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EDITORIAL FOREWORD

This double issue of *Lutheran Theological Review* is appropriately dedicated to the immediate past President of Lutheran Church–Canada, Dr Edwin Lehman. Faculty members of Synod’s two seminaries and of Concordia University College’s Religion Department have fond memories of President Lehman’s presence throughout the long Saturday sessions of our annual joint faculties’ meetings. With his calm yet incisive interjections and his pertinent summings up of the day’s proceedings, Dr Lehman exercised a firm but kindly *episkopee* over Synod’s teaching theologians, in the process setting us an example of how to speak the truth in love.

The first item in this issue, “The Self-Revelation of God in the Holy Scriptures,” was written by Dr Jonathan F. Grothe in connection with the dogmatics textbook being prepared by Concordia Publishing House. This essay will find its way onto the required reading lists of systematics courses and will offer us all a fresh perspective on the most fundamental of all fundamental articles of faith.

Our second article is supplied by Dr Juris Dreifelds, a native Latvian who practises the secular discipline of political science at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. “Religion in Latvia: From Atrophy to Rebirth” covers church-historical terrain largely hidden from view during the years of the Soviet Empire.

Dr L. Dean Hempelmann’s “Luther, a Shepherd under Christ,” presented at Concordia Lutheran Seminary’s February 1996 Symposium marking the 450th anniversary of the Reformer’s death, affords a teaching practical theologian the opportunity to summarise the approach of a master of his discipline.

We reprint in amended form an article already published in the Australian *Lutheran Theological Journal*. Dr Edward G. Kettner’s “Christian Dialogue with the World’s Religions: Is It Possible?” is highly relevant to the pluralistic milieu of contemporary Canada.

President Lehman’s labours to forge close ties with our sister Synod, the Lutheran Church of Australia, render it fitting for the fifth essay in this issue to come from the pen of Dr John Kleinig. “Sharing in God’s Holiness” is a revised version of a paper delivered to the General Pastoral Conference of Lutheran Church of Australia.

Pr Ernie Lassman’s “The Church Growth Movement and Lutheran Worship” was delivered to the British Columbia Church Workers’ Conference, held from 16-18 October 1995 at Victoria, British Columbia.

The 1995 St. Catharines Sasse Symposium would not have come to fruition without Dr Lehman’s encouragement and support. We thus fittingly include a paper delivered by the undersigned to a Sasse Symposium hosted

in June 1995 by the Concordia Catechical Academy in Sussex, Wisconsin. "Roma Semper Examinanda" examines the field explored at the St. Catharines gathering by Dr Gottfried Martens.

This issue closes with a CLTS chapel homily delivered on the Friday of the Fourteenth Week of Pentecost 1995 by Pr (now also Dr) Thomas M. Winger on Mk 10:24-31.

The editors wish a long and happy retirement to President and Mrs Lehman, along with their best wishes for Dr Lehman's stewardship of the CLS Centre for Missionary Studies and their sincere desire that our beloved President Emeritus continue for many years to offer pastoral, spiritual, and theological leadership among his fellow Lutherans in Canada and abroad.

JRS

Third Sunday in Advent 1997

**EDWIN LEHMAN:
A SERVANT FOR JESUS' SAKE**

There are no better words to describe Dr Edwin Lehman, President Emeritus of Lutheran Church–Canada, than the phrase used by St Paul to describe those who hold the Office of the Public Ministry. They are “servants for Jesus’ sake”. Edwin Lehman is a “servant for Jesus’ sake”. It was with a servant heart that he carried out his ministry whether it took place in a congregation, in the district or as President of Lutheran Church–Canada. First and foremost he was a “servant for Jesus’ sake” and he continues to serve the Synod as a servant in his retirement. He stands as an example to us all.

To be a “servant for Jesus’ sake” in the Office of the Public Ministry means being a theologian. Dr Lehman certainly equates them. In a presentation he made at the Sasse symposium, he defined the pastor-theologian in this way:

It is to think according to the Word of God, to apply Law and Gospel in our preaching, teaching, and care of souls, to guard the truth faithfully, and, at the same time to give the truth away freely and purely.

Dr Lehman is such a theologian and theological education is important to him. He was and continues to be a theological student. As a leader in Synod he championed the cause of theological education in our institutions and continuing education for our pastors and full-time workers in the church. In light of this it is most fitting that this volume of *Lutheran Theological Review* should be printed in his honour.

It was as a pastor-theologian that Dr Lehman served our Synod well. In the days of LC–C’s formation, concerns were everywhere in the church. What would this new Synod be like? What would its confession be? Could the new Synod, apart from mother Missouri, continue with a strong confessional identity? We have reason to give thanks to God that through the labour of such theologians as Dr Lehman our Synod was established on a strong biblical and confessional foundation. That confessional identity is now recognised around the world. A good part of that recognition is the result of the efforts of Dr Lehman who served as our Synod’s representative to the International Lutheran Council, serving for a number of years as its president. Our tribute to him and to the other fathers of Synod will be to continue strengthening that biblical and confessional foundation as we “guard the truth faithfully and at the same time give the truth away freely and purely”, having a strong confessional identity coupled with evangelical fervour.

One must also recognise Dr Lehman's service in establishing Synod administratively. It was no easy task, but administration is certainly one of his gifts. When I arrived in Richmond where I first followed Dr Lehman, the congregational Board of Directors used to joke about the fact that all their reports had to be printed in triplicate. That congregation was administratively efficient. Dr Lehman as Chief Executive Officer of Synod put those same gifts to work after his election at the founding convention of Lutheran Church–Canada. The result of his labour is a Synod and a national office carrying out its administrative responsibilities effectively and efficiently.

Though Dr Lehman served Synod in the district and then in the national office for approximately 18 years, his heart always remained in the congregation. "Being in the national office is like being in the kitchen," he would say. "The action of ministry takes place in the congregation where people are being fed with the Word and Sacrament." And it is through the congregation and for the benefit of the congregation that we have been called as "servants for Jesus' sake". Dr Lehman has always remained a pastor. He loves to do what he described the pastor-theologian doing. That is the way he conducted his ministry in Richmond (What a blessing to follow such a servant in a congregation) and that was the accent he shared with all of us who served with him either at the district or national level.

As a "servant for Jesus' sake" Dr Lehman was and is a man of faith. His words to me at my orientation into the office demonstrated his own faith and continue to give me tremendous comfort. "In this office you will encounter difficulties with which you will not know what to do and the one thing you will learn, if you have not already, is to depend totally upon God, to trust in Him and His promises given in Jesus Christ. If you don't, you will never survive."

It was with that kind of trust and dependence upon God that Dr Lehman provided leadership to our Synod. He knew who he was and is: a sinner redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ; one who had been called to be a "servant for Jesus' sake" and who has served and continues to serve his Lord and Christ's Church as a servant. We in Lutheran Church–Canada give thanks to God for such servants. We give thanks to God for our President Emeritus, Dr Edwin Lehman.

Edwin Lehman was born in Edmonton, Alberta. He attended Concordia College and graduated from Concordia St. Louis, in 1956. His congregational ministry included congregations in Margo, Wadena, and Nut Mountain, Saskatchewan; Red Deer, Craig, and Alhambra, Alberta; completing his congregational service in Richmond, B.C. It was in 1978 that Dr Lehman was elected President of the A–BC District and in 1988 that he was elected president of the newly founded Synod, Lutheran Church–Canada.

Dr Lehman is married to the former Marjorie Huber and God blessed them with three children, Rodney, Barbara (Haberstock), and Katherine (Royce). Ed and Marge reside in Edmonton, Alberta.

In his retirement Dr Lehman continues as a “servant for Jesus’ sake”, giving leadership to the newly formed Concordia Mission Society and serving as director of the Missionary Study Centre at Concordia Lutheran Seminary, Edmonton.

Ralph E. Mayan
President, Lutheran Church–Canada

The Reverend Edwin Lehman, D.D.

This stained glass window in the chapel of LC-C's Winnipeg office was a gift of the LC-MS.
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THE SELF-REVELATION OF GOD IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

Jonathan F. Grothe

God is a given throughout the Scriptures. There is no “doctrine of God”. God’s existence is not proposed; it is presupposed. He is. For Him and through Him everything exists,¹ including man, into whom He breathed the breath of His life and from whom He will “require” his “soul”.² Personal and powerful, God has a claim on human beings. Awareness of being under His claim is a given of human existence; to pervert it or to deny it is to embrace a lie.³ Thus Scripture records the self-revealing words and deeds of the true God, of Whom all peoples know that He exists, even if they do not know His name nor His saving deeds in His incarnate Son.⁴

Proclamation and worship are the context of a Scriptural doctrine of God. A catalogue of God’s names and attributes can, indeed, be compiled from Scripture.⁵ But the God of Scripture is not **known** through mere literary analysis and “scientific” study of “the religion of the Bible”.⁶ Holy

¹ Heb. 2:10; Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:16; Eph. 4:6; I Cor. 8:16.

² Gen. 2:7; Lk. 12:20 (KJV); cf. James 4:5.

³ Rom. 2:12-16; 1:19-25.

⁴ In Acts 17:22-31 and at several other points Scripture touches upon the fact, extent, and significance of fallen human beings’ “knowledge” (“awareness” might be preferable) of God **apart from** special revelation. In a sort of “blind awareness” that some divine being exists, they grope, εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν (Acts 17:27). When their physical eyes rest on visible “things made”, “invisible things of God” are perceived, being apprehended inwardly (νοούμενα καθορᾶται), to wit: God’s “eternal power and divine nature” (Rom. 1:19-20). As Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God, . . . Why do men then not reckon his rod?” Psalm 19:1-6 also speaks of creation’s testimony to its Creator, but these words are the confession of a believer. But there is also in every human being an inner voice of discernment and their mutual and reciprocal accusations and defences which testify to their awareness of living under the claim of the will of Another (Rom. 2:14-15). This “natural revelation” is “knowable” (τὸ γνωστόν), accessible to all human beings. To fallen humanity it is in no way **saving** knowledge; the God known to **sinner**s in **this** way is the God of Law. This “knowledge”, rather, establishes the inexcusability of idolatry (Rom. 1:20) and shall serve as a witness against all persons on the last day (Rom. 2:16). In Athens, Paul used the fact of the pagans’ groping awareness as the point of departure for his proclamation (Acts 17:22-23).

⁵ See, e.g., Herbert Lockyer, *All the Divine Names and Titles in the Bible: A Unique Classification of all Scriptural Designations of the Three Persons of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).

⁶ Adolf Schlatter rightly described such “scientific” (“objective” and “critical”) approaches as “atheistic” in *Atheistische Methoden in der Theologie* (1905), qtd Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, ed. J. Roloff, trans. J. Alsup, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) I:278. It is instructive to note well Jesus’ words to the Sadducees in their

Scripture does not teach a “new”, “better”, nor a “more (nearly) correct” **concept** of God—in all His “metaphysical aseity”.⁷ Rather, Scripture testifies to the self-revelation of the personal and living God: the Transcendent Almighty lets Himself be known as a holy, merciful, righteous God, a God of Law (wrath, threat) and of Gospel (love, promise), the Judge and Saviour of all. Scripture proclaims, therefore, and calls to repentance, faith, and obedience.⁸ To **know** the God of the Bible, therefore, is to **be known** by Him, to **be turned**, to repent, believe, worship, obey.⁹ For through these writings comes not just a “concept” or “doctrine”, but the Incomparable Lord of all.¹⁰ He speaks, and His Word creates faith and evokes worship, prompts proclamation and generates praise ... and teaching. The doctrine of God is inseparable from the worship of God; theology ever blossoms out of doxology.

He reveals Himself through words and through deeds accompanied by prophetic interpretative words. For there is a unity of the “being” and the “doing” of God, of His essence and His work. The “I Am” of His name regularly takes an action-oriented predicate.¹¹ Testimony to God’s deeds is thus testimony to God and His nature, and vice versa.¹²

And this self-revelation of God began “in the past” but has culminated, “in these last days”, in the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-2). A **Scriptural** doctrine of God acknowledges that the Old and the New Testaments comprise a unity; **together** they are canon. The goal of the Torah is Christ and the righteousness which is by faith; the Old Testament has been fulfilled in what He has accomplished.¹³ The faith of Abraham was

“theological discussion” (Mt. 22:23-32): “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.” To know both is essential for the theologian.

⁷ Hans Zenzelm, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, trans. J. Bowden, *The New Testament Library* (London: SCM Press, 1969) 79.

⁸ Mk. 1:15; Acts 3:12-26; 13:16-41; cf. Rom. 1:5, e.g.

⁹ Gal. 4:9. Only faith attains to the **truth** of God, for “faith” and “truth” are one and the same, as Luther explained in his 1531 Lectures on Galatians; on Gal. 3:7, AE 26:236-40.

¹⁰ C. J. Labuschagne discussed the origin and theological significance of this concept in *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*, *Pretoria Oriental Series*, V (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966). H. Kleinknecht also emphasises its significance, in contrast to the images and concepts of God in the Classical Greek epics, poets, and philosophers, in “θεός, κ.τ.λ.”, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [hereafter *TDNT*], ed. G. Kittel, trans. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) III: 65-79.

¹¹ Ex. 3:14; 20:2; Jn. 8:58; 10:11; cf. Jn. 8:12; 1:9; 12:46. Similarly, Paul described the God in Whom Abraham trusted as “the God Who” ... justifies, makes alive, creates (Rom. 4:5, 17).

¹² The distinction between *Deus per se* and *Deus ad hominem* is a distinction without a difference; so Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972) II:16-17. But history *per se* is not “revelation”; interpretative revelatory **words** always proclaim the significance of historical events as divine deeds.

¹³ Matt. 1:22-23; Lk. 1:46-55, 68-79; Rom. 3:21; 10:4; II Cor. 1:20; Hebrews, chs. 7-9.

intrinsically the same as the faith of the New Testament Christians.¹⁴ Scripture (*in toto*) interprets Scripture; its unity is rooted in the one true God revealing Himself in it.¹⁵

That one true God of special revelation is the merciful and Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As Scripture proclaims the words and deeds of God, it testifies to the oneness of the God who is three persons.¹⁶ This thread runs through the whole of the Bible, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 ... in ever-increasing clarity of expression.¹⁷ The following survey attempts to delineate this and the other substantive aspects of the “content” of the self-revelation of God in the Old and New Testaments.

A **survey of the Old Testament**, looking for its testimony to God, discerns three recurring sets of circumstances, each of which suggests a tension and poses a question which are only resolved in the New Testament. They are: the tension between transcendence and immanence; between the holy judgement upon sin and compassionate forgiveness of sin and sinners; and between God as the “God of Israel” and the God of all.

For God is the Inscrutable Wholly Other, Who comes and lets Himself be known; He finds forms of appearing¹⁸ and establishes forms for the expression of mutual knowledge (fellowship, communion) between Himself and human beings. The mystery of the incarnation fully expresses this paradox and resolves this tension. But in the Old Testament, “incarnational aspects” of “the Word becoming flesh” anticipate that mystery. The transcendent God relates to all of His creation via His Word and works in human beings and in their history by His Spirit.

¹⁴ Romans 4; cf. Hebrews 11.

¹⁵ L. Goppelt identified the relationship of the New Testament to the Old Testament as “a key issue” for theology, especially New Testament theology, since “Jesus takes as his own starting point the God of the Old Testament and is himself understood in the New Testament ... as God’s conclusive revelation” (I:280). Indeed, the entirety of the New Testament “wishes to attest to a fulfilment event coming from the God of the Old Testament and having Jesus at its centre”(I:281).

¹⁶ Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest make this the theme of their chapter, “God’s Unity includes Three Persons”, in *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 251-89.

¹⁷ This does **not** mean an “evolution” of the “concept of God”.

¹⁸ This is one way in which to interpret the significance of the plural form, אֱלֹהִים, although such explanations as plural of “majesty”, “fullness”, or “intensification” are more common; see [Helmer] Ringgren, “אֱלֹהִים ’elohîm”, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* [hereafter *TDOT*], ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Wills (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) I:267-84, esp. 272-73. The singular אֱל, is used often as a common noun or in epithets, but only irregularly stands alone as a proper noun equivalent to Yahweh, according to [Frank M.] Cross, “אֱל ’el”, *TDOT* I:242-61, see esp. 258-60.

And the God who reveals Himself thus reveals His Word of Law and of gracious Promise; nonetheless, all of His self-revelations have an inner consistency, also. He is holy and cannot abide by sin; He threatens to destroy it. He is compassionate and hates nothing which He has made; He promises a means of deliverance from sin and death. He is righteous and true to His word; He cannot keep the promise by forgetting the threat. He **will** judge and He **will** save. This tension, too, is first resolved on Calvary, where the Holy God punished sin (II Cor. 5:21) and simultaneously fulfilled His gracious promise to save (Rom. 3:21-25), thus showing Himself true to His Word (δικαιος, 3:26).

There also, finally, is resolved the tension between the “God of Israel” and the God of all. To study the Old Testament notion of God as though it belonged to “the religion of Israel” is to misconstrue the import of this tension. It is **not** a matter of the evolution of Israelite thought about God from polytheism to henotheism to monotheism. No. “**In the beginning**” is the only true God, Creator of all. “Israel” does not determine His identity; rather, He chooses to fulfil His promise for all (Gen. 3:15) **through** “Israel”. Genesis 1-11 is not some afterthought preface pasted onto the gathered traditions of some tribe’s origins. It is theologically programmatic. The “history of Israel” must be read in its place **situated between** the promise to Adam and Eve and the fulfilment of that promise in the New Testament. Then the tension between “the God of Israel” and the God of all is resolved through their absolute identification and through a proper understanding of the role of the call of Israel in the plan of salvation for all humankind: when the Christ, “Israel reduced to one”, dies on the cross and so, with arms outstretched, draws all men to Himself (Jn. 12:32).

Thus the self-revelation of God in the Old Testament leans forward; stretching from past through present, it points to the future fulfilment.¹⁹ The following survey reveals that tension as well, even though it is not organised according to any modern source or historical analysis but according to the traditional Jewish divisions of Torah, Prophets, and Writings. The Pentateuch records the **origins**: God’s words and works to **establish** relationships. The Prophets address conditions in the unfolding history of God at work to keep His promises, to guide history to His goals. And the Writings preserve believers’ reflections on matters of personal piety, crises of faith and challenges to hope that arise in days of difficult and “small” things.

In the Torah God reveals Himself in creative acts and in words and deeds of judgement and grace; but His being in all its fullness remains

¹⁹ Even New Testament Christians, who live in this world’s last days, experience this tension; see Rev. 1:8; 22:20.

hidden and inaccessible to humankind. This is evident during the primeval history, the patriarchal age, and the period of the exodus.

“In the beginning, God” God is eternal; what is created is not co-eternal with Him. The non-mythological account of Genesis 1 can only begin with “the beginning”, leaving the mystery of God’s existence from all eternity to stand as an unfathomable presupposition. “In the beginning, God created” The Wholly Other created something other than Himself. By His Word, that projection from within Himself by which He relates to all that is not Himself, He created all that is, and by that Word He continued all such relationships with the creation.²⁰ The source of all order and life, He created and continues to create all order and life by His Word and Spirit (Gen. 1:2; Col. 1:17). Human beings He created in a special relationship to Himself, in “the image and likeness of God”. Not the same as God, they were created for communion with God,²¹ able to receive and radiate His goodness and glory, His love and headship throughout the rest of creation. The rebellion of sin broke that communion with God, and caused the loss of His glory, the image-relationship; its end consequence is death. But God showed a “hint of His true colours”. He sought out the sinners. He came to confront—and to comfort—Adam and Eve; He came to punish them—and to protect and sustain them. Even after they had sinned, He continued His self-revealing relationship with them: He spoke to and dealt with Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah, the whole world, in judgement and grace.

The God “of the Patriarchs” is also the Transcendent One who lets Himself be known as He speaks and works to judge and save. He speaks to Abraham on starry nights and visits him in mysterious “incarnations”.²² He establishes this-worldly signs of their relationships (Gen. 15:8-21; 17:1-27) and, in Isaac, visible proof of the power in His promise. God’s ultimate will and plan is beyond Abraham’s ken (Gen. 22; cf. 18:17); Abraham’s right relationship to God consists in his receiving and believing such word of revelation as he is given. **Why** God undertakes to fulfil His ancient promise as He does, through the likes of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (!), is unfathomable; it is His “election will” (Rom. 9:11), aimed at the incarnation of His Elect One. But surely, the classic passage showing how the “hidden God” lets Himself be known and even bound (“had”) is Gen. 32:22-32. Mysteriously “incarnate”, the Almighty condescends to wrestle with Jacob and lets Himself be held, bound to His Word promising a blessing; receipt of the blessing, of course, “wounds” Jacob and changes both his name

²⁰ Gen. 1; Prov. 8; Jn. 1; and Heb. 1:1-4, where creation, preservation, communication and redemption are all present.

²¹ This is the central thought of Th. C. Vriezen’s very helpful *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 2nd ed., revised and enlarged (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970) 156-57.

²² Gen. 14:18-20?; 18:1-33.

(identity) and the way he walks (life). In order to complete the plan for dispensing that blessing, God continued to intervene in the history of the patriarchs. In the context of the moment, they often find His ways hard to understand; but in retrospect, the goal of His deeds becomes clear. Joseph aptly illustrates and enunciates this principle,²³ in accord with which it remains true still that only by the Spirit of Jesus can one discern the full truth about the self-revelation of God given in the Old Testament (cf. II Cor. 3:12-17).

That divine intervention and guidance led, eventually, to the **captivity** in Egypt, all arranged so as to set the stage for the (typologically prophetic) Exodus deliverance **through the blood of a lamb**. As God worked toward this deed of salvation, He called the Old Testament prototype of the “deliverer”, Moses. To him, in the burning bush, God said: “I am who I am. ... This is my name.”²⁴ But this is not a “name” of “a god”, like “Marduk” or “Apollo”.²⁵ As any attempt to translate (rather than transliterate) it makes clear, this is a verb form.²⁶ Its content and context suggest that precisely in this revelation God is maintaining a certain hiddenness and inaccessibility.²⁷ “I am who I will be. For you there is this: I will be with you” (cf. Ex. 3:5-6, 12). In the promise of His presence to help (and judge) God is known; more than that of Him is not knowable. He gives no “proper name” to be used as the names of pagan gods are used in magical incantation. (Only a god which man has made has such a name.) The Almighty does not come under the control of the creature. His “name” is a promise of His presence (Immanuel), an offer, ultimately, to be Saviour (Jesus). There, where **He** determines, He does put Himself at man’s disposal! To know this name and have this God is to receive His gift.

“I am what I will be” Throughout the Pentateuch, God’s revelatory words and deeds give indication as to what predicates fill out that “name-promise”. Repeated and significant revelations **about** God (“content” of the “doctrine of God”) are His holiness, His compassion, and His righteousness.

²³ Gen. 50:19-21. Joseph recognised that his role in history was not for the sake of his own aggrandisement, but for the “saving of many lives”. All of his physical descendants did not understand their call, their preservation and their position in those same terms. But the Israel of God, the Israel reduced to one, of whom Joseph was a type, Jesus, did so understand His mission and “office”.

²⁴ The NIV rendering of Ex. 3:14, 15; MT: אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה.

²⁵ Walter R. Roehrs, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1979) 63: “No appellation representing human thinking suffices to explain Him.”

²⁶ See [D. N.] Freedman and [M. P.] O’Connor, “יהוה YHWH”, *TDOT*, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) V:500-21, esp. 513-17. Freedman claims that in archaic poems “Yahweh” is a personal name, with no trace of its original verbal form (515); for Ex. 3:14 he suggests the translation: “I create whatever I create” (516).

²⁷ Vriezen 179-80.

In the primeval history, even before the fall into sin, the Holy God enunciated the threat of punishment against disobedience (Gen. 2:7). His holiness led Him to expel the human beings from the garden and to post angels at the gate, that the tree of life be guarded from sinners.²⁸ But His compassion also produced a word of promise to those fallen sinners (Gen. 3:15), and even garments (v. 21), a divine replacement for their own feeble attempts to cover their guilt and shame.²⁹ And His righteousness, His truthfulness to His threat and promise, is substantiated by the consistency with which He upholds both in all that He subsequently says and does. Having expelled Adam and Eve with curse and promise, He gives them children, seed. He punished Cain, but puts upon him a mark to keep him alive. He sends the judgement of the flood upon the sinful world, but preserves Noah and his family alive for the sake of the promised Seed of the woman who shall win the victory.

The call of Abram, which opens the patriarchal period and sets in motion the history of Israel, is a self-revelatory deed of God which fits into that same pattern. God has struck down the hubris arising on the plain of Shinar. He protects His holiness by scattering and confusing those sinners who presume, by concerted effort (“civilisation”—it is to laugh!) to storm His heaven. But out of that scattered humanity, then, He calls one, the one family to be protected and preserved in order that that “Seed of the woman” be born, in particular, as the “Seed of Abraham”, in Whom **all** the nations of the earth shall be blessed. All the subsequent promises and covenants and dealings with Abraham and his progeny represent God revealing Himself as righteous, true to His word, true to Himself.

And precisely that is what is happening in the events of the Exodus and the Sinai covenant. The holy God, whose presence sinners cannot endure, graciously condescends to reveal His saving will. Set free from death and bondage through the blood of a lamb, the children of Israel (from whom **the** Lamb of God would be born) are led through the desert, onward toward their typologically revelatory history as an image of “the Israel of God”. At Mt. Sinai, God allowed Moses to approach His holy glory, in order that he might serve as a mediator between the holy God and the sinful people.³⁰ And all of the covenant laws there given to the people (Ex. chs. 20ff., further elaborated in Leviticus) testify to the holiness of God who is

²⁸ Gen. 3:22-24. The imposition of a limit on the life-span of sinful humankind may be related, Gen. 3:6.

²⁹ Gen. 3:7, cf. 10-13. These coverings reveal God’s forbearance during the time of the promise and foreshadow that covering of guilt accomplished in the *ἱλαστήριον*, Jesus (Rom. 3:25).

³⁰ Ex. 19; cf. Ex. 3:5; and ch. 34. In this Moses is a typological prophecy of Christ, cf. II Cor. 3:7-18. Indeed, **only** because, in God’s gracious revelation, Moses **is** a type of Christ can he perform this role here and live; otherwise he, too, would have died, sinner that he was.

revealing His will through the history of this people.³¹ Their immediate sin (Ex. 32) makes it clear that this people Israel was only an imperfect adumbration called to give prophetic testimony to the coming Holy One of God. But precisely this sin of theirs sets the stage for a remarkable self-revelatory word from the Holy God. When Moses came up the mountain again, with the second set of stone tablets:

Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished” (34:5-7).

Nowhere are these two attributes and actions of the God who “is what He will be” revealed more clearly or juxtaposed more sharply. Just how He shall accomplish them both is a question which only Calvary answers. But this much Moses, who heard those very words, proclaims and confesses:

I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he (Deut. 32:3-4)

Thus it is clear also that in the Pentateuch God reveals Himself not simply as the “God of Israel”, but as God over all. No mere “god” of Midianite-Israelite cult, Yahweh is the same transcendent, eternal, and (in part) inaccessible God as *El*, *Elohim*, *El Elyon*, etc. The language that is sometimes described as (apparently) “polytheistic or henotheistic”³² is not that at all. Such things as are called “other gods” are simply not in the same category (Deut. 32:16-17, 21, 39). Yahweh is not one god among many, not just a jealous *el* of the Israelites. He is the God of creation, of the garden, of the world-wide judgement of the flood, He is the God of all those peoples whom He scattered, and for their sake He calls Abram out from Ur. He is the God of Abraham, and of Israel, in order to be (in Christ) the God of all

³¹ Cf. Lev. 19:1, e.g. The High Priest, priests, Levites, and Israel are each called to manifest holiness in special ways and degrees. This testifies to the holiness of the God who has drawn them near to Himself; the gulf between the holy God and the sinful world (Gentiles) is graciously bridged—in such a way as to cleanse rather than kill the sinners—in God’s Elect One, “Israel”, i.e., Jesus, to Whom the people Israel are called to bear typological prophecy. Thus the goal of all these ordinances and laws is reached in Jesus; see Gordon J. Wenham, “Christ’s Healing Ministry and His Attitude to the Law”, in *Christ the Lord; Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie*, ed. Harold H. Rowdon (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1982) 115-26.

³² Deut. 32:8-9 is the oft-cited example; cf. Norbert Lohfink, “Gott im Buch Deuteronomium”, *La Notion biblique de Dieu*, eds. J. Coppens et al., *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium*, XLI (Leuven: University Press, 1976) 101-26.

nations. Pentecost **is** the reversal of Babel, the goal for whose sake He “became” the “God of Abraham” and “the God of Israel”. Even after Genesis 12 in the Pentateuch, there are copious demonstrations that He is the God (Creator, Judge, and Saviour) of all.³³

The historical narratives of the **former Prophets** record the history of the Israelites from the point of view of God’s purposes for history. Throughout these books also great men of God deliver oracular words from the Lord, proclaiming His power and explaining His will. The analysis of the present and the orientation to the future are always in accord with earlier self-revelations. God continues to interact with His creation, carrying His self-revelation forward. He reveals His anger at sin, His compassion for His creatures, and His righteousness. He reveals Himself as the God, Judge and Saviour, of all humankind. This can be illustrated by reference to several passages.

In this long period between Sinai and exile, the Transcendent One continued to find ways to be present and to reveal Himself. He sent His glory upon the ark of the covenant and so committed His presence and His power to that mobile shrine, which the children of Israel carried about with great care.³⁴ This tabernacling of the glory of God, along with the prophecy of II Sam. 7:13, eventuated in Solomon’s building of the temple.³⁵ But Solomon’s own prayer of dedication for the temple expressed awareness of a tension: only by His gracious condescension does He, Whom “the heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain”, deign to let His “eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which [He] said, ‘My name shall be there’” (I Kgs. 8:27, 29). But ark and temple are not the only media of God’s presence. The Transcendent One also reveals His will and accomplishes His purposes through chosen individuals upon whom His Spirit rests. Joshua thus fell heir to Moses’ office (Deut. 34:9-10; Josh. 1:16-18), and each of the Judges, likewise, accomplished **the Lord’s** work by **the Lord’s** Spirit (Jdg. 2:16-19; 3:9-10; 4:4; 6:12, 14, e.g.). Samuel served as a prophet (I Sam. 3). His anointing of Saul meant that the Spirit of the Lord would come upon Saul (I Sam. 10, cf. v. 6). Saul having forfeited the kingship (I Sam. 13:13-14), Samuel obeyed God’s command to anoint David, with the result that the Spirit of the Lord came upon **Him** (I Sam. 16:1-13). And the Word of the Lord came to Nathan (II Sam. 7:3-17), Elijah (I Kgs. 17:2), Micaiah (I Kgs. 22:6-28), and Elisha (cf. II Kgs. 2). Through

³³ Gen. 12:3, 17; 14:20; 18:16-19:29; 26:6-33; Joseph in Egypt; the Plagues; Ex. 15:14-16; Num. 20:14-24:25; Deut. 32:40-43.

³⁴ Josh. chs. 3-4, 6; I Sam. chs. 5-6. In this way, God gave typological prophecy of His tenting among men to reveal His glory, judge and save all humankind in Jesus (Jn. 1:14).

³⁵ I Kgs. chs. 5-6; cf. 8:1-11, 21. This, of course, was only the immediate fulfilment of the prophecy; the temple is a type of the House of God that David’s later and greater Son, Jesus, would build: the ἐκκλησία, the body of Christ (Jn. 2:13-22; Mt. 16:18; Eph. 2:19-22).

instituted cult, through anointed kings, through specially called judges and prophets,³⁶ the Word and Spirit of the eternal God worked and spoke in the world; God continued to reveal Himself.

Also in this period He revealed Himself as holy, merciful, and righteous. Stamped upon this historical record of the children of Israel is a pattern demonstrating God's holy wrath against sin and His merciful compassion to save. The conquest of Canaan represents God's victory over all who oppose His Saviour and His rest for His people (Josh. 23; cf. Heb. 4:8-10). The cycle of sin-punishment-repentance-mercy-rescue dominates Judges (cf. 2:10-19). God's powerful presence in ark, temple, and prophet rebukes sin and punishes the hard-hearted,³⁷ but to the earnest and repentant seekers goes out His merciful offer of forgiveness.³⁸ He promises victory and rest under the eternal reign of the coming Son of David (II Sam. 7:11-16). The section closes with the exile (II Kgs. 25), a punishment of sin; with the promise of the Messianic reign unfulfilled, the faithful must still look to the future.

While these "historical books" of the former Prophets appear preoccupied with the people of Israel, several incidents serve as reminder that the God guiding Israel's history is the God, Judge, and Saviour of all. He controls **all** peoples for the sake of His purposes in history (Jdg. 2:20-23; II Kgs. 25). His saving power is available to work for Gentiles like Rahab³⁹ and Naaman (II Kgs. 5). And the temple stands as a house of prayer also for "the foreigner", whose prayer Solomon implores God to heed "so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you" (I Kgs. 8:41-43).

The self-revelation of the Incomparable God is similarly attested in the books of the "latter" Prophets, specially called individuals to whom the Word and/or Spirit of the Lord came, giving words from on high or visions of the Holy One in His heaven.⁴⁰ In these books, great bodies of oracles are recorded, supplementing the accounts of God's deeds in history. Interpretative words, threats and promises, they do much to link God's present and future actions to His past revelations and to place His dealings with the Israelites and Judaeans into the larger picture of His work to judge and save all humankind. Above all, when these prophets speak the Word

³⁶ Each of these points forward, of course, to Jesus: Prophet, Priest, and King.

³⁷ I Sam. 2:27-36; 3:11-14; 5:1-12; 13:13-14; II Sam. 12:1-12; I Kgs. ch. 22; II Kgs. 9:1-10; 21:10-16.

³⁸ II Sam. 12:13; cf. II Kgs. 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 46-51.

³⁹ Josh. 2:1-21; not only is she a Gentile, but a woman and an open sinner! Mt. 1:5 names a Rahab as an ancestress of David and of Jesus, presumably the same woman. Note the similar state of affairs in Ruth, which is set in the period of the Judges.

⁴⁰ Is. 1:1; 6:1; 7:3; Jer. 1:2, 4; Ezek. chs. 1-3, e.g. They know that He is both nearby and far away (Jer. 23:23), and lives "in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit" (Is. 57:15).

given them, God Himself is present, in all His power, to judge unfaith and to save those who trust in Him. It is a Word of power (Is. 55:10-11), a sign and a prophetic anticipation of ... Immanuel, "God with us" (Is. 7:1-25).

For these oracles continue the revelation of the holy wrath of God against sin (Is. 1; 3; 5; Jer. 2; 7; Amos 2:6-5:3, e.g.). They repeatedly prophesy that God has a "day", a day of vindication, of judgement and salvation.⁴¹ Consistent with His victories on His "days" in the past, His future day will bring a greater victory and a new and glorious reign (Is. 9:2-7; Jer. 23:5-8; Zech. 9:9-13), a new covenant, rendering the earlier one obsolete (Jer. 31:31-34; cf. Heb. 8:7-13). On that day paradise will be restored (Is. 11:6-9); God will reverse the consequences of sin, restoring sinners to communion with Himself through forgiveness (Jer. 31:34). He Himself shall undertake to accomplish this (cf. Is. 59:16-20) through His own plan, which will both punish sin and save sinners: His servant, Who embodies perfectly all that "Israel" had been called to be, shall bear the punishment which produces peace. Pouring out his life, He shall bear the sin of many (Is. 53). Wrath and mercy meet in Him on that Day, when the righteous God keeps His promise.

The latter Prophets also provide abundant testimony of the world-wide horizon of God's power, judgement, and salvation. "Foreign" nations do His bidding as His instruments in history (Is. 7:17-20; 8:6-8; 45:1-7, e.g.). The many oracles "against the nations" show that **all** come under His judgement.⁴² But the salvation wrought through His Servant, also, is equally aimed at and accessible to all:

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. ... He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel.⁴³

This generates praise:

In that day you will say: "Give thanks to the Lord, call on His name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted ... Let this be known to all the world" (Is. 12:4, 5b).

The reflections on faith and life contained in the **Writings** of the Old Testament⁴⁴ testify to these same three things about God: the unknowable

⁴¹ Is. 2:12-21; 13:6; 22:5-13; 61:2; Jer. 30:7-11; Ezek. 7:5-14; 30:2-4; Joel 1:15; 2:11; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:14-16; Mal. 3:2; 4:1.

⁴² Is. 34; Jer. 46-51; Ezek. 25-32; Joel 3; Amos 1:3-2:3; Obadiah; Nahum; Zeph. 2:4-15.

⁴³ Is. 11:10, 12a. Cf. Is. 42:1-13; 49:1-7; 56:3-8; 60:1-22; Jonah.

⁴⁴ This description also encompasses I and II Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Daniel and Esther. These are not "court histories", but revisions, memoirs, and vignettes reflecting the struggle involved in being the remnant people in the midst of a foreigner's empire.

God lets Himself be known as a God of Law and of Gospel, the Judge and loving Saviour of all nations. This shows up in several different contexts and is expressed in a variety of literary genres.

Job, Ecclesiastes, and some Psalms wrestle with the question of the acknowledgement and knowledge of God. It is only “the fool” who “says in his heart, ‘there is no God.’”⁴⁵ But even the wisest of men “under the sun” ends up in a *Sackgasse*, or blind alley:

I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.⁴⁶

Job applies the criteria of his own reason in an attempt to discern God’s justice, but fares no better (cf. 3:23-6). Each of these, in its own way, testifies to the limits of “wisdom under the sun”, “natural revelation”, conventional religions’ ways of seeking to “know God”. They do not work; the whole enterprise leads only to mellow frustration or furious rebellion. Thus each one of these testifies, also in its own way, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7; Ps. 111:10). Communion with God is impossible apart from repentance, creaturely awe, trust, patience, worship and obedience.⁴⁷ This faith, this patient “waiting for the Lord”, so evident in the Psalms (27:13-14; 130:5), is rooted in the history of what God has done for His people as a promise of what He will do.⁴⁸ Trust in the saving presence of God is often focused on the immediate spiritual crisis of the (present community or) individual (Pss. 4, 6, 25, 35, 51, e.g.). By faith each such Psalmist “has” the God who keeps His promise, conquers sin, and vindicates His cause in Christ, to Whom the words of every Psalm truly belong. Thus by faith is righteousness, a right relationship to God, in Christ, in the forgiveness of sins (Ps. 32:1-2; Rom. 4:4-8). The Wisdom that comes down as a gift from beyond the sun is offered to every human being under the sun (Prov. 8).

But this “international” and “universal” aspect of the Wisdom books does not mean losing sight of God’s guidance of history to the goal of a salvation accomplished in the Seed of Abraham and Son of David. The Psalmists celebrate the victory of the Lord’s Anointed, the Son of David and Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Pss. 2, 89, 110).

⁴⁵ Ps. 53:1; similarly, the **wicked** has “no fear of God before his eyes” (Ps. 36:1) and “no room for God” “in all his thoughts” (Ps. 10:4). By no means is it debatable **whether** God exists; these passages only note that some people pretend and act as though He does not.

⁴⁶ Eccl. 3:10-11; cf. 1:12-18.

⁴⁷ Job ch. 42; Eccl. 12:1, 13-14; cf. Ps. 19:6-11. In Gen. 51:3 God is referred to as “the Fear of Isaac”.

⁴⁸ Ps. 33, esp. vv. 4, 10-12, 20-22; cf. Ps. 106, esp. vv. 44-48. Psalm 130:4 therefore confesses: “But there is forgiveness with Thee: that Thou mayest be feared” (KJV).

Correspondingly, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Chronicler direct the eyes of the post-exilic community back to the Law, cult, and promises of God; His past pattern of action is the basis for trust in the present and hope for the future.⁴⁹ By the will of the God of Abraham and Moses, a remnant of pious and pure⁵⁰ Judaeans, trusting, committed to their special calling, must be restored in the Persian period (and preserved through the Hellenistic and Roman periods). The “Unknowable” who had been revealing Himself through Israel’s history and prophets was still at work. On that basis Daniel and Esther provide encouragement to exiles living in the midst of a hostile environment. Trust in the God of the covenant, the God of Israel, the God, now, of the Judaeans. Worship Him, the true God, for He is still working toward His goal: the punishment of sin and the revelation of His love for the whole world in a Saviour who is “of (born of, originating from) the Jews” (Jn. 4:22).

Ruth and Song of Songs, finally, testify to that love in a special way. Scriptural testimony to the self-revealing God, they provide reflections on love—and on the breadth and the depth of the love of God. To say that “God loves with a great love” is all-too easy. These treasured books give an inkling of the greatness of the love which would send Jesus into the world. It is a love so searching, so strong, that it pierces through ethnic and cultural barriers. It pierced the heart of the Moabitess Ruth and created in her, as its reflection, a love for the true God and for His Israel. Ruth’s touching pledge mirrors that strong love of God (Ruth 1:16-17); having sought and claimed her, He incorporated her into the “Israel of God” and into the genealogy of David and of Jesus (4:16-22; Mt. 1:5). And it is a love of intense yearning and joyous consummation. Human beings of all times and places know a little bit about love as it is sung of in the Song of Songs. This, too, is a reflection of and so a testimony to the love of God, Who does, indeed, yearn for His Beloved (Cant. 3:1-3) and celebrate joyful communion (2:3-17; 7:1-13). So intense is His love that He did not spare His own Son (Rom. 8:32); **full** is the joy of fellowship with God restored in Christ (cf. I Jn. 1:1-4). Conjugal love in Christian marriages is an opportunity to reflect and mirror Christ’s love for the Church (Eph. 4:22-23); believers can see that every true love is a celebration of the Creator Who “is love” (I Jn. 4:16).

This God of the Old Testament is the “given” personal reality for Jesus and for all of the New Testament writers. A **survey of the New Testament**,

⁴⁹ See P. R. Ackroyd, “God and People in the Chronicler’s Presentation of Ezra”, *La Notion biblique de Dieu* 145-62.

⁵⁰ The concern of Nehemiah and Ezra for the ethnic integrity and covenant-Law purity of the post-exilic community is not some distasteful chauvinism. God’s plan for the birth of the Christ **required** that such an ethnic entity be preserved, that within it there may arise the likes of Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph, and Mary.

therefore, uncovers the great underlying consistency in the Bible's testimony to God: the Holy Trinity in action to judge and save **all**.

In any study of the **Gospels**, it is important to note their twin contexts: the life of Jesus and the historical situation of each Evangelist. Study in each context is valid. The continuity from Jesus to the Evangelists makes these two approaches ("Life of Jesus" and "Redaction Criticism") complement one another.⁵¹ A survey of the Gospels' testimony to God, therefore, considers first Jesus' revelation of God as recorded in them and then notes the emphasis of each Evangelist as he writes for the Church of his own time and place.

Complemented by ratifying deeds, Jesus' words testified to the person and work of God in His own prayers, in His public preaching, and in His teaching to His disciples. He testified to the true God of the Old Testament, the Holy Trinity, at work in His mission to establish and extend the kingdom of God.

Jesus referred to God as "the Father" (Mt. 11:27; 24:36; Jn. 5:20, e.g.) and "My Father" (Mt. 7:21; 10:32-33; 11:27; Jn. 5:17, e.g.). His atoning work made peace with God, so that on Easter morning He told Mary: "Go ... to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God'" (Jn. 20:17). For this reason Jesus also spoke of God as the disciples' Father (Mt. 6:1, 4, e.g.). He prayed to His Father (Mt. 11:25; Lk. 23:24) and taught them to pray: "Our Father ..." (Mt. 6:9), establishing in His own practice the use of the unique and intimate "*abba*" (Mk. 14:36), a testimony to sonship which the Christians learned (by the Spirit) to repeat (Rom 8:15).

Jesus' words and deeds also testify to His own divinity. Son of God, He is God the Son. His references to Himself as "the Son" (Mt. 11:27, e.g.) and as the (ambiguous but potentially heavenly) "Son of Man" (Mt. 9:6; 12:8, e.g.) are indications of a special sonship. His self-consciousness as the unique Son, true God, adumbrated by His pronouncement as a twelve year-old (Lk. 2:49) and ratified at His Baptism (Mt. 3:17), is made clear in His pronouncing of the forgiveness of sins (Mt. 9:2; cf. v. 3) and by His claim to be David's Lord (Mt. 22:41-45).⁵² His doing of His Father's works testifies to Who He is: the Son of God (Jn. 5:31-40). He has the glory of the Son from all eternity (Jn. 17:5) and enjoys a unity with the Father in work, love,

⁵¹ The Gospels themselves are the fulfilment of Jesus' promises given in Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:4. The New Testament is not some "new faith" over against "the teaching of Jesus"; Goppelt I:3-11, 276-81. Therefore Goppelt (as Schlatter) devoted many pages to the teaching of the earthly Jesus (I:43-250).

⁵² Also Jesus' response to the questioner's address in Mark 10:17-18 is probably best taken as an acknowledgement of His divinity; Jesus suggests (ironically) that the questioner (unwittingly) **has properly** addressed Jesus as the "Good One", because Jesus is, in fact, God.

and being (Jn. 5:17, 20; 10:30, cf. vv. 31-33). He is “I Am” (Jn. 8:58; cf. v. 59; 18:5-6).

The Gospels’ report of Jesus’ words also reveal His testimony to God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God, Jesus preached, rested on Himself.⁵³ By Him He cast out demons (Mt. 12:28). Jesus described the Spirit as the “other” Comforter,⁵⁴ sent from the Father (Jn. 14:26) and from Jesus Himself (Jn. 15:26). He is the Spirit of truth who leads into all truth by taking what pertains to Jesus and telling it to the disciples (Jn. 16:15). In Acts 1:4-8, Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit is the gift of promised power that will inspire the disciples to bear witness to Him (cf. Mt. 10:20) and so extend the reign of God (cf. v. 6).

The Great Commission, Mt. 28:18-20, encapsulates this testimony most succinctly. Jesus gives to His disciples the authority and the charge to make disciples of all nations; one of the means of so doing is: “baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. This verse reveals the correct way to name the true God in the new age.⁵⁵

Despite His many clashes with the Jewish leaders (Mt. 23, e.g.) and His insistence that with John the Baptist and Himself something new had come (Mk. 2:18-22), Jesus repeatedly made it clear that this God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Whom He reveals, is the God of the Old Testament.⁵⁶ The twelve-year-old Jesus already hinted that the temple was His Father’s house and that discoursing with the teachers of the Old Testament was His Father’s business (Lk. 2:49). It is self-understood that “God” in Mt. 22:32 is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Jesus upholds the divine authority of Moses’ office in Mt. 23:2-3. After having read from the Old Testament, Jesus proclaimed: “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk. 4:17-21). His allowances and allusions that the Old Testament offices are fulfilled in Himself⁵⁷ make clear His consciousness of the continuity between the Old Testament revelation and His mission. But while

⁵³ Lk. 4:18-21; John the Baptist’s testimony elaborated that God gave Jesus the Spirit “without limit”, Jn. 3:34.

⁵⁴ ἄλλου, Jn. 14:16, i.e., another of the same sort. God the Father is also ἄλλος in relationship to Jesus, Jn. 5:32. See Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950) I:383-84.

⁵⁵ This verse may be said to reach a climax in clarity in the “history” of the self-revelation of God, which moves from expressions which are less than fully clear (in the Old Testament) to those that are clearer, cf. Karl Rahner, “Theos in the New Testament”, *Theological Investigations*, trans. C. Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961) I:79-148, esp. 86-89.

⁵⁶ This is not the same as saying that “His Father” is the God of the Old Testament. The God of the Old Testament is the Holy Trinity, even if K. Rahner’s interesting hypothesis is valid, namely, that in the New Testament ὁ θεός (with the article) consistently refers to the first person of the Trinity. Rahner I:125-48.

⁵⁷ Son of David, Mt. 21:9; the Christ, Mt. 26:3-4; Suffering Servant, Mk. 10:45.

that is self-evident for New Testament believers, it is by no means self-evident for unbelieving Jews that Jesus and His Father and the Spirit, on the one hand, and the God of Israel, on the other, are one and the same. From the discussion in John chs. 5 and 8 there emerge two opposing complexes of interrelationships. On the one hand, those who believe in Jesus and recognise that God is His Father and know that the Spirit of God is in Him **have** Abraham as their father, receive Moses' testimony and have the true God as their Father. On the other hand, those who reject Jesus and do not acknowledge that God is His Father but think that He has a demon **do not have** Abraham (but rather the devil!) as their father and do not receive (but rather are judged by!) Moses' testimony.⁵⁸ Two of Jesus' strongest words on His connection to the God of the Old Testament appear in these chapters. While the New Testament does not reproduce the tetragrammaton of the Old Testament, it is strongly alluded to in the ἐγὼ εἰμι of Jn. 8:58 (cf. 18:6, 8)—an allusion which the hearers understood well, as they undertook to stone Him (v. 59). No wonder, then, that Jesus reveals Himself as the hermeneutical key to the Old Testament when He says: "These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (Jn. 5:39).

Lastly, the words and deeds of Jesus testify also to the arrival of the reign of God in Him.⁵⁹ Jesus' ministry revealed that God is a King Who is graciously establishing and extending His reign among men. When Jesus preached ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, He meant "has come near and **has arrived**", for πεπλήρωται (perf.!) ὁ καιρὸς (Mk. 1:14-15). It is also necessary for the consummation of this kingdom that the Messiah who brings it die on the cross as the Suffering Servant, be raised as Son-of-God-in-power, and return as Son-of-Man-in-glory (Lk. 24:26; Mk. 8:38-9:1). Between resurrection and parousia, the Spirit empowers the extension of that kingdom through the Church's witness to the Gospel (Acts 1:4-8).

It is the faithful report of all the Evangelists that Jesus revealed God the Holy Trinity fulfilling, in Himself and through the Spirit, His plan of salvation promised in the Old Testament. But each Evangelist, in his work of composition, has also operated as a redactor, selecting and arranging the available materials. Study of this redactional work yields an understanding of each Evangelist's particular emphases.

The Gospel according to St. Matthew clearly emphasises the unity of Jesus' person and work as the fulfilment of God's promises.⁶⁰ Salvation for

⁵⁸ See esp. Jn. 5:23-24, 37-47; 8:13, 25-29, 31-47, and 48-59.

⁵⁹ The preaching and teaching of the kingdom of God belongs to the doctrine of God, cf. Goppelt I:43-76, and Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981) 84-85.

⁶⁰ "More than sixty times this Evangelist appeals to the fulfilment of Scripture, and every such fulfilment, of course means that God has planned something, that he has spoken

all (Mt. 2:1-12; 28:18-20) is accomplished precisely in Jesus the Christ, Son of David and of Abraham (1:1-16). Matthew's **arrangement** serves to proclaim Jesus as Son of God, Herald of the kingdom, and Suffering Servant Messiah.⁶¹ By incorporating extensive blocks of Jesus' teaching and reports of His deeds, Matthew displays the unity between Jesus' being (Son, 3:17 and Servant, 20:28), mission (to conquer Satan, 4:1-11 and save on the cross, 20:17-19), preaching (of the arrival of the kingdom, 4:17), teaching (with authority, 7:28-29 and in parables, 13:10-17), and deeds (signs of the kingdom brought by the Servant, 11:2-5; 12:28). In union with the Father and the Spirit (1:20; 3:16-17; cf. 11:27-29), **Jesus** is "God with us" (1:23) and God for us (26:28; cf. 20:28); God for us, He is with us always (28:20).

St. Mark's work of selection, arrangement and emphasis testifies especially to the God Whose Gospel has been preached to the Gentiles.⁶² He prefaces his document with the caption: "The origin of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1), and lets the matching confession of the (Gentile!) centurion (15:39) serve as the climax. His two unique miracles point to the spread of Jesus' power and praise in Gentile territory (7:31-37) and to the **gradual** enlightenment (8:22-26) of the disciples regarding the significance of the **two** feeding miracles. The bread discourse in Mark (8:14-21) points to the **number** of baskets gathered in each feeding, which (along with other details) suggests that the first feeding (6:30-44) is a Messianic sign for **Israel** and the second (8:1-10) is a sign of salvation for the **Gentiles**. Thus Mark presents the God who in Jesus has sent His Gospel "to the Jew first and then also to the Greek" (cf. Mk. 7:24-30; Rom. 1:16; 3:29-30).

There is in Luke's arrangement of Luke-Acts a strong sense of two things: 1) Jesus' ministry fulfils the plan of salvation prophesied in the Old Testament (Lk. 24:27); and 2) the Holy Spirit, the power at work in Jesus' ministry (Acts 10:38), is the power working to continue that ministry in the post-Pentecost Church (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:5; 2:1-4). Already the infancy narratives make it clear that the salvation in Jesus is a Spirit-orchestrated fulfilment in history of the divine plan promised long ago.⁶³ That Spirit rested upon Jesus from the outset of His ministry (Lk. 3:21-2; 4:1, 14, 18). That Spirit empowers the apostolic preaching of the Gospel (Acts 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:2, 4, 9; 15:28; 16:6-10; 20:28). Christians for whom Luke wrote

about it through his servants the prophets, and that he has now brought it to pass", Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 118.

⁶¹ See Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 7-25. The divisions are 1:1-4:16; 4:17-16:20; and 16:21-28:20.

⁶² Mk. 1:14; 13:10; 14:9; cf. 16:15. The association of this written Gospel with Gentile Christians in Italy is widely accepted, cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970) 59-63.

⁶³ Lk. 1:15, 35, 41-42, 67-79; 2:25-32.

should know that God is the Lord of history Who has executed His plan of salvation within history (cf. 3:1-2) in the special history of Israel, of Jesus and of the Church.

Not only in the subtler matters of selection and arrangement, but also in the Evangelist's explicit statements, the Gospel according to St. John offers a highly developed expression of the "doctrine of God". John proclaims the divinity of the Word Who became flesh (1:1, 14), the unique Son Who makes the Father known.⁶⁴ While it is true that "God is Spirit" (4:24) and that all who enter the kingdom are born anew/from above by (of) the Spirit (3:5-8), there is also a set time after Easter (cf. 7:39) when the Holy Spirit is sent to the believers for their comfort, guidance and preservation in the faith. The Evangelist John gives a most clear expression of the person and work of the Holy Trinity.⁶⁵

As **the Apostles** continued Jesus' ministry, they addressed many different situations and produced a variety of documents. But, rooted in the revelation of God in Jesus and inspired by the Spirit, their testimony agrees. It is a testimony given in the context of preaching and praise.

St. Paul spoke of "doctrine" (ἡ διδαχή) as a power, the power of the grace of God in the Gospel, to which one **is delivered** and **under** which one lives (Rom. 6:14, 17; cf. 1:16; Acts 20:32). Paul's theology is the expression of the understanding of the event of the bestowal by God of an alien righteousness as a gift to man.⁶⁶ It is rooted in his encounter with God in Christ on the road to Damascus, an encounter not with an idea nor a doctrine, but with a personal God who **took possession** of him (cf. Phil. 3:12). Within **that** context Paul spoke of God. Herewith follow some of the things he said.

There is only one God (Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; I Cor. 8:4-6; cf. Gal. 4:8), one and the same for Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 3:29-30; cf. Acts 17:26).⁶⁷ He is "the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God" (1 Tim. 1:17, a doxological outburst), the Incomparable, Whose wisdom and knowledge

⁶⁴ John 1:18. If the reading in this verse is θεός, the context still makes it clear that the unique (μονογενής) Being referred to as God is the Son (1:14, 18b). If the reading is υἱός, the context still teaches that this unique Son is intimately one with God (1:18b; 1:1b-2), indeed, "God" (1:1c).

⁶⁵ The testimony in the Epistles of John is in full accord with this: I Jn. 1:1-3; 2:1-2; 2:23-24; 3:24-4:3; 4:9-10, 13-17; 5:6-8; II Jn. 3, 7, 9. Cf. Morris 287-91.

⁶⁶ Conzelmann 52.

⁶⁷ Paul reckons with the reality of spiritual beings other than the one true God, cf. Eph. 6:12 and ὁ θεός τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, II Cor. 4:4. His point is that they are not the true God and that they have no claim to lordship over human beings anymore because of the perfect freedom won through the all-sufficient atonement accomplished in Christ, in Whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt (Col. 1:19-20). Any others are only "so-called god" (I Cor. 8:5). K. Rahner, "Theos", 96-98, discussed Paul's encounter with pagan mankind's notions of god(s). Cf. Deut. 34.

have such depths as to evoke awe and praise (Rom. 11:33-36). He has “eternal power”, a “divine nature” (Rom. 1:19), and His glory (δόξα), which sinners lack (Rom. 1:23; 3:23) but which shines from the face of Christ (II Cor. 4:6) and of which the sons of God in Christ have the hope (Rom. 5:2; 8:17, 21,30).

God is holy. His wrath is being revealed against all unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18); He **will** judge (Rom. 2:5-9). He also has a wealth of “kindness, tolerance and patience”, shown in the fact that He has suspended execution of eternal judgement on sinners whilst the plan of salvation and preaching of the Gospel be accomplished, affording the opportunity for repentance.⁶⁸ For God is also the “Father of compassion and the God of all comfort” (II Cor. 1:3), the God of love and peace (II Cor. 13:11) from whom there flows, through Jesus Christ His Son, grace and peace.⁶⁹

To mention God and His attributes thus leads inescapably into a recounting of His deeds—and to doxology:

Grace and peace to you from our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (Gal. 1:3-4).

God loved us⁷⁰ who were His enemies (Rom. 5:10) and made Jesus to be sin for us (II Cor. 5:21). He did not spare His own Son, but set Him forth as a means of expiation, a sin-offering, in order that He might justify the ungodly, that the just requirement of the Law might be fulfilled, and that we might live according to the Spirit (Rom. 3:25; 4:5; 8:3-4). On the last day He will make alive again our mortal bodies through and by virtue of the Spirit Who dwells within us (Rom. 8:11; cf. 1:4).

This description of God in action makes abundantly clear that God the Holy Trinity is the God of Paul’s theology, as is also apparent in the blessing of II Cor. 13:14: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Furthermore, Paul also asserts that the God Whose Gospel he preaches is the God of the Old Testament, and that He has been faithful to His Word given therein. This is the burden of the argument in Romans, and it comes to light especially in Rom. 3:26.⁷¹ That same faithfulness of God to His promise to forgive sins underlies the great word of pastoral comfort in II

⁶⁸ Romans 2:4; cf. ἀνοχή, Rom 3:26.

⁶⁹ Regularly in the epistolary prescripts: Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:3; II Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Phil. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; and, with mercy, I Tim. 1:2 and II Tim. 1:2.

⁷⁰ Paul would have us **confess**, in the first person plural.

⁷¹ The final articular infinitive clause should be translated with an adverbial καί, and circumstantial participle: “with the result that He Himself is true to His word even when pronouncing the one who believes in Jesus to be in a right relationship to Himself.”

Tim. 3:13: “if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”⁷²

In their recorded sermons and canonical writings, **the other apostles** and New Testament authors do not depart from what has already been described. Their basic agreement, and a few special emphases, may be noted.

St. Peter reiterates the testimony to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The “living God” is the Creator and Judge (I Pet. 1:23; 4:6, 19). In Jesus, the Christ (I Pet. 1:1; cf. Acts 2:36), our “God and Saviour” (II Pet. 1:1), the “God of all grace”, sends the “revelation of grace” (I Pet. 1:13; 5:10). Through the saving ministry⁷³ of the “chief Shepherd” and “guardian of our souls” (I Pet. 2:25; 5:4), God calls from among men of every nation (Acts 10:34-35) believers to His eternal glory (I Pet. 5:10), into which they shall enter when Jesus, revealed, returns (I Pet. 1:5, 7; II Pet. 3:8-10; Acts 3:20-21). In this the “sanctifying work of the Spirit” (I Pet. 1:2) is important. This is the “Spirit of Christ” (I Pet. 1:11) and of God (I Pet. 4:14), sent from heaven. He inspired those who spoke the prophecies in Scripture (II Pet. 1:21; Acts 4:25) and He also inspires those who preach the Gospel (I Pet. 1:12; Acts 2:33; 4:8).⁷⁴

The Epistle of James displays a “robust emphasis on right living”,⁷⁵ but under the assumption of the full New Testament doctrine of God. The true God is one (James 2:19), the unchanging “Father of the Heavenly lights” (1:16). He is the God of Abraham (2:23) and our Father (1:27), who has “chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith” (2:5; cf. 4:6). He has given us “birth through the word of truth” (1:18), so that “we” are “believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (2:1). Jesus’ return is near (5:7-9). Meanwhile, in response to sincere prayer (1:5; 4:2-3; 5:13-16), God sends down every good and perfect gift (1:17). Some may find it puzzling that there is no clear reference to the Holy Spirit in the Epistle of

⁷² My trans.; NIV reads “disown himself”.

⁷³ See esp. I Pet. 1:18-21; 3:18-22; also Acts 2:22-24. Of I Pet. 3:18-22, Goppelt wrote that, “In no other passage of the New Testament were so many elements mentioned of what later became the second article of faith than here: he ‘suffered’ or ‘died’ (v. 18), ‘he went ... to the spirits in prison’ (v.19), ‘through the resurrection’ (v.21) ‘gone into heaven and is at the right hand’ (v.22). This christological formula was in fact a preliminary stage of the second article”(II:177).

⁷⁴ The brief Epistle of Jude reiterates much of II Peter. He warns against those who do not have the Spirit (v. 19), and urges his readers to steadfastness in the faith, based on the powerful love of God, being held by Christ, and the edification of one another in the Holy Spirit (vv. 1, 21, 24).

⁷⁵ Morris 312. Goppelt acknowledges the difficulty of classifying the epistle of James historically and theologically; II:199. His thought-provoking characterisation of it is as a “Parenetic Theology of Empiricism” (II:199-211), whose theological outlook is to be associated with that of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

James.⁷⁶ It is plausible that its author is James the brother of the Lord, in which case Acts 15:24-29 attests to his faith in the Holy Spirit's guidance of the Church (cf. v. 28).

The anonymous Epistle to the Hebrews testifies to the God of the Old Testament, the creator (2:10; 11:3), "God Most High" (7:1), the holy Judge ("a consuming fire", 12:29; cf. 6:2). It is necessary to believe that He is and that there is a recompense to those who seek Him (11:6). In these, the last of days, He has spoken "sonwise" (ἐν υἱῶ, 1:2), revealing Himself as the "God of Peace", "who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep" (13:20). Hebrews mentions the Holy Spirit, also, as the one speaking in the Old Testament Scriptures (3:7; 9:8; 10:15). When God made distributions (μερισμοῖς) of the Holy Spirit according to His will, that, along with the signs and wonders and various miracles, was divine confirmation of the message of salvation spoken through the Lord and those who heard Him (2:3-4). Christians are persons who "have shared the Holy Spirit" (6:4, μετόχους γενηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου). And anyone who "tramples the Son of God underfoot" has also "insulted the Spirit of grace" (10:29).

But Hebrews teaches **especially** about Jesus. The document is best read as a "word of exhortation" (13:22), but the **basis** of each hortatory section is an exegetical demonstration of the excellence of Jesus.⁷⁷ True man (2:5-18), He is also God's Son, agent of creation, heir of all things, ἀπαύγασμα of God's glory and χαρακτήρ of His being (1:2-3), superior to the angels (1:4), indeed: "God" (1:8) and "Lord" (1:10). The readers should therefore heed the word of salvation given through Him (2:1-4). They should, moreover, draw near to God, because Jesus has become the great High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, which the Levitical order only imperfectly foreshadowed (5:10; ch. 7), and He has accomplished once and for all the atonement which their repeated ministrations typologically prophesied (9:1-10:18). They should endure, also, drawing strength for their faith by fixing their eyes on Jesus, the "author and perfecter of ... faith" (12:1-3, as the climax to ch. 11). He, Who came just recently and is present today, will be the same also forever (13:9). As a sound basis for its exhortations, Hebrews

⁷⁶ James 2:26 could be applied to the Holy Spirit, but can also stand as observable "mundane" truth. James 4:5 is problematic and most likely refers (with the NIV margin vs. the NIV text) to the breath of God which He breathed into the human being at creation. It could, however, refer to the indwelling Holy Spirit given by the Father to believers in Jesus, as A. W. Argyle stated in *God in the New Testament, Knowing Christianity*, series ed. Will Neil (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1966) 17.

⁷⁷ See Wolfgang Nauck, "Zum Aufbau des Hebraerbriefes", *Judentum Urchristentum Kirche*, ed. W. Eltester, J. Jeremias, *Festschrift, Beiheft ZNW*, vol. 26 (Berlin: Topelmann, 1960) 199-205.

testifies to the Triune God at work in Jesus, fulfilling the plan of salvation revealed beforehand in the Old Testament.⁷⁸

The worship of the Holy Trinity, and the proclamation of His work for the comfort of the saints is also the marvellous testimony of the last book of the Bible, Revelation. So different and yet so much the same, the Apocalypse is a fitting capstone to a review of the testimony to God in the Scriptures, for it speaks so much of the language of the Old Testament also.

“In the Spirit” on the Lord’s day, John heard and saw this message of comfort (1:10, 11; cf. 4:2). The “other Comforter” sent words of encouragement to the Church.⁷⁹ The basis of this comfort is the proclamation of the victory God has won in Jesus. This is especially forceful in 12:1-9, which recounts the birth of the child and the defeat of the dragon, followed by a victory song (12:10-12a). Similarly, ch.5 includes the announcement that “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed” (5:5), followed by the vision of the Lamb who was slain and the new song of praise (5:6, 9:14). This Lamb is the Messiah, Jesus Christ, “who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father” (1:5b-6).

Whilst awaiting her Lord’s return, the Church is comforted and sustained by these proclamations of who God is and what He has done. Inspired by such visions, she does more than teach a doctrine about God; she worships Him and so continues the testimony to Him:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come (4:8b).

You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (5:9).

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever!” (5:13b).

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD IN THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

Committed to Holy Scripture as the sole authority, source and norm for the faith and life of the Church, Martin Luther and the other confessors involved in the 16th-century reform of the Church known as the Lutheran

⁷⁸ William Manson has noted that some of the same theological outlook as is found in Hebrews is present in the testimony of Stephen, Acts 7:2-60; see *The Epistle to the Hebrews: An Historical and Theological Reconsideration* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1951).

⁷⁹ Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22. Argyle is surely wrong when he says that the author of the Apocalypse “has no definitely conceived doctrine of the Spirit”(170). Few men have ever been so close to the Spirit and His work!

Reformation confessed their faith and expounded their teaching in several documents. Certain “electors, princes and estates in the Holy Empire of the German nation”,⁸⁰ having become convinced that “in these last times of this transitory world almighty God in his immeasurable love, grace, and mercy toward mankind has permitted the pure unalloyed and unadulterated light of his holy Gospel and of the Word that alone brings salvation to appear to our beloved fatherland”, caused those confessional documents and expositions to be gathered and to be published, along with the newly-drafted Formula of Concord, in 1580.

Abhorring sectarianism, these confessors claimed their confession and doctrine to be a faithful exposition of Scripture (“apostolic”) and therefore at one with the true faith of the whole Church (“catholic”).⁸¹ It is as such **confessions of faith** that they bear testimony to a doctrine of God. For, as Edmund Schlink says: “In the last analysis, all Confessions of the church are nothing more than a fortification built around Baptism, and an explanation of the Trinitarian name.”⁸² This is clearly true as regards the three creeds of the ancient Church; but the principle extends also to the catechisms and, ultimately, to all of the confessional documents. There is an abiding relationship between God, the proclamation of God’s words, trust in God (faith), confession and worship of God, and, finally, the “doctrine” of God.⁸³

Reflection on this fact, particularly as formulated in Schlink’s concise dictum, generates two theses, which this survey of the Lutheran Confessions shall undertake to demonstrate. On the one hand, the “doctrine of God” (narrowly defined as the description of the three persons and one essence of the Trinity and their interrelationships) was **not** a point of contention between the Lutheran confessors and the Roman Catholic theologians and so is not an item of major concern in the Lutheran Confessions. But, on the other hand, insofar as **everything in theology** pertains to it,⁸⁴ the doctrine of **God** is precisely what lay at the root of the whole experience of Luther and the subsequent Reformation. For the “Gospel”, which is often and rightly

⁸⁰ Preface to the Book of Concord, *The Book of Concord*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert *et al.* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959) 3. These “civil” authorities understand that concern for and involvement in the confession of the truth is part of their office.

⁸¹ Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehnke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961) xv-xxix, esp. xv-xix.

⁸² Schlink xiii.

⁸³ See Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, vol. 1, *The Theology and Philosophy of Life of Lutheranism Especially in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962) 211-13. “Luther’s whole theology appears as the answer of a man with whom God Himself has spoken” (212). “Every attempt to construct God’s ‘essence’ (Wesen) hypothetically from His ‘attributes’ (*Eigenschaften*) must run aground on the diastasis of wrath and mercy” (213).

⁸⁴ “... everything that can be said in theology pertains to the doctrine of God, and the doctrine of God embraces every theological *locus*.” Preus II:16

named as the central issue in the Lutheran Reformation,⁸⁵ is the self-revelation of **God**, powerfully at work to judge and save humankind.⁸⁶ Precisely in His works humankind knows God. The Gospel, what God has done, inevitably has an impact upon the “doctrine of God”.⁸⁷ “The Triune God is not yet known if he is presented without the distinction of law and Gospel.”⁸⁸ But neither does this mean that the ancient Church’s Trinitarian doctrine is some peripheral *Nebensache* for those who have justification at the centre of their theology. It is the basis for the Gospel; the Gospel is not the same without it.⁸⁹

The Lutheran Confessions accept the traditional Creeds’ formulation of the doctrine of the Triune God and of the interrelationships of the three persons in the one divine essence as a correct exposition of Scripture. They do not spend much time or effort in expounding the finer points of these interrelationships, nor do they understand that aspect of the doctrine of God to be an item of contention in the historical situation which has evoked their new confessions. This latter understanding is matched by the acknowledgement of the same in the Roman Confutation of the Augsburg Confession. In the historical developments within Lutheranism in the 16th century, moreover, there was no controversy over this point *per se*, and the later Confessions pay heed to the importance of Trinitarian formulations only in relationship to a few current sects. All of this is demonstrated in the following few points and passages.

⁸⁵ See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700) The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) IV:128: “At the heart of the church doctrine that came out of Luther’s Reformation was the axiom he enunciated in 1517: ‘The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.’” (The reference is to WA 1:236.)

⁸⁶ Paragraph 236 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994) 60 alludes to the helpful patristic distinction between *theologia* and *oikonomia*, on which yet more light is shed by the distinction of Law from Gospel: “The Fathers of the Church distinguish between theology (*theologia*) and economy (*oikonomia*). ‘Theology’ refers to the mystery of God’s inmost life within the Blessed Trinity and ‘economy’ to all the works by which God reveals himself and communicates his life. Through the *oikonomia* the *theologia* is revealed to us; but conversely, the *theologia* illuminates the whole *oikonomia*. God’s works reveal who he is in himself; the mystery of his inmost being enlightens our understanding of all his works. So it is, analogously, among human persons. A person discloses himself in his actions, and the better we know a person, the better we understand his actions.”

⁸⁷ See esp. Elert 211-17.

⁸⁸ Schlink 66. Cf. Elert 217: Luther gradually “recognised more and more the Christological approach to the doctrine of the Trinity as the only one that was compatible with his theology.”

⁸⁹ Cf. FC SD XII:37, and Schlink 62-64, which warns against modern attempts to reinterpret the Trinitarian formulations.

First, the men who assembled the Book of Concord (1580) placed the three Creeds of the ancient Church at the very beginning.⁹⁰ In so doing they ratified an acceptance that had been at work as an inner dynamic throughout the history of the confessions-writing period of the Lutheran Reformation—an acceptance which worked itself out in their claims that their Confessions **were**, indeed, Scriptural and apostolic, orthodox and catholic, the embodiment of the Church’s heritage. They made this rationale for their action explicit in the Preface and in the Rule and Norm of the Solid declaration of the Formula of Concord.⁹¹ Having pledged allegiance first to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments, they next write:

Since in ancient times the true Christian doctrine as it was correctly and soundly understood was drawn together out of God’s Word in brief articles or chapters against the aberrations of heretics, we further pledge allegiance to the three general Creeds, the Apostles’, the Nicene, and the Athanasian, as the glorious confessions of the faith—succinct, Christian, and based on the word of God—in which all those heresies which at that time had arisen within the Christian church are clearly and solidly refuted.⁹²

Thus the traditional formulations of τὸν υἱὸν ... θεὸν ἀληθινόν ... γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα, ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ, and τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, τὸ κύριον ... τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον, τὸ σὺν πατρὶ καὶ υἱῷ συμπροσκυνούμενον καὶ συνδοξαζόμενον are all confessed in the Nicene Creed.⁹³ Similarly, the exact terminology defining the interrelationships of the three persons in the one essence in the Athanasian Creed is adopted and confessed:

... *neque confundantes personas, neque substantiam separantes* ...

Pater a nullo est factus, nec creatus, nec genitus.

Filius a patre solo est, non factus nec creatus, sed genitus.

Spiritus sanctus a patre et filio, non factus nec creatus nec genitus,

⁹⁰ Tappert 18-21. In *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, Herausgegeben im Gedankjahr der Augsburgischen Konfession 1930, 4., durchgesehene Auflage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), they are printed, with introductions and commenting notes, under the names *Symbolum Apostolicum*, *Symbolum Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*, and *Symbolum Athanasianum* (text and notes, 21-30, introductions XI-XV).

⁹¹ See Tappert 501-2, and the corresponding sections of the Epitome, esp. Tappert 465.

⁹² FC SD Rule and Norm, 4; Tappert 504. The Augsburg Confession, then (5), is designated as “our symbol in this epoch”, to which the Lutheran confessors make appeal just as later bishops and synods in the ancient church appealed to the Nicene Creed.

⁹³ *Bekenntnisschriften* 26. Note the *filioque* in the Latin version, p. 27 line 2; cf. *Symbolum Athanasianum* 22.

sed procedens ...

Et in hac trinitate nihil prius aut posterius, nihil maius aut minus,

sed totae tres personae coaeternae sibi sunt et coaequales ... ⁹⁴

This capstone explicit adoption of the three Creeds in 1580 was a reflection of the acceptance and exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity throughout the history of the writing of the Lutheran Confessions.

For, it is to be noted as a second point, the chronologically earliest exposition of the Trinity in the Book of Concord is in the Catechisms of Martin Luther, each of which includes an explanation of the Apostles' Creed.⁹⁵ Here Luther shows his utter acceptance of the Apostles' Creed as a Scriptural Confession of the faith, something which every Christian should know thoroughly. The explanations in the Small Catechism, moreover, teach a "doctrine" of God not "as He is within Himself", but **as He is known in action for "me"**. The repeated use of the first person singular pronouns signals the interplay of confession and doctrine. In **faith**, personal and passive, God is rightly known. The Apostles' Creed is such a great exposition of the doctrine of God because it is, first and foremost, a baptismal confession.⁹⁶ Ministry and worship by the faithful is the context of the right knowledge of God. Luther's explanations grow out of and reflect that faith-worship-confession complex. *Sola gratia* and *sola fide* are at the heart of his expositions of the Creed; he shows that the God of the Apostles' Creed is to be rightly understood only as the God of the Gospel.⁹⁷

Thirdly, it is therefore no surprise that in 1530 the Augsburg Confession opens quite calmly and concisely with its article on the "Doctrine of God":

Our churches teach with great unanimity that the decree of the council of Nicaea concerning the unity of the divine essence [*essentiae divinae*] and concerning the three persons [*personis*] is true and should be believed without any doubting ... ⁹⁸

⁹⁴ *Symbolum Athanasianum* 4, 20-22, 24-5; *Bekennnisschriften* 28-9.

⁹⁵ Written in 1529, prior to the Augsburg Confession, these were later incorporated into the Book of Concord as materials in wide use in the churches, schools, and homes of "those churches which adhere to the Augsburg Confession", FC SD Rule and Norm 8.

⁹⁶ The same holds true for the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds. Whatever their origin may have been, much of their power for teaching and confession has come out of their being **used** (the Nicene more so than the Athanasian) in corporate worship.

⁹⁷ Luther's expositions of especially the second and third articles are critical proof of the second thesis of this segment, below.

⁹⁸ AC I:1 (Latin).

Nor is this a shallow, parrot-like affirmation.⁹⁹ Good students of the history of doctrine, Luther and Melanchthon knew the heresies that had prompted such formulations and specifically rejected them (AC I:5-6), being on the watch, meanwhile, for new manifestations of the old errors, condemning Samosatenes “old and new”. They would have their words to carry the meaning that the Church always has heard in them:

And the term “person” [*personae*] is used, as the ancient Fathers [*scriptores ecclesiastici*] employed it in this connection, to signify not a part or a quality in another but that which subsists of itself [*quod proprie subsistit*].¹⁰⁰

While not considering it a point of contention between themselves and the Roman Catholics, the Lutheran confessors clearly held that the traditional Trinitarian formulations are of foundational significance for theology and confession, for proclaiming the truth of the Gospel and for distinguishing Christian believers from unbelievers.¹⁰¹ The Roman Confutation of the Augsburg Confession, moreover, acknowledged its agreement with the Augsburg Confession on this article, a circumstance noted by Melanchthon in Apology I.¹⁰²

This same state of affairs, fourthly, is reflected in the Smalcald Articles, where the doctrine of the Trinity and of the incarnation are affirmed in the remarkably brief “first part”, which treats of “the sublime articles of the divine majesty” (SA I). Luther there repeated all of the orthodox terminology: essence (*Wesen*), persons (*Personen*), begotten (*geboren*), and proceeding (*ausgehend*), and made explicit reference to the Apostles’ and Athanasian Creeds, as well as to the (Small) “Catechism in common use for children”. “These articles”, Luther wrote, “are not matters of dispute or contention, for both parties confess them. Therefore, it is not necessary to treat them at greater length” (SA I).

Finally, as indicated above, the Formula of Concord placed this entire confessions-writing process into perspective with its explicit reiterations (SD Preface, Rule and Norm) and, eventually, with the publication of the entire Book of Concord. The solidarity of these 16th-century confessions with the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Creeds of the ancient Church was thereby sealed.

The Formula of Concord itself, however, dealt with various theological controversies which arose within the first generation of Lutheranism. But the doctrine of God (in the narrow sense of the doctrine of the Trinity) was

⁹⁹ Some later interpreters held that this affirmation was only a matter of political expediency; cf. Schlink 62, n. 16.

¹⁰⁰ AC I:4 (Latin).

¹⁰¹ Cf. also LC II:66.

¹⁰² For the words of the Roman Confutation, see Tappert 100, n. 1.

not an issue in those controversies and so was not dealt with at any length in the Formula.¹⁰³ The Formula of Concord does note, however, the existence of sectarians from whom orthodox Scriptural Christians can and must delineate themselves by reference to the doctrine of the Trinity. They are referred to in the “omnibus” section XII, specifically: the “New Arians”, or Unitarians (36) and Anti-Trinitarians, who “reject and condemn the old, approved symbols, the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, both as to content and terminology, and instead teach that ... each person has a distinct essence separate from the other two” (37), notions which “all pious Christians will and should avoid ...” (39).

Thus the thesis that the Lutheran Confessions do not hold the doctrine of God to be an item of major concern in the controversies of the 16th century can be supported. And yet: “The triune God is not yet known if he is presented without the distinction of law and Gospel.”¹⁰⁴ The Lutheran confessors placed the Gospel, the doctrine of justification by grace through faith for Christ’s sake, at the centre of all **theology** as the chief article of doctrine, by which the Church stands or falls. The Gospel, therefore, has an impact everywhere in the theology, faith, and life of the Church.¹⁰⁵

This is also most obviously true as regards the doctrine of God. The Triune God is the God of the Gospel. It is not enough to know how to say the creeds, to repeat the formulae about ὁμοούσιον, *essentia*, and *personae*, if one still **fears** the Father, Son, and Spirit as a fierce Judge, a God of Law. Luther, indeed, had met such a Holy Trinity in the Medieval Roman Catholic church; he learned all about that Triune God in the monastery.¹⁰⁶ But that church did also have the Scripture. Through study of it, Luther eventually heard the voice of the gracious God of the Gospel, revealing what He himself had done for humankind’s salvation. Trust in that God of the Gospel displaced fear of the God of the Law; faith, so to speak, “created a quality in God” for him, in that it uncovered God’s true self.¹⁰⁷ What a difference it makes to have an “evangelical Trinity”, a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who are the source and the subject of the Gospel, the Good News of what **God** has done for humankind’s salvation! This is a Father Who so loved the world that He spared not His only Son but gave Him up for us all. This is the Son Who has accomplished all things necessary for our salvation, out of pure grace and mercy. This is the Spirit sent to enlighten us, create faith and lead us to the glorious freedom of the children of God. This true

¹⁰³ Of course, the “doctrine of God” taken broadly was, indeed, involved also in those intra-Lutheran controversies.

¹⁰⁴ Schlink 66.

¹⁰⁵ Pelikan IV:167-82; Elert *passim* (esp. 211).

¹⁰⁶ See Pelikan IV:128.

¹⁰⁷ Elert 215.

God the Word incarnate, the Son, makes known (Jn. 1:18). The Triune God is rightly known only through Christ.¹⁰⁸ The Holy Spirit leads us to see this gracious God of the Gospel in the Scriptures (II Cor. 3:16-17). The relatively small amount of ink devoted to the description of Trinitarian interrelationships in the Lutheran Confessions should not obscure this fact: they **everywhere** confess the God of the Gospel and proclaim Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as gracious and evangelical.¹⁰⁹

This is most clear at those points where the Lutheran Confessions describe the central importance of the Gospel and/or the doctrine of justification. The Holy Trinity is known rightly only when the Gospel is preached and believed. The true God, revealed in Scripture alone, is the God Who, by grace alone, saves and justifies through Christ alone, bestowing the gift of a right relationship to Himself—a gift which is received through faith alone. The Creator, Who calls into being things that are not and Who by His Spirit raises life from the dead, is the God Who, in Christ, **justifies the ungodly**, not imputing their sin to them but rather reckoning faith as righteousness (Rom. 4).

Nowhere is the Holy Trinity explained as the God of the Gospel more eloquently than in Luther's Catechisms. The Father's goodness and mercy toward His unworthy creatures, the Son's redeeming work through His suffering and death, the Spirit's enlightenment and sanctification of blind and impotent sinners (SC II:2,4,6) all testify to the *sola gratia, solus Christus, sola fide* of the Gospel. And, after having given a brief summary of the second article by saying "the little word 'Lord' simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, he who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness" (LC II:31), Luther concludes: "Indeed, the entire Gospel that we preach depends on the proper understanding of this [second] article" (33). The conclusion of his entire exposition recapitulates:

Here in the Creed you have the entire essence of God, his will, and his work exquisitely depicted in very short but right words Although the whole world has sought painstakingly to learn what God is and what he thinks and does, yet it has never succeeded in the least. But here you have everything in richest measure. In these articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart, his sheer, unutterable love. He created us for this very purpose, to redeem and sanctify us. Moreover, having bestowed

¹⁰⁸ Elert 217; Elert also notes there (pp. 217-18) how Melancthon placed his entire exposition of Christology under the doctrine of the Trinity in the last edition of his *Loci*.

¹⁰⁹ This word has been claimed by a whole "network" of 20th-century religious (and religio-political) societies of varying (and often questionable and most un-evangelical) stripe and hue. But *abusus* should not preclude *usus*. Its meaning here is in its best Lutheran (i.e., Scriptural and catholic) sense: as the adjective that corresponds to the noun "Gospel".

upon us everything in heaven and earth, he has given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. As we explained before, we could never have come to recognize the Father's favour and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible Judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit (LC II:63-65).

Trinity and Gospel, faith and the knowledge of the true God, confession and doctrine are inseparable. Confessing and "having" this God of the Gospel distinguishes believers from all others; the difference between the Ten Commandments and the Creed is the difference between Law and Gospel.¹¹⁰

Thus also Melanchthon, after having noted the Roman Confutation's rejection of the teaching in the fourth article (and others) of the Augsburg Confession, declared in the Apology that in this controversy (merits vs. grace and faith) the "main doctrine of Christianity is involved" (Ap IV:2; cf. XII:59). He asserted elsewhere the fact that "we receive the forgiveness of sins freely, for Christ's sake" is the "obvious truth", which "the church must defend" and for which one can gladly and confidently die (Ap XX:6-8). And Luther later reiterated the importance of this "first and chief article" (pertaining to "the office and work of Jesus Christ, or to our redemption") "that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, 'was put to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification' (Rom. 4:25)." "Inasmuch", moreover, "as this must be believed and cannot be obtained or apprehended by any work, law or merit, it is clear and certain that such faith alone justifies us" (Rom. 3:26, 28). "Nothing," he says, "in this article can be given up or compromised. ... On this article rests all that we teach and practice ..." (SA II.i:1-5).

Finally, in settling points of controversy in the exposition of justification, the Formula of Concord had recourse to the words of the Apology and of Luther, to the same effect: "this article of justification by faith is 'the chief article of the entire Christian doctrine'"¹¹¹ and "where this single article remains pure, Christendom will remain pure, in beautiful harmony, and without any schism. But where it does not remain pure, it is impossible to repel any error or heretical spirit."¹¹²

¹¹⁰ LC II:66-69. But this does not mean rejection of a "third use" of the Law, even in the Ten Commandments, as the positive encouragements in Luther's explanations of them suggest. It is that the Creed teaches us how we are **enabled to do** what the Commandments ask. Note also, in this section, how Luther distinguishes between "natural revelation" (which reveals only a God of Law) and "special revelation".

¹¹¹ Not "a" but "**the**" chief article; SD III:6; cf. Ap IV:2.

¹¹² SD III:6. (The Tappert edition failed to close the quotation at the end of the paragraph.)

If, then, the doctrine of justification, of the Gospel, is **the** chief article, without which one does not have the true God, then it is clear that only an “evangelical Trinity” can be the true Holy Trinity of Scripture and of the true Christian faith. One may search for God. One may think, even, that he has found God. One may even call him “Lord, Jesus, and/or Triune God”. But one does not have the **true** God unless he confesses his faith in the God of the Gospel. The way in which the Lutheran Confessions deal with several issues illustrates the import of this.

In his discussion of the First Commandment in the Large Catechism, Luther was led to contrast Christian faith and life under the papacy (where they did, indeed, have all the words of the Creeds) with what it has been like since his rediscovery of the gracious God of the Gospel. Expounding on his insight that “to have a God properly means to have something in which the heart trusts completely” (LC I:11), Luther says:

Again, consider what we used to do in our blindness under the papacy. If anyone had a toothache, he fasted in honor of St. Apollonia; if he feared fire, he sought St. Lawrence as his patron; if he feared the plague, he made a vow to St. Sebastian or Roch. There were countless other such abominations. ... All these fix their heart and trust elsewhere than in the true God. They neither expect nor seek anything from him (LC I:11-12).

Noting again that to “have God” means not to “shut him up in a chest” but “to cling to him with all our heart” and “entrust ourselves to him completely” (LC I:13-15), Luther spends some words describing the vanity of the pagan worshippers of Jupiter, etc. (17-21). He continues:

There is, moreover, another false worship. This is the greatest idolatry that has been practiced up to now, and it is still prevalent in the world. Upon it all the religious orders are founded. It concerns only that conscience which seeks help, comfort, and salvation in its own works and presumes to wrest heaven from God. It keeps account how often it has made endowments, fasted, celebrated Mass, etc. On such things it relies and of them it boasts, unwilling to receive anything as a gift from God, but desiring by itself to earn or merit everything by works of supererogation, just as if God were in our service or debt and we were his liege lords. What is this but making God into an idol—indeed, an “apple-god”—and setting up ourselves as God? (LC I:22-23).

To refuse to be passive and receive everything as a gift from God is to have a false God; the giving Holy Trinity of the Gospel, known only through faith, is the true God. Thus the lack of the understanding of the Gospel that is evident in the doctrine of merits, in the trust in good works, in the whole system of religious vows and monasteries, in the Roman Catholic church’s practice of the Mass and understanding orders—all those abuses signal that

their doctrine of God (Trinitarian though it be) is wrong because it is not evangelical.¹¹³

A second illustration of the impact of the Gospel on the doctrine of God in a particular theological issue lies in the way in which the Formula of Concord preserves and defends the Scriptural teaching about election and the foreknowledge of God in Article XI. The desire of reason to forge theology into a consistent system leads to a false, non-evangelical and therefore un-scriptural God. For, all suggestions to the contrary notwithstanding, here, too, the true God is **only** the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who saves by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

The Formula of Concord repeatedly asserts the need to extract and apply this teaching, about election, **only** from Scripture (cf. SD XI:52).¹¹⁴ We must be content “not to speculate concerning the absolute, secret, hidden, and inscrutable foreknowledge of God” (SD XI:13); this will always lead only to a God of Law.

On the contrary, we should consider the counsel, purpose and ordinance of God in Christ Jesus, who is the genuine and true “book of life” as it is revealed to us through the Word. This means that we must always take as one unit the entire doctrine of God's purpose, counsel, will, and ordinance concerning our redemption, call, justification, and salvation¹¹⁵

The promise of the Gospel extends over all human beings (28), with no deception (29). To teach otherwise undermines the doctrine of the true God at work in the Ministry, the Word, e.g., of absolution (38-39). But when it is taught “in Christ”, this is a comforting doctrine, for then “it mightily substantiates the article that we are justified and saved without our works and merit, purely by grace and solely for Christ’s sake” (43). This is done when one confesses that the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the Holy Trinity Who “directs all men to Christ as to the book of life in whom they are to seek the Father’s eternal election”,¹¹⁶ and Who draws all humankind to Himself through Christ.¹¹⁷ For the test of the truth of any exposition of doctrine—and of the God to which it bears witness—is whether or not it does to people what the Gospel does to them (SD XI:90-92).

¹¹³ See AC XX-XXVIII; Ap, *passim*; SA II.ii-iv; III.x-xi, xiv-xv; Tractate, *passim*. Especially illuminating in this context are Luther’s remarks in his “The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith” (1538), AE 34:209f.

¹¹⁴ The formal principle of theology must be Scripture **alone**, not Scripture and reason.

¹¹⁵ SD XI:13-14. This is followed by a summary of the whole counsel of salvation in 8 points (15-22).

¹¹⁶ SD XI:66, with Scripture passages as evidence in 66-67.

¹¹⁷ SD XI:76-77.

Thus in any and every article of doctrine and discussion of ecclesiastical practice—everywhere, indeed, that “God” is mentioned, the Lutheran Confessions let the Gospel have its impact. For the *opus proprium* of God is the Gospel; in His heart of hearts, the Holy Trinity is evangelical.

MANIFESTATIONS OF THE RESULTS OF GOD’S WORK

The God of Whom the “doctrine of God” speaks is the determinative force behind all “practical results” of that doctrine. This is no simple matter of “theory and practice”, of teaching a doctrine and leaving it to the learners to implement the programme. Philosophical ethics always find sin an ineradicable and inimical power. But the “ethics”¹¹⁸ of the Scriptures are different. Sin is both recognised and dealt with, in the Gospel’s word of forgiveness and in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Scripture talks little of “Christian praxis” or “ethics”; it talks, rather, of the fruit of the Spirit, and worship (*λατρεία*).¹¹⁹ Foundational to any evangelical discussion about the “practical implications” of the doctrine of God, therefore, is the observation that God Himself determines all divine service.¹²⁰

God determines and controls divine service in three important aspects. First, because He is the God of grace, the God of the Gospel, **He** initiates it. The divine service is first and foremost **God’s service to human beings through Christ** and through the Ministry instituted by Him.¹²¹ **God gives:** in Christ He gives forgiveness of sins and a life of peace, joy and freedom. Secondly, it is God Who works powerfully to transform those persons who, through faith, receive Christ’s gift of forgiveness: He creates within them a new being, which He daily renews and transforms, making it progressively

¹¹⁸ There is some doubt as to whether that be the right thing to call it.

¹¹⁹ Gal. 5:22-23; Rom. 12:1-2.

¹²⁰ This *klingt* better in German: “Gott bestimmt Gottesdienst”, in which the grand word *Gottesdienst* (“divine service”) incorporates the Gospel idea of God’s service in Christ to humankind which ends in empowering the believers’ “worship”-response in Christ to God. God’s service to humankind is via the means of grace, Word and Sacrament Ministry of the Church, which takes place (also apart from, but primarily) in the corporate actions of the assembled congregation; the believers’ response of worship to God also takes place in everyday life (vocation, neighbour-love) as well as in the corporate worship activities of the assembled congregation. In this one phrase, “divine service”, are included all four elements: God’s action in the Gospel (1) and the response it creates (2) take place both apart from (3) and within (4) the corporate liturgy of the Church. See Vilmos Vajta, “Gottesdienst als Glaubensexperiment”, *Gott und Gottesdienst*, mit Beiträgen von Vilmos Vajta *et al.*, *Ökumenische Perspektiven* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 1973) IV:9-20, 12. All of this is inherent in Luther’s dictum in “Wider die himmlischen Propheten”: “das Wort ‘Ich bin dein Gott’ ist Maß und Ziel all dessen was vom Gottesdienst gesagt werden mag ...” (as quoted on p. 7 of that same volume).

¹²¹ Mk. 10:45; II Cor. chs. 4-5; Jn. 20:19-23.

be conformed to the image of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.¹²² He does this service in individual believers, one by one, and so overcomes the power of sin in His sons and servants, who think in accord with the Spirit, are led by the Spirit, walk by the Spirit and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit (Rom. 8:3-11; Gal. 5:22-23). The believer's λογικὴ λατρεία is to present his body as a living sacrifice, so that the matter of his "worship" extends into every aspect of his daily life.¹²³ This makes "station(s) in life" into "divine vocation", a service of worship, whether it be as father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, husband, wife, master, servant, apostle, elder, layperson, prince, magistrate, or even widow.¹²⁴ God's grace and love transform all such relationships and fill every believer with joyous freedom, peace, and love toward his neighbour.¹²⁵ Thirdly, God determines the divine service of the Church as a corporate body in that He has established their κοινωνία and has instituted what they do when assembled as a corporately worshipping body.¹²⁶ No encounter with fellow-believers should be without the exchange of "grace and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ".¹²⁷ The saints are αἱ ἐκκλησίαι αἱ ἐν Χριστῷ (I Thess. 2:14; Gal. 1:22). James refers to their συναγωγή, (2:2) and Hebrews to their ἐπισυναγωγή.¹²⁸ When they gather, they have in common the word, prayers, and the breaking of bread, (Acts 2:42), for their departing Lord had enjoined them to "remain in my word" (Jn. 8:31; 15:1-11; cf. II Jn. 9) and to "do this in remembrance of me" (I Cor. 11:24, 25).

That gracious command, that loving institution of Sacrament and Ministry, is the fountainhead of the divine service in and for the Church of all times. To recognise this is to attain to a point of departure for describing practical implications of the doctrine of God in the Church today. For this insight preserves the grace of the Gospel, and avoids a law-oriented focus on the works Christians "ought" to do in order to carry out "the practical programme that is implied by their doctrine". For as His disciples "do this",

¹²² Rom. 12:1-2; 8:29; II Cor. 3:18.

¹²³ Rom. 12:1-2. See Ernst Käsemann, "Gottesdienst im Alltag der Welt", *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) II:198-204.

¹²⁴ Rom. 13:4; I Cor. 7:17-24; Eph. 5:21-6:9; Col. 3:18-4:1; Phlmn. 12, 16; I Tim. 5:9; cf. Small Catechism IX.

¹²⁵ Gal. 5:1, 13-14; Rom. 5:1-5; 14:17-18.

¹²⁶ This includes "worship" in the narrower sense, the public and orderly activities which now, typically, occur on Sunday mornings. But there never has been a mandated set time for it in the Church, and at every gathering of Christians there is an expression of fellowship in God, cf. Acts 2:42-47.

¹²⁷ Mt. 10:13; Rom 15:7; cf. Paul's epistolary prescripts, Rom. 1:7, e.g. Note also Luther's counsel that "a Christian congregation should never gather together without the preaching of God's word and prayer, no matter how briefly", "Concerning the Order of Public Worship", AE 53:11.

¹²⁸ Probably a "trans-parochial" and/or eschatological assembling, Heb. 10:24.

He is present as the gracious giver of the forgiveness of sins. As they gather under and abide in His Word, He is present to fill them with joy, peace, and love, gifts which overflow beyond the boundaries of the “time” for corporate worship into each person’s vocation in daily life. As the believers gather under His Word and around His altar, the true God gives Himself; believed-in and confessed, received by faith, He is “had-in-common” and so establishes the fellowship (κοινωνία) of the Church in God. The believers thus have a unity and an identity in Him, and in their common confession they become a testimony to His presence in and for the whole world. God’s service to the Church, embodied in the services of corporate worship but extending into every Christian’s life, thus also determines the Church’s service to the world. God sends the Church into her mission not just with a command, but through His gift of Himself. His Spirit fills the believers so that they testify to Him (Mt. 5:14-16; 10:19-20; Acts 1:8). Through no other motive or power does the Church’s mission take place. God determines the divine service. This is manifest in three aspects of Christian life and Ministry.

The doctrine of God enables Christians to **live under grace** (Rom. 6:14). This is an all-pervading consequence of having a truly gracious God. Martin Luther wrote¹²⁹ that there are only two kinds of righteousness: that which avails before God (the alien and imputed righteousness given as a gift) and all other kinds (based on human capacities and valued in the eyes of men). So also there are only two “religions” in the world:¹³⁰ that of the Scripturally-revealed God of the Gospel and all others, which rely on something within a human being or the world. These are simply the two ways in which human beings respond to their awareness of the existence and claim of God. Either they are enlightened by the Spirit to know Him fully, in Christ, as the God of the Gospel, or they know Him (in the blindness of their sin) as a God of Law. The doctrine of the “evangelical Holy Trinity” produces the clear sound of the predominance of the Gospel in all of the preaching, teaching, and daily life of the Church—in the medium as well as the message.¹³¹ The final word from the preacher, teacher, and witness of the Gospel is one of grace. Indeed, not only words, but life, deeds, and personal demeanour, testify that he is under grace, not under law. Evangelical words are hollow if they come from a person whose life itself is a testimony to the importance of accomplishments under the law. But where grace rules there results a holy joy and love-filled freedom. Christians who believe in, belong to, and worship and serve such a gracious God live, by the ἀγάπη of God

¹²⁹ “Lectures on Galatians (1535)”, AE 26:4-12.

¹³⁰ Pieper I:10-21.

¹³¹ Cf. C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929) 403-13.

poured out with the Spirit (Rom. 5:5), in joy under grace. Grieved by sin, they know the joy of sin forgiven. Ungodly, they know their worth is proven in the love God has shown for them in Christ. Free from the accusations of conscience, they are free to live in joy and to die in confidence. As the lives of Christians in families, congregations, and church bodies are infused with this joy and freedom, they become a sort of “Gulag Archipelago”, islands of joyful life in this world of deadly fear. The evangelical Trinity of Holy Scripture creates it.

The fact that there are these two “worlds” of joyful life and deadly fear reflects the fact that the self-revelation of the God of the Gospel causes a κρίσις, a judgement, division, distinction.¹³² In this world of deceiving spirits,¹³³ believers are enjoined to “**test the spirits**, to see whether they are from God” (I Jn. 4:1). The doctrine of God separates truth from falsehood. Fellowship in the confession of the true God gives Christians identity and demarcates between them and non-Christians (LC II:66), who are thus the objects of missionary concern.¹³⁴ But the separation of truth from falsehood is necessary also **within** the institution of the Church-on-earth. Because of the persistent attempts of Satan to deceive also from within the (institution of the) Church itself by introducing (under the guise of religion) notions which **oppose** the Gospel (cf. II Thess. 2:3-12), this is an urgent practical matter. Believers, made one in their reception of the gift of the God of the Gospel, take note of those who introduce into Christian doctrine and practice things which are stumbling blocks to the true faith (Rom. 16:17-18). Christian individuals, congregations, and church bodies do this by listening to their neighbour’s confession of faith (studying doctrine) and by observing their works.¹³⁵ In cases where professing Christian persons, congregations and/or church bodies accept articles of doctrine and/or tolerate practices which obscure the Gospel, the impact of the Gospel on the doctrine of God becomes a measure of the truth and a delineating factor.¹³⁶ Believers in the

¹³² Jn. 3:19; cf. vv. 31-36; Lk. 2:34; Mt. 10:34; II Cor. 2:15-16.

¹³³ Both the Lord Jesus and the Apostles warned about false prophets and deceiving spirits: Mk. 13:5-6, 21-23; II Thess. 2:1-12; II Pet. 2:1-22; I Jn. 2:18-26; 3:7; 4:1; Jude *passim*.

¹³⁴ Excluded, e.g., are adherents of Buddhism, Hinduism, as well as Judaism and Islam, and the aberrant sectarian “modern Anti-Trinitarians” of the Reformation (FC SD XII) and since: from John Campanus and Hans Denck (Tappert 28, n. 1) down to the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons and the false Trinitarianism of Christian Science and Process Theology.

¹³⁵ “By their fruit you will recognise them,” Jesus said (Mt. 7:16, 20; cf. 11:19). St. John also taught that “every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God” (I Jn. 4:3; cf. 2:23), and “anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness” (2:9).

¹³⁶ Paul, on the one hand, and Peter and even Barnabas, on the other hand, all claimed the same God, but disagreed on the impact of the Gospel on fellowship practice in the

God of the Scriptural Gospel always strive to preserve the Gospel teaching pure in all sectors of theology and practice. They testify to all with loving boldness of the over-riding importance of that Gospel for the self-definition of all Christians.¹³⁷ Recognising the presence of the Word of God and the Sacraments in such erring groups, believers acknowledge that saving faith may be present in individual hearts, despite the distortions in teaching or the unevangelical aberrations in practice.¹³⁸ But no adherent of the true God of the Gospel overlooks the danger or plasters over the inconsistencies involved in such distortions and aberrations. Nor will conscientious confessors of the God of the Gospel do anything to give the appearance that such stumbling blocks in the path of the ingenuous¹³⁹ are of little concern. For the God of the Gospel is at work to delineate the true confession from those adulterated by the introduction of teachings or practices which becloud or endanger the Gospel. It is **His** *ecclesia semper reformanda*. But when individuals, congregations, and church bodies find that their confession and practice is at one accord in the Scriptural and evangelical Trinity, they join in joyful affirmation of the harmony of their confession and of the gift of unity they know to be theirs. They know it because, through their common confession, they “have” the one God, by Whose grace and gift they live in the one Body of Christ. Such external concord and practice of ecclesiastical fellowship in this world testifies to the oneness given in Christ; it is a joy and a privilege whenever and wherever it is to be found.¹⁴⁰

Full joy, of course, lies not in only a few having that fellowship. Rather, Jesus said: “**Therefore go** and make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:19), for God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:4; cf. II Cor. 4:15). Christians, joyfully free under grace and knowing what makes and marks them such a new creation and chosen nation,¹⁴¹ do not remain, happily passive, in their own little enclaves. They are the light of the world, a city set on a hill (Mt. 5:14-16; cf. Phil. 1:14-16). The God Whom they confess and to Whom they belong sends them into a

incident at Antioch (Gal. 2:11-21). Lutherans and Roman Catholics of the 16th century agreed upon the Trinitarian formulations but also discovered, in examining certain practices and the doctrinal basis for them, they had (in some measure) “different Gods”—a God of Law and a God of Gospel. Cf. SA I and II.i:1-5, and Tappert 292, n. 5.

¹³⁷ Eph. 4:15; Gal. 2; cf. Luther, “Lectures on Galatians (1535)”, AE 27:106-12.

¹³⁸ Cf. Preface to the Book of Concord, Tappert 11.

¹³⁹ τῶν ἀκάκων, Rom. 16:17-18; cf. Preface to the Book of Concord, Tappert 4.

¹⁴⁰ I Jn. 1:1-4; Preface to AC 2-4, 9-14, 21-23; FC SD Rule and Norm, 1; Preface to the Book of Concord, Tappert 8.

¹⁴¹ II Cor. 5:17; I Pet. 2:9, whose context elaborates: “a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (v. 5) and “a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (v. 9).

Gospel mission. He is both the impelling power and the content of the Christians' mission. "Abide in my Word" and "do this" are the springboard¹⁴² for evangelical mission work that has **God's** goals, motives, and means. God sets the mission agenda: He "wants all men to be saved" through the "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:4-5),¹⁴³ justifying Jew and Gentile alike by faith (Rom. 3:29-30). There can be no limitations on that goal, no pre-judgements about "readiness to receive" the Word, based on sociological or psychological evaluations,¹⁴⁴ and there can be no alteration of the agenda to substitute a this-worldly goal of social action or political liberation. God also determines the motives for that mission: "faith expressing itself through love", that velvet yoke which "compels" believers to "persuade men" and "win as many as possible".¹⁴⁵ Neither guilt nor hope of fame are pure motives of that mission. And, finally, God has also established the means for accomplishing His mission:

To obtain such faith God instituted the preaching office to give Gospel and Sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel (AC V:1-2, German).¹⁴⁶

"Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in [the Christ's] name to all nations", Jesus said (Lk. 24:47; cf. Rom. 10:14), adding on that same occasion that disciples are to be made by "baptising ... and teaching" (Mt. 28:19, 20). Faith is the correct posture for receiving the Gospel's gift. And faith itself is a creation of the Holy Spirit at work through those means (Eph. 2:8). The Church's evangelising mission relies on the work of the Spirit through Word and Sacrament to create faith and **so** to produce the saving knowledge of God in the heart of the hearers and recipients. This is a mystery; no human being can claim to know how and why it works (Jn. 3:5-

¹⁴² Jn. 17:21b: "May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." I Cor. 11:26: "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

¹⁴³ There are **not** "many roads all leading to the same (heavenly) destination", cf. Mt. 7:13-14.

¹⁴⁴ See *Evangelism and Church Growth, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1987) esp. 38-39.

¹⁴⁵ Gal. 5:6; II Cor. 5:11, 14; I Cor. 9:19.

¹⁴⁶ Qtd from Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, 2nd printing, 1995 corrected edition (Fort Wayne, IN: International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1995) 111. For a discussion of the proper translation of AC V, whose original lacks the "das ist" reflected in Tappert, see Kurt E. Marquart, "The Two Realms ('Kingdoms') in the Lutheran Confessions", in *God and Caesar Revisited; Luther Academy Conference Papers No. 1*, John R. Stephenson ed., 41f.

8; Mk. 4:26-29). Resisting all temptation, then, to minimise the scandal of the cross and to cajole or argue people into the kingdom of God, the Christians fulfil the Great Commission as they confess, testify, preach, baptise, and teach. The God Who sends them is the foundation on which they stand—whether encountering the crass animism of some hitherto unknown culture, the sceptical rationalism of the Enlightenment agnostic, or the post-Enlightenment voodoo of New Age sectarians and their ilk.

Thus God determines the divine service in the believers' life of joyful freedom, confessional self-identity, and mission to the world. And the fountainhead of power for that for the Christian today is the divine service of God to the Church through the Ministry especially in the corporate worship services of the assembled body as it obeys the commands "abide in my word" and "do this". This suggests one more "implication" of overarching importance: that the Church (especially the Ministerium, whose responsibility this is) pay special heed that the assembled body's corporate worship activities **be** the fulfilment of those commands. Then God can and will determine the divine service. A few principles, it would seem, follow as a matter of course.

First, "Do this" surely means to place the celebration of the Lord's Supper at the **very centre** of congregational worship life and to teach individual Christians that both their personal piety and their *λατρεία* in their vocation rests on the basis of this, their communion with God.

Secondly, "Abide in my word" means confessing, proclaiming and worshipping the evangelical Trinity of Holy Scripture in corporate worship. There are, sadly, many ways in which attitudes about corporate worship activities or forms of corporate worship services can introduce distortions into one's "doctrine of God". To act as though attending services or performing rituals were a merit-earning deed—as though "worship" were mankind's service to God apart from His service to mankind—is to lose the God of the Gospel and to return to the service of a false God (cf. Gal. 4:8-10). Overemphasis on the worship of God the Father may lead to worshippers into some kind of *de facto* universalism that sees all religion as the recognition of the existence of a Supreme Being.¹⁴⁷ Often an overabundance of "Jesus talk", not in the context of the Holy Trinity and the death on the cross, signals the adoption of "Jesus" as a cipher standing for one's own murky notion of what God is, usually "love".¹⁴⁸ Similarly, to let

¹⁴⁷ Such a distortion could well be the root of some persons' inability to understand the conflict involved when a professing Christian also holds membership in certain lodges.

¹⁴⁸ That "God is love" does not mean that "love—or 'whatever'—is God". Some "flower children" became "Jesus People", but they were not well known for their doctrine of sin and atonement.

the Spirit's wings overshadow the cross of Christ¹⁴⁹ is to make Christianity into a God-**claiming** (rather than God-confessing) power-now religion; the cross calls for faith and hope in the promises of future glory. The conduct and the content of worship needs to be evangelical and Trinitarian.

Thirdly, the traditional¹⁵⁰ liturgy of the Western Rite, in its current shape (reformed in the tradition of Luther) is an excellent resource for accomplishing this goal and should be the form in common use. A treasure of the Church, it is Scriptural, evangelical and Trinitarian,¹⁵¹ balanced and not idiosyncratic.¹⁵² While the uniform observance of ceremonies is not necessary to the true unity of the Church (AC VII), it is, all else being equal, highly desirable.¹⁵³

Fourthly, let theologically sound hymns, anthems, and prayers—as well as scriptural and evangelical sermons!—complement that liturgy. Such new materials as are introduced ought to be the offering of artisans having a profound faith, knowledge of Scripture, and sense of responsibility for the worship life of the believers.¹⁵⁴

Fifthly, encourage families and individuals to complement congregational worship through the use of evangelical and theologically sound materials for daily devotions. Here, too, while new materials may be responsibly written, there already exists a treasure chest full of devotional classics from believers of the past;¹⁵⁵ it is a matter of getting them into people's hands in usable forms.

Finally, the teaching that the evangelical Trinity is the Holy God, the Wholly Other, suggests that the matter of the divine service not be thought as “business as usual”. In His grace He calls men to draw near to Himself; He makes such a thing possible by extending His Holy power toward them, in Christ and the Holy Spirit, to sanctify them. “Take off your sandals,” God

¹⁴⁹ Worship buildings used by neo-Pentecostalist groups often have no cross—only doves.

¹⁵⁰ “Traditional” is not, of course, automatically “good” and “true”. In Luther's day, the “traditional” liturgy needed considerable reform in accord with scriptural and evangelical principles; see his “Concerning the Order of Public Worship”, AE 53:11-14, as well as AC XXIV.

¹⁵¹ From Invocation to Aaronic Benediction; cf. Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947) 21-22; Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press Adam and Charles Black, 1945) 743-44, e.g.

¹⁵² Reed 19-24.

¹⁵³ See Luther's “A Christian Exhortation to the Livonians Concerning Public Worship and Concord”, AE 53:45-50, and his Preface to “The German Mass and Order of Service”, AE 53:61-67.

¹⁵⁴ See the discussion of prayers in public worship, e.g., in Erik Routley, *The Divine Formula* (Princeton: Prestige Publications, 1986) 103-11.

¹⁵⁵ St. Augustine's *Confessions* and Luther's “Concerning the Freedom of a Christian” come to mind.

told Moses, “for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Ex. 3:5), and Isaiah felt the heat of the divine coal that touched his lips (Is. 6:5-7). The corporate worship of the Church cannot simply transplant worldly actions into a space called a sanctuary. God, the **holy** God, determines the divine service; believers who gather in His presence have a sense of standing on Holy ground and an expectation that His sanctifying power will be at work to bring out the very best, His new creation, that is in them.

Worship, educational, and devotional materials are of the utmost importance for the matter of the “doctrine of God”. Martin Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress” and Small Catechism have served as vehicles to draw or keep many more persons in communion with the true God than did his *On the Bondage of the Will*. The faith of more Christians is influenced (directly, at least) by hymnals than by dogmatics textbooks. Generation after generation of believers have learned and taught the “doctrine of God” through the Church's forms of corporate worship. *Lex orandi* [the law of praying] is *lex credendi* [the law of believing]. Proclamation and praise are still the context of the expression of the doctrine of God.

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RELIGION IN LATVIA: FROM ATROPHY TO REBIRTH

Juris Dreifelds

Latvia has a unique mixture of religious traditions. The preponderant share of believers is found in the Evangelical Lutheran, the Roman Catholic, and the Russian Orthodox branches of Christianity. In addition to these three, there are viable groups of Baptists, Old Believers, Adventists, Pentecostals, and Jews. Until the decade of the 1980s all of these religious organisations were experiencing different rates of decline and atrophy.

During the period 1986 to 1989 a new grassroots movement called "Rebirth and Renewal" led by mostly young Lutheran theologians prepared the ground for a total reorientation of the Lutheran Church. In April 1989 reformists took over leadership in this church and ended over four decades of official subservience to and frequent co-operation with Communist authorities. Soon thereafter the crumbling of the atheist Latvian State allowed for a new affirmation of faith by all religions. Freedom of religion was once again the guiding policy of Latvia. Many new congregations were formed. Churches were repaired or returned to their original owners, Sunday schools flourished, theological education attracted many young people. Since 1988 there has been a resurgence of interest in religion among all classes of people including the intelligentsia and especially the younger generations. Nevertheless, religion in Latvia as yet is not a major influence on life and politics. The overwhelming majority of the population is willing to accept and even praise religion as the clear antipode to Communism, but is not yet prepared to become actively involved in its sacral or lay activities.

While much blame for the decline of religious practice and belief can be placed at the doorstep of organised and militant atheism, not all of its inroads and seeming victories are the result of such actions and policies but rather, can be found in the peculiar mixture of Latvian history and in the world-wide neutralising effects of urbanisation and modernisation.

Religion in Latvia has never been as closely interwoven with nationality as is the case in Lithuania and Poland. There are several explanations for this. The lack of a homogenous religion among Latvians, no doubt, prevented the deep rooting of such an associative bonding. While three-quarters of Latvia's territory was predominantly Lutheran, the South East portion, the area of Latgale, was almost exclusively Roman Catholic.

The historical legacy of the way in which Christianity was first established also left its mark on the consciousness of the nation. Twelfth-century German priests and bishops brought with them battle-tested troops which successfully conquered the Latvians, one tribe at a time, and imposed

Christianity with the help of the sword. These soldier-conquerors then became the new masters and landlords of the Latvian territories and they and their progeny ruled many centuries thereafter with the help of German or Germanised clergy.

At another crucial period of development the Lutheran clergy passed up the chance of national support. The movement of national awakening which set in motion the rapid growth of Latvian cultural and national consciousness in the second half of the nineteenth century did not attract many notable religious figures except in the case of Catholic clergy in Latgale. In fact the Lutheran clergy were more sympathetic to the interests of the German land-holding elite than to the stirrings of Latvian cultural nationalism. In Latgale on the other hand, the predominantly Latvian-origin Catholic clergy gained much sympathy from the people for their successful struggle against the Tsar's Russification policy and their active support for and leadership in the creation of a new Latvian-Latgallian intelligentsia.

During the two decades of the independence period (1920-1940) the Lutheran church was slowly Latvianised and acquired many new trappings of nationality. Latvian clergy educated in Latvian higher schools replaced many of the German pastors; the New Testament was translated into modern Latvian literary language; and many hymns were composed by Latvian poets. In sum, the church generally became integrated into the rhythm of Latvian national holidays and national life. This trend of religiosity was intensified somewhat by the experience of the alien Communist and Nazi occupations and the uncertainties of the war years when death lurked so palpably close. But this new bonding was seriously checked by the deportation and emigration of clergymen and tens of thousands of the most active citizens and members of the intelligentsia. The devastation and bombing of churches in the last year of the war and the imposition of strict anti-religious laws by Stalinist bureaucrats seriously decreased the opportunities for interaction between organised religions and the nation.¹

Before the traumatic years of World War II Latvia had a very broad religious mosaic (see table 1).

¹ J. Rutkis, *Latvia: Country and People* (Stockholm: Latvian National Foundation, 1967), 616-22. For background information on religions in Latvia until 1967 see Alexander Veinbergs, "Lutheranism and Other Denominations in the Baltic Republics", in Richard H. Marshall Jr., ed., *Aspects of Religion in the Soviet Union 1917-1967* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971).

Table 1: Religious Mosaic in Latvia According to 1935 Census

	Absolute Number	%	Clergy	Congregations
Evangelical Lutheran	1 075 641	55.15	288	325
Roman Catholic	476 963	24.45	177	177
Russian Orthodox	174 389	8.94	128	163
Old Believer	107 195	5.50		
Jewish	93 406	4.79		
Non-Lutheran Protestant	19 146	0.98		
Other	3 762	0.19		

Source: *Ceturta Tautas Skaitisana Latvija* (Riga: 1936) 71-88.

Among ethnic Latvians 68.3 per cent (1 005 207) were Lutheran and 26.4 per cent (388 117) were Catholic. The remaining 5.5 per cent were scattered among other religions: Orthodox (57 600), Baptists (12 429), Old Believers (2786) and Jews (170).²

With the advent of communist rule, all churches without exception were subject to the anti-religious activities of the State and Party, suffering particularly fierce assaults in the periods 1949 to 1953 and 1959 to 1964. Yet not all religions were equally affected because of differential solidarity and flexibility shown by religious leaders and their flocks. A particularly striking contrast developed between the anaemic Lutheran church and the much more vital Catholic church. The reasons for this difference can only be surmised but it seems probable that the early historical bonding of the Catholic church with the people allowed for much greater mutual support during trying times. Catholic clergy have also been active bridge builders between the various nationalities integrating Latvian, Polish, and Belorussian Catholics as equals before God. One should also note that Catholicism throughout the world has had a deeper impact on religiosity than Protestantism. Lutheranism, especially the Scandinavian variety, has not been particularly demanding or strict in either church attendance or religious participation. Lutherans are not excommunicated. No doubt, guidance from Rome for Catholics has allowed a certain measure of protection against direct manipulation of clergy leadership by Communist functionaries. The Catholic practice of confession is a particularly useful method for gauging the mood of the population and for mounting pre-emptive actions to prevent serious cleavages or ruptures in congregations.

Another factor is worthy of note. A much higher percentage of Lutheran than Catholic clergymen fled from Latvia as refugees. In general, Latgale experienced the smallest outflow of refugees because it was furthest away from seaports and because Latgallian refugees were cut off much

² Rutkis 616.

earlier from access to the coast by the Red Army which effectively sealed that part of Latvia. From another perspective, Lutheran clergymen had families to think about whereas Catholic clergy were less encumbered in deciding their options.

The assault on religion in Latvia was unrelenting, but compared to Russia, Ukraine and other republics it was slightly less harsh. Indeed, many of the Baptist and Adventist sects emigrated to Latvia because it was easier to register congregations, and their children could receive education with less discrimination. Riga had more congregations during the Soviet period than the six times more populated Leningrad.³

THE STATE OFFENSIVE AGAINST RELIGION

For over four decades thousands of full-time atheists as well as all the levers of state power, including the media, were arrayed against religion and even against the belief in a divine being. This direct intervention by the state made a mockery of the Soviet constitutional declaration about freedom of conscience and the right to profess any religion and conduct religious worship. Yet the constant one-sided bombardment by atheistic forces with no allowance for rebuttal or fair play as well as the well-planned policies to emasculate all church power and influence managed to seriously cripple religion in Latvia. But even the vestiges of a seemingly dying institution were considered a serious threat to the Communist establishment. On 19 January 1982, the official Party newspaper in Latvia, *Cina*, concluded a long editorial on effective atheistic upbringing with the following exhortation: "Religion is still a very effective form of ideological opposition. All ideological workers and means of mass communication must become more actively engaged against it. This is a struggle for people, for the benefit of mankind."

Basing itself on the view that religion is harmful, the Party skewed the rules of the game entirely in favour of atheism and against the growth and survival of religion. In his analysis of anti-religious propaganda in the Soviet Union, David E. Powell has pointed out that the Communist regime sought to achieve six anti-religious objectives:

1. To destroy the political and economic strength of the church.
2. To limit the church's access to the citizenry, especially the children.
3. To induce people not to attend church.
4. To induce people not to celebrate religious holy days or perform religious rituals.
5. To convince religious believers that their views are "wrong".

³ *Diena* (18 March 1993).

6. To mould citizens into militant atheists and Soviet Men.⁴

The Soviet regime attempted to implement the above objectives in Latvia as well with variable success. For a better overview of their impact a brief analysis of each of the objectives will be presented.

Any economic and political power religious denominations may have held in pre-war Latvia was crushed by the Communists in 1940 and later in 1945. All church property was nationalised and much of it confiscated. Many churches were turned over for secular uses or shut down and vandalised. All religiously-supported political movements and parties were outlawed. More important, every activity undertaken by various religions and even their existence was subjected to the arbitrary regimentation of the Party-controlled Council of Religious Affairs which had been mandated to use the restrictive laws on religion to further Party interests. The Council could control religious personnel, activities, policy, and whether or not any single group was to be allowed to maintain a congregation, a church, or prayer house. It influenced the selection of church leaders and, through selective inducements and restrictions, co-opted clergy into performing “useful” roles especially in dealings with the outside world. In this capacity they were enjoined in supporting Soviet foreign policy and Soviet image cultivation. Thus almost all church leaders in Latvia had to give their dues to state interests by participating in world congresses by visiting church leaders in non-communist countries, and by hosting world religious leaders in Riga. All this was done in conformity with the policies worked out by the Party. In this finely tuned theatre of “impression management” church leaders were pressured into performing their assigned roles in order not to jeopardise the already precarious position of the church and by hopes of establishing their loyalty and winning some minor concessions for their flock from the authorities.

Almost all activities of religious organisations, including the most trivial, were regulated by a Party representative or commissioner. Even local and republic congresses and conferences required permits to be approved and issued separately for each case by local state organs for local meetings and by the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR and of the Council for Religious Affairs of the Council of Ministers for republic-wide meetings. Other clauses of the law regulating religious activity may appear at first glance rather innocuous but the broadness of the terms used left much arbitrary or discretionary power in the hands of the regulators.

There is no doubt that in Latvia the Communist authorities effectively destroyed every vestige of political and economic strength that churches

⁴ David E. Powell, *Antireligious Propaganda in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1975) 156-57.

may once have had. Even more, one could say that the churches became co-opted by the state for political missions and image building activities abroad.

The Communist regime also made much progress in realising its second goal of limiting the church's access to citizens and especially to children. The entire state-controlled system of socialisation—the schools, media, books, propagandists, youth groups—all were dragooned into the service of atheism. Knowing full well that young people are the most impressionable, **the law forbade** the church from teaching Sunday schools, and from involving youths under 18 in any church activity such as choir singing, processions, orchestras, or even religious rituals. As well, laws limited the range of religious undertakings to only church services within the walls of assigned premises. One can imagine the consternation of any North American congregation where church and state are also separated if confronted with a state edict which set out the following:

Religious societies and cult servants are forbidden ... to organise special prayers or other meetings for children, youths or women; or meetings, groups, classes and sections for joint bible and religious studies, for literature, handicrafts and work; as well as to organise excursions, and children's playgrounds, to open libraries and reading rooms, to organise sanatoria and medical aid; ... to create mutual aid societies, co-operative enterprises and associations, or in general use the property and money of religious societies for any other purpose except the satisfaction of their religious needs.⁵

The school system became one of the most important battle grounds for the spiritual allegiance of the young—determining whether they would become “secular, scientific, and progressive”, or “religious-superstitious and regressive” as seen by Soviet authorities. The school system was explicitly mandated and encouraged to do everything in its power to neutralise and eliminate any vestiges of religious belief. Teachers were urged to confront religious parents. Classmates were encouraged to confront and reform any “deviants” in their ranks. Neutrality towards religion was not tolerated by the Party. All children and youths had to be indoctrinated with atheism so that they would become militants willing to extirpate religious beliefs wherever they found them, including the family. At the school-age level no compromises were allowed, no accommodations were made. The war was total and unconditional. Any remnants of religious belief among young believers were seen as a failure, a neglect of duty or gross negligence by teachers deserving of severe reprimand and chastisement. The “goodness”

⁵ *Latvijas PSR Augstakas Padomes un Valdības Zinotājs* 44 (4 November 1976): “Nolikums par reliģiskajām apvienībām Latvijas Padomju Sociālistiskajā Republikā”, section III, article 6.

of Communism was to displace the “evil” of religion. Even when no “religious problems” were perceived the struggle was expected to continue because the dark forces of religion were cunning, adaptable, and ready to use any means to achieve their ends. Therefore atheism was to be strengthened as a prophylactic against future exposure to the disease. The Latvian teachers’ newspaper *Skolotaju Avize* was very explicit about the dangers:

Schoolteachers who consider that atheistic training should only apply in cases where religious prejudices are strongly rooted should reconsider their approach. Religiosity is a disease that can appear with a person not only in childhood but also later. Therefore for prophylactic purposes elementary immunity should be vaccinated in all youths from the start.⁶

Attempts at converting young people for the cause of atheism began from an early age indeed as attested by a headline in the 1980 Latvian school and family journal *Skola un Gimene*: “Atheistic Upbringing in the Kindergarten”.⁷ School subjects were mobilised for a continuous barrage of atheistic propaganda. Teachers were urged to draw atheistic conclusions from their class presentations. For example, Latvian teachers were presented in their newspaper with an explicit set of atheistic arguments for use in chemistry classes. Each of the several points were to undermine the credibility of religion from different angles:

- a) The famous chemist M. Lomonosov was a militant atheist.
- b) Religion once violently opposed the atomic molecular theory of matter and then totally reversed itself. Today the theory has been accepted and is used to prove the existence of God.
- c) The law of the indestructibility of matter proves why the world was not created from nothing and will not disintegrate into nothing. No God can create or destroy.
- d) New methods of radioactive dating conclusively invalidate the religious belief that the world was created seven and a half thousand years ago.
- e) The predictions of the prophets are not super-natural. Unknown elements were predicted from D. Mendeleev’s tables before they had yet been discovered. Mendeleev was a militant atheist.⁸

Detailed arguments were prepared also for teachers of geography, geology, history and biology.⁹

⁶ *Skolotaju Avize* (29 March 1972).

⁷ *Skola un Gimene* 7 (1980): 16.

⁸ *Skolotaju Avize* (25 September 1974).

⁹ *Skolotaju Avize* (28 March 1973; 13 February 1974); *Cina* 8 (August 1973); J. Gailums, “Veidot komunistisko pasaules uzskatu”, *Skola un Gimene* 12 (1974): 9-10.

A favourite approach taken by atheist militants was to ferret out students who were still under the influence of religion and to focus their “neutralising” efforts using a personal approach. Widespread and localised sociological studies of student attitudes helped pin-point “problem areas”. Other approaches included personal discussions by the teacher with parents and students, content analysis of written work, and analysis of drawings which dealt with student orientations to “reality, religion, and God”. Schools also had museums of atheism, atheism clubs, atheist lectures, films, question and answer forums, and similar undertakings. Needless to say, no clergymen were invited to outline their side of the argument or participate in the one-sided debates.¹⁰

But even the small number of believers uncovered gave atheists no rest in their search for ultimate solutions. They acknowledged the tremendous role of the family in the continuation of religious traditions and hence set out to neutralise the impact of the family itself. One article suggests that in the first place teachers should explain to these religious parents “how deleterious to the spiritual growth of children is the foisting of religious beliefs”.¹¹ If this fails other more drastic measures can be taken including the placing of children into state custody. Having discovered the preponderance of women in religious organisations, atheists decided to focus their attention on activities to neutralise religious mothers, grandmothers and aunts.¹²

As adults, citizens were no less protected from the verbal and psychological assaults of militant atheism than they were as youths in school. The republican council on atheism was responsible for co-ordinating a vast network of local councils on atheism. These groups were reinforced by a large cohort of voluntary lecturers of the Society of Knowledge. According to *Cina* of 19 January 1982 the republic had “over 6000” people employed in the work of atheism. Each year books were published on topics of atheism, and atheistic-oriented scientific research was supported at higher educational institutes. One individual, Janis Vejs, was sent to study theology

¹⁰ V. Dobelniece, “Pilnveidot individualo darbu ar ticigajiem”, *Padomju Latvijas Komunisti* 1 (1977): 81-82. V. Nasenijs, “Ateistiskas andzinasanas sistema”, *Skola un Gimene* 5 (1979): 34-35. E. Virse, “Ko dara karojosie ateisti?” *Draugs* 2 (1980): 22-23. M. Licitis, “Lai religija neapeno dzivi nevienam”, *Draugs* 7 (1986): 15-16.

¹¹ A. Serdants, “Kas pievers jaunieti religijai?” *Skola un Gimene* 7 (1971): 25; *Cina*, (6 July 1977).

¹² A. Podmazovs, “Sociologiskie petijumi un ateistiska audzinasana”, *Padomju Latvijas Komunisti* 5 (1972): 58-59; V. Virtmane, “Pret religijas piedavatiem labumiem”, *Padomju Latvijas Sieviete* 8 (1980): 6; V. Virtmane, “Religija un gimene”, *Veseliba* 1 (1982): 29-30; *Cina* (27 February 1985).

at Oxford in order to better formulate programmes of atheism.¹³ Formerly religious people who had apparently relinquished their beliefs were allowed to write extensively in books and articles on the error of their former ways.¹⁴ On the other hand, a reversion back to religion was seen as a threat to be contained. In the case of Baptist preacher Oskars Pukitis, who had earlier fallen away from his faith but returned to religion, *Cina* wrote an article warning against the “misuse” of his example by congregations for religious purposes.¹⁵

The paranoid nature of atheists is well revealed by their great consternation at the practice adopted by many youths in Latvia during the 1970s of wearing decorative crosses around their necks:

The cross is and remains a symbol of Christianity. It has been a cult object since the fourth century. It has not lost its significance for Christians. ... Like any other symbol, the cross is the physical representation of certain ideas, concepts and relationships. ... Youths with a clear materialistic world view, of course cannot stand on the side lines when their cohorts demonstrate an unprincipled attitude towards a symbol under which so much harm has been done to mankind. History speaks about this very convincingly.¹⁶

The third objective of the anti-religious crusade war was to attempt to induce people not to attend church. In this respect significant inroads were made among Lutherans, as attested by the low figures of church participation. It seems to have been much less successful with Catholics. One of the important means of checking church attendance was the absolute rule that no Party or Komsomol member could be seen in a religious building or even ceremony. As well, individuals who did not necessarily want to become members but who aspired to better occupations and higher

¹³ Juris Rubenis, “Teologijas zinātne Latvija no 1944. līdz 1990. gadam”, *Filozofija un Teologija: Rakstu Krājums* (Rīga: 1991) 13.

¹⁴ For example, B. Zvejsalnieks has written the book *Zaudētie Gadi* [“The Lost Years”] (Rīga: Liesma, 1974). A book review of this work by Z. Lejina provides an ideological assessment of the value of Zvejsalnieks to atheists: “We know Zvejsalnieks as an energetic fighting atheist since the first days of his departure [from religion]. His powerful, scientifically based and emotionally effective lectures are still being presented in many meeting halls of school children, kolhozniks and workers ... equally popular are Zvejsalnieks’ articles in the press and presentations on television and radio. He conducts antireligious propaganda by writing to believers as well thus helping them to free themselves from religious falsehoods.” Another renegade Catholic priest, Alberts Peipins, wrote a long letter to *Cina* (10 October 1970) stating his reasons for embracing atheism. Another book by a religious renegade came out in 1985, A. Indriksons, *Cels uz Patiesību: Bijusa garīdznieka un skolotāja atmiņas un pardomas* (Rīga: Avots, 1985).

¹⁵ *Cina* (2 August 1985).

¹⁶ Alfons Sultmanis, “Vai krustins ir mode?” *Draugs* 11 (1980): 27.

pay knew that upward mobility rested on Party connections and a “clean” record—that is, one which was not tied with religion.

Party demands were very categorical. Even deviations for the sake of family were not tolerated. Thus in 1970 a Latvian *kolkhoz* chairman was expelled from the Party and voted out by the *kolkhoz* because he allowed his mother to be buried by a Catholic priest and attended her funeral. It made no difference to the Party that such a religious burial was his dying mother’s last wish.¹⁷

An extensive discussion in the Latvian Komsomol Journal *Liesma* in 1980 about the case of a secret church wedding by a Komsomol member with the attendance of his Komsomol colleagues who also joined in the cover-up, concluded with a call to principles and for expulsion from the organisation:

Can a Komsomol youth use the ceremony services of the church for his wedding—this question I repeat is not debatable. If a Komsomol member cannot free himself of all prejudices, if he does not recognise the Komsomol Statutes and does not respect his organisation’s principles of honour, then he has no room in the ranks of the Komsomol.¹⁸

Until the period of rebirth in 1988, harassment of churchgoers was a common policy. Films would be taken by state employees of those entering churches. Places of work put pressure on their employees to abstain from church attendance. A young music teacher, Andris Lasmanis, was fired from his position in 1975 because he refused to stop supporting the Baptist Church.¹⁹ Public ridicule against believers was widespread. Cartoons reinforced the officially cultivated image of the clergy as retrograde, money grubbing, and womanising exploiters. In the last few years, harassment for religious beliefs and church membership decreased in volume, but as in the case of the attacks on the Rebirth and Renewal group in 1987 the venomous style and distortions were still part of the atheist arsenal.

The fourth objective of the displacement of church-officiated “rites of passage” by state-sponsored ones was one of the most successful initiatives by the Party. While religious Baptisms and funerals remained more tenacious, confirmations and weddings were celebrated almost entirely outside religious confines. A cleric was allowed to officiate at a funeral service only if there were no objections from any member of the immediate or extended family. In one conflict, between a religious woman preparing to

¹⁷ *Cina* (4 April 1970).

¹⁸ Ilmars Bitenieks, “Vai dosim nodevas aizspriedumiem?” *Liesma* 16 (1980): 9.

¹⁹ Pavils Bruvers, “The Oppression of Religious Freedom in Occupied Latvia”, in World Federation of Free Latvians, eds., *Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe Follow-Up Meeting in Vienna, November, 1986: Soviet Violations in the Implementation of the Final Act in Occupied Latvia* (Washington: 1986) 28, 34-38.

bury her husband according to Catholic rites but opposed by her five sons each with a high-standing Party position, a compromise resolution was achieved. Religious ceremonies were held in church, followed the next day by an “atheist funeral” at the cemetery.²⁰

As in other fields of Communist endeavour, official campaigns of atheism were not as effective nor as conscientiously carried out as planners would have hoped. The leading writer on atheism in the republic, Z. Balevics, a blood relative of a Catholic bishop, captured the essence of this “problem” when he complained that in many Soviet enterprises, lectures or discussions of atheism were organised only once a year or even less often. As he saw it, “the sum of sermons in religious congregations many times over surpasses the number of atheist lectures presented in the republic”.²¹ In spite of such rhetoric, however, the impact of atheist programmes, but especially state punitive measures, was enormous. Many people were turned away from active participation in religion. Some did it to preserve their careers, others wanted to protect their families. Nevertheless, some individuals, especially Party organisers from Catholic backgrounds, avoided conflicts by going to and receiving sacraments from neighbouring congregations where they were not known or recognised.

While the Communist establishment more or less effectively neutralised active religious participation, it was not successful in mobilising large numbers to join the ranks of militant atheism. It was fairly easy for people to decline joining the vanguard of atheism without encouraging serious consequences. Thus in the sixth objective of anti-religious propaganda the track record points to only minimal success among several thousand individuals rather than to the engagement of large masses of people in the work of atheism. It is a miracle of sorts that religion was able to survive during more than four decades of anti-religious propaganda and of direct state assault. To be sure, the ranks of the religious had been badly battered. By the mid-1980s clergy were predominantly of pensionable age with minimal replacements filling the gaps. The bulk of active parishioners were in the older age groups and most churchgoers were women. A few more decades of continued active state atheism would have resulted in the death-knell for most religions in Latvia. Only the advent of change induced by a more tolerant regime allowed religion to end its rapid decline into oblivion and to begin a journey back to vitality and significance. While all religions suffered repression and all were weakened, some were better able

²⁰ Henriks Trups-Trops, *Latvijas Romas Katolu Baznīca Komūnismā Gados 1940-1990* 86. Unpublished manuscript by Catholic clergyman who for years was also head of the Catholic Theological Seminary in Riga.

²¹ Z. Balevics, *Lielais Oktobris* 70. Z. Balevics, *Pareizticīgo Baznīca Latvijā* (Rīga: Avots, 1987)143.

to withstand the pervasive and pernicious inroads of militant atheism and widespread indifference and apathy than others.

In January of 1988, the year commonly considered to be the demarcation point between decline and the rebirth, Latvia had 620 officially registered congregations from all religions serviced by 320 clergy. In 1940 there were 1131 congregations with about 900 clerics.²² In 1988 the decline in congregations stopped and growth began (see table 2).

Table 2: Number of Congregations in Latvia by Religious Denomination

	1/1/88	1/1/89	1/10/90	1/1/93	1/6/96 ^a
Lutheran	202	224	248	282	300
Roman Catholic	179	182	185	190	196
Russian Orthodox	86	88	88	94	111
Old Believers	64	64	65	54 ^b	55
Baptist	60	60	61	68	79
Adventist	23	26	28	33	42
Pentecostal	2	4	6	34	60
Jewish	4	4	4	5	6

^a In 1996 there were also the following other congregations: 6 Methodist, 5 Buddhist, 3 Muslim, 2 Uniate, 1 Armenian Catholic, 1 Krishna, 1 Latvian Dievturi, and 10 smaller Protestant denominations.

^b Old Believer congregations have not diminished, but 10 of the smaller ones have not been able or willing to register.

Source: *Diena* (18 March 1993), *Rigas Balss* (6 November 1996), and unpublished data from the Religious Affairs Department of Latvia.

EVANGELICAL LUTHERANS

The ranks of the Lutheran clergy were seriously weakened by the events of the Soviet and Nazi Occupations and World War II. From a pre-war total of 198 their number dwindled to 95 immediately after the war in 1945. Even this dramatic loss was not the end of the dissipation of clerical representation. In the next five years 21 more were deported, five were killed, four were imprisoned, and six disappeared without a trace.²³ Conditions were slightly improved with the return of many deportees from Siberia in 1955-56.²⁴

²² J. Kokins, "Cik Latvija baznicu?" *Horizonts* 9 (1989): 17.

²³ Rutkis 625. Details about this period also found in Arveds Svabe, ed., *Latviju Enciklopedija* I (Stockholm: Tris Zvaigznes, 1951-52): 222-25.

²⁴ The amnesty affected most political deportees including clergy. Lutheran Archbishop Gustavs of Latvia was able to include the following part of his Christmas message in the church calendar of 1956: "With the humane decree of the Soviet government on 17 September regarding the amnesty of citizens, the number of workers has increased in Latvia's

Following this Khrushchev amnesty the number of Lutheran clergy reached a post-war high of 120, and thereafter decreased gradually, falling to a low of 85 in 1987.²⁵ The decline in the number of clergy was paralleled by a decline in the number of congregations from 311 in 1940 to 200 in 1987. A more dramatic fall-off was evident in the number of churchgoers and the number partaking of religious sacraments and rituals. An internal church document of 18 March 1987 spoke candidly of a then current membership of less than 25 000 with 3800 of these in the capital city of Riga. In 1986, the Lutheran Church registered 1090 Baptisms, 212 confirmations, 142 marriages, and 605 funerals.²⁶ These are dismal statistics indeed. Put another way, that year each of the 200 Lutheran congregations witnessed, on average, five Baptisms, one confirmation, less than one marriage, and three religious funerals.

After 1987 the Lutheran Church experienced a rebirth not only in its leadership but also in its appeal. The number of congregations rose from 200 to 241 in 1990 and 271 by the end of 1991.²⁷ Sunday schools began in late 1988 and by May 1990 had been introduced in 103 congregations. In comparison one could note that in 1940 there were 130 such schools.²⁸ According to one church organiser Sunday schools have been a surprisingly effective means of reaching “the middle, lost generation”, the parents of attending children. At the same time the placing of children in Sunday schools by inactive parents can result in conflict situations:

Alongside the positive changes there are also negative nuances—spiritual conflict between parents and children. Non-believing parents take their children to Sunday school. The child begins to live a new life but the parents remain with the old, thus creating an incompatibility in the beliefs and perceptions of life. The children suffer. This is a serious problem.²⁹

Latvia was the first of the former Soviet republics to offer religious education in state schools. Optional instruction on the history of religion was provided by a Lutheran pastor in the Fall of 1988 to several Riga schools. A major innovation in the realm of education was the establishment of an explicitly Christian school in the Fall of 1991. Many pupils had to be

fields and pastures. As well, many workers returned to work in the fields of the Church. *Baznicas Kalendars 1956* 32-33.

²⁵ Official Soviet data for 1962 listed 115 Lutheran pastors, 15 deans, and 20 candidates. Another source claimed only 100 Lutheran clergymen for 1963. Rutkis 625.

²⁶ Mimeographed church document.

²⁷ Karlis Gailitis, “Lai Dievs vada talak”, *Latvijas Evangeliski Luteriskas Baznicas Kalendars 1991* (Riga: Latvijas Ev. Lut. Baznicas Konsistorija, 1990) 10. Hereafter cited as *BK 1991*.

²⁸ Vera Volgemute, “Bernu gariga atdzimsana”, *BK 1991* 154.

²⁹ *Izglitiba* (3 October 1990).

turned away indicating the need for more such schools.³⁰ By the Fall of 1993 there were already three explicitly Christian schools financed in large part by the state. The mass media also discovered religion and the whole subject of “spirituality”. The radio presentations by the erudite and eloquent Reverend Juris Rubenis have been particularly effective. The revolution in press orientation to religion was highlighted in the Latvian youth paper *Padomju Jaunatne* (Soviet Youth) of 21 April 1989, when the Lutheran Archbishop’s call for young people to apply for the theological seminary was printed on the front page. Indeed there is now keen competition to get into the newly created Faculty of Theology at the University of Latvia. By 1991 the number of church Baptisms and weddings had increased tenfold and church funerals almost tripled. In 1992, 92 per cent of all children born that year were baptised. In addition, 26 per cent of all weddings and 28 per cent of funerals were officiated by religious representatives.³¹

Table 3: Religious Baptisms, Weddings, and Funerals in Latvia, 1991

	Baptisms		Weddings		Funerals	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Roman Catholic	10 661	35.0	2 651	55.3	4 995	52.8
Lutheran	10 666	35.0	1 549	32.3	1 439	15.2
Orthodox	6 315	20.8	468	9.8	1 937	20.5
Old Believers	1 273	4.2	33	0.7	730	7.7
Jews	-	-	35	0.7	137	1.4
Pentecostal	662	2.2	37	0.8	25	0.3
Baptist	462	1.5	20	0.4	130	1.4
Adventist	388	1.3	5	0.1	69	0.7
Total	30 427	100.0	4 798	100.0	9 462	100.0

Source: Unpublished report titled *Ad Limina* prepared by the Riga Roman Catholic Bishop, Janis Cakuls, in 1992.

It should be noted that many of the Baptisms and confirmations are requested by nominal Lutherans who are not regular members of any congregation. There is, no doubt, a built-up demand for these sacraments by

³⁰ *Svetdienas Rīts* (8 September 1991). In an interview the director of the Christian school, Vera Volgemute, pointed out some of the problems encountered in their first year: “There is a wish in all situations [by the teachers] to behave in a Christian manner. This is not easy because we must work not only with the children, but also with their parents. Problems are created by the fact that a large number of schoolchildren do not come from Christian families. Even more—we have children that average schools usually try to dismiss. There are children ... with a difficult character, with learning problems, with a tendency to conflict with others. Volgemute, however, was pleased that not a single student had left or had to be expelled from school and that conflicts decreased with time.” *Laba Vests* (June-July 1992): 24-25.

³¹ *Diena* (27 July 1993).

people who formerly were too intimidated to experience them. Hence there are adults who are being baptised and confirmed, especially if they desire to have a church wedding. As well, it is extremely difficult to disentangle from the bare statistics alone the cultural from the religious components, especially at a time when the Soviet-style traditions are being denigrated and a return to the traditions of free Latvia is in fashion. For example, in 1991 Anna congregation of Liepaja had 770 registered members, 690 Baptisms, but 170 regular churchgoers.³² Surprisingly, in all of Latvia the number of registered Lutherans was only about 32 000 in 1991 or about 7000 more than in 1987, the period of religious stagnation and Communist power, although according to the late Archbishop Gailitis there were about 300 000 who could be denoted as falling within the Lutheran “sphere of influence”.³³ Part of the problem of low numbers could be explained by the fact that official registration is accorded only to those who pay their annual church dues. According to some ministers Latvians are reticent about settling their regular financial obligations to the church although they are more generous in providing funding for major projects, especially building renovations. The Lutheran Consistory of Latvia was forced to remind congregations that their ministers should receive at least wages equivalent to those set for “minimal survival” by the state.³⁴

There are obstacles to more rapid growth in membership which appear to be in the process of being mitigated or overcome. As yet there is a shortage of space for various church activities. Sunday schools are often forced to use municipal libraries or attics. Most church property, except for the actual hall of worship was nationalised and reconverted to non-religious uses and only now is being returned or being considered for return. This is also the case with former clergy residences. For decades clergymen had difficulties in finding accommodations close to their spiritual charges. The local communist farm or village administrators were opposed to providing housing to “unproductive labour”, especially since they had a space shortage for their own workers. Under such circumstances over half of all clergy in 1987 were forced to reside in Riga and commute usually with public transportation as best they could to their respective parishes. Such a practice, needless to say, did not foster great psychological warmth or intimacy between pastor and communicant. At the end of 1991 the situation had not

³² Unpublished computer printout obtained in June 1992 from the Lutheran Church central office in Riga. Hereafter cited as “Lutheran printout 1992”.

³³ “Lutheran printout 1992.”

³⁴ *Svtdienas Rīts* (12 January 1992).

yet changed and 47 of the 114 full and assistant clergy were domiciled in Riga and no rapid changes were expected in the future.³⁵

A corollary problem is the dearth of clergymen. With a total of only 114 clergy in 1991 (of which 29 were either pensioners emeritus [17] or members of the church administration) it is inevitable that in order to service 271 congregations almost all servants of God were forced to adopt more than one parish. One unusually vigorous minister, for example, was responsible for eleven different congregations with a total of 1105 members.³⁶ Personnel pressures have forced the church to use ordained and non-ordained theology students as pastors. In 1992 this practice was to be modified. Further ordination will now be allowed only after completion of theological studies and no students alone will be made responsible for entire congregations as before.³⁷

Servicing several congregations has its pitfalls, not readily discernible by those accustomed to North American facilities. Automobiles are an obvious luxury in Latvia and generally not available to clergy who face tremendous difficulties in trying to reach their scattered, mostly rural congregations. A small number have received aid from congregations abroad to buy automobiles, but most have to rely on buses or trains to reach their houses of worship. After 1992 many of the rural bus routes were discontinued because of fuel shortage and the cost of tickets skyrocketed. As well, it is apparent that most congregations cannot expect church services every week but must be satisfied with monthly gatherings.

The age structure of the clergy is another problem facing the church. There has been a marked improvement in this area since 1987 when only 39 pastors out of a total of 85 were under the age of normal retirement. The age distribution of clergy is still far from normal, but the infusion of new blood is having its effect and in 1991 there was almost a doubling of clergy below retirement age.³⁸

³⁵ *BK 1992*. The proportions are tabulated from the list of clergy and their addresses listed at the end of the calendar, 150-61.

³⁶ "Lutheran printout 1992."

³⁷ *Svetdienas Rits* (14 June 1992).

³⁸ *BK 1992*, tabulation from 150-61.

Date of Birth of Latvian clergy officially listed for 1991:

1962 and later	18
1952 - 1961	25
1942 - 1951	11
1932 - 1941	7
1922 - 1931	17 (2 of these are emeritus)
1921 and earlier	36 (15 of these are emeritus)

The quality of theological education is another residual problem which for new recruits has now been largely resolved. Unfortunately most of the clergy studied under difficult conditions with minimal resources. Competition for entry to clerical studies was also low although the harassment of the church at that time assured that only the most dedicated would apply.

The approach to new recruitment was evidently haphazard and ad-hoc prior to 1969 involving essentially private consultations. In February 1969, however, the General Synod voted to create a theological seminary to be located in Riga. No doubt the seminary was a decided improvement over the previous period, but it still had major problems. Theological studies at the seminary were part-time only. Students met with their professors and lecturers only three days a month and did most of their studying on their own from mimeographed notes and outlines, alongside their work as parish leaders or helpers. They received a small stipend and usually took up to 10 years to complete their studies. This long period of training brought about impatient urgings from Archbishop Eriks Mesters in 1986 to expedite the study process in order to fill more quickly the critically short-staffed ranks of the clergy.³⁹ Such shortcuts, however, held obvious dangers. Already in 1980 the faculty of the seminary discussed the necessity of paying greater attention to student quality and being more demanding of them during their study period. For many years the seminary was located at the Sv. Jana (St. John's) Church and according to one participant was merely "a small corner in pitiful shape with a tiny library in the attic". Only after 1987 were slightly larger quarters obtained as a result of the donation of a minister's residence adjoining Sv. Pavila (St. Paul's) Church.⁴⁰

All lecturers were clergymen who in most cases undertook their academic assignments alongside full-time work with their own parishes. The shortage of qualified lecturers forced the church to adopt a new strategy in 1981. It was decided that all seminarians completing their courses "with distinction" were to be encouraged to work on a scientific thesis in a theological discipline and defend this work before the Seminary Council, thus receiving a theological candidate's (licentiate) degree. With this degree individuals could become seminary lecturers in their area of specialisation. By 1987, over six young pastors had completed their candidate requirements

³⁹ *BK 1987 145.*

⁴⁰ The description is from Lutheran Minister, Vaira Bitena, of Latvia, interviewed at Chautauqua, NY, August 1987.

and had been inducted as lecturers.⁴¹ In 1988 the 50 newly accepted seminarians were the first to enrol in full-time studies.⁴²

A major shift in theological education occurred when the Latvian University renewed the Faculty of Theology in June 1990. This Faculty has been geared to provide a base for Lutheran theologians, although students can receive a broad theological education. The current study programme appears very intensive and demanding. Students carry a lecture load of 36 hours a week and graduate after completing 31 obligatory, 10 optional, and 4 language credits, usually in five years. Each day begins with an obligatory chapel service. All faculty are certified and paid by the University. First-year enrolment in 1991 was limited to 30, chosen from 42 applicants. One-third of the successful student candidates already had a completed degree and one-third were women.⁴³

Under the circumstances of a dire shortage of ministers it was indeed ironic that for many years the Church leadership has refused to ordain women. During his tenure in the 1970s and 1980s, Archbishop Janis Matulis, after a wide but informal consultation with his colleagues, took the unprecedented step within the Latvian Lutheran Church of ordaining half a dozen women. After his death and the accession of Archbishop Eriks Mesters, the ordination of women was stopped. This issue has been reviewed several times but the deadlock has not yet been broken. Unfortunately the environment for women has not been overly warm and in 1991 only nine women were listed in the ranks of the clergy, at least one of whom had come from outside Latvia.⁴⁴

The bulk of the theological seminary's efforts prior to 1988 aimed to satisfy the requirements of the Latvian Lutheran Church. However, a small fraction of its graduands were slated for ministration work in Lithuania and in other republics of the U.S.S.R. where pockets of Lutheran faithful existed. In an unusual reversal of roles Latvia also became a leadership centre for religious work in the Soviet Central Asian republics servicing

⁴¹ *BK* 1982 120-121.

⁴² These students were accepted in two groups: 23 in May and 27 in December 1989, *BK* 1991 11.

⁴³ *Izglitiba* (22 August 1990).

⁴⁴ Theology student Anita Varsberga working in a Latvian congregation, but from the USA, wrote that there was great rapport with her flock, but the relationship to her "occupational colleagues" was "different": "Just for example at the last conference of clergy: We were addressed as brothers even though there were 'sisters' in the room; during the break between sessions nobody even thought to come and chat. But this is the same relationship to people that I already mentioned. Much is said about Christian love, but in life one sees it rarely. In all of Latvian society in my opinion, there is a strange and often unacceptable attitude towards women." *Sveidienas Rīts* (19 April 1992). The first three ordained were H. Valpetere, B. Stroza, and Bitena. *BK* 1976 155.

over 500 predominantly German language Lutheran congregations outside the Baltic.

The Lutheran Church for a long time coasted along as if resigned to its ultimate disappearance. Among the main items of the 1970s Church chronicles, in fact, were funerals and various birthday ceremonies for septuagenarians and octogenarians. Christel Lane, in his 1978 book *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union*, had a very pessimistic assessment of the Lutheran Church in Latvia and Estonia:

In general, then, it appears as if the combined impact of rapid economic and social change on the one side and of militant activity on the other has eroded the strength of the Baltic Lutheran Churches to such an extent that they now have only a very marginal influence over their respective populations and are faced with the prospect of complete decay in the not so distant future.⁴⁵

Lane's assessment reflected the reality of Lutheranism up to the late 1970s. At this point, however, the Church began to stir from its long period of lethargy. A common point of mobilisation became the repair of old churches. Donations of time and money were solicited and received. Groups of individuals used their own training, personal contacts, and ingenuity to scrounge materials, draft plans and construct technically complicated renovations. Both the inside and outside of historic churches were refurbished. Joint commitments and pooled efforts at reconstruction led to greater congregation solidarity, pride, and enthusiasm which in turn spurred personal efforts at mobilisation of new members. The same enthusiasm infused church services.

No doubt part of this slow movement of the Church came about because of increased foreign pressures. U.S. President Jimmy Carter's religious orientation was not lost on Kremlin tacticians. The example of Polish activism may have revitalised battle-weary members. Most important, however, has been the role of the many new ministers who certainly did not complete their theological training to become witnesses to the dissolution of the Church.

The advent of new blood, however, brought with it certain problems. It created severe strains, on the one hand, between those who were comfortable in the old ways, and, on the other hand, the new visionaries determined to undertake the sweeping of the Augean stables in record time. The confrontation has had extremely serious repercussions which have yet to be fully assessed and resolved.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Christel Lane, *Christian Religion in the Soviet Union* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978) 195.

⁴⁶ Aija Predele, editor of the main Lutheran newspaper *Svetdienas Rits*, wrote about the generational problem in a column of 27 October 1991: "Some of the older groups resent the

THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT FOR “REBIRTH AND RENEWAL”

The arrival of a new wave of seminary graduates was bound to disturb the complacency of the status quo. Individuals who for the most part had not experienced Stalin’s camps and who had grown up within the Soviet system were not afraid to speak out and demand fair treatment for the church. They were also not willing to accept the rapidly decreasing membership and dwindling role of the church without trying out new, more contemporary methods of church services and activities. Their innovations and enthusiasm brought in new members and a new vitality to congregation activities. Such a situation was intolerable to the Party. It began its counter offensive by forcing the Lutheran Church leadership to remove one of the most visible new clergymen, Modris Plate, from a key congregation in Central Latvia (Kuldīga) and relocate him in an obscure area of Eastern Latvia.⁴⁷ Unbowed and with the full support of his two congregations Plate continued to fulfil his church functions, ignoring the decision of the Lutheran Consistory. Meanwhile, discontent in the ranks of the clergy mounted when Archbishop Eriks Mesters in his newsletter of 20 April 1987 called a halt to all liturgical innovations and demanded that all ministers commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Communist revolution and provide detailed accounts of their sermons and service proceedings. In reaction, 22 pastors sent a petition on 8 May calling for a special synod to consider the “question of the Archbishop’s suitability for his position”.

The sense of grievance and frustration at the inability of the church leadership to stand up to pressures from the state and the general mood of *glasnost* prevailing at the time brought many of the reformers together in a common cause. They formed a group which they called “Rebirth and Renewal” (R&R) and on 14 June 1987 came out publicly with a single-page statement of grievances backed by fifteen signatures (fourteen clergy and one lawyer).⁴⁸ Most of the signers were from the younger generation and

presence of ‘nonbelievers and communists’ and the way in which these new arrivals violate the traditional peacefulness of the church by their new activities which include Sunday schools, choir practices, weekly communions, excursions and the like. On the other hand, there are occasions when members of the new congregations entirely replace the old board and take over the direction of the church without regard to the past contributions of the elders, who at least deserve from the young ‘respect and love’ for having preserved the faith and the church.” According to Predele some of these disillusioned “greymothers”: ... hide sacramental vessels (“these are ours”), form new congregations (“we are the true believers”), write complaints, declarations, and open letters. Or similarly, gossip and scandal-monger everyone who for the first time dares to step into the church. In Predele’s view, “few are the churches which at this point in time do not have these tragic problems.”

⁴⁷ *Radio Free Europe* [hereafter *RFE*] (15 June 1987): 13. See also *RFE* (8 May 1987).

⁴⁸ *RFE* (17 July 1987): 9. *Auseklis* 1 (1987): 84-97.

many were faculty members of the Seminary. The primary thrust of the document was to defend and promote the rights of believers in Latvia.

The polarisation of the reform and status-quo clergymen increased dramatically and became acrimonious and politicised and the Communist newspaper *Padomju Jaunatne* on 18 September 1987 charged that the reformers wanted nothing less than “an independent Latvian state”. Indeed, the reformers played a most important catalyst role in the struggle for independence. The Latvian independence-minded Helsinki '86 group was guided to a large extent by the reformist clergymen. Several of the luminaries of the “Rebirth and Renewal” movement became prominent in the conception of the idea of a Latvian People’s Front in the summer of 1988 and later were active participants in the organisation of the Front and in its accession to political power in the Spring of 1990. The efforts of two of these organisers, Modris Plate and Juris Rubenis, culminated in an unprecedented event in Communist-occupied Latvia. On 9 October 1988 they were able to arrange a special church service in the Doma Cathedral in Riga which for 20 years had been closed to religious use. This service was organised to pray for the success of the first congress of the Latvian People’s Front assembled at that time. The sermon by Plate and the entire service, with an overflow crowd, was viewed by all of Latvia on television. One year later at the second congress of the People’s Front Rubenis was instrumental in breaking a deadlock among Latvian national groups by his call for mutual accommodations.⁴⁹ In the vanguard to defend Latvian survival interests was Karlis Gailitis who had been a candidate for archbishop in 1986 but lost to the more regime-oriented Eriks Mesters.

In April 1989 at the XIVth Latvian Synod after over a year of tension and acrimony between opposing factions within the Church, Gailitis was elected the new archbishop and many of the reformers, including Plate and Rubenis, were elected to leadership positions in the Consistory. As well, a new church constitution was adopted and resolutions were passed on returning nationalised church property, on the protection of conscientious objectors who were slated for the military draft, the unification of the Latvian Lutheran Church (with the emigré church), the annulment of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 signed by Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union “giving” the Baltic States to the USSR, and the right of Latvia to sovereignty and independence.⁵⁰

The Lutheran Church strengthened its positive image in the Latvian public. The Archbishop himself and many in the Consistory participated actively in the pursuit of Latvian independence. They offered church buildings to allow Latvians to register for the nationalist-oriented

⁴⁹ *BK* 1990 154.

⁵⁰ *Svtdienas Rīts* (30 April 1989).

“Citizenship Committee”; they declared their opposition to the “zero option” which would grant citizenship to all the post-war Soviet colonists currently residing in Latvia; several clergy, including the Archbishop, became official members of the Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK), and they provided support for the 3 March 1991 referendum on independence. Archbishop Gailitis even ran as a candidate for the Latvian Supreme Soviet (Council) in April 1990 but lost to his opponent Juris Bojars, an ex-KGB officer who claimed that the new Latvia needed economists and law experts more than theologians. Since the elections of the Supreme Council in the Spring of 1990 the Lutheran Church has lowered its political profile although it actively pursues its goals through Parliament and the Council of Ministers. Archbishop Gailitis died in a car accident on 22 November 1992 and on 29 August 1993, Janis Vanags was ordained as his replacement. His policies have been more defensive and status-quo oriented.

In 1997 there were still issues of disunity between reformers and conservatives, the Latvian church and the emigré church, those supporting women’s ordination and those adamantly opposed. However, in spite of its many problems the Lutheran Church is poised for a major gain in its influence and appeal. With a new crew of young and well educated clergy coming through the system, a solid base of Sunday schools, refurbished church buildings, together with a visible and credible leadership there is a likelihood that Lutheranism could establish itself as a component part of Latvian culture, a task it began during Latvia’s first independence period but was never able to fully complete. The tenor of this symbiosis has been well articulated by the late Archbishop Gailitis: “I perceive the Lutheran Church as a Latvian church. For me it is tied with Latvian culture—and our role is to give back to the nation those values that have belonged to it for centuries and from which for a very long time a large number of people have been isolated.”⁵¹

The Lutheran Church under Gailitis did not waffle on the question of independence but provided leadership at a critical phase in the development of Latvian national consciousness. If the Lutheran Church missed the opportunity of blending with Latvian national sentiments in the first awakening period in the late 19th century, it may have recouped its credibility in the period of rebirth.

⁵¹ *Tevzemes Avize* (17 May 1991).

ROMAN CATHOLICS

Catholics in Latvia have survived much better than Lutherans in spite of harsher treatment by the Communist regime.⁵² There is no doubt that they are today the leading and most active believers in the republic and on almost every index stand out as successful survivors. They too felt the full brunt of Soviet and Nazi occupations and many of their clergy were deported to Siberia and many died at the hands of the N.K.V.D. According to Viktors Krasts who has consulted many Vatican sources, “at one time or another since 1945, approximately half of the Latvian Catholic clergy have been imprisoned or deported”.⁵³ During the early 1950s about 60 priests were imprisoned and the total number of working clergy was 110, of which about 50 had received their ordination after the war.⁵⁴ As a result of the 1955-56 release of political prisoners from Siberia, most of the captive clerics returned to active duty, significantly solidifying the Catholic infrastructure and providing more or less normal conditions for Catholic believers. This may be the reason why fewer Catholic churches were demolished or converted to other uses.

While one could state that the Catholic clergy are more numerous and more active than is the case for Lutherans, at present they too have a serious shortage and many of them must service more than one congregation. Although in 1990 there were about half a million Catholics, Bishop Janis Cakuls has provided a qualified analysis of the religiousness of this group. According to him, at least half never or seldom attend church although they do try to be baptised, while among the other half a part is very active and another part attends on special occasions. In 1985 Latvia had 185 Catholic parishes but only 104 priests. In 1991, the number of parishes had increased to 192 but the number of active priests declined to 98 (three of whom were continuing studies in Rome). Their age distribution in 1991 was decidedly abnormal with only 36 priests below the age of 50 but 43 of pensionable age.⁵⁵ Most or 83 were Latvians. It is noteworthy that only 23 priests joined the clergy in Latvia from 1981 to 1991. This apparently slow recruitment record came about in large measure because of the special mission undertaken by the Riga Catholic Seminary. It provided education for clerics from other parts of the USSR where such training was not allowed and thus sacrificed Latvia's own needs for the greater cause of the Catholic Church.⁵⁶

⁵² Catholics had more restrictions placed on publishing and on foreign travel.

⁵³ V. Krasts, “Cardinal Julijans Vaivods and the Catholic Church in Latvia”, *Radio Liberty Report* 72 (8 February 1983): 1.

⁵⁴ According to Trups-Trops a total of 81 Catholic clergy were “repressed” between 1940 and 1988, 40-42. *Katolu Kalendars 1991* 61.

⁵⁵ *Katolu Kalendars 1992* 17-23.

⁵⁶ *Katolu Kalendars 1992* 24-25.

Another phenomenon has strained the resources and flexibility of the Catholic Church. During Latvia's first independence period about 70% of all Catholics were concentrated in the Easternmost province of Latgale, but ever since 1945 many of these people flocked to cities and even rural areas across the republic where previously there were no active Catholic churches. By 1991 only 42% of Catholics in Latvia were found in Latgale. In 1991 Latgale accounted for 99 parishes out of 192 and 47 priests out of 98.⁵⁷ Latgale has traditionally had very high birth rates but relatively poor soil conditions for farming, hence the exodus has been fairly massive. These Latgalians have been replaced, to some extent, by non-Latvian migrants from neighbouring republics creating even more strain on the traditional pre-eminence of the church in this region. As a consequence the church has been forced to take defensive measures as indicated by Krasts:

The Church leaders in Latvia ... unlike those in Lithuania to the south, where the population is overwhelmingly Catholic and Lithuanian and parishes abut one another ... have had to pull together dispersed clusters of the faithful.⁵⁸

One of the most impressive statistics of the sway of the Catholic Church among its parishioners during the period of religious repression is the fairly constant number of Baptisms. In 1985, the number of Baptisms stood at 5167 or 13% of all children born in the republic that year. If Catholics formed about 20% of all the population at that time, then close to two-thirds of them baptised their children. Using data provided by the official Latvian newspaper *Cina* in 1987 which claimed that in the republic between 18% to 20% of all newborns were baptised in church, then the Catholics undoubtedly accounted for the lion's share of such Baptisms, whereas Lutherans, Baptists, Orthodox, and others accounted for the remaining 5% to 7%. According to Bishop Cakuls about 10% to 15% of Catholic families have remained unbaptised.⁵⁹

The Catholics have also experienced a religious revival. In 1991 the number of Baptisms had more than doubled to 10 661. Only 40% of these had been born in families where the parents had been married in church. Church marriages, as well, have increased. While in 1987 about one thousand marriages were performed by Catholics, the number jumped to 2651 in 1991, representing 55.3% of all church weddings that year. It must be remembered that many more Catholics would have liked church weddings but were not admitted because one of the partners was divorced. In 85% of conjugal unions in 1991 both partners were Catholics, whereas

⁵⁷ Janis Cakuls, "Cik katolu Latvija?" *Katolu Kalendars* 1992 49.

⁵⁸ Krasts, *Radio Liberty* 1.

⁵⁹ Cakuls, *Ad Limina* 1. Other statistics from *Cina* (9 September 1987).

15% were mixed, that is involved partners from other religions or ones who had not been baptised.⁶⁰ Catholics are also most likely to choose religious funerals. In 1991 they accounted for almost 5000 or 52.8% of all religious funerals.

A most unusual demonstration of Catholic commitment occurs annually in mid-August on the day of the assumption of the Virgin Mary. Tens of thousands of the faithful trek to Aglona, a small locality in Latgale, which has an old basilica constructed by the Dominicans in the 18th century. On the occasion of the celebration of the 800th year of Christianity in Latvia in 1986, the numbers assembled were estimated at over 50 000. Other years attendance has fluctuated between 30 and 40 thousand.⁶¹ In the Fall of 1993 the Pope held services at this spot.

Catholics, as well, have introduced optional religious instructions in schools—mostly by lay believers in Latgale. They now are also providing religious classes to those preparing for their first communion and first confessional. In 1992 Archbishop Janis Pujats was in charge of religious instruction courses for about 60 future teachers at the Daugavpils Pedagogical Institute.⁶² The Catholics have their own refurbished seminary in Riga to train young priests.

Confiscated churches are being returned and repaired or reconstructed and new ones are being built especially in areas outside Latgale where many Catholics settled after World War II.⁶³ The Catholics are a major source of ethnic integration in Latvia. In September 1993, one-quarter of Catholic believers were non-Latvians who often shared church buildings with Latvians. Thus, of the 225 congregations at that time serviced by 96 priests, in 31 congregations services were in Latvian and Polish, in 12 congregations services were in three languages: Latvian, Polish, and Lithuanian, and in 3 others in Latvian and Lithuanian. In 164 congregations services were in Latvian only, and in 15 in Polish only. In the St. Jekaba Cathedral in Riga services are also held in French and English.

The Catholics, much like the Lutherans, have begun to consolidate and grow in numbers and influence. Help is provided from various countries and Catholic clergy have finally been able to travel abroad and publish religious literature. Because Catholics did not fall as far as the Lutherans, their rebirth is not as noticeable. With time the 58% of Catholics outside Latgale will receive new churches and more complete services but the lingering and subtle lower status placement of Latgallians and Catholics together with the

⁶⁰ Cakuls, *Ad Limina* 1-4.

⁶¹ Cakuls, *Ad Limina* 1-4.

⁶² Cakuls, *Ad Limina* 65.

⁶³ Cakuls, *Ad Limina* 3 (i.e., Sigulda, Aizkraukle, Sloka, Ogre, Riga, Lielvarde).

anonymity provided for a minority in an urban environment could slow down the process of total Catholic Church restoration.

In Latgale proper there has been a visible demographic dilution of ethnic Latvians and Catholics but the environment for a strong rebirth of the Church is much more positive. In this region Catholicism is an integral part of the Latgallian culture which is now witnessing a resurgence of interest.

OTHER RELIGIONS

While the **Orthodox Church** may have been less persecuted than the Catholic Church it, nevertheless, suffered the same attacks by atheists as all others. The membership of the Orthodox Church in Latvia in 1935 was predominantly Russian with only one-third Latvian.⁶⁴ In view of the massive immigration of Slavs into Latvia during the forty-five years after the war, the Latvian share in this religion is today significantly lower. Indeed, the Latvian-language version of the Orthodox Church calendar was discontinued in 1961.

During the first Soviet occupation in 1941 the Latvian Orthodox Church was ordered to liquidate itself as an independent entity and become a dependent branch subject to the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate. By 29 December 1992, however, it once again renewed its pre-war independent status.⁶⁵ In 1991 it had 90 parishes scattered in many of the major cities such as Riga, Daugavpils, Liepaja, and Jelgava, and also in the rural areas of Latgale. Of these 17 were Latvian.⁶⁶

The problems faced by the Orthodox Church do not differ significantly from the Lutheran and Catholic Churches. The Chief Orthodox Bishop of Latvia, Patriarch Alexander, pointed out the three main problems as being a shortage of space, a shortage of religious literature, and a shortage of clergy.⁶⁷ In contrast to the two other major religions the Orthodox do not have a local institute to train new recruits. They have to go outside Latvia for this purpose. Bishop Alexander has expressed interest in renewing the former Orthodox Seminary which functioned in independent Latvia but whose buildings were converted to serve as an *anatomicum* for the Riga Academy of Medicine.⁶⁸

The Orthodox are also experiencing an influx of people seeking spiritual solace. Almost all congregations have Sunday schools with one in

⁶⁴ Rutkis 616.

⁶⁵ Rutkis 622; *The Baltic Observer* (8-14 January 1993).

⁶⁶ *Svetdienas Rits* (23 December 1990).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Pardaugava claiming a membership of over 400.⁶⁹ At the same time optional religious instructions in Russian schools are not widespread and are poorly attended.⁷⁰

Between 1961 and 1992 the Orthodox Cathedral in the centre of Riga with its several bare cupolas served as a planetarium and a restaurant informally dubbed “God’s Ear”. The building has now been returned and crosses have been replaced by Latvian donors in Germany. There is still much to be done to restore it to its original resplendent, brilliant colours and contours. Its construction was originally financed by the Tsar himself and the building with room for 2700 people was completed in 1884.⁷¹

Bishop Alexander was born in Daugavpils, Latvia, in a religious family and until grade seven went to church every Sunday. Later, when he was a student and worked as a teacher in Riga, he attended different churches so as not to attract attention to himself. He later decided to enter the theological seminary in Zagorsk and served two years in the Urals before coming back to Riga to replace the former Orthodox metropolitan Dr Leonid (Sv. Polakov).⁷²

The Orthodox Church in Latvia is experiencing the schisms found in Russia. Some congregations are placing themselves under the jurisdiction of the Suzdalya Eparchy whose headquarters are located outside the former Soviet Union. These break-away congregations are now expressing their disgust at the way in which the Moscow eparchy collaborated with the Communist regime and the K.G.B. and its “traitorous” treatment of believers.⁷³

In Latvia during the Soviet period only the Orthodox Church was allowed to keep its convent located in Valgunde. In 1990 it united 180 nuns and in October 1991 celebrated its 100th birthday.⁷⁴ The Orthodox Church has regained several of its centrally located properties which it plans to rent out in order to obtain funds for renovations and general upkeep.

There has been some tension with the Latvian wing of the Orthodox Church. Critics have claimed that obstacles to the rebirth of Latvian Orthodoxy are being placed by the church itself. If during Latvia’s pre-war period 54 of the 123 clerics were Latvian, in 1990 the ratio was only four out of 60.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ *Latvijas Jaunatne* (6 January 1990).

⁷² *Svtdienas Rīts* (23 December 1990).

⁷³ *Svtdienas Rīts* (8 September 1991).

⁷⁴ *Svtdienas Rīts* (4 May 1990); *Laba Vests* 8 (1991): 30.

⁷⁵ Andrejs Golikovs, Janis Kalnins, et al., “Jana Pommera Bralibai Japastav”, in *Filozofija un Teologija: Rakstu Kraujums* (Riga: LZA Filozofijas un Sociologijas instituts, 1991) 15-16.

During the Soviet period the **Latvian Baptists** provided the highest number of dissidents in Latvia and, not surprisingly, their high level of organisation and activity for many years worried Communist authorities. Their willingness and ability to socialise their children into the faith stymied many of the best campaigns and tactics of militant atheists. The high profile of Baptists belies their relatively small numbers. During Latvia's independence their twelve thousand adherents amounted to less than a half percentage point of all believers. Today, the Baptist Church has been able to maintain its positions better than any other church and during the Soviet occupation was able to co-opt believers from other less active religions. Current 1997 statistics indicate over 6000 active members, 75 parishes, and 65 ministers or preachers. They also have a very active and extensive Sunday school system.

The Latvian Baptist Church for decades was a subordinate member of the All Union Baptist Federation and participated in the elections and deliberations of this body. In 1990 it became independent, although it still maintains ties with Moscow.⁷⁶ The activities of various parishes are well described in the Baptist Church Calendar which was allowed to be published for the first time in 1979—probably in reaction to the indirect influence of Baptist Jimmy Carter.

Until 1990 aspiring theologians did not have any seminary or school which they could attend in order to receive ordination. All their studies had to be pursued through correspondence courses guided from Moscow with students receiving periodic examinations and facing final examination commission in order to graduate. Now the Baptists also have their own seminary with about 36 theology students.⁷⁷

One of the unusual aspects of the Latvian Baptists is their deep attachment to choral music and religious poetry. Almost every congregation has a choir which in most cases contains many young people. Poetry is printed in the calendar and poets are singled out in the news chronicles of Church activities. In 1992 the Baptists organised a song festival in Kurzeme and this tradition has continued with the fourth festival held in 1996.

Old Believers have a long history in Latvia. They fled tsarist persecution in the 1600s and settled in what was then Swedish- or Polish-controlled territory of Latvia. They found particular support during Latvia's independence period when the state financed primary schools for them and aided in the building of churches. They are very strict in their traditional

⁷⁶ *Svetdienas Rīts* (18 March 1990).

⁷⁷ *Tevezemes Avize* (25 November 1990). Graduates of this school receive a Latvian Education Ministry-recognised secondary school certification. Ten students attend the day sessions but 16 participate through correspondence courses. Ilmars Hirss, "Profesija kas dod gandarijumu", *Laba Vests* 8 (1991): 14.

observances and in their daily behaviour (no smoking or drinking). There are 65 congregations and about 70 to 80 thousand believers with about a third concentrated in Riga and most of the others in Eastern Latvia. A significant number fled as refugees to the United States ahead of the Red Army during World War II. The remainder were persecuted with many clergy sent to Siberia.⁷⁸ Certain congregations have chosen to become isolated in their own small communities. At the same time a significant number of Old Believers prior to 1940 were efficient businessmen and gifted members of the intelligentsia. To this day they have been able to take care of their own and follow an independent line. They have maintained relations with their co-religionists in Estonia, Lithuania, Moldova, St. Petersburg, Moscow, and other parts of the world. The Riga Grebeshchikov congregation is the largest in the world with 20 000 members in 1990.⁷⁹ This brand of Old Believers does not have ordained clergy but only spiritual preachers or teachers (*Bespopovtsy*). The first spiritual school since 1940 opened in Riga in November 1989. The course lasts two years and there were ten students in 1991.⁸⁰ The Grebeshchikov church is recognisable to all in Riga because of the tall gilded cupola, a visible landmark from almost all points of the central part of the city.

CONCLUSION

Without a doubt the slow death of religion in Latvia has been stopped and there are many signs of recovery. A public opinion poll taken in the Fall of 1993 found only 12 per cent convinced atheists among Latvians and 16 per cent among non-Latvians, a much lower proportion than in Estonia with its 27 per cent atheists. This poll thus revealed many other interesting aspects of religion. Among Latvians, 24 per cent claimed to be Catholic, 2 per cent Orthodox, 30 per cent Lutheran, 3 per cent other, and 20 per cent were "believers without a particular church". The rest found it difficult to answer. Among non-Latvians, 10 per cent were Catholic, 49 per cent Orthodox, 1 per cent Lutheran, 5 per cent other, and 10 per cent believers without a church. Claimed church attendance among believers is rather unimposing with 13 per cent of Latvians and 12 per cent of others attending at least once a month or once a week.⁸¹ There seems to be a wide consensus

⁷⁸ *Atmoda* (6 January 1989).

⁷⁹ *Atmoda* (23 October 1990).

⁸⁰ Oxana Antic, *Report on the USSR* (21 June 1991). M. Pashinin, "Staroobriadchestvo i prosvesmchenie v Latvii" *Staroobriadcheskii Tserkoonyi Kalendar na 1992 rog* (Riga: 1991) 51.

⁸¹ Richard Rose and William Maley, *Nationalities in the Baltic States: A Survey Study* (Glasgow: University of Strathclyde, 1994) 62.

that the greatest religious inroads are being made with the old and the young and that the middle generation, heavily imprinted with the pervasive cynicism and atheism of the years of communist stagnation, is much less affected. Nevertheless, some of them have a wish to let their children partake of religion most often for the sake of “character building”, yet in the process they too are being engaged into various church-led activities.

There are many problems to be overcome and not all religious organisations have the wherewithal to cope with a surge of demands for services. Some religions are more flexible than others. With the new freedom has come a new opportunity for various religious sects which had not formerly been represented in Latvia to proselytise and obtain converts. For example, Jehovah’s Witnesses are finding many willing to listen and join, although they experienced much controversy in 1996 because of the death of a girl whose parents refused blood transfusions for her. Similarly, the Hare Krishna with their garb are often found in the streets of Riga. Charismatic movements are spreading rapidly. A Russian charismatic Christian sect has made great advances among youth. The Adventists have experienced a phenomenal growth rate. The opening to the West has seen a stampede of religious groups engaged in missionary work, problem assessment, aid of various sorts, as well as choirs, rock concerts, mass meetings, religious shops offering books, and the like. The Salvation Army, the Y.M.C.A. and Gideons-International are just some of the traditional religious components of the West now finding a niche in Latvia.

While all of this may give the appearance of a major religious revival it should be kept in mind that the Latvian environment is not going to reflect that of the United States or Poland, but more likely the one found in Scandinavia and Germany where the degree of religious activism is much more muted. There is a visible thirst for something beyond the boundaries of materialism and rationalism. Latvia has many people engaged in various extra-sensory and other superstitious activities and rituals. Whether these yearnings will become channelled into traditional religions or remain as folkish diversions will depend on many factors including the efforts expended by religious organisations. The head of the Baptist theological seminary, Ilmars Hirss, has provided a critical assessment of the apparent Latvian search for spirituality:

I agree that the Latvian nation has become more preoccupied with various religions. But to be preoccupied with religion and to seek the true live God, these are totally different things. Atheists too are preoccupied with religion. The search for spirituality by the Latvian nation is beginning to lead it along erroneous paths: to occultism, extra-sensory, Eastern religions and paganism. All these have nothing in common with the God that we sing in our national anthem. The Latvian nation as a nation is still very far from God. To come to God, first of all one must regret one’s sins, one must accept what has been done wrong. And the

Latvian nation has cause for repentance. I am bothered by these pagan tendencies in the nation as well as by the way in which Christianity itself is devalued, transformed into a fashion and a form.⁸²

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⁸²*Laba Vests* 8 (1991): 14-15.

LUTHER, A SHEPHERD UNDER CHRIST

L. Dean Hempelmann

The Lord said to Jeremiah: “And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jer. 3:15).

What is your favourite picture of Martin Luther? What image flashes in your mind when you hear his name?

Luther scholars of this generation remind us that Luther was an Old Testament professor. His proper vocation was *Doctor* (that is “teacher”) of Theology (Bible) at Wittenberg University, beginning on 22 October 1512. This call was Luther’s boast in God. When controversy swirled around him and accusations about disturbing the Church were hurled at him, he stood on this call.

And yet, it was Luther’s engagement in a pastoral and liturgical act that galvanised him into action on indulgences and repentance. Listening to people confess their sins, Luther was stunned at the way they had been led to miss Christ. As a pastoral professor, Luther could not be silent. As a doctor of the Bible in the Church, he would not be silent.

As professor and preacher Luther was pastoral not merely in that he did pastoral work from time to time. Rather, he was pastoral in that he called the Church to repentance—a whole life of repentance and faith.

Like Moses and the prophets on whom he lectured, and like Jesus in whom he hoped, Luther’s pastoral passion was “repent and believe the Gospel”. That is the call of the first of the 95 Theses: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent!’ He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”¹

Luther was a shepherd under Christ. The professor in Wittenberg perceived God’s people through the eyes of Christ—a commendable perspective for pastors of our day. Life and faith are interrelated for him. There was no area of pastoral care with which he was unfamiliar or with which he felt uncomfortable. He was a shepherd under Christ because he was a pastor and preacher of the Word; he was a pastor and preacher of the Word because he was a shepherd under Christ.

We consider together in this paper some aspects of Luther’s ministry to God’s people as a shepherd under Christ. Consider this a painting, an impressionistic as well as partial picture, of the factors important to Luther as he served as a shepherd under Christ. We consider nine insights, nine

¹ AE 31:25

striking, pastoral features of the man who could debate with an Erasmus and drink beer with Peter the Barber.

POINT ONE: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Luther saw people through the eyes of justifying faith. To him there was no ministry apart from this central doctrine of the Scriptures. Justification by faith is the central issue around which Luther performed his whole ministry.

The importance of this doctrine, not only to the life of the sinner but also to the Christian faith, must always be emphasised—whether one is speaking of Luther or the faith itself. To the novice in the pastoral ministry or the student in first year homiletics, the reiteration of this biblical teaching may seem as if the pastor is “carrying coals to Newcastle”. After all, the people know all this. But it is not so! Unless this doctrine is taught, re-taught, and emphasised, there is the real danger of losing it, confusing it, or ignoring it.

The Gospel is not preached in the pulpit Sunday after Sunday in order to bring something brand new to God’s people. It is proclaimed Sunday after Sunday because “it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”.² When the Gospel is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit works through it on human hearts, unbelievers and believers. This justification by faith is not one of many truths of Scripture; it is the central teaching of the Word of God. It is—as the reformers entitled it—the **material principle**, the heart of the Bible. It is the central theme of the Christian faith. All other doctrines gather around this splendid light from above.

What is justification? Luther wrote his answer in the 1535 introduction to the publication of his 1531 lectures on Galatians. He called justification:

that single solid rock ... namely, that we are redeemed from sin, death, and the devil and endowed with eternal life, not through ourselves and certainly not through our works, which are even less than we are ourselves, but through the help of Another, the only Son of God, Jesus Christ.³

Luther again clearly states what he means when he comments on Gal. 3:5:

The doctrine of justification is this, that we are pronounced righteous and are saved solely by faith in Christ, and without works. ... This is the true meaning of justification.⁴

² Rom. 1:16.

³ AE 27:145.

⁴ AE 26:223.

Luther believed, taught, and confessed what the Scripture teaches, namely, that all are

justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.⁵

Luther believed this and preached this. Luther stressed justification in his dealing with people. He was no inflexible idealist seeking to make people perfectly holy in their lives with some worldly philosophy or their good works and ways. He knew that no effort on people's part could ever justify the sinner before the righteous Judge. Only trust in the objective atonement earned by Christ was the blessed entrance into the presence of a forgiving God. He taught and applied this cardinal doctrine to the lives of the people. It was not only the chief doctrine of the Bible but also central to all his dealings with the broken and harried lives of God's people. "The most important thing for Luther was that the Gospel as he understood it be preserved."⁶ The Gospel was fundamental to all his pastoral practice. As a shepherd under Christ, Luther could not possibly conceive of a pastoral practice not centred on and flowing from justification by faith.

Insight One: Justification by faith! All teachings of the Scriptures, all application of these teachings to the lives of people grew out of this central doctrine of the Bible. The Gospel applied to both the person in their need and the pastor in his application of the Word of God. This doctrine was Luther's springboard to being a shepherd. He always perceived God's people as **justified** people, reconciled people, people accepted by God for the sake of Christ. This imprinted itself on all Luther's pastoral practice. No less can be claimed for being a shepherd under Christ today. Justification by faith is the basis for all pastoral theology and practice in the year 1535 and 1995.

POINT TWO: SAINT AND SINNER

A second crucial insight Luther supplies for pastoral ministry is the clear perception of the Christian as *simul iustus et peccator*, at-the-same-time-saint-and-sinner. Luther did not look upon his fellow believers as sinless saints. It was one of the teachings of the Reformation that God's people continue as sinners even while they are declared saints by Christ.

⁵ Rom. 3:24-25.

⁶ James M. Kittelson, "Luther der Mensch," *Concordia Journal* 17 (October 1991): 387.

How much agony in the world has been caused by Christian idealists and Pietists trying to force God's people to become perfectionists and "super-saints"! Luther learned from Scripture to look at people through the eyes of Christ and see the *simul iustus et peccator*. Luther writes:

We are righteous, not as though we had no sin—for we have need of the prayer "Forgive us our trespasses" every moment—but because the sins we do have are not imputed but forgiven because of our faith in Christ.⁷

Luther's understanding of the-same-time-sinner-saint was basic to his understanding of the pastoral ministry. If Luther, or a pastor today, views people as saints-and-sinners, this will greatly affect their goals, their satisfaction, and their effectiveness in ministry. The failure to uphold the *simul iustus et peccator* teaching of Holy Scripture has led to religious idealism of the worst kind. As a shepherd under Christ, Luther understood people as Christ knows them.

POINT THREE: CLEAR COMMUNICATION

This insight is not often heard, but reading Luther brings one to see that Luther had the ability to communicate on many levels. That cannot be said of contemporary theologians, some of whom write so few can understand them. Not so with Luther! Won Yong and Hyo Jong and James and Susan can pick up almost any volume of Luther's and understand it. Luther writes:

I spoke about this to Bucer in Gotha and suggested that he and Osiander should refrain from erudite preaching. ... Christ could have taught in a profound way but he wished to deliver his message with the utmost simplicity in order that the common people might understand. Good God, there are sixteen-year-old girls, women, old men, and farmers in church, and they don't understand lofty matters! ... Accordingly he's the best preacher who can teach in a plain, childlike, popular, and simple way. ... Some day I'll have to write a book against artful preachers.⁸

Please note the gift of this man in promoting the art of communication. Modern homiletics lays great stress on this needed art—clear, simple communication. The most orthodox sermon in the world is worth little if the people cannot understand it. The Gospel is made powerless if it cannot be comprehended by the hearer. One of Luther's gifts as a shepherd under Christ was his gift of communicating—clearly and simply. Blessed are the people of God who have for their pastor a man who communicates well! The goal of clear, simple communication must be a high priority in training

⁷ St. Louis Ed. 6:1295; my trans.

⁸ AE 54:383.

pastors today. Luther is an example for the theological student and the experienced preacher.

POINT FOUR: THE SUPREMACY OF THE WORD

Luther believed in applying the Word to any and all pastoral problems. Psychological and sociological models for the pastoral ministry are predominant in western Christendom today. The applications and imperatives of the Word of God are no longer the primary foundation blocks for pastoral practice. In fact, the use of the Bible as a source for correction, reproof, edification, reconciliation and the like is under attack and often lampooned within, as well as without, the Church. Luther would be under serious attack today by many modern psychologists and trendy sociologists, not to mention certain “Lutheran” theologians and contemporary interpreters of God’s Word.

Luther was not only simple and direct in his pastoral activities; he was pre-eminently Biblical. The application of God’s Word to the believer and his/her life is the business of the pastor. It is the correct use of Law and Gospel that forms the proper basis and practice of pastoral care. As an example, here is a statement that shows Luther as a shepherd under Christ not only to his gravely ill daughter but also to himself:

Afterward, he said to his daughter, who was lying in bed, “Dear Magdalene, my little daughter, you would be glad to stay here with me, your father. Are you also glad to go to your Father in heaven?” The sick girl replied, “Yes, dear Father, as God wills.” The father said, “You dear little girl!” (Then he turned away from her and said,) “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Mt. 26:41). I love her very much. If this flesh is so strong, what must the spirit be?” ... I am angry with myself that I’m unable to rejoice from my heart and be thankful to God, though I do at times sing a little song and thank God. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s (Ro. 14:8).⁹

This quote from Luther’s *Table Talk* presents a clear picture of his manner as a shepherd. He deals with his daughter realistically and scripturally. For Luther the comfort, the advice, the analysis of a pastoral situation, is found in God’s Word, not the secular disciplines. Today one can find a number of college classes on death and dying. Yet, in these studies and textbooks one will look in vain for the comfort of the resurrection. Pray God that Christians will never change from the belief and practice of confronting the dying with the hope of the resurrected and living Christ.

⁹ AE 54:430.

As one reads Luther's letters to various and sundry people, there is no doubt that he considers the Scriptures as the source, the guide, for confronting and comforting God's people. Luther refers readily and easily to God's promises. This topic is no minor matter for the Christian Church of this century. It deserves to be placed high on the agenda of pastoral preparation. As a shepherd under Christ, Luther dealt with person and problem on the basis of the written text of God's Word. That was Luther's way.

POINT FIVE: HUMILITY

Luther did not claim to know everything about Holy Scripture. He was always willing to learn. He demonstrated an approach to ministry that was humble and open to full consideration of the matter before him. Always scriptural, he looked at the whole situation as he applied the Word of God. This approach is found in this statement:

Luther remarked in connection with this, "Jonas once claimed that he knew everything in the Holy Scriptures and was angry at me because I didn't let this claim pass unnoticed. But I know there are many things I don't know. I have preached for twenty-five years and still don't understand the verse, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live'" (Ro. 1:17).¹⁰

Luther was not saying he was simple-minded or didn't know anything. He was demonstrating what every faithful, intelligent undershepherd does. He was throwing pride out the window and leaving himself open to further instruction by the Holy Spirit.

Humility is a mark of a great pastor and shepherd. May the Lord of the Church deliver us from know-it-alls and wiseacres! Luther was humble. This learned doctor was a man of the people. He loved them, fraternised with them, shouted at them, helped them, and prayed for them. His comments on humility in his lectures on Titus give us a clue:

Therefore let a pastor or a bishop think as follows: "Although you occupy a superior place and have been endowed with better gifts, nevertheless the judgments of God are unsearchable (Ro. 11:33). It can happen that He looks down upon someone in a lowly place while you are in a high place, and yet the one in a lowly place pleases God more."¹¹

Theological arrogance has no part in the make-up of a shepherd under Christ. He, like Christ, is to be a humble, loving, caring person.

¹⁰ AE 54:287.

¹¹ AE 29:26.

POINT SIX: CHRISTOCENTRICITY

To be christocentric was a given for Luther. No theology, whether pastoral or academic, was accepted and used by him if it was not christocentric. Christ was the very heart of all theology and practice. Christians today, surprisingly, are not necessarily christocentric; some centre on the millennium, others on the restoration of the nation of Israel, and others on the sovereignty of God. Listen to Luther on the person of Jesus Christ:

Christ, he says, is the Son of God and of the woman. He was born under the Law on account of us sinners, to redeem us who were under the Law. In these words Paul has included both the person and the work of Christ. The person is made up of the divine and the human nature. He indicates this clearly when he says: “God sent forth His Son, born of woman.” Therefore Christ is true God and true Man. Paul describes His work in these words: “Born under the law, to redeem those who were under the Law.”¹²

Can you imagine Luther dealing with a personal problem outside of the person of Christ? No. He was a shepherd under **Christ**. The Lutheran Confessions also touch on this approach to ministry. In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the confessors acknowledge that the article on Christ (article III) stresses their understanding of this crucial doctrine—that Christ is the centre of everything in the faith. From Him radiates all doctrine and practice of the holy faith. Christians view everything from the christocentric point of view. It is a given for the Church’s shepherds.

POINT SEVEN: SERVANTHOOD

Servanthood is not exactly a new concept for the practising Christian—layperson or clergyman. The Bible speaks of servanthood often. Our Lord states it clearly:

Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.¹³

None would dare to claim to serve in this fullness, but one can note that Luther understood his Lord and stepped out on the path of servanthood and the primacy of the other in Christ. He writes:

¹² AE 26:367.

¹³ Mark 10:43-45.

On the contrary, he has commanded that you be humble and serve your neighbor with it. For example, I am a preacher because God has given me the grace to be one, but he has also commanded me not to pride myself on this gift but rather to go down and serve every man that he may be saved, as Paul says in Ro. 15:2,3, "Let each of us please (not himself, but) his neighbor for his good, to edify him. For Christ did not please himself, etc."¹⁴

While humility was mentioned previously, the accent here is on service. Humility does not remain a passive quality; in Christ it acts and moves and lifts up and seeks to serve the other. Luther served.

Servanthood is not only a topic for historical discussion on Luther; it is a basic ingredient of the pastoral ministry in this day and age. Pastors without it should not be pastors. Men who enter the ministry with a hidden agenda of worldly success and high office are traitors to their high calling. Luther, in a sermon on the Gospel for the early Christmas service, writes:

The fourth item is love of one's neighbor and renunciation of self. The shepherds demonstrate this by leaving their sheep and by proceeding, not to the high and mighty lords in Jerusalem, not to the town councilors at Bethlehem, but to the lowly people in the stable. They present themselves to the lowly and are ready and willing to serve and to do what was expected of them.¹⁵

Servanthood tests the credibility of the pastor, the shepherd under Christ. It points to his authenticity and sincerity. This is where the rubber hits the road!

POINT EIGHT: PREACHING IS SHEPHERDING

Luther's total dependence on the Word of God has already been stated. Yet here one is forced to take note of his dependence on the preached, proclaimed Word for pastoral care. In an age that has fallen back more and more on personal counselling, Luther's reliance on preaching for shepherding is refreshing.

One does not wish to imply that pastoral counselling is in some way suspect in the landscape of theology; Scripture gives illustration and encouragement to counsel others. Yet, it is not the cure-all, the major method of ministry. Preaching is a major means for instructing and correcting.

A contemporary homiletician comments on the rejection of preaching in the recent past:

¹⁴ AE 51:348-49.

¹⁵ AE 52:35.

After a generation of walking alone, the object of general ridicule and preoccupied in self-flagellation, preaching is again making new friends among other disciplines and renewing old acquaintances with biblical studies, literary criticism, and communication theory. The consumer posture is being abandoned and the discipline is again a producer.¹⁶

If Craddock is correct, no wonder preaching as pastoral care has suffered from bad press.

This loss of confidence in public preaching as a primary method of shepherding has led to a further movement towards secular models. Today the clinical psychologist and the psychiatrist have become accepted alternates for fellow workers in shepherding God's troubled people. Once again, please do not misunderstand; they are to be used, but not as cure-alls for every disease. The Bible reminds the Church that the proclaimed, preached Word is the effective power of God touching the hearts of God's troubled people and assisting them to sort out their lives and build wholesome personalities under Christ. The Author of the Bible has a word to say on the subject:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. ... Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.¹⁷

This Word of God cannot be limited to preaching only, but the thrust of the passage carries a heavy implication for the public proclamation of the Word. The Gospel works; it is effective. Proper sermons address the condition of mankind and point to God's answers and God's power for change and help.

Luther spoke highly of the art of preaching as he preached his last sermon in Eisleben 1546:

Oh, people say, what is that [God speaking through His Word]? After all, there is preaching every day, often many times every day, so that we soon grow weary of it. What do we get out of it? All right, dear brother, if you don't want God to speak to you every day at home in your house and in your parish church, then be wise and look for something else.¹⁸

And listen to this excerpt from a funeral sermon in 1532:

So much we shall take up for now, in order that I may not overburden myself and you. You know that the greatest divine service is the preaching (of the Word of God), and not only the greatest divine service, but also the best we can have in every situation; but especially on these

¹⁶ Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985) 13.

¹⁷ II Tim. 3:16-17.

¹⁸ AE 51:390.

solemn occasions of sorrow (there is nothing better than we can do than to preach).¹⁹

Preaching is God speaking to the individual, not just the congregation; and it is the greatest divine service the pastor can offer God's people. Luther regarded the sermon as crucial to the worship of the Church and for guiding the individual person in his/her daily life. And now one more word from the Catechism of Luther:

Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy. *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.²⁰

As a shepherd under Christ, Luther preached the Word to the hearts of the people and to the problems they faced. It is not that Luther refused to counsel one-on-one, but he regarded preaching as vital to the life of the Church.

POINT NINE: MINISTRY AND MARRIAGE

Luther did not write a whole book on the necessity of marriage to the ministry, but the point is that he was always finding analogies and comparisons in his family life with that in his ministry. Luther as husband and father also gives a valuable insight into serving as one of God's called and ordained servants of the Word.

After a year of marriage he wrote to a friend, "My Katie is in all things so obliging and pleasing to me that I would not exchange my poverty for the riches of Croesus." Of all the tributes he could have paid her, the highest was when he designated Paul's ultra-evangelical epistle to the Galatians as "my Katherine von Bora", that is, my "Schatz", "my treasure".

Busy as he was, Luther took time with his children (six of his own and eight orphaned nieces and nephews). He recognised great truths reflected in the most trivial occurrences. For example, one day when the baby had befouled Luther's lap, Luther not at all disconcerted, noted that this behaviour illustrated how most people treated their heavenly Father, repaying Him for His gracious care with the filth of their sin and ingratitude.

This final insight of Luther on ministry and marriage is made simply to point out that Luther was no shepherd removed from real life. He and his ministry were shaped by the crucible of daily life—carp from the fish pond, Hans's new tooth, a vase he intended for a wedding gift but deliberately

¹⁹ AE 51:232.

²⁰ SC I:5-6.

hidden by Katie, as well as treatises on theological subjects. It made for a thoroughly believable, warm, and exciting shepherd under Christ.

So, that's it; nine aspects of the pastoral ministry of Luther. These are not the only insights but they are the primary ones when you consider Luther, a shepherd under Christ.

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CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE WITH THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS: IS IT POSSIBLE?

Edward G. Kettner

Interreligious dialogue is big news these days. Our pluralistic society is fascinated with the possibility (dare we say, even the hope?) that the religions of the world, by meeting together and discussing the concerns of the world from a common religious basis, may find a common ground on which they all can stand over against the materialism of the world at large. From 28 August to 5 September 1993 the second Parliament of World Religions was held in Chicago for this purpose, held then and there to mark the centennial of the first such Parliament, which was held in 1893 in conjunction with the Chicago World's Fair. That first Parliament marked the beginning of overt Christian efforts to come to terms with the world's religions. Since that time, Christians have recognised that they have to face the fact that the majority of humanity is unwilling or unable to call itself by the name of Christ, and, through dialogue in some form or another, and through the formation of a theology of the religions, have sought to come to terms with the religions of the world.

Ever since that time, the question of the nature of Christian dialogue with the world's religions has been an item of prime importance. The very term "dialogue" carries with it implications that both sides have something to say, and that each side can learn from the other. In the face of the exclusivist claims that Christianity has maintained from the very beginning, starting with the apostles' assertion that "There is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 NRSV), dialogue on the face of it seems impossible. After all, Christ did not commission His Church to "go and dialogue with all nations". Thus, if dialogue is deemed to be necessary, a number of sticky issues need to be dealt with in order to determine the form which that dialogue should take.

As theologians have come to see (or at least debate) the necessity of dialogue, they have had to deal with questions concerning the nature of the Gospel, the nature of Scripture's exclusivist claims, the nature of justification, the relationship of religion to culture, and the implications of the pluralistic mind set of current Western culture. Lutherans throughout the world have taken part in the struggle with these issues. The Lutheran World Federation conducted a working seminar on the subject in October/November 1986 and published the papers in LWF Report 23/24 in 1988. The Lutheran Church of Australia has shown itself keenly aware of the question, and has contributed to the discussion of the nature of pluralism as it relates to the proclamation of the Gospel through both the work of its

own theologians and articles in the *Lutheran Theological Journal*,¹ and contributed to the discussions of the International Lutheran Conference in Seoul in September 1989. In July 1990 three papers from that convocation were published in the *Concordia Journal*.²

The influx of large numbers of people from Asia to Canada and to Australia has particularly brought the question of dialogue into focus for the Lutheran Churches in those countries. Now, not only are missionaries being sent to countries where Christianity has had little, if any, foothold; now those who do not call themselves by the name of Christ and have never even considered the possibility of doing so are coming to nations which, if not Christian in fact, at least have had their roots in a culture which has its source in the Christian world view. Now, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and Buddhists exist in large communities in the major cities of Canada, and the question of the means, and even the desirability, of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to these immigrants is no longer left to the missionaries and the theologians, but is something now impressed upon the minds of every Christian, as the "mission field" moves to our own doorsteps. As one gets to know advocates of other religions as individuals and hears their articulate expressions of faith, they cease to be seen as the "heathen hordes", a faceless mass of people waiting to be "enlightened".

Indeed, neither the reality nor the importance of pluralism in contemporary culture can be ignored. John Strelan has noted Paul Rajashekar's comment that any response we make to pluralism must be made from within, and not to, the context of pluralism.³ The question, then, is whether this means that any discussion of the relationship between Christianity and the religions must modify or abandon Christian claims to exclusivity.

For some, the reality of pluralism necessitates a movement from acceptance of the right of other religions to exist in our society to acceptance of other religions as valid in the eyes of the Church and indeed in the eyes of God. The call has thus gone out to re-evaluate the exclusivist claims of Christianity and to ask instead if perhaps God is working through other religions. It is incumbent upon us to examine the challenges set forth to the

¹ John G. Strelan, "The Age of Pluralism", *Concordia Journal* 16 (July 1990): 206-16; John G. Strelan, "Faces of Pluralism", *Lutheran Theological Journal* 25 (May 1991): 26-37; Carl E. Braaten, "God and the Gospel: Pluralism and Apostasy in American Theology", *Lutheran Theological Journal* 25 (May 1991): 38-50.

² Strelan, "The Age of Pluralism"; Jonathan F. Grothe, "Confessing Christ in a Pluralistic Age", *Concordia Journal* 16 (July 1990): 217-230; Won Yong Ji, "Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Principle and Practice", *Concordia Journal* 16 (July 1990): 231-44.

³ J. Paul Rajashekar, "The Challenge of Religious Pluralism to Christian Theological Reflection", in *Religious Pluralism and Lutheran Theology*, ed. J. Paul Rajashekar, LWF Report 23/24 (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1988) 21; qtd Strelan 35.

claims of exclusivism and to see if those challenges compel us to change our attitude toward the religions.

Even though the question of Christianity's relationship to the world's religions has to be answered in the face of the pluralistic orientation of modern culture, the root of the question lies not so much with attempts to deal with pluralism, but rather with the result of the exclusivist claims of Christ, namely the condemnation of the vast majority of humanity. In other words, it is compassion for the whole of humanity which leads many theologians to question whether explicit faith in Jesus Christ is necessary to achieve what, in Christian parlance, is termed "salvation". John Hick notes this problem as he declares:

The Christian faith is held today, as in the past, only by a minority of the human race; and it looks as though this minority may well be smaller rather than larger in the future. This thought casts a massive shadow over any assumption that it is God's will that all mankind shall be converted to the Christian faith.⁴

For Hick, the sheer number of those who refuse to be called by the name of Christ is itself an empirical indication that God never intended the whole world to come to know Jesus Christ as Saviour. Thus for him it also becomes an empirical indication that the Christian faith as traditionally proclaimed, namely that Jesus Christ is God the Son made flesh whose work is an atoning sacrifice for sin, must be rejected. Such a teaching, rather than being God-given, is instead to be understood as "myth" used to explain the experience of Jesus held by the early Church. He explains the phenomenon in terms of Feuerbach's theory that human ideas of God stem from the projection of human ideals.⁵ He sees the Christian idea of Incarnation stemming from the disciples' experience of reconciliation in Christ being informed by the Hebrew dictum that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness, leading in turn to an idea of His death as atonement, the extent of which demands His divinity.⁶

Hick's understanding of the doctrine of the Incarnation indicates a belief that the theological task must begin "from below", that is, with human experience, rather than from above, that is, with God's action in human history. Experience thus becomes the means by which God is conceived and understood, rather than that which is to be interpreted in light of God's revelation. Hick's understanding of theology necessitates, in his words, a "Copernican revolution" in our understanding of the world's religions,

⁴ John Hick, "Whatever Path Men Choose is Mine", in *Christianity and Other Religions*, ed. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 172.

⁵ John Hick, "Jesus and the World's Religions", in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. John Hick (London: SCM Press) 168.

⁶ Hick, "Jesus and the World's Religions" 176.

replacing the “theologically Ptolemaic” understanding that there is no salvation outside of Christ with an understanding which sees God at the centre of the universe of religions and all of the religions of the world revolving around Him.⁷ Thus, though he declares God to be the source of all of the religions, and sees each of the world’s religions serving as a means of revelation and point of contact with a different stream of human life,⁸ in fact his view relativises all of the religions of the world. Absolute truth resides in God alone, and cannot be fully communicated to humanity. The best that God can do is to contact the different “streams” of human life in a way that is understandable to each stream. Revelation thereby comes into focus through the lenses of the various cultures of the world and is interpreted by one’s cultural experience. Thus the various religions of the world have come into being because the various cultures have interpreted God’s general revelation in terms of their own experience. Since our own cultural experience now includes an acknowledgement of religious pluralism, our interpretation of God’s revelation must reflect that experience. Hence, the “Copernican revolution” becomes a necessary corollary to our modern culture’s experience of the benefits of religious pluralism. Even the similarities in the phenomenology of the worship of the various religions of the world show this to be true. Thus, Hick declares this to be the only acceptable option:

That there is but one God, who is maker and lord of all; that in his infinite fullness and richness of being he exceeds all our human attempts to grasp him in thought; and that the devout in the various great world religions are in fact worshipping that one God, but through different, overlapping concepts or mental images of him.⁹

With his totally relativistic understanding of the nature of religion, Hick rejects any attempt at dialogue with other religions which in any way whatsoever implies that Christianity completes or surpasses the other religions of the world. All religions must be placed on equal footing, and dialogue becomes an exercise in comparative religion, as the religions compare their “myths” and seek to learn from the “myths” of other religions and cultures.

There is no question but that Hick’s methodology and hermeneutic are incompatible with a Confessional Lutheran understanding of revelation and of the Incarnation itself. In fact, it must be questioned as to whether Hick’s presuppositions can be even remotely be considered Christian at all. Michael Green points out that such an understanding has more in common with

⁷ Hick, ““Whatever Path ...”” 181-82.

⁸ Hick, ““Whatever Path ...”” 182.

⁹ Hick, “Jesus and the World’s Religions” 177-78.

Hinduism than with Christianity, since it departs from salvation by the Incarnate God and instead embraces salvation by ideas. He notes:

For the Hindu, history is unimportant: the idea is everything. ... And once we lose sight of the particularity of Jesus and salvation through God become man in him, then our faith becomes just one more stream emptying itself in the sea of Hinduism. What survives may make Christian-sounding noises, but it will no longer be Christianity. The nerve of faith, God made manifest in the flesh, will have been cut.¹⁰

Virtually all other attempts to relativise Christianity make the same assumptions that Hick does. Whether it be the idea that all religions are “exoteric manifestations” of a common “esoteric heart”, as Frithjof Schuon declares,¹¹ Gordon Kaufmann’s understanding of religion as historically conditioned world view which must in all cases be purged of “self-idolatry”,¹² or any other, the *Deus absconditus* is placed at the centre of religious truth and all of the religions of the world become mere human attempts to fathom that God and His (Her/Its) relation to the world, the result of which can only be categorised as “myth”. It further serves as an insult to those who hold certain “myths” to be true, for it assumes that only members of an intellectual elite are capable of finding the true essence of religion, while the rest of humanity are able only to come to terms with the outward manifestations.

Aside from the methodological problems inherent in Hick’s views, there is also a problem with the evidence that he cites to support his view, namely that it is the cultural lens that brought the doctrine of the Incarnation into focus, making the Incarnation a myth rather than a historical reality. Against such an understanding, Oskar Skarsaune¹³ has shown in great detail that the doctrine of the Incarnation could not have arisen either in the culture of first-century Palestine or in the culture of Hellenism. The fact that Christianity has also gained adherents from diverse cultures throughout the world, while at the same time continuing to hold to the doctrines as explicated in the Hebraic and Hellenistic cultures of the first three centuries A.D., must lead one to question whether Christianity is as culture-bound as Hick makes it out to be. Far from being bound by a particular culture, the Gospel has shown that it transcends culture, since it addresses substantive issues of

¹⁰ Michael Green, “Jesus and Historical Scepticism”, in *The Truth of God Incarnate*, ed. Michael Green (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977) 115.

¹¹ Qtd in Langdon Gilkey, “Plurality and Its Theological Implications”, in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987) 43.

¹² Gordon D. Kaufmann, “Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology”, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* 5.

¹³ Oskar Skarsaune, *Incarnation: Myth or Fact?*, trans. Trygve R. Skarsten (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991).

human nature such as sin, guilt, and shame, realities which transcend the “accidents” of individual cultures.

Yet, even as we recognise that the Gospel is trans-cultural (yea, even supra-cultural), it must be asked whether the language used to express it is itself culture-bound. There are those even within the Lutheran tradition who see it important to take seriously the correlation between religion and culture, while at the same time refusing to deny the reality of the Incarnation. Paul Varo Martinson, for example, notes that religion is more than bare event, for an event must be interpreted for it to have meaning. He thus understands religion to be “a secondary construal of an event or concatenation of events, a construal that is public, having a cultural form ...”.¹⁴ He goes on to note, “Religion is not something that arises *de novo* with every new experience but, like a language or cultural system, it enables experience to be ordered and to appropriate events in a meaningful, if not always lucidly intellectual, way.”¹⁵

For Martinson, a Christianity that is “particularist” in orientation (such as one drawn from the Protestant Scripture principle) falls short of recognising this, because it draws the whole of its content from its particular form and gives that form an impenetrable surface in order to keep it free of violation or contamination, thus making dialogue impossible. “Like a billiard ball it has a hard surface, and it encounters other claims much like other billiard balls.”¹⁶ However, he also sees the “historicist” view of Ernst Troeltsch as deficient because it sought and failed to prove the truth of Christianity solely on the basis of empirical content, and ended up relativising it because of the logic of the historical-cultural context.¹⁷ The result is that the context is absolutised to the extent that the form is emptied of its content.¹⁸ The “ontological” (“experience-expression”) view of Hick is also deemed deficient, for the cultural or concrete aspects of religion are seen only as distortions of the one truth.¹⁹ In the face of all three extremes, Martinson desires to formulate a model for dialogue which takes all three aspects—form, content, and context—seriously. However, in doing so, he notes that the way we speak of Jesus in these dialogues must be governed by a set of regulative principles. He borrows three of these from George Lindbeck: the monotheistic principle, that there is only one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus; the principle of historic specificity, that the stories of Jesus refer to a specific man, who was born, lived, and died in

¹⁴ Paul Varo Martinson, “Speaking the Truth: Contemporary Approaches to Religious Pluralism”, *Religious Pluralism* 42.

¹⁵ Martinson 42.

¹⁶ Martinson 46.

¹⁷ Martinson 47.

¹⁸ Martinson 51.

¹⁹ Martinson 50-51.

a specific time and place; and the principle of “Christological maximalism”, which demands that every possible importance is ascribed to Jesus that is not inconsistent with the first two principles,²⁰ to which Martinson adds a fourth, needed specifically in the context of Judaic and Islamic anti-incarnational bias: that the divine/human boundary was permeable from the Godward side.²¹ In terms of dialogue, this has much to commend it, yet at the same time it needs to be asked if the content of the doctrine of Scripture can be preserved without at the same time recognising the form as itself normative. The question must remain, on what basis are other doctrinal formulations to be considered culturally bound, and only these “regulative”? If Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic model is valid, can any religious content whatsoever be considered “non-negotiable”?

Yet there are some within Lutheran circles that believe that even Martinson’s understanding goes too far in denigrating the other religions and so rendering dialogue unfruitful, if not impossible. Theodore Ludwig, for example, notes several ways in which theologians have tried to retain the supremacy of Christ while allowing the possibility of salvation of those who do not have explicit faith in Christ, and finds them all deficient, whether it be the modern Roman Catholic view that sees Christ as the final revelation from God which fulfils all of the world’s religions, or the World Council of Churches’ understanding of Jesus as the “Criterion of all Revelation”.²² For Ludwig, the proper model for dialogue is that of “Pilgrims on the Way”. Such a view, he says,

would hold to the claim of the universality of Christ and continue Christian mission toward others of humankind; but it would acknowledge the integrity and the God-given role of the other religions. Its metaphor would be that of pilgrims moving on a search for knowledge and understanding and transformation, with the final Mystery still ahead, still not fully possessed.²³

But even recognising the above demands an acceptance of the “scandal of particularity”, which is nothing other than the scandal of the cross. If Christ is “universal” He must in some way also be “final”, unless one denies that Christ is “particularised” in the person of Jesus. Even some Lutherans suggest that we must not overly bind the “Christ” to “Jesus”. For example, Hiromasa Mase declares that we confess “Jesus” as “the Christ”, but denies that the significance of the Logos is confined to the “Christ-event”. He

²⁰ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984) 94; qtd Martinson 60-61.

²¹ Martinson 61-62.

²² Theodore M. Ludwig, “Does God Have Many Names? Theology and the Religions”, *Cresset* 47. 8 (September 1984): 6-8.

²³ Ludwig, “Does God Have Many Names?” 11.

would have us move from a “Logos Christology” to a “Logos Theocentricity”.²⁴ In fact, Ludwig himself declares that Christians need to do more than recognise the existence of other religions and to change our views of them. He sees that one of the things dialogue will do, and indeed must do, is cause us to reshape our theology.²⁵ Indeed, he insists that there must be a readiness and ability to experience and understand the other person's religion from within, without reading it through the lenses of one's own religion.²⁶ Such a process assumes that God is active in the religions through both law and Gospel:

The Christocentrism of the gospel cannot mean that Christ's work is restricted to Jesus in the flesh, however central that is. Christ is the medium of creation, not just at the beginning but also now. And he is fulfilling the law, now, also for peoples of other religions. This is the whole Christ, who is never separated from the cross. This means we should expect to find the love of God in Christ in the other religions.²⁷

The scandal of the cross demands belief that God has acted once and for all in a particular place and time by becoming incarnate as a particular individual, and thus cannot escape the problem presented by the world's religions. In the face of the Scriptures' declaration that “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (II Cor. 5:19 NRSV), that is, that the whole world has been objectively justified before God because Christ (that is, the Logos who has become incarnate once and only once in the person of the man Jesus of Nazareth) has died for all, the lostness of the vast majority of the human race becomes a problem even for the theologian who accepts the Scriptures as the sole source and norm of Christian teaching. How can the God of the Bible, the God who wills that no one perish (II Peter 3:9), make explicit faith in Christ the sole criterion for salvation, and thus condemn to eternal destruction the majority of those for whom Christ died?

Attempts are being made to deal with this problem by eliminating the absolute necessity for explicit faith in Christ as necessary for salvation. This is common in neo-evangelical circles, as witnessed in these words of Michael Green:

It is one thing to claim that all salvation is through Christ, and Christians do say this, even if Professor Hick denies it. It is quite another to claim that nobody finds life with God unless they pass through the doorway of explicit Christian faith. ... The Christian Church has never maintained

²⁴ Hiromasa Mase, “Speaking the Truth: Contemporary Approaches to Religious Pluralism”, *Religious Pluralism* 76-77.

²⁵ Theodore Ludwig, “Some Lutheran Theological Reflections on Religious Pluralism”, *Religious Pluralism* 130.

²⁶ Ludwig, “Some Lutheran Theological Reflections” 147.

²⁷ Ludwig, “Some Lutheran Theological Reflections” 153.

that overt knowledge of the person and work of Jesus was essential for salvation.²⁸

Lutherans have been reluctant to accept the neo-evangelical argument that those who have never heard of Christ will be saved by their following the “light” which God has given them. Besides violating St. Paul’s dictum, “faith comes from what is heard” (Rom. 10:17 NRSV), such a salvation would depend on obedience, and hence be one of merit rather than grace. The challenge that Lutherans are setting before us is to recognise the possibility that grace is available and is taught in the world’s religions. Ludwig declares:

We have discovered that the religions do provide meaning and value to their adherents, that they serve as contexts of wholeness and cultural creativity, and that they are sources of humanization and reconciliation. Moreover, a careful and sensitive look inside these religions raises grave questions about the theological judgment that they are based totally on self-salvation by works.²⁹

The insistence that all religions but Christianity teach salvation by works is also challenged by William Danker, who sees divine monergism present in other religions, particularly Pure Land Buddhism, and even Hinduism.³⁰ Yet, even if it cannot be denied that the **idea** that salvation is God’s act apart from human merit may be present outside of Christianity, can this be called “grace”? Even if we allow the term to be used, we must also note that the mere idea of grace does not save. There is no grace except the favour of God for the sake of Christ. Apart from that actual grace which God brings to us in Jesus Christ, the “idea” is a mere hypothesis based upon a recognition of one’s own sinfulness that has been brought about by the law, a “hope against hope” in the face of despair. Over against this idea, the particularity of Christianity must again be proclaimed, to declare that it is in Christ and Christ alone that God’s grace is not only shown in human history, but has in fact been won for us.

Carl Braaten has boldly declared that Christianity has no choice but to continue to assert the exclusive nature of the Gospel. At the same time, he declares that, while Christ is the final revelation of God, He is not the only revelation. The fact that under the first article we can and must recognise that God reveals Himself provides hope that God saves through them as well, yet only on the basis of the justification won in Christ. He states:

The New Testament nowhere makes the claim that Christ is the one and

²⁸ Green 118.

²⁹ Ludwig, “Some Lutheran Theological Reflections” 134.

³⁰ William Danker, “Who Wrote the Pivotal Quotation in Francis Pieper’s *Christian Dogmatics*?” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 4.4 (August 1977): 238.

only revelation of God in history and to humanity. The presupposition of the gospel message is that God has already spoken his Word, that people already encounter God and know him in some way apart from the biblical witness.³¹

For Braaten, this is not just a vague “natural theology”, but is an active revelation of God through creation and human experience. In seeking to prove his point, Braaten cites Romans 1:18-32, and Romans 2 and 7 to show that God uses this revelation to prepare the way for Christ. Yet at the same time it must be noted that the context in which Paul points to this revelation is always that of the wrath of God. Such knowledge serves not to save but to render them without excuse. In the face of Paul’s rhetorical question in Rom. 10:14, “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” (NRSV), any attempt to find a salvific place for the world’s religions is doomed to failure. In fact, even to debate the possibility must be deemed an attempt to delve into the *Deus absconditus*, as the only answer the Scriptures give to the question of the salvation of those who have never heard is to make sure that they do hear.

What implications does all of this have for dialogue with the other religions of the world? Even if any answer we give to the problem of the religions must come from within the context of pluralism (and there is no question but that it must), that pluralism cannot demand a particular response from us. Though it can demand that all ideas be heard, it cannot itself judge the truth of those ideas, nor can it claim that none have the right to assert superiority over another. Indeed, the Gospel must be proclaimed in the face of any attempt to relativise it.

What a recognition of pluralism can do is drive away any triumphalistic attitude on our part. Dialogue can be possible because we speak under the shadow of the cross, as sinners to sinners. We are not to go into dialogue as the “saved enlightening the heathen”. We speak as people for whom Christ died with other people for whom Christ died, the difference being that we (through no merit of our own) know it. Dialogue means listening to those of other religions as well as speaking to them. Since they have the law written on their hearts through God’s general revelation, they may be means by which God continues to speak the law to us and to call us to account for our pride and for our unloving acts in the world, including in areas of personal and social ethics.³² We can hear how they in their own experience and their own setting deal with the ultimate questions. Finally in dialogue we can

³¹ Carl E. Braaten, *No Other Gospel! Christianity among the World’s Religions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 69.

³² Cf. Ludwig, “Some Lutheran Theological Reflections” 136-37.

speak, not in presenting rational arguments as to why Christianity is superior to the religions, but in declaring the reason for the hope that is in us by declaring our faith in the one who was, who is, and who is to come. In dialogue we must declare why we consider the wrath of God to be a reality, but also what God has done to turn aside His wrath. While the purpose of formal dialogue is not to convert the one with whom we are in dialogue, in the context of that dialogue the Word will be proclaimed, and the Holy Spirit will be at work.

Can common statements come out of such dialogue? The propensity for attempting to come up with common statements arises out of the desire to show that something productive has come out of the dialogue. Yet all too often those statements dance around the real differences that exist and end up not saying anything, and the differences that exist here are far greater than those that exist between differing communions within the pale of Christianity—witness the problem of trying come up with a joint statement in the area of ethics at the recent Parliament of World Religions, when some of those present had problems even with the use of the name “God”. Any common statement that comes out of such dialogue must not die the death of a thousand qualifications, and from the Christian perspective cannot give any doubt to the finality and exclusivity of Christ, the Christ specifically incarnate in Jesus.

Will dialogue change our theology? The context in which it is expressed will change, and therefore the form of expression may change in that it will address new situations. The content, however, dare not change, for the content is not of human origin, nor is it culturally conditioned. The content must remain the same whether those who profess it speak from within pluralism or outside of it, because the content has been revealed by the One who came into this world to redeem it.

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SHARING IN GOD'S HOLINESS

John W. Kleinig

We come upon a rather amazing claim in Hebrews 12:10. There the writer of the epistle says that we Christians are to share in God's holiness. Indeed, he claims that our heavenly Father, who has made us His children, instructs us by various means so that we become even better fitted to share in His holiness. That's the point of His dealings with us.

But I fear that such talk of holiness tends to fall on rather deaf ears even in Lutheran circles for a number of reasons. First, we are traditionally accustomed to equate holiness with morality. Sanctification is then regarded as nothing more than the life of moral renewal and good works which follows on justification. Secondly, we have been told, and some of us have even been convinced, that Jesus got rid of the primitive, half-pagan distinction between the sacred and the profane. After all, didn't Jesus, and Paul after Him, maintain that everything which God has created was good, and therefore holy? Thirdly, much modern scholarship tends to regard those parts of the Old Testament which are dominated by the language of holiness, like the "priestly" sections of the Pentateuch and the book of Ezekiel, as corrected by the prophets and superseded by our Lord. Fourthly, we are uneasy about too keen an interest in holiness, for we tend to associate it largely with Catholic sacramentalism, Calvinist rigourism, Methodist revivalism, and Pentecostal enthusiasm. Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, we have been so indoctrinated by the cultural secularism of our desecralised society that we have lost a sense for what is holy. Whatever the reason, the language of holiness is as lost on us as a foreign tongue. Many of us have become quite unfamiliar with the grammar of holiness.

This loss of a sense for holiness has, I believe, created some problems for us in the Lutheran Church. Most obviously, many of our people see little reason for them to attend worship. If they do attend, our pattern of worship makes little or no sense to them. They don't appreciate the architecture of our churches with the central aisle up to the altar, the traditional division into sanctuary and nave, the central location of the altar, and the impersonal, extrinsic focus. What's more, they can't see why we make so much fuss about Baptism and why we begin our common worship with corporate confession and absolution. They don't see why we insist on the practice of close[d] communion. Above all, they have problems with our order of service which go far beyond its formalities, its rather archaic language, and its old-fashioned music. They have problems, because worship has to do with the mystery and reality of God's holiness.

The celebration of the liturgy is meant to teach us of God's holiness, initiate us into His holiness, and advance us in His holiness. Have you ever noticed how frequently the order of service for communion mentions holiness? We begin by invoking "the Holy Spirit". At the climax of the Great Gloria we confess that our Lord Jesus is "only ... holy". We profess our faith in the "holy Christian ... Church" or else in "the communion of saints". Many pastors introduce their sermon by asking the Lord to "sanctify" His people by the truth of His Word. Then, as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we not only praise God as our "holy Father", but we also join with the angels in adoring our thrice holy Lord. Just before we receive the Sacrament we pray for the "hallowing" of our Father's name in the Lord's Prayer. All this makes scant sense to those who do not know the grammar of holiness. Whoever loses that can hardly appreciate the mystery of worship, for worship has to do with God's holiness.

As a grateful tribute to Dr Ed Lehman for his kindness to me and interest in the Lutheran Church of Australia I would like to sketch out rather briefly and inadequately the grammar of holiness.¹ I don't intend to deal with the matter historically, confessionally, or systematically. I restrict myself to what the Scriptures have to say about it.² My basic thesis is that through the public worship of the Church we come to share in God's holiness, and we do so already in this life.³

¹ The first draft of this paper was presented to the General Pastors' Conference of the Lutheran Church of Australia held in Melbourne, 1984.

² There have been surprisingly few general treatments of holiness by modern Biblical scholars. Two may be singled out for special mention. J. G. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) examines the understanding of holiness in the various parts of the Old Testament. Despite many useful observations it is rather piecemeal and suffers from lack of consideration of God's holiness as a power in connection with what is clean and in contrast to what is common and unclean. The most helpful study on holiness by a New Testament scholar has been written by D. Peterson, *Possessed by God: New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995). He analyses the connection between the gift of positional holiness by faith in Christ and the demand for purity in holy living. While it is good on the gift of holiness, it fails to do justice to the liturgical and sacramental means of sanctification.

³ Modern scholars have often had difficulty in understanding the references to holiness in the Scriptures because they have taken it as a moral rather than a cultic term. The two scholars who have clearly articulated the connection between holiness and worship are H. Ringgren, *The Prophetic Conception of Holiness*, UUA 12 (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1948) 3-30, and O. Procksch, "hagios", *TDNT* (1964) I:88-97, 100-115.

1. THE NATURE OF HOLINESS

A. *The Source of Holiness*

The pagan nations which surrounded Israel believed that there were many sources of holiness, because there were many gods and semi-divine beings. Each gave access to some part of the supernatural world and to some portion of its power. But all this was repudiated by the Israelites. In fact, they were commanded to desecrate and defile much of what their neighbours held holy (Ex. 23:24; 34:13). They believed that the Lord, their God, alone was holy (I Sam 2:2). He Himself had demonstrated His exclusive holiness in His victory over the gods of Egypt (Ex. 15:11) and had told them repeatedly that He was holy (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7,26; 21:8). His name and therefore His being was holy (Is. 57:15). He was the Holy One (Ps. 99:3,5; Is. 10:17; Hos. 11:9), their holy God (Ps. 99:9; Josh. 24:19; I Sam. 6:20), the Holy One of Israel (Ps. 71:22; 78:41; 89:19). He was adored by the heavenly hosts in His heavenly temple as thrice holy, the superlatively holy King of the universe (Is. 6:3).

The Lord alone was inherently and permanently holy. His holiness was in a sense the essence of His being. It was inseparable from Him and His presence. It followed then that all other holiness derived from Him, and was available only by way of contact with Him, like electricity from a battery. People and things borrowed their holiness from their association with God. Their holiness was therefore an acquired condition, an extrinsic power, which could and would be lost the moment contact with Him was lost.

It is only against the background of God's claim to be the only source of holiness that we can appreciate the claim of the risen Lord in Revelation 3:7 to be the Holy One. He is, as Peter recognises, the Holy One of God (Jn 6:69; cf. Mk 1:24). Not only has God the Father consecrated Him as the messianic priest and king (Jn 10:36), but He has ordained that we are saints only in Him (Phil. 1:1; 4:21; Eph. 1:4). We therefore rightly confess in the Gloria that He only is holy, for we have no holiness apart from Him (I Cor. 1:30).

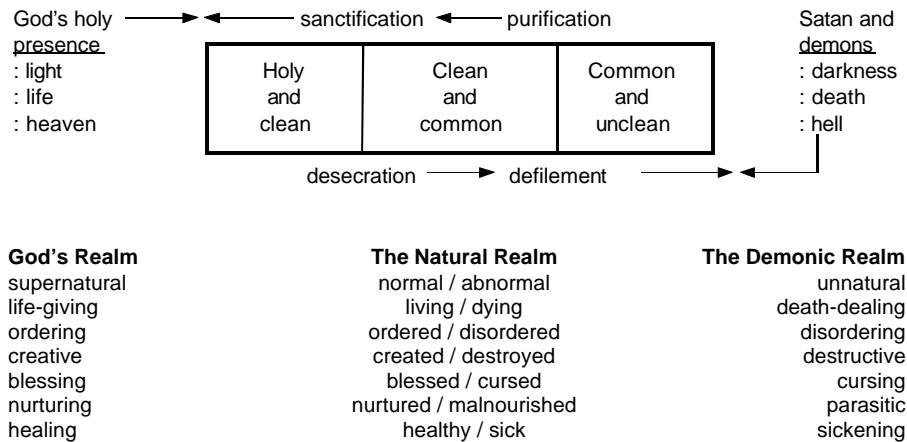
B. *The Language of Holiness*

Many attempts have been made to explain the notion of holiness linguistically, historically, phenomenologically and sociologically. The most famous attempt to explain the concept of holiness was undertaken by R Otto in *The Idea of the Holy*.⁴ He defined it as "the totally other" which strikes us as "a fearful and yet wonderful mystery". But there is something rather odd

⁴ R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: University Press, 1923).

about such a definition of holiness, for, if God is the only source of holiness, then the nature of His holiness is beyond our ken and known only to Him.

It is much better to start with God's own definition of His holiness as was spelt out quite concretely by the architecture and arrangement of the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament. In Lev. 10:10 God speaks of His holiness in connection with what is clean and in contrast with what is common and unclean.⁵ His holiness creates three interlocking spheres and composite states of being which may be represented diagrammatically thus.



The state of holiness was an environment created by God's presence in the tabernacle or the temple. It was, as it were, a divine bridgehead in the profane world, the place where heaven and earth overlapped. Its opposite pole was the state of impurity which was utterly incompatible with holiness, like light with darkness. In fact, holiness annihilated impurity, like fire which burns up petrol. Everything natural and normal therefore had to be cleansed of impurity, before it could come into contact with God and so

⁵ G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979) 18-25, gives the best and simplest explanations of these correlative terms. His work provides the conceptual framework for this essay. His thinking on holiness was stimulated by Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London & Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966). Her brilliant monograph on the power of pollution and the function of purity in Leviticus has revived interest in the theology of this much neglected book, even though she interprets it sociologically. This leads her to equate holiness with purity and to define it as wholeness. Three studies which have been spawned by her work can be singled out for special attention: B. J. Malina, *The New Testament World. Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (London: SCM, 1983) 122-52; J. H. Neyrey, "The Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel", *Semeia* 35 (1986): 91-128; and P. P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness. A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, JSOT Sup 106 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

share in His holiness, just as water must be clean before the light of the sun can shine into it.

The human world lay suspended between these two poles and within the magnetic field of either power. Everything natural and normal in it was common. Anything common could be either clean and normal, or else unclean and abnormal. Ordinary food could be common and clean, if free from impurity, or else common and unclean, if infected by impurity. If something common became holy, it ceased to be common, since it then belonged to God and existed in His domain. Likewise, if something clean became unclean, it remained common but ceased to be clean. Holiness and impurity were therefore powers which vied for the control of the world and what was in it.

Because nothing that God had created was either inherently holy or unclean, there were various degrees of holiness and impurity. The closer something came to God, the holier it became. Hence the high priest was holier than the ordinary Israelite and the holy of holies than the holy place. The ark, the altar of incense, the lamp stand, the showtable, the main altar, and the laver were most holy, because they were closest to God and most directly associated with Him. The peace offering was less holy than the other sacrifices, because no part of it ever came into the tabernacle or temple. The same applied for impurity. Some kinds of defilement, like acting as a medium (Lev. 20:27) and sacrificing a child to Molech (Lev. 20:2), were so absolute that the death sentence was mandatory for them, whereas others, like contact with corpses and venereal discharges, were temporary and readily rectified.

Since purity was the prerequisite for admission to God's sanctifying presence in worship, the task of the priests was to distinguish between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean (Lev. 10:10; Ezek. 44:23). They were also required to teach the people of Israel about this, for the health of the nation depended on its participation in God's holiness through sacrificial worship.

Our Lord did not abolish all this language and thinking, as some contend. His incarnation did, to be sure, change the locus of holiness from the temple to His body (Jn 2:21) and the focus of defilement from the physical body to the human heart (Heb. 9:13-14). It also extended the range of purification and sanctification from the righteous Israelite to the Israelite sinner and the unclean gentile (see Lk. 15:1-2; Mk 7:1-30; Ac. 10). The blood of Jesus brought about the justification of the ungodly and the cleansing of unclean sinners. Jesus also taught that only those who were pure in heart would see God (Mt. 5:8; cf. Ps. 24:4). He invaded the realm of impurity and cast out the "unclean spirits" from those who were trapped in it. His mission was to destroy them, and they were the first to recognise that (Mk 1:21-27). He washed and cleansed His disciples so that He could

sanctify them (Jn 13:8-11; 15:3; 17:17,19). He was, then, as much priest as He was king.

The language of holiness is therefore the language of worship, for holiness has to do with God's presence, and access to that presence is given in worship. Where God is present, there holiness is to be found; where He is worshipped according to His Word, there His presence sanctifies His people and everything connected with their worship. Since God's holiness is connected with the mystery of His being, it cannot ultimately be understood rationally and defined abstractly; it can only be adequately apprehended in adoration and truly expressed in praise by those who share in His holiness and stand in His holy presence (Is. 6:3; Ps. 9:9; Rev. 4:9).

C. The Effect of God's Holiness

The effect of God's holiness is like fire with some kinds of metal. On the one hand, like fire with dross it burns out and purifies that which is contaminated by impurity. On the other hand, like fire it communicates itself and permeates that which is clean. It is both life-giving and death-dealing, creative and destructive, saving and judging. It is therefore either beneficial or detrimental in its effect on human beings.

Contact with God's holiness has a positive effect on those who are clean and so stand in a right relationship with Him. They then share in God's holiness and become holy like God. In the Old Testament both the priests who ministered to Him and the whole worshipping community were holy (Ex. 19:6; 22:31; Lev. 11:45; 19:2, etc.). Likewise everything connected with God's presence in worship was holy, whether it was a time or a place or a thing. We too who belong to Christ are all "saints" with angelic status, as St Paul reminds us repeatedly. We share in His holiness, because we are in Him and stand together with the holy angels in heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22).

Moreover, those who are holy receive all the benefits of their contact with their holy God. The conclusion of the Holiness Code lists some of those blessings in Lev. 26:3-13, such as prosperity, peace, security, fertility, affluence, freedom, and fellowship with God. We who are saints in the new covenant have the Holy Spirit together with all His gifts and graces. As those who are holy in Christ we have "every spiritual blessing" in the heavenly world (Eph. 1:3-4).

But God's holiness can also have a detrimental effect on those who come into wrong contact with His holy things and thereby desecrate His holy name. So contact with God was fraught with peril in the Old Testament, for a person could just as readily incur God's wrath as His grace. The ordinary Israelite could theoretically incur His wrath in one of two ways, by bringing impurity into God's presence and so defiling what was

clean, or else by desecrating something holy which was the worst possible offence against God.

Both the tabernacle and the temple were designed to forestall both these eventualities. The priests were responsible to safeguard God's holiness, while the Levites were liable for the purity of the people who entered the sacred precincts. The priests then bore the guilt for any acts of desecration, while the Levites suffered for any acts of defilement in worship (Num. 18). The ordinary Israelites therefore had little or nothing to fear from their appearance in God's presence, because the priests and Levites represented them and shielded them from the consequences of desecration.

Jesus scandalised the theologians of His day by quite deliberately making contact with unclean people, like the lepers, sinners, and even the corpse of a man. They argued, quite correctly, that He was not only defiling himself but also desecrating God's holiness by His actions. He thereby incurred God's wrath and came under His curse. From this point of view His death was well deserved and even just. They did not know that He did this quite deliberately to bring those who were unclean into the presence of His Father as well as to take upon Himself the inevitable consequence of the subsequent desecration and defilement, just as the priests and Levites did for the people who came to worship at the temple (cf. II Cor. 5:21). Paradoxically, the holy one of God became the cursed one to make the cursed people holy (Gal. 3:13; cf. Jn 7:49).

But this was no revolutionary act of defiance, for it was done in obedience to His heavenly Father. Nor did it mean that Jesus insulated His disciples completely against God's wrath and so eliminated the possibility of desecration, even if He minimised that possibility. He warned His disciples rather strongly against casting what was holy before an unclean person (Mt. 7:6), and vehemently denounced those who had blasphemed the Holy Spirit by accusing Him of demon possession (Mk 3:28-30). What's more, the writer to the Hebrews warned his readers against the dire consequences of desecrating the blood of Christ by spurning Him and so outraging the Holy Spirit (Heb. 10:29). St Paul went as far as to describe both the congregational schism and the practice of consorting with prostitutes in Corinth as acts of desecration, because both the congregation and the human body were temples of the Holy Spirit and consequently holy (II Cor. 3:16f.; 6:18ff.). He even maintained that some members of that church were weak and sick, and others had died, because they had desecrated the body and blood of Christ (I Cor. 11:27-34).

Holiness is then either a beneficial or a detrimental power. In a meditation on the call of Moses, Andrew Murray sums up its ambivalence rather aptly:

In the burning bush God makes Himself known as dwelling in the midst of the fire. ... The nature of fire may be either beneficent or destructive.

The sun, the great central fire, may give life and fruitfulness, or may scorch to death. All depends upon occupying the right position, upon the relation in which we stand to it. And so everywhere, when God the Holy One reveals Himself, we shall find the two sides together: God's Holiness as judgement against sin, destroying the sinner who remains in it, and as Mercy freeing His people from it. ... Of the elements of nature there is none of such spiritual and mighty energy as Fire: what it consumes it takes and changes into its own spiritual nature, rejecting as smoke and ashes what cannot be assimilated. And so the Holiness of God is that infinite Perfection by which He keeps Himself free from all that is not Divine, and yet has fellowship with the creature, and takes it up into union with Himself, destroying and casting out all that will not yield itself to Him.⁶

2. PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S HOLINESS

A. *The Call to Holiness*

God Himself is the source of holiness. But He does not keep himself and His holiness to himself; He calls His people to share in His holiness.

The call first came to the people of Israel. He told them: "You shall be holy, as I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). This was both a promise and a command. In it He announced His will for His people. He wished to be their God by dwelling with them and sanctifying them. But He also called them to share in His holiness by obeying Him and living as His people (Lev. 20:7-8). God's purpose for His people did not reach its fulfilment in their constitution as a political entity but in their creation as a worshipping community. Israel was called to be a royal priesthood and holy nation (Ex. 19:6). Her whole existence was to be involved in her worship of God; her mission to the world was tied up with her service of the living God.⁷

The same call has come to us, too, for we also have been called by our heavenly Father to be holy as even He is holy (I Pet. 1:15). We are "called saints" (Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2). God has called us in holiness (I Thess. 4:7) and has chosen us to be holy in Christ (Eph. 1:4). His will for us is our entire sanctification (I Thess. 4:3; 5:23). We therefore have a "holy vocation" (II

⁶ A Murray, *Holy in Christ* (London: James Nisbet, 1888) 38.

⁷ Unlike most modern scholars who maintain that Israel became the people of God by His covenant with them at Mt Sinai, T. E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991) 208-14, rightly argues that the Israelites who already were God's people, were commissioned as God's holy priesthood at Sinai. This covenant therefore established Israel's vocation as a holy nation rather than Israel's existence as God's people.

Tim 1:9) and “holy mission” to the world (Jn 17:17-19). We serve God the Father together with Christ in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:13-14).

When God calls us to holiness, He does not call us to a morally perfect human life or even to the realisation of our full humanity; He calls us to Himself and His own divine life. We are to become as He is; we are to share in His being. Andrew Murray puts it rather well:

Holiness is not something we do or attain; it is the communication of Divine Life, the inbreathing of the Divine Nature, the power of the Divine Presence resting upon us. And our power to become holy is found in the call of God: the Holy One calls us to Himself that He may make us holy in possessing Himself.⁸

B. The Gift of Holiness

Since God alone is holy, human beings can be holy only through Him. Holiness is therefore never a human achievement; it is always a divine gift.

That was already quite plain in the Old Testament. Israel was holy, because God chose to make her holy. He did this out of love for her (Dt. 7:6-8; 14:2). Furthermore, He emphasised again and again that He was the one who sanctified Israel (Ex. 31:13; Lev. 20:8; 21:8,15,23; 22:9,16,32; Ezek. 20:12). He sanctified her by His presence within the tabernacle and the temple (Ex. 29:42-46). Through the prophet Ezekiel He promised that in the age to come He would set His sanctuary as His dwelling place in the midst of His people so that the nations would finally come to know that He sanctified His people (Ex. 37:28).

The New Testament is even more emphatic that holiness is a gift of God to the believer. The writer to the Hebrews maintains that we are to share God's own holiness (Heb. 12:10). The Triune God then communicates His holiness to us. The **Father** is the source of our holiness (Jn 17:17; I Thess. 5:23; cf. Rom. 6:19,22). The **Son** is the embodiment of our holiness. By His priestly ministry He sanctifies us and all His disciples (Jn 17:19; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 2:11; 10:10,29; 13:12). We are sanctified in His name (I Cor. 6:11) and by faith in Him (Ac. 26:18). Christ is our sanctification (I Cor. 1:30). We are sanctified in Him (I Cor 1:2) and are therefore holy in Him (Phil. 1:1; 4:22). The **Holy Spirit** communicates the holiness of Christ to us. He not only unites us with Christ; He also sanctifies us in Christ (I Pet. 1:2). We are therefore sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16; I Cor. 6:11; II Thess. 2:13).

⁸ Murray 14.

C. The Means of Sanctification

Nothing is holy unless God Himself has chosen it and decreed it so by His Word (Dt. 7:6; 14:2; Lev. 20:26; Num. 16:7). The holiness of people and things then depends upon His Word. It declares that certain persons and objects are holy and decides to what extent they are to share in His holiness. It also decrees the means by which those people and things are to be sanctified. The holiness of Israel and her worship depends upon God's commands and His promises (Ex. 19:5-6; Lev. 19:2; 20:8,22,31-32; 22:31-33). In that sense then God's Word sanctified Israel, even if the matter is never stated quite so in the Old Testament.

The people of Israel were sanctified by God for divine service at Mount Sinai. After the people had agreed to God's will to make them His holy priestly people who were to mediate between Him and the peoples of the earth by their involvement in the sacrificial ritual at the tabernacle (Ex. 19:3-8), God consecrated them by sprinkling them with the blood of the sacrifices (Ex. 24:3-8), just as the priests were sprinkled at their consecration (Ex. 29:19-21).⁹ Thereafter they were sanctified and kept holy by God's presence with them at the tabernacle and their meeting with Him at the altar during the performance of the morning and evening burnt offering (Ex. 29:38-46).

God then made and kept His people holy by their participation in the sacrificial service as prescribed by the law of Moses. This occurred in three stages.¹⁰ First, they were cleansed from their impurity by the rite of atonement with the sprinkling of the blood from the sacrifices.¹¹ Secondly, they met with God through the daily burnt offering where He announced His acceptance of them, received their petitions and blessed them. Thirdly, they ate the holy food from their sacrifices in God's presence and so enjoyed the sacred hospitality of the heavenly King.

In all this God gave access to His presence and communicated His holiness through sacred things. Initially the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the priests were consecrated with the holy anointing oil (Ex. 30:22-33; 40:9-11; Lev. 8:10-13). Both the altar for burnt offering and the priests were also sprinkled and smeared with blood for their purification and sanctification (Ex. 29:10-21; Lev. 8:14-24,30). Once that had been accomplished, God's

⁹ See E. W. Nicholson, "The Covenant Ritual in Exodus XXIV 3-8", *Vetus Testamentum* 32 (1982): 74-86, for the interpretation of the sprinkling in Exodus 24:3-8 as a rite for the consecration of Israel as the Lord's holy people rather than as a rite to seal the covenant; cf. Fretheim 258.

¹⁰ See J. W. Kleinig, *The Lord's Song. The Basis, Function and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles*, JSOT Sup 156 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 101-108, 132.

¹¹ For an analysis on the connection between purification and atonement, see N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature. Its Meaning and Function*, JSOT Sup 56 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987).

holy presence established three classes of most holy things. First, there was the inner sanctuary which was called the holy of holies and was out of bounds for all except the high priest on the Day of Atonement. Secondly, there were the most holy pieces of furniture consisting of the mercy seat with the ark, the altar for incense, the lampstand, the table for showbread, the altar for burnt offering, and the laver. God communicated His holiness to the priests by their association and contact with these most holy things. Thirdly, there were the offerings which belonged exclusively to the priests. They were the sacred incense, the showbread, the bread or grain from the cereal offering, the meat from the sin and guilt offerings, and the votive offerings of the people. Through these holy things the priests participated bodily in the holiness of God and had access to His holy presence.

This pattern of sanctification found its fulfilment in Christ. He Himself told His disciples that they were both cleansed and sanctified by the Word of His Father (Jn 15:3; 17:20). As in the Old Testament, cleansing preceded sanctification (Eph. 5:26; cf. I Cor. 6:11; II Cor. 7:1; II Tim. 2:21). But both went much deeper and extended much further. Christ not only cleansed and sanctified the flesh but also the conscience of His disciples (Heb. 9:13-14; cf. Mt. 5:4; Mk 7:14-23; Heb. 10:22). And He did this for all His disciples, so that they were all equally qualified to serve as priests into the heavenly holy of holies (Heb. 10:19-22).

Our sanctification then is accomplished through the sacrifice of Christ (Jn 17:19; Eph. 5:26; Heb. 9:14; 10:14). As in the Old Testament we are sanctified through holy things.¹² These are the Word of God proclaimed in preaching (Jn 17:17), the name of the Triune God invoked in prayer (I Tim. 4:5) and employed with the water of Baptism (Eph. 5:26; cf. I Cor. 6:11), and the Body (Heb. 10:10; cf. 10:20) and the Blood of Christ (Heb. 10:29; 13:12; cf. Jn 1:7) received in the Lord's Supper. The effect of Christ's Blood bears out the uniqueness of our sanctification. In the Old Testament only the priests and the most holy things in the tabernacle were sprinkled externally with the blood of the sacrifices, but through Christ's death we all drink Christ's Blood and so have our hearts sprinkled by it for our inner, total cleansing and sanctification (Heb. 10:22; 12:24; I Pet. 1:2; cf. Heb. 9:13, 19, 21). Our hearts therefore have been sanctified for God's presence and for service in the heavenly sanctuary.¹³

¹² See A. Ludwig, "Communion in Holy Things in the Old Testament", *Logia* 5.1 (1996): 5-14.

¹³ I have analysed Luther's teaching on holiness in the light of the position developed in an essay entitled "Luther on the Christian's Participation in God's Holiness", *Lutheran Theological Journal* 19 (1985): 21-29.

D. The Maintenance of Holiness

Holiness is not achieved by human performance. But this does not mean that God's holiness does not require human obedience. The Old Testament stressed the need for obedience to God's cultic ordinances so that He could sanctify His people through their worship (Lev. 20:7,8) as well as obedience to God's commandments so that they would maintain their God-given holiness (Dt. 7:6-11). The commandments which were associated with Israel's holiness all forbade whatever defiled their purity and profaned their holiness. This comes out most clearly in Dt. 28:9, where we read:

The Lord will establish you as a people holy to Himself, as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and walk in His ways.

God Himself made that quite plain to His people through Moses at Mt Sinai in Ex.19:5-6 where He told them that their ongoing existence as a holy nation depended on their obedience to Him, since they could not be holy apart from Him.

In the same way our holiness and progress in it depend on our obedience to God, for we are holy only through Him. We are therefore urged to avoid sexual immorality as something incompatible with our vocation to holiness (I Thess. 4:3-8). We are told to offer our bodies as holy sacrifices to God (Rom. 12:1) and to yield their members to His righteousness for our sanctification by Him (Rom. 6:19). As holy people we should put on all the qualities of Christ in our dealings with each other (Col. 3:12-15). Our conduct should not be governed by our evil desires but by God's holiness (I Pet. 1:14-15). Above all, we must strive after holiness (Heb. 12:4).

Yet for all that it is remarkable how infrequently imperatives are linked with any mention of holiness in the New Testament. It is as if the writers deliberately exclude the notion that we in some sense make ourselves holy before God by what we do or what we are.

E. The Purpose Of Sanctification

When God calls us to holiness he calls us to Himself. By letting us share in His holiness He gives us access to His very presence and admits us to fellowship with Himself, for only in so far as we are holy may we remain in His presence. His holiness qualifies us for His presence.

We are sanctified so that we can share in the glory of Christ (II Thess. 2:14; cf. Jn 17:22). As saints we share in Christ's sonship with His heavenly Father. We are with Him where He is (Jn 17:24). We are to be as He is (I Jn 3:2). Christ sanctifies us in order to present us holy and spotless, like a radiant bride, both to Himself and His heavenly Father (Eph. 5:27; Col.

1:22). In fact, it is the eternal will of God the Father that we should be holy before Him as His sons in Christ (Eph. 1:4-5).

There are two sides to this. On the one hand, God lets us share in His holiness so that we may serve Him as His royal priesthood (Ex. 19:6; I Pet. 2:5; cf. Rev. 5:10). We therefore have access to His presence and may enter the heavenly sanctuary in our worship to receive help directly from the throne of grace (Eph. 2:18; Heb. 4:16; 10:19-22). We join with the angels and all the redeemed in their heavenly worship and adoration of God (Is. 6; Rev. 4-5). We stand in His holy service and are called to reign with Him on earth (Heb. 9:14; II Tim. 2:21; Rev. 5:10).

On the other hand, Christ sanctifies us so that by faith we may even now participate in the divine life of the Holy Trinity. The end of sanctification is, as Paul declares, eternal life (Rom. 6:22). Jesus tells what this entails in Jn 17:19-26. He sanctifies His disciples so that He can include them in His fellowship with the Father. Because they are in Him and with Him in the presence of the Father, they share in His divine life and in the Father's love for Him; in Him they are united with the Father and each other. They are the "temple" where He dwells and where the world may get to know Him. So by sharing in His holiness they have eternal life and lead heavenly lives on earth. They are withdrawn by Christ from this world, so that they may share with Him in His mission to the world.

The writer to the Hebrews describes the purpose of sanctification most simply. He maintains that without holiness no one will ever see God (12:14). God then gives us His holiness so that we can see Him face to face and enjoy Him forever. Holiness is the prerequisite for the vision of God through life in His presence. Unless we ourselves become holy, we shall not be able to enjoy Him as the heavenly hosts do by adoring him in His holiness and glory. J. C. Ryle explains the need for holiness rather eloquently in his book on holiness:

No man can possibly be happy in a place where he is not in his element, and where all around him is not congenial to his tastes, habits and character. When an eagle is happy in an iron cage, when a sheep is happy in the water, when an owl is happy in the blaze of the noonday sun, when a fish is happy on the dry land—then, and not till then, will I admit that the unsanctified man could be happy in heaven.¹⁴

Ultimately, God the Father shares His holiness with us in His Son here on earth, so that He can give Himself completely to us and all His saints in heaven.

The final goal of God's dealings with His people, according to Isaiah 35, was the establishment of a "holy way", so that His people, cleansed and

¹⁴ J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1984) 23.

redeemed, could finally return to Zion with great rejoicing and there see His glory. There they would be glorified by His glorious presence. Then His name would be sanctified on earth (Ezek. 39:7-8), the common world would be absorbed into His holy domain (Zech. 14:20-21), and God's glory would fill the whole earth (Num. 14:21; cf. Is. 6:3). Christ is that holy way. His work of sanctification will be complete when new Jerusalem comes down from God to fill His new heaven and earth (Rev. 21-22). Then what was foreshadowed in Genesis 2:1-3 will finally come to pass, for the purpose of creation does not lie in creation itself and in the care of it by humans but in their worship of God and the incorporation of it in the divine domain. Then God will be all in all, and everything will be holy through Jesus Christ.

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THE CHURCH GROWTH MOVEMENT AND LUTHERAN WORSHIP

Ernie V. Lassman

I. A CRISIS IN WORSHIP

Although pastors may have different opinions about the value or the danger of the Church Growth Movement, many, if not most, are aware of how divisive alternative worship styles have become in our midst as Lutherans. For some of us it is a crisis of worship, a crisis of theology, and a crisis of identity. This crisis is manifested in the dialogue between those who wish to use historic liturgical formats and customs and those who wish to use alternative formats. Many of the members of our congregations sense that their church is being taken away from them. Such concerns are sometimes belittled by telling them that they must change if they want the congregation to grow. Thus, massive dosages of guilt are heaped upon those who may resist alternative worship forms. It would be a grave mistake to arrogantly ignore this crisis by assuming in a simplistic fashion that such opponents of alternative worship styles are simply set in their traditionalistic ways with the result that they are unable or unwilling to make the necessary adjustments to be the church of the '90s. It is even a graver mistake to dismiss much needed evaluation and discussion with the cry of "Adiaphora!" as if there are no principles, no parameters of Scriptural worship, but all things are possible. It would also be a grave mistake to think that this crisis is simply another parochial squabble in the Missouri Synod or Lutheran Church–Canada. This crisis in our midst is not just our crisis. It is a crisis involving other denominations besides our own. The Roman Catholic Church is also involved in this crisis of worship style. Vatican II was the beginning of their crisis. In his book *Trojan Horse in the City of God*¹ Dietrich von Hildebrand warned already in 1970 of the dangers of secularism changing the Church and its worship and the negative effects this would have. In more recent times Thomas Day has chronicled the negative effects of secularism on Catholic worship in his books *Why Catholics Can't*

¹ Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Trojan Horse and the City of God* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1967).

*Sing: The Culture of Catholicism and the Triumph of Bad Taste*² and *Where Have You Gone Michelangelo? The Loss of Soul in Catholic Culture*.³

But this crisis of worship format is also found among those with a Reformed, even Evangelical tradition. Among Evangelical theologians Os Guinness has written *Dining With The Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity*⁴ and co-edited *No God But God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age*.⁵ Recently, David Wells has written two influential books also critical of certain elements of the Church Growth Movement: *No Place For Truth: Or Whatever Happened To Evangelical Theology?*⁶ and *God In The Wasteland: The Reality Of Truth In A World of Fading Dreams*.⁷ Charles Colson has touched on this theme as well in his *Against The Night: Living in the New Dark Ages*⁸ and more recently in *The Body*.⁹

In Lutheran circles Lutheran Church–Canada and the Missouri Synod have not been alone in raising concerns about certain Church Growth Movement principles and assumptions that affect worship format. There have been voices in the ELCA expressing concern such as David Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis: The Question of Identity in the American Republic*¹⁰ as well as independent Lutheran journals such as *Lutheran Forum*. This is also a topic of discussion in the Wisconsin Synod.

This is only by way of introduction. There is a growing body of literature that is expressing grave concerns about the Church Growth Movement and worship styles. Thus, it would be a mistake to ignore the concerns of fellow Lutherans in Lutheran Church–Canada and the Missouri Synod because we think that they have some narrow, parochial view that is not found outside of our circles of contact.

² Thomas Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing: The Culture of Catholicism and the Triumph of Bad Taste* (New York: Crossroad, 1990).

³ Day, *Where Have You Gone, Michelangelo: The Loss of Soul in Catholic Culture* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

⁴ Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993).

⁵ Os Guinness and John Seel, eds., *No God but God: Breaking with the Idols of our Age* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992).

⁶ David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

⁷ Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

⁸ Charles Colson, *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages* (Minneapolis: Grason, 1989).

⁹ Colson, *The Body* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992).

¹⁰ David A. Gustafson, *Lutherans in Crisis: The Question of Identity in the American Republic* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

II. THE CRISIS AND CULTURE

But this crisis must be put in the larger context of our culture. What we are dealing with is the relationship of the Church to the culture in which we live. The Church has always had this tension with culture. But an increasing number of observers of our culture talk about our Post-Christian society. It seems that many segments of the Church are trying to accommodate our culture at a time when our culture appears not only to be more hostile to the Church as an organisation but even to the Gospel message. In his book, *The Culture of Interpretation: Christian Faith and The Postmodern World*, Roger Lundin writes, “If the danger two centuries ago was that of a Christian faith become irrelevant, the present risk is that Christ may become so completely identified with the concerns of the present age that his person is rendered superfluous and his authority denied.”¹¹

There are two sources of the problem. One is our society/culture in general, as the whole of western civilisation is in the midst of a crisis. It is true that since the Enlightenment there has been a slowly unfolding crisis in Western civilisation, but with the advent of the 1960s this crisis has intensified and taken on a new urgency. There are different nuances to this crisis. Some of its elements include an exaggerated individualism, consumerism, pragmatism, popularism, emphasis on technology, statistics, and methods, including management, focus on experience at the expense of truth, an a-historical view of life with emphasis on the present at the neglect of the past and indifference to the future, and stress on the psychological well-being of man as facilitated by a therapeutic mind set. Three terms seem to capture the essence of all these different traits: modernity, secularisation, and narcissism. In his book, *Dining With the Devil*, Os Guinness defines modernity as “the character and system of the world produced by the forces of development and modernization, especially capitalism, industrialized technology, and telecommunications.”¹² Concerning secularisation he says, “The sharpest challenge of modernity is not secularism, but secularization. Secularism is a philosophy; secularization is a process. ... The two most easily recognizable hallmarks of secularization in America are the exaltation of numbers and of technique.”¹³ Narcissism describes a personality that is shaped by the forces of modernity and secularisation. In 1979 Christopher Lasch wrote the nationwide best selling book *The Culture of Narcissism*,¹⁴

¹¹ Roger Lundin, *The Culture of Interpretation: Christian Faith and the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 79.

¹² Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* 16.

¹³ Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* 49.

¹⁴ Christopher Lasch, *Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1979).

which describes the relationship of our culture and the narcissistic personality. David Wells summarises Lasch's description of the narcissistic personality:

... he means a person who has been hollowed out, deprived of the internal gyroscope of character that a former generation sought to develop, and endowed instead with an exaggerated interest in image as opposed to substance. Efforts to build character have been replaced by efforts to manage the impression we make on others. Behind this constant game of charades, this shifting of cultural guises, is a personality that is typically shallow, self-absorbed, elusive, leery of commitments, unattached to people or place, dedicated to keeping all options open, and frequently incapable of either loyalty or gratitude. This, in turn, produces a strange psychological contradiction. On the one hand, racked by insecurity, this personality is driven by a strong desire for total control over life. This accounts for the modern mania for technology. ... On the other hand, this kind of person often proves unwilling to accept the limitations of life and hence is inclined to believe in what is deeply irrational. Thus primitive myths and superstitions are now making their appearance side by side with computer wizardry and rampant secularization.¹⁵

Everyone in our society is influenced by these forces of modernity and secularisation and all that these forces bring. But these forces are being catered to and brought into many churches through some aspects of the Church Growth Movement which caters to these forces under the auspices of meeting needs—without questioning the validity of these needs. Many in the Church Growth Movement seemed to have forgotten that the culture we live in is not neutral to the message of the Church. David Wells says:

It is ironic that there are those in the church who view culture as mostly neutral and mostly harmless ... while there are those in society who recognize that culture is laden with values, many of which are injurious to human well-being. ... The church may choose to disregard many of today's cultural critics who are raising the alarms about the drift of western culture and its internal rottenness ... but it does not have the luxury of disregarding what Scriptures says about our world. And today, what Scripture says about the "world" and what these critics are seeing in contemporary culture are sometimes remarkably close.¹⁶

Os Guinness makes the remarkable statement that:

modernity simultaneously makes evangelism infinitely easier but discipleship infinitely harder. ... The problem is not that Christians have disappeared, but that Christian faith has become so deformed. Under the

¹⁵ Wells, *Wasteland* 217.

¹⁶ Wells, *Wasteland* 35.

influence of modernity, we modern Christians are literally capable of winning the world while losing our own souls.¹⁷

Then he goes on to state five ironies:

First, Protestants today need the most protesting and reforming. Second, evangelicals and fundamentalists have become the most worldly tradition in the church. Third, conservatives are becoming the most progressive. Fourth, Christians in many cases are the prime agents of their own secularization. Fifth, through its uncritical engagement with modernity, the church is becoming its own most effective gravedigger.¹⁸

In *No God But God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age* Os Guinness issues “A Serious Call to Evangelicals in America”:

It is time once again to hammer theses on the door of the church. ... Christendom is becoming a betrayal of the Christian faith of the New Testament. To pretend otherwise is either to be blind or to appear to be making a fool of God. The main burden of this book is a direct challenge to the modern idols within evangelicalism. But this idolatry is only one part of the wider cultural captivity of evangelical churches in America. We therefore begin by looking beyond idolatry to the broader need for revival and reformation within evangelicalism.¹⁹

There are many who fear that the Church Growth Movement shows characteristic signs of modernity and secularisation in trying to meet the needs of narcissism. Yet, Lutherans have been influenced by the Church Growth Movement, including its concept of worship. In view of this influence it seems that certain questions beg to be answered in order for us to evaluate worship forms. The form that worship takes will to a large extent depend on the answers given to certain questions. Until recently, these questions were not being asked, especially in official gatherings of Lutherans; or at least I have not heard them being asked in any formal presentation at conferences. Rather, my experience has been that certain Church Growth Movement principles have simply been stated as a given—as if the validity of these principles are obvious and thus beyond debate. Fifteen years ago I was on the road of The Church Growth Movement because I wanted my congregation to grow and because I didn’t know at the time where the road was leading. Thus, I speak as one who has read Church Growth books and attended Church Growth seminars and conferences. I slowly changed course because I could not in good conscience maintain a Scriptural and confessional position. In my own struggle over these issues I discovered six questions that relate to the crisis we are experiencing and

¹⁷ Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* 43.

¹⁸ Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* 62.

¹⁹ Guinness, *No God but God* 290.

helped me to sort through the issues. These questions are all closely related to one another and have other ancillary questions intertwined with them. It's hard to answer one question without reference to the others. But these six questions are at least a starting point to evaluate our crisis and the answers to these questions will not only determine what we do on a Sunday morning but the answer to these questions will determine our future (and our children's future) as a confessional Lutheran church. I would now like to examine these questions.

III. WORSHIP AND EVANGELISM

One important question involves the relationship between worship and evangelism. Do we use worship to evangelise people or do we evangelise people so they can worship? Is worship **primarily** for believers or unbelievers? Is worship **primarily** for the "churched" or the "unchurched"? How one answers this question has significant implications. If worship is primarily for believers who already belong to the church then one would expect the worship form to reflect this. This would mean that language, concepts, symbols, and music would have an "insiders" feel. Such an approach would have an "alien" feel to an "outsider", i.e., one who is not yet a believer and a member of the church. Such an approach would encourage a form that would reflect knowledge of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith. The form/style we would expect would be in keeping with Paul's exhortation to be mature and to put away childish things (I Cor. 13:11; Eph. 4:13; Heb. 5:14). But if one uses worship to evangelise the non-Christian there could be a temptation to have a format which is lower in its expression of Christianity—the lowest common denominator, so to speak. For example, we hear these days of "seeker services". For whom is such a service designed? If they are designed for non-Christians there can be no worship format at all since they cannot worship God without faith in Jesus Christ. This is carried out to its logical conclusion in a church like Bill Hybels's Willow Creek Community church which looks like a concert hall and a cross is purposely not put in the building. But if they are already Christians what are we trying to do with them with a "seeker service"? And if these services are held on Sunday morning such services really confuse for the "seeker" and for many members of the congregation what "worship" is. Indeed, George Barna makes this very point in *The Church Today: Insightful Statistics and Commentary*:

The concept of worship has no meaning to many people. A study among Baby Boomers who are lay leaders in their churches found that less than

1% said they participated in the church out of a desire to worship God.²⁰

The research also points out that we operate on the basis of assumptions—many of which are unfounded. One startling discovery from a survey among young adults who are lay leaders in their churches was that the very reason for attending church on Sunday mornings (that is, what we *assumed* was the “reason” for attending church) was but a foreign concept to 99 out of 100 of those individuals. Worship? These leaders readily admitted that they were involved in the church for a myriad of reasons *other than worship*. The problem was not that they rejected the idea of worshipping God, but rather that they were not clear what that meant. This absence of clarity did not stop them from pursuing what they thought their role in the church was. That role simply had little, if anything, to do with worshipping God, or encouraging others to do so.²¹

In his concluding chapter he says:

We believe that people attend church because they want to worship and glorify the Creator. ...In fact, when we assume that people even understand the meaning of worship, much less how it is to be practiced, we are skating on thin ice.²²

In addition, “seeker services” has the sound of revivalism which is foreign to the Scriptures and to the Lutheran Confessions. Revivalism was one aspect of American Lutheranism as promoted by Samuel Schmucker. Revivalism is a distinct American phenomenon shaped by the culture of the 19th century. Speaking of the negative consequences of revivalism Mark Noll says:

The combination of revivalism and disestablishment meant that pragmatic concerns would prevail over principle. What the churches required were results—new adherents—or they would simply go out of business. Thus, the production of results had to override all other considerations.²³

And this is part of the problem, for these same forces are loosed in the Church Growth Movement. Thus, a part of our current crisis is “Americanisation”. In other words, the battle with Samuel Schmucker and the American Lutherans is repeating itself. In *Lutherans in Crisis* David Gustafson, an ELCA theologian, writes:

²⁰ George Barna, *The Church Today: Insightful Statistics and Commentary* (Glendale: The Barna Research Group) 37.

²¹ Barna 39.

²² Barna 57.

²³ Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 66.

The American Lutheran controversy [of the 19th century] is an example of an Americanization struggle, one that involved Lutheranism's very identity. The debate regarding the form Lutheranism is to take in America is not finished. It is as alive among Lutherans in America today as it was in the mid-nineteenth century. Unfortunately, Lutherans do not always realize that the issues of Americanization and religious identity are ever-present and are a part of the various decisions they make.²⁴

If one shapes the worship format according to the lowest common denominator one is not only restricted in the use of the best of Christian expression but opens the door for secular ideas and concepts to shape the worship service rather than God and His Word. I have been at pastors' conferences and heard Lutheran speakers say that the problem is our members who don't want to change because they don't want to grow. Church Growth experts tell us we should be more concerned about meeting the needs of the unchurched person than meeting the needs of the very people who believe in Jesus Christ and support the church with their faithful and regular involvement and monies. It is true that our democratic society doesn't like the idea of "outsiders" and "insiders", yet this is inherent in Christianity. There are outsiders and there are insiders. Jesus made the distinction between "outsiders" and "insiders" when He was telling parables. In Mark's Gospel Jesus tells His disciples (the "insiders"): "The secret of the Kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables" (Mk 4:11). And Paul refers to "outsiders" and "insiders" at least in 4 different texts: I Cor. 5:12,13; Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 4:5; and I Tim 3:7. The very name "church" *ekklesia*, means "those called out" and implies this outsider/insider tension as well as Paul's familiar phrase "When you come together" (I Cor. 11:18).

I have been to pastors' conferences where the members of the congregation, the believers, the insiders, are spoken of as if they (the baptized children of God) are the enemy and the non-members, the unbelievers, the "outsiders", people who are presumably spiritually dead, are considered the appropriate people to determine the Christian worship practices of the congregation. If these "seekers" are not spiritually dead, then they are already Christian and how does this relate to "outreach" and why should Christians from outside our congregation be more influential than those who are already in our congregation?

Do we use worship to evangelise people or do we evangelise people to worship with us? If new Christians are properly instructed, worship makes much more sense. It is not uncommon for new members who have gone through the Adult Information Class to tell me how the sermons and the liturgy have become more meaningful with a fuller understanding and

²⁴Gustafson 170.

appreciation. Not only Lutheranism but the history of Christianity has a long practice of catechetics for “outsiders” to make the transition to being “insiders”, This is the process of learning the language of Christ’s culture, i.e., His Church. Indeed such evangelism and catechesis were the norm for the history of the Christian Church. In his book *Evangelism in the Early Church*²⁵ Michael Green discusses the various methods of evangelism in two categories: public evangelism and personal evangelism. Under the category of public evangelism he includes the following methods: synagogue preaching, open air preaching, prophetic preaching, teaching (catechesis), and household evangelism. Under personal evangelism he includes: personal encounters, visiting, and literary evangelism (apologetics).²⁶ He does not mention evangelism (as primarily reaching the unbeliever) as a part of worship. Rather, his account is in keeping with Peter Brunner who writes in his *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, “It is already becoming evident that the worship of the church must, in its essence, be more than a missionary proclamation of the Gospel.”²⁷ We must have a clear image of worship in our mind. Do we come together on Sunday mornings primarily to evangelise the unchurched (and why should they want to come if they are not Christian), or do we evangelise with the result that new baptised believers join us in worship?

IV. ENTERTAINMENT AND WORSHIP

A second question that is important concerns the difference between entertainment and worship. Entertainment is man-centred while worship is God-centred. This too is a cultural phenomenon that is affecting the Church and its worship. In 1985 Neil Postman wrote *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*.²⁸ In this book he continues the observation made by others that television has radically changed our culture. He says:

Television speaks in only one persistent voice—the voice of entertainment. Beyond that, I will try to demonstrate that to enter the great television conversation, one American cultural institution after another is learning to speak its terms. Television, in other words, is transforming our culture into one vast arena for show business. It is entirely possible, of course, that in the end we shall find that delightful,

²⁵ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).

²⁶ Green 194-225.

²⁷ Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, trans. M. H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968) 86.

²⁸ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

and decide we like it just fine. That is exactly what Aldous Huxley feared was coming, fifty years ago.²⁹

Postman goes on to demonstrate the negative effects of entertainment on education and journalism. Television, he says, presents everything (even serious subject matter) in such a way that “the overarching presumption is that it is there for our amusement and pleasure.”³⁰ This idea is seen in a most recent and dramatic way in CNN’s coverage of the O. J. Simpson trial with its melodramatic lead-in music and format that is hard to distinguish it from a fictional murder drama. This idea is also related to an exaggerated emphasis in the Church Growth Movement on the immanence of God and a neglect of His transcendence. God is often communicated in ways where He and His Son are more like friends with whom we are on equal terms so that God’s “otherness” and holiness cannot find expression in celebratory, user-friendly worship formats. Postman also has an entire chapter on television’s effect on Christianity. In his chapter “Shuffle Off to Bethlehem” he writes:

Religion, like everything else, is presented, quite simply and without apology, as an entertainment. Everything that makes religion an historic, profound and sacred human activity is stripped away: There is no ritual, no dogma, no tradition, no theology, and above all, no sense of spiritual transcendence. On these shows, the preacher is tops. God comes out as second banana.³¹

Postman is referring to such broadcasts as the Trinity Broadcasting Network as hosted by Paul and Jan Crouch. But the religious programming so common on television is often duplicated in parts of the Church Growth Movement and entertainment can creep into the local congregational worship. Entertainment focuses on what is pleasing and pleasurable to me. Entertainment is self-centred. The sense of entertainment comes into the Church through such concepts as pragmatism, meeting needs, and the role of the therapeutic in American Culture. Entertainment does not involve a Law and Gospel, sin and grace approach to worship. The Law is often missing (such as confession of sin) or if it is included it is trivialised by the therapeutic approach to worship. What is this therapeutic approach? In his book *The Culture of Narcissism* Christopher Lasch said in 1979, “The contemporary climate is therapeutic, not religious. People today hunger not for personal salvation ... but for the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well-being, health and psychic security.”³² In this therapeutic model everyone is seen as a victim of someone or something so that

²⁹ Postman 80.

³⁰ Postman 87.

³¹ Postman 116-17.

³² Lasch 33.

confession of wrong doing is unnecessary as we are simply victims who need comforting words to soothe our wounds. So, I come to church to feel good, to be soothed and comforted—not in a Biblical sense, but in a therapeutic sense that often passes for Gospel, but is no Gospel at all. And if you won't provide this other kind of Gospel people will find someone else who will. An entertainment approach to worship which exaggerates the immanence of God has forgotten God's transcendence, His holiness. David Wells in *God in the Wasteland* reminds us of this when he says:

In the church today, where such awe is conspicuously absent and where easy familiarity with God has become the accepted norm for providing worship that is comfortable and consumable, we would do well to remember that God is not mocked.³³

Until we recognize afresh the centrality of God's holiness ... our worship will lack joyful seriousness ... and the church will be just one more special interest pleading for a hearing in a world of competing enterprises.³⁴

The psychological fallout from this constant barrage of changing experiences, changing scenarios, changing worlds, changing world views, and changing values ... is dramatic. ... It greatly accentuates the importance of novelty and spontaneity, since each new situation, each new opportunity, each new alternative demands that we make a choice of some kind. We are, in fact, caught up in a furious whirlwind of choices that is shaking the foundation of our sense of stability.³⁵

And finally, he says:

Recent proposals for church reform have rarely amounted to anything more than diversions. They tend, in fact, to lead the church away from what it needs most to confront. They suggest that its weakness lies in the fact that its routines are too old, its music is too dull, its programs too few, its parking lots too small, its sermons too sermonical. They suggest that the problems are all administrative or organizational, matters of style or comfort. That is precisely what one would expect to surface in an age that is deeply pragmatic and fixated on image rather than substance. ... By this late date, evangelicals should be hungering for a genuine revival of the church, aching to see it once again become a place of seriousness where a vivid other-worldliness is cultivated because the world is understood in deeper and truer ways.³⁶

Charles Colson in *Against the Night* writes:

³³ Wells, *Wasteland* 141.

³⁴ Wells, *Wasteland* 145.

³⁵ Wells, *Wasteland* 159.

³⁶ Wells, *Wasteland* 225-26.

Recently a neighbor told me how excited she was about her church. When I tried to point out diplomatically that the group was a cult, believing in neither the resurrection nor the deity of Christ, she seemed unconcerned. "Oh, but the services are so wonderful," she said. "I always feel so good after I've been there!" Such misguided euphoria has always been rampant among those seeking spiritual strokes rather than a source of truth. But what about the church itself, that body of people "called out" to embody God's truth? Most of the participants in Robert Bellah's study saw the church as a means to achieve personal goals. Bellah notes a similar tendency in many evangelical circles to thin the biblical language of sin and redemption to an idea of Jesus as the friend who helps us find happiness and self-fulfillment. These "feel gooders" of modern faith are reflecting the same radical individualism we discussed in earlier chapters. ... The new barbarians have invaded not only the parlor and politics but the pews of America as well.³⁷

The danger of much of "contemporary" worship is to make God so comfortable, so common that our Heavenly Father is changed into a Sugar Daddy who spoils us with all that we want and His Son, Jesus Christ, becomes simply our friend that we introduce to others on "Friendship Sunday." God's immanence can be stressed to the point of neglecting His transcendence, His "otherness" and holiness.

V. THE MEANS OF GRACE AND RESPONSE

Another question that needs to be answered adequately is the relationship in worship between the objective (the Means of Grace-the Gospel-justification) and the subjective (our response-sanctification). What is this relationship? Does one try to get a 50/50 balance between these two elements? Or should one of these elements be purposely emphasised more than the other? And if so, which one? Clearly, even as the Gospel is to have a certain priority over the Law, likewise, the objective Means of Grace are primary in the worship life of a Christian. Not all Christians, and specifically the Reformed Churches, agree on this Law/Gospel tension with the Gospel as priority. But our Lutheran Confessions have a very clear and definite understanding of worship as primarily God's service to us with His Gospel in the Means of Grace, yet without falling into Antinomianism. For example, the Apology says, "It is by faith that God wants to be worshipped, namely, that we receive from what he promises and offers."³⁸ Or again, "Thus the service and worship of the Gospel is to receive good things from

³⁷ Colson, *Against the Night* 98-99.

³⁸ Ap IV:49, in *The Book of Concord*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) 114.

God, while the worship of the law is to offer and present our goods to God. ... [T]he highest worship in the Gospel is the desire to receive forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness.”³⁹ Or again, “But the chief worship of God is the preaching of the Gospel.”⁴⁰ There can be no appropriate response apart from the Means of Grace-the Gospel-justification. But our human nature leads us to naturally emphasise the subjective side of worship, our response. This is simply another aspect of Law and Gospel. By nature people are oriented not to the Gospel but to Law. This means that, unless consciously monitored, worship will easily become dominated by the Law and our response, with a focus not on justification but on sanctification. And where a balance between Law and Gospel is attempted the Law will win. Thus, while Law and Gospel are both to be proclaimed Walther reminds us that the Gospel is to predominate: “In the twenty-first place, the Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching.”⁴¹ Thus, in worship the Means of Grace-the Gospel-justification are to predominate in relation to our response and sanctification. This natural inclination towards the Law is reinforced and illustrated by our society’s emphasis on entertainment and therapy. Left unchecked worship can be reduced to a purely human activity where man becomes the measure of all things.

In view of this inclination a conscious effort must be made to emphasise the Means of Grace-the Gospel, not at the expense of response but to keep the response in its proper proportion to the Gospel as presented in the Means of Grace. Thus, the structure of the liturgy is built around and takes its form from the Means of Grace and not our response, feeling, or experience. Thus, the driving force behind concern for worship formats is not “traditionalism” or “maintenance ministry mentality” or other such things, but rather, it is a concern for the Gospel as given through the Means of Grace. For the Church Growth Movement, among its many other problems, does not have a strong Means of Grace theology. Among other things, the Sacrament of the Altar does not fit well into “user friendly” formats that are based on methods with roots in revivalism. Tim Wright is one of the pastors at the ELCA’s influential Community Church of Joy in Phoenix, Arizona. In his book, *A Community of Joy: How to Create Contemporary Worship* he comments on the practice of close(d) Communion by saying: “This policy will not work in a visitor-oriented

³⁹ Ap IV:310, in Tappert 155.

⁴⁰ Ap XV:42, in Tappert 221.

⁴¹ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928) 403.

service. ‘Excluding’ guests will turn them off. It destroys the welcoming environment that the church tried to create.”⁴²

VI. STYLE AND THEOLOGICAL SUBSTANCE

All of this leads us to another closely related question. Can worship style really be separated from theological substance? Can a Lutheran congregation worship with a Reformed or Pentecostal style and maintain its Lutheran identity in its teaching and worship over a period of time? My emphasis is **over a period of time**. No doubt a certain tension can be maintained by conscientious people, but what about when they leave? What about a long period of time? What if our theology and tradition are forgotten in certain circles and the foundation deteriorates? What will future generations build on?

Is worship so much an adiaphoron, as many people say, that the style of worship is insignificant or indifferent? Common sense, experience, and church history would say that such a view is naïve and misguided. Can it really be true that there is **no** relationship between theology and worship style? If this were true then why would there be even a need for alternative worship styles? Besides, the history of the Christian Church shows that there is a relationship between style and substance. Such a denial is simply the influence of our culture which sees everything in neutral terms. In the fifth century Prosper of Aquitaine summarised the practice of the early church with his saying “*Lex orandi, lex credendi*” (the rule of praying [i.e. worshipping] is the rule of believing). This principle was around long before Prosper articulated it for posterity. In his *Faith and Practice in the Early Church*, Carl Volz says, “The way in which Christians worshiped served to shape their understanding of the faith just as powerfully as reading the Bible.”⁴³

During the time of the Reformation style and substance in worship became an issue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics and then between Lutherans and Reformed. During the time of the Leipzig Interim Lutheran Churches were under pressure to return to certain forms of the Roman Mass. What Lutherans had deleted or changed in the received Roman Mass reflected theological differences between Rome and Wittenberg. Clearly our Lutheran forefathers knew that style and substance went together as this is one of the main reasons for including in the Formula of Concord Article X,

⁴² Tim Wright, *A Community of Joy: How to Create Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) 122.

⁴³ Carl Volz, *Faith and Practice in the Early Church: Foundations for Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983) 148.

“The Ecclesiastical Rites That Are Called Adiaphora or Things Indifferent,” which reads in part:

We believe teach, and confess that at a time of confession, as when enemies of the word of God desire to suppress the pure doctrine of the Gospel, the entire community of God, yes, every individual Christian, and especially the ministers of the Word as the leaders of the community of God, are obligated to confess openly, not only by words, but also through their deeds and actions, the true doctrine and all that pertains to it, according to the Word of God. In such a case we should not yield to adversaries even in matters of indifference, nor should we tolerate the imposition of such ceremonies on us by adversaries in order to undermine the genuine worship of God and to introduce and confirm their idolatry by force of chicanery.⁴⁴

I’m afraid that often the discussion of worship forms is too easily retarded by the cry of “Adiaphora!” Too often those who try to raise some red flags about certain worship practices in our midst are tuned out with the cry of “maintenance ministry,” “traditionalism”, or “adiaphora.” But in his book *Worship in the Name of Jesus* Peter Brunner reminds us that:

The legitimate historical change of the form of worship takes part in the legitimate historical change of the form of testimony. The legitimate change of form is not a matter of convenient accommodation to the questionable needs of a certain era. The history of worship in the Evangelical [Lutheran] church since the era of Enlightenment demonstrates so clearly how the form disintegrates and its service of testimony is rendered doubtful and impossible by such a wrong adaptation of the form of worship to the pattern of this world (Rom. 12:2). Secularization is assuredly not adapted to the form of worship. Just as the witness of the Gospel faces the world vested in a peculiar and singular strangeness, so also the form of worship dare not surrender—precisely in view of its testimonial service—its singularity and strangeness, which is well-nigh incomprehensible to the world.⁴⁵

In *No Place For Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* David Wells says:

The important contrast lies not so much between those who define themselves theologically and those who do not but between two different theologies by which people are defining themselves. Those who voice dissent with classical evangelicalism at this point do so not because they have *no* theology but because they have a *different* theology. Their theology is centered on a God who is on easy terms with modernity, who is quick to endorse all of the modern evangelical theories about how to

⁴⁴ FC SD X:10, in Tappert 612.

⁴⁵ Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus* 227.

grow one's church and how to become a psychologically whole person.⁴⁶

Such differences are manifested in worship practices. When I read David Luecke's book *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance*⁴⁷ I was reminded, among other things of the Roman Catholic terms "accident" and "substance" used to explain transubstantiation which teaches that bread and wine are no longer a part of the Supper but only have the appearance of bread and wine, while the substance is the Body and Blood of Christ. To these we Lutherans respond, "If it looks like bread, it is bread. If it looks like wine, it is wine. The Body and Blood of Christ are surely present, but there is also the **substance** of bread and wine and not simply the **appearance**, the 'accident' of bread and wine. A rose by any other name is still a rose." If a Lutheran worship service takes on the appearance of a non-Lutheran service, that's exactly what it is: non-Lutheran. The format of a worship service will reflect some kind of theology. To think otherwise is to be naïve or to be influenced by our culture.

VII. WORSHIP AND MUSIC

Closely related to worship style is the question of music. Is music neutral? Is some kind of music more suited to the worship of God than other kind of music? Both common sense and studies have shown that music is not neutral. Both television and the movies use music to call forth the desired emotions to fit the action on the screen. If you get scared while watching a scary movie on television all you have to do is hit the "mute" button and your anxiety immediately goes away. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death* Neil Postman writes:

All television news programs begin, end and are somewhere in between punctuated with music. I have found very few Americans who regard this custom as peculiar, which fact I have taken as evidence for the dissolution of lines of demarcations between serious public discourse and entertainment. What has music to do with the News? Why is it there? It is there, I assume, for the same reason music is used in the theater and films—to create a mood and provide a leitmotif for the entertainment. If there were no music—as is the case when any television program is interrupted for a news flash—viewers would expect something truly alarming, possibly life-altering.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Wells, *No Place for Truth* 290.

⁴⁷ David Luecke, *Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance: Facing America's Mission Challenge* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988).

⁴⁸ Postman 102-3.

And regardless of the music that is used in worship no music should dominate the Word of God, but serve the proclamation of the Word. Thomas Day comments on the impact that an informal, non-liturgical style with folk type music has had on the Roman Catholic Church:

GLORY AND PRAISE [a song book] and the whole reformed-folk repertory have been responsible for a radical redistribution of power. What power the liturgical event once contained is now handed over to individuals who take turns showing off their newly acquired strength: *Priest*. The reformed-folk repertory creates a casual ambiance which permits the priest to spend every moment of a liturgy trying to manipulate a congregation with the power of his charm. *Congregation*. That “now” repertory in GLORY AND PRAISE and similar books—virtually untouched by any indebtedness to the past—reassures the congregation the Catholicism of history, church authority, experts, and authorities of all kinds have no power over them. *Musicians*. Folk musicians are big winners in this redistribution of power. The music itself allows them to pull a large portion of the liturgical “time” to them. If all the music in GLORY AND PRAISE and derivative publications could be stretched out and measured by the inch, you would find that several hundred feet are for the congregation but miles and miles belong to the special performers, the local stars, who must always be placed where everyone can admire the way they feel the meaning of words. The congregation, awestruck, merely assists.⁴⁹

Has the question about music become too important? We cannot escape our culture’s view of music that includes such songs as “I believe in music” with its spiritual overtones about the value and worth of music or that music is the international language of the world which can unite the world or its emphasis on emotions as expressed by one of the Seattle’s Rock ‘N’ Roll, Golden Oldies, stations advertised as the “feel good station”. Is the concern in many churches about upbeat music another example of the influence of the culture on the Church that is not entirely good? Is there a danger of exchanging a Word and Sacrament ministry for a Word and Music ministry? In his article “Music: Gift of God or Tool of the Devil?” Richard Resch summarises the attitude of the early church in regards to music with these points:

Music was respected as a power (even without a text). Music was regarded as one of the best teachers available for both good and bad. Music was expected to serve the glorification of God and edification of man. Music was feared as a carrier of pagan influences to young and old. Music required and received vigilance by church authorities, and concerns were addressed decisively by modifying the practice of the

⁴⁹ Day, *Why Catholics Can’t Sing* 73-74.

church.⁵⁰

It is clear the one danger of music in the church is that it can easily fall into the category of entertainment with the goal or result that feeling good about the music overshadows the message of the music and the glory of God. There is a danger that worship will not be about truth but about having an experience, and that the **words** of the music will become secondary to the beat, the sound, or the feeling produced. The practice of having Gospel songs prior to the beginning of the worship service is designed to “prepare our hearts for worship”. Why is such singing **preparation** for worship and not worship itself? What is the role/purpose of this music? It can be perceived to be nothing more than emotional manipulation. Two powerful forces combine to denude worship of its theological content. One is the role of pragmatism over truth and theology. The other is the therapeutic model of our society which is not concerned with theology either, but our psychological well-being: experience over truth.

All of this leads to not only a diminution of the value of words, but of theology in order that the music may produced the desired therapeutic effect. A Word and Sacrament ministry calls for a different form from a Word and Music ministry. In II Cor. 10:5 Paul says, “We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (NIV). Everything is obedient to Christ, including music, which is to serve the Word of Christ and not compete with it or dominate it. This subjection to Christ is true not only of the music but those who are playing the music—they are servants in a corporate setting, not individuals entertaining. In Philippians Paul says, “Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:8,9 NIV). These are the standards that are to be applied to the use of music in the Church. The music of worship is to be noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy.

The danger is that the anti-intellectual currents in our culture will pander to the poorer music in terms of text and notes. We must be aware of this element of anti-intellectualism that accompanies “user friendly” formats and a stress on feelings and emotions. Several books have recently been written about this anti-intellectual climate in our culture and among evangelicals specifically. One of the more recent books written is Mark Noll’s *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* of which one person has written:

Mark Noll has written a major indictment of American evangelicalism. Reading this book, one wonders if the evangelical movement has

⁵⁰ Richard Resch, “Music: Gift of God or Tool of the Devil?” *Logia* 4.3: 35.

pandered so much to American culture, tried so hard to be popular, and perpetuated such a do-it-yourself, feel-good faith that it has lost not only its mind but its soul as well. ... The pews may be packed, but the churches are in deep trouble. Unless they retrieve the intellectual rigor of historic Christianity, their role in the future will only diminish.⁵¹

It is this kind of evangelicalism of the Church Growth Movement that is wanting us to modify our worship and our music. Many fear that we are in danger of giving up our intellectual heritage, our theology, for emotional pottage. Clearly, this is the fear expressed in the books mentioned by such evangelicals as Mark Noll and David Wells. Emotions have a place in worship. No credible persons would deny this. But emotions are secondary and are monitored by the intellect. The place and role of emotion in worship is an important part of the current debate on worship styles.

VIII. WORSHIP AND MEETING NEEDS

All of the above-mentioned questions come from one of the most basic principles of the Church Growth Movement and that is meeting the needs of people. As Robert Schuller is fond of saying, “Find a need and meet it.” This principle needs to be evaluated carefully in view of the Scriptures and our society. There are differences between wants and needs. The church in some sense has a responsibility to meet genuine needs, but not wants and whims. In a culture that has an extreme view of individualism and a society “consumed” with buying and consumption characterised by countless options to meet every individuals wants, how does the Church make distinctions between valid needs as compared to whims and wants? Through marketing techniques and other methods the Church is being heavily influenced by the consumer mentality of our society that exists on a narcissistic personality as David Wells says in *Wasteland*, “Malls are monuments to consumption—but so are mega-churches”⁵² The consumer mentality is based on individualism gone rampant. In his book *Against the Night* Charles Colson captures the essence of the problem when he says:

I don’t want to generalize unjustly or be overly harsh, but it’s fair to say that much of the church is caught up in the success mania of American society. Often more concerned with budgets and building programs than with the body of Christ, the church places more emphasis on growth than on repentance. Suffering, sacrifice, and service has been preempted by

⁵¹ Comment on the back cover jacket by Robert Wuthnow, author of *Christianity in the Twenty-First Century*.

⁵² Wells, *Wasteland* 61.

success and self-fulfillment.⁵³

Treating culture and the things of culture as if they were neutral the Church Growth Movement is susceptible to marketing the Gospel as a product to be sold. This is characteristic of “American Christianity” as it has been shaped by culture and revivalism. Mark Noll states:

American evangelicals never doubted that Christianity was the truth. ... What they did do, however, was to make most questions of truth into questions of practicality. What message would be most effective? What do people most want to hear? What can we say that will both convert the people and draw them to our particular church?⁵⁴

In the concern for marketing and meeting the needs of the hearers, when is the line crossed over so that the “audience” has replaced the message as the determining factor? Tim Wright expresses a familiar Church Growth Movement theme when he says, “In preparing a message, the question is not, ‘What shall I preach?’ but, ‘To whom shall I preach?’”⁵⁵ Without careful evaluation of our culture and how it affects the Church, how can we guard against an ever-increasing secularisation of the Church as it becomes more and more defined and formed by secular images, concepts, and techniques? Good intentions are not enough. Many well-intentioned activities can have negative consequences. What is the purpose of the Sunday morning worship service? To entertain? To be therapeutic? To give one a break from a busy, hectic week? To meet wants that pass off as needs? Or is the purpose to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments which result in a godly response of corporate praise and thanksgiving and in holy living for God?

IX. CONCLUSION

Whether we like to admit it or not we are in the midst of an ecclesiastical crisis. The crisis extends beyond our denomination but it is also in our midst. My own personal position is not one of liturgical fundamentalism that says there is only **one** right way to do liturgy. Perhaps in years past it was proper to make fun of ourselves for not deviating from page 5 and 15 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. Those were the days when there was a greater consensus about liturgical forms. But we live in a new era where the opposite is the case. Because of our general culture and because of the Church Growth Movement the historic liturgies are often dismissed

⁵³ Colson, *Against the Night* 103.

⁵⁴ Noll, *Scandal* 67.

⁵⁵ Wright, *A Community of Joy* 86.

and criticised to such an extent that anyone who does historic liturgy runs the risk of being labelled a traditionalist interested not in a growing church, but in maintenance ministry. Indeed, our current struggles with worship questions associated with the Church Growth Movement have no doubt helped us to come to a better understanding of liturgy and worship. We can learn a great deal from our struggles over these issues. But what has been lacking is a willingness for Lutheran proponents of the Church Growth Movement to seriously consider and respond to constructive criticism based on legitimate theological concerns. By its own admission the Church Growth Movement is heavily indebted to sociology and popular culture. There is a certain naïveté that thinks that such things are neutral and can be used indiscriminately. Jesus warns us that while we are **in** the world we are not to be **of** the world. Motivated by the sincere desire to make disciples of Jesus Christ the Church Growth Movement has been incredibly naïve about using the things of the world in service to the Church. It seems rather ironic that at the very time Western civilisation is becoming more pagan and hostile to Christianity the Church Growth Movement would have us try to meet its needs and standards. Based on the premise of being relevant and meeting the needs of people, the Church is in danger of becoming more and more worldly and becoming nothing more than a mirror copy of society itself. In his book *Dining With the Devil* Os Guinness says:

The fourth step toward compromise is assimilation. This is the logical culmination of the first three. Something modern is assumed (step one). As a consequence, something traditional is abandoned (step two), and everything else is adapted (step three). At the end of the line, Christian assumptions are absorbed by the modern ones. The gospel has been assimilated to the shape of culture, often without a remainder.⁵⁶

Again he says:

When all is said and done, the church-growth movement will stand or fall by one question. In implementing its vision of church growth, is the church of Christ primarily guided and shaped by its own character and calling—or by considerations and circumstances alien to itself?⁵⁷

Put differently again, modernity is a colossal, accentuation of a deep cleavage in the human soul that is as old as the Fall. ... In short, nothing “meets our needs” like need-meeting gods in our own image.⁵⁸

And finally he says:

The notion of decisive authority and therefore of the remainder, the

⁵⁶ Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* 57.

⁵⁷ Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* 35.

⁵⁸ Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* 37.

irreducible, the noninterchangeable, and the unquantifiable is fundamental to grace and to the church. The church of Christ is more than spiritual and theological, but never less. Only when first things are truly first, over even the best and most attractive of things, will the church be free of idols, free to let God be God, free to be herself, and free to experience the growth that matters.⁵⁹

Toward the end of the Scriptural crisis in the 1970s someone from Seminex said that liberalism wouldn't kill the Missouri Synod—Fundamentalism would. Missouri's superficial tie with Fundamentalism seems twofold. One is the belief in a trustworthy Bible. And the other is a concern for evangelism. But the Fundamentalist/Evangelical camp is in disarray. This historically conservative group of Christians is heavily influenced by our culture and via the Church Growth Movement Lutherans are experiencing the same phenomenon. Such cultural realities as therapy, individualism, and pragmatism come into our churches by two channels. One source is less organized and informal: the people sitting in the pews who, consciously or unconsciously, are affected by the culture in which they live. And the other source is more organized and formal: the Church Growth Movement. In order to respond to all the calls for changes in our churches, and especially changes in worship, we need to be more profound in our evaluations and less simplistic. In his concluding chapter in *Dining With the Devil: The Megachurch Movement Flirts with Modernity* Os Guinness, writing as an evangelical, says:

In the early eighties when the Christian right was the dominant trend, criticism of the movement was often treated as treason. Today, when the trail of its debris-strewn illusions is all too obvious, many former enthusiasts wonder why they did not recognize its shortcomings earlier. Could it be that the church-growth movement in its present expansionist phase is also a movement waiting to be undeceived? It would be wise to raise our questions now.⁶⁰

And this is the whole point of this paper—to raise these questions now—for the future of confessional Lutheranism, our identity as Lutherans, and the kind of church which we give to our children and our grandchildren will depend on how we answer these questions.

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⁵⁹ Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* 39.

⁶⁰ Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* 89.

ROMA SEMPER EXAMINANDA¹

John R. Stephenson

The Church of Rome was a latecomer to the ecumenical bandwagon which Hermann Sasse successively joined, left, and in his own way continued to accompany in the course of his long career. In the encyclical *Mortalium animos* issued on 6 January 1928, Pius XI Ratti (1922-1939) forbade his subjects' participation in the "Faith and Order" and "Life and Work" movements. To Eastern schismatics and Western Protestants alike this pope proposed reunion on terms identical to those on which Churchill and Roosevelt offered peace to the Third Reich at their Casablanca meeting of 1943, namely, unconditional surrender. Pius XII Pacelli (1939-1958) walked by and large in the footsteps of his recent namesakes; so that his pontificate appears in retrospect to traditionalist Roman Catholics as the glorious Indian summer of the chapter in church history opened by the Council of Trent. Yet at the same time as he kept one foot firmly planted in the old order,² with the other Pius XII stepped cautiously towards new terrain, engaging in some low-key ecumenical manoeuvres³ and encouraging the Biblical and Liturgical movements within Roman Catholic scholarship apart from which Vatican II would have had little to say. On the Conversion of St Paul 1959, John XXIII Roncalli (1958-1963) announced to a consistory of cardinals his intention to summon the gathering which Rome

¹ Alluding to the well known phrase *ecclesia semper reformanda*, which insists that the Church must be involved in continuous reformation, the title of this paper suggests that the process begun by Martin Chemnitz in his *Examination of the Council of Trent* should itself be continued in an ongoing enquiry into the official theology of the contemporary Roman Catholic Church.

² See, e.g., Malachi Martin, *Three Popes and the Cardinal* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1972) 152: "Pacelli's attitude ... is very well summed up in how a gentle, peace-loving, and fraternal initiative of His Holiness Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople was received. The latter sent a letter to Pius, proposing that the two men meet and discuss mutual problems. There was no official, public papal response. It was made known to the Patriarch and to all interested that His Holiness of Rome first of all required submission. Then the talking would begin[!]."

³ Pius XII cultivated the epistolary acquaintance of Yngve Brilioth, Lutheran Archbishop of Uppsala from 1950 to 1959. See Frère Michel de la Sainte Trinité, *The Whole Truth About Fatima*, trans. John Collorafi (Buffalo, NY: Immaculate Heart Publications, 1990) III:455. In the later years of Pius' reign the Roman curia began both to apply to Protestants the label "separated brethren" (*fratres seijuncti*), which had hitherto been reserved for the Eastern Orthodox, and to modify the earlier absolute prohibition of ecumenical activity enjoined on Roman Catholics. See the entry "Roman Catholic Church And Pre-Vatican II Ecumenism", in Nicholas Lossky et al. eds., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans) 883.

holds to have been the twenty-first Oecumenical Council. Commenting on Pope John's first encyclical, *Ad Petri Cathedram*, Hermann Sasse wrote in June 1961 that "the reunion of Christendom will be ... one of the great thoughts pervading the whole work of the council".⁴ By this time Sasse was academically prepared and spiritually ready to follow Vatican II with sympathy and understanding and to offer a Lutheran contribution to the dialogue now being actively sought by Rome.

The theological priorities of Dr Sasse's old age are made clear in his devoting almost two-thirds of the postscript to the second volume of his collected essays *In Statu Confessionis* to observations on the papacy in general and on the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council in particular.⁵ Roughly one half of Sasse's literary output in the last decade and a half of his life was taken up with one aspect or another of his *Auseinandersetzung* with the giant newcomer to ecumenism. Be it noted, though, that Sasse's involvement in formal dialogue with Rome had begun already in 1946 when he "[took] part in the first official conference between Roman Catholic and Evangelical theologians in Germany."⁶ In a review of the Council's work written months after its ending, Sasse recalled how joint prayer was forbidden at the outset of those conversations, but then gingerly permitted after a Roman Catholic theologian refused to restrict himself to silent prayer in the company of his Lutheran and Reformed partners in dialogue.⁷ Change was in the air even under that Tridentine triumphalist, Pius XII.

The deep familiarity with 19th- and 20th-century Roman Catholic theology and church life evident from Sasse's later writings was obviously not acquired in a hurry on the accession of John XXIII. It is safe to assume that Sasse had become what Dr Ronald Feuerhahn has described as "a dedicated 'Rome Watcher'"⁸ already in his Erlangen years. Notwithstanding the strain placed on his teaching duties and family life by the exigencies of the German Church Conflict, tensions with the ruling Nazi Party, ambitious literary projects, pastoral obligations, and the tragic inner disintegration of German Lutheranism, Sasse somehow found time in the turbulent third and fourth decades of this century both to acquaint himself with post-Tridentine

⁴ Hermann Sasse, "The Second Vatican Council (I)", *The Reformed Theological Review* (hereafter *RTR*) 20.2 (June 1961): 33f.

⁵ Sasse, "Nachwort des Verfassers", in *In Statu Confessionis* [hereafter *ISC*]; *Gesammelte Aufsätze und Kleine Schriften von Hermann Sasse Band II*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (Berlin und Schleswig-Holstein: Verlag Die Spur GMBH & Co., 1976): 367-73. The postscript is dated Reformation 1975, i.e., less than ten months before Sasse's death on 9 August 1976.

⁶ Ronald R. Feuerhahn, *Hermann Sasse as an Ecumenical Churchman* (unpublished Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1994) 123.

⁷ Sasse, "Nach dem Konzil", *ISC* I:237f.

⁸ Feuerhahn 123.

theology and to keep abreast of contemporary Roman Catholic developments. From his Australian exile he was later able to explain the intricacies of the Liturgical movement, cautioning against Dom Odo Casel's "mystery theology",⁹ on the one hand, and commending Canon Pius Parsch's five-volume guide to the church year, on the other.¹⁰ Sasse had clearly grappled with the brilliant late 19th-century dogmatics of Matthias Joseph Scheeben,¹¹ and he was conversant with the ups and downs of Roman Catholic Biblical scholarship between the milestone dates of Leo XIII Pecci's *Providentissimus Deus* of 1893 and Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritu* of 1943.¹² In this last context he displayed more sympathy with the harassed Modernists who underwent what he described as the "ordeal"¹³ of Pius X Sarto's reign (1903-1914) than would most informed Missourians.

Sasse's spiritual and theological formation in Wilhelmine Prussia had done little to equip him for his later role as Rome's most significant interlocutor from the ranks of confessional Lutheranism. To the contrary, the Church of the Prussian Union had buried those elements of the Lutheran Faith which still linked the Reformer to the Church under the papacy. From a generic Protestant background shot through with Pietism, the young Sasse came to study under a Berlin theological faculty dominated by the students of Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1887), whose influence on 19th-century theology was second only to that of Schleiermacher. Despite its deliberate recourse to Luther's writings, Ritschl's moralistic *Kulturprotestantismus* saw no need for Means of Grace to connect people with the Trinitarian and Christological mysteries which were discarded as junk from the Catholic attic. The Berlin historian of dogma Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) was allergic to Catholicism, while Karl Holl, the father of the Luther Renaissance, distilled his dismissal of the Reformer's testimony to the Real Presence into a single withering sentence.¹⁴

In a roundabout way, however, the theological faculty of pre-World War I Berlin did set the stage for Sasse's later development as a confessional Lutheran and therefore also for his dialogue with Rome. The Ritschlian left was in those days marshalled at the cutting edge of

⁹ Sasse, "Wort und Sakrament, Predigt und Hl. Abendmahl", *ISC* I:84f.; ET "Word and Sacrament: Preaching and the Lord's Supper", in *We Confess The Sacraments*, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1985) 27f.

¹⁰ "Wort und Sakrament", *ISC* I:89; *We Confess The Sacraments* 34.

¹¹ See Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf ed., *Sacra Scriptura; Studien zur Lehre von der Heiligen Schrift von Hermann Sasse* (Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, 1981) 67.

¹² See Sasse, "Rome and the Inspiration of Scripture", *RTR* 22.2 (June 1963): 33-45.

¹³ "Rome and the Inspiration of Scripture" 38.

¹⁴ Karl Holl, "Luthers Bedeutung für den Fortschritt der Auslegungskunst", *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1923), vol. I, *Luther* 554f. See also 575!

theological scholarship as it practised the method and unleashed the conclusions of the “history of religions school” (*Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*). Where the classical Reformed and the earlier Liberal Protestants had either denied outright or else greatly watered down the massive New Testament witness to sacramental faith, piety, and practice, the history of religions school boldly acknowledged St Paul’s confession of baptismal rebirth and of the Real Presence in the Eucharist. These scholars qualified this admission with an insistence that such components of New Testament religion were of pagan provenance, deriving not at all from our Lord and His original apostles. The convert Paul is supposed to have ascertained the felt needs of the Hellenistic religious market and to have tacked items culled from the mystery religions onto the Gospel preached by the primitive Palestinian Church.¹⁵ Sacramentalism and the ongoing apostolic ministry active through the presbyteral-episcopal office were thus recognised as genuinely Biblical factors by the history of religions school but firmly relegated to the later strata of the New Testament. This concession that “early Catholicism” (*Frühkatholizismus*) is a Scriptural phenomenon and not simply the invention of the second-century Church might one day have implications both for the essence of Lutheranism and for the terms of inter-confessional dialogue.

The 1920s saw the young Pastor Sasse align himself with the Neo-Lutheran renewal (*Neuluthertum*) of the previous century. Having become acquainted with the writings of Löhe and Vilmar, the participant in the Lausanne “Faith and Order” Conference of 1927 was pushed partly through ecumenical dialogue gradually to reclaim the buried sacramental heart of Lutheran Christianity. By the mid-1930s, Sasse was on fire for the Confessions. *Here We Stand (Was heißt Lutherisch?* 1934; 2nd ed., 1936) invites comparison with the classics of Tractarianism. In 1938 and 1941 Sasse published major defences of the Real Presence and its Liturgical and ecclesiological corollaries. His 70-page pamphlet *Church and Lord’s Supper* is probably the most eloquent and impassioned of his four literary transpositions of Mozart’s *Ave Verum*. Along with his three contributions to the wartime symposium volume which he edited *On the Sacrament of the Altar (Vom Sakrament des Altars)*, *Church and Lord’s Supper* was a platform whence Sasse protested against Karl Barth’s hijacking of German Lutheranism in the direction of the Union. Well before the first tentative dialogue with Rome began, Sasse acknowledged in these essays that with its sacramental focus Roman Catholicism still preserved an essential treasure which Reformed Christendom had lost. The propitiatory sacrifice of the Mass and the denial of the chalice to the laity notwithstanding, Rome had

¹⁵ See Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) 157-67.

retained the reality of the Biblical Lord's Supper¹⁶ as the actual source of its ongoing spiritual strength.¹⁷ Had he known that his son Hans would one day quit Luther Seminary, Adelaide, to join the Roman Church, perhaps Sasse would not in 1938 have echoed Luther's "pure blood with the pope before mere wine with the *Schwärmer*" with the anguished remark that:

The time could then one day come when the question must be posed with full seriousness whether Luther would find more tolerable a Church with the sacrifice of the Mass or a Church which has to all practical intents and purposes lost the Supper.¹⁸

The Brandenburg Protestant who once studied under a Ritschlian faculty had clearly come a long way. In his 1941 article on the Lord's Supper in the New Testament, Sasse attacked the history of religions school with its own weapons, powerfully arguing the unthinkable proposition that the high sacramentalism present in the thinking of Paul and John actually originated with the earthly Jesus Himself on the night of His betrayal.¹⁹ Sasse was by now equipped to undertake the *aggiornamento*²⁰ of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology.

Winston Churchill's overdone rhetoric about "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma" is much more applicable to Roman Catholicism as experienced by Lutherans in general and Hermann Sasse in particular than it ever was to the unpredictable actions of Soviet Russia. Sasse the confessional Lutheran had a love-hate relationship with Rome which perfectly mirrored and faithfully continued that of Luther himself. Just as Luther would opt for "pure blood with the pope over mere wine with the *Schwärmer*", so Sasse had more respect even for pre-critical Roman Catholic exegesis than he could ever have for American Fundamentalism or Liberal Protestantism:

And yet, there is a difference between the Fundamentalism of Benedict XV and the Fundamentalism of American Protestants, just as the Modernism in the Roman Church cannot be compared with the Modernism of America which was only the Liberalism of European theology uncritically taken over by men who had no theology of their own. Behind *Spiritus Paraclitus* as behind *Providentissimus Deus* there stands the scholarship of centuries, Patristic and Thomistic scholarship

¹⁶ Hermann Sasse, *Kirche und Herrenmahl; Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Altarsakraments*, 2nd ed. (Fürth: Flacius-Verlag, 1990) 23, esp. 23, n. 11.

¹⁷ *Kirche und Herrenmahl* 22.

¹⁸ *Kirche und Herrenmahl* 59f.; my trans.

¹⁹ Sasse, "The Lord's Supper in the New Testament", *We Confess The Sacraments* 49-97.

²⁰ "updating"

indeed, but it was scholarship ...²¹

Evidence of Sasse's love-hate relationship with Rome is found in the postscript of 1975 where a tribute to John XXIII as one who strove to live out the title of "servant of the servants of God"²² is counterbalanced by mention of "the guilt that lurks in the entire institution of the papacy".²³ The latter comment occurs in a sweeping historical review in which Sasse recalled how the venerable Eastern patriarchates had crumbled one by one as sand castles submerged by the successive waves of Islamic conquest to leave the See of Rome unrivalled in Christendom.²⁴ Into this fateful vacuum stepped the unbounded claims of the medieval papacy which were formulated with the aid of the false memory syndrome that produced the Donation of Constantine and the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals.²⁵

Sasse's near contemporary Karl Barth (1886-1968) was also deeply interested in the Second Vatican Council and much occupied in dialogue with Roman Catholic theologians. In the winter semester of 1966-67 Barth came briefly out of retirement to conduct a seminar on the dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* after which he concluded that Vatican II represented a distinct improvement over Trent and Vatican I.²⁶ Now Barth and Sasse had hugely differing perspectives on Rome in general and on Pope John's council in particular. On the one hand, Barth was further removed from Rome than was Sasse, and on the other Sasse was both closer to and more distant from Rome than was Barth. In the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics* Barth had located Antichrist's intrusion into Roman Catholicism in the philosophical notion of the *analogia entis* which posits a certain likeness not so much between as rather within divine and creaturely being.²⁷ Apart from recognition of the *analogia entis*, divine incarnation, propositional revelation, and the real communication of the life of God through the sacramental economy would be unthinkable. Barth's opposition to the *analogia entis* was very likely the continuation under other circumstances of the Reformed view that *finitum non capax infiniti* which is contested by thesis VIII of the Catalogue of Testimonies. By way of contrast, Sasse launched no attack on this side of Roman Catholicism;

²¹ "Rome and the Inspiration of Scripture" 40.

²² "Nachwort des Verfassers" 370.

²³ "Nachwort des Verfassers" 369; my trans.

²⁴ "Nachwort des Verfassers" 368f.

²⁵ "Nachwort des Verfassers" 370.

²⁶ Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth; His life from letters and autobiographical texts*, tr. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) 485.

²⁷ "I regard the *analogia entis* as the invention of Anti-Christ, and I believe that because of it one cannot become a Catholic. At the same time, I concede that all the other reasons one can have for not becoming a Catholic are short-sighted and frivolous." *Church Dogmatics* I.1:xiii; qtd Busch 215.

instead for four decades he doggedly located Rome's problem in a Gospel-dulling synergism which crept into its presentation of not only the Third but also the Second Articles of the Creed. In his essay of 1941 on "The Supper in the Catholic Mass", Sasse bent over backwards to agree with Trent that the Eucharist is indeed a memorial, a making present, and an application of our Lord's once-for-all sacrifice on the Cross. Yet while the constituent elements of the Roman understanding of the sacrifice of the Mass are all "in order", there remains something deeply wrong with the way in which they are put together to the effect that the Church offers her Lord as a propitiatory sacrifice to the Father.²⁸ At the root of this doctrine and practice lies the falsehood of man's co-operation in his own redemption.²⁹ This synergistic conception, which Sasse described as "a genuine tragedy precisely in its indissoluble intermingling of human guilt and unavoidable historical fate",³⁰ is both what makes Roman Christianity tick and therefore also the humanly-speaking insuperable obstacle to reunion.

Since Sasse cultivated a Gnesio-Lutheran love-hate relationship with Rome, superficial consistency is absent from his many appraisals of the Council and its aftermath. He began a magazine article against women's ordination with a pertinent Pope John story in which the beloved pontiff put the orthodox argument in a nutshell,³¹ and a moving personal tribute is

²⁸ "Zerlegt man den komplizierten Begriff des Meßopfers in die einzelnen Gedanken, die ihn konstituieren, so scheint alles in Ordnung zu sein. Denn fast jeder dieser Gedanken läßt sich auf einen Gedanken der Bibel zurückführen, aber das Ganze, das aus diesen Elementen entstanden ist, läßt sich aus dem Neuen Testament nicht rechtfertigen. Von Anfang an ist das Abendmahl die Feier des Gedächtnisses an das e i n e Opfer, das Christus am Kreuz gebracht hat. Noch mehr: est ist schon bei Paulus Opfermahlzeit, ein Mahl, bei welchem das empfangen, bei welchem das gegessen und getrunken wird, was Christus geopfert hat. Est ist also nicht nur memoria, sondern auch representatio und applicatio des e i n e n Opfers Christi, nicht nur Gedächtnis, sondern auch Vergegenwärtigung und Zueignung jenes Opfers, das auf Golgatha gebracht worden ist." "Das Abendmahl in der katholischen Messe", *Vom Sakrament des Altars* 87f.

²⁹ "Wenn es zum Wesen des Katholizismus gehört, daß er von einem Mitwirken des Menschen an seiner Erlösung weiß, dann wird klar, weshalb das Meßopfer das Herzstück des katholischen Kultus ist." *Vom Sakrament des Altars* 92.

³⁰ "... eine wirkliche Tragödie gerade in dem unlösbaren Ineinander von menschlicher Schuld und unentrinnbarem historischen Schicksal." *Vom Sakrament des Altars* 90.

³¹ "During the First Session of the Second Vatican Council a lady turned up in Rome and asked for an audience with the pope to discuss with him the question of the ordination of women to the Catholic priesthood. She was Dr. Gertrud Heinzelmann, a lawyer at Lucerne, the famous centre of the Roman Church in Switzerland. Pope John, who was otherwise kindness and patience personified, lost his patience. 'Tell that suffragette that I shall never receive her. She should go back to her homeland.' Why did the good pope, who was otherwise prepared for a dialog even with the worst enemies of the Church, give such a harsh answer? Could he not have replied something like this: 'Tell my daughter that the ordination of women is against the Word of God'? This was his argument when the Archbishop of Canterbury declared such ordination to be against the tradition of the Church. Could he not

found side by side with germane critical questions in Sasse's article in memory of Augustine Cardinal Bea, who was successively the champion of the Biblical and Ecumenical movements in the Roman Church.³² Going into Vatican II, Sasse acknowledged that Rome and other Christians were still "separated" but rejoiced that at a deeper level they would henceforth also be "brethren".³³ But while Karl Barth came out of a private audience with Paul VI Montini (1965-1978) remarking that "The Pope is not the Antichrist!"³⁴, Sasse never revoked his acceptance of the identification made in the Smalcald Articles.³⁵

After the Council's closure in 1965 Sasse announced that "Rome is on the way to a Reformation",³⁶ but already at this time he was severely disappointed in his earlier hopes that Vatican II would recall Christendom to dogmatic substance and ecumenism to theological integrity.³⁷ In the postscript of 1975 Sasse observed that while the Council was "certainly one of the greatest church-historical events of our century", it had nevertheless "turned into something completely different from what it was meant to be according to the Pope's intention."³⁸ The Modernistic virus that had destroyed much of Protestantism had somehow in, with, and under the Council infected the Roman Church, and Sasse trembled at the potential results of this development. With an eye on the radical goings-on in Dutch and American Roman Catholicism, Sasse wrote in 1967 of:

a deep spiritual crisis within the largest church of Christendom which may well end in the breakdown of its organization, in the disintegration

have referred her for further information to one of his theologians? John was not an intellectual like his predecessor. He was not a great theologian either. But he was, as his 'Journals' show, a great pastor. Every pastor knows, or should know, that there are cases, when a discussion is impossible and the only answer to a question can be that 'Begone, Satan!' which Jesus spoke not only to the devil (Matthew 4.10), but also to his faithful confessor, Simon Peter (Matthew 16.23)." Sasse, "Ordination of Women", in *The Lutheran* 5.9 (3 May 1971): 3.

³² Sasse, "Heil außerhalb der Kirche? In piam memoriam Augustin Kardinal Bea", *ISC* II:315-27.

³³ "As *separated* brethren we enter the historic period of the Second Vatican Council and the ensuing theological and ecclesiastical discussions. But even where our separation remains, we shall be separated *brethren*." Sasse, "The Second Vatican Council (II)", *RTR* 20:78.

³⁴ Busch 484.

³⁵ Sasse, "Last Things: Church and Antichrist". in *We Confess The Church*, tr. Norman Nagel (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986) 108-26.

³⁶ Sasse, "Nach dem Konzil", *ISC* I:234.

³⁷ See Feuerhahn 124.

³⁸ "Nachwort des Verfassers" 371; my trans.

of the vast body of the Roman Church.³⁹

And in his 1969 tribute to Cardinal Bea he pointed out that:

The grand question remains what will become of the renewal introduced by the Council. Will it end in a true Reformation of Rome, a real rediscovery of the Gospel? Or will it end in a revolution in which the substance of the Christian Faith is completely lost? One can observe the omens of such a revolutionary decay of the substance of the Christian Faith in all the churches of Christendom.⁴⁰

Having begun the Council as a supporter of the progressive forces within the Roman hierarchy, in its aftermath Sasse's sympathies increasingly swung towards the maligned traditionalists, for whose leader Cardinal Ottaviani he found some kind words.⁴¹ During the last years of his life Sasse's private correspondence was dotted with laments over the passing of the Mass of Pius V to make room for Paul VI's rite of 1969. "The new *ordo missae* has practically destroyed the old Mass. It strikes me that even the Real Presence can no longer be taken for granted." "The greatest liturgy of the western world has been wantonly destroyed. For what is now celebrated as Mass is no longer the Sacrament of the altar." Sasse regretted the abandonment of the old high altar and detested the new *ad populum* style of celebration. He could only "look on in astonishment as St. Zwingli is being elevated to the honour of the altar."⁴² While the cantankerousness of old age may have played a role in these pronouncements, these sentiments make it clear that Hermann Sasse certainly did not have the same bones to pick with the Roman Church as did Karl Barth!

With his remark that, "It may be a great work of the future to write an *Examen Concilii Vatican secundi*, ['Examination of the Second Vatican Council']"⁴³ Sasse acknowledged an unfinished quality in his own efforts at Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue. His studies of *Dei Verbum* and *Lumen Gentium* prompted him to agree with the Reformed observer who stated that, while the glaciers had gone, the Alps remained.⁴⁴ The inroads of

³⁹ "Holy Church or Holy Writ? the Meaning of the *Sola Scriptura* of the Reformation", (Sydney, Australia: IVF Graduates Fellowship, 1967) 5. See *ISC* II:293.

⁴⁰ "Heil außerhalb der Kirche?" 325.

⁴¹ "Die Sorge des Römers Ottaviani—er stammt aus Trastevere—ist die legitime Sorge des Mannes, dem im Heiligen Officium die Bewahrung der katholischen Lehre anvertraut war, daß die Reform der Kirche nicht in einer Reformation, sondern in einer Revolution endet, in der die Lehrsubstanz des christlichen Glaubens verschwindet, wie sie in den meisten Kirchen, die sich auf die Reformation des 16. Jahrhunderts gründen, verschwunden ist." "Nach dem Konzil", 240f.

⁴² *Corpus Christi; Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Abendmahlskonkordie*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, 1979) 105, n. 16; my trans.

⁴³ "Nachwort des Verfassers" 371.

⁴⁴ "Nach dem Konzil" 243.

Modernism into the post-conciliar Roman Church led Sasse to suggest an agenda for future instalments of ecumenical dialogue, which would show among other things that “we all suffer from the same sickness”.⁴⁵ Sasse was keenly aware that inter-confessional relations belong in a different ballpark from the rivalries of political parties. The eclipse of the NDP and the fizzling of the provincial Liberals recently aided Ontario’s Tories in securing a sizeable margin of victory, but a Roman Catholic drop in church attendance of five per cent does not mean a Lutheran rise of ten per cent. The political paradigm is not applicable to the fortunes of the *Una Sancta*:

It is one of the great discoveries of Christendom in this century of revolutionary changes that in spite of all divisions and separations the Christians and the churches of whatever denomination are bound together by the strange solidarity of a common history. They experience the same joys and disappointments, successes and failures, opportunities and frustrations. Great spiritual movements, healthy or unhealthy, spread through the whole of Christendom irrespective of denominational borders. It is by no means so as it was believed forty years ago that the fall of one church means the rise of another. They are all confronted with the same enemies, the same emergencies. Together they rise, together they fall.⁴⁶

Hermann Sasse died two summers before the pontificate of John Paul II Woytyla (1978-) began. He would obviously approve of Dr Bohlmann’s two meetings with the present pope and would be especially gladdened by the welcome given by Dr Barry to *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*.⁴⁷ Sasse would rejoice that in his *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia* which Dr Precht has made recommended reading for students of *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*⁴⁸ John Paul II has indicated a willingness to speak, as Luther put it in 1524, “auff Evangelisch—in the language of the Gospel”.⁴⁹ But given his sharp critique of *Lumen Gentium*’s universalising tendencies⁵⁰ and his bewilderment at Paul VI’s publicly praying with Pentecostals who reject

⁴⁵ “Die Lehre von Sünde und Gnade sollte das erste und vordringlichste Thema in dem zwischen den Kirchen bestehenden Dialog sein. Dieser Dialog würde offenkundig machen, daß wir alle an derselben Krankheit leiden.” “Heil außerhalb der Kirche?” 324.

⁴⁶ “Holy Church or Holy Writ?” 4.

⁴⁷ Cf. Hermann Sasse, “Ordination of Women?” *The Lutheran* (3 May 1971): 3-6, esp. 6: “One of the deepest reasons why a woman may become a deacon, but not a bishop or an ordained elder (1 Timothy 5:17) seems to be that in the office of the pastor there are functions which the minister performs as the representative of Christ.”

⁴⁸ Fred L. Precht, “Confession and Absolution: Sin and Forgiveness”, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, ed. Fred L. Precht (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1993) 317f., n. 1.

⁴⁹ “Auff Euangelisch aber von bildern zu reden.” WA 18:74³. See AE 40:91.

⁵⁰ “Nach dem Konzil” 246; “Heil außerhalb der Kirche?” 320-25.

Holy Baptism,⁵¹ we may be sure that Dr Sasse would join the supporters of the late Archbishop Marcel Lefèvre in weeping over the present pope's Assisi prayer meetings with non-Christians of various sorts.

Why, though, has the *Examen Concilii Vaticani secundi* proposed by Sasse not yet been written, and, if a confessional Lutheran scholar were to undertake and complete this massive task whose scope would have to be broadened to include the 1992 Catechism, would CPH take the risk of publishing his work? Perhaps the deepest reason why no successor to Martin Chemnitz has arisen in our generation has to do with world Lutheranism's present sickness unto death. The Augsburg Confession was spoken to the Church of Rome and its Apology was developed within the context of Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue. Rome is by necessity Lutheranism's first and major dialogue partner, and if the Lutheran confession is not to petrify or gather dust, the process begun at Augsburg must continue wherever the Spirit may lead. Lutheran lack of interest in charitable and critical *Auseinandersetzung* with the official theology of contemporary Roman Catholicism may well be rooted in a disinclination to engage with the Book of Concord itself: which demonstrates that Hermann Sasse's task within the Communion which he served is itself yet unfulfilled.

Perhaps we may make our own the words of a contemporary non-Lutheran ecumenist whose church body:

seeks a unity which, if it is to be the fruit and expression of true reconciliation, is meant to be based neither upon a disguising of the points that divide nor upon compromises which are as easy as they are superficial and fragile. Unity must be the result of a true conversion of everyone, the result of mutual forgiveness, of theological dialogue and fraternal relations, of prayer and of complete docility to the action of the Holy Spirit, who is also the *Spirit of reconciliation*.⁵²

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⁵¹ *Corpus Christi* 79.

⁵² Pope John Paul II, *On Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today* (Boston, MA: Daughters of St. Paul, n.d.) 32.

**A SERMON:
ST MARK 10:23-31¹**

Thomas M. Winger

“And Jesus looked around [examining their faces one by one] and then He said, ‘With what difficulty will those who have wealth enter into God’s kingdom.’ And the disciples were deeply startled at His words.” The Master Teacher is playing games with His disciples again. Shock treatment. If you think that one’s hard to swallow, He continues boldly: *“‘Children, how hard it is to enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ ... And they were blown away.”* Why does Jesus suddenly address His disciples as τέκνα “children”? By my reckoning, this is the only place in the entire Gospel of Mark where He does this. It’s a tactic in His instruction by time-bomb. With that word τέκνα “children” Jesus is giving a little jiggle on the bomb which He planted a few paragraphs ago. Back in vv. 14-15 we find it: *“Let the little **children** come to me, stop hindering them, for of such ones is God’s kingdom. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive God’s kingdom like a child, shall certainly not enter into it.”* Tick, tick. They haven’t got it yet. They’re still hung up on that rich man.

Yes, there’s the other side of the story. What’s he doing there? He’s a foil over against the child. He’s everything the child is not—grown-up, strong, self-sufficient, respected, awe-inspiring. And so he’s a personification of all the selfish claims of mankind before God. He’s the old Adam in us. He’s the *opinio legis*, that stubborn streak—to put it mildly—which says “I’m not a child any more, I can take care of myself”, a declaration of independence without economic association, the terrible two’s played out a few years too late. Commentators on these verses, beginning with the first manuscript copyists, fail to grasp this fundamental key. They miss Jesus’ transition from type to antitype, rather from image to reality, and get hung up on riches. And so the majority of manuscripts slip in *“how hard it is **for those who trust in riches** to enter God’s kingdom”*. But it’s not really about riches. And then the commentaries play around with the camel and try to turn it into a rope, or the eye of the needle becomes a city gate—all attempts to relativise Christ’s absolute. It’s no wonder the disciples are confounded. They’re still stuck on the rich guy, too. If he can’t get in, who can? They’re still looking at the kingdom by the Law, which admits of degrees. Measure each other, find someone who can pass the height

¹ This sermon was preached in chapel at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines, on Friday of Pentecost XIV, 1995.

requirements. Then march your Goliath out before God and say, “throw everything you’ve got at him”. But Goliath soon lies headless from one swing of the Law’s blade, and a little child triumphs. How is this so?

Because, Jesus says, it’s not just hard, it’s impossible. Riches don’t help; riches don’t hurt. This isn’t some revolutionary propaganda in the jungles of Colombia to stir up the poor. It’s the Law’s crushing blow against the rich man in all of us that holds any claim on God’s kingdom by the power of our own hands. The message of the child is that it’s not “something in us” at all. You see, we can’t co-opt the **child** to suit our agenda either. As little as the kingdom can be bought with wealth or power, can it be merited by child-like faith, pretended innocence, trust or obedience. That’s not what the child is about. The child is rather an image of having no claim to make at all, the picture of one whose entire life is a gift. The child leads us completely away from the Law with its entrance requirements by degrees, and turns us to the Gospel which gives entrance through regeneration, new life, re-birth. Yes, we’re back to Baptism. We must beware the “proof-texter” who views these words simply as evidence that “kids can get baptised too!” It’s more radical than that. It says that we all enter the kingdom as children, as babes—by birth not by effort, by God’s hand, not by our hand.

For that’s what Holy Baptism truly is. So Luther can confess many times over that the pastor’s hand which baptises is truly God’s own hand. That’s even in today’s hymn²—were it not for translators. Stanza two concludes in Luther’s words: “God speaks and wills that water be not simple water alone, for His holy Word is also with it, with the rich Spirit beyond measure: **He is indeed the baptiser.**” And by virtue of Christ’s own Baptism, he can go on to confess: “The Father’s voice itself one heard at the Jordan; ... God’s Son Himself stands here also in his tender humanity, the Holy Spirit descends clothed in the form of a dove, that we should have no doubt about it: when we are baptised, **all three persons have done the baptising**, so that they might dwell with us on earth.”³ “*With men ἀδύνατον [impossible, there is no capability], but not with God. For with God all things are δυνατὰ [possible, He is capable].*” Holy Baptism turns us completely away from our wilful independence, our desire to hold up some good titbit before God in hope of reward, and directs us entirely to the place where He is at work, not we ourselves.

Only in this way does the theme of the week, which is also at the end of this text, become a word of promise for us: “*But many who are first will be last, and the last first*” (Mk 10:31). This is the great reversal of God’s grace. Today’s Psalm is equally dramatic: “*He turns a desert into pools of water, a*

² “To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord” – *Lutheran Worship* 223.

³ *Evangelisches Kirchengesangbuch* 146:2,4.

parched land into springs of water" (Ps. 107:35). God turns the rich man into a child, and the child into a rich man. And the child who is deprived of brothers and sisters is born again into a new family, gifted a hundredfold with brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers in the communion of saints, yes, even united by his Baptism with the sufferings of Christ, and finally granted the rich blessing of eternal life in the age to come. Thanks be to God.

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