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CHAPEL ADDRESS*

Clifford M. Kuehne

* Delivered at Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire WI, January 31, 1997.

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:7 — “*For we walk by faith, not by sight.*”

In our text the Apostle Paul expresses a general truth which applies to every Christian without exception: “We walk by faith, not by sight.”

As we consider this truth, we should recognize that walking by faith and not by sight is not normal or natural for us as fallen human beings. Our Old Adam would far rather walk in accord with the widely accepted principle that “seeing is believing.” Think of how we may be tempted at times to look for the assurance of our salvation in things that we can observe, such as our good works and our feelings of being saved, rather than in the Son of God’s unseen sacrifice for our sins and the Father’s unseen verdict of forgiveness. Think also how we get such a secure feeling about the future when all the bills are paid, when we have a lot tucked away in savings, and when we have enough social security and retirement benefits to take care of our old age. And think how easy it is for us to get more excited about the good things and happy times that we have here in this world, than about the unseen joy and pleasures that will be ours with God in heaven.

Sinful flesh and Old Adam we still have, to be sure. But by the grace of God that is not *all* that we are. At a time too long ago for most of us to remember, the Holy Spirit came into our hearts through the gospel of Christ and performed there a miracle as great as the resurrection of Christ itself—the miracle of faith—so that the apostle’s words are now true also for us: “We walk by faith, not by sight.”

But have you ever considered the *foolishness* of this kind of faith life when judged by *human* standards? What astounding and seemingly impossible things God asks us in Holy Scripture to believe without seeing! To our eyes the rocks and canyons and distant stars seem to be so old; and yet we are asked in Genesis to believe that their true age is reckoned in the thousands and not millions of years,

and that all things came into being by the almighty word of the eternal God. A baby is baptized, and we see nothing more than several handfuls of water and hear a few words; and yet we are asked to believe that in that moment the Holy Spirit comes to that flesh-born child and gives him a new and eternal life as a child of God. The Lord's Supper is celebrated, and we see nothing more than wafers and grape wine; and yet we are asked to believe that with those visible elements, coupled with the words of institution, we receive the same body and blood of Christ which were the purchase price of our redemption. We see ourselves as tiny specks of dust in a vast universe; and yet we are asked to believe that God is deeply concerned about each one of us individually, and pays attention to even the smallest details of our lives. We look at ourselves and see how true it is that we are poor, miserable sinners, who justly deserve God's temporal and eternal punishment; and yet in the gospel we are asked to believe that our heavenly Father has removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west, and that for Christ's sake we are righteous and holy in His sight.

And there is even more. You young people sit in class and study English and history and math, and at times you can't see the point of any of it; and yet you are asked to believe that right now, day by day, God is preparing you for some kind of kingdom work that lies in your unseen future. Again, troubles crowd into your lives, you feel yourself pushed into a corner, and your prayers for relief seem to go unanswered; and yet you are asked to believe that God can and will turn these very troubles into wonderful blessings for you. The balance in your checking account may be reckoned in only a few dollars while the unexpected expenses add up to thousands; and yet you are asked to believe that your heavenly Father is nevertheless perfectly able to provide you with all the necessities of life. What fools we must appear to the unbelieving world around us when they see us walking by faith and not by sight!

But we *aren't* fools, for Holy Scripture assures us that what we Christians now believe we shall one day also *see*. As one Christian writer put it: "They who upon God's Word believe what they do not see, shall soon see what they now believe." Scripture says that the Bible-based hope that we have as believers in Christ will not be put to shame. In the words of the apostle: "This hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5).

How great, then, is that miracle of our conversion, which has given us the willingness and ability to walk, not by sight, but by simple, childlike *faith* in the truths and promises of Holy Scripture. May our Savior God graciously keep us in this Christian faith through the gospel in Word and Sacrament. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

PSALM 51 SERMON SERIES

Paul Fleischer

VI. Psalm 51:10-12

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your generous Spirit."

Before us in this study are some very familiar words; we call them "The Offertory" and sing them almost every Sunday after the sermon.

What is it about these words which led the ancient church fathers to incorporate them into the weekly liturgical service? Surely this was done with good purpose and reason. In the sermon we have heard the preaching of the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on the basis of the text for the day. This gospel is such good news, for it tells us what God has done FOR US—redeemed, ransomed, justified, saved us by grace alone, through faith alone in our Savior, without the works of the law.

Yes, we are saved by faith alone, and yet what we shall dwell upon in this study and what we, in effect, remind ourselves every single time we sing "The Offertory" is that *the faith that saves is never alone*. That phrase, "faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is never alone," was Dr. Martin Luther's way of conveying the life-giving and life-changing effect of the gospel upon our newly-created,

renewed hearts. Let our prayer be that the Holy Spirit might help us to see the deep and glorious truths contained in “The Offertory” as together we consider David’s

PRAYER FOR RENEWAL

I. “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

David here prays, “Create in me a clean heart, O God ...,” whereas, as we heard in our last study, he had earlier prayed, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” It is very obvious that at this point David is very sensitive to his need for cleansing, for purity. He had previously prayed that he might be cleansed outwardly; now he prays that he might be cleansed inwardly.

In other words, David shows us the relationship between the doctrines of our JUSTIFICATION and our SANCTIFICATION. You have heard before how justification may be compared to the action of a judge. When you think carefully about it, a judge does not get inside a person, does he? If he is a good judge, he stays entirely away from the person about whom he is to make an objective ruling. He investigates the facts, tries to establish the facts, carefully weighs the facts, and then pronounces a verdict on the basis of his findings. This God does when He justifies us. As sinners we stand guilty before God, the Judge. When He investigates or examines our lives according to His holy law, what does He find? “The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. (And what does He find? —) They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one” (Ps. 14:2ff.).

But lo and behold, God’s Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, stepped in on our behalf. Jesus took our place under the curse and penalty of the law, and God laid ON HIM the iniquity of us all. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. Our sin-guilt was imputed, charged to, Christ. This being the case, God the Judge declares us not guilty, clean! Justification is a judgment of acquittal. Justification is a free gift of God pronounced upon us guilty ones through Christ’s all-sufficient sacrifice. Justification is God’s imputing to us the perfect righteousness of Christ. And it is all accomplished totally apart from any contribution on the part of the sinner, solely through God’s mercy and grace in Christ, without our works or any contribution on our part. It all takes place OUTSIDE OF US. It is for this type of cleansing that David has been praying for up to this point.

But now he prays for inward cleansing, which has reference to what is called our sanctification. If justification may be compared to the action of a judge, sanctification may be compared to the efforts of a physician. A physician works *on* his patient and *in* his patient in order to check disease and restore health. Similarly, when God sanctifies a reborn sinner, He works inside the heart, fighting against the evil lusts which lurk there and produces fruits worthy of repentance. When I was a child there were times when I had dirty feet, and didn’t want to take time for a bath. If, for example, I played outside in the dust and mud in the afternoon before going to midweek Lenten services that evening I would try to get away with putting clean socks over dirty feet. My mother would never let me get away with that, impressing on me that “outward clean” is useless unless you also have “inward clean.” This illustrates a powerful spiritual truth! In the first place, sinners can and must be assured of their being outwardly justified, cleansed, through donning the perfectly white-as-snow robe of Jesus’ righteousness. Yet, a person’s life falls short of God’s expectations if the inner life is still dirty.

This, you see, is why David is not content to pray for being cleansed outwardly, but adds a prayer also for inward cleansing. And how we too need to realize the importance of this. There is ever the danger that the enemy of God, the devil, will cause us to take sin lightly, thus abusing the doctrine of God’s forgiving grace. As Luther said one time, “Sin is forgiven not for the purpose that we continue therein, but that we break loose from sin; else it would be called a permission to, and not a remission of, sin.” Sinning that grace may abound was the final result of the law-religion of the Pharisees, whom the Lord denounced as hypocrites. And Jesus said this one time (no doubt the basis for my dear mother’s remarks about the foolishness of my wanting to put clean socks over dirty feet), “No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the

wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved” (Matt. 9:16-17).

But now let us notice something else very carefully: *sanctification never precedes justification, but justification and sanctification always go together*. When God who justifies the ungodly declares a believing sinner just and righteous through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, God also and at the same time sanctifies that sinner. The Roman Catholic religion, all non-Christian religions, and many of the Reformed churches place sanctification (good works) before justification. That amounts to heathenism. We are never to “put the cart before the horse” in regard to good works. “First make the tree good and then the fruit will be good” says Luther, even as the Savior teaches in the Sermon on the Mount: “Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit” (Matt. 7:17f.).

In our circles we properly emphasize Christ’s work FOR US, outside of us. Yet I fear we often fail to understand that as forgiven sinners we are also sanctified sinners, with this result that we often lead a life void of the holy joy which ought to be ours.

Think of the miracle of our new life of faith. In baptism God made us new creatures. At that time the Holy Spirit saw to it that we were born again. Have you been baptized? Then you are a new creature in Christ! You don’t have to receive what some call the “second blessing of the Spirit” before you can live “the new life.” No! “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). The moment I am justified, it is true of me that “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:11).

With true faith as the new life principle in our renewed lives, we automatically begin serving God. Listen to these glowing words with which Luther describes our new life of faith: “Faith is a divine work in us; it changes us and regenerates us; it mortifies the natural man in us and makes us new men in heart, spirit, mind and all powers, and it cannot be without the Holy Ghost. Oh, it is a living, busy, and powerful thing about faith. It is impossible that it should not always do good works. It does not stop and ask where good works can be done. Before there can be any asking, it does good works and is always doing them.” Think of the malefactor on the cross. The moment he was brought to believe in Jesus, all his sins were forgiven, and he was, as well, sanctified, with Jesus living in his heart. “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is never alone” — and that was true of the malefactor, and it is true of you and me.

II. “Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.”

With all that has been said, we still need to recognize a problem. Our justification is always 100% and complete, for it depends not a bit on what we do. Our sanctification is a different story; our new life of faith is never complete so long as we sinners live on this side of the grave. Indwelling sin ever seeks to hinder our faith-life. But there will be progress in our living for God, as we learn to live more and more by faith, crucifying and mortifying the sinful nature. Knowledge of this fact is what moved David to pray that God would “renew a steadfast spirit within me.” The opposite of steadfast is weak, uncertain, changeable, variable. What is steadfast cannot be moved or overthrown. Lest we exhibit a wavering, unsettled spirit we, with David, need to ask God daily that His Holy Spirit would keep us steadfast in the faith.

David prays, “Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.” How all-important it is for us to realize that only God the Holy Spirit can steady our spirit, our faith! We do not bring ourselves to faith. We cannot keep ourselves in it. This is the work of the Spirit through the means of grace in Word and Sacrament. The more we commit ourselves to the steadfast Rock, our God and His Word, the more steadfast we shall stand against all the assaults and temptations of the devil, world, and flesh. In His rich grace and mercy God cast all our sins behind His back, when really it was we who deserved to be cast away from His presence. Yes, think of it, fellow

believers, every time we sin anew each day, God would have the right to cast us away from Him, but He doesn't — all praise to Him!

And yet the time does come when, as we despise Him, His Word, His Spirit, God can remove His Holy Spirit from us. This ought to shake us into the realization that sin, all sin, is a serious matter. The Spirit of God is the HOLY Spirit who is sure to be driven away by the love of sin. If we allow ourselves to be worldly-minded and filled with worldly amusements, readings, entertainment, pleasures and so on, which play into the hands of our sinful nature, then injury is done to the HOLY Spirit who dwells within our believing hearts. This is why Holy Scripture warns against grieving the Spirit or quenching the fires of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Let it be, then, with a sense of great danger and great urgency that we join David every Sunday in this prayer: "And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." God will never do this unless we, through an inordinate love of sin, cause Him to do it to our own great harm. On the other hand, let us remember that it is due to the grace of God if the Holy Spirit is not taken away from us, for we all "daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment" (Luther, 5th Petition).

III. "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your generous Spirit."

In a previous study we heard David say, "Make me to hear joy and gladness ..." (v. 8). Now in our text he prays again for joy, saying, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your generous Spirit." Why does David now add this prayer? A likely reason for this is that there is, in a sense, a two-fold joy. First of all, there is a joy which comes from the knowledge that, though a sinner, I am justified and my sin is forgiven. But there is another source of deep spiritual joy. Just as one cannot experience true joy without forgiveness, neither can one experience continued joy apart from a holy life. Isn't it so that, while rejoicing in the gospel of God's forgiveness, we soon find our lives lacking the joy which God intends for us when we fall again into some sin? So it is that we need to join David in praying for this joy—a joy which comes not only from the knowledge of freedom from the guilt and punishment of sin, but for the joy which comes from being released from the power and pollution of sin.

David calls the Holy Spirit, "Your generous Spirit" (or "free" Spirit as we sing it in "The Offertory"). This is in keeping with St. Paul's words, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17). Contrary to what our depraved human nature may suggest, true joy comes not from the service of sin, but through living our lives in the spirit—placing our entire life, our wills, our hearts, our talents, our affections, our possessions, our minds, our hands, our feet, our voices, yes, our all, into the service of our good and gracious and forgiving God. The more we are in the Word of God, the more we make use of the Sacraments, the more the Spirit of God will lead us to rejoice in the blessings only He can give.

A Prayer of Dr. Luther "for a clean heart and a firm faith":

I thank you, my dear God, that I have learned not to begin faith by my own efforts, nor attempt to destroy my sin with my own repentance. I might do this before men and be acceptable to the world and its judges. But with you, O God, there is an eternal wrath which I cannot satisfy, and before it I would despair. Therefore I thank you that Another has seized and carried my sins and has made atonement for them. With joy I wish to believe this. It seems so very right and comforting to me. But I cannot believe it by myself, and I find no power in me to convince myself. I cannot comprehend it as I ought. Lord, lead me, help me. Give me the power and gift to believe. I plead, as did David: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. I am unable to create a new and clean heart; it is your work and creation. I cannot create the sun and moon and make them rise and shine brightly in the heavens any more than I can make the heart clean and give myself a right spirit, a strong and firm frame of mind that is unbending and unwavering and that will not doubt or mistrust your Word. Help us daily to increase in faith. Though the world should topple and all conspire against us, and though the devil were to destroy every creature, grant that I may not fall. By your divine help let me remain in the gospel. Amen.

THUNDERBOLTS FROM HEAVEN: LUTHER'S *BONDAGE OF THE WILL**

Gregory L. Jackson

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Introduction

Luther regarded *The Bondage of the Will* (*De Servo Arbitrio*, 1525) as one of his two works worth keeping, including his Small Catechism. Only those two writings were “right.”¹ One could write a history of Christian doctrine based upon the subject of this work, the unfree-will. St. Augustine battled with Pelagius (who died in 418); Luther debated with Erasmus; Arminius (died 1609) broke with Calvinism; Jansenists (Jansen died in 1638) argued against the Molinists; the Synodical Conference suffered its longest and greatest conflict in the 1870s.² Today orthodox Lutherans remain a tiny minority among those who have embraced Erasmus’ position among the Roman Catholics and the Reformed. Twenty years ago, when I was a Lutheran Church in America pastor attending an ecumenical pastors’ group, I broke up the meeting by saying that the rest of the members were liberals because they rejected St. Paul’s position on predestination. One Pentecostal minister said, his voice quaking with rage, “That position would destroy all mission work,” forgetting perhaps that St. Paul was the greatest missionary of all time, both to his people and to the heathen.³

The strength of genuine Lutheranism has been centered in the doctrine of election, not only in Luther’s writings, but also in Article XI of the Formula of Concord, which unifies that confession.⁴ When friends of mine looked for an antidote to the Church Growth Movement, statements which would drive a wooden stake into the heart of crypto-Calvinism, they found their weapon in that article on predestination which was largely fashioned by Martin Chemnitz. Article I, Original Sin, and Article II, Free-will, both reflect Luther’s teaching as well. *De Servo Arbitrio* is named and commended in Article II (*Triglotta*, 897).⁵

The doctrine of election defined the Synodical Conference in the last century and will decisively influence us today, even if it seems to run in the background of our other work.⁶ John Calvin quoted it favorably in his *Institutes*, even if he did not understand it completely.⁷ Our century’s version of Calvin, Karl Barth, dealt with election in great detail in his *Dogmatics*.⁸ Father Harry McSorley, who spoke to our class at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, wrote a best-seller called *Luther: Right or Wrong?*, arguing that Luther was right and Erasmus wrong on the subject of free-will.⁹ Waterloo’s dogmatics professor, Aarne Siirala, published a book which reversed that conclusion.

Erasmus’ Position

Moreover, I conceive of free-will in this context as a power of the human will by which a man may apply himself to those things that lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from the same.
Erasmus¹⁰

One is immediately reminded of Melanchthon’s changing position and the synergism which he introduced to Lutheranism (Bente, 128)¹¹ by changing the Augsburg Confession (Bente, 26) and the *Loci Communes*, and by teaching false doctrine. In the 1543 *Loci Communes*, Melanchthon listed three causes for conversion and salvation: 1) the Holy Spirit; 2) the Word; 3) “the human will assenting to and not resisting the Word of God.”¹² Therefore, we can see in Melanchthon the origin of Lutheran synergism (the human will cooperating in salvation) as opposed to the monergism of Luther: God acting upon and changing the will of man through the Word. Although many differences may be noted, almost all non-Lutheran Protestants are synergists at best, agreeing to some extent with Roman Catholicism.¹³

Erasmus was quite different from Luther in many ways. Desiridius Erasmus was almost 20 years older than Luther, a world-famous scholar, a friend of the pope—moderate to a fault. Erasmus did much to start the Reformation in publishing his Greek New Testament (1516), in criticizing the corruption of the Church, and in protecting Luther from criticism during the Reformer’s early years. Erasmus would be at home in Lutheranism today, welcome for his wit, his learning, and his ability to make the right political choices. Luther provided fodder for the Roman apologists by publishing his

Assertio Omnium Articulorum in response to the papal bull *Exsurge Domine*, 1520. Luther wrote about the unfree-will in his *Assertio* and in *Grund und Ursach*, 1521. Erasmus' attack against Luther, *De Libero Arbitrio* (1526), was designed to strike the Reformer where he was weakest and to give the Humanist a good reputation as a defender of the Faith.¹⁴ Luther thanked Erasmus in the conclusion of *Bondage of the Will*, commending the Humanist for attacking the jugular (*ipsum iugulum petisti*) rather than dealing with extraneous issues—the papacy, purgatory, indulgences.

Outline of *Bondage of the Will*

- I. Introduction (p. 62)
- II. Review of Erasmus' Preface (p. 66)
- III. Review of Erasmus' Introduction (p. 109)
- IV. Review of Erasmus' Arguments for "Free-will" (p. 137)
- V. Erasmus' Treatment of Texts (p. 190)
- VI. The Bible Doctrine of the Bondage of the Will (p. 273)
- VII. Conclusion (p. 319)

Luther's Language

Luther began by comparing Erasmus' work unfavorably to Melancthon's *Loci Communes* of 1521, which Luther was willing to canonize, "... whereas your book, by comparison, struck me as so worthless and poor that my heart went out to you for having defiled your lovely, brilliant flow of language with such vile stuff. I thought it outrageous to convey material of so low a quality in the trappings of such rare eloquence; it is like using gold or silver dishes to carry garden rubbish or dung."¹⁵ If such language seems strong, then we should remember that we have signed a *quia* subscription to Luther's Large Catechism, where we confess with him that pastors who despise the profit and power of God's Word should "not only have nothing given us to eat, but be driven out, being baited with dogs, and pelted with dung ..." (*Triglotta*, 571). Luther wrote to Erasmus: "You ooze Lucian from every pore; you swill Epicurus by the gallon."¹⁶ In response to Erasmus' deploring the loss of peace and attempting to heal the breach, Luther said, "Your intentions are of the best (at least, I think so); but the gouty foot laughs at your doctoring...why, you are attempting to quench fire with straw!"¹⁷ Other examples could be cited from throughout the book. The cause for Luther's sarcasm is revealed later:

But to dare to handle God's words in this way argues a mind that is notable for its contempt of both God and man and deserves no forbearance whatsoever.¹⁸

Many Lutherans claim to be shocked at such rebukes, even though Luther is dealing with public false doctrine, so neither the 8th Commandment nor Matthew 18 apply. Nor is Luther being "loveless," a popular term today.

Luther on Love

"Therefore, do not speak to me of love or friendship when anything is to be detracted from the Word or the faith; for we are told that not love but the Word brings eternal life, God's grace, and all heavenly treasures."¹⁹

"In matters concerning faith we must be invincible, unbending, and very stubborn; indeed, if possible, harder than adamant. But in matters concerning love we should be softer and more pliant than any reed and leaf and should gladly accommodate ourselves to everything."²⁰

"Doctrine is our only light. It alone enlightens and directs us and shows us the way to heaven. If it is shaken in one quarter (*in una parte*), it will necessarily be shaken in its entirety (*in totum*). Where that happens, love cannot help us at all."²¹

"But this tender mercy is to be exercised only toward Christians and among Christians, for toward those who reject and persecute the Gospel we must act differently; here I am not permitted to let my love be merciful so as to tolerate and endure false doctrine. When faith and doctrine are concerned and endangered, neither love nor patience are in order. Then it is my duty to contend in earnest and not to yield a hairbreadth."²²

Authority and Perspicuity of the Scriptures

In *Bondage of the Will*, Luther is contending against a different spirit. Erasmus' *Freedom of the Will* is dangerous in its appealing language, use of human reason, and argumentation. If a group of Lutherans read only Erasmus' essay, many would be convinced, if not confused, because many of the texts cited are the hard sayings of the Bible.

Luther counters the Erasmian style two ways:

1. The authority of the Scriptures as the ruling norm (*norma normans*), judging all other authorities;
2. The perspicuity or clarity of the Scriptures.

Although Luther knew and used the church fathers, as well as a host of classical literary sources, he never allowed himself to be kidnapped by appeals to the authority of the Church, the church fathers, or consensus.

Erasmus wrote: **I gladly submit my judgment to these authorities in all that they lay down, whether I follow it or not.**²³

Luther wondered what the Church can settle when the Word of God has already settled it. Everyone is to judge the Church's decisions through the Word (1 Cor. 14:29). Erasmus would not only take away that command, making us subservient to human authority, but also give himself the freedom to dissent from the same human authority ... "whether I follow it or not." Luther correctly called Erasmus to account for his supercilious attitude and spirit of scepticism.

Luther: "The Holy Spirit is no Sceptic, and the things He has written in our hearts are not doubts or opinions, but assertions—surer and more certain than sense and life itself."²⁴

Perspicuity

The Romanists tried to subvert the Reformation by compiling Scriptural arguments for their positions.²⁵ They invented an early version of modern Biblical criticism by arguing for the ambiguity of the Scriptures, making the Word into a wax nose which they could shape into an infinite variety of forms. The same approach is found among "conservative" Lutherans today when they promote a new doctrine by saying, for instance, that the passages about women in authority over men are "gray areas of Scripture." Or they will argue for two contradictory interpretations of the same passage or doctrine, as in the Madison Settlement of the Norwegian Synod.²⁶

Luther's greatest contribution in *Bondage of the Will* is his insight about the perspicuity (or clarity) of the Scriptures, since much of today's confusion is caused by people saying, as Mormon missionaries did to me, "Every verse in the Bible is interpreted 100 different ways." I responded to the Mormons by saying, "Yes, that's true. Ninety-nine wrong ways and one right way. I hope you are not saying that God speaks to us in such a confused way that we cannot possibly know what He is trying to say." In this debate, Erasmus argued that some passages are "recondite" or obscure, quoting Romans 11:33 and Isaiah 40:13. Luther asked:

For what solemn truth can the Scriptures still be concealing, now that the seals are broken, the stone rolled away from the door of the tomb, and that greatest of all mysteries brought to light—that Christ, God's Son, became man, that God is Three in One, that Christ suffered for us, and will reign for ever? And are not these things known and sung in our streets?²⁷

Some passages used by Luther in support of the clarity of the Scriptures are:

1. All things that are written are written for our instruction. Romans 15:4.
2. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for instruction. 2 Timothy 3:16.
3. Their sound has gone into all lands. Psalm 19:4.

The perspicuity of Scripture is twofold, internal and external.

- A. No one who lacks the Holy Spirit can understand a speck of the Scriptures (internal).
- B. Nothing is left obscure or ambiguous (external). For instance, Scripture is not incomprehensible, but the mind of God is (Isa. 40). However, Christians do know what God has given us (1 Cor. 2:12). The problem is not with the Scriptures but with our ignorance.²⁸

The spirits can therefore be tried by a double-judgment:

- A. One is able to judge all doctrines because of the work of the Holy Spirit (internal). "The spiritual man judges all things, but he himself is judged by no man" (1 Cor. 2:15).

- B. The doctrines of all men are judged for the benefit and salvation of others. “This judgment is the province of the public ministry of the Word and the external office, and is the **special concern of teachers and preachers of the Word.**”²⁹ How little we see of Luther’s concept today, when false teachers are promoted in the name of “being able to separate the wheat from the chaff” and “spoiling the Egyptians,” when Christ clearly teaches us in Matthew 7 that figs do not grow on thistles, and when our confessions say:

Dr. Luther, who, above others, certainly understood the true and proper meaning of the Augsburg Confession, and who constantly remained steadfast thereto till his end, and defended it, shortly before his death repeated his faith concerning this article with great zeal in his last Confession, where he writes thus: “I rate as one concoction, namely, as Sacramentarians and fanatics, which they also are, all who will not believe that the Lord’s bread in the Supper is His true natural body, which the godless or Judas received with the mouth, as well as did St. Peter and all [other] saints; he who will not believe this (I say) should let me alone, and hope for no fellowship with me; this is not going to be altered [thus my opinion stands, which I am not going to change].”³⁰

Difficult Passages Explained by Luther

Once both the authority and perspicuity of Scriptures are established, the efforts of Erasmus to invent a free-will are easily dismissed.

Deuteronomy 30:19

Erasmus contended that God’s command to choose proved the existence of free-will. Luther argued (158) that the Law illuminates the blindness of reason. “By the Law is knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). All the “big concordances” put together would only show (with their examples of imperatives) what man **should** do, not what he **can do** with a free-will.³¹ Moses commands in this passage; he does not say “You have the power to do this.” Erasmus claimed that the bound will of Luther was analogous to a man having his right arm bound, his left hand free, told there was wine on his right and poison on his left to drink. Luther responded:

But the Scripture sets before us a man who is not only bound, wretched, captive, sick and dead, but who, through the operation of Satan his lord, adds to his other miseries that of blindness, so that he believes himself to be free, happy, possessed of liberty and ability, whole and alive. Satan knows that if men knew their own misery he could keep no man in his kingdom; God could not fail at once to pity and succor wretchedness that knew itself and cried to Him, for God is proclaimed with mighty praise throughout the Scripture as being near to the brokenhearted. (Isaiah 61)³²

Matthew 23:37

Erasmus argued that Jesus would not have lamented over Jerusalem unless He knew they had free-will. “If you didst not wish us to hearken to the prophets, why didst thou send them?”³³ Here Erasmus is confusing the issue by addressing the mysterious will of God. “It belongs to the same God Incarnate to weep, lament, and groan over the perdition of the ungodly, though that will of Majesty purposely leaves and reprobates some to perish. Nor is it for us to ask why He does so, but to stand in awe of God, who can do, and wills to do, such things.”³⁴

“If” passages prove nothing about free-will. “If Caesar conquers Turkey, he will gain the kingdom of Syria; therefore, Caesar can and does conquer Turkey!”³⁵ Erasmus is not informed by reason, but blinded by reason, so that his arguments either make a hash out of the Scriptures or are destroyed by the passages he cites. Luther: “It has pleased God not to give the Spirit without the Word, but through the Word; that He might have us as workers together with Him, we sounding forth without what He alone breathes within wheresoever He will. This He could do without the Word; but He will not.”³⁶

Exodus 9:12 (Pharaoh’s heart)

Luther: “Did not the Holy Ghost know a little rhetoric, there would be some risk that He would break down before such a skillfully acted display of contempt, and despair of His cause, and yield the palm to ‘free-will’ before battle begins!”³⁷ Erasmus thought that Pharaoh’s heart was hardened by his “long-suffering.”

Erasmus: “As by the same sun mud is hardened and wax melted; as after the same rain tilled ground bears fruit, and untilled ground thorns; so by the same long-suffering of God some are hardened and others converted.”³⁸

The hardening which God accomplishes is described by Luther in a passage which is especially clear and edifying. The ungodly man is like Satan, wholly turned in on himself, not seeking God, not loving God. He wants his own riches, glory, and works, and “wants to enjoy it in peace.”³⁹ He is still a creature of God, but he cannot tolerate anyone getting in the way of what he wants.

This is precisely the rage which the world shows against the gospel of God. By the gospel there comes that stronger One, to vanquish him who keeps his palace in peace; and He condemns those desires of glory, wealth, wisdom, righteousness of one’s own, and all the things in which the world trusts. This very galling of the ungodly, as God says and does to them the reverse of what they wanted, is the hardening and embittering of them. As of themselves they are turned away from God by the very corruption of their nature, so their antipathy greatly increases and they grow far worse as their course away from God meets with opposition or reversal. Thus, when God purposed to deprive ungodly Pharaoh of his kingdom, he galled and hardened him, and brought bitterness to his heart, by falling upon him through the word of Moses, who seemed about to take away his kingdom and deliver the people from under his dominion. He did not give Pharaoh the Spirit within, but allowed his own ungodly corruption, under Satan’s sway, to blaze with anger, to swell with pride, to boil with rage and to advance along the path of scornful recklessness.

Let none think, when God is said to harden or work evil in us (for hardening is working evil) that he does it by, as it were, creating fresh evil in us, as you might imagine an ill-disposed innkeeper, a bad man himself, pouring and mixing poison into a vessel that was not bad, while the vessel itself does nothing, but is merely the recipient, or passive vehicle, of the mixer’s own ill will...David spoke in this way of Shimei, in the second book of Kings: “Let him curse, for God hath bidden him to curse.” (2 Samuel 16:10)⁴⁰

Malachi 1:2-3 (Esau have I hated); Romans 9:12

After calling St. Jerome, a Father of the Church, “dull, sleepy-headed, supercilious, and sacrilegious,” Luther used Erasmus’ example of “Esau have I hated” to show that no free-will can be found in the Old Testament or New Testament references. Jacob attained his role not by free-will but by the gracious mercy of God.⁴¹ “How did free-will help Jacob, or harm Esau, when before either was born or had done anything it was already determined by the foreknowledge and predestination of God what the portion of each should be—that is, that the one should serve and the other rule? The rewards were decided before the workers set to work, or were even born!”⁴²

The Holy Spirit Working Through the Law: Thunderbolts

Luther still has the power to speak to us today, not to confuse us by quibbling about the Word of God, but through his unique ability to bring out the full force of the law and the contrasting comfort of the gospel.

This office of the Law the New Testament retains and urges, as St. Paul, Romans 1:18, does, saying, “The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Again, 3:19, “All the world is guilty before God. No man is righteous before Him.” And Christ says, John 16:8, “The Holy Ghost will reprove the world of sin.”

This, then, is the thunderbolt of God by which He strikes in a heap [hurls to the ground] both manifest sinners and false saints [hypocrites], and suffers no one to be in the right [declares no one righteous], but drives them all together to terror and despair. This is the hammer, as Jeremiah says, 23:29: Is not My Word like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? This is not *activa contritio* or manufactured repentance, but *passiva contritio* [torture

of conscience], true sorrow of heart, suffering and sensation of death. Smalcald Articles, III. Of Repentance.⁴³

Luther used the “universal dominion of sin” in Romans 3:9ff to disprove free-will in his conclusion to *Bondage of the Will*.⁴⁴ Erasmus asked, “If we can do nothing, what is the purpose of all the laws, precepts, threats, and promises?”⁴⁵ Luther answered (as we also find in Walther’s *Law and Gospel*) that the law “displays disease, sin, evil, death, hell and the wrath of God.” The law does not help man or heal him. “It [the law] is content merely to point them out.”

Another light is needed to reveal a remedy. This is the voice of the gospel, which displays Christ as the Deliverer from all these evil things. But neither reason nor “free-will” points to Him; how could reason point to Him, when it is itself darkness and needs the light of the Law to show it its own sickness, which by its own light it fails to see, and thinks is sound health?⁴⁶

The purpose of the law is not to prove “free-will” but to lead us to Christ, as St. Paul shows us in Galatians 3:19ff. Furthermore, “the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ disproves ‘free-will,’ as shown in Romans 3:21-26.” This is a “thunderbolt,” because St. Paul divides all people into two groups, those who believe and those who do not believe in Christ. The righteousness of God is given to believers, but everything is sin when done by unbelievers. Since justification is not accomplished through free-will, free-will must be a sin.⁴⁷ Works are completely irrelevant to man’s righteousness before God, so there is no place for the moralism and works-righteousness of Erasmus.⁴⁸ Nothing in St. Paul argues for free-will, and the first chapter of the Gospel of John also destroys the concept. The three groups in John 1:12-13 are defined by Luther as:

1. Born not of blood (Jewish people who expected to be in the Kingdom because of being children of Abraham);
2. The will of the flesh (carnal men without the Spirit);
3. The will of man (the efforts of all men, in the law or without the law).⁴⁹

All believers are born “of God,” made believers by the power of the Holy Spirit in the Word preached and spoken and the visible Word of baptism. Not the wisest of men could understand, for Nicodemus did not, that the Son of God must be lifted up.⁵⁰ The wrath of God abides on all unbelievers (John 3:36), so we cannot shoehorn free-will into God’s plan of salvation. Salvation must be given “from above” (John 3:27). Therefore, the doctrine of the unfree-will is the greatest possible comfort.⁵¹

Influence upon Lutheran Justification

The clarity of Luther’s thought is lost today in much of the talk about justification. When we speak of monergism, it means that the Holy Spirit brings about contrition through the law and faith through the gospel, God alone working and accomplishing His will (Isaiah 55:8-11). Faith is sustained and good works prompted by the Holy Spirit continuing to work in law and the gospel. The use of a distinction between “objective justification” and “subjective justification,” though well intentioned, has led to statements which cannot be borne by the Scriptures or Confessions. The most obvious example is the Kokomo Statements of the Wisconsin Synod, although similar thoughts may be found elsewhere, not necessarily determined by the use of two types of justification, objective and subjective.⁵²

WELS, Kokomo Statements, 1979⁵³

“Objectively speaking, without any reference to an individual sinner’s attitude toward Christ’s sacrifice, purely on the basis of God’s verdict, every sinner, whether he knows it or not, whether he believes it or not, has received the status of saint” (J. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, 103).

“After Christ’s intervention and through Christ’s intervention God regards all sinners as guilt-free saints” (J. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, 107).

“When God reconciled the world to Himself through Christ, He individually pronounced forgiveness to each individual sinner whether that sinner ever comes to faith or not” (J. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, 109)

“At the time of the resurrection of Christ, God looked down in hell and declared Judas, the people destroyed in the flood, and all the ungodly, innocent, not guilty, and forgiven of all sin and gave unto them the status of saints” (Pastor Charles Papenfuss)⁵⁴

Confusion

Two matters seem to be confused. First of all, this relatively new term “objective justification” not only includes Christ’s universal atonement in the Kokomo Statements, but also goes beyond the meaning of the atonement by claiming that people receive forgiveness without the law causing contrition, without the gospel at work in the Means of Grace, and without faith. Secondly, instead of clarifying the doctrine of justification with two terms (objective and subjective justification), the statements merge the two concepts together at the expense of justification by faith.

Sometimes the term “objective justification” is used as a synonym for the atonement of Christ, as an antidote to the limited atonement taught by John Calvin. We must always stress that Christ paid for the sins of the world when He died on the cross, because the cross continues to be our source of comfort throughout life. The term may also be attractive to some because we base our salvation upon the objective Word of God, not our feelings.⁵⁵

When justification is used in the New Testament, the context is “justification by faith.” The same is true of the Book of Concord, which never uses the term “objective justification.”⁵⁶ We must guard against the false concept “in view of faith,” which also began correctly (saved in view of the merits of Christ apprehended by faith, but truncated to “in view of faith,” another matter, in the Pontopidan catechism). Faith is the empty hand which receives the gospel promises. We trust that God has declared us righteous because of the cross. The monergism of *The Bondage of the Will* naturally supports the concept of faith merely receiving what God has done in Christ, as opposed to faith being a quality or work which earns salvation. The gospel demands faith and the gospel provides faith, as taught in *Law and Gospel*: “... the Gospel, when demanding faith, offers and gives us faith in that very demand.”⁵⁷

Luther on Justification by Faith

In reviewing my collection of 340 Luther quotations, I find two basic statements, always in conjunction with each other. The first is the objective reality of what God has done for us in Christ. The second is a statement of how it means nothing unless we receive this treasure in faith.

In like manner Moses must precede and teach people to feel their sins in order that grace may be sweet and welcome to them. Therefore all is in vain, however friendly and lovely Christ may be pictured, if man is not first humbled by a knowledge of himself and he possesses no longing for Christ, as Mary’s Song says, ‘The hungry he hath filled with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away,’ Luke 1:53.⁵⁸

The apostle says “our,” “our sins,” not his own sin, not the sins of unbelievers. Purification is not for, and cannot profit, him who does not believe. Nor did Christ effect the cleansing by our free-will, our reason or power, our works, our contrition or repentance, these all being worthless in the sight of God; he effects it by himself. And how? By taking our sins upon himself on the holy cross, as Isaiah 53:6 tells us.⁵⁹

Christ is speaking here not of the word of the law, but of the Gospel, which is a discourse about Christ, who died for our sins, etc. For God did not wish to impart Christ to the world in any other way; he had to embody him in the Word and thus distributed him, and presented him to everybody; otherwise Christ would have existed for himself alone and remained unknown to us; he would have thus died for himself. But since the Word places before us Christ, it thus places us before Him who has triumphed over death, sin, and Satan. Therefore, he who grasps and retains Christ, has thus also eternal deliverance from death. Consequently it is a Word of life, and it is true, that whoever keeps the Word shall never see death.⁶⁰

To this incline your ears, and be persuaded that God speaks through men and forgives you your sins; this, of course, requires faith.⁶¹

If I do not believe it, I will not receive its benefits; but that neither renders it false nor proves that anything is lacking in Christ.⁶²

It is a faithful saying that Christ has accomplished everything, has removed sin and overcome every enemy, so that through Him we are lords over all things. But the treasure lies yet in one pile; it is not yet distributed nor invested. Consequently, if we are to possess it, the

Holy Spirit must come and teach our hearts to believe and say: I, too, am one of those who are to have this treasure. When we feel that God has thus helped us and given the treasure to us, everything goes well, and it cannot be otherwise than that man's heart rejoices in God and lifts itself up, saying: Dear Father, if it is Thy will to show toward me such great love and faithfulness, which I cannot fully fathom, then will I also love Thee with all my heart and be joyful, and cheerfully do what pleases Thee. Thus, the heart does not now look at God with evil eyes, does not imagine He will cast us into hell, as it did before the Holy Spirit came....⁶³

Christ did indeed suffer for the whole world; but how many are there who believe and cherish this fact? Therefore, although the work of redemption itself has been accomplished, it still cannot help and benefit a man unless he believes it and experiences its saving power in his heart.⁶⁴

The Book of Concord

This faith, encouraging and consoling in these fears, receives remission of sins, justifies and quickens. For this consolation is a new and spiritual life [a new birth and a new life]. These things are plain and clear, and can be understood by the pious, and have testimonies of the Church [as is to be seen in the conversion of Paul and Augustine]. The adversaries nowhere can say how the Holy Ghost is given. They imagine that the Sacraments confer the Holy Ghost *ex opere operato*, without a good emotion in the recipient, as though, indeed, the gift of the Holy Ghost were an idle matter.

Article IV, Justification, Apology of the Augsburg Confession⁶⁵

Now, that faith signifies, not only a knowledge of the history, but such faith as assents to the promise, Paul plainly testifies when says, Romans 4:16: "Therefore it is of faith, to the end the promise might be sure." For he judges that the promise cannot be received unless by faith. Wherefore he puts them together as things that belong to one another, and connects promise and faith.

Article IV, Justification, Apology of the Augsburg Confession⁶⁶

But outside of this Christian Church, where the Gospel is not, there is no forgiveness, as also there can be no holiness [sanctification]. Therefore all who seek and wish to merit holiness [sanctification], not through the Gospel and forgiveness of sin, but by their works, have expelled and severed themselves [from this Church].

The Large Catechism, The Creed, Article III, #56⁶⁷

Conclusion

Erasmus mounted a clever assault against Luther by erecting a foundation of human reason which sits in judgment over the Word of God (magisterial use of reason).⁶⁸ We may wish that Erasmus might have used his God-given abilities, his stature as a scholar, and his friendship with the pope to encourage the Reformation. In fact, he did. By going for the throat in his debate with Luther, Erasmus unwittingly prompted the publication of Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, a work which is clearly reflected in the Smalcald Articles and mentioned by name in the Formula of Concord. No other theological work defines so well the monergism of God against all the false teachers. *The Bondage of the Will* is somewhat difficult, but well worth the effort for laity and pastors to read, study, and use as a reference work. The book is embedded in our Confessions. Is it also embedded in our daily confession of faith?

Practical Applications of Luther's Work

Studying *The Bondage of the Will* can benefit us in many ways, so I hope that this brief treatment of it will encourage many to read and reread the Reformer's polemic against Erasmus. Knowledge of sound doctrine is the most practical skill we can have, as pastors and lay leaders, since God works only through the Word, which is His only method of softening hardened hearts, converting, justifying, and sanctifying. I recommend *The Bondage of the Will* for:

- λ Showing how to argue forcefully from the Scriptures as our sole authority;
- λ Explaining the perspicuity of the Scriptures as an antidote to slick reasoning;

- λ Revealing the wrong use of reason in Erasmus' thought, a common if not universal malady in Reformed works today;
- λ Teaching the comfort of predestination while guiding us through the minefield of "free-will," Calvin's double predestination, and the most dangerous of all, synergism;
- λ Giving a foundation of monergism, God working alone, to make us more discerning about false and misleading descriptions of justification;
- λ Instructing how to teach the hard sayings of the Bible, especially in dealing with the nature of evil, Satan, and our fallen nature.

If we study Luther's sermons and his other works as a normal part of our work, and not just as an annual obligation for a Reformation service, then we will agree with his statement:

Thus too, if our confidence is to begin, and we become strengthened and comforted, we must well learn the voice of our Shepherd, and let all other voices go, who only lead us astray, and chase and drive us hither and thither. We must hear and grasp only that article which presents Christ to us in the most friendly and comforting manner possible. So that we can say with all confidence: My Lord Jesus Christ is truly the only Shepherd, and I, alas, the lost sheep, which has strayed into the wilderness, and I am anxious and fearful, and would gladly be good, and have a gracious God and peace of conscience, but here I am told that He is as anxious for me as I am for Him.⁶⁹

May God help us daily in hearing our Shepherd's voice and following Him. Amen.

NOTES

¹ Luther's letter to Capito, July 9, 1537, cited in Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer, O. R. Johnson, Westwood: Fleming Revell, 1957, 40. Hereafter cited as *Bondage*.

² E. Clifford Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975, 313-25. I have a copy of C. F. W. Walther, "The Doctrine Concerning Election, Presented in Questions and Answers, From the Eleventh Article of the Formula of Concord," trans. J. Humberger, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1881.

³ "Thus the Lutheran Church not only admits, but zealously guards, the mystery contained in the doctrine of grace and election. It distinguishes between God in as far as He is known and not known; in as far as He has revealed Himself, and in as far as He is still hidden to us, but as we shall learn to know Him hereafter. The truths which may be known concerning God are contained in the Gospel, revealed in the Bible. The things still hidden from us include the unsearchable judgments of God, His wonderful ways with men, and, in particular, the question why some are saved while others are lost. God has not seen fit to reveal these mysteries" (F. Bente, *Concordia Triglotta, Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1921, 206. Hereafter cited as Bente.).

⁴ "In the Formula of Concord, Article XI is closely related to most of the other articles, particularly to Article I, Of Original Sin, and Article II, Of Free-will and Conversion. Election is to conversion what the concave side of a lens is to the convex. Both correspond to each other in every particular. What God does for and in man when He converts, justifies, sanctifies, preserves, and finally glorifies him, He has in eternity resolved to do—that is one way in which eternal election may be defined. Synergists and Calvinists, however, have always maintained that the Second Article is in a hopeless conflict with the Eleventh. But the truth is, the Second fully confirms and corroborates the Eleventh, and vice versa; for both maintain the *sola gratia* as well as the *universalis gratia*" (Bente 203).

⁵ "Both articles [I, Of Original Sin, and II, Of Free-will and Conversion] teach that in every respect grace alone is the cause of our conversion and salvation, and that this grace is not confined to some men only, but is a grace for all. Both teach that man, though contributing absolutely nothing to his conversion and salvation, is nevertheless the sole cause of his own damnation. Both disavow Calvinism, which denies the universality of grace. Both reject Synergism, which corrupts grace by

teaching a cooperation of man towards his own conversion and salvation. Teaching, therefore, as they do, the same truths, both articles will and must ever stand and fall together” (Bente 203).

⁶ The Wisconsin Synod defended Walther in the midst of the election controversy. The Ohio Synod (merged into the ALC of 1930, The ALC of 1960, and ELCA of 1987), broke with Missouri. The Norwegian Synod broke with Missouri in 1883, which “paved the way” for the formation of the ELS in 1917, when the minority rejected the Madison Settlement allowing two contradictory doctrines to exist side by side. The Anti-Missourian Brotherhood of the Norwegian Synod built St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, in 1886. Supporters of Walther included such leaders as Herman A. Preus, Ulrik Koren, Jacob Ottesen, and Johannes Ylvisaker.

⁷ “Calvin and his adherents boldly rejected the universality of God’s grace, of Christ’s redemption, and of the Spirit’s efficacious operation through the means of grace, and taught that, in the last analysis, also the eternal doom of the damned was solely due to an absolute decree of divine reprobation (in their estimation the logical complement of election), and this at the very time when they pretended adherence to the *Augsburg Confession* and were making heavy inroads into Lutheran territory with their doctrine concerning the Lord’s Supper and the person of Christ,—which in itself was sufficient reason for a public discussion and determined resentment of their absolute predestinarianism” (Bente 195f.).

⁸ Barth’s concept—the Bible contains the Word of God without being the Word of God—became the position of Fuller Theological Seminary, which was founded to teach the inerrancy of the Bible.

⁹ *Luther: Right or Wrong?*, New York: Newman Press, 1969 *and* Minneapolis: Augsburg.

¹⁰ Cited in *Bondage*, 137.

¹¹ 1536. Luther said, “This is the identical theology of Erasmus, nor can there be anything more opposed to our doctrine.”

¹² Bente 129.

¹³ One formula, which may help people, is this: Pelagians believe man can save himself; semi-Pelagians teach that man must add works to earn the salvation which God has begun in him (Roman Catholic; *gratia infusa*, infused grace; *fides formata*, faith formed by good works); synergists hold that man cooperates in salvation, that God has done something in Christ, therefore man must do something (believe, make a decision for Christ, give one’s life to the Lord) to complete the transaction), often associated with a covenant (transaction between two sides). The Reformed make sanctification a cause of justification (Hoenecke’s *Dogmatik*, III, 253) and thus turn Christ into Moses, Moses into Christ.

¹⁴ Erasmus responded to Luther’s work by publishing *Hyperaspistes Liber I* in 1526 and *Liber II* in 1527. Melancthon changed his *Loci* and the Augsburg Confession later, to eliminate or downplay differences with his friend John Calvin.

¹⁵ *Bondage* 63.

¹⁶ *Bondage* 74.

¹⁷ *Bondage* 92. Luther’s humor is evident throughout his work, scandalizing the humorless but entertaining most readers. When Erasmus condescended to argue only from Scripture and then quoted the fathers selectively, Luther noted, “You have broken our agreement,” and listed Augustine as a father in complete disagreement with Erasmus. By omitting Augustine, of course, Erasmus made his case seem especially weak and disingenuous.

¹⁸ *Bondage* 186.

¹⁹ *What Luther Says, An Anthology*, 3 vols., ed., Ewald Plass, St. Louis: Concordia, 1959, III, 1411f. Ephesians 6:10-17.

²⁰ *What Luther Says*, I, 412f. Galatians 2:8.

²¹ *What Luther Says*, I, 414. Galatians 5:10.

²² *What Luther Says*, II, 637f.

²³ *Bondage* 69.

²⁴ *Bondage* 60.

²⁵ “The method of debate on the part of the papalists is far different now than it was at the time of Eck, Emser, and others like them. These men did not refuse to fight with us with the weapons of the Scripture. Pighius, however, has perceived that this arrangement has done the papal kingdom more

harm than good. Therefore he has shown a different and shorter way by which, provided they stuck to it, they could obtain practically anything without trouble. It consists in this that they bring together every oratorical device and then declaim loudly about the shortness, the incompleteness, the insufficiency, ambiguity, and obscurity of the Scripture and strenuously fight for the necessity, authority, perfection, certainty, and clarity of the unwritten traditions” (Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, trans., Fred Kramer, St. Louis: Concordia, 1971, I, 71.

²⁶ The Madison Settlement combined two contradictory views of justification, both the correct one and the new doctrine “in view of faith” (T. Aaberg, *A City Set on a Hill*). The new doctrine began as a minority position and later became the majority position. More important was the attitude of indifference which the settlement promoted. Much later, Bishop David Preus (TALC) wrote to me that communion with the Reformed was not a problem because “we only disagree about the mode of His presence.” Note the recent articles in *Christian News* about the ELCA/Episcopal/Reformed altar and pulpit fellowship declarations. In July, the Wisconsin Synod, which works with ELCA and the LCMS in the areas of worship, evangelism, and leadership training, sponsored a worship conference at Carthage College, inviting a Roman Catholic, an Episcopalian, an ELCA member, several LCMS pastors, and five WELS women to teach WELS pastors and laity about how to worship. (Nelson, *The Lutherans in North America*, 322.)

²⁷ Bondage 71.

²⁸ Bondage 72f. The Arians deny the Trinity. Is it the fault of the Scriptures?

²⁹ Bondage 125. Emphasis added.

³⁰ Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article VII, Lord’s Supper, 33, *Concordia Triglotta*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1921, 983. Tappert, 575. Francis Pieper, in “The Difference between Orthodox and Heterodox Churches,” reminds us that those who deny baptismal regeneration and the Real Presence must cross out literally hundreds of passages in the Bible, making God a liar. It takes nine lies to cover up one lie, so the Reformed must constantly strive to deny Biblical truths, whenever they write.

³¹ Bondage 159.

³² Bondage 162.

³³ Bondage 175.

³⁴ Bondage 176.

³⁵ Bondage 181.

³⁶ It is good to remember Hoenecke’s epigram — “The Word never without the Spirit; the Spirit never without the Word. That is sound doctrine” (*Dogmatik*, IV, 17). The Enthusiasts (all non-Lutherans) separate the Word from the Spirit, cannot determine the how of conversion, and conjure up for themselves the monster of uncertainty.

³⁷ Bondage 190.

³⁸ Bondage 199.

³⁹ Bondage 205.

⁴⁰ Bondage 206. Luther’s analogy (204) portrays a man riding on a bad horse. His riding compares with how many good legs the horse has. The rest of the horses in the company ride well because they have good legs. Nothing can change this unless the lame horse is healed.

⁴¹ Bondage 224.

⁴² Bondage. Erasmus also claimed that God does not love or hate as we do. Luther agreed, saying that we love and hate inconstantly! This is a good little joke, because Erasmus wanted to soften the passage, while Luther only makes it a clearer example of the majesty of God (225f.).

⁴³ *Concordia Triglotta*, 479.

⁴⁴ Bondage 278.

⁴⁵ Bondage 287.

⁴⁶ Bondage 287.

⁴⁷ Bondage 290.

⁴⁸ Bondage 295.

⁴⁹ Bondage 303.

⁵⁰ Bondage 306.

⁵¹ Bondage 313.

⁵² Hoenecke, *Evangelische-Lutherische Dogmatik*, Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1909-12, trans. John Drickamer, (justification in Schleiermacher): “That means simply that conversion is the consciousness of being reconciled through the life-fellowship with Christ, and justification is the blessed consciousness of that.” Schleiermacher influenced Barth, who trained the Fuller Seminary leaders. More significantly, Schleiermacher influenced all modern “neo” theologians.

⁵³ A controversy arose at Faith Lutheran (WELS) in Kokomo, Indiana. The congregation accepted the four statements drawn up by Pastor Charles Papenfuss. Professor Armin Panning and a panel supported the statements at the district level. Circuit Pastor Al Siggelkow (now a seminary professor) backed the statement. The district president announced the case closed in 1981. The membership of two couples was terminated. Professor Sig Becker supported the action and accused the couples of false doctrine in a paper he gave to the Chicago Pastoral Conference, November 9, 1982. Becker used the term “universal justification,” which one finds in WELS literature, in spite of the confusion necessarily caused.

⁵⁴ Kurt Marquart wrote: “Terminology like ‘universal justification’ can also be abused, and therefore one must keep clearly in mind certain distinctions and explanations and to avoid one-sided overstatements (e.g. ‘all the damned in hell receive the status of pure, forgiven saints and children of God’!)” “Justification — Objective and Subjective: A Translation of the Doctrinal Essay Read at the First Convention of the Synodical Conference in 1872,” Ft. Wayne: Concordia Seminary Press, 1982. David Valleskey uses the term “universal justification” in *We Believe, Therefore We Speak*, 71. I heard one pastor say that “objective justification” made mission work easy because one could say to any person, “Your sins are already forgiven.” Luther said that if we use the gospel without the law, the individual will look at us the way a cow looks at a newly painted fence.

⁵⁵ I used objective and subjective justification in this way in *Catholic, Lutheran, Protestant*. Both terms are found in the English translation of Pieper’s *Dogmatics*.

⁵⁶ Ken Schurb, “Does the Lutheran Confessions’ Emphasis on Subjective Justification Mitigate Their Teaching on Objective Justification?” Ft. Wayne: Concordia Seminary Press, n.d. Schurb finds “all are justified—in those precise syllables” in the Smalcald Articles, II, I, 3, *Triglotta*, 461. E. Plass (*What Luther Says*) finds objective justification in the Fifth Petition, Lord’s Prayer, Large Catechism, *Triglotta*, 723.

⁵⁷ Walther’s *Law and Gospel*, 15.

⁵⁸ *Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed., John Nicholas Lenker, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, II, 149. Matthew 15:21-28; Luke 1:53.

⁵⁹ *Sermons of Martin Luther*, VI, 180. Hebrews 1:1-12; 1:3.

⁶⁰ *Sermons of Martin Luther*, II, 177. John 8:46-59.

⁶¹ *Sermons of Martin Luther*, II, 200.

⁶² *Sermons of Martin Luther*, II, 258. Easter, Third Sermon. Mark 16:1-8.

⁶³ *Sermons of Martin Luther*, III, 279. Pentecost Sunday. John 14:23-31.

⁶⁴ *What Luther Says, An Anthology*, 3 vols., ed., Ewald Plass, St. Louis: Concordia, 1959, II, 705f.

⁶⁵ *Concordia Triglotta*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1921, 139. Tappert, 115.

⁶⁶ *Concordia Triglotta*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1921, 135. Tappert, 114. Romans 4:16.

⁶⁷ *Concordia Triglotta*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1921, 693. Tappert, 418.

⁶⁸ Siegbert Becker’s *The Foolishness of God*, Northwestern Publishing House, is an outstanding treatment of Luther’s concept of proper (ministerial) versus improper (magisterial) use of reason with the Scriptures.

⁶⁹ *Sermons of Martin Luther*, 8 vols., ed., John Nicholas Lenker, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, IV, 86. Third Sunday after Trinity, Second Sermon, Luke 15:1-10.

PRAYER IS THE CHRISTIAN’S VITAL BREATH

Encouraging Spontaneity in Prayer

For and With One Another.*

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Prayer is certainly one of the great privileges and blessings that God has given us through Christ Jesus our Lord. Through the reconciliation bought by Jesus' blood, we have the privilege to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). Prayer is part of the gift of eternal life that we can enjoy right now while in this world of sin. Through Jesus, we can walk and talk with our Heavenly Father in prayer.

Prayer is a tremendous blessing, but most of us do not enjoy this blessing to its fullest. We can all relate to the sentiments expressed in the hymn, "Oh, what peace we often forfeit, / Oh, what needless pain we bear, / All because we do not carry / Ev'rything to God in prayer" (TLH 457).

Ask yourself a few questions:

- * Do you feel your prayer life is what it should or could be?
- * Do you pray fervently and daily for mission prospects?
- * Do you bring all the troubles in the church to the Lord for resolution instead of worrying and getting frustrated by them?
- * Do you give thought and preparation to all the prayers you use in the worship service?
- * Do you feel you are spontaneous in your praying?
- * Do you feel your prayer life is lacking?

We have a lot of room for growth and encouragement in the area of praying. Some have an admirable gift to be able to express their thoughts freely in extemporaneous prayers. That in itself doesn't mean that they are good pray-ers, however. They may be lacking in other respects of prayer. We are sinners who have many weaknesses. We do need strength and encouragement to make full use of the blessing of prayer.

Where Do We Find Encouragement?

Prayer is a very popular topic these days. We seem to be getting a lot of encouragement to pray from many sources. If you go into a Christian book store you may find dozens of books that focus on prayer, and there are new ones coming out all the time. Even in the secular world you will find a new interest in prayer.

The Encouragement from the World

Somewhat surprisingly, doctors, who have in general always taken a naturalistic approach to medicine and to life, are now becoming more interested and involved with prayer. We are told that "more and more medical schools are adding courses on holistic and alternative medicine with titles like, 'Caring for the Soul.'"¹ Most of the major magazines have had articles in the past few years on prayer. Most recently I have read articles in *Reader's Digest* and *Time* magazines. The import of most of these articles is that new medical research indicates there is some benefit in prayer. Prayer can heal!

These articles might be viewed by some as encouragement to pray. When you read some of the articles, however, you soon realize that this is simply another onslaught of Satan filling our country with idols, not a resurgence of faith and prayer in the true God. This becomes very clear in the *Time* magazine article which highlights Eetla Soracco of New Mexico as one of the 20 faith healers who participated in a study of the effects of prayer on AIDS patients. Soracco, we read, is "an Estonian-born 'healer' who draws on Christian, Buddhist and Native American traditions."² It is even more evident when the same article talks about prayer as being successful because of the placebo effect. People believe prayer will help and so it does. Therefore, in their opinion, prayer helps because of the belief of the individual, no matter what he believes, not because of an Almighty God that answers prayer. The article in the *Reader's Digest*, March 1996, "Does Prayer Heal?," is not much better.

Again the emphasis was on prayer itself, not on God, as if prayer itself has power. This is certainly not the type of encouragement we need.

The Encouragement from “Christian” writers

What about all the books in the religious book stores? Obviously I can't speak for all of them, but the majority of them are by Reformed writers. They typically place a very high priority on prayer. They talk very enthusiastically of the power of God to answer prayer. They often give a lot of examples of the wonders worked by God through prayer. They are all written to encourage prayer. The Reformed also seem to put that enthusiasm into practice. It may be refreshing to hear them talk freely about praying for all the needs in their life. We can be encouraged by their zeal in prayer. However, there is also a great danger in them. I read through one entitled *The Prayer Factor*, by Sammy Tippit, which was interesting and had several good reminders. But throughout the book he places prayer on a higher pedestal than the Word of God itself. He, as is true of most Reformed writers, considers prayer more important than anything else for the Christian life. They consider prayer to be a means of grace. Here are just a few quotes from *The Prayer Factor* to show this. On page 21 Tippit writes, “Prayer is an encounter with a holy God. It is coming into His presence — entering into fellowship and a relationship with Him. It is the means by which we get to know Him. Out of the personal, intimate knowledge of God the victory of Jesus flows through us and into the world around us” (emphasis added in all quotes). Prayer is a blessing and benefit that we enjoy from the fellowship that Christ has given us with God. It does not enable us to enter into fellowship and a relationship with God. And in no way is prayer “the means by which we get to know Him.” How can anyone possibly get to know God through prayer? Prayer is our opportunity to talk to God. It is made up of what is in our own mind and heart. We cannot get to know God by the thoughts and expressions of our own heart. If we rely on prayer to get to know God then we are going to be praying to a god of our own fabrication, not the true God of the Bible. As we have said many times, prayer is not a means of grace. Only by the Word of God can we get to know God. Only by the grace of God given through the Word and Sacraments can we enter into fellowship with God.

On page 27 Tippit quotes Leonard Ravenhill as saying, “The two prerequisites to successful Christian living are vision and passion, both of which are born in and maintained by prayer. The ministry of preaching is opened to few; the ministry of prayer — the highest ministry of all human offices — is open to all.”³ We can really begin to see the danger involved. These writers promote prayer above the Word of God. Prayer, not the Word, brings us into fellowship with God. Prayer, not the Word, gives us the vision and passion for the successful Christian life. In other words, we find out what the Christian life should be and receive the power to live it through prayer, not the Word. This kind of encouragement can only lead us farther away from God, as we follow our own hearts and minds, not closer to God. That is not the type of encouragement that we want or need.

At our recent CLC convention we were refreshed and invigorated by the reminder that we are a “Means of Grace Church.” That is one thing that makes us truly unique from most other denominations in the world today. It is through the Word and Sacraments that we are brought into fellowship with God by faith. It is through the Word and Sacraments that we get to know God and come closer to Him. It is through the Word and Sacraments that we receive the vision and passion for the Christian life. Prayer is a blessing God gives to His children as a result of the reconciliation in Christ. Prayer is a fruit of faith which the believer exercises by the power of the Holy Spirit. We do pray for wisdom, greater faith, and the Holy Spirit. God grants such prayers, but not apart from the Word. Therefore, the only true encouragement for prayer can be given by God in the means of grace

The Encouragement from God

Remember, prayer is not a means to become close to God; it is the result of being close to God. Therefore if we want to grow in our prayer life and become more spontaneous in praying, we must grow closer to God in faith through the means of grace. The natural result of a stronger faith will be that we will communicate more often and more freely with God.

When we recognize the reformed error of making prayer a means of grace we may even wonder about the hymn verse that was chosen for the title of this essay, “Prayer is the Christian's vital breath.” We may have more reason to wonder when we see that it was written by James Montgomery, a

Moravian Minister. (The Moravian church was first formed by the followers of John Hus, but later in England they were heavily influenced by Calvinism and other Reformed branches.) Can we say that prayer is the Christian's vital breath? That depends largely upon how we understand those words. If we think that prayer is our vital breath in the sense that prayer is necessary to give and sustain life, then that is making prayer a means of grace and is wrong. However, prayer could be understood as our vital breath in the sense that it is a vital part of our Christian life. Just as a body that is not breathing is dead, so a Christian who does not pray cannot be a true living Christian. The Apostle Paul describes believers as being those "who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:2). It is impossible for one who has become dependent upon God in faith for all things not to pray to his God. Francis Pieper talks about "the inseparable connection between the Christian life and prayer." He says, "As soon as a Christian has been justified by faith and thus has become God's child, he begins to commune with God. This personal conversing of the Christian with God is called prayer." Luther even compares prayer to the heartbeat of physical life which never stops as long as there is life.⁴ It is in this sense that the title of this essay is intended. Let us, therefore, turn to the pages of Scripture to see how vital prayer is, and be strengthened by God to pray.

God shows how vital prayer is

We get a good picture of how vital prayer is to our lives just by making a few general observations about the way the Bible speaks about prayer.

Look at how many words God uses to speak about prayer. There are 14 different Hebrew words and six different Greek words that are translated "pray" or "prayer" in our King James Bibles. The different thoughts expressed in these words add to our appreciation for the beauty and greatness of prayer. The different words range widely in meaning. Among them are: wish, desire, need, ask, beseech, beg, to entreat for mercy, bend or bow down, meditate, to smooth down or deprecate, song of praise, to call to one's side or aid, to enter, come near or in the presence of, to strike upon, to assail any one with petitions, to urge. These are all translated "pray." What depth there is in that common word! That is not even to mention all the other words that are not translated "pray," like: supplication, intercession, crying out, entreat, call upon the Lord, waiting upon the Lord, fall on one's face before the Lord, etc. We certainly get the picture that prayer is very important in the life of the believer and is used in many different ways and in many different situations.

We are also impressed with the importance of prayer when we see the multitude of examples of believers praying. A brief scan of the Bible came up with almost 700 passages that speak about prayer in some form or another, and I am sure that is by no means a complete listing. From the Garden of Eden to the Island of Patmos communication with God has been a vital part of the believer's life.

We can get an even better picture of the vital nature of prayer in the Christian life by looking at the life of Jesus. There was no one closer to God than His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. That fact showed itself in many ways, one of which was the way Jesus communicated with His Father through prayer. Jesus was the perfect, holy Son of God. He had the power of God. One might think that He would not need prayer as we do, yet, like no one else, Jesus prayed to His Father in heaven.

The gospels do not give a detailed account of all the times Jesus prayed or of what He prayed for, but they do give the picture that communicating with His Father was an integral part of His life. "Jesus **often** withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16). "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and **spent the night praying to God**" (Luke 6:12).

Jesus' example of constant prayer made the disciples feel that they were missing something. "One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, '**Lord, teach us to pray**, just as John taught his disciples'" (Luke 11:1). Jesus not only taught His disciples by His example but taught them many things about prayer. "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should **always pray and not give up**" (Luke 18:1).

Jesus prayed in private and also in public. Jesus prayed for himself, for God's Kingdom and for others: "After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: 'Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ... Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. ... I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word'" (John 17:1ff.). "Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them **and pray for them**" (Matt. 19:13).

Jesus seemed to find rest and strength through prayer. After a late night of healing, we read, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35).

Constant communication with His Father was certainly a vital part of Jesus’ life. It seems that, as the opposition and temptations grew, Jesus spent more time in “lonely places” praying. Jesus was more and more confronted with the worldly desires of the people and their lack of interest in a spiritual kingdom. When the people wanted to make Jesus their king and He was faced again with the temptation to forsake the way of the cross, Jesus sent all the people away, even His twelve disciples, and spent the night praying.

If prayer was so vital in the life of the almighty, sinless Son of God, how much more isn’t it a necessary, vital part of the lives of weak and sinful human beings?

God Encourages us through His Law and Gospel

Since prayer is a fruit of faith, then, like our faith, we need a proper application of the law and the gospel to truly encourage us to pray.

The Law

We will not pray to God as we ought and seek His strength if we do not see our great need for God. As long as we think that we can take care of things ourselves, or that we are strong enough, we are not going to pray as earnestly and fervently as God would have us pray.

In the days before the crucifixion Jesus tried to alert the disciples to what was going to happen. He told them many times, “The Son of Man is to be delivered up for crucifixion” (Matt. 26:2). On Maundy Thursday Jesus had warned His disciples of the great perils they would face that very night. He warned them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night” (Matt. 26:31). He told Peter plainly, “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times” (34). He told Peter, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31). They should have known that they were at a crisis point. They should have seen it as a time for fervent prayer. When they entered the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus urged them to “watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” But there is no indication that they uttered a single breath of prayer. Instead they slept. They still considered themselves as loyal, dependable, strong disciples. As Peter expressed in self-confidence, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble. ... Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’ And so said all the disciples” (Matt. 26:33,35). They did not know their weakness and vulnerability but foolishly mistook their good intentions for strength, and so did not pray. As a result they did fall prey to the attacks of Satan. It was only by God’s grace, and the prayer of Jesus, that they were saved and brought back to Jesus once again.

If we want to be encouraged to pray, we need first of all to be encouraged to gaze into the mirror of God’s law and see who and what we really are. There we see that we are weak and wretched sinners who have no spiritual strength of ourselves. We have no power of ourselves to resist temptation or to do the will of God. We need to realize the truth of Jesus words, “Without Me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

This is also true when it comes to every physical and worldly trouble. God wants us to be completely dependent upon Him for all things. There is nothing wrong with modern technology in and of itself. It is a great blessing that God has given us. However, we should be warned that it is very easy to become more dependent upon our technology than we are upon our God. If there is something wrong with us we may find ourselves turning to some new thing which has been shown to work, rather than turning to God and depending upon Him. The things we trust have changed, but the warning of Isaiah is still very fitting for us: “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but who do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the Lord!” (Isa. 31:1). In our day of advancement it is easy to think that we have all the answers. It is very easy to confess to be a Christian but live like a humanist, trusting in ourselves and in the power and wisdom of man. When that happens we will not pray fervently to God. If God wants to use some new technology to help us He will, but we need

to go to God first with all our needs. The more we dig into Scripture and see the nature of man and the power and glory of God the more we will be dependent upon Him, and pray to Him from the heart.

A literal translation of James 5:16b might read something like this: “The fervent begging of a righteous person avails much.” *Ενεργουμένη* describes a believer putting forth great energy in a most earnest, persevering pleading or begging (*δησις*). That type of prayer God says, “avails much,” (*πολυ ισχυει*). It forcefully prevails to be effective. We may pray with very nice sounding words, but our prayers often lack the fervent and desperate pleading that God says has great power to prevail.

The Apostle Paul finally learned to say, “I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:9-10). The more clearly we see our weakness and helplessness the more we will reach out and fervently beg for the power of God and we will receive it. Therefore we need the law of God and at times the heavy hand of God to bring us to our knees.

Some of the greatest examples of believers praying in the Bible are those who prayed out of a feeling of great need and despair. Think of Hannah. Hannah wanted a son. She had, no doubt, prayed often for a son. But when her despair became overwhelming because her husband’s second wife “provoked her severely, to make her miserable,” then Hannah went into the tabernacle of God and “prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish.” In her great need, Hannah “spoke in her heart” and “poured out her soul before the Lord” (1 Sam. 1:6,10,13,15). This is quite an example of the fervent begging that James spoke of. Her prayer did prevail before God and He gave her a son. Not only one son but four sons and two daughters.

The Gospel

If we want to be encouraged to pray, we need more than the law. The law cannot strengthen our faith or cause us to pray more. The law can only show us our own weakness, frailty, sinfulness and utter helplessness. That can only lead us to despair. Thankfully God has also given us the gospel to show us the greatness of our God in His grace. The gospel shows us the power and promise of God to answer our prayer. This is what gives us the true motivation and desire to pray. It is the knowledge of our own weakness together with God’s promise to hear and answer our prayer that leads us to a true dependence upon God which shows itself in daily prayer.

Jesus’ own disciples did not have an active prayer life while Jesus was still with them. They asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Yet, after three years, up to the time Jesus was crucified, the disciples still had “asked nothing in [Jesus’] name” (John 16:24). That night, Maundy Thursday, Jesus encouraged them to pray by giving many promises that God will hear and answer all their prayers in His name. He promised, “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24b). He said, “Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:13-14). And again, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7).

After Jesus’ ascension the apostles were given the faith to carry on a close communication with God. We read, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication ...” (Acts 1:14). The Apostle Paul also prayed fervently. He testifies to us, “Night and day we pray most earnestly” (1 Thess. 3:10). He says, “We constantly pray for you” (2 Thess. 1:11). Those apostles in turn encouraged other believers to pray by holding out the promises of God to answer their prayers. The Apostle Peter urges the scattered believers to live the life of God’s children and then reminds them, “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers” (1 Pet. 3:12). King David, a man after God’s own heart, showed how he turned to the Lord in prayer for all things in his many psalms. In Psalm 145 David praises God for many things also because “the Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth” (18).

All of these promises and assurances that God does hear and answer our prayers do strengthen our faith and encourage us to pray to the God who hears. But God gives us so much more than the bare promises. He gives us proof. From the beginning of scripture to the end God gives us one example after another of how His people prayed to Him and He came to their aid. It is quite

overwhelming to sit down and read through 20, small-typed pages, with one passage after another, gleaned from Scripture, where God's people called upon Him, and He answered them with His power and help. God was truly there to help for whatever His people asked of Him. When Abraham's servant asked God to let him know which woman he should take to be Isaac's wife, "before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out ..." (Gen. 24:15). When Isaac prayed for his wife Rebekah who was barren, "the Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant" (Gen. 25:21). When God was determined to destroy his people for their wickedness and rebellion, Moses prayed to God. "Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened" (Exod. 32:14). When God said He would not go with the children of Israel, Moses pleaded again with God and God said, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken." Elijah prayed and a dead boy came to life. Hezekiah prayed to the Lord to save Jerusalem from king Sennacherib and 185,000 of Sennacherib's soldiers died in their sleep. On and on we read of the amazing answers that God gave to man's prayers. What a tremendous encouragement to pray to this great and gracious God.

God strengthens our faith and builds us up in prayer through His promises and His proof. God encourages us even more when He shows His power to help in our own lives. When we experience the power of God and see that truly He answers OUR prayers, we are filled with joy and praise and are encouraged to pray all the more, just like Hannah, who worshipped and praised God with great joy when He answered her prayer and gave her a son. At times we need to watch consciously for the answers of the Lord. At other times His answers are so powerful and immediate that we can't help but see them. I had such an experience a few months ago when a new-born baby was very ill and getting worse day by day. The doctors were losing hope of the child recovering. The Lord led me to come and talk with the mother and we prayed for her child. That very hour the Lord gave the child a remarkable, almost instant recovery. The Lord's powerful answer filled me with joy and praise and gave me greater encouragement to keep on praying.

Spontaneity in prayer

Our prayer life will improve as our faith is strengthened. When we see our great needs, and the power and promise of God to answer prayer, we will also become more spontaneous in prayer. But there are a few things that we might say specifically about spontaneity. Most believers one talks to express a desire to become more spontaneous in their praying. However, they have different areas in which they feel spontaneity is lacking.

When to Pray

Some may have difficulty in spontaneously praying at any time or in any place. They have certain set times of the day when they pray. It is a good thing to have set times when we pray every day. The Jews had set times during the day when everyone was to stop what they were doing, and go to the Temple to pray, or pray toward the Temple. Peter and John, we are told, "went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour" (Acts 3:1). Daniel always followed this custom: "In his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God" (Dan. 6:10). What a wonderful habit for all of us to follow.

We do not want to think of that as our only time to pray, however. God urges us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). Paul says to the young pastor Timothy, "I desire that the men pray everywhere" (1 Tim. 2:8). God wants us to live our lives in constant communication with Him. Wherever we are, and whatever we are doing, we can be thinking and conversing with our God. God would strengthen us in the faith so that, in every need that arises, we will call upon God; in every question that comes up, we will seek God's will; in every temptation that we face, we will cling to God for strength; in every time we enjoy the goodness and grace of God, we will thank the Lord in our hearts. That is the life of faith which is a life of prayer. That is what we want God to work in us through His word.

How to Pray

Others may feel a lack of spontaneity in how to pray. This may happen as a result of being taught only to pray with pre-written prayers. One may become so used to using these prayers that he

does not feel able to say his own prayers. When special situations arise he may be at a loss and feels as though he doesn't know how to pray. This can come from thinking that one has to find the right words to say. There is no set formula, style or posture to make prayers correct. God simply wants us to come to Him and pour out our hearts to Him out of faith in the name of Jesus. We should not feel hindered by not knowing how to pray but simply pour out our hearts to God. Hannah gives us a beautiful example. In her sorrow and distress she wept before the Lord. She spoke in her heart and her lips moved but nothing came out. We can't be sure if she was even expressing her thoughts always in logical sentences. But God certainly heard her and responded. We don't need to worry about how to pray because God says, "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear" (Isa. 65:24).

The feeling of not knowing how to pray can especially be a hindrance in praying with other people. Most people feel very uncomfortable praying out loud in front of other people. Even many close families never pray together except in using pre-written prayers. What a sad thing it is when our own self-consciousness deprives us of the blessing of coming together in prayer with our fellow believers and especially our loved ones. This may be a more difficult problem to overcome, but it is worth the effort. To some extent it is one of those things that the more we do it the more comfortable we will feel at it. But more, it is something to pray for. God can strengthen us to be more comfortable in praying together.

God encourages us to pray together by giving us so many wonderful examples of believers coming together to pray, and seeing the great blessings God gave them. You may have seen highway billboards that say, "The family that prays together, stays together." It is questionable if such a sign will do much good in our society. It does not direct people to pray to the only true God through Jesus. It gives the idea that if you simply pray your family will get along happily. However, to the family that knows the triune God, and does pray by faith in Jesus, the saying has a lot of truth. There is a great blessing that God gives to a family that comes together to pray. They grow together in faith because they remind each other that when there is any need they turn to God for help. They also come together to thank and praise God for His many blessings. Such thankfulness makes them all the more happy and content. God says, "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:4-5). A family that commits its way to the Lord in all things is certainly one that reads and discusses God's word together and prays together. God promises to give them the desires of their heart. One of those desires certainly is to have a happy, healthy family. The blessings far outweigh our fears. So turn to the Lord for strength to pray together. One of the best things you can do for your children is to pray together with them and have them say their own prayers with you. Teach them while they are young that they can pray together with others.

What to Pray for

Still others express a lack of spontaneity in what to pray for. Do you sometimes get into a rut of praying the same thing day after day? There is nothing wrong with praying the same thing every day. We have the same needs every day, and we certainly owe God our thanks and praise every day. Daniel prayed three times a day "and gave thanks before his God." We do not, however, want our prayers to be limited to the same thing day after day.

God urges, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6). God wants us to come to Him with every need. When we understand that God is the only one who can help in every situation we face in life, then whatever comes up we will "take it to the Lord in prayer."

The main thing is that we always want to pray for what is God's will. There is an interesting passage in Hebrews which says, "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission" (Heb. 5:7). Jesus always completely submitted Himself to the will of His Father. For that reason, God says His prayer was heard. We too want to be in perfect harmony with God's will and always pray according to His will. The only way we can know God's will and learn what to pray for is digging into the Word of God. That is where God reveals to us what His will is, and what we should pray for.

When we are not in tune to God's will, then our prayers will become predominantly for ourselves, or our immediate family. God, however, teaches us to "look out not only for [our] own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4). He teaches us: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John.13:34). "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves" (Rom. 12:10). "Serve one another in love" (Gal. 5:13). "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32). "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21). Therefore it is no big surprise that God also urges us to "pray for one another" (Jas. 5:16). Even stronger than that He urges us to "always keep on praying for all the saints" (Eph. 6:18). The more God strengthens our faith to look at others and care for them the way God would have, the more we will naturally pray for them and not just ourselves.

It may also be very helpful, due to our forgetful nature, to make a prayer list for ourselves. When you hear of someone or something that you want to pray for, write it down. Each day go through your list praying for everyone and everything on it.

We may also fall into the trap of praying mostly for our physical needs and little about our spiritual needs. That is not what we have learned from God. God says He cares about our physical needs. He invites us to "cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). But our physical needs should not be our greatest concern, or the main subject of our prayers. Jesus says not to worry about them, "for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" (Matt. 6:32). He will provide them. God also gives us the warning, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" (Jas. 4:3). When we are strengthened by God through His Word and Sacraments, we will see that our greatest needs are spiritual, and we will pray far more for our spiritual needs than our physical needs. Jesus gives us the proper proportion of spiritual to physical needs when He taught us to pray the Lord's prayer. He gave us six petitions having to do with our spiritual needs and only one for our physical needs. A good practice, in order to learn what to pray for, would be to take the Lord's Prayer and meditate and pray about each of the petitions. Then our prayers will certainly be in accord with God's will.

There is one more tremendous comfort that God gives us in regard to the question of what to pray for. No matter how strong in the faith God makes us we are still weak sinners. We do not always know what or how to pray. Take comfort in God's promise, "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:26-27).

Prayer in the Church

God said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isa. 56:7). Jesus restated that fact when the temple was being misused as a place of merchandising, and turned into a "den of robbers." God's house is a house of prayer. Have we kept it a house of prayer in our use? When you look at our worship services, prayer is certainly given a very high priority. We have at least five formal prayers in our public worship: the confession of sins, the collect, the general prayer, the Lord's Prayer and a closing prayer. In addition to these, many add an opening prayer; some close their sermon with a short prayer; many of our hymns are actually prayers; the psalm in preparation for worship is most often a prayer; plus, our whole liturgy is really in the form of prayer, calling upon God for mercy and offering our thanksgiving and praise. This certainly seems very much like a house of prayer. But are we really praying that much? No doubt some do pray earnestly in the worship service, but who of us can say that we go through a whole service in concentrated prayer? Don't we much more often find ourselves simply reciting or reading words? That is not prayer but vain repetition like the heathen.

We will never overcome this completely, for we are sinners; our powers of concentration are limited. Jesus' sacrifice paid for these sins also, which gives us great encouragement and strength. Are there some ways, though, that we can make it easier to be truly involved in the prayers in God's house? I will be the first to admit that I usually focus most of my time and attention on the sermon

when preparing for the Sunday service. I usually rely on the Lutheran Liturgy and the prayer book for the rest. When we read that the first disciples “all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication,” I do not picture the congregation sitting while a pastor reads a pre-written prayer. It is very difficult to concentrate on praying when simply reading a prayer. I am usually concentrating more on reading the prayer correctly than actually praying to our Father in heaven. Experience has shown that for many it is even more difficult to be involved in praying when you are listening to someone read a prayer. We could do much to enhance the involvement in the prayers in our church by giving thought and preparation to them as we do the sermon. The introit, collect, and gradual are intended, together with the readings and other prayers, to focus the service on a special thought or theme of that Sunday. However, with all the different pericopes in use how well do they tie things together? A little forethought and preparation could make our service more focused and easier to follow. We can also make the liturgy more meaningful with a few comments and explanations along the way. Little things can help people think about what they are saying and keep focused. I have come to appreciate greatly the liturgy we have; it is very meaningful and reverent. However, my appreciation for the liturgy did not come from many years of reciting it week after week, always the same. It came from thinking about it in the light of God’s word. If we take time to explain things as we go, introducing different parts of the liturgy, that could do a lot to keep it fresh and meaningful to the people.

Praying for and with each other:

Perhaps our greatest weakness in the area of prayer is in coming together to call upon the Lord. If we have weaknesses in our personal prayer life, that will also carry over and be magnified in our ability to pray together.

We seem to be so reluctant even to tell each other that we are praying for them. When our oldest son was born and had to stay in the hospital with some minor complications, I don’t recall anyone in the congregation telling us they were praying for us. They all cared very much and helped out a great deal, and I’m sure they were praying for us on their own, but they didn’t tell us about it. While many of our acquaintances from outside the church, people we really didn’t even know that well, told us often that they were praying for us. Telling someone that you are praying for them doesn’t make the prayer more effective, but it certainly is encouraging and comforting for them to know. The Apostle Paul mentions in most of his letters, “I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:16). Paul constantly prayed for all the congregations that he began and he often told them that he prayed for them and what he prayed about. That is not only a great encouragement, but also a great reminder to them of the constant need to turn to God for everything. God is the one to turn to for all things. Paul also asked the people, many times, to pray for him.

If we are so reluctant even to talk about praying for each other it is even less likely that we will join together in prayer. How often do we come together to pray? We do pray together in the public worship, but is that all? We have opportunities with our various meetings and classes. We may begin our council meetings and ladies’ meetings with a prayer, but how well do we use that time to lay out the troubles and needs of the congregation and earnestly pray about them together? Do our prayers at times give the impression it is more of a formality we do, than an earnest calling upon God for help?

This is not the picture we get of the early church. Read through the book of Acts again, giving special attention to the role of prayer in the church. We get a picture of a church where the believers looked to God for everything and as a result were active in prayer. When Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples, who had not prayed in Jesus name before, now “all joined together constantly in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers” (Acts 1:14). After Pentecost, when 3,000 souls were added to the church, “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). Again and again we read that they gathered together and prayed. The Apostles appointed seven deacons to help serve in the church so that the Apostles could devote themselves “continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).

From the greatest to the least, the church was a praying church. Whenever special needs arose, the believers gathered together to pray about it. And the Lord worked powerfully among them. The first time Peter and John were put in prison for speaking about Jesus, they were warned “not to speak

nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18), then they were let go. What was the first thing they did after they were released? They went and reported to their fellow believers all that the chief priests and elders had said to them, then “they raised their voice to God with one accord” (Acts 4:24). On a later occasion Herod threw Peter into prison with the intent to kill him. This was after he had already killed James the brother of John and he saw it had pleased the Jews. We read, “Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church” (Acts 12:5). In answer to their prayer, God sent an angel to free Peter from prison at night. When Peter was free, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, “where many were gathered together praying” (12). This was late at night. Peter had already been asleep in the prison but the believers were still gathered together praying.

What a tremendous thing it would be if our congregations would gather together in prayer as the early church did. Think of how much more we could accomplish if, instead of worry and getting frustrated about the troubles we have, we would come together in prayer to seek the power of God to overcome those troubles. The Lord has so many blessings and so much power to give us. Let us become more intent on calling upon Him. Jesus promises, “If two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven” (Matt. 18:19). The Apostle James tells us, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (Jas. 5:14-16). How many of us do this? If not, why not? What tremendous promises! Certainly such promises should motivate us to come together in prayer.

Concluding thoughts

Weakness in prayer is a result of weakness in faith. Do you want to grow in prayer? Pray for the Holy Spirit to fill you with His grace and power and allow you to see his holiness. Pray for the Spirit because Jesus promised that the “heavenly Father [will] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him” (Luke 11:13). After Peter and John were warned by the council not to speak or preach the name of Jesus, the disciples prayed. “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).

Pray for the Spirit, but also immerse yourself in the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments. That is where God comes to us and shows us His glory. That is where God will fill us with awe and faith and teach us to live a life of constant and fervent prayer. Moses was a man like us. He had some zeal to help his people, but when he failed he resigned himself to a quiet life in the wilderness. But when God revealed His glory to Moses, and came upon him, Moses became a great and mighty leader. Moses became a great man of prayer. Dig into the Word. That is where we will see the glory of the Lord. In the Word we come into His presence and are overwhelmed with His glorious power, holiness and grace. The grace and holiness of our God is truly magnificent. When we come face to face with God in His Word and see His magnificent holiness, we will be brought to our knees. There we will pray in humble submission. We will pray for mercy and forgiveness. We will fall before Him in adoration and praise. We will truly come to Him in meekness, seeking His grace and power for every need in life, not only for ourselves but for all people and especially for His Church.

NOTES

¹ “Faith Healing,” *Time*, June 24, 1996.

² “Faith Healing”

³ Leonard Ravenhill, *Why Revival Tarries* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1984), 23.

⁴ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, III, 76-77.

PANORAMA

ELCA/EPISCOPAL/REFORMED FULL-COMMUNION

Stephen C.F. Kurtzahn

The November 1996 issue of *The Lutheran*, an official publication of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), dealt with the subject of “ecumenism” in general, and “full communion” with several Reformed groups in particular. The ELCA’s 1997 Churchwide Assembly in Philadelphia will vote on “full-communion” with the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ. One wonders why the United Methodists were not included. Undoubtedly its conspicuous absence has more to do with church polity rather than doctrine. Much of this parallels the “Parvoo Agreement” that was signed in Trondheim, Norway on September 1, 1996, between most of the Lutheran state churches in the Nordic and Baltic countries and the Anglican churches of Great Britain and Ireland. A separate agreement will be signed with the Roman Catholic Church rescinding “some of the ‘mutual condemnations’ issued following the furor of the 16th century Reformation” (8). A common statement would also be made with the Roman Catholic Church on the central issue of justification by grace through faith. It is stated, however, that this action would not “involve ‘altar and pulpit fellowship’ or make the sharing of clergy possible” (8).

There are actually three proposals on the table right now. The ELCA/Episcopal proposal is entitled “*Concordat for Agreement.*” Among other things that our readers would find interesting, it would “temporarily suspend a restriction of the Episcopal Church that limits the pastoral office to those ordained by bishops in the line of ‘apostolic succession,’ thus allowing ELCA pastors to serve Episcopal congregations and Episcopal priests to serve Lutheran congregations” (11). It would “not insist that Episcopal ordinands subscribe to the Lutheran church’s ‘Augsburg Confession’” (11). It would “make provisions in the ELCA constitution and liturgies so that only bishops would ordain clergy” (11).

The proposal with the PC-USA, RCA and UCC is called “*A Common Calling.*” Among other things, it calls the churches to “recognize one another as churches in which the gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered according to God’s Word” (11). It would also “continue to recognize one another’s baptism and to encourage the sharing of the Lord’s Supper. Lutheran and Reformed churches believe that Christ is present in the Lord’s Supper, but some differences exist to understanding how Christ is present” (11).

The ELCA/Roman Catholic proposal is referred to as the “*Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.*” This document calls the two churches to agree that “our entire hope of justification and salvation rests on Jesus Christ and on the gospel whereby the good news of God’s merciful action in Christ is made known; we do not place our ultimate trust in anything other than God’s promise and saving work in Christ” (11). Notice how the wording is vague enough for almost anyone to agree with it.

The editor of *The Lutheran*, Edgar Trexler, embraces the idea of full communion wholeheartedly, as do the other writers in this issue. The old ecumenical watchwords are used throughout, like: “*The fragmentation of the Christian church has troubled believers for many years. Christians have long agreed that competing denominations and doctrines confuse unbelievers and slow the spread of the gospel*” (8). And in the editorial it is stated, “*The missionary urgency and opportunity have rarely been larger or more difficult. No one denomination can handle the task, and we can be more credible if we do it cooperatively rather than separately*” (58).

There has been a great deal of pulpit and altar sharing between these church bodies for several years. Most of us have probably witnessed Lutheran pastors and Roman Catholic priests sharing pulpits in our own communities. Some communities have had organizations called LARC since the early 1980s (Lutherans, Anglicans and Roman Catholics who conduct joint worship services regularly). This writer is personally aware of a joint Lutheran/Episcopal congregation in the Franklin/Murphy area of North Carolina. This issue of *The Lutheran* lists several others. Interestingly,

there is also at least one joint ELCA/Missouri Synod (LC-MS) congregation (United Lutheran Church of Manteca, CA).

What makes these present proposals significant, however, is the fact that a pastor from one denomination can be called and serve as a pastor in another denomination. For example, A UCC seminary graduate can be ordained and serve in the ELCA, and *vice versa*. In order for such a union to take place, the ELCA is removing the last vestiges of its Lutheranism: in particular, the ordination subscription to the Augsburg Confession, and the belief in the Real Presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper. From all outward appearances with the ELCA at least, Philip Melancthon and Ulrich Zwingli are finally getting their way. We would hope the ELCA would next rid itself of the name "Lutheran," so that people would no longer be deceived as to this organization's true nature.

Much is made in *The Lutheran* that the ELCA would not lose its "confessional" identity with full communion with the Reformed. "*Ecumenical activists say the churches would not give up key elements of denominational teaching and polity*" (8). "*The governance procedures, discipline and doctrine of each church involved in the proposals are carefully maintained*" (10).

We would beg to differ, however. All of these church groups have wholeheartedly embraced the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation. After one has reviewed the Braaten-Jenson *Christian Dogmatics* text of the ELCA, and after reading Smith and Leppien's *What's Going on Among the Lutherans?*, it is painfully obvious that the ELCA cares nothing for doctrine in our sense of the word, and one would have to seriously ask if the ELCA is even Christian anymore, much less Lutheran! It is at least deceptive and at most hypocritical on the part of one ELCA seminary president to state: "*With the Reformed churches, Lutheran worries center on theological authority, especially in the United Church of Christ (sic). To guard against doctrinal indifference, it would be helpful to insist that ongoing theological dialogue about differences be a requirement for full communion rather than a possibility for the future*" (17).

The words of Augustana VII are alluded to several times in this issue. The reason for using the phraseology over and over again is to show that the Reformed, Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches do indeed rightly preach the gospel and administer the sacraments, according to the ELCA. Augustana VII reads:

"Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered.

"And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. Eph. 4,5,6" (Triglot Concordia, 47).

We need to remember that their definition of "gospel" is much different from ours as confessional and orthodox Lutherans. Having rejected verbal inspiration and inerrancy many years ago, having denied the virgin birth and even resurrection of our Lord (if not officially, practically), the ELCA has also lost the true New Testament message of forensic justification by grace through faith in Christ. So the gospel of the Bible must be replaced with a different "gospel." The "gospel" for such liberal church groups is their "all-inclusiveness." It should be no surprise then that these denominations are going to such extremes as openly accepting gays and lesbians, even for their clergy. Full-communion fits very nicely with such a definition of "gospel." In connection with Augustana VII I would direct our readers to an interesting article on the subject in *LOGIA*, Volume V, Number 3, Holy Trinity 1996, entitled, "*The Church in AC VII: An Exegetical Overview*," by Randy Asbury.

In spite of *The Lutheran* editor's denial, "full communion" is just one step closer to the "super-church" many have been striving for during the last several decades. Is the next step union with Rome, and a bowing before the Antichrist in the Vatican? That time may come sooner rather than later. May our prayer be, however:

In these last days of sore distress
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness
That pure we keep, till life is spent,

BOOK REVIEWS

Biblical Interpretation: The Only Right Way, by David Kuske. Milwaukee: Northwestern, c1995. Paperback, 244 pages. \$11.99.

This volume by David Kuske, a professor at the theological seminary of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, grew out of his classroom notes on “The History and Practice of Biblical Hermeneutics.” We have been using Prof. Kuske’s notes, and now his book, as collateral reading in the hermeneutics course at Immanuel Lutheran College; and the students have expressed appreciation for the author’s high view of Scripture, his evangelical approach, and his ability to clarify difficult concepts. While the book is not as detailed as some other volumes on Biblical interpretation, it can be characterized as presenting the reader with *multum in parvo*.

Prof. Kuske surely shows himself to be an effective teacher. The chapters contain subheadings, text boxes with major points, charts which organize and relate items, and summary paragraphs. He takes nothing for granted, in that he employs a simple style of English, defines technical terms lucidly, and promotes understanding through apt illustrations. If, for example, you have had a hard time understanding what existentialism is all about, you may benefit from reading the author’s discussion of this philosophical approach. Notes, suggestions for additional reading, and bibliographies appear throughout the book. While there is no index, topics can generally be found quite readily by consulting the detailed table of contents at the beginning.

Not only pastors and teachers, but also persons who are not theologically trained should be able to use this book with profit. Prof. Kuske states: “In order to ‘guard the good deposit,’ each of our called pastors and teachers must be an interpreter who can be described ‘as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth’ (2 Timothy 2:15). It is equally important that every layperson understands the principles of proper interpretation and uses them in reading the Bible” (244). The book provides interesting and useful material for any Christian who takes God’s Word seriously. In fact, it is hard to put the volume down once you have started reading a chapter.

This reviewer agrees with the author in most matters of content and approach. Prof. Kuske’s substitution of the threefold term “historical-grammatical-scriptural” interpretation (113) for the traditional “grammatical-historical” is useful. While he does on occasion speak of the holy writers as “authors” of the books of the Bible, he manifests a correct understanding of verbal inspiration. (It might be better to reserve the term “author” for the Holy Spirit.)

In the section on textual criticism, Kuske urges that all of the ancient witnesses to the New Testament text be considered, and that those variants be chosen as original which appear to be the oldest and most widespread. Some readers may disagree with this approach, believing that this evaluation process was carried out already in the early, Greek-speaking church—with perhaps better materials than are available to us today—and that the traditional, ecclesiastical text of the New Testament is correct in most of its readings.

Relative to the typology of Scripture, the author holds to the narrow Marshian principle: namely, that something in the Old Testament may be regarded as a God-intended picture of something in the New Testament only if the Bible *explicitly* identifies it as a type. Some readers may prefer the approach of Patrick Fairbairn in his *Typology of Scripture*, which suggests that some types may be indicated by Scripture in a less direct fashion. For example, whenever the Bible indicates that the *whole* of something is typical, the exegete may then look for types in the individual *parts* of that whole. This more moderate approach to typology may not seem as “safe” as that of Bishop Marsh; but it has been adopted by a number of recent Lutheran scholars, such as George Lillegard and Raymond Surburg.

On page 128 of his volume, Prof. Kuske comments on the application of the doctrine of church fellowship to brethren who have become involved in false doctrine or practice. His discussion seems to reflect the differences between his synod and the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) on this subject. Since his remarks are rather brief and do not refer to the CLC directly, it would not be appropriate to attempt an analysis. Suffice it to say that the CLC *does* recognize a role for admonition in its dealings with brethren. For example, it has subscribed to the following statement: “We regard fraternal (in-fellowship)

admonition as a continuing function of Christian love among brethren in the exercise of their fellowship relations, also and particularly when there is concern that brethren may have strayed into error. . . . Such admonition directed to a sister church body and the response thereto play a proper role in ascertaining whether that synod has the status of weak brethren or whether it is causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of God's Word" ("CLC Theses and Antitheses on the Role of Admonition in the Termination of Fellowship with Church Bodies," revised by CLC Board of Doctrine, February 1, 1990).

But the CLC also affirms: "When it has been ascertained that a church body is causing (*tous poiountas*) divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of Holy Scripture, the directive to avoid is as binding as any word addressed to us by our Savior God in Holy Scripture. . . . Continuing in fellowship for any reason with those who are causing divisions and offenses exposes Christians to the dangerous leaven of error, which is contrary to the Lord's saving intent. Romans 16:17-18" (*ibid.*). The avoiding of those who have been recognized as causing divisions and offenses ought, therefore, not become a matter of human judgment as to whether or not admonition should continue for a longer time within the bonds of fellowship. The avoiding of recognized false teachers is, rather, a matter of simple obedience to the Lord's express will!

On the whole, this reviewer heartily recommends the reading of this volume by Kuske on Biblical interpretation. Bad hermeneutics cannot but produce bad exegesis and then bad doctrine. The author can help us avoid the many traps that Satan and our own fallen reason would set for us in our study of Holy Scripture.

— C. Kuehne

The Diary of a Missionary, by Ernst H. Wendland. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1996.
318 pages.

If someone is interested in getting an inside view of overseas mission work and, as Wendland says, its "agony and ecstasy," this is the book. Wendland covers his initial ten years (1962-1972) in Zambia and Malawi. While the vicissitudes of outreach in the third world are many, Wendland avers that it is the greatest calling in the world. As a diary would, he does not hesitate to lay bare his feelings in what he encountered: joy over the triumph of the gospel, sorrow in witnessing ones like Demas who chose to walk in the way of the world, consternation over the clash of cultures.

As one who spent twenty-one years in the dark continent seeking to dispel the darkness of sin with the light of the gospel, he gives his insights into such things as the application of indigenous principles. "I don't think we should emphasize total elimination of support from the mother church as much as we do. What's wrong with those who have so much continuing to share with those who have so little?" (135). "I've heard the argument that missionaries are called to a certain place for only a limited time. They must be ready to let the nationals take over as soon as possible, 'in keeping with the indigenous church policy.' This is sheer nonsense to me. How long does it take for a missionary to become established in a new field, become properly acquainted, learn the people and the language, and then train nationals to carry on what has been started? Sometimes it seems to me that projections and policies are formulated by people who don't know from personal experience what it really takes and what it means to establish a national church" (87). "I'm afraid that sometimes the idea of indigenization is pushed beyond its limits, stressing the absolute implementation of rules and regulations rather than the use of common sense" (166). Read this book of experience in the field to see if you think his views are noteworthy.

In his epilogue he reminds us, "Mission work is never static. This doesn't mean to say that the basic principles, which are founded upon God's Word, change. But the work always involves new situations, new challenges, and continued adaptations, which are to be entrusted to changing personnel and new leadership. To be sure, none of the work takes place without the Lord's constant direction and support. This fact had been impressed on us day after day" (315).

To God alone belongs the glory.

— David Koenig

Correction: Vol. 36, Dec. 1996, No. 4, page 31 — line 6 of the hymn stanza should read: "Let not **Your** good Spirit ..." EH.

