

# LOGIA

A JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGY



## BAPTISM & UNA SANCTA

EASTERTIDE 2000

VOLUME IX, NUMBER 2

# εἰ τις λαλεῖ, ὡς λόγια Θεοῦ

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

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## COVER ART

The woodcut on the cover is from Lucas Cranach, the Younger, entitled “Catholic Service,” dated c. 1545.

This image is taken from the left side of two blocks that comprise a double image. The other half depicts the abuses of the “Catholic Service” under the Roman papacy—the sale of indulgences, baptizing bells, a priest “saying mass” by himself, a priest “preaching” with a demon filling his ear with what to say, and so forth.

The panel we see here depicts the proper uses within the restored “Catholic Service”—Luther is preaching from Scripture and pointing to Christ, Holy Communion is being given in both kinds and to the people, and a child is being baptized.

One of the most striking aspects of the picture is the contrast between the central figures of each panel. In the right panel, the central image is a freakish court jester waving “holy water.” In the left it is a baptism of a child. Thus, the striking conclusion from the images is this: The restored “Catholic Service” of the *Una Sancta* emphasizes, among other things, the centrality of Baptism.

The cover art is provided by Concordia Seminary Library, Saint Louis, by the Rev. Ernest Bernet.

*Logia* is indexed in the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) religion database and abstracted in the Religious and Theological Abstracts (RTA).

## FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

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

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# CORRESPONDENCE



To the editors:

✧ Grammatical correction: A past issue was entitled *Pietismus Redivivus*. Problematic is that “Pietismus” is a German word in the neuter gender, “das Pietismus.” “Redivivus” is a Latin adjective and in this case has a masculine ending. Hence the correct grammatical form would have been *Pietismus Redivivum*; however, the alliteration would have been lost and the correct grammatical title would have sounded flat. The editors can stand by *Pietismus Redivivus* to demonstrate that “Lutheran Pietism” or “Pietistic Lutheranism” is not a grammatical but a theological inconsistency, something that is rarely recognized.

David P. Scaer  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

✧ I greatly appreciate the information I received in the two articles on Pietism by John Pless and Brent Kuhlman in the Reformation 1999 issue of *LOGIA*. These articles, although criticizing Pietism in the most gentle terms possible, nevertheless provide encouragement to those of us who are beset almost on all sides by church leadership that believes in the false promises of Pietism, and whose worship services and Bible classes focus on urging loving and caring activities from church members as the means for the growth of the kingdom of God.

I would like to add to the good words of Pless and Kuhlman a few more passages of Scripture that show the emptiness of the promise stating that faith in God is kindled through the pietistic behavior of church members.

First, the four Gospels tell us Jesus lived perfectly during his first thirty years on earth, but Scripture records no growth of the church during this period. In Ezekiel 14:12–20, God tells us that even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were present in Israel, nevertheless the pattern of righteousness of these three men would not save another soul. Enoch, a righteous man for his generation, was translated into heaven at a relatively young age, and at a time when his pious behavior, if beneficial for kindling faith in God, was sorely needed. In summary, God’s Word tells us that the behavior and actions of church members are not the means he uses for bringing the population of believers to completion. While love of neighbor and other good works are a fruit of faith and may be expected of believers, nevertheless Scripture nowhere indicates that these good works are the means for kindling faith in God.

On the other hand, Scripture reveals to us that God personally makes happen all of the activities and communications that bring men to faith in him. In Psalm 100:3, God reveals that the church is not even in part the work of man, but is solely God’s work and product. In Luke 3:8–9, God reveals that he can from stones raise up children for Abraham, who was one of the first to walk by faith in God rather than according to his evaluation of the world around him. In Revelation 3:9, Jesus states that he will make those from the synagogue of Satan come into the Christian church. In summarizing Scripture, the Formula of Concord states that God is so greatly concerned about my conversion that from eternity he has ordained how he can bring me thereto. God self-determines the revelation of

himself and is the ever-living, ever-working One who is progressively and incessantly realizing his own purpose (Is 41:4; 53:10, Lk 13:34). Such a God is more than capable on his own of conscripting the most unlikely of men to be his instruments for the proclamation of his judgment and grace—men such as the reluctant Jonah, the ungodly-minded prophet Balaam, and Saul, the arch-persecutor of the young Christian church.

The articles by Pless and Kuhlman are one way of providing encouragement for those of us who see how Pietism tries to undermine the revelation God has made of himself through his word to us. Another increment of encouragement will come when God begins to judge the proponents of Pietism. While God is much more longsuffering than man can imagine, nevertheless Scripture tells us that judgment begins in the house of God (1 Pe 4:17, Is 30:1–5, Am 3:2). So I rest my hope in the knowledge that at some time in the future God will visit the proponents of Pietism with distress and poverty, and with ever more irrational hopes for success, and with ever more restless and militant leaders. As God used a series of judgments with ever-increasing severity as the means for saving a remnant from the bulk of the nation of Judah, who trusted in the activities of man for the prosperity of their nation, despite the warnings of prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, so perhaps God is working to save at least a remnant of the proponents and followers of Pietism. As God continues to perform his wondrous works of judgment and grace, we believers ever more thankfully glorify him.

Larry Siefken  
Idaho Falls, Idaho

✦ Paul Strawn’s review of the three small books produced by the LCMS responding to significant ecumenical documents (*LOGIA* 9, Epiphany 2000) was woefully inadequate. One senses this right away when Strawn devotes so much space to criticizing them for looking the same. As Charlie Brown would say, “Good grief!”

Perhaps someone needs to ask Brother Strawn when any document produced by the LCMS has been of such an “official” nature as he seems to be looking for. The last time a book achieved that kind of status was Walther’s *Church and Ministry* in 1847, and perhaps the *Brief Statement* in the 1950s, and a *Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* in the 1970s. Since I do not believe that a “confessional Lutheran perspective” is limited to only those occasions when the LCMS adopts something in a convention, I would assume that most readers will rather appreciate the clarity of the title of these books.

Strawn criticizes the documents for not providing some overarching “confessional Lutheran perspective toward ecumenical endeavors.” He expects something from these documents that they nowhere claim to provide, nor were they asked to provide.

These documents provide a confessional Lutheran perspective on specific doctrinal statements: Porvoo, the JDDJ, and the Formula of Agreement. And, contrary to what Strawn suggests, there was no need for the LCMS seminary faculties and CTCR to gush on about the many meetings and all the hard work behind these documents. The ELCA and LWF press agents took care of that rather well, thank you. Their arms must have been in casts for months after all the self-congratulatory patting themselves on the back that went on. The LCMS did not have to provide more of the same.

Strawn labors under a very significant misunderstanding in his review, namely, that the primary audience these documents were written for was uninformed laity. These documents were not geared toward uninformed

laymen, nor do they claim to be. They were intended for pastors who could use them to better inform their lay people, not as a beginner’s guides to ecumenical thinking.

Strawn criticizes the documents because their “logical construction will prove the biggest challenge to the pastor or theologian — especially the pastor or theologian who is not in agreement with their content.” Are we to believe that putting these documents in whatever order Strawn thinks is better would have convinced those who agree with the ecumenical documents?

Strawn even criticizes the documents for not putting the various ecumenical statements under consideration first. The documents were included merely as a convenience for the reader. I suppose the Apology of the Augsburg Confession should have put the Roman Confutation first before criticizing it, if Paul Strawn’s thinking is to hold here.

Finally, Pastor Strawn is simply kidding himself if he seriously thinks that Europeans are sour on Missouri because J. T. Mueller’s *Dogmatics* was passed around in years past. European Lutherans are sour on Missouri because they are sour on Lutheranism.

Missouri was clearly a party in the dismantling of Lutheranism in Europe, thanks to Graebner and company’s attempt to play up to what would become the Lutheran World Federation. This is not simply my opinion; it is what Hermann Sasse actually witnessed. He had the dubious pleasure of watching Missouri totally wreck things at the very moment it should have been forcefully resisting and supporting those who resisted the LWF. Time has proven Sasse to be a prophet without honor in his own country. Missourians are quite skilled at attempting to ingratiate themselves to those who have abandoned Lutheranism, and they have done so at precisely the wrong times and in the wrong places.

For what it is worth, the document on the JDDJ alone has been downloaded over 17,000 times from the LCMS Internet site. We have received countless messages from around the world thank-

ing the LCMS profusely for responding to the JDDJ with specific criticisms of the key theological problems in these documents. This information was and continues to be available nowhere else. The seminary faculties of systematic theology of both Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, are to be thanked for their excellent analyses.

Confessional Lutherans in all church bodies should be grateful that the LCMS took this matter seriously enough to make these important commentaries available. Fortunately, notwithstanding Pastor Strawn’s remarks, many “lonely Lutherans” around the world are very grateful for these excellent, concise, penetratingly accurate reviews of such monumental ecumenical disasters.

*Paul T. McCain*

*Assistant to the President*

*The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*

#### LOGIA CORRESPONDENCE AND COLLOQUIUM FRATRUM

*We encourage our readers to respond to the material they find in LOGIA—whether it be in the articles, book reviews, or letters of other readers. While we cannot print everything that is sent, we hope that our Colloquium Fratrum section will allow for longer response/counter-response exchanges, whereas our Correspondence section is a place for shorter “Letters to the Editors.”*

*If you wish to respond to something in an issue of LOGIA, please do so soon after you receive an issue. Since LOGIA is a quarterly periodical, we are often meeting deadlines for the subsequent issue about the time you receive your current issue. Getting your responses in early will help keep them timely. Send your Correspondence contributions to LOGIA Correspondence, 314 Pearl Street, Mankato, MN 56001, or your Colloquium Fratrum contributions to LOGIA Editorial Department, 314 Pearl Street, Mankato, MN 56001.*

# The Sacrament of Baptism

HERMANN SASSE



Dear Honored Brothers!

**I**N MY LETTER OF 1 JANUARY, I had spoken to you regarding the Lutheran pastoral office and its responsibility in our time. Allow me today to deal briefly with an entirely concrete question in which the difficulty and the promise of our offices become especially clear: holy baptism.

There is no longer any debate—God be praised!—among theologians that baptism is not the changeable initiation rite of a religious fellowship of the past, but an unalterable sacrament of our Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, the will, command, and fancy of men do not provide the basis for this sacrament, but only the institution of Christ. This was not always so. A generation ago we could read in the article “Baptism, Dogmatic Considerations,”<sup>1</sup> which says, “The mandate of the necessity of being baptized and the three names ought be fought on the basis of the moral truth of our religion.” The “dogmatician” who here takes issue with the necessity of baptism and the Trinitarian formula for baptism was a theologian who hailed from the lower Rhine in Zürich, where today, as Emil Brunner reports, even an unbaptized person can possess full church membership. We must consider this in order to measure the powerful advance that Evangelical theology of all persuasions has experienced in the question of the sacrament. But as much as we in Evangelical Germany have begun once again to take the sacraments seriously, we are still far removed today from a consensus regarding the meaning of the sacrament of baptism. If this is to change, we can do nothing other than become humble students of the Catechism. In it, the church of Christ speaks a confession of the sacrament of baptism. If I fail to listen attentively to it, I thus stand in danger of speaking not of the baptism that since the days of the apostles was practiced in the church, but of the ideal baptism of a church of the future, of the new baptism of a new church, of which I myself am the only erstwhile member.

The first thing that the confession of our church teaches us to do on the basis of Holy Scripture is this, that we again take baptism absolutely seriously as a sacrament. If the world today despises the sacrament of baptism and blasphemes it, then the Christianity that no longer understands the precious treasure of this sacrament bears part of the guilt. In our baptismal addresses

we speak of God the Father, the almighty Creator, of trust in his fatherly goodness, of the duty of Christian instruction, but we scarcely know of anything to say of the nature and the grace of baptism. Luther’s great baptismal hymn “To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord”<sup>2</sup> itself is not even found in the hymnbooks of Lutheran Churches. To what extent baptism is the fundamental fact of our Christian life, what it means that the “I am nevertheless baptized” should be our strong consolation in all trials, this even we pastors more often than not no longer understand at all. First, we children of the sacramental-less (and perhaps precisely for this reason so comfort-less) world must with great difficulty find our way into the spiritual world of Luther, into the church of the Reformation, the true church of all times, which has these marks: the word and the sacraments. The lack of understanding of what the sacraments meant for Luther still stretches right into the most recent theology, which boasts that it has better understood Luther than did former generations. We can only designate it a terrible misunderstanding that when Luther calls the word the only and true *nota ecclesiae*, the opinion is ascribed to him that the sacrament is in general nothing other than *verbum visibile*.

Certainly, the word is always superordinate. “For without God’s Word the water is simply water and no baptism, but with the Word of God it is a baptism,” as then also according to Roman doctrine the word that is added to the element is that which makes the sacrament the sacrament.

Yet the sacrament is not simply a “double” to the word or a seal appended to the word or a visualization or individual appellation of the word. The terminology once given its foundation by Augustine, to which also the Reformation knew itself to be bound because it had been traditional in the West for a thousand years (and there was no replacement for it), did not provide Luther and the old Lutheran Church with the possibility of so clearly expressing the new understanding of the sacrament theoretically that later no misunderstanding would have been possible. What the Lutheran Reformation taught regarding the effect of baptism, of the supper (and in accordance with Luther’s and the Augustana’s understanding absolution needs to be added) is so plain that there can be no doubt regarding the following proposition: According to Lutheran doctrine the sacraments are not only signs of grace (*signa et testimonia voluntatis Dei erga nos*, AC XIII) rather also means of grace in the strict sense. For through them, just as through the preached word of the gospel, the Holy Spirit is given as through means (*tamquam per instrumenta*), AC v. Therefore baptism not only indicates, but rather is “a water of life rich in

DR. HERMANN SASSE wrote Circular Letter 4 from Erlangen at the end of March 1944. Translated by Matthew Harrison.

grace and a bath of the new birth in the Holy Spirit.” “It works the forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe.” The external, visible dealing of baptism does all this. It is not merely an image, a figure, a security of this happening, as the *Heidelberg Catechism* teaches, “that I may be as certain that I am washed of all my sins with his blood and Spirit . . . as I have been washed externally with water.” No, there are not two baptisms, one external with water and one internal with the Spirit. Rather there is only one baptism, as the Lutherans of the sixteenth century untiringly emphasized over against the Reformed.<sup>3</sup> It has, similar to the church, a visible and an invisible side (Luther: “All that the mortal eye beholds / Is water as we pour it. / Before the eye of faith unfolds / The power of Jesus’ merit. / For here it sees the crimson flood / To all our ills bring healing; / The wonders of his precious blood . . .”) But these are two sides of one and the same matter, just as the external word of the sermon and the internal word spoken by the Holy Spirit are one word, and the absolution of the pastor and the acquittal of God (“Do you believe that my forgiveness is God’s forgiveness?”), and as in the supper the bread and the body of Christ are one. For this is indeed the manner of divine dealings of revelation, “that the external parts should and must precede and the internal come thereafter and through the external, consequently, that He has concluded to give to no man the internal part without the external part” (AE, 40: 144–145).

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***There are not two baptisms, one external with water and one internal with the Spirit. Rather there is only one baptism.***

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It is on this basis that baptism is to be understood as a means of grace. It is according to Titus 3:5 the “washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” This is what it actually is. We are actually “buried with him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too should walk in newness of life.” The sacrament of baptism has an eschatological meaning, just like absolution, which is the anticipation of the acquittal in the last judgment, and like the Lord’s Supper as the anticipation of the heavenly meal and Christians becoming one with their heavenly head in the full unity of the body of Christ. In the sacraments God does something to us which he one day will do in eternity.

Perhaps on this basis there will be achieved a deeper, more scriptural understanding of the sacraments than that which is afforded by the sign theory of Augustine, which is not based on the Bible but on Neo-Platonism. The sacraments are more than signs. They are acts of God, miracles of Christ, in which the saving works of his earthly days continue just as does his proclamation of the gospel in the preaching of his church. Just as the healing of the lame, the blind, the leprous, and the raising of the dead were not only a “visible word” (*i verbum visibile*), but more than

that, namely, deeds in which the advent of the kingdom of God was announced, so the kingdom of God is already present in the sacraments. Just as word and deed, or more precisely deed and word (according to Matthew 11:5 and Luke 24:19) belong inseparably together in the works of Jesus, so word and sacrament belong together in the life of the church, and indeed not only in baptismal, confessional, or Lord’s Supper addresses, but ever again also in the Sunday sermon, in the Bible class, and in confirmation instruction, which indeed, in distinction from the rest of the ecclesiastical instruction, should properly be instruction regarding the sacraments. If you will allow a parenthetical remark, our own experience has shown how fruitful for the life of the congregation Bible classes on the sacraments can be. This of course presupposes that the pastor possesses a real picture of the life of the church of the New Testament centered on the divine service, and not merely a pietistic caricature of primitive Christianity, which since Gottfried Arnold has ruled Protestantism.

In such proclamation the baptismal address will again become a clear, joyous testimony of the miracle of regeneration, of the death of the old man and the birth of the new, which will happen in my death and in the resurrection at the last day, but which in my baptism has already happened and which accompanies my entire life as a present reality, insofar as “the old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” [SC IV].

If the sacrament of baptism is to be understood in this sense as the miraculous deed of God in which that is already present which shall become of me in the eschatological consummation, then it is clear that baptism and faith belong inseparably together, that the blessings of baptism never obtain without faith: “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved. But he who does not believe will be condemned” [Mk 16:16].

This connectedness is, however, not to be understood as though faith in all circumstances must precede baptism, as though only he could be baptized who has previously confessed his faith. That this historically was the primary and dogmatic norm is proven by the baptismal liturgies of the Christian churches, which with entirely insignificant exceptions (e.g., the Nestorians) carry out the baptism of children according to the liturgy used for adult baptism. Just why did this happen? It is the height of senselessness for the sentiments of modern man when in Luther’s *Little Baptismal Book* [*Taufbüchlein*] and in the old agendas of our church, the child continues to be asked whether it forsakes the devil, if it will be baptized according to its faith, and if it will affirm the question “Will you be baptized?” But it is not merely avowed liturgical conservatism or even thoughtlessness when the church for nearly two thousand years has thus baptized infants, as though they were adults, as though they could already confess with the mouth and believe with the heart. This is not the “as though” of mere fiction. It is much rather connected with the eschatological “as though” of the sacrament of baptism. God views us in baptism as people who have already died and been raised, put to death with his beloved Son on Golgotha and raised from the dead on Easter morning. Thus he already views us as such who already believe, the poorest, weakest little child that we bring to holy baptism in “the understanding and hope that it will



believe” in a way no different from a Basil, an Ambrose, an Augustine, who as grown men and conscious Christians came to baptism. He views us as such who are included in the high-priestly prayer that Jesus Christ spoke for his apostles and for his church of all centuries: “But I pray not only for them, but also for those who through their word will believe in me” [Jn 17:20].

For even as believers we are all merely like such who, as the infants in the old baptismal liturgy, pray for faith. As believers we are merely those who there say, “I believe, dear Lord, help my unbelief!” Whatever we may think of Luther’s theological attempts to help explain the faith of children, we must grant this much, that the unbelief, the human incapability to believe in God, is the same for all the children of Adam, and that faith in every case is a psychologically inconceivable miracle of God. It is on this basis that Luther’s proposition is to be understood, “that the most certain baptism is the baptism of the child. For an older man may deceive, and as a Judas come to Christ and allow himself to be baptized, but a child cannot deceive, and comes to Christ in baptism, as John [the Baptist] came to him (Lk 1:41), and as the little child is brought to him, that his word and work go over it, stir and make it holy: because his word and work can not go out for nothing” (AE, 40: 244).

Thus the baptism of children for the Lutheran Church as for the Catholic Churches of the East and the West has never been a serious theological problem. Over against the Baptists of all persuasions who saw in the introduction of the baptism of children a fall of the church into sin, a corruption of the sacrament, we can hold up the *Large Catechism*, “That the baptism of children is pleasing to Christ, is sufficiently proved from his own work, namely, that God has sanctified many who have been thus baptized and has given them the Holy Spirit. . . . Now if God did not accept the baptism of infants, he would not have given any of them the Holy Spirit.”

The question of the baptism of children has ever and again become a terrible problem for the Reformed churches, the discussion of which has shaken the church to its very foundation. For this church baptism is not a means of grace in the strict sense, but only a sign of grace. We can best make clear the distinction that exists between the confessions and their respective positions in the case of emergency baptism. The Reformed confessions and church orders forbid emergency baptism by laymen. Whether a child dies baptized or unbaptized, that does not alter his eternal fate in the least. Baptism gives the child nothing that he did not already possess as a child of Christian parents (1 Cor 7:14) and as an object of divine predestination. It is only a (to be sure, very important) sealing, a sign of divine grace. The Reformed Church does not recognize a necessity of baptism for salvation, as the rest of Christianity teaches on the basis of John 3:5 (though our church does not thereby deny that God may also have still other ways hidden from us), to save a human child from eternal destruction. From its completely different understanding of baptism and the sacraments in general (it has to do with a difference that is hidden under the superficiality of the Augustinian terminology common to the western churches) it is explained that the question of the legitimacy of the baptism of children, which once was directed to the churches of the Reformation by the Anabaptists, was never settled among the Reformed. Zwingli and Calvin, and with them

the old Reformed confessions, decidedly rejected the Anabaptists. But the decisive biblical basis for their maintaining the baptism of children was the thought that is completely at the periphery of the New Testament doctrine of baptism: the parallel to circumcision as the covenant sign of the Old Testament people of God. If this foundation is discerned as theologically insufficient and the *Volks-churchly* ideology tied together with it as untenable, then the Reformed Church is presented with the immediate necessity of a revision of its baptismal doctrine and practice.

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***God views us in baptism as people who have already died and been raised, put to death with his beloved Son on Golgotha and raised from the dead on Easter morning.***

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This revision is in process today. Already a few years ago Karl Barth presented theses in which he rejected the baptism of infants because the testimony to be rendered by the baptized himself to the Christian faith and his desire to join the Christian congregation should be one of the indispensable considerations of Christian baptism. The baptism of children, which owes its origin to a false understanding regarding the relationship of church and fellowship, is to be replaced by an ecclesiastical presentation of the newborn, which does not do away with the [later] acceptance into the congregation. A change of present-day baptismal practice, however, could not take place on the basis of the opinion of one individual. It would rather only come in the form of an ecclesiastical decision. Barth already in these theses resisted all too-rash Baptist consequences on the basis of his doctrine of baptism. In a lecture of 1943 on “The Ecclesiastical Doctrine of Baptism” he sought to accomplish a delineation against all Anabaptist practice. The baptism of children would be a corruption not of the essence, but rather of the ordinance and practice of baptism, and a repetition of baptism under all circumstances would be inadmissible, indeed, a blaspheming of God, as Vilmar had correctly stated. What separates Barth from the Baptists of all times is the sense for the objective character of the sacrament as a divine institution, whose power rests not upon a human will and action, but rather on the divine pledge included therein. What brings him together (against his will) with the Baptists in contesting the baptism of children is his Reformed doctrine of the sacrament as a mere sign of grace. “Christian baptism is in its essence the image of the renewal of the man through his participation in Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection, consummated by the power of the Holy Spirit; and therewith [it is] the image of his coordination to him, to the covenant of grace, and to the fellowship of his church concluded and affected in him.” “The effect of baptism consists in this, that the baptized man is once for all placed under the sign of hope, by virtue of which he here and now has death already



behind and only life ahead. . . .” If the sacrament is only a sign, not a means of grace, if it has only cognitive and not causative or generative significance, as Barth says, then the miraculous act of divine mercy does not happen in it. Then the baptism of children has in fact lost its meaning. It would then certainly have to be seriously asked whether or not then the Baptists have it right, who see in the baptism of children a corruption of the essence and not only of the ordering and practice of baptism. Perhaps they are indeed more consistent than the great consistent perfecter of the theology of Calvin.

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***If it has only cognitive and not causative or generative significance, then the miraculous act of divine mercy does not happen in it.***

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We can await with suspense the echo that the new doctrine of baptism that understands itself as the consistent Reformed doctrine will find in the Reformed churches of Germany and the world. It also has great significance for us Lutherans, and indeed not only because it knocks on the door of our church. For it comes at a time when Lutheranism has been broadly Calvinized, and it finds disciples among us, disciples who are ready to read the new doctrine into the Lutheran Confessions and then with pleasure to discover it there. No, the proper significance of the doctrine put forth by Barth with his characteristically sharp thought and suggestive power, as with Reformed doctrine in general, is this: it requires us to prove anew that our own doctrine of the sacrament is scriptural. This is not to try to justify it at all costs, but rather to bow to the one Word of God, the sole judge, rule, and norm of all doctrine, with complete seriousness. The task placed before us thereby dare not be confused with the problem of under which presuppositions the baptism of children, if it is scriptural, can still be practically exercised in an age of the decay of the *Volks*-church and the dissolution of ecclesiastical customs. All churches alike face this question, the Catholic Church just as much as the Protestant, the Lutheran just as the Reformed. If, as expected, the great discussion of the sacrament of baptism ends with a new and deeper understanding of baptism, including the baptism of children as it was practiced in the church from the earliest times, apparently already in the apostolic age (compare Joachim Jeremias, *Hat die älteste Christenheit die Kindertaufe geübt?* 1938), then it will certainly have to become the most important concern of the church to exercise the most serious church discipline to protect the sacrament of baptism, like the sacrament of the altar, from profanation and thereby decay. There is much more of a theological and practical nature that could be said on the question of baptism and particularly regarding the document by Barth, but this will have to suffice for now.

Honored brothers, this letter will reach you in the church's time of joy between Easter and Pentecost. We celebrate it this time in a terrible period of war, filled with grief for so many fallen brothers and with concern for the future of our people. Perhaps it would be a service to our own souls and an act of genuine care for the souls of those entrusted to us, if once more we prayerfully and contemplatively read the fourth chief part in the Large Catechism and convey something of the great consolation of baptism, which is there testified to, into our congregations.

I greet you in the bond of the faith,  
Your Hermann Sasse

#### NOTES

1. "Taufe, dogmatisch," RGG 1, ed. v (1913): 1107.
2. "Christ, unser Herr, zum Jordan kam," *LW*, #223; *ELH*, #247.
3. E.g., Jacob Andreae against Beza at the Mömpelgard Colloquy.

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# Hidden in Christ

## A Baptismal Perception of the Imperceptible

TROY DAHLKE



*“You are my hiding place;  
you will protect me from trouble  
and surround me with songs of deliverance” (Ps 32:7).*

THE GOSPEL ADDRESSES PEOPLE WHERE they are. Human malady is multifaceted and penetrates every aspect of life on this side of heaven. There is no place where its effects are not felt. Individuals suffer from such things as loneliness, alienation, oppression, lack of self-worth, self-hatred, and guilt. The gospel finds them in suffering, deals with their affliction, and provides substance for their daily, personal lives.

The raging debates over the nature and impact of sin have produced numerous descriptions of the human condition, some helpful, others not. For those who find verification in Scripture *and* life, the gospel is properly articulated to address the particularities of the ailment. Thus the message of Emmanuel may prove especially comforting to the lonely. This proposal is an effort to deal primarily with real, actual sin, in a practical manner. While it does not, and cannot, avoid the question of original sin, it aims to speak to those of us who know they have sinned, both against God and neighbor. It is for those who struggle with guilt, remorse, and the inability to believe, in the face of all contrary appearances, that God has put away their sin and remembers it no more. This is for those like Peter, who wept bitterly; Paul, the chief of sinners; David, the adulterer and murderer; and me, who feels sin daily and cries with David,

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love. . . .  
For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me.  
Against you, you only, have I sinned” (Ps 51).

God graciously does not leave us to wallow, consciously or unconsciously, in sin. God comes looking for us where we hide, and provides for us a safe place to reside.

### NEEDING A HIDING PLACE

#### *The Alien Work of God*

*“The LORD will rise up . . . he will rouse himself . . . to do his work,  
his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task” (Is 28:21).*

Always keep in mind your last end, and how you will stand before the just Judge from whom nothing is hid. . . .  
“Lord, your judgments thunder against me. My limbs tremble and shake with fear, and my soul is horribly afraid. I stand awestruck. . . . There can be no holiness, Lord, if you withdraw.”<sup>1</sup>

Ever since God walked through the garden in the cool of the day, causing fear to grip the rebellious creatures, the approach of God presses the sinner to find a place to hide. God’s one commandment was broken, sin was committed, and their eyes were lowered to themselves. Before, they had their eyes on God and had their hands stretched out in service to creation, but when the footsteps of God were heard, their eyes saw their nakedness and their hands withdrew to cover themselves. The coming of God revealed to them their new sinful condition of being “like God.” Sinners cannot bear the sight of themselves in God’s presence. They need a place to hide. The imminent appearance of God in death or at the consummation of the age weighs heavily in the conscience of the religious and unreligious alike. It is often enough to drive even the most confident to despair. Since “there is no one righteous, not even one” (Rom 3:10), humanity collectively has a sense of its nakedness. History is replete with humanity’s attempts to find or construct hiding places of its own. God knows, however, that there is no place of security outside of him. Therefore, God searches for sinners where they hide and unmasks their false sense of security. Idolatry, failure to take sin seriously, and denial are all makeshift shelters that, finally, furnish no safe haven. The Lord has roused himself to do his strange and alien work: flush us from unsafe shelters and expose the reality of our sin.

“When God speaks, shows his wrath, is angry, punishes, gives us into the hands of our enemies, sends plague, hunger, [etc.] . . . it is a certain sign that he is gracious to us and seeks our welfare.”<sup>2</sup> God is driving us from our hiding place in the darkness of our sin to the hiding place under the shelter of his wings. In fear we can see this. But God is strange and works not according to our ways. For if he says, “I will no longer punish you but be silent, withdraw my wrath from you, and let you go on and do whatever you want,

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as you think best,” it is a sign that he has turned away from us.<sup>3</sup> Perception provides no security. As sinners living in a fallen world, we fear God not only when God’s approach sends us scurrying for shelter out of fear, but also when life seems to be fine. There is simply no escape from the alien work of God. When our conscience is troubled, God horrifies. When it is not, we are left to wonder if God cares. Our fundamental problem is our inability to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Our relationship with God is the chief relationship. All others flow from it and are affected by it. Because we have destroyed this relationship in open rebellion, by original and actual sin, the whole of our lives is affected. We need a place to go: a place where our conscience can rest from all that the eye sees, the heart feels, and the mind thinks. We need a place to hide from the alien, wrathful God whose footsteps thunder in our ears.

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***While God is One, God seems, at least on this side of heaven, to be of two minds: indeed, to be two gods.***

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While God is One, God seems, at least on this side of heaven, to be of two minds: indeed, to be two gods. We hear with Moses the proclamation that the Lord is a “compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love” (Ex 34:6). But when God is performing his alien work, he can seem anything but compassionate—God can seem like a killer. As the nature of sin and guilt is realized by God’s approach, so are the perilous consequences of living in false security.

If we only had to address “the good-naturedness of the good Lord,” Jesus would never have had to die. Then there would have been no need for the sacrificial action and suffering by which He took upon His shoulders the weight of the whole world. . . . What is at work here is the miracle through which God conquered the *ira dei* [wrath of God] by means of His love. Here pain and anguish struggle in God Himself. And there, here again, beats the heart that trembles and loves and pities and suffers with me. . . . God the Judge wrestled with God the Father—and God the Father won.<sup>4</sup>

The hiding place from God is God. We hope in God’s love against God’s wrath. Our lives, hope, and future fundamentally do not exist within ourselves, but in God. Here we find Christ who is with us in our sin. When the alien work of God is done, and we flee from our sinful, idolatrous hiding places, we are driven into the wilderness of despair. It is here, in the wilderness, where only serpents and scorpions live, that Christ dwells among us. God performs the alien work *solely* to perform his proper work: to lead us to Christ. The alien work of God must never be abstracted from the proper work, but must be understood as the servant of it. It is in our flight into the wilderness that we encounter Christ: Emmanuel.

God’s vengeance did not strike the sinners, but the one sinless man who stood in the sinners’ place. . . . That was the end of all phony thoughts about the love of God, which do not take sin seriously. God hates and redirects His enemies to the only righteous One, and this One asks forgiveness for them. Only in the cross of Jesus Christ is the love of God to be found.<sup>5</sup>

We can try to find our own place to hide, or we can hide behind the Crucified. In Christ, and Christ alone, do we find the God who suffers with us and, perhaps more importantly, *for* us. Only in Christ do we behold the love of the Father who does not frighten, but comforts the frightened with overwhelming forgiveness. No matter how terrible the sin or severe God’s strange work, Christ’s forgiveness and love are infinitely greater.

In the Christian life, as temptation, failure, and conscience press down upon us, it is to the Crucified that we run. This is not to some mystical or “out-there” Jesus who we hope is real; it is to a certain Jesus who has given us himself when he placed his name upon us in baptism. When the alien God crushes, when everything looks contrary to the fact that God loves us, we retort, “But I am baptized! And if I am baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life.”<sup>6</sup> The baptism into which we have been baptized is one, as the Nicene Creed confesses. It is the “objective” baptism of Jesus located in history and the “subjective” baptism of the individual in water with the word throughout history. In this baptism, the whole life of the Christian is properly located. The alien work of God forces us to look outside ourselves for a safe place to hide: to our baptism (near genus) and to Christ’s (remote genus).

#### A PLACE TO HIDE

##### *The Baptism of Jesus (Objective Justification)*

When James and John approached Jesus with a theology-of-glory question, he gave them a theology-of-the-cross answer. “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” (Mk 10:38).<sup>7</sup> The disciples knew not what they asked.

In Mark the verbs are present—“the baptism that I am being baptized with,” “the cup that I am drinking.”. . . The baptism of Jesus is his whole existence in the form of a servant, all that is included in his being upon earth “not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. . . .” The essential meaning of Jesus’ baptism is precisely that he was “numbered with the transgressors” and “bare the sin of many.”<sup>8</sup>

The baptism Jesus spoke of was not what the disciples had in mind. His baptism was not one of power, glory, and strength, but was one of judgment, wrath, and weakness. Christ would be identified with sinners and would bear the full brunt of God’s strange activity. His baptism included the cross and death.

He was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,  
and by his wounds we are healed (Is 53:5).

It is into this baptism that Christ has brought his disciples. Christ said to them, “You will drink the cup I am drinking and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with” (Mk 10:29).



According to the New Testament, all men have in principle received baptism long ago, namely on Golgotha, at Good Friday and Easter. There the essential act of baptism was carried out, entirely without our cooperation, and even without our faith. There the whole world was baptized . . . in Christ [who] “first loved us.”<sup>9</sup>

The objective baptism of Christ in history is the unchangeable basis for the appropriation of the forgiveness of sins to all believers. Where baptism is, there is the forgiveness of sins.

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*In the shadow of the cross, we can relax our hands, which were drawn back in shame, and again stretch them out in service.*

---

The whole question is our standing before God. Everything, as Luther contended, is in response to the question of God’s disposition towards us. In the baptism of Jesus Christ we find the answer. “The decisive thing about Christ is that God has opened his heart to us in the person, activity, and history of Jesus Christ and thus gives us certainty about how he feels about us and what he intends to do with us. . . . [Christ] is ‘the mirror of God’s fatherly heart.’”<sup>10</sup> What has Christ done to show us the heart of the Father? He became

the greatest thief, murderer, adulterer, robber, desecrater, blasphemer . . . there has ever been anywhere in the world. He is not acting in His own person now. Now He is a sinner, who . . . has and bears all the sins of all men in His body—not in the sense that He has committed them but in the sense that He took these sins, committed by us, upon His own body, in order to make satisfaction for them with His own blood.<sup>11</sup>

Because of what Christ has done for us in his baptism (life, death, resurrection), we know exactly how God feels about us: we are cherished in God’s heart. The baptism of Jesus is the only safe place to hide, but what a wonderful place it is!

#### HIDDEN IN CHRIST

##### *The Sacrament of Holy Baptism (Subjective Justification)*

“To be baptized ‘into Christ’ . . . is to be ‘baptized into his death’ (Rom 6:3). . . . Behind Christian baptism stands the baptism, unique and all-inclusive, undertaken by Jesus himself for the sins of the whole world.”<sup>12</sup> The water used in Christian baptism “is a very different thing from all other water. . . . God himself stakes his honor, his power and his might on it. Therefore it is not simply a natural water . . . for it contains and conveys all the fullness of God.”<sup>13</sup> As in the Creed, God gives us himself in baptism. Christ is the one doing the baptizing. He gives what he says: he

gives his name. By placing his name on us, Christ pulls us onto the cross, carries us into his tomb, and quickens us with his resurrection. In baptism, “I am not the one who decides for or against my salvation in my now and my here, but . . . it is God who makes that decision.”<sup>14</sup> There is nothing left to doubt. When God deals strangely with us and we must rejoin, “But I am baptized,” we do so knowing that in Christ’s baptism, God the Father conquered the *ira dei* (anger of God). “Therefore, [the baptized] can with confidence boast in Christ and say: ‘Mine are Christ’s living, doing, and speaking, his suffering and dying, mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered, and died as he did.’”<sup>15</sup> Now, when the alien God comes looking for us, God finds us in Christ. As God proudly spoke of Christ, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Mt 3:17), so God proudly speaks of us.

The Christian’s identity, however, is not simply swallowed by Christ’s. In baptism, “the Christian is addressed by God in a wholly personal way, is called by name, and is accepted personally as a child.”<sup>16</sup> Our particularity remains. As God looks upon us and sees Christ, so God looks upon Christ and sees us. The church’s baptismal liturgy demonstrates this. The sign of the cross is made upon the forehead and the breast, and, as the water is applied, our individual names are spoken as we are baptized into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

#### CHRIST HIDDEN IN US

##### *The Life of the Baptized (Sanctification)*

The weightiest concern of the Lutheran doctrine of Baptism [is] . . . that the significance of Baptism should extend throughout one’s whole life. And this is true not only of the chronological passing of one’s lifetime; it is true of the totality of life—the totality which always comes into question when man deals with God. The whole man must die with Christ; the whole man must rise again with Him—“daily,” that is, without interruption.<sup>17</sup>

The Christian life is a life lived in baptism, empirically as well as normatively. While baptism can play a very practical, Christocentric role in the conscious ordering of the Christian life, its ultimate significance comes from its objectivity in the ontology of the Christian. Baptism does not lay before us “shoulds,” but it states the “is-ness” of the baptized. We who are baptized *are* holy, just, sanctified, and *do* ontologically, if not existentially, die and rise with Christ daily.<sup>18</sup> Baptism *happens* to us. Christ has placed his name on us and has raised our eyes, once again, to his. No longer are we to be overcome with excessive self-consciousness. In the shadow of the cross, we can relax our hands, which were drawn back in shame, and again stretch them out in service. Baptism, while providing a safe place to hide, also restores the created order.

With conscience and hands now free, we can, do, and should live in love and service towards our neighbor. “The Word became flesh two thousand years ago. The Word would like to be flesh today, too. . . . The Word desires to be incarnate once more in [the one] who can perform deeds of love.”<sup>19</sup> As we move forth into the world, always under the protection of the cross, Christ hides himself in our flesh. Our hands become his hands.

What we need for a right relationship with God our Father (justification) is exactly what we need for holy living (sanctification). These two columns of the Christian life rest on the same unseen foundation: the forgiveness of sins. Our *entire* relationship with both God and man always hinges on this one central reality. . . . We are not holy in and of ourselves, but the life we live as baptized believers is not our own. It is the life which Christ lives in us. And since it is Christ's life, it is a holy life.<sup>20</sup>

Christ hides in us, making our lives holy. While this is true, we also need to be reminded and instructed how to serve. We must not take for granted the needs of our neighbor, but should seek to become "perfectly dutiful servants of all, subject to all."<sup>21</sup> Because we need not worry about our standing with God, all our concern may be focused on loving our neighbor.

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***Even when things seem utterly horrible, when God seems distant or incomprehensible, our baptism unmistakably affirms that he loves us.***

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Luther's morning and evening prayers offer a simple yet helpful way of bracketing the Christian life within the confines of baptism.

*In the MORNING, when you get up, make the sign of the holy cross and say:* In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

*. . . repeat the Creed and the Lords Prayer . . . and you may also say this little prayer:* I thank Thee, My heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray Thee that Thou wouldst keep me this day also, from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.

*Then go joyfully to your work.*

*In the EVENING when you go to bed make the sign of the holy cross and say:* In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

*. . . repeat the Creed and the Lords Prayer. . . and you may also say this little prayer:*

I thank Thee, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me in this day; and I pray Thee that Thou wouldst forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body, and soul. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me Amen.

*Then go to sleep at once and in good cheer.*<sup>22</sup>

The day begins with the sign of the cross and name of the Triune God, as the dominical mandate for baptism stipulates. Following the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, we pray that God would keep us from sin as we go forth into the world. This petition implies both not doing the things we ought not do, and doing of those we ought: loving God and neighbor. With the commendation of self into the hands of God, Luther's instruction is to "*go joyfully to your work.*"

Since we are in God's hands, as our baptism affirms, our work and vocations take on special meaning. Safely in God's hands, we are also God's hands in service to God's world. In baptism, therefore, our vocations take on special, particular meaning.

When I have this [baptismal] righteousness within me, I descend from heaven like rain that makes the earth fertile. That is . . . I perform good works whenever the opportunity arises. If I am a minister of the Word, I preach. . . . If I am a magistrate, I perform the office which I have received. . . . If I am a servant, I faithfully tend to my master's affairs.<sup>23</sup>

While this does not negate freedom to change vocations, it does give them meaning, even when they appear meaningless. In every honest vocation, the Christian may take comfort in the fact that he or she is God's servant to the world at that particular place and time. Baptism can help us recognize and celebrate the plurality, legitimacy, and importance of our daily lives. Christ is hidden in us.

At the end of the day, we again refer to our baptism, making the sign of the cross and reciting the name of the Triune God, and confidently ask forgiveness for our sins. Once more commending ourselves to God's hand, we are instructed by Luther to *go to sleep at once and in good cheer*. This is not some Pollyanna view of life, but a real confidence that, no matter what the day brought or the next will bring, we are hidden in Christ and Christ in us.

#### THE CHRISTIAN STRUGGLE: *To Remain Hidden*

Since baptism involves the totality of the Christian life, its primary concern is always our standing before God. The need for a hiding place remains as long as sin remains. Because the Christian is *simul iustus et peccator* (simultaneously saint and sinner), the need for respite from the alien work of God continues throughout life and into death. It is always a struggle to stay hidden in Christ. The *opinio legis* (opinion of the law) that inheres in the flesh perpetually tries to coax us to leave the shelter of Christ's cross and go it alone. Pride, complacency, and despair all tempt us to sneak out from under the cross and stake our own claim. Sin still afflicts us and, when it does, the footsteps of God again can be heard. Now, however, God is not the impartial judge, but is the loving Father who, in chastening us, causes us to recognize our error, and to return to the only certain place of safety. Just as children who do hurtful and/or dangerous things, need to be disciplined, so God disciplines those he loves (Heb 12:6). Like disciplined children who do not always perceive their parents' love, since they act so strangely, neither do we always perceive God's love. Even when things seem utterly horrible, when God seems distant or incomprehensible, our baptism unmistakably affirms that he loves us. "God alone knows the way of the righteous; for His right hand leads them in such a wonderful way that it is not the way of the

senses or of reason but of faith alone, which is able to see even in darkness and behold the invisible.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore:

However great and heavy sin may be, this article is still greater, higher and wider, for no man has spoken it out of his own wisdom, or established it, but He who created and upholds heaven and earth. My sin and my saintliness must remain here on earth, for they concern this life and my doings here; but there on high, I have a different treasure, greater than these two, where Christ is seated holding me in his arms, covering me with his wings, and overshadowing me with His mercy. You say: How can that be, since I feel my sin daily, and my conscience condemns me, and holds up the wrath of God before me? Answer: you should learn that Christian justification, whatever you may think or imagine, is nothing but the forgiveness of sins, which means that it is such a kingdom or sovereignty as deals only with sins and with such overflowing grace as takes away all wrath.

For it is called forgiveness of sins because we are downright sinners before God and there is nothing in us but sin, although we may possess all human righteousness. For where He speaks of sin there must be real and great sin; just as forgiveness is not a joke but something really serious. Therefore when you look at this article you have two things, first, that sin takes away all sanctity, however devout you may be, on earth; and second, forgiveness brings to naught all sin and wrath, so that your sin cannot cast you into hell nor can your sanctity lift you into heaven.

Therefore, before the world I will be devout and do as much as I can, but before God I will gladly be a sinner, and not be called by any other name, in order that this article may remain true. Otherwise there would be no forgiveness or grace, but it would have to be called a crown of righteousness and of my own deserving. Apart from forgiveness there is and remains nothing but sin which condemns us.<sup>25</sup>

*Coram Deo* (before the face of God), the baptized can breathe easy in the shelter of Christ’s cross and gladly be known as a sinner. Christ made His dwelling among sinners. While we need to take sin seriously, we need not become *overburdened* with what we have done or must do. Neither do we look to the greatness of our sin, nor our holiness in sanctification, but only look to the baptism of Jesus and our incorporation into it. *Coram hominibus* (before man), however, we will do all that we can and seek to be known primarily in love. Commenting on Christ’s injunction to turn the other cheek (Mt 5:28), Luther writes,

In what concerns yourself and your own interest you hold to the Gospel and as a true Christian suffer injustice for yourself; in what concerns your neighbor and his interests you hold to love and do not tolerate any injustice for your neighbor.<sup>26</sup>

In accordance with the third function of the law, our neighbor’s need dictates our response.

The life of the Christian is difficult. Being baptized into Christ can, but does not necessarily, make life existentially easier. Sometimes, in fact, it becomes harder. The Christian life is not a

glorious one, as the world accounts glory, but is one of the cross. But it is precisely in times of crisis that Christianity is at its best. Here we hear the words of Christ, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). When we are weak, then we are strong.

Luther’s transition from the cross of Christ to the suffering of the Christian and from the weakness of God in Christ to the demolition of man’s moralistic self-confidence is significant. . . . It means that the knowledge of God is not theoretical knowledge but rather a matter of man’s entire existence. We cannot view the cross as an objective reality in Christ without at once knowing ourselves as crucified with Christ. The cross means: God meets us in death, in the death of Christ, but only when we experience Christ’s death as our own death.<sup>27</sup>

In holy baptism we are baptized into Christ’s death (Rom 6:3). Daily we die with him (1 Cor 15:31) and daily we rise to new life.

Even in those times when God deals particularly strangely with us, when it seems that for no special reason suffering, pain, sickness, and loneliness have come upon us, we have a place to go. When God’s activity confuses us and leaves us wondering if he still cares, baptism provides an invaluable safe haven. With Job we sometimes say:

He is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God’s rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more. Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot (Job 9:32–35).

In Christ we have someone who suffers with us, arbitrates for us, and removes the rod of God from us. Although our senses will not be able to tell in any way that God cares for us, our baptism eternally affirms that, at the end of the day, God loves us. When we hear Paul’s words, “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1), we are, in times of trial, tempted to say, “True, but who says we are in Christ Jesus?” Baptism, however, affirms that we are indeed in Christ Jesus. This may not always be good enough for us, but it is always good enough for God. Even when we cannot see that we are hidden in Christ, God knows we are.

We need not ever worry about how God feels about us. Christ has died. Our sins *are* forgiven. Christ *is* with us and has suffered *for us*.

Lo . . . I have the greatest treasure, namely, the death of Christ and the power which it has wrought, and I am more concerned with that than with what I have done. Therefore, devil, be gone with both my righteousness and my sin. If I have committed some sin, go eat the dung; it is yours. I am not worrying about it, for Jesus Christ died. . . . Even though I have sinned, it does not matter; I will not argue with you about what evil or good I have done. There is no time to talk of that



now; go away and do it some other time when I have been a bad boy, or go to the impenitent and scare them all you please. . . . Speak out freely and say: No matter how much sin I have committed, even more than ten worlds can commit, I still know that Christ's death and resurrection is far greater.<sup>28</sup>

Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:39). When this reality is hidden from our eyes, when

sin, conscience, confusion, and death press in on us, when we have no other recourse, we reply to God, ourselves, and the devil, “[But] I am baptized. . . . In my conscience not the Law will reign, that tyrant and cruel disciplinarian, but Christ, the Son of God, the King of peace and righteousness, the sweet Savior and Mediator.”<sup>29</sup>

“For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). LOGIA

## NOTES

1. Thomas Á Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (London: Penguin Books, 1952), 60, 111.
2. Martin Luther, quoted in Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 173.
3. Ibid.
4. Helmut Thielicke, *How the World Began*, quoted in Robert Kolb, *Speaking the Gospel Today* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 132–133.
5. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: the Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), 58.
6. LC IV, 44; Tappert, 442.
7. Cf. Mk 10:38; Is 51:17, 22; Jer 25:15.
8. John A. T. Robinson, “The One Baptism,” *Twelve New Testament Studies* (SCM Press, 1962), 160, 162.
9. Robinson, 159–160. Robinson notes that in many baptismal references (e.g., Col 2:11–15 and Ti 3:4–7) it is all but impossible to distinguish the baptism of Jesus from the baptism of the church.
10. Althaus, 181–182.
11. *Lectures on Galatians*, AE, 26: 279.
12. Robinson, 158.
13. LC IV, 17; Tappert, 438.
14. Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 294.
15. *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor, Doubleday, 1962), 86.

16. Elert, 295.
17. Ibid., 298–299.
18. This distinction is made according to the application of law and gospel; e.g., when people take baptism lightly and do not refer to it in daily life, we may direct them to the “law” side of baptism, thereby reminding them consciously to recall and rejoice in it. When, however, they are troubled of conscience, we may direct them to the “gospel” side of baptism, in which they are daily dying and rising with Christ, whether they know, feel, or think of it. In either case, however, God is and remains the one doing the baptizing.
19. Richard Wurmbrand, *With God in Solitary Confinement* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 66.
20. Harold Senkbeil, *Dying to Live* (St. Louis: CPH, 1994), 163.
21. *The Freedom of a Christian*, in Dillenberger, 52. (N.B. This does not include or imply a fatalistic sense of unnecessary suffering, e.g., in abusive relationships.)
22. Small Catechism, LW, 303.
23. *Lectures on Galatians*, AE, 27: 11–12.
24. *Psalms III*, AE, 14: 309.
25. Martin Luther, *Day by Day We Magnify Thee* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 255.
26. *On Temporal Authority*, AE 45, 96.
27. Althaus, 28.
28. *Sermon at Funeral of the Elector, Duke John of Saxony*, AE 51: 242.
29. *Lectures on Galatians*, AE, 26: 11.

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# Ministry to the Baptized

GEORGE WOLLENBURG



RESEARCH DONE IN The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as well as in other Lutheran churches demonstrates clearly that less than 50 percent of the children whom we baptize will be confirmed. (You may want to go back to the records in your congregation and see what your own statistics are.) Of those who are confirmed, about 25 percent are still active in the church at the age of twenty. That is about 13 percent of those whom we have baptized. Research done by the Research Institute of Minneapolis, Minnesota, headed by Merton Strommen, indicates that only about 13 percent of the families in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have any conversation about God, daily prayer, and the reading of Holy Scripture. A study funded by the Lilly Foundation examining the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. discovered that those youth who remain with the church come from homes in which there was daily prayer, conversation about God, and reading of Scripture.

In the light of this, it is essential that we examine our ministry to the baptized, especially to the parents. It is my intention to offer some concrete suggestions for our pastors and congregations to consider.

## BAPTISM IS PRIESTLY CONSECRATION

When Christian parents bring a child to be baptized, they do so “in the priestly service of the gospel, to bring the unbelieving to God as a gift” (Rom 15:16). They bring an unbeliever, an unclean and unholy infant, born of unclean parentage and ancestry. They bring this child in order that he, or she, may be “acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:16). In and through baptism God consecrates the child to the priesthood (1 Pt 2:9). Baptism is for the forgiveness of sin and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:38). Through baptism God separates the child from the sinful past, the history that reaches back through human ancestors to Adam. “*All men from the fall of Adam are conceived and born in sin.*”<sup>1</sup> That past determines the future as well, “and would be lost forever unless delivered by our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup> Baptism brings freedom from sin since it incorporates, that is, embodies us in Christ, “who loved us and washed us in his own blood, and made us

kings and priests to his God and Father” (Rv 1:5; 5:10). The freedom from sin is also the gift of a new future: not a future determined by the sinful inheritance of the past, but a future determined by Christ our Lord. The prognosis for the future of the child, conceived and born in sin, is death—eternal death. The prognosis for the future of the baptized lies in the promise of God. Baptism “works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare” (SC iv, 6).

In and through baptism God not only frees from sin, but also consecrates the baptized to priestly service in the holy priesthood. “To him who loved us and has washed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom and priests to his God and Father” (Rv 1: 5). The biblical model for this is the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The Pharaoh is instructed to “Let my people go, that they may serve me” (Ex 8:1). We do not bring our children to be baptized only “so that if they die they might go to heaven.” We bring them in order that God may make them fit to serve him by the forgiveness of their sins.

God clothes his priests in priestly vestments. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). The righteousness and holiness of the priest does not come from within the priest, from some inner change. Righteousness is put upon the priest—the righteousness and purity of Christ. Aaron and his sons were not to appear before the Lord without being clothed in the commanded priestly vestments, or they would die (Ex 29:39–43). So also the members of the royal priesthood may not seek to appear before God clothed in their own broken righteousness. To come into the presence of God clothed in the stained garments of their own righteousness will bring them death. The present collect for the communicants preserves some of the language of the older collect: “preserve us from impenitence and unbelief. Cleanse us from our unrighteousness and clothe us with the righteousness purchased with your blood.”<sup>3</sup> The older collect is far more clear: “Keep them from impenitence and unbelief that no one may partake of this holy sacrament to his damnation. Take off from them the *spotted garment of the flesh and of their own righteousness*, and adorn them with the garment of the righteousness purchased with Thy blood.”<sup>4</sup> The psalm prays, “Let your priests be clothed with righteousness” (Ps 139:2). Even the righteousness that is the work of the child of God, born from God (Jn 1:12), is not that righteousness which enables the priest to stand in the presence of God, since it is defiled with sin. “Put off” and “put on”

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is the language in which St. Paul speaks of this alien righteousness, the righteousness of Christ.

### GOD ACTS IN BAPTISM

God acts in baptism. Baptism is his work, done by his fully deputized priesthood. He consecrates a priest in baptism. *You cannot unbaptize yourself!* A number of years ago the pope addressed himself to a number of priests who were seeking to be released from their priestly vows. He said to them, “Tu es sacerdos in aeternum!” (You are a priest forever!) He was wrong when he said this about the clergy order of his church. But his words are correct when applied to the holy priesthood. You are a priest forever. Even in heaven the priestly service continues: “they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple” (Rv 7:15). You cannot unbaptize yourself, just as the sons of Israel could not uncircumcise themselves. You can be a faithless priest, a disobedient priest, a negligent priest, a rebellious priest, but you cannot unbaptize yourself.

The question is not whether or not baptism did something inside of you. The question is whether there was a baptism. The sign of the cross, given at baptism, is the mark of the soldier of Jesus Christ. The soldier in the Roman army who received the *sacramentum* (the soldiers’ oath) was branded with the mark of his captain. He could be a deserter, but he still belonged to his captain. So the baptized are placed into the priesthood by God. They may become deserters, apostate, disobedient, unbelieving, rebellious, traitors, but they cannot unbaptize themselves. This is why any effort to repeat baptism is an act of great unbelief. We can receive what God promises and does in baptism by faith, or we can reject it in unbelief and thus put ourselves under the wrath of God.

### BAPTISM IS INITIATION INTO THE HOLY PRIESTHOOD

God baptizes through the priesthood. At baptism the holy priesthood—the priestly nation—entrusts to the newly baptized three divine mysteries. These are the hidden wisdom of God, the wisdom that the world does not know. The priestly life is to be shaped and given form by these three mysteries, this hidden wisdom. These three are spoken of in the baptismal rite. Parents and sponsors are instructed to see that the child learns “*the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer.*”<sup>5</sup>

This teaching is more than simply imparting information or having the child memorize these things for the pastor’s confirmation class. The teaching that parents are to do is to shape and form the life of the little priest with these three mysteries. This does not begin when the child is three years old and enrolled in the congregation’s Sunday school, or later in the pastor’s confirmation class. The teaching is to begin immediately after baptism, if it has not already begun. Father and mother are to pray these three mysteries in the presence of the child, so that the child will learn to say a priestly “Amen” to the prayers of father and mother. The baptismal life is to be given shape and form as father and mother teach the meaning of these “mysteries” in the daily conversation of the home. In this way father and mother carry out their priestly work. They brought an unbeliever to the font, they take a little priest home. The little priest is to be trained, formed, shaped for the priestly life.

## PRE-BAPTISMAL MEETING

### *Review of the Bible Passages that Speak of Baptism*

- ✿ *Matthew 28:19*—the dominical command to baptize
- ✿ *Acts 2:38-39*—baptism promises the forgiveness of sins—the gift of the Holy Spirit
- ✿ *Galatians 3:27*—in baptism we are clothed with Christ. If a white baptismal vestment is put on the child, this is explained
- ✿ *Romans 6:3-11*—buried and raised with Christ
- ✿ *Colossians 2:11, 13*—buried and raised with Christ in baptism
- ✿ *Titus 3:5-7*—water of life and new birth—renewal of the Holy Spirit
- ✿ *John 3:5, 6 and John 1:12*—born from above—born into the chosen people of God
- ✿ *Ephesians 5:25-27*—our holy mother, the bride of Christ, who gives birth to the holy nation in her womb, the baptismal font
- ✿ *1 Peter 2:9*—born into the holy priesthood

### *Review of the Baptismal Rite*

- ✿ “*Conceived and born sinful*”—“All men from the fall of Adam are conceived and born in sin and would be lost forever.” What is meant by “the Old Adam” (SC IV, 12)?
- ✿ *The sign of the cross*—teaching the child to use it daily in connection with daily prayer. “Who am I?” Identity is given with the Triune name and the sign of the cross
- ✿ *Task of parents and sponsors*—to teach the little priest, to give priestly formation to the baptized
- ✿ *The three “divine mysteries” by which this is done*—how to use them in daily prayer; see Luther’s Small Catechism
- ✿ *It takes a village to raise a child*—the need for the child’s weekly participation in the gathering of the priesthood
- ✿ *The divine name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*—this name identifies. We can only know who we are by our relationships: “He is my father, I am his/her son/daughter”
- ✿ *The daily use of the Ten Commandments, Creed, and Lord’s Prayer* in the home to shape and form the priestly life



An old African saying observes that “it takes a village to raise a child.” The little priest, or priestess, is given priestly form, not only by the work of the parents, but also by the community of faith. Parents are instructed to “bring him (or her) to the services of God’s house.” Without the regular presence of the little priest in the house of God, little priestly formation will happen. Children learn to be adults by imitating adults. The congregation, as the community of faith, needs to be aware of the fact that the divine service is where children learn the rituals that give shape and form to their lives. Unless these are, ordinarily, of such a nature that the little children can participate, they will be denied their divinely given right to share in the priestly service of the community; neither will they identify themselves with the community of faith.

### THE DISCIPLINING OR FORMATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD

In baptism we are made members of the priestly nation, the holy people, members of God’s house. “You also . . . are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pt 2: 5). The word “house” in this passage is used in the way we use it when we speak of the royal house, such as “the house of David” or “the house of Aaron,” which was the priestly family in Israel. The members of the priesthood are royalty, kings and queens, princes and princesses. Princesses and princes are not left to “grow like Topsy.” They are to rule with the King.

Christ has made us “kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” (Rv 5: 9). For this reason God disciplines his priesthood. To discipline does not mean to give out punishment. To discipline means to “develop by instruction and exercise; to train in self-control or obedience to given standards.” Athletes are disciplined. God provides for the disciplining of his priesthood by giving them ministers, pastors, or bishops who are to oversee the priesthood (Acts 20:28). The word “bishop” in the New Testament (1 Tim 3:1–7; Ti 1:7) is the equivalent of our word “pastor.” The word “bishop” (*episcopus*) means a visitor, one who comes to look you over, that is, an overseer.

The pastor begins his overseeing of the priesthood, instructing and training, not when rebellious teenagers are brought by parents to his confirmation class, but at the time the child is baptized. He needs to oversee the training of father and mother in their daily priestly work of giving priestly shape and form to the life of the newly consecrated priest. This means, first of all, to teach parents how to pray the three divine mysteries, daily, in the presence of the little priest. The Creed, Ten Commandments, and Lord’s Prayer need to be embedded in the mind of the child from the time of baptism, so that daily praying of these, together with meditation upon their meaning, will become a lifelong habit.

In fact, the training of parents ought to begin before the child is born. A pastoral visit to the expectant parents is an opportunity to talk about baptism, the choice of sponsors, the priestly consecration that God does in holy baptism, the truth that baptism is not a private purification ritual, but “being born again” into the “priestly nation, the holy *people* of God.” A meeting of parents with the pastor before the baptism, together with the sponsors, should be mandatory. This ought not to be a meeting simply to get the information needed for the church records and to discuss the baptismal rite or seating arrangements. On the preceding page is a brief outline of what should be discussed in the meeting of parents, sponsors, and pastor.

### FOLLOWING THROUGH WITH THE PARENTS

Since the majority of parents come from a home where there was little or no conversation about God and little or no daily prayer, we cannot expect them to establish the ritual of such daily prayer in their home without help and support. No matter how sincere their desire to do these things, they will ordinarily not do them for a number of reasons. They are embarrassed to pray in each other’s presence. Forming a new habit demands constant attention and regular repetition. Their time schedule may provide an excuse. They themselves do not know how to pray these things, may not even know the Ten Commandments, Creed, or Lord’s Prayer.

For these reasons it is essential that the pastor and congregation give active and regular help and support. This cannot be done by a “parenting class” at the church, or by an occasional sermon, or by trying to shame them into doing these things. For this reason an initial visit by the pastor, in the home, should be scheduled immediately following the baptism. In this visit the pastor has an opportunity to inquire whether they have begun the practice of such daily prayer. This should be done in such a way that the parents sense the kindness and desire of the pastor to be helpful and supportive. The pastor leads the family in the outlined ritual of prayer. It is helpful if the entire daily prayer, i.e., devotion, is printed on a card that can be given to the parents and used in the pastoral visit.

This initial visit by the pastor needs to be augmented by regular supporting visits by trained elders, the sponsors of the child after having received training from the pastor, or by trained congregational sponsors. Such visits also need to help and support the parents in using the Ten Commandments to lead their child to confess—and teaching the parents how to absolve when there has been acknowledgment of sin. Parents also need to be taught how to speak about God on the basis of the Creed in their conversation within the family. Luther’s Small Catechism with its explanations provides a marvelous tool for assisting the parents in doing this. ■■■■■

### NOTES

1. The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, *The Lutheran Agenda* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), 1. [This agenda was used with the 1941 *The Lutheran Hymnal*—ed.]
2. *The Lutheran Agenda*, 1.
3. The Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Worship Altar Book* (St. Louis: Concordia

Publishing House, 1984), 146.

4. The Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.), 290. [This altar book was used with the 1941 *The Lutheran Hymnal*—ed.]

5. *The Lutheran Agenda*, 4 (cf. *LW*, p. 200).

# “Fragments and Crumbs” for the Preachers

## Luther’s House Postils

PAUL T. McCAIN



It is perhaps no surprise that Lutheran preachers are often curious about how Luther himself preached. And there is perhaps no better source for a good understanding of Luther as preacher than the House Postils. This brief article lays before the reader some of the issues involved in the textual history of Luther’s House Postils and, happily, assures the reader that the superb English translation of the House Postils completed by Dr. Eugene Klug and his collaborators is a very reliable translation, since it is based on the best textual tradition of the House Postils.<sup>1</sup>

### BACKGROUND TO THE HOUSE POSTILS

The word *postil* is from the Latin phrase *post illa verba textus*, “after the words of the text,” a reference to the exposition of a text of Scripture just read, either the Gospel or Epistle lesson for the day. The *Hauspostille* need to be distinguished from the *Kirchenpostille* (Church Postils). The Church Postils were translated into English in the first decade of this century. This edition was reprinted by Baker Books and has been available for quite some time.<sup>2</sup> The Church Postils are not actually a collection of sermons that Luther preached, but rather a collection of Luther’s suggestions and notes for sermons. Luther’s goal with the Church Postils was to put sermonic resources into the hands of parish pastors who were struggling to preach the Reformation message of the gospel, but were often ill-equipped for the task. Since the Roman priest’s role in large part was understood to be primarily that of performing the sacrifice of the mass and not so much that of proclaiming the word, the art of preaching was lost and unknown throughout much of Medieval Christendom. Thus Luther recognized the need that existed for sermon helps for preachers. With his Church Postils (1521–1525) Luther attempted to provide for this need. The House Postils, on the other hand, were actual sermons preached by Luther. What makes them even more noteworthy is that they were, for the most part, preached to a close circle of friends and family in his home from 1531–1535. So the House Postils have the advantage of being a collection of sermons Luther actually preached, and also benefit from the thinking of a more mature Luther than the Luther of the Church Postils.

Veit Dietrich was Luther’s academic assistant. Georg Röer was the Deacon of St. Mary’s church under Pastor Johann Bugenhagen, but also Luther’s lifelong associate and close friend.

Röer participated in the translation of the Old Testament into German from Hebrew. Both Dietrich and Röer were present when Luther preached his sermons in his home.

The House Postils were preached during a period of time in Luther’s life when he simply did not feel up to the rigors of every-Sunday preaching in St. Mary’s Church in Wittenberg. Luther often referred to his call to be a parish pastor at St. Mary’s. We read remarks like this from 1514 up until his death in 1546. But during 1531–1535, Luther took to the pulpit at St. Mary’s only when Pastor Bugenhagen was absent because of his work establishing the Evangelical reformation of the church in other parts of Germany, Europe, and Scandinavia. Luther preached his sermons at home later in the day, apparently when he felt stronger.

Luther usually preached only from a brief outline rather than from a written manuscript. He gave considerable thought to the main points of his sermon, but did not make it a habit to write his sermon out before preaching. Luther’s style therefore is a combination of an exegetical and a topical approach. He was said to have been a very careful and deliberate speaker, whose tenor voice carried well, as he spoke slowly, with determination and emphasis. His preaching style made the task of dictation somewhat easy.

### CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP’S VIEW OF THE HOUSE POSTIL

The study of Luther’s sermons is becoming more popular in scholarly circles, after years of regarding Luther’s sermons as unreliable sources for documenting and understanding the reformer’s theological development. The textual authority of the sermons we have from Luther is less certain than in the case of his major treatises, because the vast majority of these sermons have come down to us from handwritten notes (*Nachschriften*) of various scribes.<sup>3</sup>

The title *House Postil* was not a title Luther himself assigned to these sermons, but one that was used when they were gathered and printed. Until the very end of the nineteenth century, the most common source for this collection was the edition published by Veit Dietrich. Dietrich first published these sermons in 1544, two years before Luther’s death. Röer had printed a smaller collection of Luther’s sermons in 1539, without Luther’s knowledge, which was not unusual in those days. Nevertheless, in 1559 Röer produced a complete collection of the House Postils. After Luther’s death in 1546, Röer, until his own death in 1557, labored at collecting and preserving Luther’s writings.

We have Georg Röer to thank for the vast collection of Luther’s works that are extant to this day. Röer produced the first truly

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comprehensive collection of Luther's Works, the Jena edition of 1559, which included Rörer's edition of the House Postils. Rörer included sermons Luther preached during those years at St. Mary's, or at the Castle Church, where the Elector of Saxony and members of his household attended church.

Until the present century, scholars preferred Dietrich's House Postils. This work was reprinted numerous times in popular editions, perhaps for no better reason than that it was the first edition of the House Postils. Because it was printed during Luther's lifetime, it was believed to be more accurate. Another factor that explains the popularity of Veit Dietrich's edition was that the original manuscript of Rörer's *Nachschriften* was misplaced for nearly 300 years. In 1893, however, Georg Buchwald discovered Rörer's notes in the library of the University of Jena. Buchwald's discovery made it possible for scholars to analyze Rörer's many notes on Luther's sermons. Today, scholars have accepted Rörer's edition of the House Postils as the better edition. For instance, Kurt Aland's *Luther Deutsch* makes nearly exclusive use of Rörer's notes in preference to Dietrich's.<sup>4</sup> The Rörer notes are also preferred by Emanuel Hirsch, who writes, "Poach and Rörer's House Postil developed from Gnesiolutheran circles because of Veit Dietrich's inappropriate arbitrariness."<sup>5</sup>

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***Rörer went out of his way to record only what Luther actually said, and, unlike Dietrich, Rörer did not try to "improve" Luther's sermons.***

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Already in 1935 the scholarly community was looking more favorably toward Rörer's notes. For instance, in the introduction to the third volume of *Martin Luther Ausgewählte Werke: Schriften, Predigten, Zeugnisse*, there is an excellent article, "The Transmission of Luther's Sermons," which points out that we have virtually every sermon that Luther preached from 1512–1546 and that Rörer's notes are more reliable than Dietrich's.<sup>6</sup>

Rörer spent twenty-four years as Luther's friend and colleague. He not only recorded Luther's House Postils but all of Luther's sermons wherever he was present with Luther. He brought to the task a complete mastery of a complex system of Latin/German shorthand, apparently of his own invention. Volume 29 of the Weimar Edition, xvi ff., provides an extensive review of Rörer's dictation methods. Pages xxii–xxiv provide a listing of the actual abbreviations and symbols Rörer used as he took notes. It is quite enlightening to see how Rörer went about his task.

Rörer went out of his way to record only what Luther actually said, and, unlike Dietrich, Rörer did not try to "improve" Luther's sermons with insertions of his own. Buchwald criticizes Veit Dietrich for inserting his own sermons in his collection of Luther's House Postils and, in at least one case, even putting in a sermon by Melancthon! (p. 3). Curiously, even though the Weimar Edition's editors were aware of Buchwald's discovery, they

chose not to devote a separate volume to Rörer's edition of the House Postils.<sup>7</sup> They did, however, devote a separate volume to Dietrich's version of the House Postils.

#### ENGLISH EDITIONS OF THE HOUSE POSTILS

Until now, the House Postils have been available to English readers only in a translation of the Dietrich edition. The Dietrich House Postils were translated and edited by Matthias Loy in 1869.<sup>8</sup> In addition to this English translation of the House Postils, we now have an excellent translation of Rörer's notes. Eugene Klug, professor emeritus at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, edited and helped to translate the volume of the St. Louis Edition of Luther's works (Vol. 13, part 2) that contains the Rörer notes. While one might lament that the Weimar Edition was not used for the translation, a look at the sermons scattered throughout various volumes of the Weimar Edition makes it clear why Klug and his translators preferred the St. Louis Edition, which contains the entirety of Rörer's notes in continuously numbered paragraphs, all in German, and in the order as they appeared in the first editions of the Poach edition of Rörer's *Nachschriften*. The Weimar Edition, when it comes to Luther's sermons, is a horrendous mess. With Kurt Aland's *Hilfsbuch zum Lutherstudium*, one is able to locate sermons by year and date and then find them in the Weimar Edition.<sup>9</sup> It is a laborious task, but at least we have some way of tracking these sermons down in the Weimar Edition.

The St. Louis Edition of Luther's Works, which was based on the earlier Walch and Erlangen editions, contains both the Dietrich and Rörer notes, in volumes 13a and 13b respectively. If one questions the textual accuracy of the St. Louis Edition of Rörer's notes, Kurt Aland's selection of sermons from Rörer's notes, as contained in his contemporary *Luther Deutsch* collection, is virtually identical to the St. Louis Edition text. Klug correctly points out in his forward that these two collections tend to complement rather than contradict each another. They are certainly not duplicates of each other. The Klug translation is somewhat free in its translation in an effort to capture the vividness of Luther in German. Therefore, close attention must be paid to the original when questions of precise word use arise. Nevertheless, the Klug edition is a delightfully done translation and is an excellent preaching resource for pastors, and even more, an excellent devotional resource for them and their congregations.

In light of the scholarship on the issue at this point, the Klug translation is a reliable source for English readers who wish to obtain a clear picture of Luther the preacher. The House Postils, which Luther preached to close friends and family members, provide us one of our most intimate looks at Luther the preacher. What was closest to his heart was what was shared with his beloved household, so they do provide unique insight into the theology of the more mature Luther. As a testimony to their long popularity, one need only view the holdings of Concordia Seminary's library and notice the many reprintings of the Dietrich edition of the House Postils in German. Many a Lutheran home had these volumes and used them regularly. On the American frontier the House Postils were sometimes a Lutheran family's only source for preaching.



Because the Dietrich notes of the House Postils were printed during Luther's lifetime, Luther was able to provide a written preface. Let us give him the last word about his House Postils:

These sermons were preached by me at certain times in my house, in the presence of my household, that I, as the head of my family, might do my duty towards them, by instructing them how to lead a Christian life. . . . I was not aware, however, of the fact that these my household sermons were taken down by Magister Veit Dietrich; much less did I expect them to appear in print, and to be distributed throughout the land. I thought they were long forgotten; but if they can please and edify others, I rejoice at it, and willingly give them as mere fragments and crumbs which have been left.<sup>10</sup>

### NOTES

1. There are some books that are nice to have. Others may be pleasant to own someday. Then there are the "must-haves." I can think of no better addition to the parish pastor's library than the Klug translation of Luther's House Postil. *Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils*, 3 vols., ed. Eugene Klug, trans. Eugene Klug et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996). The House Postils have been reprinted by Baker Book House together with the Church Postils and are presently being sold by Christian Book Distributors for \$70, a remarkable buy.

2. *Sermons of Martin Luther*, 8 vols., trans. John Nicholas Lenker et al. (reprint Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983). This work was first published in 1905 as volume 10ff. in *The Precious and Sacred Writings of Martin Luther*.

3. Recent studies of Luther's sermons include *Luther als Seelsorger*, Redaktion Sibrand Siegert, *Veröffentlichungen der Luther-Akademie* (Ratzeburg, 1991); Ulrich Asendorf, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers nach*

*seinen Predigten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988); *Luther als Prediger*, Redaktion, Heinrich Kraft, *Veröffentlichungen der Luther-Akademie* (Ratzeburg, 1986); Ulrich Nembach's *Predigt des Evangelium: Luthers als Prediger, Pädagoge und Rhetor* (Berlin: Neukirchner Verlag, 1972). Sadly, none of these works has yet been translated into English. Perhaps Concordia Publishing House will commission translations of some of these works for their Concordia Academic Press line. That series has recently released an excellent collection of sermons on Easter by Martin Luther.

4. See Kurt Aland, *Martin Luther Die Predigten, Band 8, Luther Deutsch: Die Werke Martin Luthers in neuer Auswahl für die Gegenwart* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965).

5. *Luthers Werke in Auswahl, Siebenter Band, Predigten* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1962), 84.

6. *Martin Luther Ausgewählte Werke: Schriften, Predigten, Zeugnisse* (Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1935), 3: 12-15.

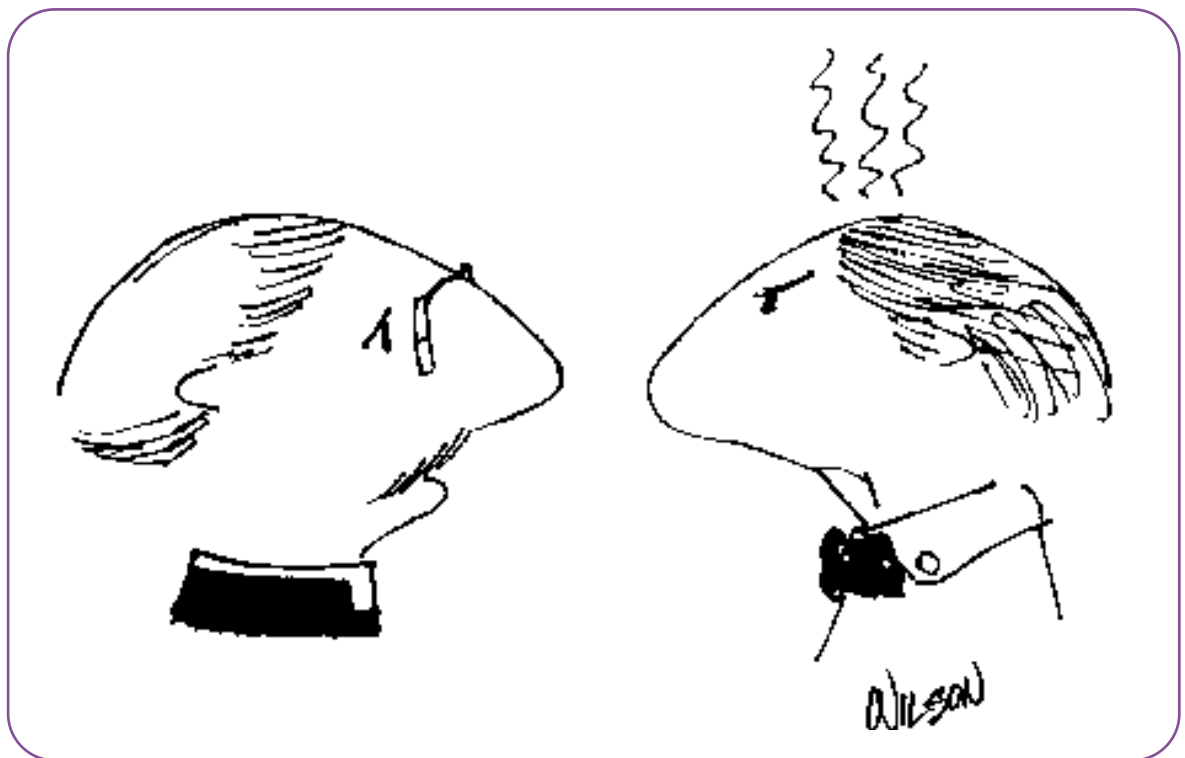
7. The library at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, actually has a copy of an edition of the original Poach/Rörer version of the House Postils. (*Martin Luther, Haus-Postilla, über die Sonntags- und der furnehmsten Feste Evangelia durchs gantze Jahr, Wie solche Erstlich von M. Veit Dietrichen bei Lebzeiten Lutheri . . . Und hernach aus M. Georg Rörers Nachschriften von M. Andrea Poach zu Jena An. 1562. Hrsg. worden; Jede mit ihren besondern Titeln und alten Vorreden . . . Jtzo mit den vornehmsten und achten alteren Editionen aufs neue fleissig zusammen gehalten, und aus selbigen von den vielen Fehlern . . . gesaubert, Auch mit einer Historischen Nachricht von M. Dietrichs sowohl als M. Rörers unterschiedenen Ausgaben erläutert von M. Johann Jacob Grieff* [Leipzig, 1737].)

8. See Dr. Martin Luther's House-Postil or Sermons on the Gospels for the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Church-Year, ed. M. Loy, trans. E Schmid (Columbus: Schulze and Gassman, 1869).

9. Kurt Aland, *Hilfsbuch zum Lutherstudium, Bearbeitet in Verbindung mit Ernst Otto Reichert und Gerhard Jordan, Dritte, neubearbeitete und erweiterte Auflage* (Wittenberg: Luther-Verlag, 1970).

10. See Dr. Martin Luther's House-Postil, 1: vi-vii.

Inklings



I'm sorry but it's true - I can only offer absolution to sinners.

*An Ascension hymn*

## DEAR CHRISTIANS, YOUR WHOLE HEARTS EMPLOY

Harry K. Bartels

(Tune: "Komm, Gott Schöpfer," LW 157)

1. Dear Christians, your whole hearts employ  
And sing to God with shouts of joy.  
O'er Christ's ascension now rejoice;  
Praise him, the Son, with cheerful voice.
2. In wondrous majesty you rise,  
God's Son in might up through the skies;  
Lo, your apostles watched you so;  
From Olivet they saw you go.
3. Lord Christ, we thank you without end  
As we in faith see you ascend.  
You are for us the very Door  
To come where you have gone before.
4. All blessing ever to your name  
That you returned to whence you came,  
And that in God your Father's house  
You have prepared a place for us.
5. Lord, you for us atonement made  
When for our sins by death you paid;  
Thus we through you may now draw nigh  
In faith unto our God on high.
6. We freely come through you alone,  
Our Mediator at his throne;  
Since you for us, Lord, intercede,  
We come e'en now in all our need.
7. Because you shed for us your blood  
And thus redeemed us men to God,  
He took you up upon his throne,  
Lord, you, the blessed Virgin's Son.
8. Though you most humbly bore sin's loss  
For us poor sinners on the cross,  
You from the womb as man were giv'n  
By him all pow'r in earth and heav'n.
9. E'er now in its full use you reign  
With God the Father on his throne,  
Lord, you, our Brother, who arose  
From death to vanquish all your foes.
10. Now gone the cross's scorn and shame,  
By him exalted is your name,  
And every knee to you shall bow,  
This to the Father's glory now.
11. O King of kings and Lord of lords,  
Your exaltation e'er affords  
Your people mid earth's conflicts calm,  
Yours through all woes unfailing balm.
12. You reign o'er all at God's right hand  
For your true Church in every land,  
And by the Holy Ghost you keep  
Your faithful as your own dear sheep.
13. Through your pure word and supper, Lord,  
Your strength by him to us afford  
To stand in baptism's holy faith  
Giv'n us through him to hold till death.
14. Your gifts and graces you bestow  
Through him on all your own below,  
That we in fervent love and fear  
Should serve you in your kingdom here.
15. For this you bid us, Lord, dispense  
Your precious word and sacraments,  
By which your holy church you build  
Till these last days are all fulfilled.
16. You help us preach your law aright,  
Man's hardened conscience thus to smite,  
Then with your gospel to console  
Each contrite and believing soul.
17. Through us you exercise by these  
The power of your church's Keys,  
To open to all penitent,  
But close when men will not repent.
18. Throughout the world you send us, Lord,  
To bear to all your wholesome word,  
And with your presence you attend  
Your servants till the world shall end.
19. For your whole flock you reign supreme,  
In might confounding Satan's scheme,  
Protecting us against his rage—  
This for your church through every age.
20. Oh, hallelujah, reigning Lord!  
Rule with the scepter of your word  
Throughout your holy Christendom  
Till you at last in judgment come.
21. For all earth's unbelieving men  
What fearful day will that be then,  
As you in wrath cast them away  
Condemned to hell eternally!
22. But for your own, what day of peace!  
Our every sorrow then shall cease  
When you, your church's Bridegroom, come  
To take us to your heav'nly home.
23. Amen, Lord Jesus, bring that hour;  
With all your angels soon appear.  
Come quickly; take us to you there  
To be with you forevermore.
24. Then with your angels, Lord, on high,  
We'll join them in their joyful cry  
To you, God's sole-begotten Son,  
With Father and with Spirit One.

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# Luther's Large Catechism: An Encouragement for Faith and Life

DANIEL M. DEUTSCHLANDER



WHY BOTHER WITH LUTHER'S Large Catechism? After all, Luther is so wordy. And besides that, don't we have all that we need in the Small Catechism, a work that we teach year in and year out? What more could there be in the Large Catechism that we have not already well understood and taught for years?

The writer could beat you over the head with the always timely reminder, "It is one of our Lutheran Confessions! It is your duty! Read it!" Indeed, that should be reason enough to read through the Large Catechism every year. But permit a more subtle pleading: "Read through Luther's Large Catechism on a regular basis because it's so . . . *Lutheran!*" There is precious little of that in what passes for Christian literature these days. There is a mindset inherent in the English language that militates against anything that is truly Lutheran. Still more fundamentally, we all are born with the *opinio legis*. It is still alive and well in each of us, and it is most certainly not Lutheran. The combination of a cultural climate drowning in relativism, the Reformed bias of the English language, and the persistence of our tendency to run wildly back and forth between arrogance and despair make Luther's Large Catechism always needed, always useful. It is a refreshing tonic for the soul. It helps us think more clearly in truly biblical terms about sin and grace, about our duty and great privilege as pastors, about the realities of our life here and what really matters as we walk with Jesus and among his people on our way to heaven. Again, it's so *Lutheran!*

It will be our purpose to reprise some of the great themes that Luther strikes in the Large Catechism, themes that are too easily forgotten and lost in our day. Those themes were lost before the Reformation. They were lost during it as well, as Luther attests so often both in the Large Catechism and elsewhere. They are never well enough learned or remembered. And we, no less than others, are always in danger of losing them too, to our own great harm and to the impoverishment of those people our gracious Lord has called us to serve.

## THE LARGE CATECHISM TAKES GOD SERIOUSLY

Perhaps that sounds trite to you. It is not trite at all. The Roman penitential system did not take God seriously. It provided a host of ways for getting around him. That is the purpose indulgences served. That is the use made of the saints. That is the ultimate purpose of the priestly and sacramental system, to find a way of dealing with God that is easy and relatively painless, that avoids really taking him seriously. Has anything changed? Rome certainly has not. Membership in the outward institution is still for many (if not most) Roman Catholics the key to the kingdom of heaven. All of the doctrinal divisions within the Roman Church ultimately do not matter. As long as one remains in fellowship with the pope, sooner or later that one will end up with the blessed.

And what of non-Roman churches? Where will we find even a handful of them that take God seriously? The fundamentalist church bodies do not. The name *fundamentalist* already tells us that. A human decision has been made as to which words of God matter and which do not, and that among people who insist that the entire Bible is verbally inspired. How is that possible? How is it possible to say in one breath that the Bible is God's Word and in the next announce what in it is important and what is not? That is certainly not taking God seriously.

Then there are those who want to be biblically conservative, traditionally Christian. One might mention David Aikman as an example. His recent best-seller is a book entitled *Great Souls—Six Who Changed the Century*. Lumped together as seekers after the truth and finders of it are Billy Graham, Mother Teresa, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Pope John Paul II, Elie Wiesel, and Nelson Mandela. Each has his own version of the truth and each one is right. Does that take God seriously?

Do we even need to mention the multitude of liberal church bodies that clutter the religious scene today? Whatever they teach betrays the mindset of Thoreau, who summed it all up very well in the middle of the last century when he said, "What man believes, God believes."<sup>1</sup> Little wonder that the fear of hell no longer motivates anyone at least to listen to a preacher. Where truth is not objective but merely and purely subjective, where fact is not the ground of faith, but faith establishes fact, one may well respond, "How can I go to hell, since I don't believe in it?" Almost no one takes God seriously anymore.

Do we? We can catch the perilous virus of not taking God seriously without even knowing it. As an excuse for sloppy doctrine and for preaching and teaching that is merely cute but pop-

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ular, we may declare, “But at least I do something, teach something biblical, try to be confessional.” And as a justification for practice that is less than what we know to be biblical and right, we may attempt to absolve our troubled consciences with logic we would not accept otherwise: “It could be a lot worse; better the gospel with a little marketing than no gospel at all!” That, however, is not taking God seriously. That is degenerating into a professional religionist, different only in degree from those we rightly anathematize for their almost total departure from the Word of God.

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### ***Preaching of the law without the First Commandment is but Protestant moralizing.***

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Spend some time with the Large Catechism and listen to a man who took God seriously. That matter of taking God seriously is one of the two great hallmarks of the Lutheran Reformation. (The other is the passionate quest for certainty. The two are intimately related.) The preeminent way of taking God seriously is taking his Word seriously—all of it, all of the time. What does Luther say of those pastors who cannot be bothered with a real and constant study of the doctrine and practice outlined in the Catechisms, much less with sound biblical and theological study for themselves and for the benefit of God’s people? Luther picks us up by the scruff of the neck and in his unique and colorful way calls out what would become the motto of the second Martin, Martin Chemnitz: *Ad fontes!* Listen to Luther’s way of saying it:

Alas! they are altogether shameful gluttons and servants of their own bellies who ought to be more properly swineherds and dog-tenders than care-takers of souls and pastors (Pref 1; *Triglotta*, 567).

And yet, these delicate, fastidious fellows would with one reading promptly be doctors above all doctors, know everything and be in need of nothing. Well, this too, is indeed a sure sign that they despise both their office and the souls of the people, *yea, even God and His Word* [emphasis added]. They do not have to fall, they are already fallen all too horribly . . . (Pref 8; *Triglotta*, 569).

After detailing the usefulness of the Catechism for repelling the devil, Luther says of those who cannot be bothered with the constant study of the plain and simple doctrine of the Bible in the Catechism:

If so, we should not only have nothing given us to eat, but be driven out, being baited with dogs, and pelted with dung, because we not only need all this every day as we need our daily bread, but must also daily use it against the daily and

unabated attacks and lurking of the devil, the master of a thousand arts (Pref 13; *Triglotta*, 571).

Can we not hear the echo of Moses’ parting words to Joshua? “Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life” (Dt 32:46). Do not the words of the Lord to Isaiah resound in our ears? “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word” (Isaiah 66:2). Did not Jesus say the same thing many times, not least when he brought to an end the written revelation of his Word? “And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” (Revelation 22:19).

Perhaps it is in Luther’s treatment of the First Commandment that the Large Catechism most eloquently urges us to take God seriously. For it is precisely in this commandment that God most fully confronts man with divine seriousness. Indeed—and it merits emphasis—for Luther any preaching of the Ten Commandments that is not also a preaching of the First Commandment is no proper preaching of the law. We might editorialize that preaching of the law without the First Commandment is but Protestant moralizing, which once again fails to take God seriously. After all, what is the real crime in adultery, gossip, stealing, and the like? It is this: I did not fear and love God enough to do what pleased him. That is the real shame, the measureless guilt, the horrible crime. In his conclusion to the Ten Commandments, Luther says of the First Commandment:

Therefore you must let this declaration run through all the commandments, like a hoop in a wreath, joining the end to the beginning and holding them all together, that it be continually repeated and not forgotten (LC I, 326; *Triglotta*, 675).

It is because of that constant emphasis that Luther’s treatment of the rest of the commandments never becomes anything like mere moralizing. Rather, throughout there is the assurance that God is serious in his call for our obedience. Moreover, the works commanded, which flow from the seriousness of God, are not at all like the dead works multiplied by the Carthusians. (This monastic order was one of Luther’s favorite targets.) They stand about all day ringing bells and singing songs that nobody can understand. They vainly imagine that they have a great and high holiness above that of mere Christians. But a child . . . well, let Luther tell us.

Therefore you should be heartily glad and thank God that He has chosen you and made you worthy to do a work so precious and pleasing to Him. Only see that, although it be regarded as the most humble and despised, you esteem it great and precious, not on account of our worthiness, but because it is comprehended in, and controlled by, the jewel and sanctuary, namely, the Word and commandment of God. Oh, what a high price would all Carthusians, monks, and nuns pay, if in all their religious doings they could bring into God’s presence a single work done by virtue of His com-



mandment, and be able before His face to say with joyful heart: "Now I know that this work is well pleasing to Thee." . . . And it serves them right for their devilish perversion in treading God's commandment under foot that they must vainly torment themselves with works of their own device, and, in addition, have scorn and loss for their reward.

Should not the heart then leap and melt for joy when going to work and doing what is commanded, saying: Lo, this is better than all holiness of the Carthusians, even though they kill themselves fasting and praying upon their knees without ceasing? For here you have a sure text and a divine testimony that He has enjoined this; but concerning the other He did not command a word (LC I, 117-120; *Triglotta*, 615).

Luther makes the point repeatedly in his treatment of the Ten Commandments that they must be diligently taught to children precisely because God is serious about the commandments, even though we do not always see his seriousness. Teaching diligently is of the utmost importance, lest we miss his seriousness and so fall ultimately under his wrath and judgment. God remains *Deus absconditus*. It is in the Word (both the written Word and the Word made flesh) that he becomes *Deus revelatus*. If we do not want to encounter the revealed God in his anger, then we had best take heed to the revealed God in his Word. So Luther says, for example, under the Second Commandment:

For by nature we all have within us this beautiful virtue, to wit, that whoever has committed a wrong would like to cover up and adorn his disgrace, so that no one may see it or know it; and no one is so bold as to boast to all the world of the wickedness he has perpetrated; all wish to act by stealth and without any one being aware of what they do. Then, if any one be arraigned, the name of God is dragged into the affair and must make the villainy look like godliness, and the shame like honor. This is the common course of the world, which, like a great deluge, has flooded all lands. Hence we have also as our reward what we seek and deserve: pestilences, wars, famines, conflagrations, floods, wayward wives, children, servants, and all sorts of defilement. Whence else should so much misery come? It is still a great mercy that the earth bears and supports us.

Therefore, above all things, our young people should have this commandment earnestly enforced upon them, and they should be trained to hold this and the First Commandment in high regard; and whenever they transgress, we must at once be after them with the rod, and hold the commandment before them, and constantly inculcate it, so as to bring them up not only with punishment, but also in the reverence and fear of God (LC I, 59-61; *Triglotta*, 597).

He speaks in a similar way in his treatment of most of the commandments. We will content ourselves with but one more reference, this time to the Fourth Commandment. Luther says:

Therefore heed well how great a thing in God's sight obedience is, since He so highly esteems it, is so highly pleased

with it, and rewards it so richly, and besides enforces punishment so rigorously on those who act contrariwise.

All this I say that it may be well impressed upon the young. For no one believes how necessary this commandment is, although it has not been esteemed and taught hitherto under the papacy. These are simple and easy words, and everybody thinks he knew them afore; therefore men pass them lightly by, are gaping after other matters, and do not see and believe that God is so greatly offended if they be disregarded, nor that one does a work so well pleasing and precious if he follows them (LC I, 139-140; *Triglotta*, 621).

That same divine seriousness pervades all of the Large Catechism, whether the subject at hand is the law in its first use or in the second and third uses. When Luther introduces each of his explanations in the Small Catechism with the words "We should fear and love God," it is clear that those words are the key to the understanding of every commandment. The fear is not, as too often portrayed, mere respect. No, it is a dread to offend against the Most High; it is a horror of bringing down God's wrath. That dread is intended as a club for the arrogant flesh, which never wants to take God seriously, as well as filial reverence in the Christian as Christian.

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***The love in "fear and love" has at once both law and gospel in it.***

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God takes the law seriously. There are consequences for sin. We take God's seriousness and those consequences lightly only to our considerable peril. Don't forget: Adam and Eve did not get back into the Garden. David's child died. The list of consequences for sin could go on and on, both the list in the Bible and the list in our own lives and the lives of those we serve.

The love in "fear and love" has at once both law and gospel in it. Love is commanded. But more than that, love is caused. God's kindness and mercy and grace create and preserve it. Indeed, Luther's seriousness in his dealing with the law foretells the seriousness with which he will also deal with the gospel. For only when we grasp the greatness of our transgression and God's seriousness about that transgression will we long, hunger, and thirst for God's solution to our problem. That solution can be found only in the gospel. Precisely because Luther is so serious about God and his word in the law, he never treats the gospel with the silliness so prevalent in our day, the silliness that reduces the gospel to "Jesus loves me; this I know; and this is all I want to know."

The gospel was not given to make us lazy. It was not given so that we should henceforth ignore the will of God expressed so seriously in the law. No, Luther says, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer are given precisely because the works of the law are so important, so high and holy that we cannot attain to them without God's gifts and grace. Since we cannot do the works of the law without God's gift and grace, it is folly to imagine that we could

save ourselves by the works of the law. Listen to Luther's introduction to the Creed:

Thus far we have heard the first part of Christian doctrine, in which we have seen all that God wishes us to do or to leave undone. Now, there properly follows the Creed, which sets forth to us everything that we must expect and receive from God, and, to state it quite briefly, teaches us to know Him fully. And this is intended to help us do that which according to the Ten Commandments we ought to do. For (as said above) they are set so high that all human ability is far too feeble and weak to [attain to or] keep them. Therefore it is as necessary to learn this part as the former in order that we may know how to attain thereto, whence and whereby to obtain such power. For if we could by our own powers keep the Ten Commandments as they are to be kept, we would need nothing further, neither the Creed nor the Lord's Prayer (LC II, 1-3; *Triglotta*, 679).

In Luther's treatment of the Creed, he gives far more than he promises in the introduction. That is so even though his explanation for the Creed is surprisingly brief. He begins, as noted above, by telling us we need the Creed so that we can keep the

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### ***A theology of the Holy Spirit apart from Christ and the Word is a contradiction in terms.***

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law. And then he proceeds to describe God in such sublimely beautiful terms that love to God, an ardent, burning, real and, yes, serious love should seem the only possible response. For in the explanation to the Creed Luther shows us a God who acts in time and in eternity for us. Why did he act in creation? Because he loved us and wanted to be our Father. Christ is *Lord*. And what does that word mean? Not, as among the Reformed: Ruler, Sovereign, or Judge. It means *Redeemer!* That is why he became man. That is why he died. That is why he rose again. He did it all to be our Lord, that is, our Redeemer! Listen to Luther's beautiful description of our Jesus:

For when we had been created by God the Father, and had received from Him all manner of good, the devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death, and all evil, so that we fell under His wrath and displeasure and were doomed to eternal damnation, as we had merited and deserved. There was no counsel, help, or comfort until this only and eternal Son of God in His unfathomable goodness had compassion upon our misery and wretchedness, and came from heaven to help us. . . .

Let this, then, be the sum of this article that the little word Lord signifies simply as much as Redeemer, i.e., He who has

brought us from Satan to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and who preserves us in the same (LC II, 28-31; *Triglotta*, 685).

Who would not love such a Savior? Who would not want to do his will?

Luther's treatment of the Third Article breathes the same spirit. Why is the Holy Spirit called holy? Because it is his special work to make us holy! Again, how Lutheran! How different from the Reformed or the Roman Catholics! The Holy Spirit is not and must not be separated from Christ who won our holiness. And he must not be separated from the word by which that holiness is made our own. How refreshing! For Luther, for the Scriptures, a theology of the Holy Spirit apart from Christ and the Word is a contradiction in terms. Thus:

For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him, and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the Gospel. . . . That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and appropriate it to us. Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves (LC II, 38-39; *Triglotta*, 689).

And then as he brings his explanation of the Third Article to a close, there is this absolutely magnificent section, a section that shows the beauty of the gospel in all its divine seriousness:

Behold, here you have the entire divine essence, will, and work depicted most exquisitely in quite short and yet rich words, wherein consists all our wisdom, which surpasses and exceeds the wisdom, mind, and reason of all men. . . . But here we have everything in richest measure; for here in all three articles He has Himself revealed and opened the deepest abyss of his paternal heart and of His pure unutterable love. For He has created us for this very object, that He might redeem and sanctify us; and in addition to giving and imparting to us everything in heaven and upon earth, He has given to us even His Son and the Holy Ghost, by whom to bring us to Himself (LC II, 63-64; *Triglotta*, 695).

And then this:

The latter doctrine [of the Law], therefore, makes no Christian, for the wrath and displeasure of God abide upon us still, because we cannot keep what God demands of us; but this . . . brings pure grace, and makes us godly and acceptable to God. For by this knowledge we obtain love and delight in all the commandments of God, because here we see that God gives Himself entire to us, with all that He has and is able to do, to aid and direct us in keeping the Ten Commandments—the Father, all creatures; the Son, His entire work; and the Holy Ghost, all His gifts (LC II, 68-69; *Triglotta*, 697).

What could be further removed from the religiosity that seeks to avoid God and find ways around him? How could a pastor degenerate into a mere professional, a time-server, who lives with this description of God and ponders it day and night? The Large Catechism takes God seriously. How wonderful that is! What a heritage is ours!

#### THE LARGE CATECHISM TAKES MAN SERIOUSLY

There was a Lutheran butcher in Germany during the second Crypto-Calvinist controversy whose wife gave birth to a son. The butcher took the boy in one arm and his meat cleaver in his free hand and went to the church to have the baby baptized. He held up the meat cleaver and asked the pastor if he planned to include the exorcism in the baptism.

There was a businessman in Roman Catholic Bavaria, where the public practice of Lutheranism was illegal. He had to make a business trip into Saxony. Eagerly he anticipated being in "Lutheran territory" and attending a real worship service. But when he arrived in a village on Sunday morning at the ringing of the church bell, what did he find? The pastor standing on the steps of the church while the sexton rang the bell. The streets of the village were deserted. Nobody came to church!

The consistory was asked to investigate the case of a pastor's widow who claimed that her husband had not been paid well enough by the congregation to provide for her now that she was alone. The representatives of the consistory came to visit her and discovered that her closet was filled with all of the latest fashions. That is what happened to her husband's salary.

In discussing the financial support of pastors a serious proposal was put forth. Why not add an agricultural component to the training of pastors? That way they could raise some cows, chickens, maybe a few sheep, and some grain crops. Then they would not be such a burden on their congregations.

Church attendance dropped so perilously in Lutheran territories, as Lutherans abused their Christian freedom, that the princes became alarmed. Fearing a collapse of morality and a reversion to superstition, fearing as well that people would not know the latest decrees of the prince (these were often posted or announced in church), edicts were issued, requiring Lutherans to go to church.<sup>2</sup>



Would any of these stories have surprised Luther? Do they surprise you? A growing concern that we have as pastors is the sinking level of religious literacy and spiritual seriousness among our members. Is it because of the national addiction to consumerism? Is it because of the inherent weakness of the English language in dealing with abstractions? Is it because of the feminization of society? Is it because of the collapse of morality? Is it because of the disappearance of any sense of shame even among the heathen, which spreads then among our people as well? Is it because prosperity has made our people intellectually and spiritually flabby, content only when being entertained, but annoyed when rebuked or required to think (never mind repent or amend)? Is it due to the triumph of the trivial and the victory of form over substance? Each of these possibilities has merit. In point of fact however, even taken together, they fail to identify the root cause and problem.

And just what is the root cause and problem? Think about it for a moment. If there were a national religion in our land, what would it be? It would surely be Methodist or Baptist! For Methodists and Baptists are Arminians; they deny original sin. And thereby they doom themselves, and the culture in which their denial is dominant, to a refusal to take man seriously. Consider how the denial of original sin, which denial is so much a part of our culture, affects your members, affects you. Where original sin is denied, the assumption is that people are basically nice. Yes, at heart—not just on the surface—they are "Minnesota nice!"

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*If there were a national religion in our land, what would it be? It would surely be Methodist or Baptist!*

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Where people are essentially nice, we should expect that they would hear the Word with gladness. We should expect that they would respect their pastors. We should expect that they would attend church and all of its attendant organizations faithfully. We should expect that they would contribute liberally for the support of the gospel's spread at home and abroad.

How shocking, if people are really nice, that very few take doctrine seriously! How shocking that respect for the clergy, the representatives of Christ in the midst of the people of God, is so low! How shocking that less than half even attends the worship service on Sunday morning! How shocking that contributing 2 percent of our income to the work of the church should be considered a great triumph!

Yes, and how discouraging for pastors! How difficult these shocking elements of our every day life make it to recruit future pastors! How tempting it may become to pander to the herd's taste for entertainment on Sunday morning! How much easier it would be to compromise on doctrine and practice, when confronted with so much opposition to sound doctrine and resistance to anything deeper in preaching and teaching than the superficial! And that from such nice people! Perhaps a little here, a little there, is in order; after all, better a little orthodoxy than none at all!

All too easily a bit of crypto-Methodism, an *ism* that is so much a part of the *opinio legis* and of American culture, can infect us too. The stories cited at the beginning of this section are there to suggest that the church has always had people who were very serious about doctrine and who found strange ways of expressing their sincerity. It has also always had a majority of people who were not doctrinally sensitive or even doctrinally aware, or who did not come faithfully, or did not respect the ministry. Yes, and it has always had some pastors too whose lack of sense or unfaithfulness or bitterness made it easy to ridicule the ministry and give people the appearance of an excuse for despising the work of the gospel.

We concluded the last section with a rhetorical question: How could a pastor degenerate into professionalism, into becoming a

mere time-server, with a God such as the one described in the Large Catechism? Were we to take the question out of the purely rhetorical category, we might venture to answer that in addition to our own sinful flesh, it is people that tempt us to be less than serious about God and his Word, about service that is zealous and faithful. They are nice people, but they don't care. Then we might ask: Why should we? How would Luther answer that? What does the Large Catechism have to say about it?

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***Without a proper understanding of original sin and its dread consequences, we will never really take people seriously; we will never understand why they act as they do.***

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Luther's answer in the Large Catechism takes man seriously. Luther wears no rose-colored glasses on the subject of man. Nor was there, by the way, much in his life and experience to contradict what God has to say on the subject of man. Dominating the discussion of man is the reality of original sin. That is what makes man the way he is. That is what, in fact, puts him in such desperate need of the Savior and of those who bring that Savior in the ministry of the word and the sacraments. In the introduction to the Large Catechism, Luther, with no sense of shock or dismay, says:

the common people regard the Gospel altogether too lightly, and we accomplish nothing extraordinary even though we use all diligence. . . .

To this there is added the shameful vice and secret infection of security and satiety, that is, that many regard the Catechism as a poor, mean teaching, which they can read through at one time, and then immediately know it, throw the book into a corner, and be ashamed, as it were, to read in it again.

Yea, even among the nobility there may be found some louts and scrimps, who declare that there is no longer any need either of pastors or preachers; that we have everything in books, and every one can easily learn it by himself [Does that have an especially familiar ring to it?]; and so they are content to let the parishes decay and become desolate, and pastors and preachers to suffer distress and hunger a plenty, just as it becomes crazy Germans to do (LC Pref, 4-6; *Triglotta*, 567, 569).

Luther's answer to our dismay at the way people can be is simply, "What did you expect?" He takes original sin seriously. Without a proper understanding of original sin and its dread consequences, we will never really take people seriously; we will never understand why they act as they do. Yes, and perhaps most impor-

tantly, we will never appreciate how much they need the gospel ministry entrusted to us. That many do not appreciate that ministry is no surprise. That *we* would therefore not appreciate it should be a great surprise indeed. For we have listened to Luther as he in the Large Catechism declares in a very matter-of-fact manner the way things are:

For those only are called spiritual fathers who govern and guide us by the Word of God; as St. Paul boasts his fatherhood 1 Cor. 4, 15. . . . Now, since they are fathers they are entitled to their honor, even above all others. But here it is bestowed least; for the way which the world knows for honoring them is to drive them out of the country and to grudge them a piece of bread, and, in short, they must be (as says St. Paul, 1 Cor. 4, 13) as the filth of the world and everybody's refuse and footrag.

Yet there is need that this also be urged upon the populace, that those who would be Christians are under obligation in the sight of God to esteem them worthy of double honor who minister to their souls, that they deal well with them and provide for them. For that, God is willing to add to you sufficient blessing and will not let you come to want. But in this matter every one refuses and resists, and all are afraid that they will perish from bodily want, and cannot now support one respectable preacher, where formerly they filled ten fat paunches. In this we also deserve that God deprive us of His Word and blessing, and again allow preachers of lies to arise to lead us to the devil, and, in addition, to drain our sweat and blood (LC I, 158-163; *Triglotta*, 627).

If that is the way things are, why didn't Luther just give up? Why don't we? Precisely because Luther continues to take God seriously. He can never forget God's promise. Immediately after the section just cited, Luther addresses the laity, but in words that apply to the pastors at least as much: "only do what is your duty, and let God take care how He is to support you and provide for you sufficiently. Since He has promised it, and has never yet lied, He will not be found lying to you" (LC I, 165; *Triglotta*, 627).

These two statements are really just another way of expressing the theology of the cross. The Large Catechism everywhere asserts the perversity of man and the faithfulness of God. The first is always evident; the second is often hidden. Thus Luther under the first table of the law repeatedly urges that the Ten Commandments be held constantly before the eyes of the young. For on every hand they will see little true worship of God. Therefore they must be brought simply to trust his Word. They—and we—must come to realize that God is true, whether we see his threats and promises immediately carried out or not.

The Large Catechism has no illusions that the Reformation and the faithful teaching of the gospel will reform society at large. Repeatedly there is the assertion that people are evil in their nature and that the evil nature more often than not finds ready expression in outward acts. We should therefore expect that people despise the gospel. We should expect that many are hypocrites. We should expect that they are often dishonest, hateful, thieves, adulterers, and the like. Listen to the following words that are typical of Luther's estimation of human nature and what we should



expect from it; they are part of his explanation of the Fifth Commandment:

Now, as there are many assaults upon all commandments, so it happens also in this commandment that we must live among many people who do us harm, so that we have cause to be hostile to them.

As when your neighbor sees that you have a better house and home . . . greater possessions and fortune from God than he, he is sulky, envies you, and speaks no good of you.

Thus by the devil's incitement you will get many enemies who cannot bear to see you have any good, either bodily or spiritual. When we see such people, our hearts, in turn, would rage and bleed and take vengeance. Then there arise cursing and blows, from which follow finally misery and murder (LC I, 183–184; *Triglotta*, 633).

Or consider this under the Seventh Commandment:

The same I say also of mechanics, workmen, and day-laborers, who all follow their wanton notions, and never know enough ways to overcharge people, while they are lazy and unfaithful in their work. All these are far worse than sneak-thieves, against whom we can guard with locks and bolts, or who, if apprehended, are treated in such a manner that they will not do the same again. But against these no one can guard, no one dare even look awry at them or accuse them of theft, so that one would ten times rather lose from his purse. For here are my neighbors, good friends, my own servants, from whom I expect good . . . who defraud me first of all.

. . . To sum up, this is the commonest craft and the largest guild on earth, and if we regard the world throughout all conditions of life, it is nothing else than a vast, wide stall, full of great thieves (LC I, 226, 228; *Triglotta*, 645).

Citations from each of the commandments would be easy to produce, each saying essentially the same thing: Mankind is lost and steeped in sin; therefore there is little good that you should expect in this world from man. Only God is faithful and always true to his word; therefore from him alone should you expect everything good, including ultimate protection from the evil in man.

But doesn't all of that just make us sour and cynical? Not at all! In fact, just the reverse is the case. If we do not take man seriously, if we assume that everyone is basically nice, we will most assuredly be disappointed. Then, having expected so much more from mankind—and from ourselves—than God's Word told us to expect, we will become disillusioned, bitter, and cynical. Ah, but if we take man seriously as fallen and sinful, and eager only for his own benefit, no matter how much harm that may do to another, what then will we discover? We will—and do—discover that sometimes people really are “nice.” Sometimes members do appreciate the gospel and are ready to sacrifice for it. Sometimes people are eager to help and befriend in time of need. Sometimes people are honest and decent, respectful and God-fearing. In a way, that is always a surprise. In our work it is the sweet fruit of the gospel. It is evidence provided by a gracious God that our

labor, just as he promised, is not in vain. Thus in failure and frustration we look to the gospel alone for joy and satisfaction. No less in moments of peace and apparent success, we see the gospel alone as their ultimate source. We start to become *Christocentric*.

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***Anything less than a love from and for Christ is doomed to become either despairing laziness or bitter Phariseeism.***

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Because man is so perverse by nature, so entirely capable of every evil, the loving service required of the Christian and especially of the pastor must be connected to and flow from Christ in the gospel. Luther makes the point so simply and effectively already in the Small Catechism. Each commandment's explanation starts with “We should fear and love God!” Anything less than a love from and for Christ is doomed to become either despairing laziness or bitter Phariseeism. For we can expect constant frustration in dealing with people, especially when we are dealing with their greatest and only real need, and offering them God's great and only possible solution. And that frustration provokes our flesh. The flesh is quick to suggest, “Why be zealous? Nobody listens much anyway. Smile nice. Go through the motions. Look and sound pious and religious. Nobody will be offended that way. No one will get angry. No one will make your life difficult, tie your stomach in knots, give you the least bit of *Angst*.”

If that doesn't work, the bitter Pharisee tries to arise out of the flesh. He argues devoid of all tact and all sense and with self-righteous and legalistic rigor, “This accursed mass knows not the law and never will. I do! And I am going to let them know it every chance I get. It is my way (no matter what the *it* is) or no way.”

If we take man seriously and recognize that it is to Christ alone that we look for our inspiration, our love, our life, our joy, then and only then do we have the tools with which to do battle against our own flesh as we strive to serve him and thus also fallen men, member or not. Yes, and then we will be liberated as well from the obsession with worldly success in our ministry. For we live by faith and under the cross. We are not in heaven yet. That things often go badly is no surprise. It is what God promised. Indeed, it is the very depth of man's wickedness and all the evil of the world that shows how much the ministry of the word is needed. To be sure, most of the time we do not see how he is fulfilling his promise to bless us and our labors in his name. But the fulfillment is not always hidden, or at least not always completely hidden. Can you not think of instances, perhaps many of them, in your ministry, when you looked up into the face of God and said, “Oh Lord, you knew so well that I needed that which just happened! How kind of you to have thought of me, just me!” Perhaps it was an especially warm thank you after a service or a sick call. Perhaps it was a thoughtful gesture from an unexpected quarter. Perhaps just something very little and

trivial in the course of your service to his people, something that made you smile and appreciate the work that God has given you to do. With that little and special evidence of his kindness and his special love for his pastor, you got on with the business at hand of serving the one who first served you.

The Large Catechism takes God seriously and it takes man seriously too. If God truly is God, and man truly is as God has described him, then let us never tire of the promises of God, as they are so graphically taught in the Large Catechism. As we grow in our understanding of our desperate need for him and his word, we will grow as well in our awe and gratitude that he has entrusted that word to us for our salvation and the salvation of our fellow sinners.

#### THE LARGE CATECHISM TAKES THE MEANS OF GRACE SERIOUSLY

Among the brightest jewels in the crown of biblical theology and of Lutheran orthodoxy is the doctrine of the means of grace. While that doctrine shines brightly in the Scriptures, only in Lutheran orthodoxy is it carefully thought through and worked out. The Scriptures are true; they correspond to reality. Just as importantly, those saving facts of the gospel are effective because they have a power inherent in them and inseparable from God, their Author. That power is sufficient to overcome spiritual death and create spiritual life, to create faith and to preserve us in it for life eternal. We believe the gospel because it is true and the Holy Spirit is the ever-present Creator and Preserver of that faith. Our believing the message did not make it true. It *is* true. God says so. And therefore we believe it, sure and certain that God would not lie to us, as Luther says so often in the Large Catechism.

Though no other religion has so carefully worked out a doctrine of the means of grace, most religions have something like a means of grace. They consider some means to be the indispensable link between God and man. In Roman Catholicism it is the papacy. It is through the pope that bishops and then priests receive the indelible character by which their sacramental acts—ultimately the sacraments themselves—receive efficacy and validity. In Rome the famous dictum *Extra ecclesiam nullus salus!* means *Extra papam nullus salus!* To be sure, Rome is willing to let anyone into heaven who follows his conscience, however well- or ill-formed that conscience may be. But that is only because they would have been Catholics, would have submitted to the rule of the papacy, had they but known about it. They get into heaven as “would-have-been” Catholics.

What about the Reformed? What kind of indispensable means is there in the Arminian Baptist and Methodist churches that connects man and God? Arminianism too has an artificial means of grace, one that is in some ways even worse than the papacy. The means of grace is faith itself, faith not defined as *scientia*, *assentia*, *fiducia*, but faith as feeling. That feeling may have some basis in the Scriptures or none at all. It is faith without any necessary foundation, often without any necessary object. Just believe—what and why are not important. And this faith, most falsely so-called, saves. In a hopelessly backward equation, for so many, faith creates truth. Truth is whatever you believe. It is true because you believe it to be true. That truth may be true for you and not for me. It may be true for you today, but not true for you tomorrow.

Your believing it makes it true; not believing makes it not true, at least not true for you at the moment.

How perverse! Surely you have heard it: “Well, pastor, that’s just not the way I feel about it.” Or, “That is what you believe, and that is fine for you. But other people believe something else; the important thing is that we just believe, just have faith.” Or, as noted earlier, this one: “I can’t go to hell! I don’t believe in hell.” The assumption is that faith and feeling, faith and opinion are the same thing, and that one is as good as another. Do you notice, lurking behind this assumption, a smiling devil? He need never again ask, “Yea, hath God said?” For man now tells God on a regular basis what God *should* have said. It is for each as though the Almighty had been sitting all this time just waiting for modern man to instruct him on the diversity of truth and the meaninglessness of meaning. “Listen Lord; thy servant speaketh! I just cannot believe that God would have said \_\_\_\_\_. [You fill in the blank.] Therefore he didn’t say it, and it isn’t true.”

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***The astonishing thing is that people really expect everyone to take their faith and all such faith seriously.***

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The astonishing thing is that people really expect everyone to take their faith and all such faith seriously. But just as the papistic means of grace is an idolatrous illusion, so is this faith in faith that typifies so much of modern Protestantism and Roman Catholicism as well. It refuses at bottom to take God seriously. It likewise refuses to take man seriously. And it certainly refuses to take the one, true, and sure means of grace seriously. Surely even the devil laughs at it.

Then we take up and read again the Large Catechism, especially Luther’s comments under the heading of the sacrament of baptism. Fresh air in the sinkhole! Cold water on a hot day! Luther in his battle with the *Schwärmer* gets it right, and in the process anticipates all the damage done by Arminianism and existentialism and their children. Listen to what he says:

Further, we say that we are not so much concerned to know whether the person baptized believes or not; for on that account Baptism does not become invalid; but everything depends upon the Word and command of God. This now is perhaps somewhat acute, but it rests entirely upon what I have said, that Baptism is nothing else than water and the Word of God in and with each other, that is, when the Word is added to the water, Baptism is valid, even though faith be wanting. For my faith does not make Baptism, but receives it. Now, Baptism does not become invalid even though it be wrongly received or employed; since it is not bound (as stated) to our faith, but to the Word (LC iv, 52-53; *Triglotta*, 745).

Therefore I say, if you did not believe then, believe now and say thus: The baptism indeed was right, but I, alas! did not receive it aright. For I myself also, and all who are baptized, must speak thus before God: I come hither in my faith and in that of others, yet I cannot rest in this, that I believe, and that many people pray for me; but in this I rest, that it is Thy Word and command. Just as I go to the Sacrament trusting not in my faith, but in the Word of Christ; whether I am strong or weak, that I commit to God. But this I know, that He bids me go, eat and drink, etc., and gives me His body and blood; that will not deceive me or prove false to me (LC iv, 56; *Triglotta*, 747).

Or how about this under the heading of the Sacrament of the Altar:

. . . If a hundred thousand devils, together with all fanatics [*Schwärmern*], should rush forward, crying, How can bread and wine be the body and blood of Christ? etc., I know that all spirits and scholars together are not as wise as is the Divine Majesty in His little finger. . . . It is true, indeed, that if you take away the Word or regard it without the words, you have nothing but mere bread and wine. But if the words remain with them, as they shall and must, then, in virtue of the same, it is truly the body and blood of Christ. For as the lips of Christ say and speak, so it is, as He can never lie or deceive (LC v, 13-14; *Triglotta*, 755, 757).

Luther then continues with his instruction on the role of faith. Faith does not make the sacraments valid. Only the word can do that. The Word is the cause of faith, its source, and its content. To talk about faith apart from the word is to separate faith from its source, cause, content, and goal. *Faith apart from the word is not faith; it is superstition!*

And that is why preaching is so important, as Luther also points out in his discussion of the sacrament as well as endlessly elsewhere. For the devil has a thousand ways of making people *Schwärmer*. Without preaching, preaching of the word, people will quickly show themselves to be what they are by nature. But it is by preaching, preaching of the word, that faith is created and strengthened. It is by preaching that faith has content. It is by preaching that faith comes to be saving faith. It is by preaching that faith bears fruit in life.

We could go on with citations all day from the Large Catechism that hammer home the point that it is the word of God that gives faith and is faith's whole content. For the sake of useful brevity (something Germans always say when they are being long-winded!), we would but ponder in sum the implications for our ministry. Too easily we give up on the gospel. Too easily we think that some new gimmick, some new program, some different package will accomplish what only the gospel can accomplish. Why is that? Is it perhaps because we do not take God seriously enough, or man seriously enough, or the means of grace seriously enough? It is still by the foolishness of preaching, as St. Paul said, that anything is accomplished at all. The task is enormous, given the holiness of God and the perversity of man. The task is enormous, given the greatness of the gift the holy God has to give and the stubbornness of man in wanting to do it all by himself. The task is enormous, given the depth of the message

and the shallowness of the target. But it can only be accomplished by the God-ordained means of grace, the faithful preaching and teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments according to Christ's institution.

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***When we have no more than fifteen minutes in which to get the job done, do we really have time for our trivial little autobiography?***

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The last sentence is not as trite as you may think on first reading. When Luther talks about preaching, he means the preaching of the word of God. Go back and look at some of the old sermon books of the great Lutheran fathers, Gerhard, Walther, Stoeckhardt, Hoenecke. The sermons are invariably at least ten pages long. You will learn absolutely nothing about Gerhard, Walther, Stoeckhardt or Hoenecke from those forty-five to sixty-minute-long sermons. And why not? They did not have time to tell us about their last fun-filled family outing or about how they successfully potty-trained their children. They get right to the word, right to preaching. When we have no more than fifteen minutes in which to get the job done, do we really have time for our trivial little autobiography? As cosmically significant as it may be to us, it passes for little more than a curiosity to our hearers. Try as we may to make our life a metaphor for all sacred teachings, the plain truth is that our lives are not all that interesting—*my* life might be, but yours . . . I doubt it. Get to the word! That is preaching. It does not have to be boring or tedious. If you did any kind of text study at all, it will be vastly more fascinating than the cute story, the clever joke. Don't tempt people to put a note in the collection plate that says, "We would see Jesus!"

"But that's what people like!" I hear someone say. You might want to give some thought to why that is. Is it because they don't like the First Commandment? Is it because the gospel has become cheap to them, since they no longer hear what the law really requires, how God really is, how they really are? The same questions might be asked about some of the hymns they really like.

Does that mean we should never tell stories, never employ a narrative style in our preaching? Of course not. But we do well to notice the example of our Lord in his stories: the point is always clear, quick, inescapable and unforgettable. Or one might think of St. Paul's references to sports. He does not drone on about the last Olympic Games, the coach, the hero, the loser, or his own experience on the playing field. He has his point clearly embedded in the reference: "We wrestle; I box not as one . . . Run the race . . .!"

Do you see, dear brothers, how it is? If we take God seriously, and if we take man seriously, then we must also take the means of grace seriously. For the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments is the precious and only means by which God the Holy One makes the damned ones holy, the dead ones alive, the barren ones fruitful. That is not to say that man ceases to

be man. That is not to say that he is not a sinner any more. We know from the Word and from the mirror that the flesh is still active, that we and our members are still in the flesh, capable of every evil, guilty daily of more evil than we know and certainly more than we admit to. But that makes the faithful hearing of the means of grace only that much more precious to us. After all this time, God still loves, still pardons. It is more unbelievable to reason now than it was yesterday. Therefore the power of the means of grace to preserve what it has already miraculously created is even more necessary, even more amazing. The need for the means of grace remains. The need for preaching it and teaching it therefore also remains.

Oh, what a high and holy work is ours! Let us not sell short the one and only means given us for carrying it out, the sacred means by which alone any and all success is achieved and that by God himself. Let us not become so eager to put the doctrine of the royal priesthood of all believers into practice that we forget the holy work that is ours by the call of Christ. So serious was the

church and so eager were you for that call from Christ that you were trained better than almost any clergy in the world for the sacred task that is yours. Let us not be so eager to let everyone have his say in Bible class and elsewhere that we all but apologize when it is time for us to say: Thus saith the Lord!

So read the Large Catechism! Make it part of your yearly private devotional cycle of readings. It will enrich your own soul. It may well enliven your teaching of and appreciation for the Small Catechism. It could easily increase your love of God and man and the means of grace. What more could your want? And besides that . . . *It's so Lutheran!* LOGIA

NOTES

1. Henry David Thoreau, *Thoreau On Man And Nature*, A Compilation by Arthur G. Volkman from the Writings of Henry D. Thoreau (Mount Vernon, NY: Peter Pauper Press, 1960), 58.
2. Excerpted from Christian Gottlob Hilscher, *Anekdotenbuch für meine lieben Amtsbrüder, Priester und Leviten* (Leipzig, 1785).

# Teach Me Thy Way, O Lord



## Essays in Honor of the Reverend Dr. GLEN ZWECK



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# Luther's "Catholic Minimum"

OLIVER OLSON



I suppose that in 1970 I was not quite prepared for the negative reaction to this article that I sent to *Response* magazine. This journal was published by the (now defunct) Lutheran Society for Worship, Music and the Arts. So what could have been more suitable than asking those entrusted with preparing the liturgy for churches loyal to the Reformation to take account of historical Lutheran principles?

The criticism began in the following issue. Hans Boehringer of Valparaiso University replied with an article on "Liturgical Minimalism." Eugene Brand called it "a minimalist approach." "Luther's Catholic minimum," wrote Johan Thorson, "has become, or at the very least threatens to become, the Lutheran maximum." But my term "minimum" was not a plea for austerity, but another way of expressing the traditional confessional distinction between *adiaphora*, indifferent matters, and *mandata*—that is, that which is commanded by Christ.

Our liturgical establishment, I soon learned, was indifferent to Lutheran liturgical tradition. A "fundamentalist type of approach," wrote Eugene Brand in the following issue, "either to Luther or the Lutheran Confessions (that is, one that overlooks their historical conditioning) confines one forever to the options of the sixteenth century. . . . Being a Lutheran in the twentieth century, then, must not mean rigid adherence to Luther and/or the Confessions. It must rather mean an acceptance of the principles they defended so capably in a quite different sort of world both ecclesiastically and politically." "The truth of the matter," according to Boehringer, "is that we can gain very little by attempting to pit the sixteenth century's view of liturgy against [Gregory] Dix's twentieth-century view. There is no great profit if we exalt our liturgical wisdom over that of the Reformers, nor is there much reason to assume that their understanding was advanced beyond our own learning and scholarship." "Catholicity," he went on, "is not a question of setting minimums at all; it is a matter of expressing the fullness of the faith 'at all times in all places.'" Nowhere are their presuppositions clearer than in the confession in the preface of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* that this book has continued "to move into the larger ecumenical heritage of liturgy."

In the course of the centuries, the term *adiaphora* has had an unintended effect—making "the larger ecumenical heritage of liturgy" acceptable by convincing seminarians and pastors that everything liturgical is indifferent. But there is a third term from the adiaphoristic controversy that has largely been forgotten. Liturgical construction must take account not only of *mandata* and *adiaphora*, but also *damnabilia*. A naïve reception of "the fullness of faith at all times and in all places," just as in doctrinal history, can easily result in accepting *damnabilia* and misleading Christians.

I know a good deal more now about the (still largely unresearched) liturgical thought of Lutherans in the sixteenth century and later—and

the reasons that Lutheran tradition seems confining and sectarian to some—than I did when I wrote this article. Nevertheless, I am pleased that the editors of *LOGIA* have chosen to reprint it. Then, as now, it is a plea for fidelity and serious appropriation of our own rich—and abidingly relevant—heritage.



SINCE VATICAN II, ROMAN CATHOLICS, struggling to catch up with contemporary life, have been coming to terms with all manner of shocking change. Lutherans cannot expect to escape similar shocks; unless all traditions are reviewed there is no possibility of uniting the churches or of coming to terms with modern life. The mere fact, then, that the new order of the InterLutheran Commission on Worship is different from what we have known should be no cause for dismay.

Nor is it a cause for dismay that the Lutheran tradition is being challenged from within. One of the greatest living Lutheran theologians, Dr. Peter Brunner of the University of Heidelberg, says flatly that Luther's liturgical reform was a "heretical distortion of the original type."<sup>2</sup> But while such challenges are to be expected and are no cause for dismay, it is cause for dismay if we do not recognize a major theological challenge when it comes along.

The ILCW order is a basic challenge to Lutheran doctrine. It is based on theological principles that tend to blunt the doctrine of grace. As the ecumenical movement progresses, we will undoubtedly be making great changes in our thinking and practice. But, inasmuch as Lutherans are not accustomed to taking liturgical texts seriously as theological documents, and because most of the discussion of the ILCW order is apt to center on musical matters, we may miss the seriousness of the theological issues involved.

Liturgy is not music. What matters is the text. Repeated Sunday after Sunday, year after year, it is far more decisive in shaping the faith than most Christians realize. Keen observers of the church have always been aware that *lex orandi* is *lex credendi*—the form of worship becomes the form faith takes. Today, with late romanticism fixing the attention of the young on the *elan vital*, forms of worship are theologically more important than ever. Romanticism, whose slogans one encounters everywhere—"celebration of life," "do it"—and whose interest in mood, feelings, "happenings," and action affect us all, has given rise to a situation in which impulses are as likely to be taken as imperatives for what the church ought to do as what she ought to *think*.

Ritual is not mere ritual. It is theology. Therefore, it is very important to examine what the ILCW is asking us to do. Whereas

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[1970 editor's note: This article is written as an evaluation of the new order for eucharistic worship recently published by the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, titled *Contemporary Worship 2—Services: The Holy Communion*.<sup>1</sup> Ed.]

the Episcopal Church, with one-fifth as many members, has published its extensive *Prayer Book Studies*, the ILCW has not provided for the studies necessary to its undertaking. And whereas other communions that have produced provisional orders have accompanied their publications with clear plans for revision, and have announced terminal dates for their use, the ILCW has not. We must assume the possibility that unless a strong case for theological review is made, the order may simply remain in our hymnbook racks indefinitely as a form “intended to supplement those already in use.”

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***Repeated Sunday after Sunday, year after year, it is far more decisive in shaping the faith than most Christians realize.***

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My purpose is to demonstrate that such a review is necessary because the ILCW order departs from basic Lutheran doctrine. My method, instead of being a complete review of the order—which from several points of view is an admirable document—will be to examine the basic structure of the service. To make the argument easier to follow, I shall list my conclusions:

1. The ILCW order is based on a liturgical concept called the “four-action shape.”
2. Since this concept was first advanced twenty-five years ago, it has been discussed extensively, and its significance as a theological position is quite independent of what the ILCW might have had in mind by making use of it.
3. Whereas the Lutheran confessions require, as a minimum, only two actions: the proclamation of the words of institution and the distribution, the “four-action shape” makes two additional actions obligatory: the offertory procession and the fraction (breaking of bread).
4. The four-action shape is derived from church tradition. Its use poses the question of the authority of church tradition as over against that of the New Testament accounts.
5. The defenders of the four-action shape make an additional appeal to Jewish tradition, implying that certain actions in the course of the meal at which the Lord’s Supper was instituted must be continued in the church because they were done in the Jewish rite.
6. Lutheran theology makes a distinction between those incidental actions of the Last Supper, which belong to Jewish tradition, and the actions implied by the command “this do.”
7. In making that distinction, and by abandoning the incidental ritual of whatever Jewish meal formed the framework of the Last Supper, Lutheran theology emphasizes the element of *newness* in the New Covenant and the authority of Christ against that of the Old Testament law.
8. The ILCW order requires the use of a eucharistic prayer (the mass canon), something specifically rejected by the Reformers, not merely because of the sacrificial terminology of the medieval canon, but because of the more important consideration that to mix man’s prayers with God’s proclamation creates confusion and reverses the sacrament’s God-to-man direction of movement.
9. The first additional action required by the rite, the offertory procession, also emphatically rejected by the Reformers, did not originate in early Christian practice but in pagan sacrifice.
10. The second of the two additional actions, the fraction, although permissible according to Lutheran theology, cannot be made obligatory, and thus it is inappropriate to make the procedure prominent by exaggerated ritual.
11. There is no consensus in church tradition about the symbolic meaning of the fraction. Any explanation is free allegory.
12. None of the structural departures from Lutheran practice in the new rite can be called contemporary because they consist of reintroducing ancient ceremonies that were well-known to the Reformers and deliberately rejected by them.
13. In common with the tradition of the “four-action shape,” the ILCW order invariably describes the actions of the rite as man’s actions, rather than as God’s actions, thus endangering the doctrine of grace, and bringing the whole construction perilously close to Pelagianism.

The difference between Luther’s principles of liturgical reform and those practiced by the ILCW lies in the interpretation of the dominical command “this do.” Are we supposed to imitate the Last Supper and produce a passion play? Or should we understand Christ’s words as commanding us to do something *new*? If Christ was in fact commanding something new, his instruction “this do” cannot mean the repetition of a Jewish meal, but must mean doing the new thing. Inasmuch as the theological issue is the relationship of the New Covenant to the Old Covenant, Lutheran theology is extremely particular at this point. It makes it very clear that Christ’s command to the church is to be understood as including only his institution and the distribution of wine and bread. The church is free to enrich the service with other elements, but they are not to be required.

Writing on this subject in another context, I coined the term the “catholic minimum” to designate this basic structure.<sup>3</sup> *The catholic minimum is the sum of those elements that by Christ’s own authority must be included in a valid celebration of holy communion.*

The ILCW rite is a radical departure from Lutheran doctrine established by Luther’s own liturgical reforms, which differ at important points from the ceremonies practiced in the church since Constantine assumed control in the fourth century. If fourth-century ceremonial in Rome and Constantinople is the criterion for liturgical correctness, Peter Brunner is justified in calling Luther’s reform a “heretical distortion.”<sup>4</sup>

The main difficulty for liturgical students of that period is the scarcity of information on it. The imperial police, although failing in their attempt to destroy the church, did succeed in destroying the church’s books, and we have no satisfactory picture of the communion service of the second and third centuries. About all we have left is an order compiled by the Roman anti-bishop Hippolytus, a short account by Justin Martyr, and a controversial text in the *Didache*. Catholics characteristically think we can trust fourth-century tradition as a faithful continuation of apostolic practice, but suspicious

Protestants trust only the tradition of the first century.<sup>5</sup>

It will come as no surprise that Luther applied his principle of scripture alone consistently, even in the specific matter of liturgical reform. He held that the definitive structure for the communion service was to be found only in the apostolic tradition according to the four biblical accounts. "On them we must rest; on them we must build as on a firm rock if we would not be carried about with every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). . . . For in these words nothing is omitted that pertains to the completeness, the use and the blessing of the sacrament."<sup>6</sup> I will show that the ILCW order is based, ultimately, on the tradition of the fourth-century church. To do that, we have to turn to the order itself and examine its basic construction. Although the commissioners have made things difficult by abandoning the distinction between "may" and "shall" rubrics, the basic construction is still quite clear from the following four statements:

1. "Our offering thus is the first action" (p. 10).
2. "Our thanksgiving is the second action" (p. 12).
3. "After taking bread and wine, and giving thanks, Jesus broke the bread, the third action" (p. 18).
4. "The action culminates as we receive the bread and wine. This is the fourth and final action" (p. 18).

We should reassure ourselves before we proceed that what we are doing is important. Those four sentences, assuredly, are printed in small type, and most people will never read them. But it is not true that they are of concern only to liturgical experts, because they reveal the construction of a document which, if adopted, will have a profound effect on the Lutheran Church.

The construction is the work of Dom Gregory Dix, abbot of Nashdom, and is an attempt to establish the theological authority of fourth-century practice. Like others influenced by the Oxford Movement, a very strong wind of doctrine indeed, Dix attempted to revitalize the worship of the Church of England by turning to church tradition—the "universal Christian mind"—for the authority necessary to authenticate a richer ceremonial. "Yet it is only by entering into that universal Christian mind," he says, "and thinking with it that we modern Christians enter into the fullness of our Christian inheritance."<sup>7</sup>

Dix's first important book was about the little wall closets for the reserved host in medieval churches (*A Detection of Aumbries*, 1942). He went on to write *The Shape of the Liturgy*, his magnum opus, which since 1945 has dominated American and English liturgical studies. In it he states his conclusions, drawn from tradition, regarding the form of the communion service: the basic form must be the "four-action shape."

With absolute unanimity the liturgical tradition reproduces these seven actions as four: (1) The offertory bread and wine are "taken" and placed on the table together. (2) The prayer; the president gives thanks to God over bread and wine together. (3) The fraction; the bread is broken. (4) The communion; the bread and wine are distributed together.<sup>8</sup>

"What he has done, quite unashamedly," comments Paul Santmire,

is to find the Shape in the many fourth-century documents, discover the same in the third and second century evidence (with which he begins the book) and then make the leap—over a considerable hiatus in historical evidence—from the familiar Shape of the pre-Nicene type, as he calls it, to the original Lord's Supper.<sup>9</sup>

It should be clear, even without tracing the discussion of Dix's thesis, that the four-action shape is one man's definition of tradition and represents a distinct theological position. It is not possible to adopt the four-action shape without adopting the theological point of view that goes with it. It is quite irrelevant, then, what the commissioners might have had in mind when they decided to use the four-action shape rather than the "catholic minimum." The theology is implicit in the "shape."

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It is evident from his method that Dix thinks it important to continue doing what Jesus did at the Last Supper: the four-action shape "with absolute unanimity . . . reproduces the seven actions" that he finds in the accounts of Jesus' institution. His reconstruction of the Last Supper is questionable. Scholars do not even know what *kind* of meal was held in that upper room, since the church did not consider incidental details important enough to remember. Joachim Jeremias thinks it was a Passover meal. Dix thinks it was a Chabburah meal. It does not matter. In his discussion of the problem Hans-Christoph Schmidt-Lauber says,

the significant element of that meal was not in its traditional ceremonial and emphases, but in those two actions at the beginning and at the end of the main meal. Both these actions are to be found in every ordinary meal . . . the actions are singled out at this hour so they can be filled with a completely new and unique content.<sup>10</sup>

If we do indeed have to do with two elements that have been taken out of the context of a meal, the task of interpreting the holy communion is clearly more complex than simply emphasizing that it is a meal. (St. Paul thought people ought to eat at home 1 Cor 11: 34.)

It is also clear that overlooking the element of newness in Christ's institution and emphasizing rather the continuity with Jewish practice represents a kind of Judaizing trend. The decision of the Jerusalem Council (A.D. 49/50; Acts 15, Galatians) to abandon the particular Jewish customs of circumcision and kosher diets, leaving only baptism, has its parallel in the church's abandoning what remained of the Passover (or whatever other meal formed the background for Jesus' institution). It would seem to be

quite a sensible idea, at a time when we are all concerned about a “contemporary” liturgical rite, to explore the implications of the newness of the covenant for the forms we use.

Let us now take a closer look at the first three of Dix’s four actions to determine whether it is legitimate to claim that the church is under obligation to include them in the celebration of communion. Since the ILCW has published no theological rationale for its work, I shall take the risk of assuming that Dr. Eugene Brand’s article, “Luther’s Liturgical Surgery: Twentieth Century Diagnosis of the Patient,” in which he discusses the above actions and expresses his dissatisfaction with Luther’s reforms, is a fair representation of the ILCW’s disenchantment with Luther.<sup>11</sup> Meant for popular reading, the essay is more useful as an indication of the attitude that led to the ILCW order than as a theological justification for it. Dr. Brand cannot be faulted with any kind of deception; he is quite open about the sweeping changes he wants to effect.

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***The need to sacrifice pressed on us with such urgency has been rejected as a pagan claim by the Lutheran tradition.***

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“Our offering thus is the first action of the Supper,” according to the new order. By “offering” is not meant the mere collection of money, but a ceremony in which the worshipers carry bread and wine to the altar, “corresponding,” the rubric has it, “to our Lord’s taking of bread and wine.” Of course, no exegesis, no matter how clever, could make the words “Jesus took bread” into a requirement that a procession be made; the reason for insisting on the offertory procession is that it is a part of church tradition.

Dr. Brand argues in his essay for a “proper offertory” and cites the early practice of the church. What he does not say is that the early Christian practice was even older than the gospel, reaching right back to the pagan Greek mystery cults. Theodor Klauser, a Roman Catholic liturgical authority, writing about the early beginnings of the liturgy, says, “in the regular practice of the ancient world, whereby members of the community themselves presented the sacrificial offerings, lie the roots of the so-called offertory procession.”<sup>12</sup> The practice has caused a great deal of mischief in the past, since it was the source of the doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass and thus of the sacrificial priesthood, according to another Roman Catholic authority, Josef Jungmann of the University of Innsbruck:

The development must have taken place in this fashion: that the contributions of the faithful which they had been accustomed to bring from time immemorial for the needs of the church and for the poor, little by little became associated with the celebration of the Eucharist. This connection occurred the more easily since they were already accustomed to calling gifts for the church and for the poor, “sacrifice.”<sup>13</sup>

Echoing the Council of Trent, which decreed that sacrifice be continued because the nature of man requires it, Dr. Brand argues the *need to sacrifice*. “Yet the void left by Luther’s surgery on the medieval offertory still wants filling in a satisfactory manner. We do receive monetary offerings and sing a fragment of psalmody now, but that does not satisfy *the need*.”<sup>14</sup>

It hardly needs emphasizing that the need to sacrifice pressed on us with such urgency has been rejected as a pagan claim by the Lutheran tradition. To give one example out of a vast literature:

The sacrament, then, is a gift of God. If the gospel is to be expressed through the sacraments, we must wholeheartedly adopt the conception of God as giver. If there is the slightest thought that communion is an offering to God, a sacred act in God’s direction, then the gospel is rendered null and void at once.<sup>15</sup>

There has been a good deal of discussion about sacrifice since 1950. Dr. Brand, who says his opinion is “conditioned by the current debate,” sounds very different from Dr. Bring:

My sacrifice is shared in that what we offer together will be returned to us as heavenly food for our sustenance and joy. In this cultic motion from sacrifice to sacrament the mystery of God’s action among men is demonstrated: what we surrender to him he gives to us and through us to others.<sup>16</sup>

He departs from Luther, too, of course. Luther expressly denies the validity of the idea Dr. Brand expresses. “The same thing cannot be received and offered at the same time, nor can it be both given and accepted by the same person.”<sup>17</sup>

“Our thanksgiving is the second action.” Now, it is clear that Luther was flatly opposed to any kind of eucharistic prayer, since the implication for the liturgy of his emphasis on grace was that the mass is essentially something God does for man, not vice versa. He was consequently very concerned that whatever the liturgical form, the direction of movement from God to man be safeguarded. “We must therefore sharply distinguish the testament and sacrament itself from the prayers we offer at the same time.”<sup>18</sup>

Roman Catholics have come a long way toward adopting Luther’s insight. The Reformers pointed out the absurdity of the expression “pray the mass.” How could one “pray” the epistle? It was not a prayer at all but something addressed to the people! What was the sense of beseeching the Lord to “lift up your hearts?” That was a greeting to the people. In fact, so much of the mass was directed toward the people that Luther thought the celebrant ought to stand *behind* the altar to give emphasis to the proper direction of movement: “In the true mass, however, of real Christians, the altar should not remain where it is, and the priest should always face the people as Christ doubtlessly did in the Last Supper. But let that await its own time.”<sup>19</sup> Today, as we are all aware, that time has come. Ironically, the reform came from Catholics, not Lutherans. What is to prevent them from making a more profound analysis of the tradition and eventually concluding that it is not only gospel and epistle, salutation and benediction that are meant to be addressed to the people, but the mass itself, as Luther says?<sup>20</sup>



We cannot make great changes in theological positions before we examine the issues squarely. Dr. Brand's discussion of Luther's attitude toward the eucharistic prayer does not deal with the main issue, the direction of movement.

Luther's objections to the canon were essentially two: (1) He insisted that the words of institution should not be said in a low voice (as was the custom), but that they should be sung for all to hear. They are proclamatory in nature and one does not whisper what is to be proclaimed. (2) He could not accept theologically the strong sacrificial emphasis of the Latin canon.<sup>21</sup>

Brand's explanation that Luther's objections have been met by the decisions of Vatican II, which discontinued the custom of repeating the words of institution in a low voice, or that they may be met by new texts for the canon with less explicit sacrificial terminology, simply does not take Luther seriously. He was against all eucharistic prayers, because *they reverse the direction of the movement from God to man*. The mass becomes something man does.

Defending the use of the eucharistic prayer, Dr. Brand advances the authority of tradition: "As far as anyone can tell, the words of institution had always been placed within a context of prayer modeled after Jewish blessings."<sup>22</sup> Here he is fairly representing the majority of those engaged these days in liturgical studies. The wind from Oxford has taken on something like hurricane force. Consider the fact that the following statement by the editors of the liturgical order of the Churches of Christ Uniting (COCU) represents the voice of Calvinism in the United States: "The thanksgiving is an essential part of every celebration, ancient and modern, and it is the primary text that gives definition and meaning to what we are doing."<sup>23</sup> Before we bend before that wind, we ought to pose the question of how much weight the argument from tradition has. Luther maintained that the basic decision on the shape of the liturgy should be a theological one. Even if it were demonstrably true that the words of institution were "always enclosed," the doctrine of the gospel is more important than the tradition:

What shall we say then of the canon of the mass and the patristic authorities? First of all, I would answer: If there were nothing at all to be said against them, it would be safer to reject them all than admit that the mass is a work or a sacrifice, lest we deny the word of Christ and destroy faith together with the mass.<sup>24</sup>

Is it really true that the words of institution were always enclosed by a eucharistic prayer? It was not true about the mass of Addai and Mari from Syria, for example. The version of St. Paul would seem to indicate that Jesus first gave thanks and *after* he had given thanks, he addressed the words of institution *to his disciples*. Since the question as to the exact moment of the consecration was not raised until later, it need not concern us here.

The researches of Joachim Jeremias suggest that the enclosure of the words of institution by the eucharistic prayer may have been a clumsy development based on confusion about the original function of the prayer. His reconstruction of the development goes like this: The early church had a dinner (the agape meal), after which

grace was said—the Jewish blessing, beginning, "lift up your hearts," with which we are all familiar. *After* the meal and the prayer were finished, communion was celebrated. The confusion of the words of institution and the prayer of thanksgiving came about as a result of a new enthusiasm for fasting. To be able to take communion on an empty stomach, the Christians reversed the order of events. Now communion was served first and the agape meal afterwards. Since they had forgotten that it was a table grace after the meal, and had become accustomed to hearing it before communion, the prayer accompanied the communion to the earlier position. Now it assumed the function of a preface to communion. When the meal finally disappeared completely, due to larger crowds, the place of prominence the prayer had assumed was acknowledged in the new name for the whole procedure, eucharist. The prayer grew longer and came to surround the words of institution, which were assigned to a subordinate clause, effectively reversing their direction.<sup>25</sup>

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***So much of the mass was directed toward the people that Luther thought the celebrant ought to stand behind the altar.***

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One wonders how carefully the COCU statement has been read; to say that the canon is "essential" is the same as saying that Protestant celebrations of communion have been invalid ones. Liturgical writers can get away with such statements only if liturgy is excused from theological scrutiny.

For Luther, the action here is not ours, but God's, addressed to the congregation. "Pronouncing the words," he says, ". . . is the principal and most efficacious action in the sacrament."<sup>26</sup> The four-action shape views the action as man's action. Paul Santmire comments on Dix's theological position, which informs the "shape."

The New Testament view of the Divine Word, held by many modern men, is that a word is by nature something ethereal and ineffective. In this connection we may surmise that Dix's apparent presupposition that a word is not an authentic action lies behind his curious lack of interest in the New Testament church as a preaching community and his lack of interest in the words of institution in particular as effectual proclamation.<sup>27</sup>

One wonders whether Dr. Brand understands Luther's point of view at all when he denies that Luther emphasizes action.

He [Luther] views the sacrament in terms of the bread and wine alone, not as an action involving bread and wine. He cannot get beyond the western preoccupation with the elements, and so the Sacrament remains a "thing" to be received or offered, rather than an act to be celebrated.<sup>28</sup>

One might reverse the criticism and ask whether Dr. Brand can conceive of any action that is something other than man's action. Dix's enormous popularity is surprisingly effective in changing the theological situation. Krister Stendahl, in an essay that mentions Dix with admiration, shows that he, too, has adopted Dix's position. "We note that when the eucharist is celebrated in Corinth (1 Cor 11) that very act pronounces the kerygma, celebrates it 'until he come,' but the church is not the object for that kerygma but the subject that 'does it.'"<sup>29</sup>

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***We have clearly done an inadequate job of teaching liturgics when this comes up and nobody remembers that the matter ever came up before.***

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But is Dix's emphasis on man's activity in the liturgy sufficiently weighty for us to change our basic orientation to holy communion? Not necessarily. Perhaps we should consider the opinion of the former Roman Catholic, Leonhard Fendt, who has few equals as a liturgiologist: "The formal exegetical statement that the disciples are the subject of the imperative, 'this do,' does not justify making the Lord's Supper into the Supper of Christians."<sup>30</sup>

The casual reintroduction of the *anamnesis* and *epiclesis*, which are required in the new rite, and both of which are associated with complex theologies that attempt to locate the action, is an issue too complex for discussion here. Since the theological interpretations that accompany their use implicitly deny the centrality of the Word, it is inconceivable that they should be introduced into the Lutheran rite without a clear understanding of how their use should be interpreted in an evangelical context.

There is nothing objectionable about breaking a piece of bread into two pieces, unless someone says that you *must* do it because it was commanded by Christ. That is the clear implication of the ILCW text: "After taking bread and wine, and giving thanks, Jesus broke the bread, the third action."

Thomas Erastus, the famous defender of complete state power of the church ("Erastianism") and professor of medicine at Heidelberg, wrote what we can consider the classic defense of the necessity of the fraction. His tract appeared concurrently with the famous Calvinistic Heidelberg Catechism. The argument is as follows:

The command contained in the words "this do in remembrance of me" is to be understood not only in the sense of eating and drinking, but also as including all the other things that Christ did. Since he broke bread, with thanksgiving, such words should not be considered as counting the inclusion of the thanksgiving and the fraction any less important than eating. . . . The fraction . . . which is expressly commanded, cannot be considered a matter of liberty.<sup>31</sup>

Erastus goes on to insist that the church was under obligation to use no more than one loaf of bread at each communion service. He does not explain whether exceptions to the law might be possible in case of large congregations.

In *Liturgy Coming to Life* Bishop Robinson manages to come to the same position as Erastus: "And when he told his friends to 'do this' . . . he enjoined this action upon us."<sup>32</sup> To a good many people the rediscovery of this legal obligation comes as an exciting and "contemporary" revelation. We have clearly done an inadequate job of teaching liturgics when this comes up and nobody remembers that the matter ever came up before.

Unless we have a clear understanding of just how much is included in the command "this do," there is no reason to leave out such probable features of the Last Supper as foot washing, reclining, or eating bitter herbs. There is, in fact, a clear Lutheran understanding of the limits of the command: the confessions are quite clear that it implies only the consecration and the distribution. When it became a polemical issue after the publication of Erastus' pamphlet, the theologians spelled it out in detail. Quenstedt, for instance, makes a precise distinction between *actus formales* and *actus concomitantes*. "It is permissible [*licet*] that the bread be broken in connection with the distribution. Nevertheless, it is not one of the formal acts of the sacrament, nor is it necessary that the fraction take place during the celebration. It is an arbitrary matter and can be taken care of before the holy supper."<sup>33</sup> The ILCW should make it rubrically clear that the practice is permitted but not required. But in that case it could hardly be called "the third action."

The meaning assigned to the fraction, "breaking of the bread . . . reminds us of post-Easter appearances like that at Emmaus," follows the tradition of Amalar of Metz, the ninth-century allegorist.<sup>34</sup> There is no basis, however, for assuming that church tradition supplies us with a consensus on its meaning. Some pious explanations have included the passion of Christ (Dix, 81), the immolation of Christ's sacrifice (Dix, 615), the unity of the church (Dix, 132). Robinson's explanation is the following:

"Look!" he is saying, "this is my body, which I am breaking!" There is no reason for requiring the fraction, then, on the basis of some valuable intrinsic meaning. If the one loaf signifies the unity of the church, why does not the breaking of the one loaf signify the deplorable disunity of the church? One reason for its being omitted in Reformation orders is that too many fanciful explanations had developed.<sup>35</sup>

The four-action shape is a definition of catholicity. It appeals to Lutherans because they are adverse to being thought of as sectarian. There is an important distinction to be made, however, between catholicity and conformity. In the name of catholicity Lutherans have been urged repeatedly during the last four centuries to conform. The most extreme form of the appeal was, in fact, a demand. The arrogant sermon of the auxiliary bishop of Mainz, preaching to the military leaders who by force of arms were about to impose the *ancien regime* on the churches of the Reformation, demanded conformity to every last syllable of the mass, since they all had come down directly from the apostles. "In the same original apostolic church the holy, salutary body and blood of Christ in the holy

Eucharist had the name 'mass,' just as it does today and consisted of the same actions as it does today."<sup>36</sup>

The extent of the conformity necessary to achieve catholicity was reduced a bit by the humanist theologian Georg Witzel. He talked about the authority to be found in the "consensus of the first five centuries." Lutherans should not be so radical; conformity to tradition was safer. "How much *safer* to use the old form. . . . Nothing has been removed; the Lord's Supper is put into a better light by the auxiliary ceremonies, and the older they are the more sacred they are."<sup>37</sup> Witzel's definition of catholicity was a bit more modest than Helding's; Dix's version is a vastly reduced version of the old argument. Apparently it is getting easier to achieve liturgical catholicity. The difference between the catholic minimum and the four-action shape is only a quick snap of bread, a short procession, and a prayer.

But can we seriously argue that the offertory procession, which developed in pagan Greek mystery rites, is a condition for being catholic? Is the eucharistic prayer absolutely necessary? Even Gregory the Great admitted, in effect, that it was not apostolic when he said that "some professor" wrote it. Must we have a fraction? Does catholicity, in short, mean conformity to church practice?

An early critic of Lutheran practice, the Dominican Johan Fabri, thought so. His assertion of catholicity-as-conformity is probably the most ingenuous form the argument has ever taken:

The office of holy mass has been carried out by command and rule of the Holy Spirit in Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Bohemia, the islands of the ocean sea, in England, Scotland, Crete, Cyprus, Rhodes, Sardinia, Corsica, by the Greeks, Russians, Muscovites, by all who confess Christ in Syria, in Armenia, in India, in Ethiopia, Palestine, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, on Mount Sinai, in the newly-discovered world in America, in Pennsylvania, etc., which new world, now found by God's providence, is more than three thousand miles long and five thousand miles in diameter.<sup>38</sup>

That the argument has had an influence on the ILCW, or at least on Dr. Brand, is evident from this statement: "The Lutherans claimed that they had not abolished the mass, and yet when they celebrated it they omitted two parts which any Christian, eastern or western, would have considered essential."<sup>39</sup> There was a torrent of criticism of Luther's audacity in the sixteenth century. Helding demanded that Lutherans conform to the complete Latin text; liberal humanists like Witzel, in love with *antiquitas*, would settle for the "consensus of the first five centuries," but nobody complained about the omission of "two parts" because the four-action shape was not defined until 1945.

It is Luther's minimum that is catholic. It is based on the earliest apostolic tradition. He puts the same emphasis on the words of institution that the holy fathers, Augustine, Ambrose, and Thomas did. There is a solid case to be made, in fact, for considering Luther a legitimate abbreviator of the mass in the same sense that Gregory I was. "An abbreviation of the mass, even the canon itself, was no damnable crime against the mass of the Middle Ages, but a reform in the best sense of the tradition."<sup>40</sup>

It would be odd if Lutherans were willing to accept the implied claim that the ILCW order is "contemporary"; it is based on

decidedly old-fashioned ceremonies. On the face of it, one might think that Luther's minimum structure, which in dispensing with hoary rituals, emphasizing the newness of the New Covenant and making room for new expressions of devotion, would recommend itself as the basic shape for a contemporary order.

It is probably safe to assume that the commissioners saw in the liturgy a means by which they could further church unity, and it is also probable that they considered the catholic minimum sterile. It is true, in fact, that the distinction between what was commanded and what fell in the area of adiaphora did tend to impoverish the liturgy.

The fault lay not in the distinction; it was a psychological phenomenon. Inasmuch as secondary matters were termed adiaphora, theologians did not take them seriously. Ironically, it is the same psychology that has made it possible for Lutherans to appoint a liturgical commission which has an inadequate representation of theologians; liturgy still seems to be something indifferent, something for musicians. There is no reason for changing our theological position. We can simply learn that secondary matters are not unimportant.

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***Inasmuch as secondary matters were termed adiaphora, theologians did not take them seriously.***

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There is no reason, either, to assume that the catholic minimum must be sterile. As long as it were not required, there would be no objection to the gospel procession, for example. And consider the pastoral possibilities of the words of institution, now that the celebrant may stand behind the altar. The provisional order of the Presbyterians is really more Lutheran than the ILCW order because its compilers recognized the theological problem and provided the words of institution twice, once as proclamation and once in a eucharistic prayer.<sup>41</sup> It seems strange, on one hand, to consider as obligatory for the church the incidental circumstance of Christ's breaking of bread and, on the other, to ignore the significance of his speaking the words of institution "to his disciples." Why not learn from the Presbyterians, who think that the direction is important? We could place a firm Amen after the first part of the eucharistic prayer, then direct the words of institution to the congregation, and then—after doing our homework on the *epiclesis* and *anamnesis* and deciding if such dubious practices can be understood in some evangelical way—we could continue praying.

It may even develop that the Catholics are not really adamant about the Godward direction of movement in the canon. Catholics with whom I have discussed the canon have not even heard about the problem. Some of them already think of the canon as a kind of conversation, anyway.

The commission has done several things well. It has made sure that the order cannot be cut in half. It has constructed a beautiful



and classic beginning. It has given us some graceful new texts. But because of the crucial nature of the theological problem it presents, provision should be made for a review, especially since under present regulations there is almost no check on its mandate to “act for the churches.”<sup>42</sup>

Inasmuch as one of the peculiarities of liturgical studies at present is that they are carried on largely in isolation from other theological disciplines, they have developed a pelagianizing theology that has little in common with other theological disciplines.<sup>43</sup> I see no reason that the “new insights into the meaning and uses of the liturgy,” about which the ILCW preface speaks, make it necessary to change the communion rite so that man’s actions are emphasized at the expense of God’s. Nor is there any reason that the pace of change in the modern world should lead to the relaxing of our theological responsibility.

When the Rev. Abdel Ross Wentz moved at the 1948 convention of the United Lutheran Church that the “proposed texts [for the

*Service Book and Hymnal*] be approved with the exception that the eucharistic prayer shall be omitted,” his motion was defeated, and the SBH included a eucharistic prayer.<sup>44</sup> However, its use was made optional, rendering its challenge to Lutheran practice less serious. There is no evidence that the synods that now make up The American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod were aware of how drastic the proposed changes were.

Things are different now. The ILCW order *requires* not only the eucharistic prayer but a “shape” based on theological principles foreign to our tradition, and introduced out of a conviction that Luther’s reform was a “heretical distortion.” Lest I be misunderstood, let me say that I consider extremely important the ecumenical, sociological, psychological, and esthetic aspects of worship. The church will be served best, however, if we observe the right priorities and make certain that the basic framework of the liturgy—the “shape”—expresses a responsible theology. ■■■■

#### NOTES

1. *Contemporary Worship 2—Services: The Holy Communion* (Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and St. Louis, 1970).

2. *Worship in the Name of Jesus* (St. Louis, 1968), 294. On the other hand, the eminent Luther scholar of the University of Bonn, Ernst Bizer, says of Brunner’s book, “I cannot reconcile this doctrine of communion either with Luther or with the Lutheran confessions. What sense is there in appealing to the Lutheran confessions if one is deviating from them so far both in content and method?” *Evangelische Theologie* 16, no. 1 (1956): 17 f.

3. *Jahrbuch fur Hymnologie und Liturgie* (Kassel, 1967), 64.

4. Brunner is one of the most influential voices in the German high church movement that is seeking to reaffirm the authority of the fourth-century tradition. Rudolph Stahlin discusses the debate among liturgiologists concerning the relative authority of the first and fourth centuries in *Leiturgia I* (Kassel, 1954), 6.

5. The four New Testament accounts of the institution of holy communion are not direct reports of the Last Supper, but reflections of liturgical usage.

6. *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, AE, 33.

7. *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster, 1945), 369.

8. Dix, 48.

9. “The Shape of the Liturgy: A Review Article,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 19 (1967): 38.

10. *Die Eucharistic als Entfaltung der Verba Testamenti* (Kassel, 1957), 48, 65. Schmidt-Laube’s analysis of the structure, which proceeds not on the basis of tradition, as in Dix’s case, but on the words of institution themselves, probably would have been a more acceptable alternative for the commission, especially as he shares many of their concerns.

11. *Interpreting Luther’s Legacy: Essays in Honor of Edward C. Fendt* (Minneapolis, 1969), 108–119. Dr. Brand was chairman of the Liturgical Text Committee of the ILCW. This group prepared the text for the new rite.

12. Theodor Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy* (London, 1969), 8.

13. Josef Jungmann, *Missarum Solemnia II* (Vienna, 1962), 5.

14. Brand, 111; italics added.

15. Ragnar Bring, “On the Lutheran Concept of the Sacrament,” in *World Lutheranism of Today: A Tribute to Anderi Nygren, 15 November 1950* (Rock Island, IL, 1950), 87.

16. Brand, 118.

17. AE, 36: 52.

18. AE, 36: 50.

19. AE, 53: 69.

20. *Treatise on the New Testament*, AE, 35, esp. 82.

21. Brand, 110. Although Brand mentions proclamation, his subsequent discussion does not stress the *function* of proclamation, merely

the question of audibility.

22. Brand, 110.

23. *An Order of Worship for the Proclamation of the Word of God and the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper, with Commentary* (Cincinnati, 1968), 66.

24. AE, 36: 52.

25. Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London, 1966), 116f.

26. *Prolatic verborum quae est potissima et principalis actio in sacramento*, Lettero Wolferinus, 20 July 1543. WA 10: 348.

27. Santmire, 48.

28. *Ibid.*, 116.

29. “The New Testament Background for the Doctrine of the Sacraments,” in *Oecumenica* 1970 (Minneapolis, 1970), 45.

30. “Sundenvergebung im Abendmahl,” *Jahrbuch fur Hymnologie und Liturgie* (1936): 85.

31. *Erzelung etlicher Ursacher, warum das hochwurdige Sacrament des Nachtmahls unsers Herrn und Hylandts Jhesu Christi nicht solle ohne das Brotbrechen gehalten werden* (Heidelberg, 1553, 1556), Biii. The controversy between the Calvinist and Lutheran points of view continued. The pamphlet was reprinted in 1891.

32. J. A. T. Robinson, *Liturgy Coming to Life*, 2nd ed. (London, 1963), 72.

33. Johannes Quenstedt, *Theologia Didacto-polemica* iv, 216.

34. Adolf Franz, *Die Messe im deutschen Mittelalter* (Freiburg, 1902), 387.

35. Dix records advice to that effect by Martin Bucer to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 671.

36. Michael Helling, *Von der heffigen Messe. Funffzehn Predise* (Ingolstadt, 1548), Ciii.

37. Georg Witzel, *Defensio Ecdesiasticae Liturgide* (Cologne, 1564), C4.

38. Johan Fabri, *Antwort auff das unnutz, unrain, irrig Geschwetz, etc.* (Dollingen, 1558), L.

39. Brand, 110.

40. Leonhardt Fendt, *Einfuhrung in die Liturgiewissenschaft* (Berlin, 1958), 38.

41. *The Book of Common Worship: Provisional Services and Lectionary for the Christian Year* (Philadelphia, 1966), 29–31.

42. The American Lutheran Church. *Reports and Actions* (Minneapolis, 1968), 507.

43. In this connection David Granskou requests that liturgical revision take into account the results of New Testament scholarship. *Lutheran Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (February 1967): 74ff.

44. United Lutheran Church, *Minutes of the Sixteenth Biennial Convention* (Philadelphia, 1948), 444.



# REVIEWS

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

Martin Luther



## Review Essay

**The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture.** Thomas C. Oden, general ed. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998–.

✦ Already in the earliest days of the church, one generation of Christians was interested in the thought of the previous generation. Thus Irenaeus listened as a boy to Polycarp of Smyrna, who in turn had been a disciple of the apostle John. Dare we believe ourselves to be very different, let us consider how many times our congregations have heard, “As Luther said . . .” from the pulpit!

The custom of reviewing the writings of the fathers became commonplace in the early church—so commonplace that by the Middle Ages the state of exegesis was not much more than simply quoting what the “fathers” said about a particular verse of Scripture. Reading one medieval father is like reading the next, with what appears to be a nearly mindless repetition of what the last fellow said about the text. This system of quoting the fathers was certainly not without merit. But as we know, by the time of the Reformation, selectively quoting from the fathers had contributed to obscuring the gospel. Luther finally had had enough of the citation theology of his generation. Making use of the revival of interest in the original languages, he delved deeply once more into the fountain and source of the faith: the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

Unfortunately, what began as a healthy and very necessary antidote to an over-reliance on the writings of the church fathers led to a near-total neglect of them by modern theologians, whose discoveries led them to believe that whatever the early church fathers had to say was born from their primitive faith, a faith filled with superstitions, fondness for myths, and an unhealthy obsession with truth and error, orthodoxy and heresy. Thus no self-respecting, enlightened theologian would pay too much attention to what the ancients had to say.

Orthodox Lutherans have always had a fondness for the early church fathers. It was John Gerhard in fact who coined the word “patrology” with his book *Patrologia*, published in 1653. The Lutheran Confessions quote the church fathers often enough to sustain the assertion that

We have cleansed and brought to light important teachings of the Scriptures and the Fathers that had been obscured by

the sophistic arguments of modern theologians. Modern theologians have evidently not paid attention to what the Fathers meant to say (Ap II, 33).

This is as true today as it was then. So it is hoped that many Lutherans will welcome the advent of an impressive new series of Bible commentaries called the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (ACCS). So far in this series has appeared *Mark* (volume 2), *Romans* (volume 6), *1-2 Corinthians* (volume 7), and *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians* (volume 8). This review will report on the background, purpose, and method of the ACCS. But first an overview of other materials available to help read the Scripture with the early church fathers.

Anyone who has ever had an interest in exploring what the early church fathers had to say about a particular portion of Holy Scripture has had to rely on the ongoing series *Biblica Patristica*, which is basically a computerized list of verses of Scripture found in the writings of the fathers. This was and continues to be perhaps the most accessible way to check for every occurrence of a particular verse of Scripture, though this project is still far from complete.

There are presently six volumes and one supplement available in the *Biblica Patristica*, covering the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian (volume 1); the third century, excluding Origen (volume 2); Origen (volume 3); Eusebius of Caesarea, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Epiphanius (volume 4); Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Amphiloque of Iconium (volume 5); and Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, Ambrosiaster (volume 6); with a supplement on Philo of Alexandria. Obviously lacking thus far are volumes on some of the giants of biblical interpretation: Jerome, Augustine, and Chrysostom. *Biblica Patristica* is being produced by the Center for the Analysis and Documentation of Patristics at the University of Strasbourg. The first volume in this series was produced in 1975, and the project continues. The series is terribly painstaking to work with and provides no indication of the particular worth, length, or merit of a citation of a Bible verse.

The other method to use in finding what the fathers have to say about a given passage is to sit with each individual volume in English collections of the church fathers, such as *Fathers of the Church*, *Ancient Christian Writers*, or *Ante-Nicene and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church*. The *Fathers of the Church* is a huge collection begun in the 1950s and still being produced today in a project sponsored by the Catholic University of America. Sadly, a number of volumes in the *Fathers of the Church*

series are out of print. Ancient Christian Writers, though not as large as the previous two sets, has the advantage of scholarly notes, introductions and appendices. It is published by Paulist Press. There are presently fifty-seven volumes in this series. The Ante-Nicene Fathers and The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church is still the most complete collection of the early church fathers in English and is by far the least expensive collection available. The disadvantage is that the translations in this set are over a hundred years old, and are thus in Victorian English, with small print in double columns on each page. Using each of these sets, it is possible to take the time to work through the many references to verses of Scripture. "Tedious" does not do justice to the painfully slow nature of such a task. More often than not, a biblical reference is merely an aside, with no particular usefulness or relevance.

Arguably, the greatest mind of the early church was that of St. Augustine. The best translation of St. Augustine is in the yet-to-be-completed series *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: New City Press, 1990). When finished, *The Works of Saint Augustine* will be the first complete translation of Augustine into English. In this series all the extant sermons of Augustine have already been translated into vibrant English that captures the force of Augustine's rhetoric. The sermons of Augustine are astounding in their depth and masterful use of rhetoric.

The only thing presently in print in English that comes close to what the ACCS will eventually offer is *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*. This four-volume hardcover set offers a reprinting of the work of M. F. Toal, originally published in 1955 as *Patristic Homilies on the Gospels* (Chicago: Regnery, 1955–1963). This set contains much of Thomas Aquinas' *Catena Aurea*, in which Aquinas offered comments from church fathers based on the lectionary. Toal also depended heavily on *Bibliotheca Patrum Concionatoria*, an eight-volume work published in Paris in 1662, in eight large volumes. This was a large compilation of patristic commentary and exposition selected and arranged for the liturgical year of the Roman Catholic Church. Lutheran preachers will find this set particularly useful. *The Sunday Sermons of the Fathers* can be purchased from Eighth Day Books ([www.eighthdaybooks.com](http://www.eighthdaybooks.com)). The price is \$129.95.

But now let us turn our attention to the ACCS. This is an ambitious project that will eventually consist of twenty-seven volumes containing selected comments by early church fathers on each book of the Bible as well as the Apocrypha. InterVarsity Press has committed itself to this massive project. The ACCS is made possible by the advent of computer technology. It relies on two extremely significant computerized data bases available on CD-ROM. First, the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG), the Greek computer data base that, in addition to secular literature, also provides the texts of the Greek church fathers. Second, the *Centre de Textes et Documents* (Cetedoc, sometimes abbreviated CLCLT) is the Latin equivalent of the TLG. All the writings of the Latin fathers are made available on CD-ROMS from the Brepols Press in Turnhout, Belgium. These computerized data bases are the foundation for the ACCS.

The general editor, Thomas Oden, notes that these resources have the advantage of being available and are a more reliable source because they contain better critical editions of the fathers'

writings than, say, the massive print edition of the Migne collection. The Migne edition is still the most complete collection of the writings of the early church, consisting of 137 huge, thick volumes of two-column texts in Greek and Latin.

Oden believes that the digital texts will be more widely available both to amateur and professional researchers. The computerized versions of the fathers' writings make it possible to download short selections as well as to explore the context more easily. Since they are on computer CD, it is far more cost-effective to acquire them than to purchase large printed versions of the texts that may in fact be less reliable.

Producing a volume in the ACCS first involves finding in the fathers as many references as possible to a particular book of the Bible. This raw data is then provided to the volume editor. The editor's task is then to select which comments are worthy of being included in the commentary. This is where both the challenge and the opportunity of the ACCS lies. In some cases, such as the Synoptic Gospels, the task is to select from a huge collection of quotations. I do not envy the person who must decide what to include when it comes to the volume on John. In the case of other books of the Bible, I am sure the challenge will be to find enough material to include.

Generally speaking, the church fathers did not write commentaries as such on the individual books of the Bible. They wrote biblical theology, and more commonly, they simply preached on the Bible. Most early church fathers did not study theology in the atmosphere of a university or seminary environment. But perhaps that is a blessing in disguise, for they did not have time to wander off on tangents that may prove of interest to a specialized academic guild, but finally do not serve the best interest of the church. More often than not, the early church fathers were addressing specific concerns, controversies, or pastoral needs. The church fathers, no matter what the purpose of their writing, quoted from the Bible voluminously, often with no attempt to cite the reference. Thus the computer search engines now available are critical to locating citations in the writings of the fathers.

The ACCS has already come under fire for the process it is using and the method employed to choose which quotations to include and which not to include. In a review of the ACCS prepared for the journal *First Things* (March 1999): 40–43, the patristic scholar Robin Young was exceedingly critical. She is associated with a series similar to the ACCS, *The Church's Bible*, a project that at one point was working with the ACCS, then broke off the relationship. In my judgment, *First Things* erred in inviting Young to review the ACCS. A more objective reviewer should have been sought.

Young criticizes the ACCS for "creating a volume that never existed." She also accuses the ACCS of falling victim to the "spiritual vice of nostalgia." And on these two points, she does raise legitimate concerns. But what of these concerns? Does the ACCS in fact do a disservice to the church in creating volumes that never existed, and is the ACCS merely a nostalgic and utopian presentation of the much-longed-for "great consensus" of the early church?

There is a danger for those hoping to find in the writings of the early church a consensus beyond the reach of modern Christianity on virtually any point of basic Christian truth. It is easy to romanticize the early church as a period of great unity, when, in fact, there

was from the very first days of the church doctrinal conflict and strife. One would imagine that Christians without the foundation of a common confession of the truth such as Lutherans have would wish even more fervently than do Lutherans to find some standard or litmus test of truth in the writings of the early church.

Thomas Oden responded to Dr. Young's criticisms in a letter written to *First Things* (June/July 1999) and lays to rest some of her more severe criticisms. He wrote,

When we speak of consensual exegesis, we are saying only that we are not focused on constantly quoting the heretical views of Valentius or Marcion or the Gnostics or the Arians. If we did this we would delegitimize our project among the many Orthodox and Roman Catholic readers we hope to attract.

In other words, anyone looking for “equal time” for those long ago judged to be heretics, will not find it in the ACCS. But then, anyone who wishes to give the ancient heretics “equal time” should not be preaching or teaching Christianity to begin with. The ACCS does not intend to play to the liberal academic community, and this may account for the sorts of criticisms that Young raises against the ACCS.

Oden provides the following apologia for the ACCS:

No other patristic inquiry has yet set out systematically to use computer technology to locate raw references in Greek and Latin texts to all canonical scripture texts and the Apocrypha using Boolean search techniques. There is, to my knowledge, no similar effort in the planning stages anywhere else. The group with which Prof. Young is working, which has discontinued cooperation with the ACCS, is highly averse to using computer searches to locate verse references, which is one of the major reasons they insisted on going their own way despite our many invitations to bring their efforts into harmony with ours. Our focus methodologically is upon making digital searches into the vast database of Latin and Greek texts that refer to a particular text, and is the unique strength of our project. This is what makes our textual base far more varied, ecumenical, and irenic than previous efforts.

What then to make of the ACCS? Of course, anyone reading the series is going to find things that he does not like. Those whose knowledge of the fathers is a bit more deep will want to read the actual texts themselves from which the ACCS quotes selectively. One must wonder how a commentary on Mark is going to be remarkably different from the one on Matthew, but that remains to be seen. The point is that the ACCS offers the English-speaking reader a useful resource for biblical studies. At the risk of sounding anti-intellectual, the simple truth is that a parish pastor sitting down to study the Word of God for the purpose of proclaiming it to the people of God will find far more of value in the ACCS than in many of the modern Bible commentaries available today. If he wishes to delve into issues of textual criticism, the history of interpretation, the ebb and flow of scholarly debate on disputed points, there is much to be found in modern, critical commentaries. But if he wishes to find practical, pastoral application of the biblical

texts, he will find much more in the ACCS than in many modern commentaries, which can end up being a waste of a pastor's limited financial resources.

Contrary to what Professor Young charges, the ACCS does not romanticize the early church, nor does it claim to have discovered the mythical “consensus” so fondly claimed by some. It is simply offering us a convenient way in which we can read what a variety of the early church fathers had to say about a given portion of Scripture. It makes accessible texts that are difficult to obtain in good modern English translation, or are impossible to obtain because they are not in English translation at all. For the vast majority of busy pastors, this set will provide them the comments of the early church fathers in a convenient format.

The ACCS covers the period from Clement of Rome in the second century to John of Damascus in the mid-eighth century. Some might wish to quibble about such a long period of time. I am not convinced that the mid-eighth century really falls under the category of “early church.” After reproducing the text of a portion of Scripture, using the RSV translation, the ACCS offers quotes from church fathers. Often, the translation is from a standard English translation already available. Thankfully, the Victorian English of the Ante-Nicene and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers collection is put into modern English. Where a Latin, Greek, Coptic, or Syriac text is deemed to be of value, it is translated if no English translation is otherwise available.

Confessional Lutherans will gladly note that the volume editors chosen for the ACCS include a number of Missouri Synod professors, including Quentin Wesselschmidt (Psalms 51–150), Dean Wenthe (Jeremiah and Lamentations), Arthur Just (Luke), and William Weinrich (Revelation).

The volumes are beautifully bound and printed on acid-free paper. The typesetting and page formatting is helpful to the reader and easy on the eyes. My only complaint is that the volumes are of a trim-size larger than normal, and so I must eventually readjust an entire bookshelf to make room for them. Ironically, the volumes in the ACCS are of the same size as Concordia Publishing House's *Concordia Commentary*. One may look forward to the day, hopefully, when the entire ACCS and *Concordia Commentary* is available.

InterVarsity Press offers a 20-percent discount to subscribers to the series, making the price for each volume quite reasonable, generally under \$30. Christian Book Distributors sells the volumes as well. I would encourage anyone looking for a more complete explanation of the series to visit the ACCS website: [www.ancientchristian.com](http://www.ancientchristian.com).

An interview with Thomas Oden, reproduced on the ACCS website, contains much useful information. Oden explains that the idea for the ACCS came to him as he was preparing a sermon. What may strike conservative Lutheran readers as obvious is a good reflection on how many modern theologians first discover the fathers. Oden says,

I suddenly realized that what I had been doing as a theologian could be applied to preaching—that it would be possible to go back to the Fathers of the Church series, look up Scripture references and find all kinds of materials for that particular text. So that was an “aha” experience for me.

In December 1993 a feasibility study was held in Washington, D.C. Drew University brought top patristic scholars from around the country to explore the possibility of launching this project. Oden notes that whereas interest in the church fathers has always been common in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox communions, Evangelicals (and some Lutherans?) have been left “hungry, with a sense of something essential missing. I think there is growing awareness among them that the work of the Holy Spirit in the period between Augustine and Luther, and even before Augustine in the Eastern Tradition, is largely a closed memory.”

Oden’s comments on the problems of modern biblical interpretation are enlightening. Oden is a self-confessed convert from liberalism, and influences from this time in his life linger in his support for the ordination of women; yet he has made great progress away from liberal theology. He notes that at the heart of modern biblical interpretation is

an ideological captivity to the assumptions of the Enlightenment. By those assumptions, I mean naturalistic reductionism, autonomous individualism, hedonic narcissism and absolute relativism. These describe the two-century hegemony of the ideology of modernity. And there is an inordinate dependence of historical-critical scholarship on that ideology. Twenty-five or thirty years ago, when I was a young theologian and a Bultmannian, it seemed that the assumptions of modernity would go on forever. But the worldview of modernity is now suffering an intense inward collapse. I strongly commend historical scholarship. But I would argue that a great deal of modern biblical scholarship needs to be freed from the narrow assumptions of modernity.

Oden observes how much of the early church fathers is not actually in English and indicates that much remains untranslated in the Migne patrology series, including commentaries and portions of commentaries by Theodore of Mopsuestia and Theodoret and much of Cyril of Alexandria’s work. A German work from 1933 translated a number of writings by Greek fathers on the Pauline Epistles. The Romans commentary in the ACCS includes much of that material in English translation.

Hoping that the ACCS will fill a void in Protestant/Evangelical theology, Oden says that

One of the reasons for the hunger in Protestant hermeneutics is precisely this, that we have missed the correctives of other voices—of other historical periods and cultures. Part of what we are doing as we read Scripture with the fathers is expanding our cultural vision, the metaphors through which we can understand the Scripture text. We are also seeing the text more according to its wholeness, that is to the wholeness of the truth of the Christian faith and of Scripture.

I recommend the ACCS to anyone who wishes to hear the voice of men far removed from the particular biases and confusions of our era. Reading the early church fathers is a marvelous undertaking. For as we listen, we hear their witness to Christ and his gospel. No, not without faults and failings, but still, a witness more clear than the cacophony heard from today’s liberal and

post-modern theologians. We can treasure the fathers of the church as men who did not doubt the Bible’s authenticity, but rejoiced in its treasures. They did not consider themselves above the text of Scripture, scrutinizing it for its veracity, but rather viewed themselves as the servants of the text, which they clearly recognized as the living God’s revelation of himself through the person and work of his Son, Jesus Christ. And thus, when and where they teach the divine truth correctly, we Lutherans rejoice to confess, “We know that what we have said agrees with the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, with the holy Fathers Ambrose, Augustine, and many others, and with the whole church of Christ” (Ap iv, 389).

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## Review Essay

*Mysteria Dei: Essays in Honor of Kurt Marquart.* Edited by Paul T. McCain and John R. Stephenson. Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1999. 392 pages.

❖ The first twenty-some pages of this *Festschrift* laud Professor Kurt Marquart, thanking God for his work and presenting his biography. This is, of course, pleasant reading for Marquart friends, but it can also be of benefit for those of us who have never met him and are only familiar with his writings.

After the words of tribute to the professor, the essays are offered in alphabetical order by author’s name. This means that one should not seek any particular development of the mysteries of God theme set forth in the title.

I found two problems with this publication. There are rather too many proof-reading errors—no offense to the editors!—likely because of haste in getting the work published. One confusion needs to be mentioned, namely, the notes for the essay “Christ in You, the Hope of Glory.” As well as I could make out, reference 1 in the text actually corresponds to note 12, with 2 corresponding to 13, 3 to 14, and so forth. Where notes 1–11 actually belong, I don’t know. If this sounds confusing, it is!

The second “problem” with the book is actually no problem at all. Many of the essays merely whet the theological appetite and leave one wanting more. It is not that the essays are deficient in themselves, but that their subjects deserve entire books. This is actually one of the benefits of a work like this. It offers food for thought and brief overviews of some timely and important topics for pastors who are all too likely to lose touch with such discussions.

For instance, many readers of *LOGIA* will likely have noted the recent release of a translation of Valentin Ernst Loescher’s *Vollstaendige Timotheus Verinus*, which is a monumental critique of pietism. Paul T. McCain in his essay offers a brief but helpful review of a number of the most salient points made by Loescher, and then suggests that some of the challenges to Lutheranism today, such as the Church Growth Movement, have a close affinity to pietism.

With all the foolish talk of angels today, Jonathan C. Naumann presents a welcome example of right teachings in his essay



“Awareness of Angels.” Especially helpful is his discussion of the connection between angels and the Divine Service. By doing this he prompts the faithful to glory all the more in the *Gottesdienst*, where heaven and earth come together.

False notions about evangelism and liturgy also plague the church. John T. Pless addresses this issue in “Liturgy and Evangelism in the Service of the *Mysteria Dei*.” With four theses, he draws evangelism back to its only heart and power, the means of grace, which, of course, is what liturgy is all about. The liturgy needs to be neither preserved as an antique treasure nor discarded as outdated. Rather, the liturgy needs to be understood as God’s serving his salvation to us. Pless calls for a recovery of the understanding of the Divine Service in preaching, church music, catechesis, pastoral care, piety, and evangelism.

Also in connection with the use of the historic liturgy, Matthew C. Harrison offers a much-needed historical background and perspective for Article x of the Formula of Concord, which deals with adiaphora. This article has been much misused by innovators and individualists to rationalize their tinkering with the Divine Service. Harrison demonstrates that Chemnitz would by no means have condoned such licentious tampering. (As an aside, Harrison also translated for this volume an article by Hermann Sasse, “Fathers of the Church,” in which Sasse takes to task a church that forgets its fathers in the faith.)

Pastoral care is addressed in “Generation X and the Care of the Soul,” by Harold L. Senkbeil. His essay includes a call to the church of our day to look back to the “classic tradition” of pastoral care demonstrated by pastors of earlier ages. While generations of pastors have been drawn to programming in the parish, therapists have discovered for themselves what the pastors of bygone ages understood: the overriding need for empathetic listening. In pastoral care such empathetic listening takes place within the context of the means of grace, particularly, individual confession and absolution and “private pastoral care—home visits.” The pastor “must learn the art of diagnosis through spiritual conversation” (so Senkbeil summarizes Walther), rather than being carried away by psychological techniques, strategies, and theories. Real pastoral care is to bring God’s people into communion with the true healer, Jesus Christ, thus means of grace again. Senkbeil states that “the first principle of the cure of souls, is to remember that pastoral care is not in reality a pastor’s care at all” (296). It is Christ’s own ministry. Psychotherapists also are invaluable for effective spiritual care, and Senkbeil suggests some ways this is true. Senkbeil covers a wide scope in this essay and calls his effort “a very cursory survey” of what “ought to become a frequent and urgent fraternal topic among us.”

Another particularly timely essay is William Weinrich’s “Should a Layman Discharge the Duties of the Holy Ministry?” Weinrich states the aim of his essay: “to lay bare the internal rationale for the historic Lutheran position of requiring an ordained minister to preach and to administer the Sacraments” (341). First comes the direct statement that historically the Lutherans have asserted that a layman is not to exercise the duties of the public ministry. There are cases when a layman must baptize or preach because of the necessity of these means of grace for faith and the justification of the sinner. I found the most helpful portion of Weinrich’s essay to be this clear explanation of “necessity.” One

can get the full idea of what he will be reading from this sentence found in the summary of the essay: “The exegetical, dogmatic, and pastoral tradition of the Lutheran heritage admits of no circumstance that justifies an ongoing, continuous use of unordained laymen for purposes of preaching, baptizing, and administration of the Holy Supper” (355).

The essays briefly discussed deal with issues and conflicts that are facing the Lutheran church today. The remaining works do not necessarily deal with issues of major discord. Nevertheless, they cover the whole spectrum of theological interest and offer the student of theology a smorgasbord of subjects to ponder.

Sacramental theology is addressed in “Baptism and Repentance” by Charles J. Evanson. He uses the thoughts of Norwegian Lutheran theologian Leiv Aalen to urge a firmer hold upon baptism as the foundation of our faith and salvation.

Sacramental and exegetical theology is in evidence in Arthur Just’s article “Eating and Drinking at His Table.” Here Just engages the Gospel of St. Luke to elaborate not only the proper function, use, and benefit of the Sacrament of the Altar, but also the jurisdiction given to the apostolic ministry by our Lord Jesus.

Historical theology is represented in any number of works, but particularly in the essay by the late Tom Hardt, “The Sixth Ecumenical Council.” Also, the previously mentioned article by Herman Sasse well falls into this category.

New Testament exegesis is offered by David P. Scaer. In his essay, “Second Peter and the Canon,” he explores what this epistle may be indicating by the phrase “the prophetic word” (2 Pe 1:19), concluding that the Gospel of St. Matthew is the probable referent. Also in the category of New Testament exegesis: what is intended by Paul when he speaks of the mysteries of God in 1 Corinthians 4:1? Jonathan F. Grothe (“The Mysteries and the Ministry”) suggests that, while the term might include the “teaching of the institution of the sacraments and the following of that teaching,” the primary referents “were Christ and the message of the Gospel that He preached” (62).

Old Testament exegesis and theology are included in the last two essays, “Ruth: Convert and Confessor,” by John Wilch, and “Luther and the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament” by Glen Zweck. Wilch’s essay analyzes the book of Ruth and concludes that it helped to validate both the house of David as the rightfully kingly family and also David’s wholehearted acceptance of non-Israelites into the people of the covenant. Zweck offers a summary of Luther’s bold, Christological hermeneutic of the Old Testament, examining the reformer’s treatise *On the Last Words of David*.

John Kleinig’s article, “The Mystery of Doxology,” is one of the best in the book, in my opinion. Kleinig points out that doxologies make a sudden appearance in the church, and that they were not the practice in Jewish worship. Doxology presumes the presence of the Lord. By exulting in doxology, Christians confess participation in the mystery of the risen Lord Jesus. They stand in his presence in the Divine Service and share in his glory by his grace. Kleinig gives a theological overview of doxology in the Old Testament and its consummation through the incarnation of our Lord in the New Testament: “With the coming of Christ, doxology began to be performed by humans on earth together with the angels in heaven” (135.) The author also offers a descriptive analy-

sis of doxology. He concludes by explaining that the doxology of the Divine Service unites us with the doxology by which the risen Lord Jesus gives glory to his heavenly Father. In this mystery we on earth are united with heaven.

The dangers and temptations of Bible translation in these post-modern times are presented by Cameron MacKenzie (“The English Bible in a Post-Modern Age”). MacKenzie gives evidence of how the text of the Word of God is changed to suit the sensibilities of the age, particularly with respect to feminism and inclusive language found in the New Revised Standard Version.

In his own words, Andrew Pfeiffer’s essay, “Christ and the Catechumenate,” is “a basic introduction to the catechumenate.” He gives a brief overview of some of the history of the catechumenate as well as exploring the renewed interest in restoring a formal catechumenate.

Charles R. Hogg Jr. begins to lay a Christological foundation for understanding the office of the holy ministry in his essay, “The Mystery of Pastoral Existence.” He describes a proper understanding of apostolic succession that is based on orthodox teaching. Because he represents Christ toward his people on earth, the pastor can expect also to share in the sufferings of our Lord Jesus.

“Christ in You, the Hope of Glory,” John R. Stephenson’s contribution to the book, uses Luther’s *The Freedom of the Christian* to explore and extol the “happy exchange.” Christ the Lord takes the form of a servant to the cross in order to restore to fallen mortals the form of God. Purification and illumination—the language of mysticism—is put into a proper connection with justification by faith rather than discarded out of hand.

The title “Luther and the Consecration” gives a clear picture of the content of Erling Teigen’s essay. He notes that in the Formula of Concord Luther was acclaimed as the correct interpreter of the Augustana; therefore, what Luther confessed and taught is what gnesio-Lutherans continue to confess and teach, especially, with respect to the Lord’s Supper. Specifically, the words of consecration are the creative words of Christ that effect the spatial and temporal presence of the Lord’s body and blood in the bread and wine at their being spoken, in refutation of receptionism.

This review may very well do the opposite of its intention. By the cursory way it has dealt with each essay, it may trivialize the thought and labor of the authors and editors, and incline the reader to forgo the book. “May it never be!” Rather, lay hands on the *Festschrift*, if you can, and read it. It is well worth it.

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*A History of Japanese Theology.* Edited and translated by Yasuo Furuya. Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997. 161 pages. Paper.

❖ The editor, Yasuo Furuya, claims that “this is the first book on the history of Japanese theology ever to be written by Japanese themselves.” He is chaplain and professor of theology and religion at the International Christian University, Tokyo. Four other contributors are Akio Dohi (professor of church history at Doshisha University, Kyoto), Masaya Odagaki (professor of religion at

Kunitachi College of Music, Tokyo), Toshio Sato (professor of systematic theology at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, Tokyo), and Seiichi Yagi (professor of philosophy and ethics at Toin University, Yokohama).

This book is a short survey of Japanese theologians after Protestant missionaries arrived to the country in 1859. Dividing 130 years of history into four periods, each author evaluates the major theological developments, mostly within Protestantism.

The editor desires to do theology of Japan, “of Japan” being an objective genitive. He believes that it was providential that Japan was defeated in World War II. By “the baptism of the atomic bomb,” he says, the old militant Japan died and a new, peace-making generation was born. “Japan’s mission, therefore, is to become a peace-making nation in today’s world, which is threatened by nuclear war.” Furuya views Japan from a historical perspective in order to know the will of God for the churches in Japan at the present time. This book is “one of the first products of this theology.” In this reviewer’s assessment, Furuya belongs to the history-of-religions school, trying to accomplish the agenda of Ernst Troeltsch.

In order to appreciate this book, the reader may need to have a certain knowledge of the history of the churches in Japan. The first missionaries came from the order of the Jesuits in 1549, during the time of the Council of Trent. The Roman Catholics enjoyed an explosive spread for about a half a century. The number of believers was said to have totalled more than 600,000 out of a population of 10 million. Compared to the total population, it was about ten times the present number of Christians in Japan. The missionaries chose Buddhism in order to teach the Creator God by way of comparison. Because they realized that funeral services and rites were a very important part of the religiosity in Japan, they immediately brought the Mass for the dead into practice. According to a letter to Rome written by one of the first missionaries:

clearly the Japanese people are superior to us in science, wisdom, and culture. We only wish that they become Christians. According to our experiences the most effective way for evangelization is liturgy. The celebration of the solemn liturgy has left the deepest impression upon the people of Japan.

Unfortunately, when Franciscans and Dominicans also came to Japan with more aggressive mission strategies, Shogun banned the Christian faith, so that from 1614 to 1873 Japan was not only a non-Christian but an anti-Christian country.

The second major period of missionary activity came in the middle of the nineteenth century. After the period of the national isolation policy (1633–1854), missionaries who came from America belonged to the traditions of English Methodism, American Revivalism and Unitarianism, and eighteenth-century German Pietism. Jonathan Edwards was the most respected figure among these missionaries. The warrior class began to accept Christianity. They found in God their feudal lords. Christianity was considered superior to Confucianism in terms of morality. The Japanese people were baptized without a clear understanding of both law and gospel.

The year 1868 marked the end of the Shogun era, which led into the Meiji period. The new rulers abandoned almost everything except for the official ban of Christianity. In order to replace the “old” Confucianism on which the Shogun government had been built, the Meiji government created a cult of the emperor. What is more, they exercised the most vigorous “catechizing” activities throughout the country to teach the absolute holiness and eternity of the emperor. Because of this emperor cult, however, Japan was not able to establish any fruitful diplomatic relations with the western countries. Realizing this, the Meiji government gave up the ban on Christianity to please surrounding countries while explaining to the Japanese people that it was no longer necessary to ban Christianity because the policy had already become a part of common sense among the Japanese.

When this policy was no longer possible, the rulers adopted a new policy. They divided the religion into “inside” and “outside.” Internal faith was permitted, but external religious activities, such as “evangelization” and worship, were forbidden. Those “external activities” were placed under the regulations and restrictions of the government. This policy was not without criticism. Both Buddhists and Shintoists objected that the emperor cult was also to be restricted by the same reason. To respond to this protestation, the government declared that the emperor cult is not a religion, but belongs to a national feast and ancestor worship. Therefore, the emperor cult was announced to be free from any regulations and restrictions.

This religious mentality, which the Meiji government created and taught, is still held by a majority of Japanese people. Religion is regarded as an internal thing. Externals should be under the control of the government for the sake of the public peace.

With this brief historical background, the reader of this book will be familiar with the kinds of theological thinking the Japanese churches followed. From the very beginning of the Meiji era, newly established churches in Japan wanted to be free from any denominational lines. The revivalistic background of the first Protestant missionaries from America and the nationalistic mentality of the Japanese Christians worked together to create such a climate. But already in the 1890s, old liberalism (so-called “New Theology”) was introduced. It probably had to do with the then-current trend to model the Meiji Constitution after the constitution of Germany. Those new Christians who were not satisfied with the theological depth of the revivalistic missionaries from America turned to Germany to learn theology. Moreover, theology was done primarily within the imperial universities, apart from the church. Beginning in the 1930s, Barthian theology dominated Japanese theology. Furuya observes that to this day there is among Christians in Japan a lack of a clear understanding of the church or a definite comprehension of what Christian faith is.

To conclude, I will present a few observations.

1. The theological backgrounds of missionaries to Japan have had lasting consequences. Because of the non-creedal, non-denominational beliefs of the first Protestant missionaries, a majority of Protestant Christians even today regard theology as a bad thing that divides Christians. Pastors are not willing to teach doctrine. Believers are not

able to distinguish the gospel from the way of life influenced by Buddhism, Shintoism, and Confucianism. Moreover, because of the non-confessional nature of the churches, they have not been able to defend the simple faith from old liberalism and neo-orthodoxy.

2. The internalization of the faith in Japan occurred not only because of the puritan faith that the first Protestant missionaries brought to Japan, but also because of the government’s policy of dividing religion between “inside” and “outside,” and because of Barthian theology, which distinguishes “religion” and “faith,” and which became very popular in Japan. Here we see a concrete example of how Satan is hard at work to keep people away from the incarnational and sacramental faith. Satan works both within and without the church to make sure that people do not come to the fleshly Christ.
3. Throughout the history of Christianity in Japan, both in the sixteenth century and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there has been no serious theological attempt to deal with the worst obstacle to the Christian faith, namely, ancestor worship. It is true that there have been occasions when the churches held dialogues with Buddhists. The Jesuit missionaries, however, were not able to reach the Japanese people properly, because instead of seriously engaging with the issue of ancestor worship, they practiced the Mass for the dead. Nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries either condemned and stayed away from the traditional religions of Japan, including ancestor worship, or taught Christianity as a better morality than Confucianism.

Theologically speaking, those churches were not able to address the real issue because of the lack of the proper distinction between law and gospel. The chief function and power of the law, which is “to make original sin manifest and show man to what utter depths his nature has fallen and how corrupt it has become” (SA, III, II, 4), was not found. Accordingly, the pure gospel was not needed, and the means of grace were never important. Luther presents the work of Christ in terms of justification and the sacraments (plus the holy ministry) in the Smalcald Articles, part II. It was too bad that the first Lutheran missionaries arrived in Japan in 1892, only after the Meiji Constitution (1889) and the Imperial Message of Education (1890) had been published. Lutherans missed their golden opportunity to be established on Japanese soil, because they came only after the emperor cult was firmly instituted.

This book is a good book for those who are sent to Japan as missionaries. It will provide for them a clear picture of how the churches in Japan have been deprived of the pure gospel and Christ’s holy sacraments. It prompts us to offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his continual saving work in Japan despite many and various obstacles to the gospel. It arouses a petition for the confessional Lutheran mission work there.

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*The Book of Revelation* (Revised Edition). The New International Commentary on the New Testament. By Robert H. Mounce. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

❖ The editors of many established commentary series periodically go through the process of updating individual volumes. The NICNT is no exception. Unlike some projects that involve replacement volumes by new authors, this revision of the 1977 volume on Revelation has been done by the original author. Robert Mounce was able to return to his publication after two decades in order to update it in light of recent scholarship and his own continued reflection. This revision, therefore, does not represent a significant change in content; the updating has occurred primarily through the consideration and incorporation of secondary literature from the past two decades.

The original volume has become known as a fair and balanced commentary. The same can be said of this revision. It avoids many of the dangerous pitfalls of some exegesis of Revelation, particularly the speculative identification of descriptions in Revelation with specific modern events and people or the historical discounting of these scenes as creative exegesis that does not originate in John's actual visionary experience. The brief introduction affirms several traditional tenets, such as authorship by the apostle John at the end of Domitian's reign. It contains only a few minor inaccuracies, for example, that apocalyptic literature is "always eschatological" and "dualistic." Mounce's exegesis has a fine textual and historical focus. The attention he affords to the nuances of the Greek text is helpful, although it is often relegated to the footnotes. The use of secondary literature is evident and is employed in a manner that does not dominate the discussion of the text. He also gives significant and helpful attention to the OT echos in Revelation. One major pitfall that Mounce does not avoid is a premillennial interpretation of Revelation 20. The tendency to interpret this difficult chapter solely upon its immediate context and apart from the wider testimony of the New Testament is not only a pattern among denominationally-defined premillennialists, but also among many modern scholars.

There are some other weaknesses of the original volume that remain in this revision. First, the inaugurated eschatology of this document is not emphasized. For example, Mounce sees the enthronement scene in chapters 4 and 5 as a future event and not a past and ongoing reality. This also means that he does not understand the worship depicted in these chapters and regularly punctuating the rest of the visions as a present reality that Christians participate in now through the Divine Service. Second, more should be said about Christology, especially the background for angelomorphic depictions of Christ. Mounce's assertion that Christ "never" appears as an angel betrays his unawareness that several of the visions of Christ draw on imagery of YHWH's angelomorphic appearances in the OT (201). Furthermore, his treatment of the Lamb Christology downplays the paschal/sacrificial accents that are central to this depiction of Christ and does not address the theological relationship between the Lamb and Angelomorphic portraits. Third, as with most commentaries on Revelation, Mounce dismisses the significant number of allusions to baptismal theology and practice in this document. For example, when interpreting the sealing activity in Rev

7:2 he renders a negative judgment against seeing a baptismal background for the action depicted in the vision: "The seal should not be interpreted in a sacramental sense as referring to baptism" (157). This vision of the sealing of the saints is not describing some "symbolic" activity that has no connection to the life of the readers. There is solid historical evidence for the early Christian practice of sealing a baptismal initiate with a mark that represented the divine name spoken in baptism.

Therefore, although the revision has enhanced the usefulness of this commentary, its substance has changed very little. It remains a fairly sound Evangelical commentary with some problematic exegesis and some weaknesses in approach. This revision, unfortunately, does not make many distinctive contributions to our understanding of Revelation.

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*The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. By James D. G. Dunn. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

❖ This volume sets out to do what few New Testament scholars have attempted, especially in recent decades: to set forth a cohesive and comprehensive theology of the apostle Paul that is based upon his letters. Recent scholarship has tended to emphasize the contingent content of the Pauline epistles to the point that some scholars assert that there is no such thing as a "theology" of Paul. As a prolific and respected interpreter of Paul's letters for some years, James Dunn of the University of Durham takes on this daunting task with zealous abandon. This 808-page volume is not only a distillation of Dunn's understanding of Paul, but also a showcase for his conversation with a host of Paul's modern interpreters.

The prologue, which serves as an *apologia* for writing such a book, spells out two significant aspects of Dunn's approach. First, although the theology of Paul must be based upon the sum of the theology in his letters, Dunn asserts that it also must be more than that sum, since the letters often contain brief reflections that draw on Paul's fuller and unexpressed theology. Therefore, Dunn seeks to do more than merely give a description of the theology found in the epistles; he seeks to "dialogue" with the apostle in a manner that poses questions about Christian thinking and living that "Paul" can answer from the content of his epistles. A second aspect of Dunn's approach is that he draws from Paul's seven uncontested letters, 2 Thessalonians, and Colossians, with Romans as his formative guide. The focus on Romans will be welcomed by many, yet the exclusion of Ephesians and the Pastorals from the "dialogue" will cause some to conclude that Paul's side of the conversation has been edited.

The body of this book is composed of chapters on the following topics: God and Humankind, Humankind under Indictment, The Gospel of Jesus Christ, The Beginning of Salvation, The Process of Salvation, The Church, and How Should Believers Live? A host of well-organized subcategories is addressed under each of these headings. Romans is usually the starting point for this out-



line and often the primary content used to address these topics. Dunn is to be commended for his ability to discuss difficult and wide-ranging material in a very clear and readable manner. His chapter and section conclusions are particularly helpful. Furthermore, his grasp and engagement of secondary literature is nothing less than impressive.

There are several helpful discussions in this volume. Five representative examples will be briefly noted here; certainly one could cite more. First, Dunn does not follow the line of scholarship that has emphasized Paul's disinterest in historical Jesus tradition. He does an admirable job of arguing that Paul did not dwell on many details of Jesus' life or teaching in his letters largely because these traditions were taken for granted through oral proclamation and not disputed or unknown. Second, in the face of the constant refrain by scholars that Paul's understanding of the imminence of the *parousia* underwent significant development during his career, Dunn argues for a more consistent Paul. He affirms that there is no good evidence of a shift in Pauline theology that was occasioned by a perceived delay of the *parousia*. Third, Dunn's focus on Pauline pneumatology, one of his long-time scholarly interests, is also commendable. Especially refreshing is Dunn's emphasis on the close relationship between Christ and the Spirit in Paul; the Spirit is even called "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom 8:9). Fourth, his discussion of Paul's use of the Old Testament does a fine job focusing the reader's attention on the key texts that are pivotal in the apostle's reading of the Scriptures, namely Genesis 15:6, Leviticus 18:5, and Habakkuk 2:4. Fifth, several of his summaries of epistolary evidence are incisive, especially if one is teaching on a topic addressed in several other epistles (for instance, the chart of angelic powers on p. 105 or the lists of various vices on p. 124).

There are several central topics in this dialogue where the answers that Dunn views as coming from Paul should be challenged. First, those who are familiar with his *Christology in the Making* will recognize the unclear and limited hues of his portrait of Pauline Christology. He hesitates to see Paul fully identifying the Son as God; rather, Jesus as *Lord* shares in the sovereignty of *God* after the exaltation. His focus on Wisdom and Adam traditions as the primary source for Paul's understanding and expression of the Son's preexistence is very limiting. Second, like much recent Pauline scholarship, Dunn's interpretation of Paul's view of the law abandons the perspective that he was combating a form of legalism within Judaism and Jewish Christianity. Dunn expresses his debt to E. P. Sanders for correcting the pervasive understanding of first-century Judaism as a legalistic "works-righteousness" religion and then distinguishes his position from Sanders's by emphasizing that Paul's statements concerning the law, especially in Romans and Galatians, were directed against Jewish nationalistic exclusivity. Although this understanding is a step forward from Sanders's argument that Paul did not have a problem with the role of the Law in Judaism, it still fails to acknowledge that there is first-century evidence for the significant role that works of the law played in both receiving and maintaining one's righteous status before God. To offer a corrective in simple terms: Paul knew that Judaism and some Jewish Christian congregations emphasized grace and faith, but not grace *alone* and faith *alone*. Third, Dunn's presentation of justification focuses almost exclusively on individual justification and does not articulate Paul's foundational

emphasis on universal justification. Fourth, if one is looking for a substantive engagement of Pauline sacramental theology, he will not find it here. Although Dunn acknowledges Paul's attention to baptism—but not *infant* baptism—and the Lord's Supper, their significant relationship to justification, sanctification, Christology, and pneumatology is not adequately addressed.

In spite of these disagreements and a few others, it is refreshing to read a synthetic theology that is passionately presented from Paul's epistles. Dunn's contribution is sure to stimulate further reflection, debate, and, as is his hope, dialogue.

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*Joseph: Eleven Bible Studies on Genesis.* By Claus Westermann. Translated by Omar Kaste. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. xi+115 pp. Paper. (The book is a translation of *Die Joseph-Erzählung: Elf Bibelarbeiten zu Genesis 37-50*, by Claus Westermann. Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1990.)

❖ Claus Westermann is an acknowledged scholar. Yet can he write and be translated for the common man? These eleven studies on Joseph answer that question with a yes. The occasional references to JEDP might puzzle those not acquainted with historical-critical biases, but on the whole, Westermann's research and study of Genesis have been made easily accessible. It could be said that the book reads as a scholarly version of *The People's Bible*, published by CPH and Northwestern Publishing House.

Westermann's overarching theme for the Joseph cycle (Genesis 37–50), God's preserving Joseph in every circumstance to keep many alive, has two sides: who is visible, a family in conflict that is reunited, and who is hidden until the end, a God who guides everything. It is unfortunate that this interpretative key is presented relatively late (45); an earlier mention would assist the reader. While the twofold theme unifies the commentary and its application, it suffers from two serious flaws. First, it has few (and inadequate) references to the incarnation and the suffering of Christ. With the many parallels between Joseph and Christ to be drawn (humiliation and exaltation in particular), Westermann has neglected a strong christological application that John 5:39, 1 Peter 1:10ff. and Romans 15:4 allow and advocate. Emblematic of this weakness are the book's concluding sentences: "There is probably no other part of the Bible which speaks of God in such human terms. In this way we are led to ask if all our statements about God are not far too burdened by thoughts and ideas which are entirely untouched by the Bible's unique message about God" (109). Though the book is primarily concerned with Joseph, if the cultural details of Genesis have been given their due attention, could not the incarnation also have received greater consideration? Second, Westermann does not allow the theme to resonate powerfully with Genesis 12:2–3, which is the pivotal text in Genesis 12–50 as explicated by Galatians 3:16. An occasion was missed to bind the stories of Joseph to the rest of Genesis and to expose the core of Genesis.

Westermann has followed the structure of Genesis 37–50, except for the omission of chapters 38 and 49 (because of his specific focus on Joseph). This absence, however, is telling; for by their exclusion, the Judah and Tamar incident and the blessings of the sons of Jacob have been tacitly relegated to inserted material and therefore are only loosely connected with the entire Joseph story. (Gordon Wenham's treatment [*Genesis 16–50*, Word, 1994] presents a more integrated approach.)

Each book chapter, according to his (traditional) division of the text, is studied under four headings: text, structure, interpretation, and application. As for the text, an English version (NRSV) is printed in the volume, which allows easy reference but also precludes serendipitous contact with other texts; considering how Westermann accents the artistry of the story, printing the text as straight prose was not advantageous. The structure briefly outlines each text, but a grander scheme, developing the flow through the entire story, would have been beneficial. The content of his interpretation and application are not easily distinguishable, separated sometimes only by a heading. The interpretation follows the standard format, verse-by-verse or unit-by-unit, though sometimes theme-by-theme. In general, Westermann's interpretation and application expose the gaps between the text and the reader, yet they are gaps that can be bridged by his research. For despite his position that Genesis is not a historical account, Westermann still interprets the people as real people, not simply as characters in an ancient parable for better modern living.

After the text has been studied, a brief bibliography is provided, which, for this book, is adequate. The final section is devoted to reflective questions, not prepared by Westermann. These questions, similar in nature to those found in *Genesis: Rooted in Relationships* and *An Introductory Course: Genesis* (recent CPH study guides), are fair but are not oriented toward Christ.

The standard background noise of critical scholarship (for instance, allusion to seams in the narrative or mention of an ahistorical account), which sounds first in the introduction, is audible throughout, but not to the point of obscuring Westermann's insights into ancient cultures. An excellent corrective for Westermann's narrative approach is Adele Berlin's *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Eisenbrauns, 1994); to some degree Wenham's Genesis commentaries draw upon Berlin's arguments.

Aligned with Westermann's low view of the text is his view of why the text has power: this is because it portrays the reality of life. Such a view gives his interpretation a spirit of law and not gospel. Instead of drawing the reader ahead into him in whom all things hold together and into him who is the revelation of God's kindness, Westermann weakens his own concrete exam-

ples and conclusions of Joseph's sufferings by not pushing them to their New Testament conclusions. First Peter 2:13 ff. is not given its due. Westermann often underscores the kindness of the hidden God, but the mercy of the God revealed on the cross remains veiled throughout the book; the kindness has been attached to the *providentia Dei*, but not to the incarnation. This should leave the informed reader wondering if Westermann's theme is artificial.

That is exactly where Westermann fails to deliver, if his book is indeed intended for a more general audience. In particular, if his application were christological, his strong secondary theme of confession of sin and reconciliation would ultimately be resolved at the cross, but the reader is not shown the cross (91). At times the language approaches the sense of "scandal of particularity" (vii), but merely mentioning Jesus (50) does not constitute a christological hermeneutic.

The use of the NRSV does not restrict the book's usefulness, primarily because the treatment is topical and not exegetical; however, you cannot read Westermann without having your Hebrew text before you.

Despite Westermann's posture toward the text, ironically, he does credit it with objective power (19) and a thoroughgoing theocentricity. His attention to the vivid action of the word reminds us that the life of Joseph is more than a collection of proof texts. With his perceptive grasp of the human spirit and knowledge of ancient customs, Westermann fleshes out the characters, and the reader knows them as real people at the end. Nor will he permit his central theme of broken family and how the old man Jacob dies in peace (99) to be distilled into abstract principles for daily living or timeless truths. Those abstractions, he would comment, lead the reader away from the power of the text. Those discerning comments about fractured families, the spiritual decay wrought by guilt, the self-destructive pursuit of power, and the longing for reconciliation may be the most persuasive reason for reading this book. For example, comments relevant to the sixth Commandment (26, 27) easily lend themselves to homiletical development and use in a Bible study. Nevertheless, it will be the pastor's responsibility to supplement Westermann's exposition of law with the gospel. A great deal can and should be used and supplemented; to interact with his little work will prove thought-provoking and illuminating.

And if this book prompts pastors to open Genesis for preaching more often, this reviewer believes that Westermann will have achieved his purpose. For after reading the book, a pastor will have another avenue by which to preach and teach the life of baptism, a life now hidden in God's promise but to be exalted with the revelation of Christ Jesus.

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# LOGIA Forum

SHORT STUDIES AND COMMENTARY

## BAPTISM AND ARCHAEOLOGY

*From a book by Clement F. Rogers entitled Baptism and Christian Archaeology, published by Oxford at Clarendon Press in 1903. The selections come from the Preface (page iii) and the conclusion (pages 354-355).*

The study of which the following pages are the result was first suggested to me by a conversation with a friend who had joined the Baptist community because, having gone into the question, he had come to the conclusion that the original method of administering the Sacrament was by submersion. I did not believe that he was right in his judgment, but was conscious that I had little definite with which to oppose his conviction. I knew that baptism by affusion was represented in the catacombs, but I had no idea of the mass of evidence from archaeology that witnessed to it as the mass of evidence in early ages. I began my study in the belief that it was at least allowed at times; I ended it with the conviction that no other method was adopted till the general introduction of infant baptism in the early middle ages made submersion possible. . . .

The Western type of font that was established by the fourth century lasts with singular persistency late into the Middle Ages; just as the traditional method of picturing the baptism of our Lord underwent comparatively little modification in the course of centuries. Fonts of the early Christian form are found at Torcello (ninth to eleventh centuries), Florence (eleventh to twelfth), Cremona (twelfth), Pisa (1153), Parma

(1196), while baptistries from which the original basins have disappeared are numerous. This conservatism in later ages would seem to argue against any sudden change having been made at the time of the peace of the Church.

Again, our examples have been taken from the catacombs of Rome and Alexandria, from Palestine, Tyre, Egypt, the Hauran, Asia Minor, Persia, Byzantium, Dalmatia, Rome of the fourth century, Naples, Africa, Lusitania, the Lombard and Merovingian kingdoms, and the Frankish Empire. In none of these cases would submersion be easy or natural; in most cases it would be impossible. Such a remarkable unanimity, in spite of differences in details, points back to a much earlier original type of basin which certainly would not have been large; and if we are right in holding that the private bath in domestic use was the model which first suggested the form and shape of the later structures, we may confidently assert that baptism by submersion would have been as difficult to carry out in them as it would have been in the catacombs.

Besides the misunderstanding as to the way in which the seven steps were reckoned, to which allusion has been made above, three other sources of popular error may be mentioned.

It might be argued that the custom of consecrating the water excludes the method of administration by bringing the head of the catechumen under a stream descending from a spout, which we saw reason to believe was sometimes adopted. But it must be remembered that the idea that any change in the water itself was brought about by benediction is of comparatively late origin. It was rather the consecration of the *element* of water that was considered to have been effected by the baptism of Christ in the running stream of Jordan.

The analogy between baptism and death, dwelt on by S. Paul in the epistle to the Romans (iv, 4), has often been quoted as involving submersion, and numerous passages in the Fathers have seemed to support the belief that the catechumen must necessarily have been entirely covered by the water. Thus Cyril of Jerusalem, when he compares the threefold immersion with the three days and nights of our Lord's entombment, and reminds his hearers that in their baptism they saw nothing "as if it were night," uses language which seems to imply total immersion (*Cat. Myst.* xx.4). This is, of course, involved in our modern times of burial, where earth is piled on the coffin; but it may be questioned whether such an idea was present either to the mind of the Apostle, who was

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thinking of the burial of our Lord where the body was simply laid in the tomb, or to the writers of the early Church, whose customs of burial involved no more than laying the corpse in a sarcophagus or carrying it down to the catacombs. It is in the structure of the font rather than in the water that they find their analogy, in the act of going down rather than in what they found when they descended (*Cat. Myst.* iii.12).

Even where the custom of earth-burial obtained, to cast a handful over the corpse was considered sufficient to constitute an interment. It was in this way that Antigone disobeyed the command of Creon that her brother's body was to remain without the honour of burial.

The words used to describe the administration of the sacrament . . . (*mergo, immersio, tingo*) are usually assumed to imply submersion. Even if this were involved in their original meaning, the same expressions might well be used if the rite were carried out in the way described above. Similarly the colloquial English word "to duck" means strictly to dive, or push under the water, but in common use it is applied to any serious wetting, and even to a simple lowering of the head, where there is no question of water at all.

As a matter of fact, we have seen that whatever may have been the theories of ecclesiastical writers on the subject, the evidence from archaeology shows that they had little or no influence on popular practice for at least 700 years, and it is only when in the West Latin ceased to be the language in which people habitually thought, and when in the East the growing rarity of adult baptism made the Greek word patient of an interpretation that suited that of infants only, that the more literal meaning of the term began to be enforced.

It would be an ungracious task to trace how persistently the greater number of archaeologists have repeated the statement that baptism by immersion (i.e., *submersion*) was the universal custom in primitive times, and to point out how consequently they have been misled in judgement; but we may hope that the study here undertaken may at least have done something to remove this cause of confusion, and settled one small point among the many questions that make the study of Christian antiquities one of such great difficulty.

## A DIALOGUE ON BAPTISM

*Uuras Saarnivaara took an interesting approach to apologetics when he wrote Scriptural Baptism: A Dialog between John Bapstead and Martin Childfont, published in 1953 by Vantage Press, New York. In his foreword he notes that the literary form of discussion was not unique, having "been used many times in dealing with the doctrine of baptism." The following excerpt comes from pages 100-102.*

*Martin:* The question of the mode of baptism is the least important issue between pedobaptists and antipedobaptists. As I have said, a great number of pedobaptists use immersion. The two great issues are the questions of infant baptism and the significance of baptism.

I read recently a pamphlet written in defense of the baptistic view of baptism. The writer said that after reading the books of those who defend infant baptism their theories seemed very plausible and had a certain charm for him, but when he turned from their writings to the word of God he was not able to find the theories in it. "It has seemed to me," he continues, "that they have read their teachings *into* Scripture, not *out* of it; *eisegesis* rather than *exegetis*" [H. A. Ironside, *Baptism: What Saith the Scripture* (3d ed., 1930), p. 6.]. I, for my part, must confess that I have had a similar experience, but in the opposite way. The arguments of those who hold the baptistic view have sometimes seemed plausible and had certain charms for me. But when I have studied the word of God I have not found their theories in it. It seems to me that they have read their teachings into the Bible, not out of it. I do not find the baptistic doctrine of baptism in the New Testament; nor have you been able to show it to me. One cannot hold the baptistic view as long as he takes the teachings of the word of God as they are and follows them. Both the New Testament and the history of the Christian Church show incontestably that infant baptism is in harmony with the plain teachings of Jesus and with the practice of the Apostolic and post-Apostolic Church. The first real opposition to infant baptism appeared in the Middle Ages in a few groups of sectarians called Cathari. In the Ancient Church, Tertullian regarded delay of baptism preferable only for some reasons of expediency, and his reasons were based on doctrinal errors. Otherwise there was hardly any opposition to infant baptism for more than a millennium after the birth of the Church.

The gulf of disagreement is still deeper with regard to the meaning of baptism. According to the baptistic view, baptism is an *act of man*, a symbolical rite in which he confesses his faith before men after having experienced salvation. We regard it as an act of God upon man, a means of grace, which is given for (into) the forgiveness of sins.

The New Testament never speaks of baptism as an act of confession on the part of man. It always speaks of it as a means of grace which is given for the remission of sins, or for washing from sin, and regeneration. This Biblical view was general in the Church for more than a millennium. The baptistic conception was practically unknown until the twelfth century. The teaching of the Church Universal is also seen from the statement of the Nicene Creed, accepted by most Christian churches—"I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins." The obvious meaning is that baptism is a means through which sins are remitted.

The baptistic doctrine is therefore a relatively late erroneous view which has no foundation in the Scriptures. The outward mode used by those who hold this view is correct, but that merely means that they have the right external form but a wrong meaning, a correct rite without Scriptural content.

When those who hold the baptistic view rebaptize people after their conversion, they do something that is entirely unbiblical, since infant baptism is a true Scriptural baptism, and the validity and efficacy of baptism does not depend on its external mode and the amount of water used in it. The true Biblical baptism is the one that is understood in the sense of



the words of Peter: “Repent ye and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ into the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

A friend of mine told me some time ago of his own experiences with regard to the baptistic baptism. He had received baptism in his infancy, but then he felt that he should be baptized by immersion. This took place several years after his conversion. It seemed to him that the Spirit of God was urging him to take that step, and so he did, desiring to show obedience to God. I asked him what the new baptism meant to him, and what he experienced in it. His answer was that when he had been baptized by immersion he was through with the question, and was not troubled by it any more. His words indicated that he regarded baptism by immersion as an act of obedience, and when he had done it he felt satisfaction, as a person always feels satisfaction after doing what he understands as the will of God.

The case of this friend of mine has revealed to me more clearly than before that the baptistic baptism is not a New Testament baptism. It is just a work of man. People who receive it do not view it as a baptism into the forgiveness of sins and as a means of grace, an act of God on them. They see it as their own act, and when they have received it they are through with it. Such a view of baptism is entirely unscriptural. We thank God for the baptism into the forgiveness of sins. But we also believe that we are truly saved only if the meaning of baptism has been fulfilled in us in true repentance and faith, in a true knowledge of Christ and obedience to Him.

*John:* This discussion has been quite an eye opener to me. When we started I thought that I could easily refute your doctrine of baptism. Now at its end I see that it is my conception that has been refuted. I am going to give some more thought and study to these questions, praying that the Lord will help me to understand His truth aright and to follow it.

*Martin:* May the Lord bless you in that purpose of your heart.

## DIFFERENTIATING CALVIN AND ZWINGLI

*Lutherans should be careful about lumping Calvinists, Zwinglians, and Arminians together under the heading “Reformed.” It is only fair, after all, if we want Lutherans to be distinguished from Protestants. Edmund Schlink shows us how to keep matters clear in his book The Doctrine of Baptism (originally Die Lehre von der Taufe), translated by Herbert J. A. Bouman and published by Concordia Publishing House, 1972, pages 146-149.*

If Baptism is understood as man’s act of obedience and sign of obligation, then the first of the above mentioned three relationships between faith and Baptism necessarily moves to the fore. The temporal sequence, faith-Baptism, has thus become for the Baptists an unalterable law and the norm for the valid-

ity or invalidity of Baptism. The third relationship, that of faith’s reflection on Baptism, is indeed not missing, but it has a character different from that contained in New Testament exhortation. For the reflection is now concerned not with God’s gracious deed in Baptism, but with the obligation discharged by means of Baptism.

Between these opposing conclusions arising from contradictory views of Baptism Zwingli occupies a position of his own, peculiar and self-contradictory. From his understanding of Baptism as sign of obligation and confession the rejection of infant Baptism follows logically, and before the appearance of the Anabaptists Zwingli was quite logically critical of infant Baptism. Infants are not capable of confessing their faith. Yet he retained infant Baptism. Early Anabaptists rightly appealed to Zwingli’s teaching on Baptism, and when he persecuted them they accused him of denying his own teaching. It is no accident that the Anabaptist movement originated in Zwingli’s intimate circle of friends. Even though in his last writings Zwingli understood Baptism not only as an act of confession but also as representation of grace, this still did not justify infant Baptism, since he emphatically distinguished this representation of grace from an impartation of grace and because infants cannot recognize such a representation.

It is true, between Zwingli and the Anabaptists, in spite of their common understanding of Baptism as an act of confession, there were differences in so far as Zwingli saw this act of confession determined less by subjective experiences than by the objective content of the Creed. Furthermore, Zwingli was shocked by incidental enthusiastic claims concerning the sinlessness of the rebaptized, and in the insistence of the Anabaptists on the necessity of rebaptism he suspected the danger of a relapse into the view of Baptism as an *opus operatum*. But the real reason for his retention of infant Baptism is to be seen not in his understanding of Baptism as such but in the Anabaptists’ calling the civil order into question and especially in their rejection of the traditional unity of the Christian community and the civil community. In favor of the view that Zwingli’s retention of infant Baptism was based ultimately on his understanding of the church is also his increasing emphasis, in the course of his arguments with the Anabaptists, on Baptism as the sign of obligation on the part of the church, a sign by which she acknowledges the baptized as her member and not only as the sign of obligation on the part of the believing baptized.

Calvin’s teaching differs extensively from Zwingli’s approach. Here Baptism, in its decisive aspect, is the sign which God gives in assurance of salvation. Calvin understood the confession of the baptized not only as precondition but also as a part of Baptism. It is “the mark by which we publicly profess that we wish to be reckoned God’s people.” Thus Calvin incorporated Zwingli’s perspective into his own definition of the essence of Baptism. But here the confession plays a decidedly inferior role over against the significance of Baptism which controls the whole, namely Baptism as the sign and seal of God. However, in Calvin’s theology the few statements about Baptism as means of the divine saving action recede entirely behind the dominant understanding of Baptism as a means of providing

assurance of salvation, so that the reception of salvation and the assurance of salvation are distinguished as separate acts and in general are separated also in time. Therefore the question arises here too, whether infant Baptism can be justified on the basis of such an understanding of Baptism. For the causative significance of Baptism has been so greatly weakened or rejected altogether and, on the contrary, the cognitive significance for the assurance of faith has been made so prominent that it does not seem logical to baptize children who are not yet competent to discern the divine sign. Even though Calvin teaches Baptism as a promise that is valid for the entire life of the baptized and says that the children should be baptized in view of their future faith, it remains more consonant with his cognitive understanding of Baptism not to administer Baptism until the person is able to recognize the sign. It is true that in distinction from Zwingli's approach and that of the Anabaptists it does not follow from Calvin's teaching on Baptism that infant Baptism is invalid, but it does raise the question whether infant Baptism can be retained as the appropriate order for baptismal practice. These difficulties may help us to understand why in the last edition of his *Institutes* Calvin devotes more space to a defence of infant Baptism than to all the rest of his baptismal teaching, and this defence, as already frequently mentioned, is presented by heaping up individual arguments without much systematic coherence.

A careful examination of these arguments makes clear that also Calvin's support of infant Baptism rests less on his understanding of Baptism than on his understanding of the church, or, more accurately, on his view of the identity of Old and New Covenants. But if Calvin's baptismal theology is viewed in isolation from his understanding of the church, it would seem that Karl Barth in *The Teaching of the Church Concerning Baptism* (1943), where in the main he supported Calvin's position, was right in drawing the inference that infant Baptism must not be regarded as the appropriate order of Baptism. "If it is to be natural, the candidate, instead of being a passive object of baptism, must become once more the free partner of Jesus Christ, that is, freely deciding, freely confessing, declaring on his part his willingness and readiness."

But K. Barth did not remain with Calvin. In the last volume of his *Church Dogmatics* (IV, 4) he explicitly moved away from Calvin and his own earlier position on Baptism and taught that Baptism is the act of the obedience of faith, similar to the position of Zwingli and the Anabaptists. Now he rejected not only the saving activity of God through Baptism, but also Baptism as a divine sign of assurance. Must not this understanding of Baptism lead to the conclusion that infant Baptism is no Baptism, since in it there is no act of obedience and confession on the part of the baptized? Yet Barth did not draw this conclusion. While he emphatically warns against infant Baptism, he rejects the rebaptism of those who were baptized as infants. "Their Baptism was administered in an extremely doubtful and questionable manner, because it was improper. Yet this does not yet make it simply invalid." The reasons for this inconsistency are here too probably to be sought elsewhere than in the doctrine of Baptism as such.

However, there are difficulties and inconsistencies also within the Baptist communities where the more recent historical exegesis of the New Testament material on Baptism has led people to see again that there a new-creating divine activity through Baptism is affirmed. It is impossible to reduce the understanding of Baptism to an acknowledgment of previously received regeneration and to an obligation of the baptized to obedience. But the more the New Testament witness to God's saving action in Baptism is again perceived, the more difficult it becomes to maintain a rejection of infant Baptism as valid Baptism. So, for example, the Baptist New Testament scholar, George Beasley-Murray, was led by his New Testament sacramental understanding of Baptism to propose: "Where an applicant was baptized as a child and was later received in due form into membership of a church by confession of faith, no matter by what ritual, he should be received into a Baptist congregation as if he came from another Baptist congregation, that is, by transfer." If Beasley-Murray will go no farther in his acknowledgment of infant Baptism, this would seem to rest less on his understanding of Baptism than on his membership in the Baptist communion.

## ROBERT PREUS REMEMBERED

In a sermon on 1 Peter 1:2, published in *Modern Reformation*, R. Scott Clark speaks of the Christians in Asia minor who were accused unjustly and innocently suffered. "They endured daily insults and petty humiliation for the sake of the Gospel" (3:14; 4:3-4). The academic dean of Westminster Theological Seminary in California uses the example of J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937), who was unjustly driven from the mainline Presbyterian Church. He then includes a chapter from LCMS history. "More recently, the late Robert Preus (1924-1995) suffered great personal loss for daring to stand for historic Lutheran theology over against both liberals and evangelical pragmatists in his Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Many other Christians have suffered a similar fate. Example of overt and covert hostility to historic Christianity are so many as to defy cataloging." ("Grace and Peace to Aliens and Strangers," *Modern Reformation* 9 [January/February 2000]: 8).

Robert D. Preus was a member of the council of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, the sponsoring organization of the journal. His nephew, and son of the late LCMS president, J. A. O. Preus, serves in the same capacity. Listed as contributing scholars to *Modern Reformation* are Arthur Just, Robert Kolb, Don Matzat, John W. Montgomery, Lawrence R. Rast, and David P. Scaer. *Modern Reformation* is dedicated to restoring traditional Reformation Lutheran and Reformed confessional theology and is published six times a year. Subscriptions are available at \$22. Write to PO Box 2000, Philadelphia, PA 19103-8440.

## ON THE AUGSBURG ACCORD

Most American Lutherans seem to be oblivious to the actual content of the documents signed on October 31, 1999, by international representatives of the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches. American Lutherans are aware of the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (JD), but few are aware that this document was subscribed within the interpretive framework of the brief “Official Common Statement” (OCS) and supplemented by an “Annex to the Official Common Statement” (Annex). All three texts can be found online at [www.elca.org/ea/jddj](http://www.elca.org/ea/jddj).

What do the latter two documents mean? Paragraph one of the OCS highlights a statement out of JD that was heretofore unmentioned by the religious press: “The teaching of the Lutheran Churches presented in the Declaration does not fall under the condemnations of the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration.” This does *not* say that the teaching of the Lutherans found in the Book of Concord no longer falls under condemnation, only that JD, OCS, and its Annex are exempt. This does *not* say that the teaching of the Catholics found in the Tridentine formulas no longer falls under condemnation, only that JD, OCS, and its Annex are exempt.

Here we see how JD, OCS, and Annex are supposed to function in the life of the respective churches. It means that in order for the Roman and Lutheran Churches to achieve consensus in their teaching about salvation, they have agreed to the following: The Roman Church will give up its Tridentine formulas, insofar as they speak of soteriology, and adopt JD-OCS-Annex as its official soteriological formula. The Lutheran Church will give up its formulas in the Book of Concord, insofar as they speak of soteriology, and adopt JD-OCS-Annex as its official soteriological formula.

What does this mean? Practically speaking, not all Roman Catholics are willing to abandon the Council of Trent, just as not all Lutherans are willing to abandon the Book of Concord. Catholics who still adhere to the Council of Trent will still be condemned. Lutherans who still adhere to the Book of Concord will still be condemned. This is made evident by a critical essay authored by Wolfhart Pannenberg, one of the chief Lutheran negotiators. He writes:

[The 16th century condemnations] do not become trivial if their church-dividing effect is annulled. They will not be simply stricken from the binding doctrinal documents of the churches. Rather they will still have the significance of a healthy warning not only for Christians belonging to other confessional tradition, but also for members of one’s own. With both the Council of Trent as well as the Reformation confessions, condemnations were directed against one-sided statements which both churches should today judge as reductions of their own understanding of the faith (Lehmann, Root, and Rusch, eds., *Justification by Faith: Do the Sixteenth-Century Condemnations Still Apply?* [New York: Continuum, 1997], 43).

Since heresy is by definition a “one-sided statement” or “reduction” of doctrine, Lutherans and Catholics are now expected to view the sixteenth-century formulations as heretical and those who adhere to them as heretics.

For Catholics, adherence to the Council of Trent is purely formal, because the substance of the Tridentine position is simply restated in Protestant lingo in JD-OCS-Annex. The choice is more dangerous for the Lutherans, because if they adopt JD-OCS-Annex, they will abandon the substance of Luther’s doctrines of salvation, which he found originally in Augustine, Paul, and Jesus. Those Lutherans who do not adopt JD-OCS-Annex, such as yours truly, will be accused of “one-eyed” theology reducing the fullness of salvation from “faith and life” to “faith alone.” In *First Things*, Richard John Neuhaus has already condemned as “antinomian” those who protest JD-OCS-Annex.

How could so many Lutherans become so bewitched? I think much of the confusion has come out of Lutheran ignorance of how Catholics talk about salvation. For example, taking paragraph 2 of the Annex: “By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works” (from JD 15). This certainly sounds Lutheran, because it uses Lutheran lingo. But Lutherans and the Thomists at Trent did not disagree on the issue of how one is converted, that is, how one first comes to faith and receives the Holy Spirit. Both agreed that conversion is purely God’s work, though only the Lutherans were willing to condemn the synergistic Ockhamist view explicitly.

The real issue (Chemnitz calls it “the Helen of Troy” in his *Examination of the Council of Trent*) was the issue of whether your performance counts on Judgment Day. Do your good works, “merits,” and sin factor into your final judgment, affecting whether or not you receive eternal life? Lutherans said no, Catholics said yes. Augustine said no, Pelagius said yes. It is a very old debate. Sad to say, Lutherans who are members of the Lutheran World Federation now have officially agreed with Pelagius. Annex 2E states clearly, “In the final judgment, the justified will be judged also on their works.” Both World Federation Lutherans and Catholics have confirmed this statement. Pelagius would be elated.

The only thing that will stop this evisceration of the Lutheran gospel is for the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation to repeal the Augsburg Accord. That may split the LWF; but the alternative is imminent union with Rome, which is the whole point, after all, is it not? One is tempted to agree with the Borg in “Star Trek” who said, “You will be assimilated. Resistance is futile!”

Martin R. Noland  
Oak Park, Illinois

## EASTER BREAKFASTS

*A sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. Norman Nagel from John 21:1-14 in the week of the Third Sunday after Easter, 1998.*

How ordinary the call “Come and have breakfast.” Yet how awesome, how never before such a breakfast. What is so peculiar? What is the meaning? Or rather, what happens? If nothing happens, there is no meaning.

Stories made up to point a moral are tailored to that moral. In the account of what happened in today’s Gospel there is a load of things which doesn’t fit. As we’ve learned in hermeneutics, it’s the bits which don’t fit the hypothesis which need to be particularly attended to. Anything that actually happens always has bits that don’t fit.

There’s what’s everyday-ordinary, and there’s what’s extraordinary. Back into ordinary is Peter’s, “Well, I’m going to go and do some fishing.” What else was there? That’s the only thing he really knew how to do. Now that the whole Jesus thing was over (that was history), what was there left? Do some fishing. He was at home in that, the comfort of the known skill, filling in the void. We saw that in the women. When it was all over with Jesus, what was there left for them? They did what was women’s work for the corpse, all that was left to them of Jesus. There was that loving work still to do. In contrast the men funkyed out, cowering behind locked doors in fear for themselves: “We’re next.” You can get lost in the void, and in your busyness.

So Peter goes fishing, and the others: “We’ll come too.” All night. Not a thing. A man on the shore: “How did it go, lads? Haven’t you caught anything?” Παῖδες, he calls them, very belonging, and perhaps something more, as the *paterfamilias*, as at table.

We’ve all heard sermons which go on to identify all the things that are backwards in what happens here. One hundred fifty-three fish. Some exegetes (none of our lads) have cracked their heads in the attempt to discover why 153. There couldn’t just be 153. The text says 153, and if that’s not so, then there’s simply no end to enquiring why it couldn’t possibly be 152.

What’s been going on, we are given the clue to in “This was now the third time that Jesus *was revealed* to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.” Ἐφανερώθη. Now there’s a Johannine word! Jesus does that with signs. Seven of them, signs, not miracles, but now in chapter 21 there’s another one. That does mess up the neat pattern of seven; the whole chapter is rather like a sermon that doesn’t know when to stop, and swings around one more time. Chapter 20 brings things to a perfect conclusion, but then there’s more: chapter 21, and in chapter 21 there’s just so much that we can’t make fit, least of all the risen Lord. Jesus won’t let us fit him in. We don’t fit him in; he fits us in with himself, and that’s more than we can dare to imagine. “Now none of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’” The answer we are given is our being told what happened, what he did, what he does, says and gives.

Best then we let Jesus get on with his being and doing the sort of Jesus he is, says, does, and gives. Any Jesus that we make fit into our notions and prescriptions can only last as long as we can sustain our notions and projections. Nothing fills his place, only he, our crucified and risen Lord, who goes on now to see that his sheep and lambs get fed. His way with Peter, his way with John, his way with you and with me. What a way for him to go about building his church. Try to get a handle on that.

Anyway, do not hesitate when it is Jesus who calls to you to feed you. “It is the Lord.” Amen.

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ISSUE	THEME	DEADLINE
Epiphany 2001	Luther and Bible Translation	August 1, 2000
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Holy Trinity 2001	Debate on Ministry	February 15, 2001
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