

LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

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EDITORIAL FOREWORD

This double issue of *Lutheran Theological Review* marks the passing of two distinguished sons of Lutheran Church-Canada, Dr. George Rode, sometime president of the Alberta-British Columbia District, and Mr. David C. Appelt, who after his retirement as chief librarian at the University of Saskatchewan, served for over a decade as an adjunct member of the St. Catharines seminary faculty. We include in this section of the *Review* a tribute to Dr. Rode and Mr. Appelt by one who knew them both well, our recently retired synodical president, Dr. Edwin Lehman.

Essays appearing in these pages usually have the status of the work of individual theologians endeavouring to write within the parameters marked out by Holy Scripture and the Book of Concord, but not purporting to speak solemnly on behalf of our church body. By way of exception to this rule, Dr. Jonathan F. Grothe's "Deposal and/or Removal: Principles, Practices, and Proposals", which was originally delivered to the Pastoral Conference of the East District, has been formally adopted by Lutheran Church-Canada's Council of Presidents, Commission on Theology and Church Relations, and seminary faculties in response to a question directed to them by the Circuit Counsellors of the East District.

Three articles in this issue were delivered to the 1993 joint faculties' meeting held in Edmonton, at which Dean Roger J. Humann addressed the topic, "The Lutheran Liturgy—An Adiaphoron?"

Dr. W. Theophil Janzow, first president of the Edmonton seminary, remains theologically active in his retirement, and we are pleased to include a paper delivered by him to a pastoral conference in the Missouri Synod's Nebraska District on "Law/Gospel Preaching vs. Moralising Messages".

Our second essay taken from the 1993 joint faculties' meeting is Prof. Ronald Jones' "Lived Faith: Theology and Ethics in the Sermon on the Mount".

Dr. Edward F. Kettner's paper on "The 'Third Use of the Law' and the Homiletical Task" is the third item taken from the 1993 joint faculties' meeting.

Pr. Yves Osborne's "L'<Onto-théo-logie>: Une Idole ou un Monstre Verbal?" examines an important work by a leading contemporary German theologian, Eberhard Jüngel, and marks the first (and we hope not the last) occasion on which *LTR* prints an article in Canada's other official language.

Prof. Vernon A. Raaflaub demonstrates the value of inter-testamental studies for Old Testament scholarship in "The Apocalyptic 'Son of Man'".

Pr. Tom Winger illumines a largely unknown chapter in 19th-century church history in “The Relationship of Wilhelm Löhe to C. F. W. Walther and the Missouri Synod in the Debate concerning Church and Office”.

Dr. Edwin Lehman’s homily “Under Pastoral Care”, delivered at the St. Catharines seminary’s 1996 Call Service, struck many of its hearers as worth sharing with a wider audience and is therefore included in these pages.

This issue closes with a review by the undersigned of the recently released Agenda, *Church Rites*, produced for use in our Australian sister Church.

JRS

Reformation Day 1996

COMMON MEN, UNCOMMONLY GIFTED

Both God's Word and our democratic traditions direct us to see all men and women of equal worth, regardless of their station in life. Certainly God's love does not discriminate. But even as all people are not equally burdened in life, so all are not equally gifted. David Appelt and George Rode were men in whom God packaged a variety of gifts and qualities not always shared by others. This didn't make them better. It made them different. And it is cause for giving thanks to God for what He gave them and what He did through them.

Their upbringings were quite divergent. David Appelt grew up in a parsonage, George Rode on a farm. But both lived through times when poverty and hardship were not considered demeaning. They were among the ingredients that went into building character. Both brought uncommon intellectual gifts to their vocation, coupled with a deep sense of common decency and civility.

And both believed and demonstrated, that whether one is called to be a pastor and a president, or a layman and a librarian, the Christian life can and ought to be a constant doxology to God who loved us and made us His own.

It is fitting that *Lutheran Theological Review* recognises God's goodness to us and to the church by having blessed us through the gifts He gave to George Rode and David Appelt.

Edwin Lehman

The Reverend George Rode (†28 February 1995)

David Clemens Appelt (†2 March 1996)

DEPOSAL AND/OR REMOVAL: PRINCIPLES, PRACTICES, AND PROPOSALS

Jonathan F. Grothe

I. PROLEGOMENA

A. DEFINITIONS

Let us begin with a few key definitions: **Church**, **Ministry**, **Divine Call**, **Expulsion** (*vertreiben*), and **Removal** (*versetzen*).

Church is the Body of Christ, the communion of saints; its presence in the world is manifested in specific assemblies, local congregations, whose marks are Word and Sacraments, not necessarily the legal trappings and sociological elements of a constitution, charter, voters' assembly, etc. While "Synods" and such are this-worldly organisations, they are not only helpful but also necessary, for they testify to the reality of the "transparochial" nature of "Church". While "congregation" is "Church", a congregation is not the whole Church!

Ministry is what God has done for all sinners in Christ and the institution by which God sees to it that Christ's ministry continues to get to people through Word and Sacraments. "Ministry" is not an abstract concept under the category "Church", but rather it **happens** when Christ appoints His representatives to continue His work. There is no ministry apart from **ministers**, and they are appointed by Christ and placed **in** the Church **for** the Church and the world.

Divine Call: We believe that the Lord, working mediately through orderly procedures of the Church (and, at times in the past, government), calls and appoints a man to a responsibility of ministry. This means it is from God, divine. It is also external and mediate. The orderly procedures have generally included some form of each of the following:

1) nomination/examination/certification, from the body of the Church including especially the current ministerium (and perhaps government), to declare the candidate eligible;

2) election/acclamation from the people to be ministered to, a valid and legitimate call indicating this candidate is received with their approval;

3) ordination/installation, a public ceremony of solemn, **performative** words, the candidate pledging his service and the congregation making commitment to receive and support him.

That the call is "divine" puts God in the picture. The laity receive minister and ministry from God; the pastor is accountable to his Lord.

Expulsion or **Deposing** from ministry (*vertreiben*) is an action based on the recognition that there can eventuate a change in a man as regards the conditions and characteristics pertaining to his qualifications to be certified for the Holy Ministry, so that he ought not any longer be a pastor—where he currently is serving, or anywhere. It is here that the “causes” for deposing a pastor are operative. The whole Church must pay heed that pastors **abide** in the necessary states and qualifications; when one does not, then God, working mediately through the Church (congregation and/or “transparochial Church”) will **depose** him. God wrought the “divine call”; **He** can undo it.

Removal (*versetzen*) refers to a procedure which moves or removes a pastor from his current specific call. The discussion in Walther encompasses both whether and how and when a pastor may/should accept a call to a new place **and** the situations in which the pastor (of his own will) may/should request peaceful release from his “divine call” or may/should be removed by compulsion from his current place (and, perhaps, moved to another place).

This concept is problematic for us because it envisions that a man might somehow be “a member of the ministerium” without being currently installed in a specific call, and it envisions the possibility that churchmen might make judgements and take actions as regards pastors’ places of service on the basis of criteria and through procedures other than those specifically set forth under “calling” and “deposing”.

B. “TENURE” AND DEPOSAL

The Lord’s Church, the Lord’s ministry, the Lord’s call. What the Lord hath joined together, let no man put asunder. Our understanding has been that the relationships created by call and ordination/installation remain in place until dissolved by God, for godly reasons. Among those godly reasons we have counted the following: through the death of the pastor; through the pastor’s request to be released (for valid reasons, e.g., failing health, retirement, to accept another valid and legitimate call, or to study full-time); or through the orderly procedures for **deposing** a pastor.¹

It is important to recognise that any “deposing” that is to be done is to be seen as the work of God, working mediately through the orderly procedures of the Church. Even as local assembly and transparochial Church are both involved in the **calling** work of God, so also they should collaborate in any deposing work of God, which needs also a public and official announcement.

¹ We also now have cases of “calls” for specified periods of time, such as those for seminary professors or District Presidents; would that all concerned consider the election/appointment to be **God’s** work and not undo it except for godly reasons!

II.

Let us review what we have understood and what is currently said about the “orderly procedures” through which we believe God would be at work for this purpose among us.

A. SYNOD, MEMBERSHIP, AND EXPULSION

The language we commonly use to talk about Synod seems to slide back and forth between “Church as Body of Christ in some transparochial sense” and “human (advisory) organisation”. The Handbook of Synod itself is, of course, very precise, stating that synod is not an “ecclesiastical government” in relation to its members.² It lists its objectives in the Constitution, including these:

8. Provide evangelical supervision, counsel, and care for pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers of the Synod in the performance of their official duties;

9. Provide protection for congregations, pastors, teachers, and other church workers in the performance of their official duties and the maintenance of their rights;

10. Aid in providing for the welfare of pastors, teachers, and other church workers, and their families in the event of illness, disability, retirement, special need, or death (C .III.8,9,10).

It further lists the following among its conditions of membership:

Conditions for acquiring and holding membership in the Synod are:

1. Acceptance of the confessional basis of Article II.

2. Renunciation of unionism and syncretism of every description, such as:

a. Serving congregations of mixed confession, as such, by ministers of the church;

b. Taking part in the services and sacramental rites of heterodox congregations or of congregations of mixed confession;

c. Participating in heterodox tract and missionary activities.

² This quotation is from article VII of *Constitution of Lutheran Church-Canada* as found in the *1993 Handbook* of Lutheran Church-Canada. Subsequent citations in parentheses will use C for Constitution and be from the same source.

3. Regular call of pastors and teachers and regular election of lay delegates by the congregations, as also the blamelessness of the life of such.
4. Exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechism in church and school.
5. A congregation shall be received into membership only after the Synod has convinced itself that the constitution of the congregation, which must be submitted for examination, contains nothing contrary to the Scriptures or the Confessions (C .VI.1-5).

The Constitution does not provide for deposal or removal from office, but only for expulsion from membership in the synod, to wit:

Article XIII Expulsion from the Synod

1. Members who act contrary to the confession laid down in Article II and to the conditions of membership laid down in Article VI or persist in an offensive conduct, shall, after previous futile admonition, be expelled from the Synod.
2. Expulsion shall be executed only after following such procedure as shall be set forth in the Bylaws of the Synod.
3. If the member expelled is a pastor or teacher in a congregation of the Synod, such congregation, unless it already has done so, is held to depose him from office and to deal with him in accordance with the Word of God, notwithstanding an appeal. If it persistently refuses to do so, the respective District is to deal with it. If all negotiations and admonitions fail of their purpose, such congregation forfeits its membership in the Synod.
4. Because of their expulsion those so expelled forfeit their membership and all share in the property of the Synod. The latter holds good also with respect to those who for any reason themselves sever their connection with the Synod. (C .XIII. 1.-4.)

The technical language and causes for actually deposing a pastor are left to the constitution of the individual member congregations.³

³ Article XII of the Constitution (“Districts of the Synod and Their Regulation”) deals with the supervisory responsibilities of a District President (7.) and his power to “suspend from membership pastors, professors and teachers for persistently adhering to false doctrine or for having given offense by an ungodly life, in accordance with such procedure as shall be set forth in the Bylaws of the Synod” (8.). These Bylaws include 1.21 (cf. 5.48 and section

As members of the synod all individuals on the clergy (and teacher) roster are subject to supervision of doctrine and practice. (So also is every congregation, which must have an acceptable constitution and abide by it.) A member of synod may be expelled from synodical membership. A pastor so expelled should also be deposed by his congregation, if it wishes to remain in the synod. (It would also follow logically that a pastor properly deposed from his office by a congregation should be expelled as a clergy member of synod.)

Procedures for supervision, visitation, admonition, suspension, adjudication and appeals are all in place in the Constitution (XII. 7.-8., concerning the responsibilities of the District President), and in the Bylaws (1.21 and Section VIII). They are all binding on members of synod; they can come into play in a congregation's action to depose a pastor, and so in fact they are very important for decisions regarding a man's official service as pastor in the Church. But the final act to actually depose or remove a pastor from his call is generally understood at present in our circles to be a matter between the congregation and the pastor.

B. CONGREGATION, DEPOSAL, AND REMOVAL

1. On page 54 of the new Mueller-Kraus *Pastoral Theology* we have the latest version of "accepted practice" in our circles as regards deposal and removal. In order that the reader may appreciate the nuances of selected sentences, we quote at length:⁴

VIII.

It can be revealing to read the Bylaws which pertain to Synodical staff (2.801, 2.803) and members of faculties of synodical institutions of higher education (6.43). In both cases, the "worker" may be a member of the clergy (or teacher) roster of synod and may even have a document including the words "solemn call" in the title (2.803a). But in both cases it also appears that the worker is considered an employee of synod rather than one in a "divine call," and so there are listed further reasons for "termination" or "removal from office". These include "adherence to false doctrine, conduct unbecoming a Christian, neglect of office, or refusal to cooperate" (2.803a), and (taking into account the terms of the appointment and the procedures of the employing institution), in addition to "honourable retirement or reduction in force"; "1. incapacity; 2. incompetence; 3, neglect of duty; 4. failure to develop to meet job requirements; 5. blatant disregard of Christian practice; 6. adherence to false doctrine (Constitution, Article II) or failure to honour and uphold the doctrinal position of the Synod as defined further by Bylaw 1.03c," 6.43 (C).

These give some indication as to thinking current in our circles about reasons for removal from office (a *synodical* post of employment) in cases which do not go so far as to involve deposal from a "divine call" as pastor to a congregation. They also show that synodical employees, including pastors and teachers (whom the Synod is to *protect* as well as supervise), serve in their appointments (or "calls") with less "security" (as regard "tenure") and more reasons for "removal" (not always necessarily "deposal") than is generally held to be the case for parish pastors, serving congregations with a "divine calls" and "tenure".

⁴ Norbert Mueller and George Kraus, editors, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis, Missouri:

Leaving the Office

A man who has been called to the pastoral ministry should not forsake that office merely for purely personal reasons. However, a pastor may resign from a particular call for valid reasons. For example, serious illness may prevent a pastor from performing all of the responsibilities of his call; and out of concern for the congregation he may resign from the call he has and retire from active service. Or he may conclude that he cannot do what is required of him and (having resigned from his call) await another call that is more suited for his abilities. Or advancing age may bring the pastor willingly to recognize that the Lord is nudging him to retire from active service. (Regrettably, a pastor occasionally fails to realize his inability to function as pastor and forces his congregation to urge his retirement due to declining mental or physical abilities.)

Leaving by Forced Resignation or Defrocking

Unfortunately, the change may be forced by tactless, legalistic, and unwise decisions. If so, the services of the circuit counselor and/or district president may be needed to bring peace. Such counsel is needed especially when the criticisms against the pastor are not personal but are directed against his faithful preaching of Biblical doctrine.

A Christian congregation, of course, has the right to depose its pastor or ask for his resignation—assuming the action is according to God's will. (The irony is that the pastor is the one who has taught the congregation what God's will is.) Biblical reasons for removal from office are (1) teaching false doctrine (Titus 1:9); (2) ungodly conduct (1 Tim. 3:1-7); and (3) willful neglect of duty (1 Cor. 4:1-2). Since the principles of admonition and church discipline (cf. Unit IV, 10) apply to the pastor as well as anyone, the aid, counsel, and support of the transparochial church and ministerium should be sought. In the Missouri Synod, the circuit counselor and/or district president should be informed and should assist so that proper procedures are followed.

As more and more stress affects the relationship between pastor and congregation, both are tempted to treat problems with non-Biblical means and to use the power and authority of the secular courts. Yet, both problems and punishment can be God's

means of bringing about confession and repentance. Following that, the Gospel can renew, heal, and restore both the pastor and the Christian congregation.

Presumably, a congregation's constitution which said this would be accepted, and a congregation which acted in accord with this would be upheld in adjudication.

There is on this page some lack of clarity. I would say that when and where any of the three listed causes for deposition is present the church (local congregation, and/or the ministerium of the "transparochial" Church through its delegated officers) has not only the right but the *duty* to become God's agent as *God* works to depose a pastor from his call to the ministry. That is one issue.

The other issue, which is only alluded to here, is that of "forced resignation" *apart* from the demonstration of any of the three causes. Is there a way in keeping with "God's will" to ask for his resignation other than on the basis of one of the three stated causes? What does it mean to "urge his retirement"? (The heading speaks of Forced Resignation—is that allowed?) What does "inability to function" mean and who will judge it? Likewise for "declining mental or physical abilities"—how far in "decline"? Are those the only conditions that might develop which will bring about his "inability to function"?

It is interesting to study this page as the latest version of something that can be traced back to J. Fritz (1932) and C. F. W. Walther (1872). For both Walther and Fritz give evidence that they are prepared to entertain a thought which Mueller-Kraus defer to address, namely whether there is a principle of the "evident benefit/well-being of the Church" which can come into play against an appeal to "the divine call".

2. Walther's *Pastoraltheologie* discusses the call in #4 (necessity, AC XIV) and #5 (valid=*ratus* and legitimate=*rectus*, in which is included the opinion that a temporary call is not legitimate); associated topics (salary, ordination, etc.) are covered in #6-8. It is not until #50, his very last section, that Walther appends *Göttliche Regeln in Betreff von Predigerversetzungen* ("Divine Rules concerning the Moving of Preachers").

In connection with the question whether a preacher should let himself be moved (or removed) or accept another position offered to him, Walther says the observance of the following five rules is involved:

1. The preacher should wait quietly for a call of that sort which comes upon him, and never himself seek to get away—above all not for the sake of a higher salary or a more pleasant or easier position.

2. He should not yield or withdraw on account of the evil (people) in his congregation, who make his life bitter (Rom.12,21), unless it would be a case that it has simply to do with his weak human character [*seine gebrechliche Person*] and therefore a case in which things could be straightened out by another orthodox pastor—which would simply not be possible for him on account of the unfriendly personal relations [*des persönlichen Miszverhältnisses*] into which he has sort of run with the greater part of his congregational members (2 Cor. 13,10).

3. It must be clear to the eyes of men that the new office offered to him is not only of itself more important, but rather that also in it (the new position) the pastor would be able to use his gifts for a greater benefit to the Church than if he were to remain (1 Cor. 12,7).

4. He should not decide lightly, by himself, but should entrust the decision [*überlasse die Entscheidung*] equally to his present congregation, the calling congregation, as also to some experienced men taught of God (Prov. 12,15).

5. He should not leave his congregation without their express consent, unless it is a case in which it is clear to everyone that that congregation is refusing its consent out of sheer stubbornness and disregard for the welfare of the Church.⁵

The point of departure for the ensuing discussion is the opinion of some that a pastor, once called and installed by God, should never move. A middle path is counselled, between seeking to move for human reasons and refusing to move when it is for the welfare of the Church. Walther lists conditions under which, in his view, a man may not refuse a new office:⁶ when a valid call has come (contrary to his expectation) and he in good conscience is convinced it is in order and is leading to a situation for the bearing of more fruit, and others advise accepting, and both the authorities [*Obrigkeit*] and his present congregation give their peaceful consent.

Then he says:

I wish to add a few things as regards the deciding of special cases.

⁵ C.F.W. Walther *Pastoraltheologie*, 1st ed. 1872, (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House) 401; the (very wooden) translation is my own.

⁶ Walther 405.

When those who are in the leadership [*diejenigen welche an der Spitze stehen*] notice that the administration of the office of a preacher is becoming entirely unbeneficial [*ganz unnützlich*], then they can move [*versetzen*] him, if it appears that his administration of the office would be more beneficial elsewhere. The administration of the office tends to become unbeneficial equally whether on account of a given offence, if he has become to his congregation a scandalous offence—but in a way which would not be the case in another place; or when he has utterly lost his personal respect [*Ansehen*] and his person is lowly regarded; or on account of the dissimilarity of [his] gifts [*Ungleichheit der Gaben*, “poor match”] in relationship to the congregation; or on account of enmity which (long experience has shown) is hardly likely to be reconciled. When one sees from that that the hearts of a great portion are alienated, so that they repel the pastor’s work and receive his admonitions with all-too little respect, or that an irreconcilable grievance would be there, it would be better to move him to another place than that he be despised by his own members, to the humiliation of the office which he is administering.⁷

Walther also says that when a pastor’s health and ministry are suffering due to the climate, the Church can transfer him to a more suitable place as soon as there is an opportunity.

References to illustrations in Scripture and the testimony of the ancient Church then follow, including a reference to Martin Chemnitz, to support his assertion that a pastor should yield “when it is clear that not his doctrine but his weak human character forms the offence and that therefore his staying only impedes the advance of the work of God while another apparently would further the same in his place.”⁸

3. J.H.C. Fritz, in his *Pastoral Theology*, has what he uses from Walther #50 under “accepting a new charge,” in #6, **The Call to the Ministry**. First he repeats what Walther said, with some interesting adaptations:

The diversity of gifts which God has given to His pastors He would have so used that the Church as such derives the greatest possible benefit therefrom; the members of the spiritual body of Christ should serve one another in the interest of the welfare of the body as such, or for the common, or general, benefit of the Church Whether, therefore, a pastor should accept a new charge depends not only upon the greater importance of that charge and

⁷ Walther 405; my trans.

⁸ Walther 423, referring to Chemnitz’ *Evangelienharmonie* ch. 72, on Mt. 10:23.

the greater influence it exerts or might exert in the Church, but also whether a certain pastor can use his gifts at that charge to greater advantage for the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom. His present charge should not be made to suffer to such an extent by his leaving that not only nothing will have been gained for the Church at large, but that rather serious damage will have been done.

From what has been said the following deductions can be made: 1. A pastor should wait until a call comes to him and should not of his own accord cast about for a call, especially not if he intends to do so merely to get a larger salary, I Cor. 9, 14-19; 1 Thess. 2, 9, to find more pleasant surroundings and easier work, or to please relatives and friends, Gal. 1, 15.16, or because he believes that his gifts and ability entitle him to more important, difficult, and responsible work in the Church. If a pastor is well qualified for greater work in the Church, the Lord knows his address. 2. A pastor should not leave his congregation because of an evil-minded persons in his church who are embittering his life, Rom. 12,21. If, however, a situation arises that on account of his own frailties and shortcomings a pastor has lost the confidence of a large portion of his congregation and cannot under such circumstances expect to have much success, he had better make room for another pastor, under whom such confidence can be restored and the work of the Lord can be made to prosper, 1 Cor. 13,10; Rom. 14,19; 15,2; 2 Cor. 10,8; 12; 19; Eph. 4,12. 3. Although the final decision whether or not a pastor should accept a new call must be made by him, he should seek the counsel not only of his own congregation, but also of brethren in the ministry, especially those of more mature experience, Prov. 12,5. A pastor should not leave his congregation without its consent, unless it be very apparent that mere stubbornness and utter disregard of the welfare of the Church at large cause it to withhold such consent, Acts 5,9. 4. A pastor should not decline a call because the other charge presents greater difficulties or does not offer as large a salary as he is getting now, or because the surroundings (parsonage, people, city or country) are not as pleasant or agreeable as he would like to have them. 5. A pastor should take the whole matter to the Lord in prayer, asking Him to let him know and do His will; for a pastor can have a good conscience and do his work cheerfully only when he is convinced that his call is divine. If it is clearly evident that the Lord is calling a pastor to another charge, that pastor cannot with a good conscience decline it, Matt. 25,30; 1 Cor. 9,16.17; Ex. 4,10-12; 1 Kings 13,20-26;

Jer. 1,17; Jonah 1,1f.⁹

Eventually he adds some words of his own, to address special concerns:

Deposing a Pastor from Office

A Christian congregation may depose its pastor from office for the following reasons: teaching false doctrine, Titus 1,9; offensive conduct, 1 Tim. 3,1-7; wilful neglect of official duties, 1 Tim. 2,2; I Cor. 4,1.2. In case of inefficiency a congregation may request that its pastor accept another call or tender his resignation.

A congregation should never act hastily in deposing a pastor from office. The seriousness of such a situation demands due deliberation and careful consideration. A guilty pastor need not always (provided, of course, that he repents and amends his ways) be deposed from office; but persistent wrong-doing as also the committing of such sins as drunkenness, adultery, or theft, whereby the office of the ministry has been disgraced even in the eyes of the world and the confidence of the people in their pastor has been shattered, demand that a pastor be unfrocked, even though he repent and promise to amend his ways, 1 Tim. 3,7. Whether such a man may later again be permitted to take charge of a Christian congregation or to serve the Church as one of its officials or as a teacher at one of its educational institutions depends not only upon his subsequent manner of life, but also upon the extent to which the offense has become known ...

In case of *inefficiency* (physical infirmities, not being able to cope with changed conditions, as with those of a larger congregation, more work, etc., or no longer “apt to teach,” 1 Tim. 3,2) on the part of a pastor a congregation should not depose its pastor, but it has a right, even the duty, to see to it that he accepts another call, if he be at all still able to serve another congregation, or to ask him to resign. Due consideration must, however, be shown the pastor and his family; if necessary (old age, sickness), a congregation should give financial support to a pastor who is compelled to retire.¹⁰

⁹ J.H.C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1932) 52-53.

¹⁰ Fritz 54-55. Fritz, as Walther before him, also enunciates the principle that “a pastor should not accept a call to a congregation which has without good reason (false doctrine, offense, wilful neglect of official duties) and *unjustly* deposed its pastor from office”, but Fritz then adds “or compelled him to resign or to look for another call”.

4. As we read Walther, Fritz, and Mueller-Kraus, we see much continuity. Three tendencies, however, are worth noting.

a) First, all three emphasise that the principles of the more fruitful use of his gifts and the greater benefit to the Church are paramount when a pastor is considering a call he has received. But Fritz says that “the final decision whether or not a pastor should accept a new call must be made by him”.¹¹ Walther, on the other hand, says no such thing, but that the decision should be entrusted equally to his current congregation and more mature brothers in the ministry—and, where applicable, the “authorities”.

b) Secondly, all three handle matters of illness or advancing age somewhat similarly, but it is interesting to note the different special cases which each alludes to. Walther speaks about situations in which a pastor’s human weakness leads to an offence or bad relationships with the members so that he has lost the respect of most of the people and the people refuse to receive his ministry.¹² Fritz mentions that kind of case as well.¹³ Later he explicitly states the three causes for deposing a pastor, but he then also makes it a special point to say that a congregation may *not* depose a pastor because of *inefficiency* (more of which below). He makes reference to forced resignation or taking of a new call. He also leaves room open to discuss whether a pastor deposed for a scandalous offence (drunkenness, adultery or theft, e.g.) might later be allowed to serve another congregation or teach in a church school.¹⁴ One can only assume that specific cases led Fritz to set down those thoughts. Perhaps there had arisen a tendency for congregations to terminate (depose or remove) pastors for “inefficiency”. Perhaps church officials were working to rehabilitate and re-assign deposed pastors. Finally, Mueller and Kraus seem to have decided to drop this whole discussion of special cases, simply saying a congregation may depose its pastor “or ask for his resignation—assuming the action is according to God’s will”, which is summarised in the three causes, with Biblical references. But a final paragraph alludes to more and more stress in relationships between pastors and congregations—and solving them in non-Biblical (secular) ways. A new situation of practice has developed (as we know)—a chaotic one.

c) There is a third trend observable in these three books: a move away from initiative by “leaders” towards congregational action with “*advice on procedures*” from the “transparochial Church”. Walther said (cryptically?) that “Those who are in the leadership” (*Diejenige, welche an der Spitze*

¹¹ Fritz 53.

¹² Walther 401.

¹³ Fritz 52.

¹⁴ Fritz 55.

stehen) can move (*können versetzen*) a pastor whose administration of the office has become harmful. (One recalls the matter with Stefan.) But in Fritz, any initiative on the part of leaders in the “transparochial” Church has disappeared. In a situation where a pastor has lost the confidence of many members and “cannot ... expect to have much success, he had better make room for another pastor”¹⁵ (How likely is that to happen?) And, Fritz says, in case of *inefficiency* (physical infirmities, inability to cope with changed conditions) a congregation should *not depose* its pastor “but it has a right, even the duty, to see to it that he accepts another call, if he be at all still able to serve another congregation, or to ask him to resign.”¹⁶ Also in Mueller-Kraus, the *congregation* acts, and the “transparochial Church and ministerium” are left to a role of advice and support.

In summary, as we move from Walther to Fritz to Mueller-Kraus, we find the evaluations and decisions about ministry take place more and more on the local scene, with the transparochial Church and ministerium moved to the sidelines. At the same time, the idea of removing a pastor from his call without actually defrocking him for cause seems to be spreading.

5. When we get into removing pastors without deposing them on the basis of specific Scriptural passages, we are in a poorly-defined area. Who shall act, and on what basis? But we do have in our tradition the notion of supervision by responsible churchmen.

For as we read in Fritz—and especially in Walther—there emerges a “practical theological” principle: that a person must judge whether a man’s administration of the office in a place is *beneficial* or not or would be more fruitful elsewhere—and must act accordingly. The *well-being of the Church* (at large) is also a criterion underlying the judging of matters involving the moving of pastors.

Consider how all three books reason when a pastor receives a call. All involved should participate in the decision to determine where the man’s gifts will be used most fruitfully and to the greatest benefit of the Church—and that course, then, is the one the pastor is duty-bound to follow. And if the decision is that he should accept the new call, what if his current congregation refuses to grant him a peaceful release? What if they say: “You have a divine call to serve us; God wants you to stay here!” Well, Walther and Fritz say, one should disregard such protestations (even, I would add, appeals to the divinity of the call) as coming from sheer stubbornness and an evident refusal to consider the well-being of the Church. Note that the general assessment of what is for the good of the Church overrules that congregation’s appeal to the divinity of the call in their effort to *hold on to*

¹⁵ Fritz 52.

¹⁶ Fritz 55.

that pastor.

So also (I propose) in the reverse case. When the leaders (Walther) or the congregation and (one hopes) the pastor himself (Fritz) note that a pastor's administration of the office has become "unbeneficial" (*unnützlich*) and that a change would be for the good of the Church (at large), they are to "move him", "make room for another", or "see to it" that he takes another call. And this principle, it must be assumed, could also be pressed against a man who resisted the move and tried to hang on to his congregation—even on the basis of the "divinity of his call"—out of what might also be called sheer stubbornness and evident refusal to regard the well-being of the Church.

This review, to this point, probably raises more questions than it answers. As we ponder the above and muse on personal experiences and current events, practical questions arise, for example:

Are the principles we avow and procedures we follow (as regards deposal and removal) 1) clear? 2) adequate? 3) being followed? That is:

- 1) Are the reasons that are the basis for either deposal or removal (or both) clear and appropriate?
- 2) When a person is removed, but not put out of the ministry, what are the perceived rationale and procedure?
- 3) Is the current concern really about "removal" without going through the procedure for deposal (and expulsion from synod). When it happens, why is it done this way—i.e. without going to procedures for deposal from office and expulsion from synod?

III.

Surely, it can come to a point where one called and ordained by God *needs* to be removed. Jeremiah 23 is a classic passage about self-serving shepherds and abused sheep, as is Ezekiel 34. But how shall he be removed? *God* will see to it. The sheep do not do it. God does it—mediately, to be sure.

Saul was God's choice as shepherd-king of his people. He became unworthy. David was anointed to succeed Saul. Saul sought to kill David. David did not kill Saul even when he could have. Even though he knew that he was to displace Saul, he would not raise his hand against "the Lord's anointed". He waited.

Sheep should not be expected to "raise their hand" against the man whom they have been given and to whom they have looked as God's man in their midst. If he is to forfeit his office, it should come to pass another way.

We might think of a pastor as the spiritual father of a family of the saints. His office is for the sake of *their* life and growth. But what if he uses

his office to serve and aggrandise himself and to abuse the saints?

A. Perhaps we can learn about the unfortunate dynamics at work and also uncover some helpful procedures by looking at the analogous issue of child abuse in families and how we in society handle it (or fail to handle it).

The miracle of God works conception and a mother is called to motherhood and a father to fatherhood. They become stewards of a mystery, a miracle which God has wrought. Blest the house where father nurtures and leads and gives room for the growth of the children. But when he uses the power of his office to feed and aggrandise himself, to meet his own needs, and abuses the children, what happens? Suffering, fear, confusion among the children.

Do the neighbours notice? ... As the children go about showing evidence that they are being abused, perhaps someone does notice. Then what? Is it bad enough to tell the police? If someone deems it so, in come the police, social workers, *et alii*, and any one of a number of things start to happen. The goal is to help all concerned. Generally the children are removed from the father's care, therapy is arranged, or perhaps incarceration.

But if there is no intervention from society-at-large, the abuse usually just goes on and on, perhaps to be ended in a violent scene with a youngster lying in wait in the garage with a shotgun. One must also note that the potential is there for false accusations by children who are disturbed or making invidious comparisons of fathers; overzealous helpers might also make mountains out of molehills.

Generally, I'd summarise that the "rights of a father in his office" are respected until things have got pretty bad, at which time therapy is probably not likely to help and a forced removal is about the only safe choice.

On what basis does "society-at-large", in the form of its proper authorities, intervene and get itself in between a man and his children? On the basis of some grand conception of God, life, and our responsibility to be stewards and protectors of what He has entrusted to us ... and on the basis of the first function of Law and the God-given office of authorities in the Kingdom of the left hand. The "father's fatherhood" is a trust, not license for him to do anything he wishes. The law represents a curb on his behaviour and the civil authorities represent a God-ordained means to stop and punish his evil behaviour.

B. Almost every element in the above scene can be transferred, for our enlightenment and instruction, over to situations of "pastoral care or abuse of saints".

The pastor is the divinely appointed spiritual father of the family, the congregation. If he serve himself and the people begin to show signs of spiritual malnutrition and even abuse, it causes suffering, fear, confusion

among the people. They don't know what to do. They instinctively know they should not "raise their hand against" this man of God, but honour him for his office.

But will anyone take notice? Finally someone does. The proper authorities are called (sometimes by lay members themselves). Circuit Counsellor and District President visit. What usually happens? Therapy ... maybe. But often it gets worse. The pastor gets defensive. Things don't change. The people see something they don't like, but don't know what to do. They *endure* it.

It is at this point that our current ecclesiastical situation differs from society. We say, in essence, that our proper authorities are there to facilitate healing or to "advise" the congregations as to proper procedures for removal. But, with our (currently-emphasised) picture of *synod* as "advisory" (a human organisation), can we truly intervene, in the way police do with an abusive father?

Thus it may be left in the lap of the children to endure, or to solve the problem on their own. They are left with "advice" on how to do what (it is commonly felt) only they can do: depose or force the resignation of their pastor. This generally turns out to be a traumatic experience for all concerned, especially given that they usually opt for the forced resignation route—either out of compassion or out of a desire to avoid the prolonged wrangling and expense of a deposal procedure.

That is pretty much what we are left with in Mueller-Kraus and even Fritz. But is that how Walther saw it all? How did they handle Stefan? Who are "the ones who stand in the leadership"? The above analogy could lead to some reflection about behaviour in ministerium and Church. What temptations do pastors feel to use the office to serve self? What would be the signs of mistreated sheep? What steps should be followed if "sheep-abuse" is suspected? Who is responsible to act? Do congregational members covet another's pastor—or make invidious comparisons? Do they judge and complain about their pastors unjustifiably? Can anyone make the principle of the "good of the Church at large" prevail over sheer stubborn self-interest, or is the genie of congregationalism simply out of the bottle and not to be reined in again?

IV.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ... of Diagnosis, Prognosis and Proposal: What's going on ... and what to do?

Has this always been a problem in the Church? I suspect so. Has it always been as bad as now? I cannot know and could only guess.

A. WHAT IS THE CAUSE? Sin Sin that invades and corrupts hearts of ministers and laity. So it has probably always been a problem, and

probably as bad as now.

Sometimes people point to the widespread “lack of respect for authority” and general conditions in society as contributing factors to the removal of pastors. I don’t think so. Most of our congregations are strongly inclined to respect their leaders.

But I do think there are some contributing factors that have exacerbated the problem. They come from the Ministerium itself: We have contributed—greatly, I would say—to the conditions in which bad situations develop and are dealt with poorly.

1.) We have promulgated—or acquiesced while others promulgated—an *Übertragungslehre*, a distorted view of the relationship of Lord, Church, and Ministry. We have let it be taught and caught that the Lord gave “ministry” to the Church, *that is, to the local congregation*, which can order and delegate to its chosen representative such functions of ministry as it wishes. What therefore the congregation (supposedly) gives, it can (supposedly) also take back again. The transparochial Church is lost sight of, as is any personal minister representing it: any “bishop” is already deposed. Synod is “only advisory”; the “real stuff” is between pastor and congregation, and the District President better watch his step. Thus we have helped set up the situation in which a congregation acts on its own, for its own reasons, and thinks it has the full right to do so.

2.) We pastors and church leaders have also contributed to the conditions where this happens by spreading—or agreeing with— all kinds of nonsense about the human skills needed for “effective” ministry. I’ve done this much myself in the *Scriptural Standards and Ecclesiastical Expectations* document, which N. Nagel criticised aptly, as looking too much at the vehicle, not enough at the Giver of Gifts.¹⁷ When we talk about how it’s so “different” in the parish today (a “new world”) and what kind of communications and counselling and cross-cultural skills today’s pastors have to have. ... And when we *rely on* Personal Information Forms and interviews and all kinds of human psych-soc. stuff to get a good “fit”, a round peg in a round hole, etc And when we marvel at the “effective” ministry in growing churches ... WE RAISE CONGREGATIONAL EXPECTATIONS SO HIGH that they would be “satisfied” with only a small percentage of the current clergy—and only with them till they hit about 55. Leaving out the need for “the right attitude”, for love, forbearance, trust, thanksgiving for God’s gifts—all attitudes which arise from spiritual sources, we focus on *talents* and *training*. We scare the daylights out of the humbler

¹⁷ *Scriptural Standards and Ecclesiastical Expectations*, published by the BHES of LC-MS; Dr. Nagel’s criticism (which was not all negative) is in *Concordia Journal*, 17, 4 (October 1991): 440-7.

seminarians, and we raise the hopes of congregations that they can get a Renaissance super-hero for a pastor and have a booming, effective “ministry”. And what happens? People see: things aren’t booming here, this ministry is not effective. What (we think) *should* be happening here, isn’t. In disappointment, and with good intentions for the “mission and ministry of the Church in this place”, the congregation removes the pastor. Perhaps the District President may even let this happen—even without demonstration of godly causes—because *he* wants “effective” (successful) ministry, or perhaps because he suspects the man *should* be *deposed* but has no desire (or thinks he hasn’t the power?) to effect the deposing.

Either way, in trumping up the pastors’ needed skills, we sow the seeds of discontent and disappointment which can come to fruition in congregational removal from office.

3.) Finally, we in the ministerium contribute to all of this happening because of a certain kind of “professional courtesy among lone rangers”. We sort of say: “I’ve got my congregation, what he does with his is his business ... and we will just stay off of each others’ turf (and maintain a shared suspicion vs. the District President).” We find it easier, for the moment, to avoid doing what Paul did with Cephas in Antioch (Gal. 2) and what I wrote about in ch.7 of *Reclaiming Patterns of Pastoral Ministry*.¹⁸ The Ministerium *as a body* is responsible for the *Gospel* ministry of each minister in the Ministerium. The antics of *one* of us reflects badly on us all. Undermining of the Gospel by one diminishes us all. For our own good and for the sake of Christ’s Church, we need to be (to speak in worldly terms) a “self-policing profession”. We need to serve together under the Word of Truth. When we refrain from reciprocal reproof and encouragement, and we act like the Lone Ranger with his head in the sand, we let bad situations get worse until they end with *congregational removals*.

B. So what might we do? I close with two proposals/ exhortations.

1.) In *Reclaiming Patterns* I suggested that we study Scripture and serve together “under the Word of Truth”. For the sake of the Truth of the Gospel, let us speak humbly ... and receive humbly, words of reproof and encouragement from our brothers and fathers in the ministry. Let us get out of our defensive postures, and talk some real talk about our practices—each others’—which undermine the Gospel and abuse the saints. Can we recognise that the Ministerium as a whole has a responsibility for the Gospel ministry of each pastor?

2.) Along those lines and to that end, let us authorise and encourage our synodical officers, especially the District Presidents and circuit

¹⁸Jonathan F. Grothe, *Reclaiming Patterns of Pastoral Ministry: Jesus and Paul* (St. Louis, Missouri, Concordia Publishing House 1988) 84-94.

counsellors, to be the best they can be as supervisors of our Ministerium. Thus they may protect congregations from abuse. Of course we must also rely on their wisdom to sort out the false cries of “abuse” from the sheep and to protect the ministers from the congregations. But I think that phenomenon can be greatly diminished if we all work together to bring Gospel ministry to the people. Very few will complain falsely; most will receive such ministry with thanks and prosper and love their pastor.

I conclude by pointing out that all of the needed elements are in Heb. 13:17, one of the passages in the Small Catechism’s Table of Duties:

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief, for this is unprofitable for you.

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THE LUTHERAN LITURGY:¹ AN ADIAPHORON?

Roger J. Humann

At a Lutheran Church-Canada congregation on the Third Sunday of Easter, 1994, the order of service as announced in the bulletin was the following:

Opening Thought
Praise Time
Psalm
Service of the Word
Prayer
Closing Blessing

There was also an insert with the words of several songs, none of which bore a remote resemblance to anything contained in *Lutheran Worship* or *The Lutheran Hymnal*.

At one time the service at virtually any synodical congregation was with “page 5” or “page 15”. Today the proliferation of a wide range of worship formats and liturgical adaptations, frequently the individual product of the *pastor loci*, has become rather commonplace. Should a pastor be challenged as to the acceptability of such a course, he may very well counter that the liturgy is, after all, an *adiaphoron*.² Does not the venerable Augsburg Confession state it clearly: “it is not necessary that human traditions or rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere (AC VII)”³ Is this not something about which one is perfectly free to make up his own mind? This is the subject of our exploration.

The first part will deal with the response of Lutheran theology when it was forced to confront the issue of public worship forms at the time of the Reformation, a response which is not without normative value for our practice today. In the latter, and much briefer, part we shall focus on two New Testament passages as lenses through which to view the question as it confronts us today. We shall conclude with an excursus which will comment briefly on adjunct topics, each of which deserves further reflection.

¹ The term “liturgy” is used in this study in its narrow sense to designate the church’s primary service, namely The Holy Communion. The term itself connotes the “public service” which God renders to His church in Word and Sacrament and *not* the “peoples’ work” which is so often asserted.

² The term *adiaphoron* is used in its normal sense as an “indifferent” or free matter, i.e., something neither commanded nor forbidden in Holy Scripture.

³ All references to the Confessions in this study are from *The Book of Concord*, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959)

I. THE RESPONSE OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

1. The Necessity of Liturgy

The liturgy begins with divinely mandated ceremonies about the doing or not doing of which the church has no option and is not called upon to make any judgements. “Liturgy is inherent in the commission to proclaim the Word of God and dispense the sacraments”.⁴ Yet, “although the basic content and the basic form of proper external divine service are clearly indicated in God’s revelation, it does not follow that every question which occurs to us when shaping our service must receive a direct divine reply.”⁵

Our Lord commanded His followers to preach the Gospel, to teach the Word, and immediately they were left with the practical decisions as to when and where this should take place. If there were to be readings from the Old Testament which ones should they be? And what about the “Memoirs of the Apostles,” and “the Apostle”? What readings from what we know as *Gospels*, and the *Epistles* of Paul should be read, and should these readings replace or supplement the elder revelation?

He took the bread and wine and said, “This do.” But was it always to be done in the context of an evening meal? Exactly which words should be said on such occasions? Should the reading/preaching take place at the same time or in the same gathering as the Supper? What day of the week or time of day? How do the two ceremonies of Word and Table relate to one another? What about “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs”? What structure or order should be followed? Judgements must be made. As a result of that which was instituted by Christ the church was compelled to settle the empirical questions of form.⁶

2. Required Ceremonies and Adiaphora

The outward structure or form begins with God’s work, preaching and the sacraments.

The Chief worship of God is the preaching of the Gospel. (Apol XV 42)

Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and absolution ... these rites have the commandment of God and the promise of grace, which is the heart

⁴ Friedrich Kalb, *Theology of Worship in 17th Century Lutheranism*, trans. Henry P.A. Hamann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965) 74.

⁵ Kalb, *Theology* 104.

⁶ “To say that what happens in this arena does not really matter is to say that we and our freedom do not matter. Moreover, our creativity has a *goal* set not by us but by God: creations of a complex of audible and visible words appropriate to the mandated proclamation and sacramental enactment of the gospel.” Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jensen, *Lutheranism: The Theological Movement and Its Confessional Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) 205.

of the New Testament. When we are baptized, when we eat the Lord's body, when we are absolved, our hearts should firmly believe that God really forgives us for Christ's sake. Through the Word and the rite God simultaneously moves the heart to believe and take hold of faith. (Apol XIII 4,5)

At its very heart, then, the liturgy is "the public service that God renders to his church in Word and Sacrament."⁷ Brunner indicates that three elements (disregarding Baptism at this point) of form are required by reason of Christ's command: 1) The Word of God must be proclaimed; 2) The Holy Communion must be celebrated in conformity with Christ's institution; and 3) Both the intra-congregational proclamation and the celebration must be carried out in a gathering convening in the name of Jesus (Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 1:), which is, accordingly, identified as worship by invocation of the Triune God.⁸ Brunner himself admits that these three points constitute a minimum of positively prescribed elements of form and that these elements themselves admit, individually, of "manifold possibilities of form."⁹ In external form, therefore, the "divine service is a composite of divine institution and human formation."¹⁰

And "although the basic form of a proper external divine service is clearly indicated in God's revelation, it does not follow that every question which occurs to us when shaping our service must receive a direct divine reply."¹¹ "'Adiaphora' are all *other* matters, about which we are indeed called to judge."¹² On the one hand adiaphora are neither worship (in the narrow sense) nor any part of it, "yet on the other hand, actual worship is not possible without concrete particulars of time, place, and manner, in other words, *adiaphora*!"¹³ It would be a mistake to infer from this, however, that such particulars, ceremonies, or liturgical forms do not matter.¹⁴

⁷ John T. Pless, "The Relationship of Adiaphora and Liturgy in the Lutheran Confessions," in *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel*, ed. Gerald S. Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Dearborn, Mich.: The Nagel Festschrift Committee, 1990) 197.

⁸ Peter Brunner, *Worship in the Name of Jesus*, trans. M. H. Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968) 221-2.

⁹ Brunner 222.

¹⁰ Kalb 81.

¹¹ Kalb 104.

¹² Gritsch/Jensen 202.

¹³ Kurt Marquart, "Confession and Ceremonies," in *A Contemporary Look at The Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978) 263.

¹⁴ "The a-liturgical orientation of our modern Reformed-pietistic environment moreover jumps too easily to the conclusion that Article X [FC] simply consigns everything liturgical to the realm of *adiaphora*, so long as Word and Sacraments still come to expression somehow, all outward arrangements are free and 'indifferent.'" Marquart 263-4. "Liturgically, talk of 'adiaphora' has continuously tempted Lutherans to suppose that so long

3. *Adiaphora* and Justification

By and large, over the years the *adiaphora*, the forms, rites, and ceremonies, came to explicate and reflect the church's understanding of the divinely mandated ceremonies. The liturgy of the church at any given time was an expression of her faith and confession. Thus, for example, as the understanding of the mass as a meritorious sacrifice came to dominate her thinking, this was clearly seen in the emerging rites and ceremonies of the church's liturgy. The time of the Reformation was a time for a reevaluation of the *adiaphora*; if the focus of the church's belief was to change, this must needs be reflected in her worship forms. It should not be surprising that just as the AC bases the need for the office of preaching directly on its doctrine of justification, so justification is at the centre of the discussion of public worship and ceremonies.

It began with Luther. When he finally set his hand to the revision of the mass he made clear the guiding principle: "we will deal with an evangelical (Latin: *pia*) form of saying mass."¹⁵ The Gospel is the heart of the Christian faith. The Gospel is God's free offer of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ which is mediated through the Word and sacraments, and received by faith.

For the chief article of the Gospel must be maintained, namely, that we obtain the grace of God through faith in Christ without our merits; we do not merit it by services of God instituted by men. (AC XXVIII 52)

As the Word was given to arouse this faith, so the sacrament was instituted to move the heart to believe through what it presents to the eyes. For the Holy Spirit works through the Word and the sacraments. (Apol XXIV)

As we have often said, faith is not merely knowledge but rather a desire to accept and grasp what is offered in the promise of Christ ... God wants us to believe him and to accept blessings from him; this he declares to be true worship. (Apol IV 227,228)

Thus the service and worship of the Gospel is to receive good things from God, while the worship of the law is to offer and

as sermons are preached, and water, bread, and wine are regularly present with the minimum of 'words,' it does not really matter what happens otherwise; and Lutherans have hardly ever resisted the temptation. Naturally, one devotes little thought to what does not really matter." Gritsch/Jensen 203.

¹⁵ AE 53:20. Cf. "Liturgy reflects doctrine; since Roman Catholic liturgy reflects Roman Catholic doctrine, it must be rejected as being contrary to the gospel." Gritsch/Jensen 196.

present our goods to God. (Apol IV 310)

Faith is that worship which receives God's offered blessings; the righteousness of the law is that worship which offers God our own merits. It is by faith that God wants to be worshiped, namely that we receive from him what he promises and offers.(Apol IV 49)

In short, the worship of the New Testament is spiritual; it is the righteousness of faith in the heart and the fruits of faith. (Apol XXIV 27)

True worship, then, is faith which is engendered by the Holy Spirit through the Word and sacraments and which receives the gifts of God. Proper worship is thoroughly grounded in the doctrine of justification and justification thus becomes the touchstone for liturgical change and adaptation.

As a consequence "Luther's liturgical revisions were not ill-conceived efforts at creating a new liturgy but rather a re-working of the historic Mass in a manner entirely consistent with the doctrine of justification."¹⁶ This was the motivation for his excision of the Roman offertory: "From here on almost everything smacks and savors of sacrifice ... Let us, therefore, repudiate everything that smacks of sacrifice, together with the entire canon and retain only that which is pure and holy, and so order our mass."¹⁷ In a similar vein AC XV does not reject ceremonies *per se*, but rather those "ordinances and traditions instituted by men for the purpose of propitiating God and earning grace." (AC XV 3)¹⁸The authority of bishops, specifically with respect to establishing worship practices, is limited and normed by the Gospel: "our teachers assert that bishops do not have power to institute or establish anything contrary to the Gospel." (AC XXVIII 34).

Worship is order. There are indeed "ceremonies and church rites

¹⁶ Pless 196.

¹⁷ AE 53:26

¹⁸ "The Reformers' critical evaluation of the rites and ceremonies which they had inherited led to a general simplification of their services and to the actual dropping of many ceremonies as valueless or worse. Among the abandoned features that the Symbolical Books specifically refer to are: Processions with the Blessed Sacrament; private Masses; daily aspersions with holy water; the distinctions of meats; penitential satisfactions such as pilgrimages; indulgences; the Dominican Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary; relics of the Saints; 'the unprofitable and burdensome babbling of the seven canonical hours'; masses, vigils, and prayers for the deliverance of the poor souls from purgatory; Communion under one kind only; and the worship of the saints in such a fashion 'that the saints are put in Christ's place and they are worshipped in a wicked way.'" Arthur Carl Piepkorn, *What the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church Have to Say About Worship and the Sacraments* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952) 13-14.

which are neither commanded nor forbidden in the Word of God but which have been introduced into the church with good intentions for the sake of good order and decorum or else to preserve Christian discipline” (FC SD X,1). Furthermore:

the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority, and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offense but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most profitable, beneficial, and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church (FC SD X,9)

“But the words ‘at any time’ have one exception: The ‘time of confession, as when the enemies of the Word of God desire to suppress the pure doctrine of the holy Gospel’ (FC SD X,10).”¹⁹Once again justification is at the centre of the decision making. “Here we are dealing primarily with the chief article of our Christian faith” (FC SD X,14). At this point ceremonies which are “in themselves matters of indifference and are neither commanded nor forbidden by God” (FC SD X,2) are no longer indifferent when the Gospel is at stake.

It is instructive to note at this point what the confessors explicitly exclude from the category of ‘matters of indifference’: 1) ceremonies which are basically contrary to the Word of God, even though they go under the name and guise of external *adiaphora*; 2) ceremonies designed to give the impression that our religion does not differ greatly from that of the papists; or ceremonies intended to create the illusion that these two opposing religions have been brought into agreement; 3) useless and foolish spectacles, which serve neither good order, Christian discipline, nor evangelical decorum in the church (FC SD, 5-7).

4. Ceremonies: A Positive Witness to Catholicity

However, it can readily be judged that nothing contributes so much to the maintenance of dignity in public worship and the cultivation of reverence and devotion among the people as the proper observance of ceremonies in the church. (AC “Abuses”; Tappert 49)

The use of ceremonies, although they are *adiaphora* but which are in harmony with the doctrine of justification, is to be maintained for two reasons: 1)ceremonies witness to the catholicity of Lutheranism, and 2)they serve for the edification of God’s people. Schalk comments with respect to

¹⁹ Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961) 267.

Luther's *Formula Missae* and his *Deutsche Messe*: "In these orders two ideas predominate: the desire to retain as much as possible, the historic practice of the church in order that worship might truly retain its catholic character and thus avoid a sectarian spirit; and the desire to enlarge the involvement of the people as much as possible and appropriate."²⁰

So Luther writes in the Preface to his German Mass: "As far as possible we should observe the same rites and ceremonies, just as all Christians have the same baptism and the same sacrament [of the altar] and no one has received a special one of his own from God."²¹ Although "it is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian Church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places" (AC VII, 3), nonetheless such ceremonies are evidence of and point to the genuine catholicity of the church both in its historic and contemporary aspects. "For the feeling of church unity extends not only to those who happen to gather at one place and at the same moment; it goes back to the time of the primitive church."²²

Here Paul is our constant champion; everywhere he insists that these observances neither justify nor are necessary over and above the righteousness of faith. Nevertheless, liberty in these matters should be used moderately, lest the weak be offended and become hostile to the true teaching of the Gospel because of an abuse of liberty. Nothing should be changed in the accustomed rites without good reason, and to foster harmony those ancient customs should be kept which can be kept without sin or without great disadvantage. This is what we teach ... the greatest public harmony without offense to consciences, should be preferred to all other advantages. (Apol XV, 50-52)

In the same year as the signing of the Augsburg Confession the church ritual of Riga "expresses the wish 'that so far as is possible and helpful to our people, we may agree not only with our people here in Livonia but also with our neighbours and other states in the German lands in which the Gospel of Christ is also proclaimed clearly and richly—especially in the principal matters pertaining to outward divine service or ceremonies.'"²³

Ceremonies also have a practical, didactic function. "The purpose of observing ceremonies is that men may learn the Scriptures and that those

²⁰ Carl F. Schalk, "Sketches of Lutheran Worship," chapter 11 in *A Handbook of Church Music*, ed. Carl Halter and Carl Schalk (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978) 62.

²¹ *AE* 53:61.

²² Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962) 331.

²³ Elert 333-4.

who have been touched by the Word may receive faith and fear and so may pray” (Apol XXIV, 3).

Although the holy Fathers themselves had rites and traditions, they did not regard them as useful or necessary for justification. They did not obscure the glory or work of Christ but taught that we are justified by faith for Christ’s sake, not for the sake of these human rites. They observed these human rites because they were profitable for good order, because they gave the people a set time to assemble, because they provided an example of how all things could be done decently and in order in the churches, and finally because they helped instruct the common folk. For different seasons and various rites serve as reminders for the common folk. For these reasons the Fathers kept ceremonies, and for the same reasons we also believe in keeping traditions. (Apol XV, 20-21)

We gladly keep the old traditions set up in the church because they are useful and promote tranquillity, and interpret them in an evangelical way (Apol XV 38).²⁴

The FC as well speaks of ceremonies which are “profitable, and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church” (SD X, 9). It might also be noted that the reference to ‘discipline’ is

more than a mere repetition of the pedagogical motive. It expresses the realization that the congregation assembled around the Word and the sacraments need other forms than an individual needs when reading the Word or praying by himself. Unity demands that the individual refrain from being arbitrary and autocratic. It demands the individual’s regard for the whole.²⁵

5. The Lutheran Service is the Mass

In the light of the foregoing it is not surprising that the AC can declare unequivocally: “Without boasting, it is manifest that the Mass is observed among us with greater devotion and more earnestness than among our opponents” (XXIV, 1).²⁶

²⁴ “Among the many traditional elements which the Reformers retained and which the Symbolical Books mention specifically are: The pericopal system, sermons, the ordinary of the Mass and other chants, Sunday, the ecclesiastical year, the dignity of feasts, the ancient collects, the Whitsunday sequence, Eucharistic and other vestments, candles, altarware of gold, the use of Latin (on account of those who understand or are learning Latin), chanting of the Psalter, the sign of the Holy Cross, the customary ceremonial of the Mass, kneeling for prayer, folded hands” (Piepkorn 12).

²⁵ Elert 328.

²⁶ The observation of Piepkorn is informative at this point. “The sixteenth century

... no novelty has been introduced which did not exist in the church from ancient times, and ... no conspicuous change has been made in the public ceremonies of the Mass except that other unnecessary Masses which were held in addition to the parochial Mass, probably through abuse, have been discontinued. (AC XXV, 40)

So in our churches we willingly observe the order of the Mass, the Lord's day, and the other important feast days. With a very thankful spirit we cherish the useful and ancient ordinances. (Apol VII/VIII 33).

In our churches Mass is celebrated every Sunday and on other festivals, when the sacrament is offered to those who wish for it after they have been examined and absolved. We keep traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of the lessons, prayers, vestments, etc. (Apol XXIV 1)

We can truthfully claim that in our churches the public liturgy is more decent than in theirs, and if you look at it correctly we are more faithful to the canons than our opponents are ... Every Lord's Day many in our circles use the Lord's Supper, but only after they have been instructed, examined, and absolved. The children chant the Psalms in order to learn; the people sing, too, in order to learn or to worship. (Apol. XV 40)

6. A Lutheran Liturgical Hermeneutic

Recognising their Christian freedom the Reformers consciously and deliberately carried forward the historic liturgy of the Western Church, in general making only those changes which were mandated by the doctrine of justification. This is surely in keeping with the Lutheran self-understanding of being in continuity with the only, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. The basic Lutheran liturgical principle with respect to adiaphora was stated by Luther:

For one should not overthrow or change what cannot be

saw the beginning of extensive innovations in Roman ritual and ceremonial. In general, these had not reached northern Europe by the time the Reformation began. Consequently they exerted only slight influence on the historic Lutheran rite. Where the historic Lutheran rite has been retained or restored, it generally reveals a purer and older form of the Western rite than the reformed Roman Catholic rite of today exhibits. This is significant. It gives us a denominationally and confessionally distinctive rite to which we have historic title and which we have not lately borrowed from alien sources. It gives us a rite which is an invaluable symbol of the antiquity, the historic continuity, and the thorough Catholicity of the Church of the Augsburg Confession. At the same time it gives us a rite which is both older than, and significantly and recognizably different from, the present Roman Catholic rite." 12.

overthrown or changed on the basis of clear Scripture. God is wonderful in His works. What He does not want, this He points out exhaustively in Scripture. What He does not point out there, this one should let stand as His work. We are excused. He will not mislead us.²⁷

Therefore, “as in the domain of dogma, the principle by far predominant in Lutheranism was to recognise previous development even with respect to worship. Scripture must be normative only for what is to be *weeded out*. To be sure, even this conservative position required the elimination of no small amount of what the Roman Catholic Church had handed down in the matter of worship”.²⁸

II. THE QUESTION FOR TODAY

Are we, then, ready to answer the question: The Lutheran Liturgy, an *adiaphoron*? On the basis of 16th century Lutheran theology and practice, and identifying “liturgy” with the basic Mass form, the answer is no doubt a theoretical “yes” (in the sense that the Word of God does not specify the precise order of service we are to use), but a practical “**no!**” However, we stand over 400 years later on the threshold of the 21st century. “*Adiaphora* and indifferent matters are always subject to judgments of time and conditions.”²⁹ “The Lutheran Confessions did not establish a list of *adiaphora* for all time. What are *adiaphora* is a decision **the church** (emphasis mine) must make at various times and in various places.”³⁰

Furthermore, the Divine Service (Mass) itself is not and never has been a completely static entity. The Mass of Luther’s day was not identical with that of the 10th century, nor that of the 10th with that of the 5th, just as the Roman Mass of 16th century is not identical with that which is post-Vatican II.

So today, “Divine Service II” in *Lutheran Worship* is undoubtedly the same “Mass” as “The Order of the Holy Communion” in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, yet the two are not identical. Divine Service II (re)introduces the

²⁷ WA 26, 167, 11ff., qtd by Elert 327, n. 8.

²⁸ Elert 327. “In essence, the Reformers are saying: Absolutely considered, we could be very radical without sinning against an express precept of God; actually we recognize an obligation, born of our historic past and our historic situation, not to exercise the liberty that we could theoretically invoke. As little as they felt that they could dispense with the *doctrinal* categories, formulations, and terminology when they had inherited, so little did they feel themselves privileged to dispense with their inherited *worship* categories and formulations. Both comprise symbols.” Piepkorn 11.

²⁹ Eugene F. Klug and Otto F. Stahlke, *Getting into the Formula of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977) 62-3.

³⁰ Gritsch/Jensen 197.

litany form of the Kyrie, offers an alternative Hymn of Praise for the Easter season (a modern composition based on Rev. 5:9-13; 19:4-9), new optional Offertory texts and Post-communion Canticle. Whether these maintain a place in the church's worship will have to await a new hymnal 20 or 30 years from now.

The point is, all of our decisions have not unalterably been made for us, but perhaps we need some clear guidelines to help in our decision-making. Such guidelines, as we have seen, are close at hand in our Lutheran liturgical (theological/confessional) heritage. They may be further clarified and augmented on the basis of two New Testament passages which relate rather directly to the question at hand.

1. Mark 2:23-28

In their plucking of the ripened grain, Jesus' disciples run afoul of the Pharisees when they do "that which is not permitted" (οὐκ ἔξεστιν) on the Sabbath. Our Lord responds with two key statements.

a) The Sabbath came about for the sake of man.

The blessing and sanctifying at the beginning was not done for God but for man who was "to have a preliminary and foreshadowing share in God's rest."³¹ The hallowed seventh day was a concrete sign which expressed and conveyed God's will that mankind should participate in this divine rest. In the pristine worship of God's foremost creature "every legalistic element, every element of constraint and of penalty, were absent." Man's "worship flowed with spontaneous necessity from the extravagant fullness of his divine image."³² In the fallen world this benevolent intention of God was manifest in Israel's Sabbath commandment.

b) The Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath.

Here we note that "the entire ceremonial law ... in particular also the Sabbath with its divine regulations, were given to Israel"³³ by the Lord as part of that gracious plan which would culminate in the coming of the Messiah. In the Son of Man, and in His fulfilment, "the whole ceremonial law would attain its divinely intended purpose,"³⁴ the new covenant without ceremonies would supercede the old. After Pentecost, led by the Spirit, the church would in perfect Christian liberty choose a day for the divine public worship, an occasion for God to impart His Messianic rest through Word and Sacrament.

³¹ Brunner 38.

³² Brunner 40.

³³ R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961) 129-30.

³⁴ Lenski 130.

2. I Corinthians 10:23

Because Christian liberty, however, is practised by those who are not fully renewed in the practical living out of the divine image which is restored in Christ, the complete spontaneity of pre-fall worship is not possible—even in the age of the New Testament church. This brings us to the second passage, I Corinthians 10:23, which is firmly implanted in Paul’s discussion relating to public worship: “everything is permitted, but not everything is beneficial; everything is permitted, but not every edifies” (πάντα ἔξεστιν ἀλλ’ οὐ πάντα συμφέρει· πάντα ἔξεστιν ἀλλ’ οὐ πάντα οἰκοδομεῖ). The “that which is not permitted: (οὐκ ἔξεστιν) of the old covenant becomes the “everything is permitted” (πάντα ἔξεστιν) of the new. In all probability one of the factions disrupting the church life at Corinth was celebrating its liberty with the slogan, πάντα ἔξεστιν—everything goes! But because the Christian is not only *iustus* but at the same time *peccator*, Paul adds the necessary qualification: but not everything is beneficial, but not every edifies (ἀλλ’ οὐ πάντα συμφέρει, ἀλλ’ οὐ πάντα οἰκοδομεῖ). Man with his old Adam is not free to do as he jolly well pleases.

Συμφέρω (confer a benefit) and οἰκοδομέω (edify) are Paul’s terms which qualify the exercise of Christian liberty.³⁵ We note two characteristics of these somewhat synonymous terms.

1) They are both community terms. The Christian community is important for Paul in determining what is profitable; the individual recedes into the background. That is beneficial (σύμφορον) which edifies the community (I Cor. 10:33). Paul recognises both for his own conduct and that of all Christians no other benefit than that which serves to build up the ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ this is the community of God’s chosen which ignores all social, political, and national boundaries, which transcends time, and is concretely realised in the ἐκκλησίαι in Rome, Corinth, and elsewhere. In other words, it is “catholic.”

2) Both terms point to God’s activity through the Gospel. Thus it is wrong, for example, for the individual who speaks in an unknown tongue to edify himself (I Cor. 14:4); this is a self-directed activity and not, therefore, motivated by love. The case is different, however, with the man who proclaims God’s Word (προφητεύων) because he edified the community (ἐκκλησίαν οἰκοδομεῖ). The community is edified through the exhortation of the Gospel (I Thess. 5:11). No one has put it better than Paul as he bids farewell to the presbyters from Ephesus: “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace which is able to build you up (οἰκοδομησαί) and to

³⁵ A more complete discussion of these terms may be found under the respective entries in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified: (Acts 20:32). God is the one who edifies the church through his Word of Grace so that the whole is built up with a view to eternity.

In discussing these same Pauline terms, Luther clearly reflects the apostle's thought when he writes in his "A Christian Exhortation to the Livonians":

For even though from the viewpoint of faith, the external orders are free and can without scruples be changed by anyone at any time, yet from the viewpoint of love, you are not free to use this liberty, but bound to consider the edification of the common people, as St. Paul says in I Corinthians 14 [:40], "All things should be done to edify," and I Corinthians 6 [:12], "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful: ...

Now when your people are confused and offended by your lack of uniform order, you cannot plead, "Externals are free. Here in my own place I am going to do as I please." ... By faith be free in your conscience toward God, but by love be bound to serve your neighbour's edification.³⁶

In planning for the worship of a congregation today the pastor does not begin *de novo*. On the one hand, the church has a large body of worship material, her liturgy. This is a given. The pastor is called upon to make numerous decisions within the parameters of the rubrics. This mandates significant competencies in the assimilation of a large body of information and in the skilful application thereof by one who has himself been profoundly shaped by the church's worship.³⁷

On the other hand, the pastor is confronted with the greater choice as to whether to use the forms of the church at all. In this case exactly how "free" is he? Perhaps not as free as one might think. His freedom is normed by that option which will more genuinely *edify God's people*. "Edify" has justification at its very centre; the Gospel is prominent and sins are clearly absolved. It grows out of and reflect Baptism and leads to the Lord's Supper. The Holy Spirit can do His work. "God's people" keeps the corporate nature

³⁶ AE 53:47-48.

³⁷ "Creative worship is not the result of resorting to innovative experiments in the attempt to create a new and improved model that reflects the latest style or fads, a procedure that invariably results in a religious *program* for the approbation of the people. Rather, creative worship comes through using the vast array of options and possibilities for the so-called *propers* in the Divine Service--even some options for the *ordinaries*--and selecting appropriate hymns and attendant music--all manifesting and advancing the particular day's importance in the church year." Fred L. Precht, *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993) 406.

of the church in focus and its catholicity, both in its historic and contemporary dimensions; it reflects the public confession and faith of the church. There is little scope for self-assertion. If the “alternative worship,” therefore, is anything less in these regards than the traditional liturgy, then one must ask whether it can be considered an *adiaphoron* at all?

It is the contention of this study that where the confessional heritage of the church and the Biblical norms for the exercise of Christian liberty are taken seriously, the pastoral and churchly use of the Lutheran Liturgy will not be found wanting.

EPILOGUE

It is the Third Sunday of Easter. I did not have the opportunity to worship where the service began with an “Opening Thought,” but I do know how things were where we used *Lutheran Worship*, Divine Service II, p. 158.

*As usual I hurried in and sat down just as the organ began to play. Snatches of the music sounded a bit familiar. I perused the bulletin and noted that we would specifically pray for the pastors and congregations at Elkford, B.D., Nipawin, Sask., and Oshawa, Ont. “Awake, My Heart, with Gladness”! —those were the words the organ prelude has triggered in my mind. We stand and sing the *first hymn*.

*Awake, my heart, with gladness, See what today is done;
Now, for gloom and sadness, Comes forth the glorious sun.
My Saviour there was laid Where our bed must be made
When to the realms of light Our spirit wings its flight.*

*We have no “Opening Thought,” but an invocation in the Name of the Triune God, the God into whose name I was baptised.

*We are no more than five minutes into the service and already heaven has been opened with no equivocation: “I forgive you all your sins.”

*It never ceases to amaze me how well our congregation has taken to the unaccompanied chanting of the Introit:

*You will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

*The singing of the post-Easter canticle, “This is the Feast” is almost raucous but, and this is different, today the women sing those parts designated **I** and the men, **II**.

*In the course of the service we hear:

*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under
heaven given to men by which we must be saved. (First Lesson)*

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but

also for the sins of the whole world. (Epistle)

This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (Gospel)

*And so the Service proceeds. We speak back to our God those saving truths He has so graciously given us to believe. At the appropriate time the “holies” of heaven combine with the earthly “hosannas” to welcome the Incarnate Lord who even now comes to us with His body and blood, and then bids us depart in peace.

*After the final hymn a rising tide of conversation competes with the organ postlude and continues after the organ is silent. The people linger in groups, almost reluctant to go their separate ways until next Lord’s Day they come together “In the Name ...”

The hungry sheep looked up, and they were fed. I’m not sure how things were where the service began with an “Opening Thought.”

EXCURSUS

At this point I would like to append a few observations and comments to indicate the ways in which areas related to this study may be further explored and developed.

Evangelism and the Liturgy

The argument for “alternative “ worship forms frequently points to the church’s need to evangelise. One must resort to an “evangelical style” of worship in order to make the service more accessible to “seekers.” Four observations:

1) The Divine Service itself can be a significant occasion for evangelism to take place. Here the “seeker” is taken out of the world and brought into the presence of God in a way that says, “This is different; this is special. There is nothing tawdry or superficial here.” With their lavish use of the Word of God and clear focus upon the Gospel, the liturgical texts give ample scope to the Holy Spirit to work that faith which can join in the confession that Jesus is Lord.

2) More to the point is the fact that the primary concern of the Divine Service is for those who are already the people of God. In the early centuries of the church, as we know, admittance to the church’s worship was severely restricted; clearly this did not inhibit evangelism. Rather, the goal of evangelism ought to be catechesis and incorporation into the liturgical life of the church. The goal of the liturgy is the nurture of God’s people until they enter into the glory of heaven.

3) One of the difficulties in assessing the so-called “Church Growth

Movement” is in trying to determine what is “growth” and what is merely “recycling” of members from one “evangelical” church in another with a similar worship style. The latter is far too common. The individual who is incorporated into the liturgical life of the church is not so easily “recycled.”

4) The fact that the Divine Service is the primary service of the church does not preclude the possibility of other services where the goal is specifically to invite the unchurched. (One can think back to the “Preaching, Teaching, Reaching” missions of the 1950’s and 60’s.) However the “style of these services should not be dissimilar to or incompatible with the Divine Service, but rather prepare for and lead into the fuller worship of God’s people.

Theological Erosion

One of the unsettling aspects of the rush to “alternative” worship is that it portends a growing theological erosion. A recent article observes that “evangelical” is “a code name for born-again evangelicals, fundamentalists, pentecostals, Southern Baptist, Missouri Lutherans, Christian Reformed and other evangelism-minded conservatives.”³⁸

How, one asks, does the LCMS find itself in such heterodox company? The bias of the author may be part of the answer; but perhaps another reason can be traced to the theological controversy of the LCMS of the 1960’s and 70’s. In the “battle for the Bible” many found common cause with the evangelicals/fundamentalists who also held firmly to an inspired and inerrant Scripture. As a consequence materials from David C. Cook, Standard, and other such religious publishers began making their way into the congregations and pastors’ studies of the Synod. Commitment to an inerrant Bible, however, does not guarantee the centrality of the Gospel with justification as the material principle of theology.

“Evangelical” worship tends to view Scripture less as a Gospel book and more as a how-to manual; it tends to the legalistic and subjective, is less concerned about right faith than right life, and blurs the distinctions between Law and Gospel, and church and world. One might well ask whether this is not “a time of confession” which would make the jettisoning of the Lutheran Liturgy even less of an *adiaphoron* (*FC SD X, 10*)

Music and the Liturgy

The liturgy per se is a text, or rather several texts arranged in a specific pattern. Yet music has been closely associated with the liturgy from the beginning, as it had been with the Temple cultus of the old covenant. Worship music over the centuries has reflected the various times and cultures of the church’s life. Excellent worship music continues to be created also in

³⁸ Martin Marty, “The Evangelical Mind,” in *In Trust*, New Year 1995 (Vol 6, No. 2) 32.

our generation by talented musicians working in a wide range of musical idioms.

But this does not mean that any sort of music, even what we might term “good,” is necessarily suitable for worship. For many centuries the church took a dim view of the use of musical instruments in its worship. Why? Because instrumental music had definite secular associations which were deemed inappropriate in the worship of God. The fact is that the culture of the world is alien to the life of the church. In choosing and using music for the liturgy today, the question is not that of personal musical tastes; rather there needs to be a clear distinction between the sounds of the world and sounds suitable for carrying and presenting the sacred texts.

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LAW/GOSPEL SERMONS VERSUS MORALISING MESSAGES

W. Theophil Janzow

What is the difference between being “moral” and being “sanctified”? Which are Christians called to be? How does a proper understanding of the distinction between the two relate to the task of preaching? In order to begin to answer these questions, we must examine the words “Law”, “Gospel”, “moral”, “moralising”, and “sanctification”.

Young’s Concordance has no listing for the words “moral” or “moralising”. The NIV Concordance lists James 1:21 as a verse that contains the word “moral”, translating ῥυπαρίαν with the phrase “moral filth”, whereas KJV translates it simply as “filthiness”, and the Liddell-Scott Greek-English Lexicon gives the English translation of ῥυπαρία as simply “dirt” or “filth”. Therefore it can be argued that the words “moral” or “moralising” do not appear in the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

True, our exposition of Luther’s Small Catechism uses the word “moral” when it distinguishes the categories of “*moral law*”, “ceremonial law”, and “political law”.¹ However, in that case these terms are labelling tools to help us distinguish between divine Law and human law and are used as aids in our teaching endeavours. They were historically developed to explain what the Scriptures teach rather than being taken directly from the Scriptures.

The word “Law” is, of course, used prolifically in the Scriptures. Some of the references to “law” are to human legal statutes or even to ceremonial and social ordinances, but the references to “law” that concern us here are to “that doctrine of the Bible in which God tells us how we are to be and what we are to do and not to do”,² e.g., Ps. 119:97: “Oh, how I love your law!” and Rom. 10:4: “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness.”

The word “Gospel” is also a frequent Biblical term, and except for the references in Galatians and 2 Corinthians to “a different gospel”,³ always refers to the good news about God’s nature and work in behalf of sinful mankind, His love, grace, mercy, and kindness which showed itself most wonderfully in the giving of His Son for the redemption of the human race

¹ *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991) 54, Question 14.

² *Luther’s Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943) 42, Question 15.

³ Gal. 1:6; 2 Cor. 11:4.

and by bringing people into His blessed kingdom by bestowing on them the gift of faith, as, for example, Paul's famous "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes".⁴

The words "sanctify" and "sanctification" are popular Biblical terms, both in the Old Testament and in the New. The Hebrew term *qadish* and the Greek words ἀγιαζῶ and ἁγιασμός have as their English equivalents the words "separate", "to set apart", or "a being set apart". The reference is to our being called out of this sin-cursed world to be forgiven children of God whose privilege now is to live under our Lord in His kingdom and to serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, as Luther so brilliantly puts it in his explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed.

The Synodical Catechism gives us a clear and simple definition of the "sanctification" concept when it discusses the work of the Holy Spirit. It tells us that in the wide sense the Spirit makes us holy by bringing us to faith in Christ so that we might have the blessings of redemption and lead a godly life.⁵ In the narrow sense, using the faith miraculously implanted in our hearts, he renews our whole life—in spirit, will, attitude, and desires—so that we now strive to overcome sin and do good works.⁶ Some people might suggest that preaching sanctification and moralising have a lot in common. Do they? That is the issue that this study must address.

"Moralising", as previously stated, is not a Biblical term, nor is its root word "moral" listed in the concordances. It is a secular term; a term that looks at human behaviour in comparison to man-made cultural standards. Webster's dictionary defines "moral" and "morality" as the "distinction between right and wrong action", and adds that "man is a moral being"; that is, it is in the nature of man to establish standards of right and wrong and to judge people as good or bad on the basis of their conformity or non-conformity to these standards. The key point here is that moral behaviour or morality, according to the dictionary, is to be "distinguished from religion" in that it involves human judgements rather than divine.

Social and cultural scientists have contributed to our understanding of this distinction by their cross-cultural comparisons of diverse societies and cultures. They find that, regardless of their religious orientation or lack of it, all societies have standards of approved and disapproved behaviour; they all classify some kinds of behaviour as good and some as bad.⁷

⁴ Rom. 1:16.

⁵ *Luther's Small Catechism* (1991) 146, Question 156.

⁶ *Luther's Small Catechism* (1991) 150, Question 162.

⁷ John A. Perry and Erna K. Perry, *The Social Web* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983) 102.

Somehow this tends to surprise us. In the course of my life I have met people from diverse parts of the world. In some countries animism and paganism predominate. To find that they have strong standards of right and wrong behaviour is not necessarily surprising. But what about the so-called non-religious, atheistic societies, e.g., the peoples of Russia and China? A few years ago two Chinese students enrolled at Concordia College, Seward, Nebraska. They had grown up in mainland China. My wife and I invited them to spend the Easter weekend with us. They went to church with us. When asked how they liked it, they said, "Interesting." I then asked, "What is your belief system?" The answer was striking. They said, "We have no belief system. No one ever spoke to us about religion or tried to teach us what to believe. So we have no religious beliefs. We don't believe anything." Yet, as the conversation developed it became clear that these Chinese atheists had strong feelings about the immorality of things like stealing, lying, and sexual promiscuity. In fact, they expressed the view that American society was less moral than Chinese society because of its growing permissiveness in many areas of social behaviour.

The Apostle Paul showed his understanding of this moralistic quality of all human nature, regardless of religious orientation, when he wrote: "When Gentiles, who do not have the law [i.e. God's law], do by nature things required by the law [i.e. of God], they are a law unto themselves" [i.e. they make up their own laws].⁸

The point is that morality, as here defined, is a secular, earthly, time-bound, culture-bound concept. A godly life, Christian behaviour, practising the fruits of faith, and growth in sanctification all find their origin and strength in God. Moral standards, by contrast, are man-made. And man provides the enforcement of these standards.

"Moralising", therefore, is always man encouraging his fellow humans to use their own human resources to help them stay in line with the socially accepted standards; things like fear of sanctions, desire for approval, acceptance by the group, or even will-power. This is true even when the claim is made that these standards come from the Bible, the Koran, the Upanishads, the Red Book of Mao Tse Tung, or any other allegedly sacred book. When people are asked to draw the strength for obedience to the law from within themselves, from their own natural powers, or from some forces in human society, that is "moralising".

Let us look at this from three perspectives: a) as it is practised by temporal, secular, earthly governments; b) as it is practised by philosophers, secular psychologists, and non-Christian religious practitioners; and c) as it is practised (unfortunately and all too often) by Bible-based Christian

⁸ Rom. 2:14-15.

preachers.

First, temporal, secular, earthly governments have as their *raison d'être* the establishment and maintenance of order and tranquillity within their borders. The premise is that the life of man, to use the words of Thomas Hobbes, is by nature “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”.⁹ He is, in other words, a profoundly uncivilised creature.¹⁰ The state’s purpose, according to this explanation, is to stand between civilised man and man the brute. It must establish and promote standards of morality for its citizens, approving lawful behaviour and punishing crime. This is an appropriate moralising function.

This role of the state also transcends borders, as one civilised nation protects itself against the uncivilised behaviour of another nation. Some will argue that this is what happened in January and February of 1992, when the international community, through the United Nations, stood up to Saddam Hussein and, in effect, said: “Your invasion of Kuwait will not be allowed to stand. It is brutish. It breaks the rules of civil morality. We must resist this. Otherwise civilisation will take a step backwards toward international immorality.”

The question is: Where do the states get the moral standards that they apply to the lives of their people? They get them from wherever they find norms which they feel will contribute to the peace, health, discipline, order, and security of their people. They may get them from what they consider to be sacred writings, from some concept of natural law, from traditions handed down from past generations, or simply from the popular demands of constituencies who request new laws to cover new problems and new situations. They may even get them from the responsible reasonings and rational deliberations of their legislative bodies.

Is this to be decried? On the contrary, it is appropriately applauded, because this is what earthly government is for. This is the way God designed things for a wicked world. This is, as Luther said, God’s kingdom of the left hand.¹¹ Governmental authorities, as Paul tells us in Romans 13, have been established by God, not to rule by grace, but by power. They address man on the level of civic, not spiritual, righteousness. Their ultimate power tool is the sword. But they also have the tool of rhetoric. They can urge, cajole, threaten, beg, appeal to a sense of decency and order, or use any other rhetorical device to persuade people to be good citizens, to obey the law.

⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* 13.

¹⁰ “The Rise of Modern Political Thought,” in *The Columbia History of the World*, ed. John Arthur Garraty and Peter Gay (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972) 595.

¹¹ Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) 79-82.

When they do this, it is always moralising. Governments do not have the responsibility to sanctify their citizens. This is not their realm. They just moralise; that is, urge their people to draw on their own human resources—their intellect, their will, their fear of punishment, their desire for a safe and tranquil existence—to help them conform to the rules of their society.

Christians make a mistake when they seek to make people lead a sanctified Christian life by government edict, e.g., by having the government pass anti-abortion laws. This is impossible. Sanctified Christian behaviour cannot be achieved by applying the long arm of the law. It is a gift. God gives it. It comes not by might, not by power, but “by My Spirit, says the Lord.”¹²

At the same time, governments make a mistake when they do not pass anti-abortion laws. They are the responsible authority in God’s kingdom of the left hand. They have both the right and the duty to do this, not to make people behave like Christians, which is not their realm, but to protect human life, which is the government’s proper sphere. As the Epistle to the Romans explains, rulers have been given their power so that they can wield it for the good of their people.¹³

A second group that engages in moralising activity includes philosophers, secular psychologists, and non-Christian religious practitioners. What other way do they have? They do not draw their theoretical constructs out of the inspired revelation of the Word of God. The context for their thinking is not the Christian Gospel. The Spirit-empowered energy of Christian faith is not what rules their findings. Where do their often provocative ruminations come from? They come solely and entirely from human resources, which by nature are fallible and inconclusive.

Philosophers from time immemorial have tried to build moral constructs, using the power of human reason alone; thus Plato and Aristotle in ancient times, and in the middle ages Descartes and Kant. More recently, men like Friedrich Nietzsche focused on the human will. Others, like William James and John Dewey, wanted empirical data and scientific manipulation of cultural forms to lead humans to higher plateaux of social morality. But none of these philosophical models have stood the test of time. Their dreams of fashioning rational highways leading toward moral utopia have been burst and are being replaced by newer, even if no less flawed, models.

Psychologists, too, appeal to reason and will, but in recent years many of them have moved into something more metaphysical, like inner self or self-love or ego consciousness, or transactional analysis, or even spirit

¹² Zech. 4:6

¹³ Rom. 13:1-5

guidance. Out of those theories have come books like *I'm OK—You're OK* by Thomas A. Harris, *Looking Out for Number One* by Ringer, and *The Art of Selfishness* by David Seabury¹⁴—all based on false assumptions about where the power for human transformation comes from.

The most recent examples of personality theories based on false assumptions are found in “New Age” philosophy and literature. Basically amorphous organisationally, but inspired by celebrity-status spokespersons like Shirley MacLaine, the “New Age” movement has thrust itself onto the world scene with a message about the self-sufficiency of each human individual, claiming that human beings need no other force than their own inner selves to guide them to appropriate moral standards.

Promoters of this philosophy tell their followers, “Don’t follow any advice, no matter how good, until you feel as deeply in your own spirit as you think in your mind that the counsel is wise.”¹⁵ Shirley MacLaine reveals the idolatry of this approach when she writes, “The tragedy of the human race is that we have forgotten that we are each Divine [note the upper case “D”] ... and that we were from the beginning basically part of what we call “God” and without limitation, masters of our own divine potential.”¹⁶

This second group of moralisers, though sometimes claiming a Biblical basis, teaches the salvation of the human personality with human powers, or, in Jesus’ words, they are “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”.¹⁷ Thus, they are one of the fulfilments of the end times’ signs, concerning which our Lord warned: “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming ‘I am Christ’ and will deceive many.” Also, “Many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.”¹⁸ One of the sad reflections of the church in modern times is that a growing number of religious leaders who go by the name of Christian are neither seeing the danger in these models of self-idolatry nor warning their people against them.

A third group of moralisers is, in some respects, the most dangerous. These are the people who stand in Christian pulpits, presenting themselves and being accepted by their audiences as Bible-based Christian preachers. Representatives of this group can be found in all Christian denominations, even though their moralising messages may often be given in ignorance.

¹⁴ Thomas A. Harris, *I'm OK--You're OK: A Practical Guide to Transactional Analysis* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969); Robert J. Ringer, *Looking Out for Number One* (Beverly Hills, CA: Los Angeles Book Corp., 1977); David Seabury, *The Art of Selfishness* (New York: J. Messner, 1964; reprint ed. New York: Pocket Books, 1974).

¹⁵ Seabury 28.

¹⁶ Shirley MacLaine, *Out on a Limb* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983) 347.

¹⁷ Matt. 15:9

¹⁸ Matt. 24:4-5,11.

Their intent is to preach the Gospel, but the main thrust of their sermon turns out to be moralistic. The Law or the Gospel or both are presented in a way that leads people to believe that if they just put their minds to it, if they just try harder, if they apply themselves more faithfully, or if they pray about it more fervently, they can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps toward a more God-pleasing way of life.

Are such sermons Bible-based? That is the point. They have a Biblical ring. The text is read, exegised, illustrated, and applied, but the pure Gospel, which is the only dynamic for Christian living, is lost in the rhetoric. The preacher's call for better behaviour, his appeal for changed life-styles, his insistence that the church's organisational goals must be met, all have the sound of a political orator's call for the elevation of a nation's moral standards, appropriate when issuing from the "bully pulpit" of a government official, but not appropriate as motivational preaching from a Christian pulpit.

A good example of a moralising sermon was one delivered by Robert Schuller, Jr. on television some time ago. He made a fine appearance and presence. He preached eloquently, with a rich voice, with cultured phrasing, with oratorical passion mixed with subdued and easy conversation; either an A or A+ in style and delivery—and, disarmingly, so Bible-based. The text was 2 Chron. 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land"; truly a wonderful text, containing all the ingredients for a model Christian sermon. First the Law in all of its undisguised reality—"You have been wicked, you must humbly confess your sinfulness, your only hope is to seek my face." Then the Gospel in all of its comforting beauty—"I will forgive ... I will heal."

Unfortunately, Schuller opted for a moralising message. The Law was muted through the literary device of understatement. The Gospel was evidenced only by its absence. The name of Jesus was spoken only once, and that in a non-salvific way. The audience heard no sanctification challenge, for such a challenge can only follow after a clear proclamation of the Gospel. Instead they heard a ringing moralistic message of the type that could have just as easily come from a non-Christian podium.

Christian preachers should be alert to the ways in which what is intended to be a Law/Gospel sermon can degenerate into a moralising message:

- 1) It is moralising if we preach the Law of God in a way that confuses it with the morality standards made by man. When preachers climb on the bandwagon of the latest morality fashions that from time to time sweep through a society, e.g. the political correctness fads which are seeking

to become the conventional wisdom in North American society, then the Law of God is traded for just another human norm and its uniquely divine character is lost.

2) It is moralising if we preach the Law of God in a way that does not challenge the world's denial of original and actual sin, e.g., if we capitulate to the use of euphemisms like "illness" or "different life styles" for behaviours that the Bible clearly labels "sin" or "transgressions of God's law".

3) It is moralising if we excessively anecdotalise our sermons with a plethora of personal references, e.g., if we turn our sermons into a kind of weekly biography of personal failures and successes rather than focussing on God's Word of criticism, comfort, and challenge to His kingdom people in the pew.

4) It is moralising anytime that we legalise the Gospel, i.e., if we succumb to the temptation "to put teeth into the Gospel", which is something that even our parishioners sometimes request us to do. Norman Metzler tells the story of a little boy who attended worship with his father. After the service the boy said to his father, "Gee, Dad, the pastor sure seemed angry today. Why was he scolding us?" The dad replied, "He wasn't scolding us, he was preaching to us about forgiveness and love."¹⁹

5) We risk succumbing to mere moralisation if we only preach "a generic Gospel". Donald Deffner says we, too, often use a lot of right words like God, Jesus, cross, forgiveness, justification, but we fail to apply them to the specific needs of the people; for example, the doubts they actually feel, the fears they have, the guilt that depresses them, the temptations they face on a day to day basis, and how the wonderful grace of God, through Jesus, meets them exactly where they are, and lifts them out of their spiritual fog into the glorious light of God's forgiving love. When either Law or Gospel is proclaimed only in glittering generalities, it is a case of "the bland leading the bland".²⁰

6) It is moralising if we see our chief sermonic task as communication, rather than proclamation. Robert Schaibley points this out. He says that Lutheran preaching is not meant to be communication, using the term in the sense that so many are using it today, especially those who are working in the area of conflict resolution.²¹ Given this definition, communication implies compromise, relativistic thinking, seeking the

¹⁹ Norman P. Metzler, "How To Preach Sanctification," in *The Concordia Pulpit for 1984* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984) 13.

²⁰ Donald L. Deffner, "The Plague of Generic Preaching," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 55 (1991): 23-42.

²¹ Robert W. Schaibley, "Lutheran Preaching," *Concordia Journal* 18 (1992): 6-27.

commonalities that will hold together the diverse publics of a heterogeneous congregation, all this in place of an uncompromising proclamation of the saving truth of God. The pulpit should proclaim, Schaibley argues, not communicate (in the above sense), since “the proclamation of the Word of God is the constant reaffirmation of the truth of our life in Christ, which is nothing other than the Gospel in all its articles.”²²

7) It is moralising when we confuse Law and Gospel by reversing the sequence, sometimes called “backwards preaching”. Walther makes this point in his great work, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*. He even lists some sermon outlines which illustrate this kind of preaching.²³ An example of this type would be, Theme: The Gracious and Forgiving Love of God. Part I. How wonderful is the gracious and forgiving love that God bestows on us through our Saviour Jesus Christ. Part II. How awful when we don’t properly appreciate this grace. It is Walther’s contention that this type of sequence gives a legalistic tone to the sermon which negates the Gospel comfort that was proclaimed in the first part.

8) It is moralising when we fail to do “therefore” preaching. The Apostle Paul always followed the good news of God’s grace in Jesus Christ with a “therefore I urge you”²⁴ Forgetting to do this can become “cheap grace” preaching, to use Bonhoeffer’s term. For example, if we elaborate on the first part of 1 Peter 2:9, marvelling at the divine grace which has made us God’s special people in Jesus Christ, but then fail to give equal emphasis to the second part of that verse, which is a rousing challenge to mobilise our lives, in whatever kind of world we live in, in a way that “shows forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light”.

9) It is moralising if we try to adjust our preaching of sanctification to modern psychological learning models, e.g., to Lawrence Kohlberg’s model of sequential and chronological cognitive moral growth. His model posits three levels of morality maturation; the preconventional, the conventional, and the postconventional.²⁵ According to this, morality development follows a steady upward process through the environmental influences of socialisation and educational learning experiences, as well as through the normal biological development of the human cognitive system. In contrast, the Christian’s growth in sanctification has see-saw characteristics, involving a daily struggle between flesh and spirit experiencing ups and downs, defeats and victories. Joel Brondos says:

²² Schaibley 18.

²³ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1928]) 94-95.

²⁴ See Rom. 12:1.

²⁵ Eleanor E. Maccoby, “The Development of Moral Values,” in *Socialization and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1968) 229-269.

Sanctification, unlike moral development theories, is not induced through cognitive development and social interaction. It is ... the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word. [Thus] sanctification can be viewed as progressive but not truly developmental in the Kohlbergian sense.²⁶

Without question, one of the best models for a Christian sermon is found in Paul's letter to the Romans. He begins with Law and articulates it forcefully in chapters 1-7, epitomising that focus in the words "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God".²⁷

Then from chapters 8-11 he presents a brilliant exposition and proclamation of the Gospel, beginning it with the assurance, "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus", and epitomising it in that marvellous set of rhetorical questions: "If God be for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him, graciously give us everything?"—namely, everything that we truly need for our life here as well as our life hereafter).²⁸

Finally, there follows in chapters 12-15 that ringing challenge to do what should come naturally for every Christian, namely, to cultivate the gifts God has given to His people (ch. 12), to show love, patience, and forgiveness to our friends, and even to our foes, to be law-abiding citizens (ch. 13), and to stop passing judgement on one another (ch. 14).

All this Paul begins with the exhortative phrase "I beseech you". He is not asking that human powers serve as the dynamic for a God-pleasing life, rather it all happens "by the mercies of God". He fully expects that a God-given faith will be followed by the God-given fruits of faith.

True, the Apostle does not stiffly separate these three messages into tight, rigid boxes. Instead he keeps weaving in the Gospel. For example, in chapters 3 and 5 of the Law section, he intersperses those beautiful assurances that, though sinners, we have now been justified by grace through Christ's redemption. In fact, our sins need no longer lie heavy on our hearts because, having been brought to faith, we now have peace with God and, indeed, can rejoice in the hope of glory. Nevertheless, the three predominant thrusts remain and the theological sequence comes through loud and clear.

So how does one preach sanctification without turning it into a morality message? This is how Paul does it in Romans 12 and following:

First, there is the "therefore", showing that sanctification is inseparably connected with justification and is as inevitable as water flowing

²⁶ Joel A. Brondos, "Sanctification and Moral Development," *Concordia Journal* 17 (1991): 436.

²⁷ Rom. 4:23.

²⁸ Rom. 8:31-32.

out of an artesian well.

Next, there is the “I beseech you”, an evangelical urging, a serious invitation to be what you are and practise what you believe.

Finally, there follows that extensive, yet specific, laying out of how Christians characteristically behave. They are a) worshipful, b) devout, c) humble, d) loving, e) joyful, f) patient, g) prayerful, h) forgiving, i) obedient, and j) active in the business of building the Body of Christ.

This is the third use of the Law, to use Formula of Concord language. This is the Law of God serving, not as a curb or mirror, but as guide and rule, or, as the Psalmist says, as “a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path”. This is how God’s Word defines for us not only the justifying but also the sanctifying power of the Gospel, as it creates new life, transforms the spirit, energises the will, enlightens the understanding, and builds spiritual muscles to daily overcome the demons that beset us.

Nowhere is this conjunction of justification and sanctification more brilliantly summarised than in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, when he writes: “Christ died for all (the content of justification), so that (the purpose of justification) they which live (the effect of justification) should no longer live unto themselves but for Christ (the sanctifying change produced by justification) who died for them and rose again (the justifying dynamic that energises the sanctified life)”.²⁹

Metzler, Deffner, and Schaibley all underscore the need to be ever vigilant, not allowing our sermons to deteriorate into moralising diatribes. We must preach Law; we must proclaim Gospel; and we must do this to the end that our hearers may be lifted to ever higher plateaux in their pilgrims’ progress, growing daily in the gift of Christian living. As Metzler puts it, “Where there is no sanctification, there is no faith. And where sanctification is not proclaimed winsomely, lovingly, and effectively, there is also no Gospel truly proclaimed.”³⁰

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²⁹ 2 Cor. 5:15.

³⁰ Metzler 14.

**LIVED FAITH:
THEOLOGY AND ETHICS IN THE SERMON ON THE
MOUNT**

Ronald W. Jones

The title for this essay was prompted by a return to Joachim Jeremias' *The Sermon on the Mount*; its content, on the other hand, is based on some "thinking in progress". For a number of years, all the way back to my seminary experience, I have wondered if we Lutherans have had it too right. It seems an almost inherited defect in our natures that we can make a vice out of a virtue. I am referring specifically to our doctrine of justification by faith. No one of us, I assume, would argue against the significance or even the validity of this doctrine. But, being the Lutherans we are, we have taken a perfectly good doctrine and beaten it to death. We are justified by faith; we are justified by faith alone; we are justified by faith alone, apart from works; and because our justification takes place apart from works, some in the Church begin to look at faith, narrowly defined in an intellectual sense, as all that is necessary for the life of the Christian.

The more I read the New Testament, the more convinced I am that this is not true, that we Lutherans have often misled people into thinking that it is, and that our eagerness to slice the pie so very neatly has led to some unfortunate conclusions. Thus we have the long-standing arguments about justification and sanctification, as if these two can be neatly separated and considered in isolation, as we do in some of our seminary curricula. What I am coming to believe with ever more conviction is that the separation between these two is rather arbitrary and even misleading, and that justification and sanctification are of a piece. Jeremias describes the connection between these two with the phrase "lived faith". While it is, in my opinion, redundant, it nonetheless describes well the theology and the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount.

THE SETTING (5:1-2)

Matthew tells us that Jesus went up into the mountain after He had seen the crowds which followed Him "from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judaea and across the Jordan" (4:25). Then, after He had sat down, His disciples approached Him, and He began to teach them. Two points should be noted: first, the Sermon is directed to the disciples of Jesus. This does not necessarily mean that His teaching is limited to the Twelve, but it does suggest that His message is for those who are already members of the kingdom. This is not a missionary, but a catechetical discourse. Second, this

discourse was only the beginning of His teaching. We should not expect it to be a complete compendium of everything a disciple should know. If it were, one might suggest that the rest of the teaching in Matthew's Gospel is redundant. It is not; this is only a start.

THE GOSPEL PROLOGUE (5:3-16)

The beginning of Jesus' sermon is a word of Gospel. Adrian Leske has argued that one must understand the beatitudes and the sayings on salt and light against the backdrop of the prophetic-apocalyptic tradition: "The proclamation which Jesus makes in his Sermon fulfils the words of Isaiah 40:9—he is restoring the covenant relationship originally established through Moses on Mount Sinai."¹ The beatitudes, then, "become the proclamation of the fulfilment of all these [covenant] promises, the blessings of the everlasting covenant spelled out!"²

In this understanding, the "poor in spirit" are those whose time of waiting has been vindicated in the proclamation of Jesus. They mourn because of "the affliction and oppression they experience and the lack of God's rule being evident in their society".³ The meek will come into possession of the land of promise. Those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness" seek the fulfilment of God's covenant faithfulness in the restoration of the kingdom, so that the beatitude "expresses the same dependence of the faithful on God's grace, and the same proclamation of its fulfilment".⁴ The merciful practice Yahweh's steadfast love in the Kingdom. The pure in heart have waited for the Kingdom and have now received it. The "peacemakers" are also faithful to the covenant relationship and seek the peace found in the kingdom of God. Those in the final beatitude "who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness" are like those afflicted in spirit in the first, and the gift of the kingdom provides an *inclusio* for the whole.

If there are any differences among the beatitudes, it is that the first four emphasise the disciples' dependency on God, while the last four emphasise the active stance of the faithful. But, as Leske says, "in each case, the emphasis is on the apodosis because that is where the Good News of the Kingdom lies. These beatitudes are not a 'series of uncompromising demands,' but simply proclamation of the Good News."⁵ Jesus has already preached that the kingdom has come near (4:17); His three-fold ministry

¹ Adrian Leske, "The Beatitudes, Salt and Light in Matthew and Luke," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers*, ed. Eugene Lovering (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991) 823.

² Leske 824-825.

³ Leske 827-828.

⁴ Leske 831.

⁵ Leske 834.

includes preaching the gospel of the kingdom (4:23). It seems clear that the Good News concerns the kingdom made present in the person of Jesus, and that the Sermon will develop the implications for those who find themselves in it.

The sayings about salt and light, then, are also addressed to the faithful. They are directly related to the beatitudes and continue to describe what Kingdom members are to be:

It is an integral part of faithful Israel's purpose in the restoration to be a people-covenant, a light to the nations that God might be glorified through their covenant faithfulness. It is that covenant faithfulness which is then described in the rest of the Sermon.⁶

What Leske has termed "covenant faithfulness", I have termed "lived faith", borrowing from the conclusion of Jeremias' work. The remainder of the Sermon spells out what this means, giving new understanding to those within the Kingdom of the implications of life under God's rule. It is no coincidence that this section ends with a reference to works. To be a member of the covenant community is to do something; faith is only faith when it is put into practice, when it is lived.

One can carry a previous syntactical point further. If the apodoses in the Beatitudes speak the word of Gospel, it is also true that the Beatitudes and the sayings about salt and light serve as the protasis for the remainder of the discourse. According to Jeremias:

Every word of the Sermon on the Mount was preceded by something else. It was preceded by the preaching of the kingdom of God. It was preceded by the granting of sonship to the disciples ... It was preceded by Jesus' witness to himself in word and deed.⁷

So, for Jeremias, the individual sayings of the sermon appear to be apodoses with unexpressed protases. But I believe that the Gospel prologue, as Jeremias himself later acknowledges, serves as the protasis. Given what God has done, the remainder of the Sermon begins to spell out what the disciple must do.

THE INTRODUCTION AND THEMATIC STATEMENT (5:17-20)

The words of Gospel in the prologue do not suggest that there is no longer any place for Law. It now becomes clear that Jesus recognises the legitimate role of the Law in the life of the Christian. He has not come to abolish "the Law and the prophets", but to fulfil them. There is a bit of

⁶ Leske 837.

⁷ Joachim Jeremias, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963)

Eastern humour in Jesus' words about "jots and tittles". It will not do to chip away at the Law; it remains whole until "all is accomplished", or until "heaven and earth pass away". How important is this Law? The person who is great in the kingdom of heaven both does and teaches the commandments, in contrast to the person who "relaxes" even a little one. Note the immediate emphasis on doing God's will. Those who are in the Kingdom, who have heard the word of Gospel spoken in the prologue, are now expected to do something. Their conduct is to reflect their membership in the kingdom; their faith is to be lived.

This conduct is made more specific in the thematic statement of verse 20. Jeremias sees here three kinds of righteousness, not two. There is the righteousness of the scribes, those with some years of theological education; that of the Pharisees, pious laymen whose leaders alone were theologians; and that of the disciples. The conduct of the disciple must exceed that of the others. Jeremias' point would be more convincing if the definite article had been repeated before "Pharisees", but it is not. Nonetheless, the observation suggests something about the outline of the Sermon. For Jeremias, 5:21-48 addresses the righteousness of the scribes; 6:1-18 that of the Pharisees; and 6:19-7:27 that of the disciples. It seems better to divide the Sermon a bit differently. Jesus will address "lived faith" and the Law in 5:21-48; "lived faith" and traditional views of piety in 6:1-34; and "lived faith" and true discipleship in 7:1-27. What verse 20 suggests, and what the three following sections will fill out in greater detail, is that the way of life of the early Christians had to be distinct from that even of religious contemporaries. The message is no less true today: Christians are called to a greater righteousness.

Leske has suggested that "right conduct" is an inadequate translation for *δικαιωσύνη*; it is "a relational term often associated with 'faithfulness,' 'steadfast love,' 'compassion,' 'justice' and 'salvation.'"⁸ A better translation would be "covenant faithfulness", reflecting either the divine or the human commitment to the covenant relationship. However, it is also the characteristic required by God, specifically in the sense of fulfilling His will. The point here is that the *δικαιωσύνη* required of the disciples is precisely that greater righteousness which fulfils the will of God in all its force. It is "right conduct" in the context of the expectations of God's will; it is "covenant faithfulness" in the context of the Gospel-based relationship between God and His people; and it is, in terms of this essay, "lived faith", the nature of which Jesus expounds in the remainder of the Sermon.

⁸ Leske 831.

“LIVED FAITH” AND THE LAW (5:21-48)

The new life of faith given to Jesus’ disciples requires a new, dramatic approach to the Law. What is clear from the six sections in 5:21-48 is that the Law—perhaps better understood here as the will of God—remains in all its force. Beginning with the commandment against killing and moving through to the command of the Holiness Code to “love your neighbour” and its Gentile-directed corollary “and hate your enemy”, Jesus offers a reinterpretation of the Law which makes it all the more rigorous and demanding. Murder, for example, extends not only to the physical act of killing someone, but also to anger, insult and speech. Adultery extends beyond the broken marital relationship to the look of sexual desire.

Coupled with this intensified implication of the Law is a repeated emphasis on doing. Not only are there the negative examples of not killing, not being angry, not insulting or speaking abusively. There are also the more positive demands: “be reconciled to your brother ... make friends quickly with your accuser”; “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’”; “Give to him who begs from you.” Thus there is theology and ethics: a reinterpretation of the Law to bring it into full conformity with the will of God, and a reminder of what the disciple is expected to do.

These words about the Law are directed not to those outside the kingdom but to those within. Thus, there is not here a question of justification, of what one must do to enter the kingdom, but of living out the reality of faith as a member of it. Matthew is in no way recording words of Jesus which subvert what we know to be true, that faith remains a gift, and that the most one can do is to respond to it. The point is that the Sermon here addresses that response in terms of how one lives faith in relationship to the Law. That this may be more complicated than one first expected is not the fault of God’s will, but of our understanding. We had made it too simple, and had forgotten the rest.

The final verse of this section makes clear the outer limit of Jesus’ reinterpretation of the Law. If it is a counsel of perfection or wholeness, it is not designed to drive us into despair. The disciples are to be fully up to the standard which God has set; they are to carry out His will completely. But their model is God Himself. This call is not new. Moses called on the people of Israel to “be blameless [τέλειος, LXX] before the Lord your God”, to serve Him wholly and undividedly. The Holiness Code admonished the people to be holy, again after the model of God. As Gerhard Delling has noted:

[In Matt. 5:48] the ‘whole’ applies to conduct in relation to men. God is fully undivided in this As God is unrestricted in His goodness, so ... the disciples of Jesus should be ‘total’ in their

love, bringing even their enemies ... within its compass.⁹

Theology and ethics: God's will for the disciple is much more demanding and rigorous than a "simple" observance of the Law. One's faith must be lived in ways which follow the example of God. If God can reach out to others with unconditional love, so can the disciple. If God can forgive the sinner, so can the disciple. But the antecedent word is always what God has done, followed by the disciple's response. The conduct of the disciple, no matter how much is demanded, is always preceded by what God has done. Conversely, the disciple must now be concerned about what he or she is to do.

"LIVED FAITH" AND TRADITIONAL PIETY (6:1-34)

On the one hand, the disciple serves as a light to the world so that it may see the good works of faith and glorify the heavenly Father. On the other, one does not practise his piety ("do righteousness", in the Greek text) before others in order to be seen by them. There is a dissimilarity of purposes in the two verses. The purpose in the former is that people may see and then glorify God; the purpose in the latter is simply to be seen. The former is commanded; the latter, forbidden. If one pursues the latter, there is the loss of a reward from the heavenly Father.

Matthew's discussion of practical piety has a great deal to say about lived faith. There is a proper way for the disciple to do things. Whether one is giving alms ("doing" them, in the Greek), praying, or fasting, one does it to be seen by God, not by men. The image of the trumpet announcing any act of kindness toward the neighbour is intriguing, but it makes its point. The purpose of the almsgiving here is to gain human praise. There are those who act out their faith only as a role to be played; they are the actors, the hypocrites, and for them the response of the audience is all-important. Conversely, there are those who live out their faith as disciples; they are the ones who receive the Father's reward.

There is in this context the repeated—and for Lutherans, disturbing—theme of reward. It makes us nervous because we suspect that someone may have earned something. This is not the case here, any more than it had been at 5:12 or 5:46. Those who practise their piety in order to be seen by others will receive nothing from God; they will receive their reward in full from the approval of others. Three times the reminder is sounded: those who sound the trumpet when giving alms will be fully paid here; those who pray in public will receive their full reward here; those who disfigure

⁹ Gerhard Dellling, "τέλειος," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* vol. 8, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 74.

themselves when fasting will be fully rewarded here. If all that one desires is public approval, then this is the way to conduct oneself. Jesus suggests a more appropriate alternative. The disciple is to exercise charity quietly, in secret; to pray in secret; to fast in secret. Three times the response of God is indicated; He will repay that expected conduct of the disciple.

But God will reward the one who is already a member of the covenant community; one does not earn this membership. The Gospel has already been spoken in the opening words of the Sermon. Now we are concerned with the response of the disciple, with the kind of almsgiving or praying or fasting which is pleasing to God. *How* God rewards the disciple is not indicated; *that* He will reward him is clear. We know from elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel (20:1-16) that the μισθός is sometimes completely out of proportion to human expectations. The early labourers in the vineyard were not at all pleased with the householder's settlement with the latecomers. His response emphasises that any decision about the μισθός is his and his alone. So here the disciple acts because he is a member of the Kingdom; his motive for the action is not the reward, but the gift of God he has already experienced. If God then chooses to reward that conduct, who are we to question His action?

Jesus' saying about treasure underlines the point; one may accumulate treasure on earth or treasure in heaven. The one who lives to accumulate the approval of others will gain earthly treasure, but this is amazingly short-lived. The one who lives to serve God will gain heavenly treasure, and it will last. One's choice of treasure is a key to one's heart; it will be loyal either to those earthly things subject to corruption or to those heavenly things which are permanent. The significance of this choice has already been made clear in the opening sections of the chapter.

The saying about the eye may seem enigmatic, but is nonetheless to the point. The key is that the eye is also to be single, simple or undivided. The entire section has focused on the need to make a choice about where to place one's loyalty. The "single eye", then, as R. T. France has suggested, "is primarily a metaphor for a life totally devoted to the service of God",¹⁰ completely appropriate to the larger context. In this understanding, it makes little difference whether the focus of the light is inward or outward. Either the whole body will be enlightened, a gentle shift to the sense perceptions which are found throughout the Sermon, or the eye will light the way, which has now found its true purpose.

The saying about two masters also supports the argument. The contrast now is between God and mammon, as previously there were

¹⁰ R. T. France, *Matthew, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 138.

contrasts between human and divine approval, or earthly and heavenly treasure. The disciple cannot serve both; he must choose one or the other. To seek human approval is to lose the reward which God offers; to seek earthly treasure is to lose it and the heavenly treasure; to serve wealth or possessions is to lose the opportunity to serve God.

One more section of this chapter underscores the basic point. There is no need to be anxious about one's life, or about food or drink or clothing, any more than it was necessary to worry about human approval or earthly treasure or worldly possessions. God knows all the things we need, and He will take care of them. The challenge for the disciple, in what well serves as a conclusion to the entire chapter, is to seek continually the righteousness and the kingdom of God; everything else will be added by that God who graciously blesses His disciples. Chapter 5 had ended with an inferential conclusion; so also chapter 6. Verse 34 recalls the anxiety of 6:25-32, but it links better with 6:33 in a two-verse conclusion to the whole. The one who places God first does not need to worry about tomorrow; today's troubles are quite enough, but the true disciple turns them over to God, whom he follows with undivided loyalty.

Theology and ethics: Jesus has discussed at length the need for undivided loyalty. One may find an earthly reward for what one does, or may be rewarded by God. One must choose his master, but it is God who provides everything one needs. The challenge for the disciple is to serve God. His acts of righteousness include almsgiving, prayer and fasting, but—above all—his life is marked by an active search and a striving to keep God's Kingdom and God's righteousness first.

“LIVED FAITH” AND TRUE DISCIPLESHIP (7:1-27)

Jesus has contrasted the righteousness of the disciple with that of the scribe and the Pharisee, focusing on the relationship to the Law and to traditional piety. Now He turns to the right conduct or covenant faithfulness of the disciple. The sayings seem loosely organised; they even occur in different contexts and differing sequence in Luke. Nonetheless, there is more order than is often credited to the Gospel writer. Each of the first group of sayings is introduced by an imperative; each of the last sets out alternative possibilities for lived faith.

The command not to judge serves two functions. First, it alerts the hearer to the social element of the Kingdom. As the Ten Commandments reminded Israel of the relationships within the covenant community, so Jesus' command here reminds His disciples that they are in relationship with one another. In the community context, it is much more important to be aware of the log of one's own failings than to worry about the splinter of another's. Second, this saying reminds us again of those who merely play

roles—the actors or hypocrites. It may seem generous to offer to assist another with his or her failings, but not when this offer ignores one's own. The disciple is called once again to a proper understanding of his role in the Kingdom. This role includes the avoidance of negative criticism, but also the application of a careful discrimination. One gives holy or precious things to those who can appreciate them.

Jesus had previously spoken about how to pray, there emphasising the contrast between the way the disciple should pray and the way the hypocrites and Gentiles did it. Here He stresses the more positive reasons for prayer. One asks because God gives good things to those who do. One seeks in order to find. One knocks that the door may be opened. What if one does not ask, or does not seek, or does not knock? As development people remind us repeatedly, you must give the prospective donor a chance to say “No!” So we must ask, seek and knock to give God a chance to say “No!”—or to say “Yes!” The word of Gospel here is that the Father in heaven does give good things to those who ask.

In the thematic introduction to the Sermon (5:12-20), Jesus had referred to the Law and the prophets. Now He refers to them again, in what may be a summary conclusion of this discourse. The “lived faith” of the disciple is now made clear in terms of one's relationship with others. The relationship with God is a given; the protasis, if you will. The relationship with others, the apodosis, flows from that relationship. The guidance is simple: let what you expect from others guide how you act toward them. Given the focus of this essay, one must note that the imperative is to do something.

What is clear from the concluding sections is, as France suggests, that “The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is not meant to be admired but to be obeyed”.¹¹ A third introductory imperative introduces Jesus' saying about the two gates, a section which is also the first of four alternatives for the disciple. He may enter through the wide or the narrow gate, but only one leads to life. He may bear good fruit or bad fruit, a sign that one is either a good or a bad tree, but one is cut down and thrown into the fire. He may either say or do, but only the one who does the will of God will enter the kingdom on the final day. This is a particularly devastating saying, since those who say “Lord, Lord”, who prophesy and cast out demons and do many mighty works in Jesus' name, may hear a completely unexpected word. They are considered evildoers because they have neglected God's will, and there is a complete lack of recognition from Jesus. In the final alternative, the disciple may build either on sand or on rock, but only one stands. Here, as in the other three, there is an emphasis on the conduct of the disciple: “Every

¹¹ France 146.

one who hears these words of mine and does them ... every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them.”

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

What this paper has suggested throughout is that the Sermon on the Mount is the teaching of Jesus for those in the covenant community. What Jesus says about the will of God—theology, if you will—is in every case then applied to the life of the disciple—ethics, or “lived faith”. The disciple cannot simply appeal to being justified, although this is a given. The word of Gospel is spoken at the outset of the Sermon, but the remainder of Jesus’ words make clear the implications of God’s gracious gift. There is no faith which is not put into practice.

There are some implications for preaching the Sermon on the Mount. Seven of the Gospel readings in Series A are from Matthew 5-7, not counting the repeated beatitudes on All Saints’ Day, with five substantially repeated in the One-Year Lectionary. More specifically, five consecutive Sundays in Epiphany (4-8) cover the whole of chapter 5 and 6:24-34. The Gospel for Ash Wednesday covers the three forms of traditional piety in chapter 6. The Gospel for Pentecost II covers the final verses of the sermon (7:21-29, with the previous six verses optional). My sense of these readings is that they have been selected to emphasise the disciple’s life of faith, particularly appropriate during the discipline of the Lenten season.

Yet one should approach these lessons with care. The Epiphany Gospels, for example, are preceded by the Gospel for Epiphany III (Matthew 4:12-23), which mentions not only Jesus’ message of repentance and His call of the disciples, but also His threefold ministry of teaching, preaching and healing. There is in all of this both Gospel and Law, as there is in the Sermon. As one begins to preach from the Sermon, one dare not focus on the Law at the expense of the Gospel. To do so with the beatitudes, for example, would be to miss their point almost completely. They are an antecedent word of Gospel which frees the disciple to live in the Kingdom. To see the discussion of traditional piety only as a summons to almsgiving, prayer and fasting is to miss the call to a clear and committed choice of one’s master and the promise of an even further reward from the heavenly Father; so the rest of Jesus’ teaching, which always assumes the antecedent word of Gospel.

Jeremias concludes his discussion of the Sermon on the Mount with the following statement:

The result to which we have come is that the Sermon on the Mount is not law, but gospel. For this is indeed the difference between law and gospel: The law leaves man to rely upon his own strength and challenges him to do his utmost. The gospel, on the other hand, brings man before the gift of God and challenges him

really to make the inexpressible gift of God the basis for his life.¹²

Then he suggests the use of “lived faith”, and says of this phrase, “Then it is clearly stated that the gift of God precedes his demands.”¹³ Lutherans understand well that we are dependent on the gift of God; may we never forget that He expects a response to His gift, as Jesus makes plain in the teaching of Matthew 5-7. To probe into the theology of these verses is also to reach the understanding that conduct must follow. There is no faith which is not practised; there is only “lived faith”, a phrase which, in fact, is redundant.

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¹²Jeremias 34.

¹³Jeremias 4.

THE “THIRD USE OF THE LAW” AND THE HOMILETICAL TASK

Edward G. Kettner

There is a concern in the church today which is a valid one; that the people of God fulfil their calling, that they “abound in good works”. Having seen the Gospel reductionism of earlier years leading to licentiousness (contra Paul’s admonition in Gal. 5:13), and fearing giving the impression that the fact that God forgives us in Christ means that sin ceases to be a serious matter since “I am forgiven anyway”, preachers rightly seek a method which will remind their hearers that God desires them to shun sin and to abound in good works. Sad to say, one method being set forth, which sounds Lutheran but in fact is not, which is meant to increase good works but in fact undermines the consolation of the Gospel, is that of “preaching the third use of the law”.

There is no question but that the Lutheran Confessions teach that there is a “third use” of the law, namely that the law does serve to tell the Christian what it is that God desires. However, if one asks the question, “How can we best preach third use of the law?” one is asking the wrong question. In fact, the answer to that particular question can be summed up in four words: “You can’t. You don’t.” (If you want to, you can add four more: “So don’t even try.”) For the question is based on a misapprehension, namely, that the “third use of the law” is *our* use, and that *we* can direct the preaching of the law in one direction and not another.

In dealing with the whole question of the relationship between law and Gospel in preaching, one must make note of the distinction between theology and proclamation. Theology is “secondary discourse”, that is, it is an analysis of the word that God has given to us which takes place in order to aid us in understanding what God is doing, so that the message which is proclaimed is indeed the message that God would have us proclaim. That proclamation is “primary discourse”. Gerhard Forde describes the difference in this way:

Primary discourse is the direct declaration of the Word of God, that is, the Word *from* God, and the believing response in confession, prayer, and praise. Secondary discourse, words *about* God, is reflection on the primary discourse. As primary discourse, proclamation ideally is present-tense, first-to-second person unconditional promise authorized by what occurs in Jesus Christ according to the scriptures

Systematic theology, however, belongs to the sphere of secondary discourse. It is not the Word of God, it is words about God, reflection on what has been heard. Above all we must be clear that systematic theology is not what is to be proclaimed. To use an analogy, proclamation is like saying, "I love you." Systematic theology is like a book on the nature of love or the art of loving. It is secondary discourse. It attempts to put things in order, to focus, to lend coherence, and to measure the church's discourse on the basis of its established norms, scripture, the creeds, and confessional documents.¹

Thus, while theologically we talk about the concept of justification by grace through faith, we are not to preach about it, except in those contexts in which the text itself makes mention of the subject. Rather, we are to preach the message by which people are justified, namely that Jesus Christ was put to death for our sins and raised to give us the gift of eternal life. It is presented to people as fact. "You *are* justified. God *has* declared you righteous. He has done it through Christ." The proclamation of that message to the broken sinner then creates the very faith that apprehends that justification, and so brings the sinner from death to life. (This fact is not recognised by those preachers who spend much time talking *about* the Gospel, or merely presenting the "claims of Christ", but fail to actually proclaim the Gospel).

In dealing with questions of the "third use of the law", the problem lies in a misunderstanding of the nature of the three uses as a theological construct. Talk about the three (or four) "uses" of the law is a theological construct which helps us to understand how the law functions when it is proclaimed. This construct serves as an aid to the preacher to see what is happening as the law is preached, but it does not provide a means by which the preacher can say "Here I am preaching so that the law condemns; here I am preaching so that the law informs." Rather, it tells the preacher, "When you preach the law it condemns the listener in that he is sinner, it informs the listener in that he is saint."

The title of Article VI of the Formula of Concord in Tappert's translation, "The Third Function of the Law", gives a much better indication about what is going on. The term "function" forces us to recognise that when the law is preached, this is what it does. In other words, the "third use of the law" is not our use—it is God's use. When the law is preached people are told how God desires that they live their lives. That preaching condemns the sinner because it serves as a mirror by which the individual examines himself

¹ Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 2-3.

and discovers that he has not done what God requires, and thereby stands condemned before God. Thus it drives the sinner to seek mercy in the blood of Christ. The sinner, rejoicing in the mercy God has provided in Christ, passes from death to life. Now, as a living child of God, the law informs the Christian as new man as to what is pleasing to God, and the Christian out of gratitude to God seeks to live in conformity with that law—not to earn salvation, not to remain in salvation, but purely out of gratitude. This “gratitude” in turn is not a sentimental emotion which is to be cultivated as though it itself makes the works worthy before God, nor is it something that can be commanded, but is the spontaneous reaction of the heart that understands the implications of what God has done.² The law thus informs the new man, who ardently desires to please God, how God desires him to live his life.

Does the law change in this process? Not a bit. The Formula is quite clear in noting that the law of God does not change, but only our perspective to it. The law remains the declaration of God’s will for human life. As the Formula puts it, the law is “the immutable will of God according to which man is to conduct himself in this life” (SD VI,15). Whether one is able to obey it or not is irrelevant to the content of the law. However, it is not irrelevant in terms of its function upon the hearer. In that we are sinners, both unwilling and unable to keep it, it condemns, and at most coerces an outward obedience. In that we are new men whose ardent desire is to please God, it informs:

[The] unregenerated man—just like the regenerated according to the flesh—does what is demanded of him by that law under coercion and unwillingly. But the believer without any coercion and with a willing spirit, in so far as he is reborn, does what no threat of the law could ever have wrung from him [Ep VI,7].

As unregenerate people, then, we are under the law; as regenerate we live our lives in it (SD VI,18).

The problem is that in the life of the Christian the law cannot be used simply as information, for the Christian is sinner as well as saint. Whenever the law is preached the Christian stands condemned as sinner. Even for the Christian the law always accuses. Thus, to attempt to urge obedience according to the third use of the law will inevitably lead to the recognition of guilt on the part of the Christian, because he will recognise that he has not

² Donald Deffner sees a problem even with urging good works on the basis of gratitude, since even this term might be understood in a way that sees good works as a “pay-back” for all that God has done for us, which in turn denies the unconditional nature of the Gospel. Donald L. Deffner, “Great Dangers Facing the Teacher and Preacher”, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 58 (1994): 82.

kept the law as God would have him. *Any* preaching of the law will lead the Christian to say with St. Paul, “What I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing” (Rom. 7:19).³

Sometimes attempts are made at “preaching of the third use of the law” by focusing on the power now available to the Christian. “Christ has come to give you power. Now lay hold of that power and get out there and do it”, whatever the “it” may be. There is even, however, a problem with such preaching, for the essence of the Gospel is not the power of Jesus in our lives, but the grace of God in Christ. To make the power for living a part of the Gospel is to confuse the Gospel itself with its result. The Formula warns against this, noting, “strictly speaking, the Gospel is the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification through Christ ... ” (SD V,27). It is the preaching of the grace of God in Christ and nothing else which brings people from death to life, and which thus empowers the living people of God for service. Thus we have a paradox. The Gospel is the power of God to salvation. But the command to lay hold of the power of God renders the individual impotent, because it turns his attention to his own actions, or his own desired actions, and away from Christ. The power of Christ becomes the carrot on the stick which we must grab if we want to gain control of our lives, and so the focus turns to our action of “grabbing the power”. This command to lay hold of the power of Christ places a responsibility upon the shoulders of the Christian that ultimately he will not be able to bear. We all know what happened to Peter on the waters of the Sea of Galilee when he turned his attention from Christ to his own actions!

The paradox exists also when preaching seeks to get people to behave in particular ways. Here the maxim must hold: You cannot get people to do what they should be doing by telling them that they should be doing it. The Christian life is not empowered through the preaching of the law, but through the preaching of the Gospel. The preaching of the Gospel, in turn, goes for naught if the one hearing it has not been struck by the full force of the law. Growth in one’s life of sanctification, then, will come when law and Gospel are properly distinguished, *not* when the third use of the law is preached.

If our churches are filled with complacency, as some claim, if people

³ So also, because the old man still clings to the Christian, the law continues to exercise a coercive function (“first use”) as well: “As far as the Old Adam who still adheres to them is concerned, he must be coerced not only with the law but also with miseries, for he does everything against his will and by coercion, just as the unconverted are driven and coerced into obedience by the threats of the law (I Cor. 9:27; Rom. 7:18,19)” (SD VI,19). However, the preacher must again remember that this coercive function does not bring about good works. It merely brings about external conformity to the law out of fear of hell. If the goal is to bring about truly God-pleasing works, the solution must be found elsewhere.

are resting easy and merely drifting along, secure in their lives, then the problem is not that the third use of the law has not been preached, but that people have not been so thoroughly struck with the terror of the law that they fail to understand the depths of the love of Christ in taking our sin upon Himself. In other words, law and Gospel have not been properly distinguished. If they say, “Let us sin all the more that grace may abound” (Rom. 6:1), they do not need the third use of the law, but the law, period. If they say, “I know this is wrong, but God forgives me in Christ, so it’s really no big deal”, they need to be driven to despair by being shown how repugnant such an attitude is—that such an attitude itself shows contempt for God and thus a violation of the first commandment. When such people are then terrified of the judgement they come to realise they deserve, they can then be assured that God has indeed put away their sin. Having been made alive in Christ, the previous attitude becomes unthinkable.

And that’s the point, is it not? The desire to sin is driven out of the heart and the desire to serve instilled by the preaching of the Gospel. The message of Christ’s love for us creates love of Christ in us; the proper preaching of law and Gospel kills the old man and raises the new man to life—the new man which abhors sin and constantly seeks to do the will of God.

The issue of the relationship between justification and sanctification, between Christ for us and Christ in us, continues to show forth the paradox which must be taken into account in the homiletical task. We are saved by the Christ outside of us, the Christ for us (objective justification). Through the preaching of the Gospel the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Christ (subjective justification). Having been brought to faith, we have been brought from death to life, and Christ sets up His dwelling in our hearts (sanctification). Thus, those who are justified by grace through faith are also sanctified. It is as impossible for a Christian to be justified and not sanctified as it is to be sanctified and not justified. Christ is in us, sustaining us, only because we have been justified by the work of Christ on the cross. The Christian life is sustained only by the preaching of Christ crucified. Thus sanctification is essentially a state of being, a state of being alive, brought about by the preaching of the Gospel and nothing else.

So how does the law relate to sanctification? It relates by stating the content of the sanctified life, and nothing more. The law cannot be preached to urge people to be more sanctified, and sanctification is not increased by the mere increasing of external works. Rather, truly good works are increased only as faith and assurance are strengthened—only as Christ crucified is preached.

Sad to say, there is a misapprehension of the true nature of sanctification and of proper preaching of law and Gospel even in our own

circles. This is most clearly evidenced in the book, *The Goal of the Gospel: God's Purpose in Saving You*, by Philip M. Bickel and Robert L. Nordlie.⁴ While it might be said that the authors' hearts are in the right place in that they desire believers to abound in good works, it must also be said that their proposed method is wrong. Indeed, there is a problem with the very title of their book, since the goal of the Gospel is the salvation of the sinner, and good works are properly understood as a fruit or result of the Gospel rather than a goal.⁵ In view of the words of Luther in his explanation to the second article, that Christ has redeemed me "that I may be His own, and live under Him in His Kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness and innocence and blessedness", one might argue that works of service are a goal of the Gospel. That, however, is a misunderstanding, since works are only possible (and indeed, they are inevitable), because the goal has been reached. Furthermore, even if we call good works a goal of the Gospel (and we should not, because doing so muddies the distinction between justification and sanctification), that goal cannot be obtained by "preaching the goal of the Gospel", as the authors maintain. This so-called goal of the Gospel can be reached (or, better, this result can be attained) only by preaching the Gospel itself. It is true that Bickel and Nordlie realise that the Gospel is the motivating power for living the Christian life. Unfortunately, the method they use shows a misunderstanding as to *how* the Gospel motivates. In fact, they dare to say that Law-Gospel preaching is incomplete!⁶ They instead advocate a system of preaching which they call "Law-Gospel-Law-Gospel". The law is first preached to condemn, and the Gospel first preached to forgive. The law is then preached again to inform, and the Gospel preached again to motivate.⁷ Unfortunately, such a method bifurcates both law and Gospel, and assumes that the preacher has control of how both law and Gospel function in particular contexts. Those assumptions are wrong; thus the Gospel is ultimately robbed of its power. Only the Confessional method of Law-Gospel preaching will bring the intended results—will create and sustain the people of God as they live out their lives in Christ. Far from stunting the spiritual growth of Christians, as Bickel and Nordlie claim,⁸ when done correctly such preaching will truly lead to empowered Christians, because the power lies in the message of forgiveness.

As harsh as it sounds, these attempts to preach the "goal of the

⁴ Philip M. Bickel and Robert L. Nordlie, *The Goal of the Gospel: God's Purpose in Saving You* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992).

⁵ This is noted by Harold L. Senkbeil in his review of *The Goal of the Gospel*, *Logia* II/1 (1993): 42. Senkbeil notes that this confusion in fact turns the Gospel into law.

⁶ Bickel and Nordlie 111.

⁷ Bickel and Nordlie 112.

⁸ Bickel and Nordlie 111.

Gospel” are symptoms of a lack of faith. These exhortations in reality are no different than the arguments that Rome used against the Reformation; namely, that if you tell people their salvation is free and they have to do nothing to gain heaven because it is a free gift, the people in turn will do nothing, but will take their salvation for granted. Now there is no doubt that there are some for whom this happens. But the problem is not that the Gospel is preached unconditionally; the problem is that the Gospel is being preached to those who have not been broken by the law. The Gospel, in other words, is being preached to the impenitent, to those who in fact need to hear the law.

If this is not understood, the wrong remedy is sought. Rather than preaching repentance by a strong preaching of the law, the attempt is made to change behaviour by “putting some teeth into the Gospel”. People are urged or cajoled or browbeaten to do the right thing, supposedly on the basis of their faith, but in fact in a way which muddles the distinction between law and Gospel and which thus robs both of their power. While the crass legalism of a statement like “If you want to remain in God’s good graces you had better stop doing that, or you had better start doing the other”, is generally avoided, modern Protestantism has come up with a much more subtle form that many are tempted to buy into—the “If you really loved Jesus, you would do this, or you wouldn’t do that”; or, “Since Jesus has done all of this for you, you really should be doing this or that”; or, “Jesus doesn’t like it when you do this or don’t do that.” This is what seems to be meant by preaching the third use of the law, but is nothing other than rank moralism.

While such statements may bring about certain changes in outward behaviour (preaching of the law will do that), such acts, motivated by abject terror and brought about by coercion, will not promote God-pleasing activity, but will create a “servile fear”, the same fear that drove Luther to “hole up” in a monastery. Even such statements as “Since Jesus did all of this for you, you should really study the Bible more, witness to your faith more, join the evangelism committee, etc.” will in fact have the opposite effect to what is intended. The demand that we do what we ought to do to demonstrate faith, or to command these acts as acts of gratitude, will create either hypocrites who are trying to be something they think they are not because somebody else thinks they should be, or people who live in utter terror of hell because they have become certain this is the type of person God expects them to be, and they know they are not. At the same time, it should be noted that the flesh is mortified when Christians steel themselves to do things which they are uncomfortable with doing because they know God desires that they do them. Yet here again the motivating power which leads them to mortify the flesh and to do what needs to be done is nothing other than the Gospel.

Much of what some concerned Lutherans speak about concerns the fact that many “evangelical” congregations are filled with activities and

programs which bring people out day after day week after week. They see people moving, doing things at the church, involved in myriads of activities, and may be deceived into thinking that because lots of activities are going on the congregation is more “alive” than many of ours are. Such perceptions, however, are deceiving on at least three counts.

First, simply because people are coming out for a lot of activities does not mean that there is real spiritual life there. After all, even a frog with a needle down his spine is “vibrant”. Movement does not necessarily indicate life. We must remember that God has called us to preach the Gospel, not merely to keep people busy.⁹

The second misapprehension, related to the first, is thinking that the nature of the sanctified life must *necessarily* show itself in involvement in the activities of the parish. If people are truly sanctified, it is thought, they will be involved in at least one, and maybe in several, “programmes”. Such thought, however, comes perilously close to the view the Reformation fought against, namely that “religious” works were in some way superior to works done in accordance with the Ten Commandments.¹⁰

However, if the sanctified life derives its content from the commandments, then that life is expressed in one’s day to day vocation, not in the number of hours one spends at church.¹¹ Again, this is not to say that congregational life outside of Sunday morning worship is unimportant or that Christians are not to be given opportunities to serve God by means of service in and with the congregation. Such activities also may, and often (indeed usually) are means by which the office of the keys is expressed in the

⁹ This is not to say that everything that goes on in such congregations is displeasing to God. Where the Gospel is preached He gathers His people. It is only to say that mere activity does not itself show that true spiritual growth is taking place.

¹⁰ Steven Hein notes that this is the modern equivalent of the “churchyard piety” which Luther spoke against: “Monasticism was the contemporary expression of churchyard piety that Luther condemned as a false and empty piety that burdened consciences and took Christians away from the real tasks in the world that God would have them to be about Today we must beware of church body or congregational churchyard piety: modern ecclesiastical monasticism that seeks to inundate its church membership with a veritable plethora of programs, activities and organizational events that lack the context of a true Christian vocation of sacrificial service in the old world communities of life. ‘Piety’ becomes program involvement In some churches, if one does not schedule life and the use of gifts according to the week’s ‘Calendar of Christian events’, something is seen as terribly wrong. One has not been assimilated into the regimen of *real* Christian living The thinly veiled message seems to be ‘Blessed are the involved and assimilated, for they shall inherit the kingdom of God.’ Activism in works that do not flow from one’s vocational call is present in every age as a temptation to leave ordinary duties of Christian piety for the extraordinary. This is churchyard piety.” Steven A. Hein, “The Outer Limits of a Lutheran Piety,” *Logia* III/1 (1994): 10.

¹¹ Bickel and Nordlie fall into this trap as well; Bickel and Nordlie 247-249.

“mutual conversation of the brethren”, as fellow members of the priesthood of believers speak the Gospel of forgiveness to one another, pray for one another, and lift one another up with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. But again, such acts are engendered by the preaching of the Gospel, not by laying an obligation on the hearts of the hearers. Yet, at the same time, there will be many in any given congregation who will faithfully be there on Sunday morning, hearing the Word and receiving the Sacrament, and who will not be in church again until next Sunday. To say that such people are not truly living out their sanctified life because they are not involved in some programme of the congregation, when in fact they faithfully execute their tasks in the world in the station of life where God has placed them, shows a grave misunderstanding of what it means to be sanctified.

Yet a third misapprehension arises when Reformed focuses on “obedience” enter the church. Sad to say, the use of the NIV is contributing to this, where the focus of the Great Commission is turned into lifestyle education—you bring people to faith so that you can then “teach them to obey”. Bickel and Nordlie fall into this trap as they discuss John 14, where the NIV consistently translates τηρέω “obey” rather than “keep”.¹² Outward conformity to certain rules becomes the norm of the Christian life, instead of “keeping the commandments” through trust in Christ, who then conforms our will to His.¹³

Again, Bickel and Nordlie show that they recognise the problem but fail at the solution very early on in the book as they themselves discuss the question of complacency in North America. Indeed, they not only see the problem but get a glimpse of its implications. They say, “Loyalty to Jesus Christ is not at the centre of most Christians’ lives. If it were, obedience would follow naturally.”¹⁴ Here a malady is correctly noted (though it is a problem in *some*, not *most* Christians lives). So also is the result that obtains when Christ is at the centre. However, they fall down on the solution. They ask, “Why is this? Could it be because we have lost sight of the goal of the

¹² Bickel and Nordlie 66.

¹³ Hein notes that Luther called this type of thinking “nave piety”. “Nave piety replaces the obedience of faith flowing from the righteousness of Christ with obedience to the law. Today some within Lutheran circles are seeking to replace the obedience of faith with a faith defined by obedience [He declares Bickel and Nordlie to be examples of this.] The gospel has the central objective to turn us all into obedient people under God’s legal system. Life with God is said not to terminate evangelically on the gospel--it is not the Good News of death to life. Rather, the gospel merely provides the ticket of admission to a legal life of obedience to the precepts of the law. Gospel is to law as means are to end. The lordship of Christ is not the dominion of grace, but the rule of Christ as lawgiver. This is the Reformed notion of the gospel in the service of the law--the idea that God has saved us for obedience.” Hein 10.

¹⁴ Bickel and Nordlie 20.

Gospel, that is, to *obey* everything that Christ has commanded us (Matt. 28:20).¹⁵ The answer to this question must be a resounding “No!” It is because law and Gospel have not been distinguished. Complacency must be addressed through the preaching of the law, noting the seriousness of the idolatry of having something at the centre of one’s life other than Christ, and of the Gospel in noting the overwhelming love of the true God who is faithful to us even when we are unfaithful to Him. That and that alone will create the love that puts Christ at the centre.

But what about “life goals” in our preaching? Do not certain texts (indeed, the whole second half of the church year) speak to the Christian life? They do indeed. But here we need to tread carefully. Richard Caemmerer speaks much about life goals in preaching.¹⁶ Roger Humann, on the other hand, notes, “It is entirely appropriate and necessary to preach sermons with respect to the Christian life”,¹⁷ but goes on to declare:

Only the Gospel can apply the needed healing, and bring to bear on the basic problem the needed changing power. Therefore, although we may address life problems in preaching, there can be, properly speaking, only a “faith” goal.¹⁸

Ultimately, though Caemmerer uses a term that Humann is unwilling to use, they are agreed as to the motivating power for the Christian life. Caemmerer declares:

To speak the Gospel to ears that hear, the preacher must speak the Law that underscores God’s will and man’s failure With patience and sympathy he must help the hearer confront his constant need for replenishing the grace of God and for refreshing the life of God so that he may apply himself faithfully to the calling in which God has placed him.¹⁹

Life situations—those which address the issues of “what should I do?”—call for the preaching of the law. There the individual is condemned as sinner for not living according to God’s wishes on the subject and at the same time informed as saint as to what God desires. However, instruction in life apart from the preaching of the Gospel is mere moralism. Only through the preaching of the Gospel of forgiveness, the good news of the overwhelming love of God, can an individual be strengthened in faith and

¹⁵ Bickel and Nordlie 20.

¹⁶ Richard R. Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959) 185-191.

¹⁷ Roger J. Humann, “Four Theses and Some Auxilliary Statements on Preaching to the Christian,” *Lutheran Theological Review* 1:2 (1989): 56.

¹⁸ Humann 59.

¹⁹ Caemmerer 187.

love and so empowered to obey, in that the desire to act contrary to God's law is squelched 1) through the preaching of the law which mortifies the flesh, and 2) by the assurance of God's unconditional love which frees the Christian for service. Thus, life goals, as such, cannot be reached apart from increasing faith through the preaching of the Gospel, by calling upon the Christian to remember who he is—a redeemed child of God who has been freed from the power of sin. As Humann notes, to preach life goals understood merely as a modification of external behaviour that will make them a “better Christian” is a misunderstanding of the true task of the preacher—to call upon the Christian to become what he actually is.²⁰ To put it another way, the preacher is to remind the Christian who he is so that he will then become who he already is. That is precisely what Walther notes as well:

How foolish ... is the preacher who thinks that conditions in his congregation will improve if he thunders at his people with the Law and paints hell and damnation for them. That will not at all improve the people [A] change of heart and love of God and one's fellow-men is not produced by the Law. If any one is prompted by the Law to do certain good works, he does them only because he is coerced, even as the Israelites had to be coerced by the covenant of the Law.²¹

Whether one thunders “hell and damnation” at them or creates guilt by saying “If you really loved Jesus, you would ...”, the law is being used to coerce behaviour, and such coercion does not create truly good works—only external change. Both forms violate Walther's twenty-third thesis on Law and Gospel: “[The] Word of God is not rightly divided ... when an endeavour is made, by means of the commands of the Law rather than by the admonitions of the Gospel, to urge the regenerate to do good.”

Be careful about that statement, “admonitions of the Gospel”, which does not refer to statements like “If you really loved Jesus, you would ...”, or “Since Jesus did this for you, you should ...”. The admonitions of the Gospel are nothing other than reminders to the Christian as to who they are—redeemed children of God, called from slavery to sin to the freedom of service. Both Caemmerer and Humann note that we need not fear the use of exhortation, as long as the command or imperative element (law) is accompanied by and coupled with the indicative element, the reality of the cross and resurrection (Gospel).²² Such reminders *will* lead the hearer to an

²⁰ Humann 58-59.

²¹ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928) 384-385.

²² Caemmerer 189; Humann 59-60.

abundance of good works.

Are Christians to abound in good works? Of course! Will proper preaching result in this! Absolutely! But only when the proper distinction between law and Gospel is maintained. May those entrusted with the proclamation of the Word maintain that distinction, that the hearers be brought to faith and be sustained in faith, and that they increase in good works, not out of compulsion, but out of the joy of knowing themselves to be the people of God.

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L'«ONTO-THÉO-LOGIE»: UNE IDOLE OU UN MONSTRE VERBAL?

Yves Osborne

INTRODUCTION

Qu'est-ce que l'«onto-théo-logie»? Selon Goulven Madec, il s'agirait ici d'«un monstre verbal, dont l'énormité favorise l'emploi en un sens péjoratif plus ou moins précis».¹ Mais selon plusieurs théologiens actuels, il s'agirait plutôt d'une idole dont il faut à tout prix se débarrasser afin de pouvoir parler correctement de Dieu. C'est ainsi par exemple qu'Eberhard Jüngel, dans son ouvrage *Dieu mystère du monde*, semble accuser l'«onto-théo-logie» de tous les maux dont «souffre» Dieu, plus particulièrement le discours sur Dieu dans le monde moderne. «La tâche théologique de toute première instance, dit-il, est d'expliquer la certitude de la foi en Dieu, de sorte que Dieu redevienne pensable.»² Mais voilà que, selon Jüngel, l'être de Dieu aurait été déclaré impensable par les Pères de l'Église, qui, sous l'influence du platonisme ou du néoplatonisme, auraient contribué à plonger la théologie dans une impasse. Remarquons bien le syllogisme: (1) Dieu est au-delà de tout; (2) or, nous ne pouvons penser ce qui est au-delà de tout; (3) donc, Dieu est impensable.³ Tel est de manière simplifiée, nous en convenons, le diagnostic de Jüngel: l'«onto-théo-logie», ou le discours traditionnel sur l'être de Dieu, aurait conduit au mutisme théologique. Mais en est-il bien ainsi?

1. LE PROBLÈME

Définissons d'abord les termes. L'expression «onto-théo-logie» est formée de trois mots: *onto* = être, *théo* = Dieu, et *logie* = discours. Il s'agit donc, comme nous l'avons déjà mentionné, du discours sur l'être de Dieu. En ce sens on peut dire que toute théologie est «onto-théo-logique» dans la mesure où il est question de parler de Dieu. Mais les choses sont loin d'être aussi simples. Lorsqu'on parle d'«onto-théo-logie», on a en tête un discours bien particulier sur Dieu. Selon Jüngel, il s'agirait ici d'un discours où la

¹ Goulven Madec, *L'«onto-théo-logie» patristique* (Paris: Institut Catholique de Paris, 1979)

² Eberhard Jüngel, *Dieu mystère du monde* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1983) Tome I: 169.

³ Selon Jüngel, en effet, les Pères n'auraient que substituer le concept de «Dieu au-delà de tout» au «Dieu au-delà de tout ce qui est présent» de Platon. Cf. Tome II: 19n.

métaphysique platonicienne, pour qui Dieu est au-delà de tout ce qui est présent, aurait sournoisement pris d'assaut le christianisme biblique, qui, selon lui, affirme que Dieu est présent dans l'événement de langage qu'est Jésus-Christ crucifié. Nous ne chercherons pas ici à expliquer ce que Jüngel entend par «événement de langage». Disons simplement qu'en bon «barthien» Jüngel tente de résoudre le problème en recourant à la linguistique moderne. Ce qui nous intéresse dans cette étude est de savoir si le discours traditionnel sur l'être de Dieu, discours que nous retrouvons avec certaines nuances aussi bien chez Thomas d'Aquin et Luther que chez les Pères, relègue Dieu dans un «au-delà des mots» de sorte que «notre époque» est maintenant «dépourvue de place pour parler de Dieu», comme le laisse entendre l'auteur de *Dieu mystère du monde*.⁴

L'Église chrétienne, nous le savons, a toujours confessé, en s'appuyant d'abord sur l'Écriture et ensuite sur l'expérience intellectuelle, que Dieu est inconnaissable tel qu'il est en lui-même, c'est-à-dire selon son essence, tout en affirmant que nous pouvons le connaître partiellement en nous fondant sur les évidences de son existence dans ses oeuvres et véritablement par le témoignage des Saintes Écritures. En d'autres mots, bien que nous ne puissions pas définir Dieu tel qu'il est en lui-même, nous pouvons quand même le connaître et parler correctement de lui en vertu de la révélation qu'il nous donne de lui-même. Il ne s'agit pas ici d'une contradiction entre deux images de Dieu, comme le laisse entendre Jüngel, celle du Dieu au-dessus de nous des philosophes et celle du Dieu parmi nous des chrétiens, mais d'une distinction théologique devenue de plus en plus évidente aussi bien par l'expérience intellectuelle que le témoignage biblique.

Bien loin de nous dispenser de parler correctement de Dieu, comme semble le laisser entendre Jüngel, la thèse classique selon laquelle le divin est indicible et inconcevable, étant bibliquement et intellectuellement fondée et reconnue par les plus grands docteurs de l'Église, quelque soit la tradition dans laquelle ils se tiennent, nous force au contraire à parler de lui d'une manière encore plus responsable. En effet, en montrant la faillite de la raison en ce qui concerne la connaissance de Dieu dans l'ordre actuelle des choses, la thèse de l'indicibilité divine nous ramène sur le terrain de la foi et de la révélation. Dieu parle dans ses oeuvres et dans l'Écriture et c'est d'abord par la foi, et non par la raison seulement, que nous recevons sa parole. Comme le souligne l'Épître aux Hébreux (11:3): «C'est par la foi que nous comprenons que les mondes ont été formés par une parole de Dieu, de sorte que ce que l'on voit provient de ce qui n'est pas apparent». Même si la raison peut conclure à l'existence de Dieu, elle ne sait rien de lui, elle ne connaît pas

⁴ Jüngel, Tome II: 21; Tome I: 2.

Dieu tel qu'il est en lui-même. La connaissance de Dieu relève donc exclusivement de la foi. «Car celui qui s'approche de Dieu doit croire [non pas comprendre seulement] que Dieu existe et qu'il se fait le rémunérateur de ceux qui le cherchent» (Héb. 11:6).

Vouloir faire de la théologie une science qui a pour but principal d'expliquer la certitude de la foi de sorte que Dieu redevienne pensable risque donc d'être une entreprise douteuse dans une perspective biblique, quoi qu'en dise Jünger. A moins bien sûr qu'on veuille raisonner à partir de la foi, mais Dieu devient-il pensable pour autant? Si oui, ce n'est plus selon la logique de la raison mais selon la logique de la foi, si tant est que la foi ait une logique. Cela reste à prouver. Le larron sur la croix aurait pu tout aussi bien ne pas croire et en rester avec la simple logique crime/châtiment qui ne prouvait pas en soi que Jésus était le Messie. Qu'est-ce qui l'a poussé à croire ou qu'est-ce qui l'a conduit à prier Jésus comme Messie contre toutes les apparences? L'Évangile ne le dit pas. Et nous ne le saurons probablement jamais de ce côté-ci. Mais une chose est certaine, le larron a prié Jésus, il a parlé à Dieu d'une manière correcte et responsable sans comprendre mais simplement dans un acte de foi.

En distinguant Dieu tel qu'il est en lui-même et Dieu tel qu'il se révèle à nous dans ses oeuvres et dans dans l'Écriture, le discours traditionnel sur l'être de Dieu ne se trouve-t-il pas à rendre un service inestimable à la théologie chrétienne en montrant que celle-ci procède exclusivement de la foi et de la révélation? Pour montrer qu'il en est bien ainsi, c'est-à-dire qu'il n'est pas nécessaire que Dieu devienne pensable afin de croire et parler correctement de lui, mais que, au contraire, il doit être impensable afin de laisser toute la place à la véritable certitude de la foi, le mieux est de montrer comment les Pères, Thomas d'Aquin et Luther, ont exprimé cette distinction théologique fondamentale.

2. L'«ONTO-THÉO-LOGIE» PATRISTIQUE

Le jugement favorable dont jouit Platon chez les penseurs chrétiens de l'Antiquité ne signifie pas qu'ils considéraient sa philosophie comme chrétienne, mais tient au fait qu'ils sont d'accord avec lui sur un point fondamental. C'est Philon d'Alexandrie, dont l'oeuvre est généralement considérée comme «une tentative de synthèse entre la révélation biblique et l'enseignement des philosophes, et Platon en particulier⁵ », qui ont mis en lumière cet élément commun. Pour Platon, en effet, Dieu est «l'être premier, et dernier qui est au-delà de tout ce qui est présent». Selon lui, il est donc impossible «de fournir une expression à cet au-delà avec la logique du logos», puisque ce qui est au-delà de l'être ne doit être conçu que comme

⁵ Madec 7.

inconcevable. Quant à Philon, voici comment il interprète la parole de Dieu à Moïse en Exode 3:13-15:

Dis-leur que je suis celui qui est, pour que, connaissant la différence entre ce qui est et ce qui n'est pas, ils apprennent en outre qu'il n'y a absolument aucun autre nom propre qui puisse me désigner, moi à qui seul revient l'être. Mais si dans leur faiblesse naturelle ils demandent encore une qualification supplémentaire, montre-leur que je suis Dieu, mais qu'en outre je suis le Dieu des trois hommes dont le nom désigne la vertu de chacun: le Dieu d'Abraham, le Dieu d'Isaac et le Dieu de Jacob, du premier parce qu'il est le modèle de la sagesse qui s'apprend, du deuxième parce qu'il est le modèle de celle qu'on tient de sa nature, du troisième parce qu'il est le modèle de celle qu'on acquiert par l'exercice ...⁶

Ainsi Philon pense, comme Platon, que Dieu est l'être, c'est le nom absolu de Dieu. Ensuite, il est le Dieu d'Abraham, d'Isaac et de Jacob, c'est le nom relatif, assortie d'une approche de la divinité qui correspond au trois niveaux de vie spirituelle selon la tradition philosophique classique, qu'on retrouve chez Platon. Ce qu'il importe de noter ici, c'est que, même chez Philon, il n'y a pas d'opposition entre deux images contradictoires de Dieu, l'une correspondant à Dieu au-dessus de nous et l'autre à Dieu parmi nous, mais simplement une distinction, semble-t-il, entre ce que Dieu est en lui-même (l'Être absolu et ineffable) et ce qu'il est dans son rapport bienfaisant avec le monde (l'Être connu et bienfaisant), distinction qu'Augustin reprendra plus tard de manière plus précise à la lumière de la révélation chrétienne. Pour le moment, retenons simplement que l'élément commun entre Philon et Platon, élément que les penseurs chrétiens de l'Antiquité reconnaîtront comme valable, est que Dieu est l'Être absolu, et en tant qu'Être absolu, il ne peut avoir de nom, de définition, il est foncièrement et radicalement transcendant.

Comment alors expliquer qu'un philosophe ait pu concevoir l'être de Dieu comme inconcevable en lui-même à l'exemple de Moïse? Selon Eusèbe de Césarée cet accord entre les doctrines hébraïques et grecs peut être attribué à trois possibilités: Platon aurait eu connaissance de l'enseignement de Moïse lors d'un voyage en Egypte; il l'aurait découvert simplement en ayant recours à la raison et à son génie naturel; Dieu le lui aurait révélé conformément à la parole de saint Paul en Romains 1:18 («Dieu le leur a manifesté»). Comme le souligne Madec, la troisième possibilité a le mérite d'être liée à «une théorie de la connaissance selon laquelle toute vérité vient de Dieu, est une participation de la Vérité qui est Dieu: le Verbe, fondement

⁶ Cité par Madec 9.

de l'universalité doctrinale du christianisme».⁷ Voici comment Justin, qui, rappelons-nous, a cru en l'enseignement du Christ jusqu'à mourir pour sa foi, s'exprime à ce sujet :

Je suis chrétien, je m'en fais gloire, et, je l'avoue, tout mon désir est de le paraître. Ce n'est pas que la doctrine de Platon soit étrangère à celle du Christ, mais elle ne lui est pas en tout semblable, non plus que celles des autres, stoiciens, poètes ou écrivains. Chacun d'eux, en effet, a vu du Verbe divin disséminé dans le monde ce qui était en rapport avec sa nature et a pu exprimer ainsi une vérité partielle; mais, en se contredisant eux-mêmes dans les points essentiels, ils montrent qu'ils n'ont pas une science supérieure et une connaissance irréfutable. Tout ce qu'ils ont

enseigné nous appartient, à nous chrétiens. Car après Dieu nous adorons et nous aimons le Verbe né de Dieu non engendré et ineffable, puisqu'il s'est fait homme pour nous, afin de nous guérir de nos maux en y prenant part. Tous les écrivains ont pu voir indistinctement la vérité, grâce à la semence du Verbe qui a été déposée en eux. Mais autre chose est de posséder une semence et une ressemblance proportionnée à ses facultés, autre chose l'objet dont la participation et l'imitation procède de la grâce qui vient de lui.⁸

On voit bien que Justin ne reprend pas ici le principe philosophique de l'indicible divine dans une dialectique d'opposition entre le Dieu au-dessus de nous et le Dieu parmi nous, comme semble le laisser entendre Jünger. Dieu est conçu comme l'être absolu et ineffable un peu à la manière des philosophes, mais cette connaissance, aussi importante soit-elle, n'est que le résultat d'une pré-manifestation du Verbe préexistant, c'est-à-dire le Christ. Ce que Platon avait vu et compris de Dieu, l'Être suprême, au-delà de tout ce qui est présent, ne peut être connu selon la logique de la raison humaine, comme Moïse, les prophètes et les apôtres l'ont enseigné. En ce sens, et en ce sens seulement, on peut dire avec Justin que «le Christ fut cru des philosophes et des lettrés⁹» sans être pour autant chrétiens.

On a souvent tendance à considérer Augustin comme un néoplatonicien, mais c'est vite oublier, comme le souligne Madec, que «Plotin n'a jamais bavardé avec l'Un comme le fait Augustin dans les

⁷ Madec, 19.

⁸ II *Apologie*, 13, 2-6. tra. L. Pautigny, Coll. Textes et documents, Paris, 1904, 177-79. Cité par Madec 17-18.

⁹ Ibid.

Confessions¹⁰». Comme Novatien, Ambroise, Jérôme et les penseurs chrétiens d'origine latine en général, Augustin considère que Dieu est l'Être absolu, éternel et immuable. Cependant, son discours sur l'être de Dieu ne procède pas simplement d'une pensée abstraite ou métaphysique dans une dialectique d'opposition entre le transcendant et l'immanent, comme semble le laisser entendre Jünger dans *Dieu mystère du monde*. Bien que le cadre de l'«onto-théo-logie» augustinienne soit platonicien ou néoplatonicien, comme on veut, le contenu est intégralement christologique et l'orientation clairement sotériologique.

Selon Madec, on compte au moins 47 citations d'Exode 3:14 dans les écrits d'Augustin. Mais ce qui nous frappe dans l'utilisation qu'il fait de ce passage, c'est d'abord l'originalité de son interprétation: Augustin considère ce passage dans la totalité de la révélation de Dieu à Moïse; ensuite, le fait qu'il cite ce passage une bonne trentaine de fois dans ses sermons montre qu'«il s'est soucié de faire comprendre sa doctrine au peuple chrétien, et non seulement à une élite philosophique ou théologique¹¹». Pour se faire une idée de l'interprétation augustinienne, citons un exemple:

«Je suis celui qui est ... » Qu'est-ce que cela ? Ô, Dieu, ô notre Seigneur! comment t'appelles-tu? Je m'appelle est, dit Dieu. Que veux dire: Je m'appelle est? Que je demeure éternellement, parce que je ne puis changer; car les choses qui changent ne sont pas, parce qu'elles ne demeurent pas. Ce qui est demeure; ce qui change, au contraire, fut tel et sera autre; mais ce n'est pas, parce que c'est changeant. Donc l'immutabilité de Dieu a daigné se désigner par ce vocable: «Je suis celui qui est».

Pourquoi donc s'est-il donné ensuite un autre nom: «Je suis le Dieu d'Abraham, le Dieu d'Isaac et Dieu de Jacob» ... parce que, de même que Dieu est immuable, de même il fait toute chose par miséricorde et le Fils de Dieu lui-même a daigné, en assumant une chair changeable, venir vers l'homme et lui subvenir. Celui qui est a donc revêtu une chair mortel, pour pouvoir dire: «Je suis le Dieu d'Abraham, le Dieu d'Isaac et le Dieu de Jacob».¹²

Notons d'abord ici la distinction que fait Augustin entre le nom de Dieu tel qu'il se révèle et se définit par rapport à lui-même (l'Être absolu et éternel [nomen aeternitatis]) et par rapport aux hommes («Je suis le Dieu d'Abraham ... [nomen misericordiae]). Ensuite, Augustin établit une distinction entre l'être et le devenir. «Ce qui est demeure; ce qui change, au

¹⁰ Madec 34.

¹¹ Madec 36.

¹² *Sermo* VI, 3,4-5, 5 (PL 38, 61); cité par Madec 36.

contraire, fut tel et sera autre; mais ce n'est pas.» Une telle idée, comprise dans un sens purement métaphysique ou philosophique impliquerait bien sûr l'anéantissement de l'homme et de tout ce qui existe hors Dieu et peut choquer un esprit sensible comme Jüngel.¹³ Mais une telle manière de comprendre les Pères ne revient-elle pas à faire d'eux des philosophes au sens propre du terme? Voici à ce sujet une observation assez simple, que Jüngel aurait intérêt à méditer: «Que Dieu seul existe et que le monde n'existe pas, doit être compris en un sens plus polémique que métaphysique. C'est-à-dire qu'il ne faut pas prendre ces formules ... à la lettre ... » Ce qu'on veut dire par là est très clair: on veut «affirmer aussi fortement que possible la différence de Dieu, sa transcendance, contre toute religion cosmique¹⁴ ». Cependant, même comprises dans un sens purement métaphysique ou philosophique, ces formules ne sont pas complètement dépourvues de signification.

3. L'«ONTO-THÉO-LOGIE» THOMISTE

Bien que ses écrits soient «nourris de la pensée d'Aristote, de sa technique philosophique, de sa méthode, de sa philosophie de la nature, de sa morale et de sa métaphysique», Thomas d'Aquin n'a pas une philosophie «indépendant de toute révélation religieuse¹⁵ », et on peut dire que c'est en

¹³ C'est ainsi, par exemple, que Jüngel semble se moquer de cet hymne célèbre de Grégoire de Naziance (cf. Tome II: 20-21n):

O toi, l'au-delà de Tout! N'est-ce pas là tout ce qu'on
peut chanter de Toi ?
Quel hymne te dira, quel langage? Aucun mot ne t'exprime.
A quoi l'esprit s'attachera-t-il? Tu dépasses toute intelligence.
Seul tu es indicible, car tout ce qui se dit est sorti de toi.
Seul tu es inconnaissable, car tout ce qui se pense est sorti de toi.
Tous les êtres, ceux qui parlent et ceux qui sont muets, te proclament.
Tous les êtres, ceux qui pensent et ceux qui n'ont point la pensée, te rendent
hommage.
Le désir universel, l'universel gémissent tend vers toi.
Tout ce qui te prie, et vers toi tout être qui pense ton univers fait monter un hymne
de silence.
Tout ce qui demeure demeure par toi; par toi subsiste l'universel mouvement.
De tous les être tu es la fin; tu es tout être, et tu n'en es aucun.
Tu n'es pas un seul être, tu n'es pas leur ensemble.
Tu as tous les noms, et comment te nommerai-je, toi seul, qu'on ne peut nommer ?
Quel esprit céleste pourra pénétrer les nuées qui couvrent le ciel même?
Prends pitié, ô toi, l'au-delà de tout, n'est-ce pas tout ce qu'on peut chanter de toi.

¹⁴ Madec 10.

¹⁵ Étienne Gilson, *Introduction à la philosophie chrétienne* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin) 28.

tant que théologien qu'il cherche à mobiliser la pensée philosophique au service de la théologie. Dès la deuxième question de la Somme de Théologie, au Sed Contra de l'article 3, *Utrum Deus sit*: y a-t-il un Dieu? ou, pour suivre le langage reçu: Dieu existe-t-il? Thomas répond: *Sed contra est, quod dicitur Exod. 3 in persona Dei: Ego sum, qui sum* (ST I, 2, 3). Cependant, Dieu lui-même a dit : JE SUIS CELUI QUI EST. On peut trouver beaucoup de brins de paille dans les écrits de Thomas, mais, en ce qui concerne son discours sur l'être de Dieu, on ne peut pas dire qu'il est en désaccord avec les Pères. Si Thomas a vu dans l'Ego sum qui sum d'Exode 3 plus qu'une simple affirmation de l'existence de Dieu, ou plus que ce que la noble famille des philologues et des linguistes modernes y voient, c'est sans doute parce qu'il croyait que Dieu lui-même est l'auteur de l'Écriture et que «[L]es écrits d'un auteur aussi exceptionnel ne livrent sans doute pas tout leur sens à qui s'en tient aux méthodes ordinaires d'interprétation des textes¹⁶ ». Quoi qu'il en soit, Thomas répond à la question de l'existence de Dieu d'abord en laissant Dieu affirmer qu'il est, avant de recourir aux cinq voies philosophiques qui ne font que conclure à son existence.

Contrairement aux hommes ou à tout ce qui existe, Thomas souligne que Dieu est en tant qu'il est, c'est-à-dire qu'il existe par lui-même, qu'il possède en lui-même sa propre origine, ce qui n'est pas le cas de tout ce qui existe hors Dieu, sinon, ce serait nier Dieu, la cause efficiente, et la création ex nihilo. Dieu ne dit pas à Moïse: Je suis ceci ou cela, mais simplement Je suis. Et c'est justement pour cette raison, parce que Dieu est celui Qui Est sans être ceci ou cela, que, même si nous pouvons savoir avec certitude que Dieu est, nous ignorons, selon Thomas, ce qu'il est. Voici comment Gilson explique la pensée de Thomas sur ce point précis :

[L]a théologie dit sans ambages que, dans notre condition présente, nous savons avec certitude que Dieu est, mais nous ignorons ce qu'il est. En effet, Dieu est l'être même, et rien d'autre: *Deus est esse tantum*, mais puisque l'être est toujours pour nous tel ou tel étant, il nous est impossible de nous représenter un être dont toute la nature serait d'être, sans plus ni moins. Que l'on se reporte à la formule concise, pleine, parfaite, sur laquelle s'exerce ici notre réflexion: notre intellect ne peut saisir que ce qui a une quiddité participant à l'être; or la quiddité de Dieu est l'être même; elle est donc au-dessus de l'intellect: *sed Dei quidditas est ipsum esse, unde est supra intellectum*.¹⁷

S'agit-il ici d'une vérité philosophique ou théologique? Peu importe qu'elle soit philosophique, qu'elle ait été reconnue par Platon ou Aristote, le

¹⁶ Gilson 49.

¹⁷ Gilson 65-66.

fait est qu'elle correspond à la révélation que Dieu donne de lui-même à Moïse et dans toute l'Écriture. Paul ne dit-il pas aux philosophes d'Athènes qu'il est possible de chercher et d'atteindre la divinité, comme à tâtons, et de parvenir à la conclusion que c'est en elle que nous avons la vie, le mouvement et l'être (Actes 17)? Par conséquent, si c'est en Dieu que nous avons l'existence, ce n'est pas en nous-mêmes ou par nous-mêmes. Nous n'en sommes pas la cause, ni le principe. En affirmant avec les philosophes que Dieu est celui qui est au-delà de tout, les Pères ne cherchaient qu'à mettre davantage en évidence la nécessité de la révélation et de l'Écriture, dont Dieu est l'auteur. Qu'ils aient vu des conceptions philosophiques dans le *Ego sum*, qui *sum*, comme Thomas, ne signifie pas qu'ils aient pensé un instant que la vérité révélée puisse être changée en vérité philosophique, que la raison puisse se substituer à la foi, que Dieu puisse devenir pensable.

4. L'«ONTO-THÉO-LOGIE» LUTHÉRIENNE

Sans utiliser les méthodes de la philosophie et s'appuyant exclusivement sur l'Écriture, Luther confesse avec les Pères, voire avec Thomas! l'incognoscibilité de Dieu. Comme eux, il enseigne qu'il est impossible de connaître la divinité par la raison, puisque celle-ci ne peut pas être définie selon son essence, c'est-à-dire telle qu'elle est en elle-même. En ce sens, on peut dire que Luther partage l'idée de Platon selon qui il est impossible de parler correctement de l'être suprême, qui est au-delà de tout ce qui est présent. Cependant, comme les Pères, Luther enseigne que nous pouvons connaître Dieu à partir de la révélation qu'il nous donne de lui-même dans l'Écriture. Et il précise que c'est au moyen de la Parole et des sacrements que nous trouvons et saisissons Dieu. En effet, selon Luther, Dieu vient à nous au moyen de la Parole et des sacrements afin de se rendre saisissable par la foi. Voici quelques témoignages qui illustrent bien la pensée de Luther :

Certains, par leurs spéculations, sont montés jusqu'aux cieux et et se sont mis à spéculer sur Dieu, le Créateur, etc. Tiens-toi loin d'un tel Dieu! Quiconque veut être sauvé doit laisser la majesté divine de côté—car Dieu et la créature humaine sont ennemis. Occupe-toi plutôt de saisir le Dieu que David saisit dans le Psaume 51. C'est le Dieu qui est vêtu de ses promesses—Dieu qui est présent en Christ Voilà le Dieu dont tu as besoin! Puisse-tu ne jamais être confronté au Dieu nu Nous ne connaissons d'autre Dieu que celui qui est vêtu de ses promesses. Si tu veux me parler de Dieu dans sa majesté, je me sauverai—comme ont du le faire les Juifs. Cependant, lorsqu'il est vêtu de la voix d'un homme et s'accommode à ma capacité de comprendre, je peux m'approcher de lui.

Chaque Parole de l'Écriture vient du Dieu révélé. Nous pouvons le saisir à cette endroit spécifique où il est lié par ses paroles. Ainsi, par exemple, le Dieu des enfants d'Israël était présent dans le temple de Jérusalem, dans des promesses et des signes spécifiques. De la même manière, nous ne discutons pas d'un vagabond, d'un Dieu nu, mais de quelqu'un qui s'est vêtu lui-même de signes spécifiques dans un lieu spécifique quelconque.

Dieu ne se manifeste pas lui-même autrement que dans ses oeuvres ou dans sa parole, parce que la signification de ces choses peut être comprise dans une certaine mesure. Tout ce qui appartient essentiellement à la divinité ne peut pas être saisi et compris.

C'est une folie d'argumenter à propos de Dieu en dehors ou avant le temps, parce que cela correspond à vouloir essayer de comprendre la divinité sans ses vêtements, ou la nature divine non couverte. Parce que cela est impossible, Dieu s'enveloppe lui-même dans ses oeuvres et dans certaines formes, comme aujourd'hui il s'emballe lui-même dans le baptême, l'absolution, etc.

Puisque notre nature corrompue est complètement incapable de saisir la divinité et que nous sommes incapables de supporter la vue de Dieu tel qu'il est, Dieu a donc choisi de vaincre notre nature corrompue et infectée par le poison satanique et de nous faire participer dans ses manifestations et sacrements afin que nous puissions être rendus capables de le saisir.¹⁸

On pourrait citer biens d'autres passages de Luther montrant la distinction qu'il fait entre Dieu tel qu'il est en lui-même et Dieu dans ses rapports avec nous, c'est-à-dire tel qu'il se révèle à nous. Dans tous les cas Luther prend soin de préciser davantage la nécessité de s'en tenir à la Parole de Dieu, aux manifestations et aux sacrements institués par Jésus-Christ. C'est là que nous trouvons, saisissons et connaissons véritablement Dieu, c'est-à-dire tel qu'il a voulu que nous le trouvions, le saisissons et le connaissons. Cette précision repose sur une distinction implicite qu'il fait entre le Dieu vêtu ou révélé (*Deus revelatus*) et le Dieu nu ou caché (*Deus absconditus*). Pour Luther, il ne s'agit pas ici de deux images contradictoires de la divinité, mais d'une distinction théologique traditionnelle fondamentale

¹⁸ Les citations sont une traduction libre de passages que nous trouvons dans Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981) 20-21n.

qui doit nous porter à nous attacher à la vérité chrétienne et nous maintenir dans la connaissance sacramentelle de Dieu. En dehors de la Parole et des sacrements, véritables manifestations de Dieu, il n'y a pas de Dieu pour nous. C'est là, et là seulement, qu'il nous rencontrent dans la foi.

Comme le souligne Althaus, nous retrouvons cette distinction présente dans toute la théologie de Luther et à toutes les étapes de son développement.¹⁹ Pourquoi un tel acharnement à répéter cette vérité sans cesse sous différentes formes? Eh, bien tout simplement parce que, selon Luther, la Parole et les sacrements sont le cœur même de la théologie authentiquement chrétienne. C'est là que nous trouvons, saisissons et connaissons Dieu. Cependant, contrairement à Thomas d'Aquin et les scolastiques qui dévouaient la majeure partie de leurs efforts intellectuels à l'étude des philosophes anciens et aux possibilités de la raison humaine à connaître ou ne pas connaître Dieu, Luther tranche radicalement en accentuant la nécessité de s'en tenir à l'Écriture seule, car elle seule peut créer la certitude de la foi dans le cœur, elle seule a le pouvoir de nous conduire à trouver, saisir et connaître Dieu.

CONCLUSION

Si la tâche théologique de toute première instance est d'expliquer la certitude de la foi de sorte que Dieu redevienne pensable, selon Jünger, on peut dire que la théologie est effectivement dans une impasse et pour longtemps. Les Pères de l'Église n'y ont pas cru. Thomas n'y a pas cru. Luther encore moins. Mais cela ne les a pas empêché de parler de Dieu correctement, voire même avec conviction, sans chercher à définir qui est Dieu ou à le rendre pensable. Quoi qu'il en soit, une chose est certaine, s'il y a une idole «onto-théo-logique», elle ne se trouve pas dans le christianisme biblique, ni dans la tradition qui lui est fidèle. Si le cadre de la doctrine patristique de Dieu est platonicien ou néoplatonicien, comme on veut, son contenu est intégralement christologique et son orientation nettement sotériologique. C'est ce que nous retrouvons pleinement chez Luther. Après avoir constaté ces choses, mais après seulement, ceux qui aiment faire des promenades dans quelque musée de concepts pourront peut-être se livrer à la critique et dénoncer ici et là quelque idolâtrie «onto-théo-logique»!

RÉSUMÉ

Dans cette étude, l'auteur cherche à montrer que la critique «onto-théo-logique» de la distinction théologique traditionnelle entre la

¹⁹ Althaus 20-21.

connaissance de Dieu tel qu'il est en lui-même et Dieu tel qu'il se révèle à nous n'est pas responsable du mutisme théologique actuel, comme le laisse entendre le théologien allemand Eberhard Jüngel dans *Dieu mystère du monde*. Se fondant sur l'Écriture et sur ce que Justin, Augustin, Thomas d'Aquin et Luther ont dit, l'auteur explique que cette distinction sert au contraire la tâche théologique dans son entreprise d'expliquer la certitude de la foi, puisqu'elle nous pousse à nous en tenir à la révélation divine et à une attitude de foi qui correspond au témoignage biblique. Le mutisme théologique actuel doit donc trouver une autre explication.

In this study, the author wants to demonstrate that the «onto-theo-logical» critic of the traditional theological distinction between God as He is in Himself and as He reveals Himself to us is not responsible for the 'muteness' of contemporary theology, as the German theologian Eberhard Jüngel claims. Looking at Scripture as well as what Justin, Augustine, Thomas, and Luther have said, the author explains that this distinction is, on the contrary, fundamental to the theological task to explain the certainty of faith, because it forces us to stick to the divine revelation and develop an attitude of faith which corresponds to the Bible. Therefore, the 'muteness' of contemporary theology must be explained otherwise.

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**THE APOCALYPTIC “SON OF MAN”:
BACKGROUND TO THE NEW TESTAMENT
USE OF THE TERM
A PRELIMINARY STUDY CONCENTRATING
ON DANIEL AND 1 ENOCH**

Vernon A. Raaflaub

The New Testament employs a variety of terms to refer to Jesus of Nazareth. One that Jesus frequently used of Himself is “Son of Man”. What did He mean by it? What did the Jewish community of His day understand by it? In 1932 Johannes Ylvisaker wrote:

In this designation He appears as a true man, lowly and weak—He is one of the race—but particularly, in His mission, as the objective of human history, *as a definite person who has no peer, the seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent’s head* (Gen. 3:15): as the second Adam, the second Man, who, descending from the human race, should atone for the sin of humanity (I Cor. 15:45,47; Rom. 5:12, ff.).¹

That is the view taught by some in the past; that the term “Son of Man” emphasised Jesus’ humanity, while the expression “Son of God” emphasised His divinity. We now know that this view misses the mark. In fact, as we trace the expression from its use in the canonical Book of Daniel through the intertestamental literature to New Testament times, we find that in the minds of Jesus’ hearers it had quite different connotations—and that this term probably expressed more clearly than most others (including the term “Messiah”) who and what Jesus was claiming to be. The purpose of this study is to show something of that development.

“SON OF MAN” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The term “Son of Man” appears 79 times in the Gospels—30 in Matthew, 13 in Mark, 24 in Luke, and 12 in John. Apart from the Gospels it occurs only once, in the sermon of Stephen (Acts 7:56). It has also been noted that apart from the Stephen reference Christ alone calls Himself the “Son of Man”; others do not employ this designation.² Ylvisaker has also suggested that Jesus “never terms Himself the Son of man when He refers to

¹ Johannes Ylvisaker, *The Gospels: A Synoptic Presentation of the Text in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1932) 178 (emphasis mine).

² Ylvisaker 178.

His special mission in Israel, but repeatedly when there is reference to His significance in the world.”³

However, it was also held by some that Jesus did not use the term of Himself.⁴ It is no longer possible to hold such a view. The intertestamental literature provides a bridge between the Book of Daniel and New Testament times, and shows us a term pregnant with apocalyptic significance. D. S. Russell can now confidently state, “There can be little doubt that, in his choice of this title, Jesus was deeply influenced by Dan. 7:13ff”.⁵

THE “SON OF MAN” IN DAN. 7:13-14

I saw in the night visions, and behold, there came with the clouds of the heavens one like a son of man, and He came to the Ancient of Days, and was presented before Him. And there was given to Him dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and His kingdom (is) one which shall never be destroyed.

The term “son of man” is an idiom of course for “human being”, and is so used in the Book of Ezekiel, for example in 2:1. The Aramaic equivalent carries the same meaning. “Ancient of Days” could probably be rendered “the Old One”.

Dan. 7:1 begins a series of visions that extends through chapters seven and eight. The time, we are told, is the first year of Belshazzar’s reign. A “dream and visions” pass through Daniel’s mind as he is lying on his bed. He writes down the substance of his dream.

7:2-8. The setting is on the earth. Daniel sees four great beasts coming up out of the sea. The fourth beast has ten horns, and then a little horn arises which uproots the others and “speaks boastfully”.

7:9-10. The scene appears to be set in heaven. We see the Ancient of Days on a majestic throne, presiding over a heavenly tribunal. Books are opened.

7:11-12. The writer switches back to the fourth beast with the boastful horn, which is now slain and thrown into the blazing fire. The other beasts are stripped of their authority, but are allowed to live for a period of time. Presumably this takes place on the earth, but Daniel is able to see both scenes simultaneously (this *is* a vision), and vv. 11-12 seem to be the

³ Ylvisaker 179.

⁴ Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1956) xxv-xxvi.

⁵ D. S. Russell, *Between the Testaments* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960) 140.

outcome of the judgement scene in 9-10, where the books were opened.

7:13-14. Now we are back to the heavenly setting, where “one like a son of man” is presented before the Ancient of Days.

7:15-18. Daniel asks the interpretation of what he has seen; he is told that the beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. But then the speaker adds, “But the saints [or ‘holy ones’] of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever” (v. 18 NIV).

7:19-23. Daniel asks about the “true meaning” of the fourth beast, and the horns. As he watches, the intruding horn makes war against the saints of the Most High, defeating them, until the Ancient of Days comes and pronounces judgement in favor of the saints, and the time comes “when they possess the kingdom”.

How is this to be interpreted? Clearly, the Ancient of Days, or “Old One”, seems to be Yahweh, though that name is not used. We do however have the name “Most High”, which appears in parallel verses. In vv. 9-10 prominence is given to His fiery throne, and He is described as having clothing “as white as snow”, and hair “like pure wool”. Countless multitudes serve Him.

More problematic, as we survey the literature, is the identity of the “one like a son of man”, the one *who appears like a human being*. That is what Daniel sees; he *looks* like a human being in Daniel’s vision; but at this point opinion has been divided. Some scholars have confidently identified the figure as Christ. For example, Leupold wrote in 1949, “This leads us back to the expression, ‘One like unto a son of man.’ It must apply to the Christ.”⁶ Writing much more recently, Gleason Archer stated that it is clearly “the glorified Son of Man of the New Testament”.⁷

Others are just as emphatic that it is not. James Montgomery, who published his commentary on Daniel in 1927, does not see the “son of man” in Daniel as divine:

Position *upon* the clouds, which the writer avoids, would rather be the attribute of Deity, *e.g.* Is. 19:1, Ps. 104:3, and his enthronement upon the cherubs. The contrast of the human being lies with both the Ancient and the beasts: God, man, beast, *cf.* Ps. 8.⁸

⁶ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1949) 308-309, especially 310. See also Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949) 155.

⁷ Gleason L. Archer, Jr., “Daniel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, gen. ed., vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985) 90.

⁸ James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927) 303.

On other hand, Montgomery *does* affirm:

The seer beholds, wafted in the upper atmosphere with a nimbus of cloud, a human figure coming ... ; he comes to the Ancient, he is presented before him, as is the custom in royal courts, and to him is then given universal and everlasting dominion.⁹

Regarding v. 13, Montgomery writes, “The pass. ‘he was presented’ ... is the proper rendering of the Aram. idiom of the act. pl.”¹⁰ Regarding v. 14, he adds:

There follows in v. 14 the description of the viceregal investiture of the humanlike being. For the attribution of dominion and glory and sovereignty, *cf.* the similar terms used of Neb.’s imperial power, 4:33, 6:18.¹¹

The relationship to Nebuchadnezzar’s power is an interesting point; William H. Shea comments that this passage “describes the establishment of a coregency: that of the Son of Man with the Ancient of Days”.¹² If Shea is correct in this (and I believe he is), it is little wonder that some messianic links are forged in later Jewish interpretation.

But what figure in this vision could be given all this by the Most High God? Some have suggested that he *is* human. But if that were the case, the text would likely say, “like a human being”. Still others have suggested he is an angel (Compare 8:15 where we read of one “having the appearance of a man”). The one “having the appearance of a man” is an angel, Gabriel. The wording is somewhat similar, but not identical, with that of 7:13,14.

Samuel R. Driver says this one appears “in superhuman majesty and state”.¹³ However, a contemporary scholar, D. S. Russell, responds that the “son of man” is not an individual at all! He writes:

It is clear from a reading of this passage that the figure here mentioned is not the Messiah and indeed that he is not an individual at all, but rather a symbol for the glorified Israel in the coming eschatological kingdom. In 7:18 the Son of Man is identified with ‘the saints of the Most High’, and this is supported by the symbolism of the passage¹⁴

⁹ Montgomery 303.

¹⁰ Montgomery 303.

¹¹ Montgomery 304.

¹² William H. Shea, “The Neo-Babylonian Historical Setting for Daniel 7”, *Andrew University Seminary Studies* 24 (1986): 34.

¹³ Samuel R. Driver, *Daniel*, The Cambridge Bible (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), quoted Young 154.

¹⁴ Russell, *Between the Testaments* 131; see also D. S. Russell, *The Method and*

C. K. Barrett, however, comments in regard to Dan. 7:9 (“As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne.”), “If this means that the Son of man is to sit on a throne beside God, it squares ill with the view ... that he is no more than a personification of Israel”.¹⁵ Yet Barrett seems reluctant to reject that view. He states:

It seems probable that the “Man” was originally a figure in an ancient myth, was taken over by the author of Daniel for the present purpose, and by reason of his functions as representing the people of God came ultimately to have messianic status.¹⁶

Arthur Jeffery and Gerald Kennedy take a slightly different view. Regarding v. 18 they say, “The son of man who received the kingdom in vs. 14 has now become the saints of the Most High, just as the little stone became a mountain.”¹⁷ Shea argues that the “son of man” should be distinguished from the saints of the Most High that are mentioned in Daniel 7:17,22,25 and 27. “This ‘Son of Man’ is a heavenly figure”, he writes, “and those ‘Saints’ are located on earth”.¹⁸ In 7:27 we read in the NRSV:

The kingship and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; *their kingdom* shall be an everlasting kingdom, [*His kingdom, NIV ...*] and all dominions shall serve and obey *them* [... worship and obey *him, NIV*]. [Italics mine.]

This raises an important question: Is the “his” in the Hebrew of v. 27 a collective (NRSV), or does it refer to an individual (NIV)? And therefore, does the “one like a human being” of 7:13,14 refer collectively to “the people of the Most High”, or to some other being? Young thinks the antecedent is “the people ... of the Most High”, so “their” would also be appropriate (contrary to the rendering of the NIV).¹⁹ It might be asked, though, why “all dominions would obey *them*”.

Here, Jeffery and Kennedy write, “ ... the future represents not the saints but the kingdom of the saints, and the king who inaugurates that kingdom, the messianic king. This is the connection between *son of man* and messianic king.”²⁰

Message of Jewish Apocalyptic (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964) 325-326.

¹⁵ C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, rev. and expanded ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987) 341.

¹⁶ Barrett 341.

¹⁷ Arthur Jeffery and Gerald Kennedy, The Book of Daniel, in *The Interpreter's Bible*, George Arthur Buttrick gen. ed. vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956) 461.

¹⁸ Shea 34.

¹⁹ Young 162.

²⁰ Jeffery and Kennedy 461.

George A. F. Knight goes so far as to say:

Since the dominion over *all* peoples given to this son of man by God, in contrast to that seized by the beastly rulers, is to be *everlasting*, the implication is that he is in some sense divine. This is suggested at once by his coming *with the clouds of heaven*.²¹

But is it not stranger for contemporary scholars to see some messianic implications and a sense of divinity in this “Son of Man” figure? It seems interpretation has come almost full circle, partly because of what we find in other sources such as I Enoch (discussed below), and partly because critical scholarship has confidently dated Daniel in Maccabaeian times rather than the Persian period which is the setting for the book.²² That brings it much closer in time to books like I Enoch and to New Testament times. The Book of Daniel is understood by them to be written in code language in response to the crisis brought about by Antiochus Epiphanes and his attempt to force Greek religion and culture on the Jews. However, it could be argued that the “one like a human being” is given the same kind of kingdom that is attributed to Yahweh by Darius in 6:26 (“his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end”). Also, this one is differentiated from the “beasts” and their kingdoms (7:12). The scholars who have seen this as a coregency (the “Ancient of Days” and the “Son of Man”) are most likely correct. Furthermore, while the passage does not say in so many words that this figure is divine, and the word “Messiah” is not used, such interpretation certainly is compatible with the text, and later Jewish interpretation picked up on these implications. I Enoch builds on this imagery, as will be shown next.

THE SIMILITUDES OR PARABLES OF ENOCH

The Similitudes of Enoch (I Enoch 37-71) are part of an apocalyptic work attributed to the Enoch of Genesis 5:24. The Ethiopic book is a collection of traditions arranged as a pentateuch. About one third of the Ethiopic text has been known in Greek for many years, but we now have fragments in Aramaic from Qumran (with the exception of the Similitudes),²³ convincing most authorities that the Aramaic fragments represent the original

²¹ George A. F. Knight, “The Book of Daniel,” in *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Charles M. Laymon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971) 445.

²² See for example Ben Asen, “Reflections on Daniel and Apocalyptic,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 15 (June 1988):263-266. The author does not even mention that another time setting is possible.

²³ For a description of the manuscript evidence from Qumran, see James C. VanderKam, “The Scrolls, the Apocrypha, and the Pseudepigrapha,” *Hebrew Studies* 34 (Summer 1993): 40ff.

Enoch, while the Greek is a primary and the Ethiopic a secondary translation.²⁴

Although many have dated the Similitudes within the Christian era, recent scholarship has tended to see them as Jewish, not Christian. Russell dates them to the Maccabean age, and E. Isaac the Second Century B.C.-First Century A.D.²⁵ J. T. Milik's suggested third century A.D. date for the Similitudes has not met general acceptance. VanderKam has shown that Milik's thesis fails due to lack of evidence.²⁶ If they are, as is now thought, truly Jewish, with no Christian interpolations, then they show a striking development of the "son of man" imagery in Daniel. The term "son of man" appears fourteen times in I Enoch 37-71.²⁷ Ralph Martin observes, "Daniel's 'son of man' is the starting-point for a development which blossoms fully in Enoch Our interest centers in the central portion of chapters 37-71, known as the Similitudes or Parables of Enoch."²⁸

The following analysis will be based on the translation by E. Isaac in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* vol. 1, edited by James Charlesworth (emphases mine).

And in those days my eyes saw the *Elect One* of righteousness and of faith, and righteousness shall prevail in his days, and the righteous and elect ones shall be without number before him forever and ever [39:6].

This "Elect One" is distinct from God, who is described frequently in these verses as "the Lord of the Spirits". Early references to this "Elect One" include the following:

On that day my *Elect One* shall sit on the seat of glory and make a selection of their deeds ... [45:3]

On that day, I shall cause my *Elect One* to dwell among them. I shall transform heaven and make it a blessing of light forever. I shall (also) transform the earth and make it a blessing, and cause

²⁴ Matthew Black, "Enoch and the Books of Enoch," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 184-185. See also James C. VanderKam, "Some Major Issues in the Contemporary Study of I Enoch: Reflections on J. T. Milik's *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4*," *Maarav* 3 (1982): 85-97.

²⁵ Russell, *Between the Testaments* 132-133; E. Isaac, "I Enoch, A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1983) 5.

²⁶ VanderKam, "Some Major Issues" 93.

²⁷ Young 155.

²⁸ Ralph P. Martin, *New Testament Foundations*, rev. ed., vol. 1, *The Four Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985) 115.

my *Elect One* to dwell in her [45:4].

It is clear from these passages that the *Elect One* is a very significant role. He is righteous, and will remain forever. He will sit on the throne of glory, and act as judge. Since this “*Elect One*” seems to be identified with the *Son of Man*, we shall now concentrate also on verses referring to the “son of man”.

At that place, I saw the One to whom belongs the time before time. And his head was white like wool, and there was with him another individual, whose face was like that of a human being. His countenance was full of grace like that of one among the holy angels. And I asked the one—from among the angels—who was going with me, and who had revealed to me all the secrets regarding the *One who was born of human beings*, “who is this, and from whence is he who is going as the *prototype of the Before-Time?*” And he answered me and said to me, “This is the *Son of Man*, to whom belongs righteousness, and with whom righteousness dwells. And he will open all the hidden storerooms; for the Lord of the Spirits has chosen him, and he is destined to be victorious before the Lord of the Spirits in eternal uprightness. This *Son of Man* whom you have seen is the One who would remove the kings and the mighty ones from their comfortable seats and the strong ones from their thrones. He shall loosen the reigns of the strong and crush the teeth of the sinners. He shall depose the kings from their thrones and kingdoms. For they do not extol and glorify him, and neither do they obey him, the source of their kingship [46:1-5].

The “One to whom belongs the time before time” (v. 1) is obviously the “Ancient of Days” of Daniel 7, as we are also told that “his head was white like wool”, language that comes from Daniel 7:9. In 47:3 he is referred to as the Antecedent of Time. The other “individual, whose face was like that of a human being”, would certainly seem to be patterned after the “son of man” of Daniel 7:13,14. He is described as “full of grace”, as “one who was born of human beings”, and as the one “who is going as the prototype of the Before-Time” (compare v. 1). It would be interesting to have an Aramaic text of this to know what word is used there for “prototype”. Might there be a similarity between this word and *μονογενής* (only, only-born, unique), a word used of Jesus in the New Testament? And again, he is portrayed as judge of the world.

At that hour, that *Son of Man* was given a name, in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits, the Before-Time; even before the creation of the sun and the moon, before the creation of the stars, he was given a name in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits. He will

become a staff for the righteous ones in order that they may lean on him and not fall. He is the *light of the gentiles* and he will become the hope of those who are sick in their hearts. All those who dwell upon the earth shall fall and worship before him; they shall glorify, bless, and sing the name of the Lord of the Spirits. For this purpose he became the *Chosen One*; he was concealed in the presence of (the Lord of the Spirits) prior to the creation of the world, and for eternity. And he has revealed the wisdom of the Lord of the Spirits to the righteous and the holy ones For they have denied the Lord of the Spirits and *his Messiah*. Blessed be the name of the Lord of the Spirits [48:2-6,10]!

Here the Son of Man exists before creation, and is given a name. He will be a support for the righteous; he will be the light of the gentiles. All on earth will worship before him; he became the Chosen One; he was concealed in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits prior to the creation of the world, and for eternity. He is the revealer of the wisdom of God, and, according to Isaac's translation, he is the Messiah. All this is quite amazing, when looked at in the light of what the New Testament claims for Jesus as Messiah, especially this Son of Man's existence before creation, the special name, his being a light to the gentiles, to be worshipped, and to be termed Messiah! This reveals that these kinds of eschatological expectations existed within Judaism, apparently outside Christianity.

The *Elect One* stands before the Lord of the Spirits; his glory is forever and ever and his power is unto all generations. In him dwells the spirit of wisdom, the spirit which gives thoughtfulness, the spirit of knowledge and strength, and the spirit of those who have fallen asleep in righteousness. He shall judge the secret things. And no one will be able to utter vain words in his presence. For he is the *Elect One* before the Lord of the Spirits according to his good pleasure [49:2-4].

Again we have language that parallels in some ways what is found in the New Testament, with the reference to the spirit of wisdom, spirit of strength, etc.

But *through his name* they shall be saved, and the Lord of the Spirits shall have mercy upon them, for his mercy is considerable [50:3b].

It is unclear in this passage whether "through his name" refers to the Lord of the Spirits, or to the Elect One/Son of Man. The emphasis in 48:2 on the Son of Man being given a name, and the fact that the previous chapter ended with the Elect One as subject allows this at least as a possibility. This parallels salvation through the name of Jesus in the New Testament, although

presumably there is no hint of sacrificial atonement by that Elect One in I Enoch.

There are brief references to the Elect One in vv. 3 and 4 of chapter 51, but nothing particularly new is said.

And he said to me, "All these things which you have seen happen by the authority of his *Messiah* so that he may give orders and be praised upon the earth [52:4].

There are additional references to the Elect one in 52:6,9, in 53:6, and in 55:4 (where he again appears as judge).

So that they all return and find hope in the day of the *Elect One* ...
. And him, the *First Word*, they shall bless, extol, and glorify with wisdom.

Does this "First Word" refer to the Lord, or to the Elect One? It is unclear, though probably to the Elect One. In any case, the use of "Word" here is an interesting parallel to John 1:1ff.

He placed the *Elect One* on the throne of glory; and he shall judge the works of the holy ones in heaven above, weighing in the balance their deeds [61:8; the Elect One also appears in 61:10].

"Open your eyes and lift up your eyebrows—if you are able to recognize the Elect One!" The Lord of the Spirits has sat down on the throne of his glory, and the spirit of righteousness has been poured out upon him. The word of his mouth will do the sinners in, and all oppressors shall be eliminated from before his face. On the day of judgement, all the kings, the governors, the high officials, and the landlords shall see him and recognize him Then pain shall come upon them as upon a woman in travail ... they shall be terrified and dejected; and pain shall seize them when they see that *Son of Man* sitting on the throne of his glory [62:1b-5].

For the *Son of Man* was concealed from the beginning, and the Most High One preserved him in the presence of his power; then he revealed him to the holy and the elect ones. The congregation of the holy ones shall be planted, and all the elect ones shall stand before him. On that day, all the kings, the governors, the high officials, and those who rule the earth shall fall down before him on their faces, and worship and raise their hopes in that *Son of Man*; they shall beg and plead for mercy at his feet [62:7-9].

Here again we have the existence of the Son of Man/Elect One from the beginning, his revelation, and his role as judge.

The Lord of the Spirits will abide over them; they shall eat and rest and rise with that *Son of Man* forever and ever [62:14].

After that, their faces shall be filled with shame before that *Son of Man*; and from before his face they shall be driven out [63:11].

And they blessed, glorified, and extolled (the Lord) on account of the fact that the name of that (*Son of Man*) was revealed to them. He shall never pass away or perish from before the face of the earth [69:27b].

Therefore nothing that is corruptible shall be found; for that *Son of Man* has appeared and has seated himself upon the throne of his glory; and all evil shall disappear from before his face; he shall go and tell to that *Son of Man*, and he shall be strong before the Lord of the Spirits. Here ends the third parable of Enoch [69:29].

And it happened after this that his living name was raised up before that *Son of Man* and to the Lord from among those who dwell upon the earth; it was lifted up in a wind chariot and it disappeared from among them [70:102].

Chapter 71:14-17 is particularly problematic. What is the identity of this Son of Man? Many scholars have understood this passage (and especially v. 14) to identify the Son of Man as Enoch himself, which seems contradictory to his apparent existence from before creation. We shall present E. Isaac's translation, discuss the emendation of R. H. Charles, and then return to the interpretation that the Son of Man in this passage is Enoch himself.

Then an angel came to me and greeted me and said to me, "You, son of man, who art born in righteousness and upon whom righteousness has dwelt, the righteousness of the Antecedent of Time will not forsake you." He added and said to me, "He shall proclaim peace to you in the name of the world that is to become. For from here proceeds peace since the creation of the world, and it shall be unto you for ever and ever. Everyone that will come to exist and walk shall (follow) your path, since righteousness never forsakes you. Together with you shall be their dwelling places; and together with you shall be their portion. They shall not be separated from you forever and ever and ever." So there shall be length of days with that *Son of Man*, and peace to the righteous ones; his path is upright for the righteous, in the name of the Lord of the Spirits forever and ever [71:14-17].

Isaac has rendered v. 14 as, "You, son of man, who art born in

righteousness and upon whom righteousness has dwelt ... “ R. H. Charles had translated v. 14 as “This is the Son of Man who was born unto righteousness, And righteousness abides over him ... ” Barrett writes:

This translation [of R. H. Charles] does not represent the text of the MSS., which give the second person, not the third: Thou art the Son of Man ... [and similarly in the following verses]. The scene is the final exaltation of Enoch to heaven [these are the last verses of the Similitudes]; according to Charles he is shown the Son of Man, about whom he has already received revelations; according to the MSS. it is revealed to Enoch, as the last secret of all, that he himself is the Son of man. Charles abandoned the MSS. because they did not seem to him intelligible; and indeed the thought they convey is very difficult. The Son of man [according to the Similitudes] has existed from eternity in heaven. Enoch, the man, came to exist on earth and after a long life is translated to heaven. We now learn that one of these distinct characters is the other. This identification cannot be rationally conceived; but rationality is perhaps the last quality we should expect in an apocalypse, and the wisest course may be to suppose that there were circles in Judaism in which this strange belief was held. There are several other pieces of evidence which attest the belief that Enoch was translated to heaven to become a celestial being. If there were, in the first century AD, Jews who believed that it was possible for a man to be exalted to heaven so as to be identified with a supernatural being who was called Son of man and was to come in glory as judge and saviour, their existence and their belief can hardly fail to be relevant to the study of the gospels.²⁹

D. S. Russell is of the same opinion, and also discusses the apparent contradiction that results, given the fact that the “Son of Man” appears as well prior to creation, but rejects Sigmund Mowinkel’s view that “Enoch is exalted not to *become* but to *be with* the Son of Man”.³⁰ Most other contemporary scholars share Russell’s interpretation of 71:14. As late as 1986 Russell insists, “We are left ... with indisputable evidence of 71:14 and its identification of Enoch with the angelic ‘son of man’.”³¹ But *is* the evidence “indisputable”? Isaac (as noted above in his translation of I Enoch) renders the 71:14 reference to Enoch as “son of man” but the other references as “Son of Man”. Clearly Isaac does not interpret Enoch as the

²⁹ Barrett 344, n. 1:66.

³⁰ Russell, *Method and Message* 349.

³¹ D. S. Russell, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) 42.

“Son of Man in this book. In a footnote he writes:

This expression “son of man” should be distinguished from the “Son of Man”. As explained above, “Man” in the “Son of Man” is a translation of either *sab’e*, “people”, or *`egwula-’emma heyyaw*, “son of the mother of the living”, i.e. “human being”; in the present case, however, we have *be’esi*, “Man”, “a masculine person”.³²

While this translation is obviously questioned, it does for the most part eliminate the contradiction. One must ask if all the scholars who have assumed that Enoch *is* the Son of Man of that book are basing their conclusions on the *Ethiopic* text, or on other secondary translations (remembering that the Ethiopic text itself is a translation, but the closest we have at this time). On the other hand, even if Isaac’s rendering is followed, one still finds some of the same things said to Enoch that were said earlier about the Son of Man—that he is born in righteousness, that everyone that will come to exist and walk shall follow his path. Still, the final verse, “So there shall be length of days with that Son of Man ...”, could imply that Enoch will be *with* the Son of Man, not necessarily that he *is* the Son of Man. It would be helpful if the original Aramaic text of the Similitudes were available; it is not impossible that the confusion results from a confusion in translation.

In any case, we are left with a view of the Son of Man that approaches *some* New Testament teaching about Jesus. Russell writes:

The Son of Man is here presented as a heavenly being with no prior earthly existence at all; but he is pre-existent (48:3), having been created by God before the foundation of the world and hidden by him from the beginning (48:6; 62:7); he is a divine creature whose face is “full of graciousness, like one of the holy angels” (46:1), upon whom God bestows his own divine glory (61:8). He goes on to describe him as the one who remains hidden but who will one day be revealed. He will then appear as judge of heaven and earth, of angels, of humans both dead and living. The godly will share in the kingdom of the Son of Man.³³

And Ralph Martin concludes:

The importance of this section is that it contains an entirely spiritualized conception of the Messiah and his kingdom. Four titles applied in the New Testament to Jesus are found in the

³² Isaac 50, footnotes re 71:14.

³³ Russell, *Between the Testaments* 132-133.

ascription to the Enochian figure: Messiah, the righteous one, the elect one, and the Son of Man. Indeed, he is hailed as a divine being: “And his glory is for ever and ever, and his might unto all generations” (49:2). The kingdom over which he rules transcends all national bounds: “And he shall be the light of the Gentiles” (48:4). He stands in a special relationship to God, and is brought out onto the stage of a cosmic drama to be acknowledged and revered by all, both human and spiritual powers. This revelation of a hidden, pre-existent Son of Man is a sign of the world’s judgement and betokens the establishment of a heavenly kingdom.

“They see that Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory: and the kings and the mighty and all who possess the earth shall bless and glorify and extol him who rules over all, who was hidden; for from the beginning the Son of Man was hidden and the Most High preserved him in the presence of his might and revealed him to the elect” (62:5-7).³⁴

However, Jeffery and Kennedy, while believing that the “Son of Man” primarily represents “the saints of God”—a view which we have disputed—write:

In the N.T. and in Enoch 45-57 the son of man is an individual whose office is to be interpreted messianically. A similar interpretation appears in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 98a) and was almost universal in the early church. It is often urged against the figure’s being interpreted messianically here that the Book of Daniel does not know a personal messianic king. Yet while it is true that this figure does not embody the kingdom of the “saints of the Most High” who appear in vss. 18-27—i.e., Israel as the people of God—we may well raise the question whether he does not also represent the messianic king. In this book we find that king and kingdom interchange (cf. vs. 17; 2:37ff.; 8:21), and there is no a priori reason why this figure may not represent both the saints as a body and the Saint of Saints as an individual. It is clear that he is subordinate to the Ancient of Days, to whom he is presented and from whom he receives the kingdom. The figure here is parallel to the stone in 2:34 ...³⁵

It is agreed that there is nothing distinctively “Christian” about the “Son of Man” figure in Enoch—he is described as “saviour” and as a “light of the gentiles,” but not as dying for the sins of the world; there is no hint of a “resurrection” from death such as we have in the New Testament. On the other hand there is much that we find in common with New Testament

³⁴ Martin 115-116.

teaching. Perhaps this is one of the reasons Jesus used the term “Son of Man” much more than he did the term “Messiah”—“Messiah” had too many unwanted overtones, many of them political. Also, the Jews thought more in terms of the Messianic Age than giving centrality to his functions or his person.³⁶ In contrast, although most scholars still think that “Son of Man” was not a title in intertestamental Judaism, it is also clear that the idea of a supernatural, heavenly saviour figure was current in Judaism, as is seen in both Daniel and the Similitudes of Enoch, as well as other intertestamental literature that are outside this study.³⁷ According to Edward J. Young, “among the Jews the Messiah came to be known as *anani* ‘Cloudy One’ or *bar nivli* ‘Son of a Cloud’“.³⁸

These concepts must certainly have been based to a considerable extent on I Enoch and Daniel 7. What is particularly distinctive in the New Testament is the combining of the idea of the supernatural “Son of Man” figure who existed from before creation, saviour of the world, light of the gentiles—all that we see in Daniel 7 and I Enoch—with the “Suffering Servant” of Isaiah. This gives the dimension we find for the Son of Man/Messiah in the Gospels. Russell writes:

If we are to seek any source at all other than his own consciousness of mission, then it is perhaps again to the Book of Daniel that we must turn. In Mark 1.14f we read, “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand (cf. Dan. 2:44): repent ye, and believe in the gospel (cf. Isa. 61.1ff)”. By so speaking Jesus showed a penetrating insight into the relationship between Daniel and Deutero-Isaiah and, by implication, between the Son of Man and the Suffering Servant. Like the Covenanters of Qumran he interpreted his mission in terms of a “unitive exegesis” of these two books, but unlike them he saw the fulfillment of these prophetic words in himself—in his life and death and resurrection, in the coming of the Spirit, in the life of

³⁶ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993) 519.

³⁷ John J. Collins, “Apocalyptic Literature” in *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986) 352-353. And although we cannot have any accurate dating on such a statement—it may come considerably later—compare also the linkage in the *Bavli* between Dan. 7:13 and Zech. 9:7, a linkage that was certainly made by the Christian community: “C.I.E. `It is written, “And behold, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven” (Dan. 7:13), and it is written, “Behold your king comes to you ... lowly and riding upon an ass” (Zech. 9:7).’ In C.I.A. this is linked with the Messiah.” Jacob Neusner, *Scriptures of the Oral Torah* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987) 298.

³⁸ Young 154.

the Church and in his coming again to reign. The Messiah-Son of Man was the Suffering Servant of the Lord through whose sacrifice the kingdom would come and the will of God be done on earth as it was in heaven.³⁹

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³⁹ Russell, *Between the Testaments* 141-142.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF WILHELM LÖHE TO C. F. W. WALTHER AND THE MISSOURI SYNOD IN THE DEBATE CONCERNING CHURCH AND OFFICE

Thomas M. Winger

“The immediate occasion for the discussion over the Office was the February revolution of 1848.”¹ With this perspective Holsten Fagerberg begins his explanation of “The Controversies Concerning the Office” in the 19th century.² In the circles of North American Lutheranism, this statement is surprising for two reasons: first, the debate between Walther and Grabau over the Office was already long under way by then (see below); and secondly, it references the debate only to Germany. Fagerberg thus places the debate into perspective, treating the American problem as but one skirmish on the fringe of a larger battle—and perhaps somewhat unrelated to it. “Through the political upheavals which this [revolution] appeared to bring with it, the relationship between Church and State, and thereby the question of the composition [*Verfassungsfrage*] of the Church, became most relevant.”

3

At the heart of the German battle was Wilhelm Löhe. Fagerberg attributes the start of the controversy to Löhe’s writing, *Aphorismen über die neutestamentlichen Ämter* [*Aphorisms Concerning the New Testament Offices*] (1848).⁴ One might look even farther back to Löhe’s *Drei Bücher von der Kirche* [*Three Books About the Church*] (1845), which was addressed to the problem of State interference in the churches of Bavaria.⁵

¹ Holsten Fagerberg, *Bekenntnis, Kirche, und Amt in der deutschen konfessionellen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1952) 101. All original German works will be cited in this essay in the present author’s own translation, with annotations where necessary. Any emphasis given is original.

Note concerning the translation of the German word *Amt*: Recent English translations often render this “ministry”. Yet in the present confusion concerning the latter word, it is more helpful and accurate to translate *Amt* as “office”. The word *Amt* carries none of the ambiguities which “ministry” has been given through modern misuse. It stresses not the *activity* of ministry, but the fact that the ministry is carried on by a man who has been given the *office* to do so. By very definition an *Amt* cannot belong to everyone.

² Fagerberg 101-20, offers the finest brief survey of this debate.

³ Fagerberg 101.

⁴ Fagerberg 103. He suggests that Löhe’s experience with the American situation may have spurred him to raise his concerns in Germany. The complete text is found in Wilhelm Löhe, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Klaus Ganzert, vol. 5, *Die Kirche im Ringen um Wesen und Gestalt* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 1954) V/1:253-330; hereafter abbreviated as *GW*.

⁵ See James Schaaf’s introduction in his translation, *Three Books About the Church*

The central issue was the proper governance of the Church, with or without recourse to State control.⁶ The nature of the Office of the Ministry was debated, as to whether the ministers were responsible for calling pastors, governing the Church, exercising discipline, etc. One can see how similar this was to problems in North America. Most of Walther's major works deal with similar questions. James Schaaf summarises the connection:

Clearly the American controversy, which began with Grabau's *Hirtenbrief* in 1840, antedates the debate in Germany by several years. While the American and German controversies originated in different ways, both discussions of *Kirche und Amt* took the same path. Löhe was the connecting link between the two. His experiences with the American situation gave him an advantage over his German associates, and it was only natural that he be the man to inaugurate the discussion in Germany.⁷

Today Löhe is often remembered only as an antagonist in Walther's debates. Yet Löhe held a far greater significance for the early development of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod than is commonly perceived. On the first synodical clergy roster of 1847, Löhe men accounted for 21 of 41 pastors.⁸ By 1851, the peak of Löhe's relations with Missouri, the synod had increased to 81 pastors and 95 congregations; Löhe had sent a total of 84 men to serve as pastors and teachers.⁹ Having just returned from his visit with Löhe in Germany, Walther expressed the opinion that the Missouri Synod arose from *two* factors: the 1839 Saxon immigration, and the pastors sent by Löhe since 1843. Walther attributed the synod's phenomenal growth to him, and heaped upon him extravagant praise:

Next to God it is Pastor Löhe to whom our synod owes thanks almost exclusively for the joyful blossoming and rapid

(Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 33-39. The complete German text is in *GW V/1:83-179*. See Fagerberg's comments 122. In this work Löhe criticises both an institutional ecclesiology (Roman Catholic), and an election-based ecclesiology (Reformed); instead, he argues, the *Word* is constitutive of the church, for it calls believers into being.

⁶ Thus, many of the works of this era included a discussion of *kirchliches Regiment*, i.e., "ecclesiastical governance". Many researchers have attempted to link up the German debate with the Oxford Movement, which began as a struggle against Erastianism. The jury is still out on their connection. But see Walter H. Conser, "A Conservative Critique of Church and State: the Case of the Tractarians and Neo-Lutherans", *Journal of Church and State* 25 (Spring 1983): 323-41. Löhe's *Aphorismen* concludes that the temporal ruler has no position as head of the church. *GW V/1:321*.

⁷ James Lewis Schaaf, "Wilhelm Löhe's Relation to the American Church: A Study in the History of Lutheran Mission" (Dissertation, Heidelberg, 1961) 137, n. 62.

⁸ Schaaf 100, n. 43.

⁹ Schaaf 114, n. 66. The great influence of his Ft. Wayne seminary will be considered below.

strengthening which it enjoys; it must quite properly honour him as its spiritual father. It would fill the pages of an entire book if one were to narrate in only a brief outline what that dear man has been doing for a great number of years with inexpressible zeal and in the most noble, magnanimous way for our Lutheran Church, and especially for our synod.¹⁰

How did it come to pass that Löhe should receive at his death only this brief, disinterested notice in *Der Lutheraner*?

DEATH NOTICE: From *Lutherische Zeitung* we learn the shocking news that Pastor Loehe of Neuendettelsau, “after a brief illness,” died at five forty-five o’clock on the evening of January second.¹¹

Both practical and theological tensions contributed to the rupture of his relations with Missouri. Though this context is important enough to demand our attention briefly below, our main concern is with Löhe’s theological contribution to the *Kirche und Amt*, i.e., “Church and Office” debate, which we will consider from his perspective in the main portion of this essay.

LÖHE’S LIFE LEADING TO INTEREST IN NORTH AMERICA

Though Löhe is respected round the world for his world-wide mission efforts, he never personally strayed far from his home in Bavaria. He was born Johannes Konrad Wilhelm Löhe on 21 February 1808 to a middle-class home in Fürth, near Nürnberg. He was raised in an active Lutheran family, who brought him to divine service. The church was always at hand—he fondly remembers peering down from the church balcony upon an august synodical gathering of pastors.¹² This spiritual formation is important, as Heintzen comments:

The orthodox Lutheran faith implanted and nourished under the parental roof never forsook Loehe. Except for some moderate periods of *Sturm und Drang* during his student days, he did not undergo the agonising spiritual conflict or experience the crisis of

¹⁰ *Der Lutheraner* 8 (17 Feb. 1852): 97. This important *Reisebericht* (“travel report”) is referred to by Schaaf 155; and also by Erich Hugo Heintzen, “Wilhelm Loehe and the Missouri Synod: 1841-1853” (PhD Dissertation, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1964), Preface, i. Walther similarly refers to “our Church” as “the plant of your hand” in a letter to Löhe on 17 February 1852; see Schaaf 154-55.

¹¹ *Der Lutheraner* 28 (15 Feb. 1872): 79. Translation taken from Heintzen, Preface, i. Schaaf 188 notes how Löhe receives only passing attention from Missouri Synod historians, despite his great contributions.

¹² See J. Deinzer, ed., *Wilhelm Löhe’s Leben: Aus seinem schriftlichen Nachlaß zusammengestellt*, 3 vols. (Nürnberg: Gottfr. Löhe, 1873) I:15.

conversion which characterised many of his contemporaries and some of his associates.¹³

Nevertheless, in the *Volksschule* of Fürth he would encounter rationalism, and he would admit coming under the influence of the Enlightenment at the *Gymnasium* at Nürnberg in 1821.¹⁴ He also had some contact with pietistic circles under the influence of the rector, Karl Roth. Entering the University of Erlangen in 1826, he flirted briefly with enlightenment philosophy, but was weaned from it by a Reformed professor, Christian Ludwig Krafft, a biblical lecturer. Löhe's deep exegetical interest may be traced to him.¹⁵ Through Krafft he also briefly came under the influence of pietistic circles in the Nürnberg "Christian Societies". However, a summer semester spent in Berlin in 1828 changed things: Professor G. F. A. Strauss "strengthened Loehe's already awakened ardor for the Confessions and Luther and also helped to negate some of the gross, un-Lutheran effects of the pietistic circles".¹⁶ Upon his return to Erlangen he shunned the mystical conventicles and placed stress on divine service; this also led him to study the differences between Lutheran and Reformed. In 1830 he passed his exams, and in 1831 was ordained. He served several positions as *Privatvikar* in Fürth, Kirchenlamitz, and Nürnberg, among others, from 1831-37. Finally he was called to the small, remote town of Neuendettelsau—contrary to his wishes at the time—where he remained as pastor until his death on 2 January 1872.¹⁷

Löhe's interest in the North American mission field can be attributed to Friedrich Konrad Dietrich Wyneken. Wyneken, having travelled from Germany to Baltimore in 1838, was sent west as a missionary to German "Protestants" by the Pennsylvania Synod.¹⁸ While serving his flock in Ft. Wayne, Wyneken became aware of the great need for more pastors. In 1840 there were only about 400 pastors in America, serving 1,200 congregations, and 120,000 communicants.¹⁹ Prompted by this, he wrote a series of articles, some of which found their way into German periodicals such as von Harless' *Zeitschrift*. One of the missionary societies formed in response to his appeals in Stade, Hannover, issued a pamphlet entitled

¹³ Heintzen 15-16.

¹⁴ See Deinzer I:33. Hegel had once been rector here.

¹⁵ See Heintzen 17-18.

¹⁶ Heintzen 20.

¹⁷ See Heintzen 22-32 for a description of Löhe's pastoral work. See also Kenneth F. Korby, "The Theology of Pastoral Care in Wilhelm Löhe: with Special Attention to the Functions of the Liturgy and the Laity". ThD Dissertation. St. Louis: Concordia Seminary in Exile; and Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology, 1976.

¹⁸ Wyneken's story is told in detail by Heintzen 37-44.

¹⁹ Heintzen 40 n. 27.

“Appeal for the Support of the German-Protestant Church in North America” (1840), which included quotations from Wyneken. Löhe acquired a copy of this appeal on a trip to Erlangen, and then became acquainted with Wyneken during the latter’s trip to Germany in 1840-43. This contact with Löhe led Wyneken to a deeper Lutheran conviction, so that he returned to Ft. Wayne determined to root out the Reformed from his congregation.²⁰ Eventually, Wyneken would withdraw from the General Synod for doctrinal reasons and, having heard of the Saxons through *Der Lutheraner*, join the Missouri Synod.²¹ Another link would be forged with Missouri through Dr Wilhelm Sihler, who came to America in 1843 at Löhe’s insistence, and was ordained into the Ohio Synod. When he and the other Löhe men withdrew from the Ohio Synod for doctrinal reasons in 1845, they made contact with the Saxons, whom they too had come to know through *Der Lutheraner*.

LÖHE’S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MISSOURI SYNOD

Löhe at first determined to train and dispatch *Nothelfer*, i.e., “emergency men” to America, with a rudimentary education,²² and with the commission to seek out a confessional Lutheran body. They were to put themselves at its disposal, to serve as teachers, or to be trained and ordained as ministers.²³ The first men associated with the Ohio Synod. Those who were to become pastors were trained at the Columbus seminary. However, when the Löhe men’s cries against un-Lutheran communion practices, the use of “licensed” but unordained preachers, and the qualified acceptance of the Confessions, fell upon closed ears, they left the Ohio Synod (with Löhe’s approval) and sought the Missouri Saxons.²⁴ Löhe’s significant financial support and supply of manpower would now be transferred to Missouri. Löhe’s desire to provide practical training for pastors, who would enter the field quickly, led him to found the “practical seminary” in Ft. Wayne to serve as the final preparation for his *Nothelfer*. Dr Sihler, the most educated of his contacts, was chosen to found it. Founded on 10 October 1846, it was donated to the newly-formed Missouri Synod at the 1847 constituting

²⁰ Heintzen 65-66.

²¹ See Heintzen 162; also D. H. Steffans, *Doctor Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther* (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917) 238-41.

²² Heintzen 48: “It included composition, English and German grammar, penmanship, piano, singing, world history, church history, the Lutheran Book of Concord, Christian doctrine, Bible history, tenets of American denominations, especially Methodism, pastoral theology, catechetics, homiletics, liturgics, and practical experience in teaching, conducting worship, and visiting the sick.”

²³ Schaaf’s dissertation is the best resource in tracing these *Nothelfer*.

²⁴ See Heintzen 138-42; and Schaaf 32-65 and 96-110.

convention.²⁵ The great impact of Löhe's training programme on the synod can be seen from these figures: from 1839-47 Walther's Altenburg seminary produced only two candidates; from 1846-52 Ft. Wayne produced forty-eight.²⁶

A detailed discussion of the relationship between Löhe and the Missouri Synod would be out of place.²⁷ The preceding sketch has served to show how the bond was formed, how dependent the synod was on Löhe in those early years, and to demonstrate what a deep impact Löhe's theology must have had through the crowd of pastors he provided. As tight as their relationship was, it came to an abrupt end in 1853. At the heart of his mission work in Michigan, Löhe hoped to establish a *Pilgerhaus*, a somewhat monastic institution which would provide temporary lodging for new immigrants and serve as the centre of the colonisation work. At the chosen site in Saginaw, the *Pilgerhaus* saw little development, but a *Schullehrerseminar* ("teachers' college") was established in 1852. Disappointed at how he had lost control of the Ft. Wayne seminary, Löhe was unwilling to turn over this new venture to the synod. Tension with the synod and local congregations over an institution and professors not under synodical control led Wyneken, the synodical president, to demand that it be turned over to their control, or moved to a location away from Missouri congregations. Löhe would accept neither option; but eventually Pastor Grossmann, director of the *Seminar*, found the situation in Saginaw intolerable, and moved the institution to Iowa.²⁸ The controversy led Löhe to abandon entirely his mission work in Michigan and to break off his relationship with Missouri. In his famous farewell letter to his Michigan colonies, edged in black, Löhe voiced the causes of the split:

Much less, however, than in the doctrine of the Office and the Church—which we would put up with, and even permit you to assert your opinion about—, [much less] do we agree with you in your truly papistic territorialism, which you audaciously set up on the basis of your free theories. Under the German princes [the order] was: *cujus regio, ejus religio* ["the one who reigns establishes the religion"]. You, still so small for such territorialism, papistically turn the claim around: *cujus religio, ejus regio* ["the one who establishes the religion reigns"]. You

²⁵ For the early history of the Ft. Wayne seminary, see Schaaf 110-15.

²⁶ Heintzen 163-64.

²⁷ Great stress would, of course, have to be laid upon the influence of Löhe's *Agende* (1844). See, e.g., Kenneth F. Korby, "Wilhelm Loehe and Liturgical Renewal", in *The Lutheran Historical Conference: Essays and Reports*. Vol. 5 (1974): 57-84.

²⁸ For the story of the Saginaw *Seminar*, see Heintzen 225-34; and Schaaf 163-71.

rule over free mission fields as if you were lords; you can tolerate no one near you who does not share your doctrine of the Office, even though he agrees with you in many of the main points, and you assert the monstrous proposition that church fellowship does not suffice among the brethren if they have reasons not to submit to your rule ...²⁹

This letter demonstrates that the cause for the split was both practical and theological. To the latter cause we now turn.

MISSOURI'S CONTROVERSY WITH LÖHE

Though Missouri's polemic concerning *Kirche und Amt* was directed primarily towards Grabau, Löhe soon became involved. Even before Löhe addressed himself directly towards the North American situation, his *Aphorismen* (1848) were read in Missouri and prompted criticism. Of particular concern was the statement: "The Office [*Amt*] does not stem from the congregation [*Gemeinde*]; rather, it is far more correct to say, the congregation stems from the Office."³⁰ Furthermore, the Office is perpetuated from person to person; the congregation cannot confer the Office without pastors doing the ordaining.³¹ Walther and the Missouri Synod in convention in 1850 expressed criticism of Löhe on several points: the idea of doctrinal development, sacramentalism [?], ordination, and the status and authority of the pastoral office. The synod could not tolerate divergent views on these matters, for though they were not fundamental articles, they touched upon them. The Confessions, they claimed, have already settled these issues.³² They invited Löhe to come to the next convention, but when he responded that he would not be free to do so, the 1851 convention commissioned Walther and Wyneken to visit him in Germany.³³

Following their visit, both Walther and Löhe reported on the accomplishments in their own ecclesiastical newspapers. Löhe felt that no

²⁹ Löhe's letter to Pastor Sievers, 4 August 1853. See Deinzer III:103; Schaaf 172; Heintzen 233-34.

³⁰ *GW* V/1:262. Of course, one must understand that Löhe spoke of Christ as the first office-holder, whose Word brought the Church into being.

³¹ *GW* V/1:294. According to Hebart, this stress on ordination and self-perpetuation of the Office was new with Löhe in this work. For this reason, the men in Missouri who had been trained by the earlier Löhe neither understood nor supported his new position. See Siegfried Hebart, *Wilhelm Löhes Lehre von der Kirche, ihrem Amt und Regiment* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund Verlag, 1939) 233-34.

³² *Synodal-Bericht* (1850) 119-21; see Heintzen 195 and Steffans 283. At this convention they commissioned Walther to produce what would become his *Kirche und Amt*.

³³ See Heintzen 199; Schaaf 151.

substantial agreement had been reached on Church and Office, but that both sides would continue to study the matter. The remaining disagreement did not warrant breaking fellowship.³⁴ Walther offered little more. His reports scattered through the 1852 issues of *Der Lutheraner* only infrequently mention Löhe. Walther felt he had convinced Löhe that he valued ordination highly, though to him it was not a “divine institution”.³⁵ Löhe admitted that the orthodox dogmatists supported Walther, and they both agreed that their differences must not hinder their joint efforts.³⁶ Thus, though it appeared that agreement was reached and that fellowship would not suffer, none of the real issues had been resolved. When Missouri later perceived that Löhe was siding with Grabau against them, and when the Michigan operations offended both sides, the doctrinal disagreements quickly became cause enough to break their relationship.

Missouri has frequently had occasion to voice its criticisms of Löhe. We have already noted the charges Walther made against him in convention. William Schmelder offers three points of criticism: Löhe’s principle that the confessions must be interpreted according to Scripture (rather than the reverse); that the confessions have not spoken completely, so that doctrine is subject to development; and that, therefore, some theological questions must remain “open”.³⁷ Heintzen further notes Löhe’s understanding of the visible Church and predilection for the episcopate, present already in the *Drei Bücher*.³⁸ In later years Löhe would also be criticised for chiliastic ideas, as would the Iowa Synod.³⁹

Yet, despite its many criticisms of him, Missouri has not often listened carefully to Löhe’s criticisms directed towards it. His dissatisfaction with the new synod’s constitution is the most well-known. Löhe seemed to feel that Missouri had drunk too deeply of American democratic thinking. Equal lay and clergy representation in synod carried the risk of the clergy being deprived of their *jure divino* leadership. After the 1847 Chicago convention, he wrote to Walther:

We note with regret in our hearts that your synodical constitution,

³⁴ Löhe’s most complete report appeared in his *Kirchliche Mittheilungen* 9 (24 October 1851): 75-80. It is reproduced in Schaaf, appendix VIII, 227-30; see also Heintzen 205-8. This document deserves a more thorough treatment than we can afford here.

³⁵ *Der Lutheraner* 8 (17 February 1852): 97ff. Cf. the quotation from this same report with respect to Walther’s praise of Löhe above.

³⁶ *Der Lutheraner* 8 (25 May 1852): 154.

³⁷ See William J. Schmelder, “The Conflict Between Walther and Loehe in the Area of Ecclesiology”, BD thesis (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1959) 91.

³⁸ *GW V/1*:148-9. See Heintzen 188.

³⁹ This was expressed in his sermon, “*Vom Entgegenkommen zur Auferstehung der Toten*” (1857); *GW VI/1*:693-706. See Heintzen 198; and Steffans 285.

as it now is established, does not entirely agree with the pattern of the first [i.e., apostolic] congregations; and we fear, certainly with full justification, that the foundational, strong admixture [*Einmischung*] of democratic, independent, congregational principles in your church structure will give rise to great harm, just as the interference [*Einmischung*] of princes and authorities has brought to our home church. A precise knowledge of the many instructions of the holy apostles about the organisation of the church and the care of souls would have been able to teach the dear brothers something else about the laity. Structure [*Verfassung*] is a dogmatic, but not a practical, adiaphoron.⁴⁰

Clearly, Löhe's objections are not merely a matter of preference, but reflect a fundamentally different understanding of polity and apostolic teaching from Walther's. These theological objections will become clear in the next section.

LÖHE'S ATTEMPT TO MEDIATE BETWEEN WALTHER AND GRABAU: HIS ZUGABE

When Löhe's first *Nothelfer* were still struggling to purge the Ohio Synod of its Reformed tendencies, Löhe wrote in a letter to Adam Ernst his analysis of the American Lutheran scene:

In North America there are many parties which lay claim to the name "Lutheran". First, in Buffalo and St. Louis there is that exclusive orientation [*Richtung*], which with complete consistency does not recognise as Lutheran any of those who depart in the least from pure doctrine. To this we are doubtless related.⁴¹

The opposite orientation he sees in the "English-Lutheran" bodies of the east, who have "progressed" beyond Lutheran doctrine. The Ohio "German-Lutherans" stand in the middle. Already at this point Löhe believed that Grabau and Missouri belonged together.

Thus, he was grieved at the rift developing between the two over Church and Office. The origin of the dispute may be traced to Grabau's *Hirtenbrief* ("pastoral letter"), written on 1 December 1840 to the congregations in Milwaukee and Freistadt, who were troubled by conventicles. They had asked whether they could, because of a lack of pastors, choose and ordain one from their midst as a "*Kirchenvorsteher* [elder]" who would administer the sacraments, and yet not be in every sense

⁴⁰ Löhe's letter to Walther, 8 September 1847; in Schaaf 119.

⁴¹ Löhe's letter to Adam Ernst, 3 February 1845; in Schaaf 100-1. Later in the letter, however, he gives passing criticism of Grabau's "harsh" way.

a “*Prediger* [preacher/pastor]”.⁴² Grabau also sent a copy of his response to the Missourians, with whom he sought union, for their approval. In brief, Grabau argued that without call and ordination according to the old German *Kirchenordnungen* (“church orders/agendas”), a pastor does not receive the ability to perform pastoral functions, and thus could not give out the Body and Blood or absolve. Grabau further stressed the sole authority of the pastoral office to excommunicate, and the necessity for the synod to approve all calls. Thus Grabau reserved supervisory power to himself. The Missouri objections and Grabau counter-critiques flew back and forth for the entire decade.

Löhe confessed that he really did not understand the American debate. Only when the relevant documents were published in 1849 did he feel prepared to respond.⁴³ The following excerpt from his *Kirchliche Mittheilungen*, in which he attempts to explain the debate to his mission society, serves as a nice summary of his point of view:

Already before we in God began our work for the Lutheran comrades in North America, two Lutheran parties stood over against one another. On the one side stood Pastor Grabau who emigrated from Prussia (from Erfurt), on the other the Saxons who emigrated with Stephan, namely Pastors Walther and Löber. While Grabau defended the rights of the Holy Office over against the individual congregations, the Saxon pastors were concerned for the rights of the congregations over against the Office. A dispute arose between the two parties, which with respect to its essence remained unclear and hidden to us for a long time; but now, since the writings of the dispute were made public in 1849, it lies completely open and clear before our eyes. While the Saxons charge Grabau with hierarchical aspirations, he brings against them a rebuke for their democratic church order. Grabau’s party is small in number, the Saxons greater, since the rest of the synod of Missouri, Indiana, Ohio, etc., stand on their side. Here a majority vote can hardly decide; rather, two paths are on a collision course. For them one can only wish that both might expire on a third, better [path], and arise in it to a perfect life, for the full blessing of the Church. Indeed, we cannot say enough what a great fortune it

⁴² Schaaf 122-24 gives a concise summary of this background.

⁴³ In the beginning of the *Zugabe*, treated below, Löhe makes reference to this publication: *Der Hirtenbrief des Herrn Pastors Grabau zu Buffalo vom Jahre 1840. Nebst den zwischen ihm und mehreren lutherischen Pastoren von Missouri gewechselten Schriften. Der Oeffentlichkeit übergeben als eine Protestation gegen Geltendmachung hierarchischer Grundsätze innerhalb der lutherischen Kirche*, ed. G. H. Löber (New York: H. Ludwig & Co., 1849). Löhe refers to this collection of documents as the *Aktensammlung* (“collection of documents”), as we shall.

would be, promising victory in all its parts, if both factions of our brothers would come to full unity of the Spirit. To accomplish this is our first, most important objective for this year, 1850.⁴⁴

Thus Löhe was determined to effect a reconciliation.

Around this time, at the beginning of 1850, Löhe published a document on the state of the Lutheran Church in Bavaria.⁴⁵ Most of this was concerned with his struggles against the *Landeskirche* (“territorial church”); however, he appended to it a *Zugabe* “supplement”, which attempted to deal with the American situation. Written from the heartfelt desire to effect reconciliation, yet with the deep concern that the errors of each side be corrected, it offers a measured critique of the entire controversy which has received little attention. A detailed consideration of this document will reveal Löhe’s theology from the standpoint of his self-appraisal over against the antagonists, via his *ipsissima verba*. It also provides an informed third viewpoint from which to evaluate Walther and Grabau. For the remainder of this study we therefore present a summary of Löhe’s argument.

Introduction:

Within the first page Löhe lays out the essential differences. The Saxons, as is well known, escaped from Stephanism, and thereby were freed forever from the errors of hierarchicalism. This disposed them to work out “a kind of American expression of the general priesthood”.⁴⁶ A taint of criticism appears already in his analysis:

Their orientation appears in some respects to have been similar to Luther’s. They were exposed to some of his temptations; his actions and words were easily able to become authoritative for them, even where they were quite individual and original (456).

On the other hand, Grabau, “more than the others, recognised the great significance of the Holy Office for leading and building up the congregation” (456). His temptations were the opposite of the Saxons, and led him to ascribe more to the Office than Scripture does. In a land of extremes, such as America is, the two parties were driven further apart, and soon found occasion for collision. This could have been avoided if they had just listened to each other.

Löhe asks permission to enter into the dispute, one which he

⁴⁴ *Kirchliche Mittheilungen* 8 (1850): 3-4; qtd. in Schaaf 133-34.

⁴⁵ *Unsere kirchliche Lage im protestantischen Bayern und die Bestrebungen einiger bayerisch-lutherischen Pfarrer in den Jahren 1848 und 1849: Mit einer Zugabe über einige wichtige Streitpunkte innerhalb der nordamerikanisch-lutherischen Kirche, zur Verteidigung und Verständigung geschrieben 1849/50*. Text in *GW* V/1:369-492.

⁴⁶ *GW* V/1:456. Subsequent references to the *Zugabe* will be indicated by parenthetical page references to this volume.

considers similar to what he and Franz Delitzsch have with Hoffmann (457). Perhaps God will bless His Church through the dispute with “the pure teaching on the controverted point” at the end of the battle (457), as Löber suggested in his introduction to the *Aktensammlung*.⁴⁷ Perhaps the German Church also may learn from this, since the Americans have so outrun them in practical matters. Löhe proceeds to describe the controversy surrounding Grabau’s *Hirtenbrief*, and then summarises the other documents contained in the *Aktensammlung*. Löhe speaks at all times as the pastor, the *Seelsorger*. He laments that Löber referred to Grabau as a “*gefallener Knecht* [fallen servant]”; on the other hand, Grabau ascribed errors to the Saxons which are not true (460). Both sides need to forgive, confess their sins, and seek healing in the cross of Christ (460).

Finally, Löhe lays down the five points which will form the basis of his presentation:

- As far as the controverted points themselves are concerned, I find:
- (a) a few, in which, in my opinion, both parties either were one from the beginning and only misunderstood each other, or in the course of the controversy became themselves more clear and then drew near to one another;
 - (b) a few, in which both parties appear to me to err;
 - (c) a few, in which the Saxon brothers [err];
 - (d) a few, in which Pastor Grabau may err; and finally,
 - (e) some, which probably could be reserved as open questions for further-going illumination (460).

Though Löhe realises he could be accused of arrogance in presenting such an analysis, he hopes that no one will take it as anything else but “as an attempt to show a true middle way, on which both parties could tread” (461).

(a) Points in Which Both Parties Really Agree:

Here Löhe cites two points on which they really are in complete agreement, with only different emphases. First, is the use of the old Lutheran Church Orders. Löhe suggests that Grabau went too far in places, and that he would have done better to distinguish more clearly between the divine and the human in the *Kirchenordnungen*. Grabau himself admitted this deficiency in presentation from time to time.⁴⁸ “On the other hand, the Saxons’ view came to such completion during the course of the dispute that it need only be understood as a supplement to Grabau’s” (461). Though Grabau may have infringed on Christian freedom, the Saxons cannot dispute the truth in Grabau’s desire for one unified Church Order. In Löhe’s opinion,

⁴⁷ *Aktensammlung* 7. Löhe indicates in a footnote that he would not have ventured to write this essay if the dispute were not made public by this publication (457 note).

⁴⁸ Unfortunately, Löhe gives no references for this assertion.

“one holy order must be seen from the churchly-pedagogical standpoint as a highly important means of promoting the consciousness of churchly togetherness and oneness” (461).⁴⁹

Secondly, they really agree with respect to “the doctrine of the spiritual priesthood of all Christians”. Grabau understands of this priesthood “that they daily offer spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, and that, saved by Jesus’ blood, they have free and joyful entrance to the gracious throne of God”. Included in this spiritual offering is “declaring the deeds of him who called us out of darkness” (462)⁵⁰—that is, worship and praise. The Saxons decline to include this proclamation of God’s deeds in the “spiritual sacrifice”.⁵¹ Löhe believes that the Saxons too quickly pass over the sacrificial duties of the spiritual priesthood, just as Grabau undervalues their role in witness to the world. And if witness itself is seen to be a sacrifice, then the two positions are reconciled. Grabau rightly notes that “people in our time generally teach the spiritual priesthood only in its relationship over against the Office and men, but seldom in its duty before the Lord, to glorify and praise” (462). Löhe also tries to draw them together with this recognition; Grabau himself asserts:

that the right to choose and ordain preachers, which comprehends, in fact, the right and duty to judge the teaching and life of candidates, stems from the spiritual priesthood; that both actions are of a spiritually sacrificial nature, in which they present to God a person, through whom He may accomplish the works and affairs of His Holy Office (462-63).⁵²

The consecration of life is also a spiritual sacrifice, as Grabau himself

⁴⁹ Löhe could well have cited Missouri’s own constitution, which in the present form gives as one objective of synod to “conserve and promote the unity of the true faith” (Art. III:1). This unity is both presupposed in and achieved by the “exclusive use of doctrinally pure agenda, hymnbooks, and catechisms in church and school” (Art. VI:4). As the constitution was originally framed in Ft. Wayne in 1846 this clause was enlarged upon as follows: “If it is not feasible in congregations to exchange without further ado existing unorthodox [*irrglaeubige*] hymnals and the like for orthodox [*rechtglaeubige*], the pastor of such a congregation can only become a member of synod under the condition that he use the unorthodox hymnal, etc., with public protest, and with all seriousness promise that he will work towards the introduction of an orthodox one.” See Carl S. Mundiger, *Government in the Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1947) 184 n. 42. Mundiger 162, n. 73 also records that between 1845 and 1847 the St. Louis *Gesamtgemeinde* (the four founding congregations under Walther’s supervision) spent \$10,000 on the production of an orthodox Lutheran hymnal for the fledgling synod.

⁵⁰ Löhe cites Grabau’s rebuttal to Missouri’s critique of his *Hirtenbrief*. *Aktensammlung* 38.

⁵¹ Löhe quotes Missouri’s response to Löhe’s rebuttal. *Aktensammlung* 66.

⁵² Löhe refers to Grabau’s rebuttal. *Aktensammlung* 38.

stresses.

This issue touches also on the right of the priesthood to judge their preachers' doctrine. The Saxons concluded from Grabau's *Hirtenbrief* that he believed only the clergy were to judge doctrine.⁵³ Grabau himself responded that "every true Christian has and recognises his general Christian calling to distinguish false and true teaching; for he must defend himself against false teaching for the sake of his salvation; also our preachers must do this for the sake of their own salvation."⁵⁴ Beyond this, however, "there is according to God's order still an 'office-ial' call [*amtlichen Beruf*], which the ministers have from God, that they as called and ordained pastors [*Hirten*] and teachers within the Church must pay attention to teaching, that false teaching not come in." Thus Löhe concludes that the two parties, though stressing different halves of the sentence, would agree to this formulation: "All Christians have the right and duty to judge teaching, [but] especially [do] the teachers" (463). One must wonder, however, whether either side could give up on its particular emphasis. Löhe recognises it, and sees that their differing *practice* arises from a "different teaching on the relationship of the congregation to the Office and the Office to the congregation" (464).

(b) Points in Which Both Parties Appear to Err:

"Both parties appear to me to err insofar as they award immediately to the local congregation the right to choose and to call their pastor" (464). Both base this on the general priesthood. In theory Grabau assigns the call to all the estates [*Ständen*] in a congregation, including pastors, but in most cases there are few or no pastors involved. The Saxons simply place all into the hands of the local congregation.⁵⁵ Even Grabau cannot come so far as to say: "Without the assistance of an orthodox ministerium, no election and call should happen"—a statement which Löhe believes to be the *least* one can say of the ministerium (464). "The obstacle certainly lies no where else than in the not entirely clear demarcation of the spiritual priesthood of Christians from the sphere of the spiritual Office, and in the authority of Luther and the older teachers with reference to this matter" (464).

In this matter, the difference between the two parties with respect to ordination and apostolic practice comes to the fore. The Saxons accuse Grabau of teaching that whatever the apostles mandated in the Church is necessary and binding for all time.⁵⁶ Grabau was speaking specifically of ordination: since Paul commanded Timothy to ordain, this must be considered a command of the apostles for all time, ordinarily not to be

⁵³ *Aktensammlung* 33.

⁵⁴ *Aktensammlung* 49.

⁵⁵ For Grabau, see *Aktensammlung* 40; for the Saxons, *Aktensammlung* 69.

⁵⁶ *Aktensammlung* 71.

omitted.⁵⁷ The Saxons take ordination to be of merely human right. Löhe suggests that the Saxons may be confusing Grabau's assertions with the Anglicans, who supposedly believe that *everything* the apostles command is to be considered the command of Christ (465). This is not a fair accusation. Neither Grabau nor the Anglicans enforce the decree of Acts 15, for instance. "Either no one in the world maintains the general principle the Saxons lay on Grabau, or also those who maintain it must be disobedient to the apostles" (465). The task of our day is to determine to what extent their commands *are* still binding. *However*, Löhe concludes, "of all the apostolic instructions, nothing has such general and lasting validity as the *mandate of the Preaching Office*" (465). But the way in which the Office enters into the congregation is free, so long as each fellowship uses an order which has divine sanction and validity—thus he does not accuse either party of erroneous *practice*.

While both the Saxons and Grabau take what they believe they find in the New Testament as *binding*, Löhe believes that:

the apostolic practice is the *wisest*, that in all church history nothing wiser, better, or more useful has appeared, that the apostolic practice is entirely natural for forming churches, that they must beget themselves and always again beget (466).

Yet beyond this "hermeneutical" distinction, Löhe actually finds a different apostolic model:

I intend to permit debate with my brothers on the basis of the apostolic instructions, and with that accepted, it appears clear to me that both Pastor Grabau and the Saxon brothers establish for the congregations too much in the matter of election [*Wahl*] and call [*Beruf*] of their elders and teachers. Both confer election on the local congregation, whereas the apostles and their disciples [themselves] do the placing into office [*setzen*], and grant to the congregations only so much of a part in the election of the person as they must have to give witness to the spirituals [i.e., pastors] taken *from their midst*; this [witness] pertains to them (466).⁵⁸

Grabau's mistake is to confuse the election of presbyters with that of deacons (Acts 6), from which procedure a greater role could be adduced for the congregation. Both "election" and "call" must remain with the ministerium; and, since no congregation has more than a few pastors, the nearby clergy must participate—in this way the *whole* Church is involved (467). Ultimately he finds Grabau rather amenable in saying: "The ordered call [*ordentlich Beruf*] or the *rite vocatum esse* in the 14th art. of the *August.*

⁵⁷ *Aktensammlung* 58.

⁵⁸ For further elaboration of this procedure, see *Aphorismen*, GW V/1:286-88.

Conf. is the general concept, which comprehends *electio*, *vocatio*, and *ordinatio*, within which the call of the local congregation is only one component part of *rite vocatum esse*.⁵⁹

(c) Points in Which the Saxon Brothers May Err:

Grabau's "contradictions" of apostolic practice are mainly questions of clarity; the Saxons' statements, however, are cogently and clearly based on the older Lutheran theologians and (unjustly) on Luther (467). This foundation Löhe challenges as he continues to attack the error of congregational call. The Saxons love to call on Luther's 1523 writings.⁶⁰ Actually, he will concede to them Luther's support: "the Saxon brothers hold true to Luther's opinion when they ascribe to preacher-less congregations the right of election and call of their preachers" (468). Despite this, Löhe points out an easily overlooked passage in the Bohemian letter which suggests something different: "How much more, then, does the whole community have the authority and mandate to commit this Office with common voice and choice to one or more in their stead; and afterwards these [*pastors commit it*] to others, though with the agreement of the congregation" (468).⁶¹ This is evidence that Luther agrees with the Saxons in *theory*, but not in *practice*.

Even Luther realises that the practice of congregations installing their own pastor is a novelty. Only in the greatest emergency could this happen—that is, where there are no orthodox pastors available.⁶² Luther's preferred practice, according to Löhe, is to be discovered in the post-Reformation *Kirchenordnungen*, "which give to the ministerium everywhere

⁵⁹ This statement, not referenced by Löhe, is found in Grabau's rebuttal, *Aktensammlung* 39. One can see why the Saxons felt Löhe had come down on Grabau's side. In the next section 467, Löhe remarks that Grabau need only strike a few sentences and his errors would disappear.

⁶⁰ *Grund und Ursach aus der Schrift, daß eine christliche Versammlung oder Gemeine, Recht und Macht habe, alle Lehre zu urteilen und Lehrer zu berufen, ein- und abzusetzen* (WA 11:401-16; see *American Edition* 39:305-14); and *Von Einsetzung und Ordnung der Diener der Kirchen, d.i. der Gemeine. An den ehrsamten und weisen Rat der Stadt Prage des Böhemischen Landes (De instituendis ministris*, WA 12:169-95; see *AE* 40:4-44, though this is a particularly unreliable translation).

⁶¹ WA 12:190.40-191.2=AE 40:36. Löhe claims to be following a 1524 translation. Yet his German quote matches neither the Walch (10:1861) nor St. Louis (10:1592) editions, which give the Speratus (1524) translation. Perhaps Löhe is paraphrasing.

⁶² Löhe's greatest argument is that Luther speaks of an emergency situation, not the normal case. In fact, he includes the "Smalcald Articles", probably meaning the Tractate, in the same category! This provides a new perspective from which to view the Tractate. Löhe may be suggesting that Walther's favourite Tractate passages (24 and 69) similarly deal with emergency cases. Incidentally, it is characteristic of Löhe that he does not often refer to the Confessions, but confines himself to Scripture. This passage is rare.

that measure of influence and activity which cannot be removed from it without injury to the congregations themselves” (469). With the emergency over, the usual practice of pastors choosing and ordaining pastors resumes. Thus, Löhe is convinced that Luther does not support the North American *practice*.

Löhe believes, however, that the foundational proposition for both Luther and the Saxons is that “the Office is an outflow of the general priesthood of Christians” (469)—a proposition which Löhe cannot accept.⁶³ He cannot, of course, deny that all Christians possess all the divine goods of the Church, and that only baptised priests may ascend to the Office. He states: “By virtue of the spiritual priesthood a layman effectively baptises and thereby passes on the grace which he himself possesses to one who until then did not have it” (470).⁶⁴ But the Office is another matter. “This Office is manifestly a special institution [*Stiftung*] of Christ *in the midst of the congregation and for her*” (470). Matthew 18 cannot be used to contradict this dominical institution. Likewise, he denies that passages which give a congregation the right and duty to avoid false teachers can be used to demonstrate the supposed right of congregations to *call pastors*.⁶⁵ Furthermore:

The contention that the Holy Office is an outflow of the congregation rests, as much as I can determine, on no unique, clear words of Scripture—and therefore cannot be held in the Lutheran Church for long. But the contention that the Office of Christ is a special institution [*Stiftung*] of Christ in the midst of the Church and for her, that this Office has perpetuated itself also through the special, prominent action of those who possess it, is to be proved not simply from the bare words of Scripture without any inferences, but justifies itself through church history in general and through the constant use of the Lutheran Church in particular (470).

This is the clearest expression of Löhe’s own opinion. In an emergency, Luther’s advice offers comfort; but the North American situation is not such

⁶³ Recent research demonstrates that this is an unfair reading of Luther. See especially Wolfgang Stein, *Das kirchliche Amt bei Luther* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974). Both Löhe and the Saxons understand Luther only from his early, provisional writings, dealing with emergencies. Löhe reminds the Saxons of this. If Löhe were more familiar with Luther’s later, mature writings, he would likely have found him more amenable on this matter.

⁶⁴ The apparent “Donatism” in the previous two sentences is puzzling, since Löhe later denies the same.

⁶⁵ This deserves some thought. Compare this to the doctrine of conversion, in which the Scriptures teach that man can reject his Saviour. It does not follow thereby that he can *choose* his Saviour.

an emergency.⁶⁶

Löhe proceeds to distinguish the priesthood of all the baptised from the Office by discussing the nature of ordination. First the duties of each:

Towards the outside, over against heathen and Jews, all the baptised have the duty to teach and indeed to baptise; but the presbyterate is an Office *within* the congregation and its special tasks are certainly administering the Lord's Supper and the care of souls. Therefore, it is indeed not without significance if ordination to this Office within the congregation above all gives power [*Kraft*] and authority [*Vollmacht*] to the tasks upon which it [the *Amt*] depends for the leading of the congregation [*T*]he teaching and *the* Baptism which happen in the midst of the congregation, thus mainly infant Baptism, nevertheless belong indeed to the Office I mention this only to indicate that there is a proper distinction between the general spiritual priesthood and the Office (471).

This is the proper use of ordination: to give the power and authority for this Office, with respect to the four tasks of Baptism, teaching, Lord's Supper, and Absolution.

Only in this way is the spiritual priesthood related to the Office:

The general priesthood, when the qualifications are there, indeed gives the right to *desire* [ὀρέγεται] the Office of bishop, but it does not *bestow* the Office of bishop; rather the bishop's Office passes itself on—in harmony with the congregation,—and to place bishops into office is, as is the actual situation everywhere, *jus episcopale* ["the bishop's right"] (472).

The congregation has its part: "witness, wish, prayer, request, and, if the ministerium finds it beneficial for the congregation, election [*Wahl*]"—but the ministerium cannot give up the calling [*berufen*] (472). If Luther stressed the congregation's role because of the corruption of the bishops, how much more may we stress the right of the Office to place true teachers into office because of the present corruption of the congregations (473).

"God forbid", Löhe cries, "that I should ascribe to the dear brothers in Missouri the mind and desire that they wanted to turn over the matters of the holy Church to the people, to majority vote" (473). They adamantly deny this; and, in fact, outside of convention they lay into their president's hand "essentially bishop's rights"! Yet their "Luther-an" principle of congregationalism sets them on a dangerous path. Luther's words do not

⁶⁶ Löhe compares Luther's advice to the situation in which one is deprived of the Lord's Supper because of a lack of pastors. The Lutheran teachers fell back on the axiom, *Crede et manducasti*.

apply to their situation, and they would do better to follow Grabau in exalting the true tasks of the priesthood and the duty of every Christian to avoid false teachers:

Many words, which Luther was able to use quite rightly against the office of the Roman bishop need at least strong modification if they will be used against the proper ministers of God in the Lutheran Church (474).

Luther often spoke *per hyperbolen* of the Church against the Roman bishops; one must not use these words against “poor Lutheran pastors”. Löhe admits that the synodical reports he has read trouble him because of the strong influence of the congregations—it appears they have imbibed of the “American-democratic spirit”. “The error which flatters American freedom is more consequential, more corrupt [than Grabau’s hierarchicalism]” (474).

In this lengthy treatment of the Saxon errors, Löhe has at times become vehement; he certainly gives this the greatest attention. In a magnanimous conclusion he pleads that someone would find his judgement wrong (475). His final comments relate to the interpretation of Luther and the Confessions. He has noted in *Der Lutheraner* that the debate is too quickly quieted when something is “proved” from the writings of Luther—or even from the Confessions. This shows the importance of the *quia*, which does not allow anything but Scripture to settle a debate.⁶⁷ At least in the Confessions, by God’s gracious providence, there is nothing which would lead one to err. This is not so in Luther’s writings. The Lutheran Church does not swear to Luther in all things: practice, organisation, and church leadership; the *Kirchenordnungen* frequently depart from Luther. Luther lived in a time of emergency, and thus often spoke one-sidedly. The emergency is now over, and the Church must now look at the other side. The instructions of the apostles, however, were not born in emergency.

(d) Points in Which Pastor Grabau May Err:

Löhe’s critique of Grabau’s errors need not detain us long. As we have noted, Löhe had little difficulty with Grabau’s theology. His main point of contention was over the authority of the Office:

Namely, I cannot give my approval to the explanation and practical application of Heb. 13:17, “Obey your teachers and follow them.” On the basis of this passage Pastor Grabau demands “fidelity and obedience to their teachers in all things, *which are not contrary to God’s Word*” (476).⁶⁸

⁶⁷ This statement demonstrates his understanding of how the Confessions are to be interpreted by Scripture, and that *quia* does not mean for him what it meant for Walther.

⁶⁸ These quotations are from the *Hirtenbrief, Aktensammlung* 14.

Löhe agrees with the Saxons' criticism.⁶⁹ On the basis of this a pastor could claim that *all things* fall under the compass of God's Word. God's Word is indeed boundless, but the application which the pastor [*Seelsorger*] makes in his human wisdom has limitations. "It would on the whole be better to require the obedience of the congregation to the pastor [*Seelsorger*] in all which is *according to* God's Word, rather than in all which is not contrary to it" (476). Otherwise Christian freedom is injured. Grabau should make this one small change, and he will be able to attain unity with Missouri (479).

(e) Points Which Should Remain as Open Questions:

At this point Löhe takes up the main point of disagreement between the parties: the role of ordination.

That the Holy Office has a divine mandate and institution, in this Pastor Grabau and the Saxon brothers agree (pp. 71, 72); and although it is a little debated whether it [the Office] is an instrument [*Dienstmittel*] through which God deals with us or not (p. 44), I certainly find here ... no essential disagreement. On the other hand, it is apparent that with respect to the entrance into the Holy Office their opinions vary. Both parties agree in the declaration of the Augsburg Confession Art. 14 that no one can exercise the Office but [one who is] *rite vocatus*. Grabau counts in *rite vocatum esse* preparation, soundness, *tentamen*, election [*Wahl*], confession, ordination, and installation (479).

Both parties agree on everything but *ordination*; that is, "whether ordination belongs to *rite vocatum esse*, whether it is at all necessary or not" (479). Löhe chooses to let each party speak for himself.

The Saxons are quoted from their critique of the Hirtenbrief:

The kind and manner of *human* order according to which the pastor enters the Office is only an *external, unessential* thing, which can vary according to time and place. Ordination is by all means to be retained as a praiseworthy and salutary general ceremony received from ancient Christian times, but not as an express divine command, rather as the Sunday fest, merely for the sake of unity and good order; and because it is the bare *publica testificatio* that *the call* [*Vokation*] as the essential part of the installation of a preacher is proper. Thus the *confirmatio* and *introductio pastoris etc.* is an unessential part, which may or may not occur according to the consideration of the circumstances (480).⁷⁰

The contrast with Grabau's opinion is enormous:

⁶⁹ *Aktensammlung* 28.

⁷⁰ *Aktensammlung* 23.

[It is] a priestly action of the Church [Kirche], by which she, according to the apostolic mandate, commissions, confirms, and blesses chosen persons through the ministers of the Church who are at hand, whereby she [the Church] believes that God Himself through this commissions, confirms, and blesses. As we see in 2 Tim. 2:2; cf. 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 Tim. 1:5; Acts 14:23; 1:26 And because ordination is a divine commissioning of the Office, thus He [God] will also ensure His gracious promises by it, whereof St. Paul speaks in 1 Tim. 4:14 Our Lord Jesus Christ first chose and called His apostles, thereafter ordained or commissioned them to the exercise of the Office among all nations. Jn 20; Mt. 28; Mk. 16; Lk. 24:50. Thus also the Augsb. Conf. Art. 28:6,7 confesses Ordination is no adiaphoron, in that it is an essential part of rite vocatum esse. It is indeed an adiaphoron whether the chosen one is ordained by a bishop or common pastor, also whether the ordainer is good or evil in his person, whether hands or one hand or none are laid on the chosen one, etc (480-81).⁷¹

The far greater length of quotation given to Grabau might indicate Löhe's preference for his point of view.

Both appeal to Scripture for their views, but the real question is whether the particular mandate to Timothy and Titus may be developed into a general mandate for the whole Church (481). Both Grabau and the Saxons cite churchly authorities for their position. Löhe concludes:

The older teachers are not one, the Symbols have no complete, thoroughgoing unanimity, the Scriptures are not understood with complete concord in the respective passages,—and the teaching of ordination is one of those over which people *within* the Lutheran Church have had varying opinions forever and ever, concerning which a unanimous understanding will only be worked out through proposal and counter-proposal (482).

With this he seems to express his criteria for an “open question”. In the Confessions he already sees divergent points of view, as Luther's understanding conflicts with Melancthon's (483).⁷² Low and high views of ordination stem respectively from these two men, he believes.

Despite Luther's advice in the emergencies, when the emergencies

⁷¹ *Aktensammlung* 40. This quotation should make it clear that the debate between Grabau and Walther was *not* over the specific manner of ordination, but over the essence and necessity of ordination itself. Grabau later calls the form and manner *mitteldingisch*.

⁷² He refers not only to Melancthon's confessional writings, but also to his *Loci*. It is unclear whether Löhe had any *confessional* writings of Luther's in mind, or whether he was thinking only of his Bohemian letter. This opinion recurs on 484, where he refers to Melancthon's use of *sacramentum ordinis* (“the Sacrament of [Holy] Order”) in the Apology.

were over ordination was observed everywhere according to the *Kirchenordnungen*. In these, ordination is:

not merely a divine guarantee of the call, a *testificatio vocationis*, but also the certainty of having divine, gracious support for the Office, ... Thus more and more the grace of the Office [*Amtsgnade*] is elevated, which already Gerhard and Balduin, etc. confess, and it was recognised as an outflow, if not of the laying on of hands, then certainly of the ordination prayers (483).

Yet the twofold witness and uncertainty continues in the *Kirchenordnungen*—Grabau can easily find one to support his point of view.⁷³

Löhe's plea for peace rests on his conviction that both the "democratic" and the "hierarchical" points of view can co-exist peaceably until together they can find the truth (484). "Though a general mandate is lacking, and the general cannot easily be abstracted from the special in this instance, nevertheless there lies before us a practice which is doubtless apostolic, certainly not empty, and which was held fast by almost every church of all time" (484). To him, ordination is not an adiaphoron, and he leans towards Grabau, but for him the Confessions simply have not spoken clearly enough (485).

Lastly, Löhe deals with a remaining controverted teaching of Grabau's: the relationship of the Office to the sacraments.⁷⁴ Both parties stress the Words of Institution, but Grabau includes in this institution the use of the sacraments by those with the proper call and mandate.⁷⁵ Even if the person were evil, the Words of Institution would be effective [*kräftig*] for the sake of the Office [*wegen des Amtes*] (485). On the basis of many Lutheran teachers, this teaching of Grabau's could easily be included among the errors, Löhe suggests. However, there is a certain precedent. Löhe points out the divided judgement of Lutheran theologians on the Sacrament of the Altar. On the one hand, some stress only the presence of Word and element. On the other, some Lutherans (including Luther, he believes) teach that there is no Sacrament among those who err in their doctrine of the Lord's Supper (486). If, therefore, such weight has been laid on a personal characteristic like belief and teaching, how much more regard should be given to the administration by those properly called? For this is not a sacrament of initiation which any spiritual priest may exercise. If it truly is a matter of only Word and element,

⁷³Grabau cites the 1592 *Nürnberger Kirchenordnung, Aktensammlung* 63.

⁷⁴Here we have returned to the issue of the *Hirtenbrief* (see above). Grabau had asserted that "consecrated laymen" could not *effectively* celebrate the Lord's Supper. The Saxons said that he "could", but that he *dare not*.

⁷⁵See *Aktensammlung* 15 and 45-46.

not Office, then why not let anyone exercise it? Because of these differing opinions among Lutherans, and because of the Confessions' silence on the matter, it must remain an open question. However, since it cannot be at all demonstrated that the capable administration of the Sacrament and Absolution derives from the common priesthood, their administration must be restricted to the Office-holder—as Lutheran practice would affirm. “For teaching and Baptism in an emergency are not Office-work [*Amtswerk*], but emergency-work [*Notwerk*]” (487).

Conclusion:

Löhe finally summarises his argument and repeats his plea for unity in North America. Most of all, the question is “whether those who differ in these points can stand in church fellowship with one another” (487). The most dangerous point is Grabau's hierarchical interpretation of Heb. 13:17. If he does not change, Löhe foresees a terrible split among his congregations (488). The other points are not as important; they belong to the *dubiis*, the unfinished business. One must have perspective: for 300 years the Lutheran Church has had no cause to consider these questions so precisely because of the German political situation. Only in America did the problems arise. They should not fight, for who belongs together if they do not? The problems can be solved in peace, with confession on both parts. To end this schism would be “a great grace of the 19th century” (489). Each should look for truth in his opponent and come half way. The answer lies in a study of the organisation, practice, and of the Office in practice, at Reformation times. In the essentials of churchly life—unity of doctrine and discipline—they are one, which cannot be said of the German Church. It would be a great joy for the devil if they went their separate ways. They do not need to become one synod—Missouri is already too large—but there must be fellowship. They need to proceed from the conviction not to fight bitterly, but to lay out their differences thetically and apologetically, peacefully in the school of Jesus (490).

CONCLUSIONS

Certainly the debate as Löhe presents it deserves an in-depth analysis. This essay has only been able to present the essence of Löhe's argument, with little comment. Yet a few closing remarks are in order. Practically speaking, Löhe's foray into the battle was completely unsuccessful. Walther and the Missouri pastors were hardened against Löhe and his theology. Though not directly treating the North American situation, Löhe's *Kirche und Amt: Neue Aphorismen* (1851) was surely his final and mature statement with respect to Church and Office, and may be said to have

been occasioned by the rejection of his *Zugabe* (by both parties).⁷⁶ Löhe himself makes this clear in a letter to Grossmann and the other Saginaw pastors:

Whoever simply loves the Scriptures will find [there] neither Luther's teaching as expressed in the letter to the Bohemians and elsewhere, nor Walther's teaching, but rather mine as expressed in the *Neue Aphorismen*.⁷⁷

The theological rupture was final.

Though we cannot attempt a detailed analysis, we may suggest wherein the deep structure of the controversy consists. At the heart of the dispute seems to be the contention that there is a divinely mandated church polity. Löhe was perhaps mistaken in substituting one form for another. Such is also James Schaaf's conclusion:

All three of the principals in this controversy—Grabau, Walther, and Löhe—had one error in common which none of them recognised. They were all blind to the fact that the forms of church government which are suitable for one time and place may not always be the best for another situation. The practice of the Apostolic Church did not suit the situation of sixteenth-century Europe, and what the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation era found expedient was not necessarily the best solution for the developing churches in nineteenth-century America.⁷⁸

Lest Schaaf's opinion sound too purely sociological, consider also the plea raised by Hermann Sasse in 1949 concerning the continuing split in North America:

For the Lutheran Church, matters of church government belong to the adiaphora, to the "rites and ceremonies, instituted by men" (Augsburg Confession VII), concerning which there may and must be freedom in the church. Christ is not the legislator of a human religious fellowship, and the Gospel has in it no law which prescribes the only right way of organisation and polity for the church.⁷⁹

Thus the tendency on all sides was to "teach the traditions of men as the precepts of God".

⁷⁶This is Schaaf's conclusion 145.

⁷⁷Löhe's letter to Grossmann, Weege, Deindörfer, and Amman 31 March 1853, GW V/2:1016. Also quoted in Schaaf 145 n. 104.

⁷⁸Schaaf 148-49.

⁷⁹Hermann Sasse, "Ministry and Congregation: Letters to Lutheran Pastors, No. 8, July 1949", in *We Confess the Church*, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986): 70.

On the other hand, Löhe correctly called Missouri to account for its over-reliance on certain early Luther writings, rather than on Scripture and Confessions,⁸⁰ while at the same time challenging Grabau's misuse of Scripture for the sake of clerical power.⁸¹ Löhe calls for a renewed apostolicity in the Church, which acknowledges how the pastor is authorised by Christ for the Gospel ministry as the apostles were before him. Thus, Löhe is not finally neutral on the so-called "open question" of ordination. For ordination is the divinely instituted means by which a pastor is given the grace of Office, and by which he knows that he speaks and acts for Christ. In this respect, Löhe leans heavily towards Grabau. It is simply the details of ordination which remain open, since neither Scripture nor Confessions are clear on the "how". When ordination is viewed as a divine action, the knot in the connection between Office and congregation is severed, and each takes its proper place in God's order.

Hermann Sasse wisely perceived this as the crux of the issue. Did Grabau and the Saxons—perhaps even Löhe—regard Office and congregation as two ends of the rope in a tug-of-war? Was the question incorrectly phrased as an either-or? Sasse pleads:

It is therefore in fact impossible in the New Testament to separate ministry and congregation. ... The office does not stand above the congregation, but always in it Only where there is a vital ministerial office, working with the full authority of having been sent, only there is a living congregation. ⁸²

Already for this reason the alternative "ministry or congregation?" in the 19th century was falsely put On both sides there was an overemphasis on one aspect of Biblical truths which in the New Testament belong together. This happened because each party took one side of the New Testament passages as the important one, under which the other had to be subordinated. ⁸³

Unfortunately, Sasse's plea, like Löhe's, was too late to reconcile two quarrelling sisters. Might it not today, however, hold the key to heal a

⁸⁰In this sense the debate was *hermeneutical*. What is to be the relative authority of Scripture, Confessions, Luther, the later dogmaticians, and the *Kirchenordnungen*? Löhe argues that the Saxons had used certain early Luther writings and late dogmaticians to trump Scripture and Confessions—a persistent temptation for the LC-MS.

⁸¹"Power" and "authority" are not synonymous. "Power" is a Law term, by which Grabau asserted the rights of the clergy to absolute obedience. Löhe argues rather for the clergy's proper "authority", which is based on the tasks and responsibilities *given* to them by Christ for the sake of the Gospel.

⁸²Sasse 78.

⁸³Sasse 79.

divided house?

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UNDER PASTORAL CARE¹

I Pet. 5:1-5

Edwin Lehman

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of ways in which what is happening here today is similar to a wedding. As in a wedding, so now, family and friends have gathered from near and far to be part of an event that most directly affects only a few. As in a wedding, so now, we are distracted from the significance of the day by irrelevant questions, such as, “Where did she buy that dress?” or, “Where’s Saskatchewan?” As in a wedding, so now, the event itself is less important than what gives reason to it: a marriage is much more than a wedding, and both the church and the ministry are much more important than a call service.

This service gives us an opportunity, however, to consider some important truths concerning the Holy Ministry, into which some of you are about to be called, and for which others are preparing to go on a vicarage experience. While all of this is important to you who are most directly involved, it is also important for God’s church on earth. For the Holy Ministry is not something which pious people, through some kind of brilliant organisational insight, decided would be good for them. It was God Himself who created the church, who also ensured that it would not be left without a ministry to serve and tend that church. It is appropriate, therefore, that our thoughts today focus not only on what most directly affects a few people, but what the Holy Scriptures teach about being under pastoral care.

The apostle Peter did not write these words for seminary graduates. He was writing to “fellow elders”, fellow pastors, most of whom were probably younger than he was. In these words, he reminds them of what it means to have a flock under their pastoral care, but also what it means that they themselves are under the care of the Good Shepherd. That is the truth for us: we are all under pastoral care.

I. PASTORS ARE SHEPHERDS OF THE FLOCK THAT IS UNDER THEIR PASTORAL CARE

1. You are called to be shepherds. Shepherd ... pastor. Few words are more appropriate for the one who cares for the souls of his flock. Although we

¹ This sermon was preached at the St. Catharines seminary Call Service held in Grace Lutheran Church, St. Catharines, ON, on 27 April 1996.

carry out some priestly functions, we are not priests of some order that is higher than that of the priesthood of God's baptised children. Although we may be called reverend, we are not always revered. We are shepherds, pastors of the flock under our care. This is the language of Peter. It is also the language of Paul, who reminded the elders at Ephesus, "Take heed to the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers." And it was the language of our Lord Himself, who instructed Peter, "Feed my sheep, feed my lambs."

2. How are pastors to see themselves? Because it is the Holy Spirit who makes shepherds, they should never see themselves as anything less than that. But neither should they ever see themselves as more than undershepherds. This calls for shepherding with a sense of humility, and it is not without reason that in the words immediately following these verses, Peter wrote, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand." Such humility does not come easy. A few years ago, I preached at an event at a different seminary, with the text from Isaiah 52, ... "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news." Since I was speaking particularly to and about those who were preparing to be pastors, I spoke about "baby feet", and made comparisons to baby's first steps which, though sometimes unsteady and tentative, are still a delight to their parents. I found it quite interesting to watch the expressions on the faces of the congregation. Faculty members and pastors generally smiled. A few nodded their heads. A good number of the seminarians, however, sat there stone-faced, not particularly amused by what I had said. Perhaps they didn't like the analogy. We don't like to be reminded of our weaknesses, of our utter dependence on God's grace.

3. How are pastors to conduct themselves? Peter reminds the pastors that they do not operate by their own authority. He makes the point both negatively and positively: "do your service not because you must, but because you are willing ... not greedy for money, but eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you but being examples to the flock." There is a world of difference between a sheep-dog and a shepherd. If you are to believe the movies, even a pig can do the work of the sheep-dog. The sheep-dog takes orders. But the shepherd takes responsibility. The well-being of the sheep is his primary concern.

Pastors are not shepherds in their own right. They are undershepherds of the Chief Shepherd. If we attempt anything beyond that, we are headed for disaster. We've probably seen sacristy prayers, some of them attributed to Martin Luther, which usually speak in lofty terms about the high calling of the pastor's office. But this translation of one of Luther's prayers for the Holy Ministry is far more earthy and realistic than most:

Lord God, you have placed me in your church as pastor and

overseer. You see how unfit I am to carry out this difficult office. If I had been without your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call on you. I gladly offer my mouth and heart to your service. I want to teach the people, and I want to keep learning myself. Use me, Lord, as your instrument. But do not forsake me, because if I were to carry on by myself, I would quickly ruin everything.²

Here we find no false illusions about one's gifts. By ourselves, we, like Luther, have the gift of being able to mess things up. Anything good must be given by the Lord Himself.

II. PASTORS ARE UNDER THE CARE OF THE GREAT SHEPHERD

Advice, advice, advice. If we haven't heard it before, we're not likely to hear it now. And what we haven't learned before, we'll have to learn from Grandma Schmidt. But there is another important lesson in this text. It is this: all of us, even pastors, are under the pastoral care of the Chief Pastor, the Chief Shepherd, the Good Shepherd.

1. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. They never called Him pastor. They called Him Rabbi instead of Reverend. But Jesus is appropriately called the Good Shepherd for the reasons recorded in today's Gospel. The Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep. The hireling sees the wolf coming and flees. But Jesus knows His sheep, they are His. No one will pluck them out of His hand. That unbreakable relationship is not merely because Christ has taken a liking to His people. It is because He has redeemed His people, giving His life for theirs. He purchased them from their sinful bondage, rescued them from their lost condition, claimed them again as His sons and heirs. That is what occupied our attention during the past few weeks of the church year, when we saw this Good Shepherd going to the cross, as both shepherd and sacrificial lamb. There He was attacked by all the forces of Satan, the way marauding wolves seize and rend a helpless lamb. In His death, and in His willing acceptance of our sin and guilt before the judgement seat of His Father, He made satisfaction for our sins. In their place, His perfect holiness and righteousness are bestowed upon us. As the true lamb of God, He has taken away the sins of the world. As the Good Shepherd He cares for His sheep.

2. Jesus is also the Chief Shepherd, and cares for His undershepherds. Yes, even pastors are under pastoral care. Sometimes it's hard for pastors, whether novice or veteran to realise that even as others are under their pastoral care, so they themselves are under pastoral care — under the care of the Good Shepherd. Even in the world, those in authority are also

² WA 43. 513.

under authority. The centurion who pleaded with Jesus to heal his servant told Jesus that He did not have to bother coming to his house, but only needed to speak the word. “For,” he said, “I too am a man under authority, and I say to this man go and he goes, to another come and he comes ... (Luke 7:8).” Note that the centurion did not say, “I am a man with authority and therefore am willing to trust that what I command will be done.” He was first a man under authority. But if that is true in the world, it is far more true in the church. Pastors have no authority but an authority that is given. It has nothing to do with their personalities, insights or skills. Whatever the pastor does is given to him by the Lord who makes him a pastor, and he remains responsible to God for the exercise of his stewardship. He remains under pastoral care — under the care of the Chief Shepherd.

3. Being an undershepherd is the pastor’s rightful place. The pastor does not lord it over the congregation as though it belonged to him. While pastors and congregations should honour the pastoral office because it is a gift from Christ Himself, they should never attach such importance to the holder of the office that he desires to, or is expected to, or is allowed to lord it over the flock. When a pastor says, “my congregation” — as he can quite appropriately do, it is a term of endearment, and it indicates those whom he is committed to serve. It can never mean that they belong to him. They belong to the Good Shepherd, who has, for a certain space of time, entrusted them to the care of His undershepherd.

4. Being an undershepherd is a great comfort. To be under the pastoral care of the Good Shepherd is also a wonderful comfort for undershepherds who are themselves weary, bruised and beaten from the difficult task entrusted to them. It is most liberating for us to know that while we have a stewardship toward the flock, which the Good Shepherd has entrusted to us, we are not their Saviour. We intercede for them, but we don’t atone for their sins. We admonish them, we encourage them in their sanctification, but we do not carry out that which only God Himself can do in their hearts.

CONCLUSION

For those who are going forth in the name of Christ to serve His flock, we offer our heartfelt thanks to God. You are gifts to His church. You are shepherds in relation to the flock, but undershepherds, even sheep yourselves, in relation to the Good Shepherd. Therefore, “may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (Hebrews 13: 20-21).”

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REVIEW ARTICLE

Church

RITES

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Winkels at a loose end might aptly devote some study sessions to *Church RITES*, a 371-page yet handily slender hardback volume issued in 1994 by our Australian sister Church. What goes on in seminary and college classrooms and in books and learned journals is mere “secondary theology”, an academic pursuit more or less relevant to the life of the Church. But the rubber of sacred science directly hits the Church’s road in the Divine Service and those rites which lead to or flow from it: where pastors administer the means of grace in an orderly manner, eternity-affecting “primary theology” is under way. If *Church RITES* is a reliable guide to what is going on at the altars and in the pews and pulpits of the Lutheran Church of Australia, we may rejoice that “primary theology” is in fine fettle among our co-religionists down under.

Church RITES enjoys two enviable advantages not shared by all recent attempts at liturgical revision. First, the English style is crisp and clear. Pains have been taken not to use two words where one will suffice; the Word is here unshackled by wordiness. The sacramental and other rites contained in this volume will accordingly hold congregations’ attention. Secondly, the doctrine which exudes from these rites is an up-to-date confessionalism alive to the catholic tradition and breathing Lutheran distinctiveness from their every pore. Congregations will therefore be edified as they are ministered to through this agenda.

Church RITES attests the vibrant legacy of the late Dr. Hermann Sasse, confirming the rightness of his accepting the Solemn Call to Immanuel Seminary of the UELCA back in 1949. Sasse’s passion for evangelical sacramentalism and liturgical vitality has borne blest fruit in these pages, which also betray the fingerprints of Dr. John Kleinig, who was prominently involved in all stages of this agenda’s production.

At the end of the volume appears a 50-page “Commentary on the rites” (308-358), which winsomely and economically offers a host of pertinent facts which pastors likely did not pick up in the seminary

classroom. Laypeople eager to get the point of what goes on in worship should be directed to this section, which explains how the Gospel is communicated and interpreted not only by way of the spoken Word but also through visible and tangible gestures. The opening remarks on “Ritual components” (310-312) are a gem, making it crystal clear why ritual cannot be allowed to be just a high church obsession. Spirited lay involvement in rites is encouraged with such remarks as:

The act of **applause** expresses joyful acceptance and acclamation in such rites as ordination, installation of a president, and restoration to communicant membership (311).

And what comfort radiates through the observation that “The cemetery is the congregation’s ‘dormitory’ (Gk. *Koimeterion*) for its deceased members” (349)!

Services of Christian initiation comprise the first section of *Church RITES* (1-46). The order of Holy Baptism (2-14) begins with a brisk and unapologetic statement of the Dominical mandate, including as options an exorcism (#5, “rebuke of unclean spirit”), the *effatha* rite (#6, “opening of ears and mouth”), and anointing with oil (#15). The first and third of these options take us back to Luther’s rites of 1523 and 1526, as does the inclusion of the Flood Prayer (#8), which is punctuated with six congregational responses of “We thank you”. At the Westfield House weekly seminar on the pericopes presided over by Dr. Ron Feuerhahn back in 1980, Dr. Kleinig would wax eloquent over the baptismal dimension of Mk. 7:31-37; he has clearly by now persuaded his colleagues of this point. Further options, such as the bestowing of a baptismal garment (#16) and the presentation of a lighted candle (#17), are already familiar to us. #19 envisages immediate admission to the Sacrament of the Altar should the baptisand be an adult or an older child.

Some congregations of LCA have apparently detached First Communion from the Rite of Confirmation, with the result that a distinct rite is given for “Admission to the sacrament of the altar” (20-23). The Dominical mandate here is obviously the Words of Institution (#2), to which I Cor. 11:27-28 is appropriately added. For the Rite of Confirmation itself (25-31), the Dominical word defining the entire ceremony goes straight to the heart of the matter as Mt. 10:32-33 (#2) is read to the candidates. The Initiation section of the concluding Commentary is a must read packed with nuggets of useful knowledge (312-322).

The rite of marriage (48-57) may raise some eyebrows, since the wife is asked to “honour and protect” her husband (#12), while St. Paul’s famous words in Eph. 5 have only optional status in the opening statement on the “foundation and purpose of marriage” (#11). Some will ask whether the

hard-line feminism of the 1990s does not place us in a “case of confession” where plain speaking is called for with respect to the orders of creation.

Church RITES envisages the celebration in the church building itself of a liturgical order for the “Care of those who are sick” (70-76). This rite features a fine series of prayers for the sick (#5); and while the laying on of hands is prescribed (#12), the anointing of the sick with oil appears as an option (#13). A general, not individual, rite of confession and Absolution is offered here (#11).

Busy pastors may be at a loss to derive a manageable funeral Service from the wealth of material provided in the *Lutheran Worship Agenda*. It is much easier to get a handle on the order offered in *Church RITES* (79-92), at whose outset we are vouchsafed an instance of uniquely Australian English usage. Whereas we “bid farewell” to loved ones, “farewell” functions in Australia as a transitive verb: “As we come here in our grief to farewell N” (#3). Along with the *Lutheran Worship Agenda*, *Church RITES* provides for the celebration of Holy Communion within the parameters of the funeral Service (#16), while acknowledging that circumstances may render this desideratum a rarity in practice:

Although holy communion ... is difficult at funerals in most modern situations, it is most fitting and helpful where possible, since in Christ the living are still united with the dead. In earlier times the sacrament was usually held in connection with funerals. In the communion with Christ, the communion of the saints is strengthened, support and sustenance are provided to the mourners, and the forgiveness of sins is given personally to all communicants, including those who are particularly burdened with guilt at this time. The Lord’s supper points the mourners to the great reunion at the marriage feast of the Lamb in heaven, where there will be no more tears.

The pastor will need to consider the circumstances of the funeral before deciding whether to incorporate holy communion or not. Discreet notice concerning the prerequisites for participation in the sacrament will probably need to be given. If it is celebrated, the service will include a confession and absolution and the parts of the service with holy communion from the preface to the post-communion prayer (332).

With respect to ordination *Church RITES* directs that “The rite takes place within the service with holy communion, and begins after the offertory” (137, n. 1), and that “The president of the church is the presiding minister, since it is the president’s prerogative to ordain pastors to the public ministry” (137, n. 2). Three Dominical mandates are read at the outset of the

rite: the institution of Absolution, the Great Commission to the Eleven, and the Words of Institution (#3). At the ordination itself, the rubric notes that “The minister keeps both hands on the head of the ordinand. Other clergy may add their right hands” (#6). The brevity of this rite is greatly to be preferred to the *Lutheran Worship Agenda*’s prolixity, but the Australians might fitly have borrowed from Missouri the ordinand’s promise not to break the seal of confession.

The rite for installation of a synodical or district president offers food for thought as it contradicts the business corporation model prevalent in North America. Some years ago an article appeared in *CTQ* arguing that a synodical president is not in fact a pastor. Such an attitude is manifestly not widespread in Australia. The Dominical word introducing this rite is Jn. 20:21-23, an unabashedly office of the ministry text (152, #2). The “Commentary on the Rites” insists, in the context of ordination, that:

The president of the LCA is responsible for the ordination of approved candidates into the ministry. As the pastor to the pastors, he represents the pastorate of the LCA and confers the office on the candidate (338f.).

Presidential installation includes investiture of “the pastor to the pastors” with a pectoral cross, to the accompaniment of the following exhortation:

Receive this cross as a sign of your office and as a mark of your obligation to preach Christ crucified. Keep watch over yourself and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseer, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son (154, #6).

The commentary on this portion of the rite indicates that not all pastors of LCA (to say nothing of vicars and lay assistants!) are in the habit of wearing pectoral crosses over their albs:

As the stole is the symbol of the office of the ordained ministry in the LCA, so the **pectoral cross** . . . of particular design has become the symbol of the office of the president. For the president of the church, it is a gold cross, for district presidents a silver cross. Where the outgoing president is present, the cross of office is reverently removed from him and transferred to his successor as a visible expression of succession in leadership. The words accompanying the investiture focus on the cross of Christ and on the need for presidents to preach Christ crucified (342).

The LCA presidents are clearly seen as occupying an episcopal office.

In the third articles of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, the

“catholic” Church makes a comeback (e.g., 9, 277), with “*or*: Christian; ‘*catholic*’ here means ‘*universal*’” appearing as a footnote.

A brief rite designed for the “Opening of a synodical convention” (255-259) contains a single feature which involves a puzzling departure from the original text of the Confessions. As the delegates reaffirm their allegiance to Sacred Scripture and the Book of Concord, *SC* VI,1 is reworded to the effect that “We accept that the sacrament of the altar is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ given with bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us to eat and drink” (257). No explanation is given for the replacement of Luther’s preferred “under” (supplemented in *LC* V,8 by “in”) by Melancthon’s looser “with”.

The volume closes with a series of Services designed for use during “The three days to Easter”. The Maundy Thursday Service opens with Corporate Confession and Absolution, the option being given of Absolution’s being granted individually at the altar (271-273). Two further features of this rite merit our attention. First, at the end of the Service of the Word “The ceremony of foot-washing may be enacted” (#18; see also 355). Secondly, the familiar Preface is slightly recast. Whereas Cranmer replaced the transliterated Latin “salutary” with the law-laden “bounden duty”, our Australian brethren confess that thanksgiving “is truly fitting and right, and for our lasting good” (#21). The Divine Service of Maundy Thursday concludes with the stripping of the altar, a moving rite which is becoming familiar among ourselves. Celebration of Holy Communion on Good Friday is gently encouraged (356). The Divine Service provided for Good Friday (282-293) includes the optional rite of “adoration of Christ on the cross” (#13; see explanation 356). The Bidding Prayer (12) names the prime minister and State premier, but pointedly omits all mention of Elizabeth our Queen. Finally comes the Easter vigil Service (295-307), which was restored to Roman Catholic usage by Pius XII in the mid-50s to be picked up by some Lutherans and Anglicans. Weather conditions make it easier in Australia than in Canada to observe the rubric (#1) which notes that “The service begins outside the church building”!

With *Church RITES* our Australian brethren have rendered a fine service to Lutherans throughout the English-speaking world. This volume merits concentrated attention in our Synod; and, since liturgy is meant for prayerful use more than for scholarly study, it may be well for our leaders to consider whether a future Convention of Lutheran Church-Canada might fitly be asked to consider authorising the use of *Church RITES* in our congregations. Such a gesture would both underscore the ecclesial Communion we happily enjoy with the Lutheran Church of Australia and enrich our own worship life.

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