevertheless, God, as he has revealed himself to us in Christ, has opened his heart to the whole world on the cross (John 12:32; 19:31–34), so it must be earnestly believed that God's grace is universal and that he wills the salvation of all (John 3:16; 1 Tim 2:4).

Although Lutherans have historically and rightly confessed this seeming incongruity between the universality of grace and election as a paradox of the faith, perhaps the doctrine of the Trinity seen in the light of the twofold divine hiddenness can help explain the mystery in a more constructive way than it has been in the past. At the end of the first volume of his dogmatics, the late Wolfhart Pannenberg made an intriguing suggestion in this regard. According to Pannenberg, perhaps one way to think of the paradox of hidden and revealed in Luther's thought is the recognition that apart from the vision we will possess of the unity of the divine essence in heaven, there is a certain degree of tension between God's visible temporal works as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

To see the point that Pannenberg is making, perhaps it might be helpful to review the last section of *The Bondage of the Will* where Luther speaks of "three lights." First, there is a "light of nature," wherein humanity knows of God's existence and his commandments but is then uncertain as to why evil befalls the righteous. This question is answered by the "light of grace," which reveals the reality of original sin as well as its solution in the cross and empty tomb. The suffering of the righteous ceases to be a problem, insofar as none are righteous, and all are therefore deserving of condemnation. Nevertheless, this does not solve the problem of election, since the "light of grace" reveals both the universality of sin and grace. It therefore appears incongruous that the Spirit works faith in some, but not others. In the "light of glory," the problem of election will be resolved as easily as the problem of human suffering by the "light of grace."

As can be observed, the three lights correspond to the actions of the economic Trinity as outlined by the Creed: Father/creation, Son/revelation of grace, Spirit/election to glory. Indeed, following Luther's theology of masks of God, we could even speak of each as a mask (*larva*) of the given person of the Trinity. From a human perspective, the activities of the Father in his mask of creation and the Spirit in his mask of the means of grace often seem in tension with the work of the Son, which Luther describes as functioning through the mask of his incarnate humanity (*LW* 11:107). From the perspective of fallen humanity, creation appears to be a realm of wrath that crushes creatures in a seemingly haphazard fashion (for example, Job, Ecclesiastes, psalms of lamentation, etc.). Likewise, as noted above, although the basis of the means of grace is the universal love of the Son, from our human perspective, the work of the Spirit through them seems arbitrary and uneven. All are equally sinful, yet only a certain number come to faith by the electing power of grace operative in word and sacrament (*LW* 33:291–92).

Hence, under the veil of divine hiddenness and the perverse interpretations of fallen human reason, there appears to be an *aporia* between the activities of the Father and the Spirit and with the universal and unconditional love revealed in the Son. Nevertheless, by faith worked through the Spirit, the believer trusts that the divine love manifested by Christ has revealed the hidden coherence of the triune being in a preliminary sense in the means of grace. As Luther observes: "For (as explained above) we could never attain to the knowledge of the grace and favor of the Father except through the Lord Christ, *who is a mirror of the paternal heart,* outside of whom we see nothing but an angry and terrible Judge. But of Christ we *could know nothing either,* unless it had been revealed by the Holy Ghost" (LC II, 3, emphasis added). Only at the eschaton will the full coherence of the works of the one God be revealed to believers.

Hence, in this life, faith partially reconciles the *aporia* between the universal grace of the Son and the electing power of the Spirit. Faith possesses the full confidence of the word of God, that the Son has revealed the Father's true heart to faith through the power of the Spirit.

Jack Kilcrease

What Went Around Comes Around

One must reach far back in the annals of the papacy to locate a pontiff comparable to the overweight and loquacious Argentinian who in 2013 succeeded the still living Benedict XVI. Two out of several possible parallels strike me as particularly apt. First, a year after the sickly French-born Gregory XI brought the papacy back to Rome at the close of its seven-decade-long sojourn in Avignon, and the Roman mob arm-twisted the next conclave to choose an Italian successor, the intimidated cardinals elected Archbishop Bartholomeo Prignano of Bari, who embarked on a tumultuous reign as Urban VI (1378–89). J. N. D. Kelly tells us that in his prepapal career, which unusually did not include a stint as a cardinal, Prignano had a reputation for "austerity, efficiency, and scrupulous conscientiousness." Once the tiara landed on his head, though, Prignano displayed the hitherto unnoticed qualities of "intransigent obstinacy, violent temper, and determination to assert his rights even beyond what was practicable." A few years after his election, Urban had six cardinals tortured, five of whom soon "mysteriously disappeared," almost certainly executed on his orders. Small wonder that within months of his accession the French majority of cardinals deposed Urban and elected one of their fellow countrymen as his successor, with whom they moved back to Avignon, provoking the Great Western Schism that lasted till 1415. The final collapse of the papal temporal power in 1870 has precluded Bergoglio from torturing and executing cardinals who stand in his way; instead, he merely sacks and badmouths senior figures like the American Raymond Burke and the German Gerhard Ludwig Müller. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Bergoglio, in his capacity as Urban VI *redivivus,* will precipitate a repetition of the Great Western Schism.

Another particularly nasty character to perch awhile on the *cathedra Petri* was Stephen VI, who reigned for little over a year at the end of the ninth century (896–97). Filled with venom for his predecessor Formosus (891–96), Stephen had this departed prelate (remembered for his "exceptional intelligence, exemplary life, and strict asceticism") exhumed, arrayed in papal robes, and put on trial in the notorious three-day "cadaver synod," which resulted in Formosus's degradation and flinging into the Tiber. Since succeeding Benedict XVI, Bergoglio has lost no opportunity to undo his predecessor's legacy. However, in early 2018 his minions went a step too far. Having asked Joseph Ratzinger to write a commendation of a series of booklets that praise Bergoglio as a substantial theologian, Msgr. Dario Vigano, prefect of the Vatican's newly created communications department, read aloud at a press conference from Benedict's letter of response, giving the impression by selective quotation that Ratzinger is on Bergoglio's theological home page, even teeming with admiration for his scholarly acumen and doctrinal integrity. It soon emerged that Benedict had politely declined to endorse his successor, and that he had complained that the author of one of the booklets issued in Bergoglio's praise was a major and vociferous opponent of his and Karol Wojtyła's pontificates. As the truth about "Lettergate" emerged into full public view, it was as though Formosus had landed Stephen a powerful punch on the jaw. Despite his cosmetic resignation as prefect, Vigano remains in Bergoglio's inner circle and much in control of his department.

"Lettergate" was still fresh in public memory when it was displaced by "Hellgate." Since his accession in 2013, Bergoglio has accorded a series of interviews to the nonagenarian atheist Communist Italian newspaper editor Eugenio Scalfari, to whom he has imparted such gems of wisdom as "Proselytism is solemn nonsense." Already a couple of years ago, Bergoglio intimated to Scalfari that souls who do not make it to eternal beatitude simply face annihilation, so it came as little surprise that he repeated this opinion to his atheist interlocutor at the beginning of Holy Week 2018; the print edition of Scalfari's interview hit Italy's newsstands on Maundy Thursday, a day that senior clergy had hitherto deemed suitable for glorifying Christ, not blaspheming him.

Having recently read well-researched and carefully presented accounts of Bergoglio's troubled and troubling pontificate by such journalists and scholars as Phil Lawler, Ross Douthat, and Henry Sire, all of whom are sober practicing Roman Catholics, I am suffering from massive Bergoglio fatigue: the man's blasphemies are simply endless, his energy for impiety inexhaustible. But "Hellgate" may not pass without comment. Bergoglio's chief doctrinal/theological defect is his brusque rejection of the opening verses of Hebrews, which confess our Lord as the unsurpassable self-revelation of the Father; *CCC* paragraph 66 beautifully encapsulates the dogmatic import of these inspired words that we take on our lips at Morning and Evening Prayer, thereby facilitating an important area of ecumenical consensus. The one who deems himself in a unique sense Christ's vicar on earth right now cares not a fig for the definitive, unchangeable words and deeds of the Father's incarnate Son. All we ordained men know the danger of thrusting Christ from the spotlight and injecting our own conceited notions into its center; but the wise among us tremble at such treason and penitently realize that it is all about Jesus and not about us.

So Bergoglio knows better than the Christ who walked on earth and now reigns at the Father's right hand. Worse still, "Hellgate," with its profession of Jehovah's Witness–style annihilationism, was yet raging when Bergoglio decided to propagate a piece of unvarnished universalism. In a staged photo-op he informed a teenager recently bereaved of his father that, although an atheist, the departed was a good man, and his son should take comfort from his now being in heaven. As in the case of Bergoglio's profession of annihilationism, it would be an exhausting task to marshal, simply from the text of the Gospels, his refutation from the lips of Christ. Bergoglio would have Christendom believe he knows better than all four Evangelists and the Lord himself.

Medieval history affords a third pontificate eerily akin to Bergoglio's. The aged hermit Pietro Angelerio reigned for but five months in 1294 as Celestine V before he became the last pope till Benedict XVI to quit the papacy by voluntary abdication. His paranoid successor refused to allow him to return to his remote hermitage, instead placing him under house arrest in which he died within a year. Oh dear, the one who followed Celestine on the *cathedra Petri* was none other than the megalomaniac Boniface VIII (1294–1303), whom Luther does not exactly commemorate as "of blessed memory" in the Smalcald Articles. Reunion with the East and reconciliation with the Lutherans will not come about till Rome disavows Boniface's claim that "it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pontiff." Perhaps, though, I should apologize at least to the shades of Stephen VI and Urban VI for the discourtesy of comparing them with Bergoglio, whose ongoing war against the Christ of the Gospels compels no other conclusion than that he exudes Antichrist from his every pore.

John Stephenson

Pentecost in Light of John 17:4

Throughout the history of the church, the Gospel of John has been read on Pentecost. Even the three-year lectionary, with all its changes, keeps a section of John for the Gospel lesson each year. Despite never mentioning the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost and instead placing the giving of the Spirit on the day of resurrection, John says more about Pentecost than any other Gospel, just as John speaks more of the Spirit's work in the verbal inspiration of Scripture and its inerrancy than any other writing of the New Testament, yet never explicitly mentions it.

John 14:23–31, the Gospel for the historic lectionary, together with John 7:37–39 and John 15:26–27; 16:4b–15, the Gospels for years "A" and "B" for the three-year lectionary, all speak clearly to the Spirit's work. But I would like to point out a text that has been neglected in this regard, misinterpreted, and explained away, and yet speaks most pointedly to it: John 17:4, the words of Jesus to his Father, "I have glorified you on earth, having finished the work you gave me to do."

There's an apparent problem with this text, or at least it has seemed that way to many. Jesus says this before he suffers and dies, which of course is the great climax of John's Gospel. He speaks of the Son of God being glorified and exalted in the suffering of his cross to his Father before this great salvific and revelatory event of the cross. "I have glorified you on earth, having finished the work you gave me to do." What does the preacher do? The easy solution is to say Jesus is speaking proleptically, that he is including his cross and suffering in the work that has already been accomplished because it is as good as accomplished. He will do it. He will not fail to do his Father's will. Consequently, he prays as if it has already happened. Similarly, Isaiah can speak of an event six hundred years in the future as if it has already taken place: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. . . . And you have laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . . For the transgressions of my people he was stricken." This, without doubt, is true. The cross is always in view. Jesus' mission is to die, as well as its outcome is assured. The immutable God in the conversation of the eternal Trinity has established it from everlasting. However, to simply point out the proleptic significance of Jesus' words is not enough. It is not as if he has accomplished nothing in the preceding three years. Additionally, his attention is specifically on his apostles, that he has lost none of them, except the son of perdition, that he has revealed the Father to them and fit them out to be preachers of his word (vv. 12, 6, 8, 20). Consequently, Jesus' saying, "I have finished the work you gave me to do," does have reference to the past, no matter how emphatically his future sufferings are in view.

The other popular option, which really isn't an option at all to God-fearing Christians, is that of the source and redaction critics. They contend that this prayer was not really prayed by Jesus on the night when he was betrayed. Instead it is the later reflection of the church on the ascended Lord's words, which, for the narrative's sake, have been placed here before Christ's death, but were actually spoken, or thought to have been spoken, sometime after Christ's resurrection. This option assumes that the Gospel of John is a literary piece, that we do not have the *ipsissima verba Jesu,* and that the Scriptures are in fact the creation of the church.

Ironically, that's exactly what John 17, this high priestly prayer, teaches against. Jesus did pray this prayer. He prayed it before his passion. Moreover, he prayed it to confirm that his words would form the church, not the church his words! Jesus' work, as we teach our catechumens, is not simply priestly, but royal and prophetic. And this high priestly prayer is just as prophetic as it is priestly.

Jesus is the great prophet, which means he is the great teacher and preacher. This he did for his apostles. He taught them as he says in this great prayer, "I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me" (v. 8). This teaching of the apostles, his giving his own words to them, as his Father gave them to him, is to establish his church forever so that Jesus will remain the great prophet, the great teacher of his church until the end of time.

The Gospel of John is replete with sayings such as we find in John 2:19–22, where Jesus declares, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Then John explains, "Therefore, when he had risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said." As slow to believe as the apostles were before Jesus' resurrection, they remembered what Jesus said afterward. His teaching of them

by the Paraclete was not the mere impartation of new information in some enthusiastic and ecstatic moment of inspiration, but what Jesus himself says it is in John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

Hence Jesus' prayer here, his assertion that he has accomplished what his Father has sent him to do, refers to his teaching of these apostles. They through their word, which is the very word of Jesus, will teach all those who will believe in the future, so that the same word of Jesus Christ that the disciples heard and that made believers out of them remains the word that the church hears and believes. "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

It is the same word. Not a word changed and augmented by oral tradition, but the same word, the *ipsissima verba Jesu,* the very words of Jesus, which is the word of the apostles, which is the word of Scripture.

It is precisely because this is Jesus' word that it focuses so emphatically on his cross. This is his glory and ours: that the eternal Son of the Father would invest himself in suffering for our sins, that God would bleed and die in our human flesh, that he would swallow his own wrath against our sin and our unbelieving flesh, and that he would call this his glory. After all, his will and his Father's will from eternity has been to win us sinful creatures back to him, so that we may be one in him, forgiven of sin and living to righteousness—sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. This is what Jesus prays to his Father. His concern is for his church as he heads to the shame of the cross not only to win this glory for her, but that he would give it to her through the word of Scripture. This is what his Spirit preached on Pentecost and still preaches today through the apostolic Scriptures.

Christian Preus

The Crisis in Preaching

Now that I have reached my sixth decade of life, I often look back with amazement over the changes and advances that have occurred during my lifetime. The "Information Age" is real, and I have witnessed a nearly unbelievable advance from the rotary dial, party-line phone of my youth, to smart phones and instant access anywhere, anytime. For the Christian, this means you can pretty much read, listen to, or watch any preacher, in any denomination, anywhere in the world. I personally do this quite often, and I have come to a very sobering conclusion: there is a crisis of preaching in the Christian church today, including my own church body, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

In one respect, this is nothing new. For generations, Christians in America have been slowly and steadily caving into the ever-decaying culture around them, seemingly eager to conform their preaching, teaching, confessing, and worship to the standards that the world has set for religious speech. Our culture now demands that no religion can be set forth as truth to the exclusion of all other religions and spiritual movements. This is especially true of biblical, orthodox Christianity.

Straight-talking preachers who preach the truth from the Bible, condemning real sins and real false teaching and exposing real false prophets in order to proclaim the life-giving and life-changing gospel, are told to watch what they say, often with the biting critique, "It's not what you say pastor, but the way you say it." Let's be honest; that's just another way of saying: "Stop preaching law and gospel because people will be offended and dollars and seats will dwindle."

As I read and listen to many contemporary sermons, it is clear that far too many preachers are afraid. They are afraid to preach the word of God. They are afraid to apply the word of God fully and completely to the people that God has entrusted to them. They are afraid of losing their status and position, their salary and pension. Rather than preach their hearers into hell with the full force of God's law in order to lift them into heaven with the bloody death and glorious resurrection of the God-man Jesus Christ, sermons may allude to the Bible but are in reality nothing more than fluff and window dressing, frosting without a cake, gravy without meat and potatoes, soothing the itching ears of sinners who need and deserve more. What often passes for preaching today reminds me of a similar situation: "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God" (John 12:42–43).

The temptation to "water down" God's word as a matter of self-preservation is ever present for the preacher. I find it helpful to study Micah 2. The people of God had allowed themselves to be engulfed by the sinful culture around them. The laundry list of sins listed in this chapter sounds very contemporary. People lie in bed at night and dream of all the possibilities in the wicked and corrupt world in which they live, and when they wake up, they do them. Why? Because they can! Nothing or no one can stop them. Their lives had become a relentless pursuit of fame and fortune, power and position. They even have a word for the preacher who might dare to call their lifestyle sin, dare to call them to account: "'Do not preach'—thus they preach—'one should not preach of such things; disgrace will not overtake us'" (Micah 2:6).

The Lord, however, is not amused. He has grown impatient with his people's desire to establish a godless society. He is angry that his people think that they have better words than the very word of God. The Assyrians are waiting and they are coming; judgment day cometh and right soon. So God

sends a faithful prophet. Micah, by the call of God and with the authoritative power of his word, he preaches to a people, God's people, who would rather not hear. He preaches the full wrath and fury of God's law. He calls sinful people to repent. He does this without regard for his own skin, but so that the skin of the people will not fry in hell. He preaches death in order to bring life. Not the fake Nirvana that the people had created for themselves, but forgiveness, life, and salvation, true life, that only God can give.

Micah doesn't leave the people in the pit of hell, but preaches them into heaven with the sweet and powerful gospel: "I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob; I will gather the remnant of Israel; I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men. He who opens the breach goes up before them; they break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king passes on before them, the Lord at their head" (Mic 2:12–13). Micah preaches Jesus! He is the King who passes before them, leading the way. Jesus is the Shepherd who gathers the precious lambs who cling to him by grace through faith. Jesus opens the breach, or as Luther calls him, "The Breaker," tearing down the walls of sin, death, and hell forever.

What can we learn from this? If the preacher preaches as God tells him to preach, folks will be offended. If Christians confess Christ as God says they should, folks will be offended. More than that, they may become downright unpleasant. The psalmist cries out to God confident that God will hear him and deliver him from those who are persecuting him: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps 27:1). He knows the cost of confessing God's truth. Faithful preachers in this world will be persecuted for saying what God wants them to say. King David knew it. The prophets knew it. The apostles knew it. Martin Luther knew it. Do we still know it today? There is a natural animosity, a fierce opposition, between Christ and his religion, and the world and its religion. Those who identify with Christ and his teaching will always be marginalized and persecuted.

False teachers deceive many preachers. In addition, their own sinful desires deceive them to believe that the Christian life will be an easy life, at least as far as spiritual matters are concerned. This is why they cower and fall away when conflict comes. But if they listened to Jesus they would know that it is precisely in the spiritual realm that the Christian can expect conflict. The preacher should expect it. St. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:12–17: "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

Preachers, especially, need to keep this in mind. Preaching the gospel and pleasing the crowd are two different things. Paul wrote, "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Gal 1:10). Christ says in John 16:33, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Preachers, you are indeed servants of Christ. You are a called and ordained servant of the word. You have the authoritative word of God. Believe it. Cling to it. Trust it. Preach it.

Clint K. Poppe

No Mystery about Mysticism

I am a pastor. I am a shepherd of the church with a flock under my care and a district roster of pastors and commissioned church workers along with their congregations to assist as I am best able. I may be too simple in what I say but I will say it anyway. There really is no mystery to mysticism. Mysticism asserts the possibility of attaining an intuitive knowledge of spiritual truth through meditation. In a basic sense it is the attempt of the finite to understand the infinite using the limited and even inadequate tools of the finite. I speak here of mankind's looking to understand and merge with God by the use of his reason and emotions, both of which are flawed by sin.

This is really nothing new. It was going on in the first century in the city of Colossae under the influence and instruction of the Gnostics. The Gnostics believed they had "secret knowledge" and boasted of the ability to achieve oneness with God by deprecating the physical and lifting the mental to divine heights. Mysticism reflects much of the same and even more. Mystics believe they can commune with God, know his mind, and determine their path in life apart from his revealed word. It is an inner notion, emotion, feeling, or sense by which they determine tactic and truth.

St. Paul wrote to the Colossians that he prayed for them, asking God "to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col 1:9). The mystic could accuse Paul of being one of them with the call to spiritual wisdom and knowledge. They would be mistaken with such an acclamation. Paul is not declaring a "secret knowledge" for understanding God. He is saying that there is a spiritual wisdom and understanding by which man can know the will of God. That wisdom is not procured by inner meditation or the emotions of mankind. Paul speaks very clearly where this wisdom of God is when he says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16).

Where is the mystery of God and understanding of his will revealed? It is not found in the center of one's mind or emotions. It is only revealed in "the word of Christ." The mystery of the Trinity, the work of redemption, the gift of faith, and the promise of salvation are made known to us in his word of truth. The Lutheran Confessions dealt with much the same matter as Paul. The Formula of Concord Article XI on "Election" states: "Neither should we permit ourselves to try to explore the secret and hidden abyss of divine foreknowledge. Instead we must heed the revealed will of God. For he has revealed and 'made known to us the mystery of his will' and has brought it forth through Christ so that it should be preached." The will of God for us and for our lives is heard in the preaching—preaching from the word of God!

If we think mysticism is only a first- or sixteenth-century problem, we would be wrong. Mysticism is just as alive and well in our day and time, yes, even in our congregations, as it has ever been. As a pastor I run into mysticism when I am confronted with a couple living together in fornication. Mysticism is heard in their response to me that says "but God wants us to be happy and we are so happy living together without the shackles of marriage." I also see it when one spouse in a marriage finds happiness in the arms of someone outside of marriage, otherwise known as adultery. This is often defended by the response: "We feel in our hearts that this is the right thing to do and just think God would want us to be happy." In each case the individuals are determining the will and pleasure of God based on what their sinful and fallen nature desires. In order to justify their actions, they convince themselves that this is God's will or he would not let them have so much pleasure with it. All this self-conversation is nothing more than Satan whispering into the ear of Eve, "Did God really say?" We find the same thoughts culturally with the new discussions arising about human sexuality. If people feel like a certain sex different from their anatomy, feelings take precedence over physical reality. The idea that one can ignore physical reality and replace it with mental expression is nothing more than first-century Gnosticism, an early form or type of mysticism.

Mysticism grew out of its Oriental founders and is still known today in the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. Both these religions declare that the individual is in himself a little divinity. For them god is not a personal being but an ultimate state of nothingness. One reaches this nothingness using the art of meditation to come to the mental conclusion that there really is nothing but an existence of nonexistence. Talk about mysticism; there it is in full color! How sad to have nothing more to look forward to than nonexistence.

We have the promise of the word from 1 Corinthians 15 that brings the light of hope to our ears and eyes. Paul confronts those who deny a physical resurrection. He tells the church that our bodies will be raised from the dead. The resurrected body will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, real, and live physically as well as spiritually in a real heaven with mansions and a banquet of food. All this is knowable by faith in Christ Jesus. All this is revealed to us by God the Father through his Son the Savior. We can know his will. We need not fear the mysteries beyond our reason and comprehension. Faith trusts what the word says because what the word says is always true.

This marvelous quotation from the Formula of Concord summarizes how and where the will and understanding of God is revealed.

We must, however, carefully distinguish between what God has expressly revealed in his Word and what he has not revealed. Beyond the matters which have been revealed in Christ and of which we have spoken thus far, there are many points in this mystery about which God has remained silent and which he has not revealed but has kept reserved solely to his own wisdom and knowledge. We are not to pry into these, nor are we to follow our own thoughts in this matter and draw our own conclusions and brood, but we are to adhere exclusively to the revealed Word. This admonition is eminently necessary. In our presumption we take much greater delight in concerning ourselves with matters which we cannot harmonize—in fact, we have no command to do so—than with those aspects of the question which God has revealed to us in his Word. (Tappert, 625)

Brian Saunders

Fearful

This sermon was preached by Pastor Fred Berry on the Resurrection of Our Lord (1 April 2018). The texts are 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 and Mark 16:1–8.

From 1 Corinthian 15:11 . . . and so you believed . . . and still do believe . . . at least you said you do. . . . "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." And that's because of the forgiveness of sins that Jesus sealed the deal with. By his resurrection from the dead on the third day! So do you think that is a fearful thing? The resurrection from the dead, I mean? Fearful or not? The women thought so from the Gospel account (Mark 16:8). And who knows if you will be afraid then or not.

You probably think not! Well, for now at least. But you haven't seen someone dead rise from the grave! Neither have you been raised from yours. Maybe when you see others being drawn out of their graves at the resurrection—who knows how you will react? Who knows how you will be then? Who knows whether you will be scared out of your wits or scared into silence? And even more so when you see yourself rise at the resurrection of the dead—when you see that casket break open. And you being drawn up—pulled up; pulled out through the dust and dirt. Hauled out by the sheer sound of that archangel's trumpet and shout of victory. Victory over your sin, death, and the grave! Made sure by your dusty dry remains coming together. Bones appearing! Bone to bone and flesh—muscles attached to those bones—nerves and skin.

Every hair on your head whose number was up is back again—restored again.

All this in a moment! In a twinkling of an eye! Faster than you can say jumping jack flash is a gas, gas, gas! And here's the kicker! All of this is out of your control. Every bit of this will happen without your control. Certainly that will be a fearful thing because you will have no say so about it! You will have no say so about rising from out of that grave. Just like you had no say so about how you got put in that grave. Sin and its symptoms put you there. You know, like cancer, heart disease, liver disease, kidney failure, COPD, or just plain old, old age. How'd that happen anyway? Well, I don't know. But I can tell you this, getting old "ain't" for sissies. And rising again from the grave "ain't" for sissies either. But it's going to happen!

You're going to rise again as sure as Jesus Christ did! And when that happens you might even exclaim in an expletive: "Jesus Christ!" And you'd be right—literally! It will all be on account of Jesus Christ . . . for Christ's sake in other words! Then you will believe like you've never believed before. No doubting. You're believers, aren't you? Sure you are! And today as at every Easter you get to confess your belief again. Ready? Here goes. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! And so shall you rise too, fearful or not!

In the Name of Jesus.

Martin Luther: From the Mystical to the Incarnate

Martin Luther grew up steeped in the mysticism of the Rhineland, or "German Mysticism" as it is sometimes called. Therefore, by the time he received a call to lecture at Wittenberg University, Luther was very familiar with the works of such mystics as Meister Eckhart, Johannes Tauler, and Henry Suso. Likewise, some of the core teachings of the mystics were embraced by the young professor, such as more focus on laity, an emphasis on preaching and teaching, de-emphasizing the monastic life, giving the New Testament place of pride over the Old Testament, a focus on Jesus and his work rather than the church and its work, and the use of common language in preaching and teaching instead of Latin.

However, although he held to these general teachings of the mystic movement, it wasn't long before Luther began to move away from the core teachings of the mystical theologians. As his own lectures on the Psalms and Romans awakened him to the paucity of gospel in his own church, they also drew him deeper into the historical, concrete realness of Jesus as gift in his word and the sacraments. Martin was discovering that a Christian faith that emphasized Jesus' example and the works of the individual Christian who followed him up the ladder of personal growth in grace and holiness wasn't biblical. In the same way, an internal movement of the Spirit and grace, which was emphasized by the mystics, was also found to be lacking by him. The force of exegesis in his biblical lectures drove Luther from believing that Christianity is a righteous person's internal, subjective experience of God to understanding the external, objective reality of how Jesus gives himself to sinners for their justification in word and sacraments.

Luther's move away from mysticism can be seen most pointedly in a clash with his colleague, Andreas Karlstadt. Luther was compelled by Karlstadt—who used Martin's earlier comments during the Psalms lectures, about how Jesus is born in us through faith and we, as a consequence, ascend into a kind of spiritual cognition of God's will—to prove his thesis that our participation in Christ's body and blood is the same as participating in Jesus' actual suffering and death. Karlstadt forced Luther to rethink what he had said in his early Psalms lectures and even what he had been preaching up to 1519. Martin now saw that what he had taught and what Karlstadt was arguing were denials and an undoing of what Jesus and his Supper actually give to sinners.

Luther understood that Karlstadt's emphasis on the inwardness of Christian faith and life is an assault on how God works through external things, simple earthly words, water, bread and wine. This inward turn also led to a new legalism and focus on Christian works for God and for salvation rather than the perfect and faithful work of Christ Jesus for sinners for their salvation. Karlstadt taught that Christians must reject vestments, statuary in churches, the word *mass,* and hymn singing; that Christians must only refer to each other as "brother" or "sister," dress in peasants' clothes—especially ministers; and that there was a particular way to break the bread and distribute the wine, Sabbatarianism was true, and self-chosen forms of self-mortification were necessary. Luther recognized in this move a "new monkery," as he called it. Karlstadt was simply pushing Jesus out of his own house by the back door of self-chosen works. For Karlstadt, the whole of Christian faith and life is meant to be spiritualized or internal. For Luther, this is a denial of the external, *extra nos,* historic, concrete, incarnation of Jesus at Calvary and in the present in baptism, Lord's Supper, and absolution. In short, mysticism is a denial of Jesus, because "the body is in the eating and the blood is in the drinking."

For Luther, everything depends on the concrete, *extra nos*-ness of the word. Christ Jesus is God's promise and gift to sinners broken by the law. His gospel is an external, objective reality announced to people by a preacher whom God sends to proclaim justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. For those bent towards mystic teachings, Jesus is little more than a lawgiver who provides uplift and guidance to trust in their own deeds in the way of self-chosen works. For Luther, however, Jesus is nothing more or less than God's treasure and gift to sinners. His work, not ours, is the means of our justification, sanctification, and so on. It is the external, objective for-you-ness preaching of Jesus in the present that makes the gospel a promise that actually does and accomplishes the forgiveness he declares to us. The for-you-ness promise of Jesus in baptism (Matt 28:19;

Mark 16:16) makes of it an actual washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit that "now saves you" in fact. It is this for-you-ness *verba domini* that Jesus is God *for you* as he feeds you with his real body and blood under the bread and wine for the remission of sins.

Luther began as an admirer and student of the mystic theologians. However, as he was confronted by God's word and pushed by peers to consider his own teaching and preaching, he was driven to focus more and more on the actual incarnation of Jesus. These conflicts between himself and God's word, and less audacious opponents, resulted in Luther's penning his great statement that is aimed at mystics in every generation, even at present: "If I want to have my sins forgiven, I am not to run to the cross, for I will find forgiveness not yet imparted there. I must also not cling to the remembrance and acknowledgment of Christ's suffering, as Karlstadt burbles. There I will also not find it. I am to go to the Sacrament or the Gospel. There I will find the word which imparts, bestows, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness achieved on the cross" (Martin Luther, *Against the Heavenly Prophets, LW* 40:213–14).

Donavon Riley

Thoughts on the Place of the Psalms in Pastoral Care

"Psalms were written by the Spirit to comfort in despair" —Luther (cited by Lubomír Batka, "Theology of the Word in Operationes in Psalmos 1519–1521," in Singing the Songs of the Lord in Foreign Lands: Psalms in Contemporary Lutheran Interpretation, *222–23).*

1. The Psalms exhibit the capacity to speak to all circumstances in life. They are vehicles for both praise and lament. "Just as lamentation is the language of suffering, so the praise of God is the language of joy. One is as much a part of man's being as the other. But it is an illusion to suppose or to postulate that there could be a relationship with God in which there were only praise and never lamentation. Just as joy and sorrow are a part of finite human existence (Gen 2–3), so praise and lamentation are part of man's relationship to God. Hence, something is amiss if praise of God has a place in Christian worship but lamentation does not. Praise can retain its authenticity and naturalness only in polarity with lamentation" —Claus Westermann, "The Role of Lamentation in the Theology of the Old Testament," *Interpretation* (1974): 27. Psalms cover the range of emotional states from the depths of despair (Pss 6, 22, 38, 88, 130, for example) to the heights of elation and joy (Pss 100, 113, 126, 145, 148–50).

2. The Psalms as disclosure of God and humanity. The Psalms call human beings into question even as they testify to the steadfast faithfulness and mercy of God. Note Hans Walter Wolff: "Above all, in dialogue with God, the human being sees oneself as called into question, searched out, and thus not so much is established for the human as they are called to new things. As is the human is anything but the measure of all things" (cited in Janowski, *Arguing with God: Theological Anthropology of the Psalms,* 12). Also, "Nothing in the psalm [Psalm 8] encourages the human beings to praise themselves: instead, everything encourages them to give praise to God" (Janowski, 13).

3. The fact that the Psalter is inclusive enables it to identify or diagnose the human condition: "For I think that in the words of this book all human life is covered, with all its states and thoughts, and that nothing further can be found in man. For no matter what you seek, whether in repentance and confession, or help in trouble and temptation under persecution, whether you have been set free from plots and snares or, on the contrary, are sad for any reason, or whether, seeing yourself progressing and your enemy cast down, you want to praise and thank and bless the Lord, each of these things the divine Psalms show you how to do, and in every case the words are written down for you, and you can say them as your own" —Athanasius's *Letter to Marcellinus,* cited by B. Janowski, 36. The Psalms then give the pastor as well as the one receiving pastoral care the words for confession, supplication, thanksgiving, and praise.

4. The Psalms teach us to walk by faith, not sight. That is, the Psalms picture a world that is true and real even though it is not yet seen. For example, Psalm 46 speaks of the city that God occupies, refreshes, and defends. Psalm 97 declares that the Lord reigns. Psalm 50 declares that the perfection of beauty shines forth from Zion. These are realities that are sure and certain but hidden from human eyes, apprehended by faith alone.

5. Spiritual amnesia is always a threat to the life of faith. The Psalms guard us from this danger by constantly recalling God's fidelity to his name and promise. See, for example, Psalms 105, 106, 107, 135, 136.

6. The Psalms not only teach us about God and his character; they give us words to speak to him. For example, the brothers Jacobson write, "The psalm [Ps. 23] does not just describe trust: *it is an expression of trust.* When the faithful follower prays the psalm, the psalm does not merely express how the pray-er feels. Rather, through praying the psalm the pray-er comes to trust" —Rolf and Karl Jacobson, *Invitation to the Psalms,* 2. Also note Bayer: "Faith in [God's] promise is nothing other than prayer" —Oswald Bayer, "Luther as Interpreter of Holy Scripture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther,* 77.

7. The Psalms draw us outside of ourselves so that our trust is in Christ alone. Note Luther's comments on Psalm 118:17 ("I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord"): "We should recognize this verse as a masterpiece. How mightily the psalmist banishes death out of sight! He will know nothing of dying and sin. At the same time he visualizes life most vividly and will hear nothing but life. But whoever will not see death, lives forever, as Christ says: 'If anyone keeps My Word, he will never see death' (John 8:51). He so immerses himself in life that death is swallowed up by life (1 Cor 15:55) and disappears completely, because he clings with a firm faith to the right hand of God. Thus all the saints have sung this verse and will continue to see it to the end" ("Psalm 118" in *LW* 14:85).

8. In the Psalms we are taught what to do with suffering. "Suffering reveals the futility of self-justification and the need for God's justification" (Dennis Ngien, *Fruit for the Soul: Luther on the Lament Psalms,* 22). The Psalms teach us how to lament *coram Deo* and how to commend the anguish of body and soul to the hands of a faithful Creator (see Psalm 130, for example).

9. The Psalms serve to orient the Christian's life by the First Commandment. Psalm 1 anchors this life in God's word and the Psalter concludes with the "doxological self-abandonment" (Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms,* 7) of Psalms 146–50. Here it is helpful to keep in mind Brueggemann's suggestion that there are psalms of orientation (that is, "creation psalms" such as Ps 104), psalms of disorientation (that is, lament psalms such as Ps 88), and psalms of reorientation (that is, psalms of thanksgiving, such as Ps 103). The Psalms work to orient us toward God as we live life in his creation, which is now subjected to futility on account of sin. Disoriented, they reorient us in the way of life. Hans Walter Wolff notes that the Old Testament has four basic objectives for human life: (1) to live in the world, (2) to love one's fellow human beings, (3) to rule creation, (4) to praise God (cited by Janowski, 248). The Psalms are reflective of this understanding of man's life in the world.

10. William Clebsch and Charles Jaekle (*Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*) note four functions of pastoral care: (1) healing, (2) guiding, (3) sustaining, (4) reconciling. The Psalms fulfill these functions even as they provide metaphors for pastoral care. For example, Psalm 103 speaks to healing. Psalms 23 and 119 provide metaphors of divine guidance. Psalms 34, 106–7, 136 deal with God's sustaining work. Reconciliation is the theme of Psalms 32, 51.

John T. Pless

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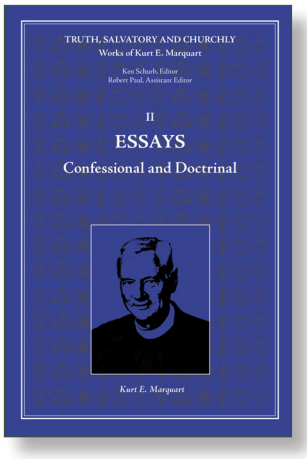
FROM LUTHER ACADEMY BOOKS

by

Kurt E. MARQUART



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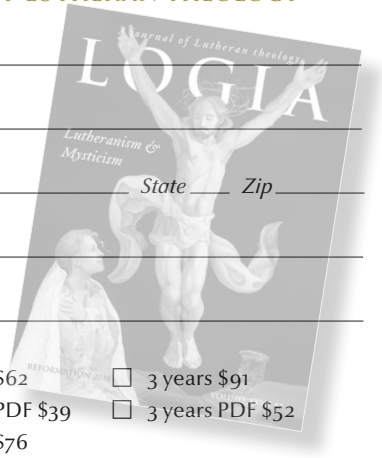

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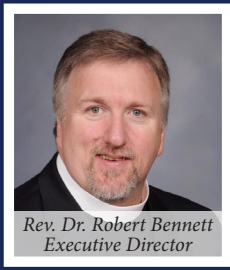

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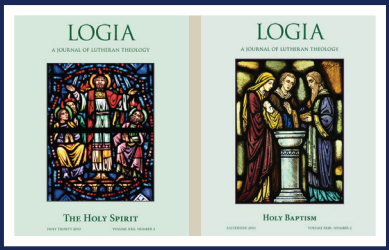

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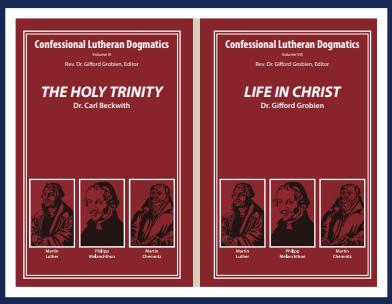

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