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Propter Absolutionem: Holy Absolution in the Theology of Martin Luther and Philipp Jacob Spener A Comparative Study

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PROPTER ABSOLUTIONEM: HOLY ABSOLUTION IN THE THEOLOGY
OF MARTIN LUTHER AND PHILIPP JACOB SPENER
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Theology

by

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For Helen, Daniel, Benjamin, Rebecca, and Elizabeth

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BSLK *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 7th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976)
- LTB Philipp Jacob Spener. *Schriften*. Edited by Erich Beyreuther. *Letzte Theologische Bedencken*. Vol. 1-3 (1711). Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1987.
- PD Philipp Jakob Spener. *Pia Desideria*. 2d ed. Edited by Kurt Aland. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter und Co., 1955.
- PDT Philipp Jakob Spener. *Pia Desideria*. Edited and translated by Theodore G. Tappert. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964.
- SL *D. Martin Luthers sämtliche Schriften*, Johann Georg Walch, ed.; re-edited and published in modern German, 23 vols. in 25 (St. Louis, 1880-1910).
- TB, I Philipp Jakob Spener. *Theologische Bedenken*. Vol. 1. Halle: Im Verlage des Weysenhauses, 1700.
- TB, II³ Philipp Jakob Spener. *Theologische Bedenken*. 3d ed. Vol. 2. Halle: Im Verlage des Weysenhauses, 1716.
- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke*. Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar, 1883-).
- WA Br *D. Martin Luthers Werke*. Briefwechsel (Weimar, 1930-1978).
- WA Tr *D. Martin Luthers Werke*. Tischreden (Weimar, 1912-1921).

INTRODUCTION

In the context of Lutheran theology much attention has been given to Luther's confession of the sacraments, specifically Holy Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar. And for good reason: for Luther the certainty of salvation (*Heilsgewissheit*) rested upon the certainty of the Lord who was there (*extra nos*) "for us" (*pro nobis*). The sacraments are the sure locatedness of this Lord and his giving out the gifts he says he is there giving out. Luther did not permit anything to erode this certainty. He thereby did not allow the "living voice of the Gospel," (*the viva vox evangelii*) which bestowed life and salvation, to be silenced. This *viva vox* for Luther comes from the mouth of the one who proclaimed, both from the pulpit and *privatim*: "I absolve you." This is indeed how the absolution was confessed in the *Confessio Augustana* (especially in articles 11, 12 and 25), which confesses joyfully the blessings which confession and absolution bestow and notably places these articles between Holy Baptism (AC 9), the Lord's Supper (AC 10) and the proper use of the sacraments (AC 13). The reason is unequivocal: in absolution the words of Christ have their locatedness as they do in the sacrament of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are to be found in the mouth of the

father confessor. Luther himself, therefore, consistently pointed not only to the absolution which the sacraments distribute, but to the *viva vox Christi*, who in the absolution proclaimed and distributed *pro me* the forgiveness of sins. He remained near to this voice his entire life.

One might indeed venture to say that that which is called the "Reformational discovery" is in itself the fruit of Luther's evangelical confession (*Bekenntnis*) of confession (*Beichte*) and absolution.¹ Indulgences, after all, assaulted the one place where Luther thought one could find hope that God will accept the sinner: in confession and absolution. *Sacrosancti salvatori*, the Jubilee Indulgence of Leo X, thus assaulted the very heart of Luther's sole source of consolation in the midst of his *Anfechtungen*: repentance

¹This is indeed what Theodor Kliefoth, "Die Beichte und Absolution," *Liturgische Abhandlungen* (Schwerin: Verlag der Stiller'schen HofBuchhandlung, 1865), argues when he writes, "Die lutherische Reformation -- kann man sagen -- ist aus dem Artikel von der Beichte und Absolution herausgeboren, denn innerlich ward Luther zum Reformator in jener Stunde gemacht, als jener Mönch ihn in der Zelle, 'mit der heiligen Absolution tröstete', und äußerlich hub sie ja mit der Bekämpfung des päpstlichen Ablasses an." Kliefoth, 255. Indeed, Kliefoth can go as far as saying that the Reformation was fundamentally a restoration of confession and absolution. Kliefoth, 125. See also Fred L. Precht, "Changing Theologies of Private and Public Confession and Absolution" (Th.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1965), 73. Precht refers to Melancthon's judgment of Luther's contribution to the subject of penance in WA 8, 311, 31-34: "So du fragist, was nutz Luther der kirchen than hat, das hastu hie ynn der summa. Er hat eyn rechte weyß der puß geleret und antzeygt den rechten brauch der sacrament: das betzeugen myr vieler gewissen." Cf. Emil Fischer, *Zur Geschichte der evangelischen Beichte*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Dieterisch'sche Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1902), 1.

which expresses itself in confession as a reflection of his *humilitas*. No repentance, no confession, no absolution. When Luther thus challenged the sale of these indulgences, he did so because they displaced the necessary contrite confession upon which alone the priest was able to speak the words of absolution. As he therefore held to his *theologia crucis*, Luther saw in contrition and the absolution which followed that which may in no circumstances be obscured or silenced. Indeed, the Ninety-Five Theses made clear that no one may abrogate this basis for absolution, and thereby repackage the sacrament of penance in any other form. According to Luther, the sale of indulgences distorted and ultimately precluded that the penitent could be given the absolution which Christ, with his words, has placed in the mouth of the priest as the location of forgiveness for the church. Yet moving beyond *contritio*, Luther looked to faith in the words of absolution themselves as the certain *locus* of forgiveness. For there where the *verba Christi* are proclaimed, there certain forgiveness has been given. Luther never tired of connecting absolution with the Gospel, Christ, the Sacraments, and the sermon. In consequence, he was compelled to argue against the duress with which the Roman church commanded confession as a matter of law. Nor did he regard the words of absolution to be limited to the mouth of the priest, but as Christ's gift to the church; the Gospel was to be heard everywhere, certainly also in the mouth of the

Christian brother and neighbor. As Gospel and gift, confession and absolution, specifically absolution as the chief part, could not be forced nor limited. For grace is resistable, and the absolution is indeed grace, Christ, given to faith. Luther thus extolled absolution which is given to the penitent who has confessed his sin *privatim*. And it is this particular *locus*, that is, Luther's confession of absolution as the *verba Christi*, spoken *in statu Christi* to the penitent who has made his confession, which calls for further examination.

The approach to Luther's theological development which will be taken here is a chronological one. This is in no small part due to the character of Luther's writings themselves, many of which are occasional in nature and therefore inherently reflect Luther's theological development. It is therefore imperative that the time of writing and the occasion of a quotation must always be taken into account. What becomes evident in following such a chronological approach is that we are then learning him all the way through and may be kept from selecting pieces which fit into a preconceived pattern. Indeed, any such shortened attempt at presenting Luther as definitive wherever and whenever he uttered a statement regarding Holy Absolution ultimately leads to the creation of a theology of the author writing about Luther, but scarcely a theology of

Lutheranism.² Here the attempt will be made to trace Luther's thought as it develops on the basis of whole documents rather than individual statements in isolation, finally noting when a line of development actually comes to full fruition.³ This study will also be done with respect for the major phases in the reformer's work, spanning the years 1514 - 1537. Luther's early years as a professor of theology to the Diet of Worms will be examined extensively, since

²See Helmar Junghans, "The Center of Luther's Theology," translated by Gerald S. Krispin, in *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel*, edited by Gerald S. Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Dearborn: The Nagel Fest-schrift Committee, 1990), 180-181. See also Bernhard Lohse, "Die Privatbeichte bei Luther," chap. in *Evangelium in der Geschichte*, ed. by Leif Grane, Bernd Moeller, and Otto Hermann Pesch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 365. Lohse discusses terms such as faith and contrition in Luther and goes on to warn against the isolation of such references. "Isoliert man seine Aussagen über die Absolution, so gewinnen diese einen ganz anderen Sinn, ja können sogar total mißverstanden werden."

³An instructive alternative approach is one presented by Ingmar Öberg, *Himmelrikets Nycklar och Kyrklig Bot i Luthers Teologi 1517-1537* [The Keys of Heaven and the Repentance of the Church in Luther's Theology 1517-1537] (Uppsala: Appelbergs Boktryckeri, 1970). Öberg organizes his major analysis of Luther's thought on the basis of subjects, such as the *Beichtzwang*, for example, and then attempts to trace Luther's thought on that subject through-out his writings from the earliest to the last. Öberg's approach is ultimately governed by the scope of his writing, which is to present in as comprehensive a manner as possible Luther's teaching about the Keys. See Öberg, 203. The present study, which seeks to trace Luther's teaching about Holy Absolution specifically, is therefore much more focused in scope. The methodology employed here therefore seems better suited for an accurate reflection upon the data and the presentation of Luther's development and thought about Holy Absolution specifically. For a review of earlier approaches to the study of Luther's teaching on Private Confession, see Öberg, 200-203.

this was clearly the most fluid and formative period in Luther's theological development; the next period sees Luther apply his "reformational discovery" to the ordering and defining of Holy Absolution in the church. This will also include the controversy at Nuremberg which sprang from Osiander's desire to abolish general confession, and will culminate with Luther's own confession of Holy Absolution in the Smalcald Articles. The procedure which will first be followed will provide the historical context of Luther's thought on the subject of absolution and will secondly provide an examination of the major documents in each period outlined above along with a summary analysis of the isolated references made by Luther in various writings which deal with absolution that are contemporaneous.

Although Luther himself remained close to the words of absolution as the *verba Christi et enim viva vox evangelii pro me*, the doctrinal and political struggles of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reflect a marked shift in the approach to confession and absolution, especially with the rise of pietistic thought. As will be discussed below, a number of radical proposals were voiced which ultimately sought to dispense with the private confession on the grounds of the manifold abuses which surrounded the *Beichtstuhl*. But along with the dissatisfaction with the *Beichtstuhl* and the renewed *Beichtzwang* which had grown out of the *Glaubensverhör* of the sixteenth century came

disquietude with the manner in which Holy Absolution was given out. As one follows Holy Absolution in this way it may be possible to discern a subtle theological shift in emphasis within the Lutheran churches of Germany. At the forefront of this new emphasis within the Lutheran church stood the universally acknowledged father of German Pietism, Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705). Spener, in response to the abstractions of Orthodox Lutheran scholasticism, expressed his desire for a practical and personal Christianity in his *Pia Desideria* of 1675. As a Lutheran pastor, Spener also indubitably heard confession and delivered the absolution with the words which had been given him in the formulations of the *Beichtformel* as found in the Small Catechism and which had been used since the time of Luther. Primary evidence is provided by the various church agendas.⁴ Spener therefore had in his hands a well developed evangelical doctrine of confession and absolution with the writings of Luther and the orthodox theologians of the

⁴Some insight into these agendas is given by Georg Eduard Steitz, *Die Privatbeichte und Privatabsolution der Lutherischen Kirche aus den Quellen des XVI. Jahrhunderts, hauptsächlich aus Luthers Schriften und den alten Kirchenordnungen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Verlag von Karl Theodor Völker, 1854), 105-164. See also the comprehensive and much cited Emil Sehling, *Die Evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16. Jahrhunderts*, vols. 1-5 (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1902-1913), vols. 6-12 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1955-1963). Cf. Laurentius Klein, OSB, *Evangelisch-Lutherische Beichte* (Paderborn: Verlag Bonifacius, 1961), 174-176, who there provides a list of where private confession took place in the 16th century. See also Ernst Bezzel, *Frei zum Eingeständnis: Geschichte und Praxis der evangelischen Einzelbeichte* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1982), 82-158. Here he makes extensive reference to the church agendas of the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both of which he quotes in his deliberations about private confession in general and Holy Absolution specifically. That is not to say that Spener was either in agreement or satisfied with this teaching. On the basis of his manifold writings it becomes possible to outline his attempt at practical and theological reform of confession and absolution.

The impetus which brought to a head many of his writings on the subject of confession in general and Holy Absolution in particular was provided by the *Beichtstuhlstreit* which began in Berlin in 1696, although the subject of reform of the *Beichtstuhl* had occupied him as early as 1666. What will be examined in the second part of this study is Spener's pastoral approach and the emphases which he places upon repentance as a basis for confession and specifically for Holy Absolution. What requires careful evaluation is Spener's manner of dealing with Holy Absolution in particular. What requires further clarification is Spener's emphasis (as Luther) upon the *extra nos* certainty of the *verba Christi* which are given to faith and the simultaneous emphasis he places upon the *in nobis* apprehension of that forgiveness by true repentance and its verification by the fruits of faith. With this latter emphasis there exists the very real possibility that the subtle shift away from the centrality of the certainty of forgiveness in Holy Absolution, which was so dominant

with Luther and in the confessional writings of the Lutheran church, begins with Spener's teaching on confession and absolution. This possibility certainly warrants investigation.

What indeed does become clear is that in the decades following Spener's work and influence, the auricular confession of sins *privatim* as being *coram deo* disappears in favor of a general confession and absolution in the Lutheran church, as does its consequent and unqualified absolution *in statu Christi*. It therefore goes without saying that there is a need to study and compare Luther and Spener on the subject of Holy Absolution, how they applied it to the situation of the *Beichtstuhl* in their day, and finally to trace their respective legacy on this point as men who sought to be faithful to the Gospel of the Lord.

PART I

MARTIN LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF HOLY ABSOLUTION

CHAPTER I

LUTHER'S EARLY THEOLOGY OF HOLY ABSOLUTION 1514-1517

According to Hermann Sasse, the eleventh century saw the priesthood of the Western church endowed with new powers in the practice of confession and absolution. What had been the intercession of the priest for the sinner (a practice which Sasse notes had satisfied the church for a thousand years) became an absolution in an exhibitivite, declarative form.¹ Yet this declared and exhibitivite absolution was also constrained by the contingencies of the penitential system, which ultimately was founded upon the *in nobis* disposition of contrition, confession, and satisfaction. The teachings of Peter Lombard² and the devotional writings of Bernard of

¹Hermann Sasse, *This is My Body*, revised ed. (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977), 13. Cf. Theodor Kliefoth, *Liturgische Abhandlungen: Die Beichte und Absolution* (Schwerin: Verlag der Stiller'schen Hof-Buchhandlung, 1865), 235-238 who helpfully traces the development of the priestly absolution from the earlier epideictic to its later exhibitivite form. See also Albrecht Peters, "Buße - Beichte - Schuldvergebung," *Kerygma und Dogma* 28 (1982): 57-58. Cf. Ingemar Öberg, *Himmelrikets Nycklar och kyrklig Bot i Luthers Teologi 1517-1537* (Uppsala: Appelbergs Boktryckeri AB, 1970), 205.

²Under the influence of Peter Lombard the number of sacraments had been set at seven. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 210. Cf. BSLK, 259, n. 1.

Clairvaux³ had laid the ground-work for the extensive resolutions of the General Council of Florence (1439),⁴ which in turn expanded upon the decrees of Lateran IV.⁵ The resolutions of this council served to canonize the theological presuppositions upon which the demand was based for the exhaustive confession which was to be made at least once a year.

Quartum sacramentum est POENITENTIA, cuius *quasi materia* sunt actus poenitentis . . . prima est cordis contritio;

³It was Bernard of Clairvaux (b. 1091) and his disciple Nicholas who had enumerated the seven steps of penance: "the knowledge of oneself; repentance; sorrow; oral confession; mortification of the flesh; correction [or satisfaction] by a work; perseverance." These seven steps became the devotional backbone of the sacrament of penance, especially among pious monks. Pelikan, 210.

⁴With respect to the sacrament of penance, the General Council of Florence followed Lombard in demanding *contrito cordis, confessio oris* (before the father confessor), and *satisfactio operis*. The absolution itself was to include the declarative words: "*Ego te absolvo.*" Karl Heussi, *Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1909), 252. Cf. Josef Neuner, S.J. and Heinrich Roos, S.J., *The Teachings of the Catholic Church*, edited by Karl Rahner, S.J., translated by Geoffrey Stevens (New York: Mercier Press, 1967), 307.

⁵Among the resolutions of the IV Lateran Council (1215) was Canon 21, which made confession before a priest obligatory. The priests were understood to be necessary judges of the authenticity of the contrition, and the dispensers of the punishment in satisfaction. They therefore came to occupy the role of mediators of grace in the absolution and executors of the *poena* for temporal satisfaction. In other words, at Lateran IV the priests were imbued with the power to judge not only upon the sin committed, but also charged to explore the sincerity of contrition, the comprehensiveness of the confession, and to determine the nature and extent of the punishment which befitted the sins committed and confessed. Heussi, 231. Cf. Laurentius Klein, *Evangelisch-lutherische Beichte, Leben und Praxis* (Paderborn: Bonifacius Verlag, 1961), 18; 71.

ad quam pertinet, ut doleat de peccato commissio, cum proposito non peccandi de cetero. Secunda est oris confessio: ad quam pertinet, ut peccator omnia peccata, quorum memoriam habet, suo sacerdoti confitetur integraliter. Tertia est satisfactio pro peccatis secundum arbitrium sacerdotis, quae quidem praecipue fit per orationem, ieiunium et eleemosynam. *Forma* huius sacramenti sunt verba absolutionis, quae sacerdos profert, cum dicit: Ego te absolvo etc., et *minister* . . . est sacerdos . . . *Effectus* huius sacramenti est absolutio a peccatis.⁶

As will be shown below, a tension between the *in nobis* demands of *contrition*, *confession* and *satisfaction* (*materia*), with the *extra nos* elements of *form* (i.e. the absolution),⁷ *minister*, and the *effect* of the sacrament of penance will develop for Martin Luther as he struggles to be

⁶Denzinger, 699. "The fourth sacrament is penance, of which as it were the *matter* consists of the actions of the penitent which are in *three parts*. The first of these is *contrition* of heart, **which consists of sorrow for sin committed and the intention not to sin in the future**. The second is oral *confession*, whereby the sinner confesses to the priest **all the sins he remembers in their entirety**. The third is *satisfaction* for sins according to the judgment of the priest, **which is mainly achieved by prayer, fasting and almsdeeds**. The *form* of this sacrament is the words of absolution spoken by the priest when he says: I absolve thee etc. . . . The *minister* of this sacrament is the priest who has the authority either ordinary or by commission from his superior, to absolve. The *effect* of this sacrament is absolution from sins" (emphasis, not italics, added). *Decree for the Armenians*, as translated in Neuner, 308. Cf. the historical summary and theological presuppositions contained in the terms *contritio*, *attritio*, *satisfactio* by Holsten Fagerberg and Hans Jorissen, "Penance and Confession," translated by James L. Schaaf, in *Confessing One Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 234-237. See also Walter Uhsadel, *Evangelische Beichte in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus-Gerd Mohn, 1961), 16-17. Cf. Öberg, 232-233 for a further explanation of the key terms above. How thoroughly Aristotelian these definitions are is all too clear.

⁷See p. 28, n. 42 below.

certain of the forgiveness of sins. As a consequence Luther will focus exclusively on one or the other of the two parts of the sacrament of penance outlined in the above decree during these early years. This is doubtless consistent with the nature of most of Luther's writings, which are usually occasional and focused in nature. To follow him thus closely and specifically is indeed the only possible way of working through the various and at times incompatible approaches which are evident as we proceed from one work to another.

Thus, for example, the *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* clearly approaches the sacrament of penance exclusively on the basis of the first part of the Florentine canon.⁸ At issue is contrition, confession, and satisfaction. Conversely, writings such as his *Sermon vom Sakrament der Buße* from the same year focus exclusively on the second part of that canon, the absolution, who gives it, and its effect. What will become clear is that Luther does not mingle the two, the consequence of which will be the eventual disposal of all that is grounded anthropocentrically from the confessional.

⁸This is not to say that Luther has this specific canon in mind as an organizational principle. All that can be said is that the two elements, the *in nobis* preparation of man in the sacrament of penance on the one hand, and the *extra nos* character of the absolution on the other, lend themselves to such a division. It is a division in the way of Aristotle's *materia* and *forma* in which Luther was well schooled.

Luther's Longing For a Gracious God

As an Observant Augustinian Luther occupied the confessional not only dutifully, but with the hope that here he could find the gracious God whom he had longed for upon entering the monastery.⁹ But it was precisely the way of confession which was to prove at once a dead end and a new beginning for Luther. For on the one hand the confessional was Luther's sole source of consolation in the midst of his *Anfechtungen*.¹⁰ And yet the absolution, though declared by the father confessor, was necessarily contingent upon the integrity and comprehensiveness of the confession and the subsequent fulfillment of all penance. Ultimately true *contritio*, complete confession of all sins, and dutiful satisfaction was the condition for sure salvation.¹¹ Monks

⁹For a clear description of Luther's confessional practice in his early years in the monastery, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Sein Weg zur Reformation* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1981), 74-76.

¹⁰In his 8th Invocavit Sermon upon his return from the Wartburg, Luther writes: "Aber dennoch wil ich mir die hymliche beicht nimalts lassen nemen und wolt sie nit umb der gantzen welt schatz geben. Dann ich weyß was trost und stercke sie mir gegeben hat: es weiß nimants was sie vermag denn wer mit dem teüffel oft und vil gefochten hat. Ja ich were langst vom teüffel erwürgt, wenn mich nit die beichte erhalten hett." WA 10 III, 61, 13 - 62, 2.

¹¹Peter Manns' provides a most helpful description of the confessional practice which Luther encountered and the attendant uncertainties which flowed out of *attritio* as a sufficient disposition for the forgiveness of sins. Manns explains that Luther rejected *attritio* outright as an altogether insufficient basis for the securing of the forgiveness of sins. This left Luther with the requirement of awakening the indispensable and yet paradoxically unattainable *contritio*. "It is certain, however, that the young

were encouraged to produce all three, for upon them the absolution rested. This left Luther not only uncertain of God's forgiveness, but positively dismayed before a God who demanded of him what was seemingly impossible. Luther was indeed compelled to say: "Wer weiß ob mir Gott meine Sünde vergibt."¹² Dismay was therefore mingled with terror and fear of punishment, whereby Luther confessed himself to plunge deeper into *tentatio trestitia*,¹³ itself regarded as

friars were instructed to "awaken" the unattainable contrition and that the order's own absolution formula in use at Erfurt made it the indispensable precondition for the effective remission of sins." Peter Manns, *Martin Luther* (New York: Crossroad Press, 1982), 52. Luther's struggle thus came to direct itself to the insurmountable wall which *contritio* built between the penitent and the desired absolution.

¹²WA 40 I, 264, 2-4. Luther consistently laments the uncertainty of the forgiveness which the absolution gives precisely because it is based upon the demands of his own *in nobis* disposition of *contrito*. Cf. WA 40 II, 14, 9 - 15, 7; 411, 5-15; WA 43, 533, 10-23; and especially WA 47, 334, 23-39, where Luther can still write in the late 1530s: "Wer kan nu alhier sagen, das ehr gnug reu und Leidt uber seine sunde getragen habe? . . . Ich kan nimer mehr wissen das ich recht alles gebeichtet und bereuet hab. Stellet also der Pabst die krafft der Absolution auf die reue, . . . Dies heisset nicht absolviret, sondern die leuthe in verzweiffelung und in abgrundt der Hellen geworffen" (*italics added*).

¹³Cf. WA 47, 441, 18-24: "Ich hab mich im Baptsumb also zumarttert und verderbt mit beichten und gnugthuen, das ich frembde Sunde suchet, die ich nicht gethan, hatt niemer kein ruhe, noch rein und friedlich hertz fur der rewe, kan der lere noch nicht loss werden, sie wir mir mein lebenslang schaden thun, das ich mein Hertz noch nicht gar kan reinigen darvon oder zufrieden stellen. Das haben sie gelacht und nichts sich erbarmet uber die, so diese burden tragen, drunder kriechen und schwizten musten, sondern noch freude druber gehabt."

a deadly sin.¹⁴ Nor was this fear allayed in the confessional, since the emphasis here lay upon the contrition for and the confession of sin and its judgment by the priest, not upon its absolution.¹⁵ This fear and uncertainty had led Luther to spend up to six hours in the confessional, only to seek its refuge again when more unconfessed sins came to mind.¹⁶ Although his *Beichtväter* sought to console him with the distinction between sins, Luther failed to be sure of a gracious God. Early in his monastic life he had come to understand all sin as damnable *coram deo*.¹⁷ Nothing, it appeared, was able to extricate Luther from his

¹⁴James Kittelson, *Martin Luther the Reformer* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 43.

¹⁵See Brecht, 75. Since the absolution was completely conditional upon *contritio*, *confessio*, and *satisfactio*, the words of absolution, to have their effect, clearly required that all these parts must be done absolutely rightly. Cf. Fagerberg, 234-237.

¹⁶If there is exaggeration here, then Manns has generously suggested it was ". . . for the greater honor of the pure Gospel." Manns, 50.

¹⁷WA 1, 623, 4-15. Cf. Öberg, 213, who notes that Luther is more interested in the condition of human sinfulness than individual sins. All sin thus becomes mortal sin and leaves man damnable before God and in need of forgiveness: "Luther intresserar sig mer för synden som ett personens tillstånd än för syndens punktuella akter. All synd är egentligen dödssynd. . . . Inför Gud står människan alltid i sig själv som syndare, som fördömd person, i behov av förlåtelse." Man therefore not only does sin, but is a sinner, *totus peccator*, where sundry big and little sins cannot be distinguished. Cf. Manns, 52.

distress and dismay.¹⁸ The sacrament of penance, that second plank which offered hope to those adrift from Holy Baptism's first plank and tossed about by sin, left Luther without the certainty of forgiveness.¹⁹

Nor did the Scriptures afford Luther any final solace in his early years as a monk and student of theology. Although exceptional in his appreciation and study of the Bible, Luther nevertheless was encumbered by the lack of a

¹⁸Note verse 2 of Luther's hymn: *Nun freut euch lieben Christen g'mein*, where he recalls his struggle with the judgment of God and the realization of sin as *totus*:

"Mein guten Werk die galten nicht,
 es war mit ihnen verdorben,
 mein frei Will' haßte Gott's Gericht,
 er war zum Gut'n erstorben.
 Die Angst mich zum verzweifeln trieb,
 Daß nichts denn Sterben bei mir blieb,
 Zur Höllen muß ich sinken."

¹⁹Pelikan, 210. In Pelikan's words: "Penance was instituted as a means of grace because those who had received the forgiveness of sins through baptism went on to sin again and needed 'a second refuge after this shipwreck' to reconcile them to the church, from which they were alienated by their transgressions." Cf. Klein, 58. He there refers to BSLK, 706, 31 - 707, 9, where St. Jerome's image of the "second plank" is dealt with. Cf. Peters, 52, who helpfully notes how Luther's radical understanding of repentance, which is intrinsically tied to Holy Baptism, supplies a corrective to St. Jerome's much cited split of Baptism into two parts. "Durch unsere Verfehlung ist die Taufe nicht ungültig geworden. Dies schien das unglückliche Bild des Hieronymus nahezulegen, nach dem uns nur noch die Rettungsplanke des tränenreichen Bußsakraments verblieben sei. Nach dem Reformator sind wir vielmehr mutwillig aus dem Schiff unserer Taufe herausgesprungen und müssen nun wieder durch die Buße zu ihr zurückkehren. Buße meinte deshalb nichts anders als das beharrliche Hineinkriechen und beständige Leben in unserer Taufe"

hermeneutic which would let him understand the Scriptures.²⁰ The righteousness and purity of love which God demanded of him thus pursued him and condemned him even as he read the pages of Holy Scripture. This dismay began to be tempered somewhat when Luther, steeped in the Psalms of the daily offices, began to delve more deeply into the Psalms. He had come to understand the Psalms as the book of temptation and the tempted,²¹ and therefore it is perhaps not surprising that Luther's first original publication was an exposition of the seven penitential Psalms. *Die Sieben puszpsalm mit / deutscher auszlegung nach / dem schriftlichen synne / tzu Christi und gottis gnaden, neben / seyns selben. ware Erkenntnis. grundlich gerichtet* (1516/17).²² Here we may see Luther's continued personal and theological struggle with confession. In these penitential Psalms Luther finds a new understanding of what it means to confess one's sins,²³ an understanding which calls for careful examination in this context.

²⁰"Ego quid dedissem, si quis me a missa, angst conscientiae, et intelligentiam unius psalmi, capitis in Euangelio, ego auff knien gekrochen ad S. Iacobum." WA 41, 582, 11-13. Cf. Brecht, 92.

²¹WA Tr 5, Nr. 6305: "Ideo totum Psalterium in singulis fere verbis nihil est quam tentatio, tribulatio et afflictio et liber iste plenus tentationum." Cf. Brecht, 93.

²²WA 1, 158-220.

²³See Brecht, 143 for the history of the writing and publication of this document.

Die sieben Bußpsalmen (1516-1517)

Central to Luther's theology at this time was repentance (*Buße*) as the *status* which human beings must assume *coram deo*.²⁴ The penitential Psalms themselves provide the words which sinful man speaks before God, whereby the one who speaks has come to agree heartily with the verdict of having fallen short of God's laws and demands.²⁵ At the heart of this exposition was Luther's theology of *humilitas*.²⁶ What the Psalms demand is self-knowledge and self-

²⁴For a general study of the Luther's early understanding of *Buße* specifically and not Holy Absolution per se, see R. A. Lipsius, *Luther's Lehre von der Busse*, (Braunschweig: C. A. Schwetschke und Sohn, 1892). See also Susi Hausmann, *Buße als Umkehr und Erneuerung von Mensch und Gesellschaft* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1974).

²⁵Brecht notes that Luther approaches these Psalms with a new hermeneutic. The usual approach to the Psalms was four-fold: the literal sense identified the Psalm as being spoken by Christ; the tropological sense established the meaning of the text on a moral basis; the allegorical sense interpreted the text in relation to the church; and finally the anagogical sense took on an eschatological interpretation. Cf. Brecht, 94. Luther, on the other hand, advances the text on the basis of one sense: the literal. Yet his literal approach places the words of the Psalms into the mouth of sinful people, rather than into the mouth of Christ. See Brecht, 143.

²⁶Cf. Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen, "Die Augustinische Sakramentsformel in der Theologie Luthers," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 1 (1970): 54. "Luther teilt die mittelalterliche monastische Bußanschauung, nach der man im Selbstgericht der Buße das eschatologische Gericht vorwegnehmen und so im Gott-recht-Geben vor Gott gerecht werden kann. (*Humilitas est*) *omnis iustitia* (WA 4, 383, 34 Schol. of Ps. 118: 163)." See also Alister McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1985), 117; 153. McGrath makes a special point of locating Luther's theology of *humilitas* in immediate relation to faith in the context of the *pactum* theology of Gabriel Biel. This work provides much insight into the intellectual influences which

accusation, which in turn leads to the casting of oneself upon the mercy of God. The same God who produces *Anfechtungen* also consoles those whom he has tempted. The point of the whole exercise is the annihilation of all self-assertion and self-righteousness, so that God can create something out of nothing.²⁷ Christ is thus the *exemplum* who is to be emulated in this *status* of repentance.²⁸ Only in this way can the thwarted conscience perceive the words of God which soothe the conscience. Yet it is not primarily the words of forgiveness which Luther has in mind in these Psalms. Instead they are words of "grace," which promise God's assistance to those who depend solely upon him.²⁹ His emphasis is upon letting God have his way with his people. God's way is the destruction of all human self-assertion in any form.³⁰ The absence of any discussion of absolution in the *Sieben Bußpsalmen* is therefore not so

went into Luther, which unfortunately cannot be dealt with at length in the present context.

²⁷Cf. Brecht, 144.

²⁸Cf. Norman Nagel, "Sacramentum et Exemplum in Luther's understanding of Christ," in *Luther for an Ecumenical Age: Essays in Commemoration of the 450th Anniversary of the Reformation*, edited by Carl S. Meyer (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 173.

²⁹WA 1, 209, 18-23: "Das ist, auff seyn vorheyssen und gelubd, das ist nu die natur des innwendigen und neuen menschen, das er eyynn stetes harren, hoffen, trawen, glauben treyt zu gott. . . . und dasselb wort und verheyßen gottis ist der gantze enthalt des neuen menschen, der lebt nit von dem broet, sondern von dem selben wort gottis."

³⁰See p. 13 above and the discussion of *forma* there.

surprising. Instead, these expositions clearly reveal Luther's concern for the proper disposition *coram deo*, based upon the *in nobis* disposition of *humilitas*. Indeed, the only express mention of the forgiveness of sins occurs in his exposition of Psalm 51. Verse nine states: "Gib meinem gehorde freude und trost." Luther interprets these as follows:

Das ist, aller eußerlicher gerechtickeit wandel und handel vormag nit mein gewissen zu trosten und sund wegnehmen, Bleybt uber all wircken und gute wercke das blode unnd erschrockne forchtsam gewissen, biß lange du mit gnaden mich sprengest und weschest, und alßo mir ein gut gewissen machst, das ich hoer deyn heimlich eynrunen, dir seynd vorgeben dein sund. das wirt niemant gewar, dan der es horet, Niemand sihet es, niemant begreiffet es. Es lest sich horen, und das horen macht ein trostlich frolich gewissen und zuvorsicht gegen gott.³¹

What is notable is that Luther does not mention the means by which these words are poured in "*heimlich*." One is left to wonder if he is here speaking of an inner assurance, which would be consistent with his position in the *Deutsch Theologia*, or if he has an absolution of the priest in mind. Nor is the matter clarified in the next paragraph:

Das ist, alle crefft der selen, die des sundlichen gewissen halben gleich müde und zurknurssert werden, die erfrewen sich und werden erquiket, wen das gewissen die freude des ablaß horet, dan die sund ist eyn schwere, betrubte, engestliche burden allen crefftten der seelen, und doch mit den eußern werckenn des menschen nit mag abgenommen werden, Sundern allein durch das *yinnerliche werck gottis* (italics added).³²

³¹WA 1, 189, 34 - 190, 4.

³²WA 1, 190, 7-12.

How the "release" from sin is heard is again not stated. It is simply stated to be an "inner" work of God. Nor is the location of this release elaborated upon. One is left to wonder whether he here may be preparing those who read these words in a devotional setting for the absolution which is given in private confession. There is, however, not yet any talk of faith at all in this document, even though it concludes with lauding Christ as God's grace, mercy, righteousness, truth, and so forth. It is a Christ *in nobis* of whom Luther speaks. Furthermore, it is the inner workings and speaking of God to those in the *status* of *humilitas* who are led to the inner contemplation of sin throughout this exposition of these Psalms.³³ Only such as these come and receive what they desire. "Darumb kommen sie zuvor mit forcht und bitten das aber *mit demut*, das die andern mit heylickeit erzwunnen zu haben meinen" (*italics added*).³⁴

³³Bernhard Lohse, "Die Privatbeichte bei Luther," in *Evangelium in der Geschichte*, edited by Leif Grane, Bernd Moeller and Otto Hermann Pesch, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1988), 362. Lohse points out that Luther understood the penitent to be "just." But he is just in the context of the *humilitas* which proves to be a reforming of the Medieval *conformitas* ideal. "Aber gerecht ist er insofern, als er die Wahrheit sagt, andererseits aber Christus selbst eben die Wahrheit ist. Hier findet eine Umprägung des spätmittelalterlichen *conformitas*-Ideals in Richtung auf das neue Verständnis von *iudicium* und *iustitia* statt, das schon in der ersten Psalmenvorlesung begegnet." He cites Luther, WA 3, 29, 40-42, the Scholion of Psalm 1: "Impossibile est enim, quod qui confitetur peccatum suum, non sit Justus, cum dicat veritatem. Ubi autem veritas, ibi Christus est."

³⁴WA 1, 191, 14-16. Cf. WA 1, 194, 9-14: "Darumb bezalen wyr yhn nit anders, dan geben uber als was wyr haben und was wyr selbs seyn, und da mit *demutiger erkenntnis unßer*

Although the *Sieben Bußpsalmen* do not reveal a gracious God who absolves unconditionally, they do point Luther in the direction of a confession which is made before a God who is willing to deal with the sinner justly. What the *Bußpsalmen* therefore provide is a way in which God may be approached, namely in humility which confesses oneself as sinner, agreeing with God's judgment and bearing its consequences.³⁵

It is again notable that the probable *locus* of the exercise of humility would be the confessional. For in the confessional one was compelled to accept God's verdict of damnation for sins committed. Here there could be no escape from God's *iudicium*, whose probing words searched out, revealed, and judged one's sin. The verdict of guilt pronounced was followed by the assurance that he who agreed with God's judgment and let himself be conformed to the sufferings of Christ would be guaranteed that God would not inflict his punishment upon the penitent. Through

gelassenheit ist die hochst gerechtigkeit, die wier haben mügen" (*italics added*).

³⁵Cf. Erich Vogelsang, "Der confessio=Begriff des jungen Luther (1513-1522)," *Luther-Jahrbuch*, 12 (1930): 95. Vogelsang attempts to trace "confessio" from the earliest writings of Luther, and ultimately equates it with praise of God, a praise which arises from the knowledge that God and the sinner agree with God's judgment. "In der confessio des aufrichtigen Herzens erwacht die Demut (*humilitas*), die Gott von uns fordert, zum Selbstbewusstsein. So sind 'confessio' und Gerechtigkeit, die vor Gott gilt, identisch. . . . Die confessio ist so einfach die Realisierung der vielgenannten 'justificatio dei passiva.'"

inflict his punishment upon the penitent. Through *conformitas* one is thus justified before God.³⁶ The suffering of the temporal punishments, the *satisfactio operis*, could thus be endured in conformity with Christ, even as Christ, who was humanity's *exemplum*, endured this punishment.³⁷ Clearly the confessional thus came to be the very center of Luther's *theologia crucis*. It is therefore not surprising that in the years in which his *theologia crucis* plays such an important role both sermons and public tracts were devoted to the subject of humility in conformity with Christ, of repentance (*Buße*) and penance. The Ninety-Five Theses of 1517 clearly fit into this theological development. At the heart of his criticism of the Jubilee Indulgence of Leo X stood Luther's new understanding of repentance, confession, and especially Holy Absolution.

³⁶Cf. Lohse, 362, who summarizes Luther's *conformitas* theology as the heartfelt agreement with God's judgment as being true, and thus confessing the truth about oneself: "Gewiß, für Luther stand schon früh fest, daß der Beichtende 'gerecht' ist. Aber gerecht ist er insofern, als er die Wahrheit sagt, andererseits aber Christus selbst eben die Wahrheit ist. Hier findet eine Umprägung des spätmittelalterlichen *conformitas*-Ideals in Richtung auf das neue Verständnis von *iudicium* und *iustitia* statt, das schon in der ersten Psalmenvorlesung begegnet."

³⁷Lohse provides a number of examples through which the benefit of suffering is expounded by Luther. Thus all the saints of the Scriptures, such as David, gratefully endured God's *iudicium*. See Lohse, 366-367.

Indulgences and Holy Absolution

Luther's struggle with the misuse of indulgences was not new to him in 1517. The University of Wittenberg of which he was a professor was in part funded by the indulgences accruing from the thesaurus of relics which Duke Fredrick had accumulated. Luther had voiced concern about indulgences in his initial lectures on the Psalms in 1514. Indulgences reduced the requirements of grace to all but a minimum.³⁸ Whereas the Jubilee bull of Pope Clement VI, *Unigenitus Dei Filius* (1343) assured that the use of indulgences would in fact increase the merits of Christ and all the saints,³⁹ since it would lead to further good works, Luther argued that the manner in which they were being distributed by priests and monks added nothing to this great store. In other words, Luther himself argued along with Clement that one should not only receive from the treasure of the church, but also contribute something to it. As one is prepared to receive the blessing, so one must be prepared to share in the suffering.

It is this element of suffering which is fundamental

³⁸WA 3, 416, 20-23. Cf. Brecht, 182.

³⁹"To this mass of treasure, we know, are added the *merits of the blessed Mother of God and of all the elect* from first to the last. There is no need to fear that it may be consumed or diminished, not only because of the infinite merits of Christ of which we have spoken but also because **the more men attain righteousness by its application the more does their stock of merit increase**" (emphasis added). Neuner, 327.

to Luther's theology of humility, and indeed his *theologia crucis*. This comes to the fore again in a sermon on Matthew 11:28 on February 14, 1517.⁴⁰ What troubles Luther in the matter of indulgences is the desire to escape punishment, not sin itself. Indulgences teach fear of punishment, but not sorrow for sin. What results is a false *securitas*.⁴¹ Instead, Luther argues, people should be urged to gladly embrace the punishment which is revealed in the cross of Christ. Not that indulgences are to be forbidden, especially to them for whom they act as a means to reach that humility which is required before God. But humility is found only where punishment and the cross are gladly embraced, which is precisely what indulgences tend to preclude. Indulgences thus hinder the declaration of any true absolution.

Sermon on Indulgences (1516)

The same message resounds in another sermon from March of 1516, specifically the *Sermo de indulgentiis pridie Dedicacionis*.⁴² What Luther develops in the context of this

⁴⁰WA 1, 141, 11-38. Cf. Brecht, 183.

⁴¹WA 1, 141, 24-25.

⁴²WA 1, 98, 16-36. See Brecht, 184 and the attendant endnote 12 on page 478 of Brecht which deals with some of the questions related to the date of this sermon. Cf. Precht, 73-74, who calls this sermon the "classic statement" on the sacrament of penance of the early Luther. He also provides a brief summary of the sermon. See also Jacoby, "Beichte, Buße, Sündenbekenntnis in Zeitalter der Reformation und der protestantischen Orthodoxie," *Zeitschrift für Pastoral-Theologie* 25 (1902): 1. Jacoby introduces Luther's thoughts upon confession with this sermon as foreshadowing

sermon is his new understanding of repentance which proves to be a radical departure from the *contritio, confessio, satisfactio*, and *absolutio* schema of the Florentine canons mentioned above. At the heart of this new exposition are the Augustinian categories of the *signum* and *res signata* of repentance.⁴² The true *res signata* is the inner repentance of the heart.⁴³ The *signum* of inner repentance is external repentance, which consists of confession and satisfaction.⁴⁴ Such confession may be done publicly or privately; the scriptural foundations of such a private confession are questioned. Rather than exterior acts of *poena*, Luther looks to an interior life of repentance, which he understands as true contrition, confession, and satisfaction in the Spirit.⁴⁵ True repentance does not seek indulgences, but crosses.⁴⁶ Inner repentance is indeed imperiled by indulgences. Luther therefore argues that true inner repent-

his Reformational stance.

⁴²See Brecht, 184. In evidence is a movement away from Aristotle's *materia* and *forma* to something Platonic: from outer to inner.

⁴³WA 1, 98, 24-25. "Rei est illa interior cordis et sola vera poenitentia, de qua Christus dicit: poenitentiam agite, . . . "

⁴⁴WA 1, 98, 26-29. "Signi est illa exterior, quae frequenter est facta, cum illa interior sit ficta saepe, et haec habet duas illas partes, Confessionem et satisfactionem"

⁴⁵WA 1, 99, 1-2: "Nam poenitentia interior est vera contritio, vera confessio, vera satisfactio in spiritu."

⁴⁶WA 1, 99, 11-12: "Ideo non petit indulgentias sed cruces."

ance is that true *contritio* in which the penitent despairs of himself and casts himself upon God with the confession of his guilt. Through this self-condemnation God's verdict is anticipated and God is appeased. In other words, the one who repents, exposes his guilt fully, endures God's punishment, and thereby confesses the righteousness of God in the punishment of the sinner and is thereby absolved.

The Ninety-Five Theses (1517)

The theology of humility we have observed lies at the heart of the Ninety-Five Theses (the *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*).⁴⁷ Repentance as the life-long expression of humility before God as it is challenged by the manner in which indulgences were being sold is the central argument of these theses. Luther first

⁴⁷See Elmore Leske, "Another Look at Luther's Indulgence Theses in View of His Radical Understanding of Repentance," *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel*, edited by Gerald S. Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Dearborn: The Nagel Festschrift Committee, 1990), 61-85. Leske's article provides an excellent and thorough examination of the 95 Theses in the context of Luther's *humilitas* theology as expressed by repentance. What becomes especially clear in Leske's exposition is Luther's essential agreement with the presuppositions of the Council of Florence cited above. See also Brecht, 189-194 for an insightful summary of the contents of the 95 Theses themselves. Cf. Jacoby, 1-3, who also provides a summary. See also Lohse, who in discussing the matter of Luther's "radical understanding" of sin shows how Luther also radicalizes repentance: "Die Reue über konkrete Sünden wird gewiß nicht aufgehoben, aber entsprechend dem radikalisierten Sündenverständnis wird nun auch die Konzeption der Reue radikalisiert: die Reue währt das ganze Leben; ja, Reue ist Gnade." Lohse, 364. He cites Luther, WA 1, 322, 9-10: "Contritio vera non est ex nobis, sed gratia dei, ideo desperandum de nobis et ad misericordiam eius confugiendum."

of all dissociates true repentance (which in this case refers to *contritio*)⁴⁸ from the other two elements in the sacrament of penance, that is, *confessio* and *satisfactio* "que sacerdotum ministerio celebratur" (Thesis 2).⁴⁹ His focus is *inner* repentance, which, as an unseen *res*, is only proven true by the *signum* of outward mortification of the flesh (Thesis 3).⁵⁰ Such repentance is also life-long, all the while hating sin and accepting the penalty of its guilt (Thesis 4). It is in this light that Luther poses his challenge to the indulgence practice of his day. In other words, his Ninety-Five Theses are a plea for true repentance which can hope for God's forgiveness by gladly embracing His judgment and suffering his punishment.⁵¹ It is conversely a call for the abandonment of an indulgence practice which leads to a false *securitas* by avoiding the penalties which alone can make the penitent hate sin and despair of himself. Thus, while no one can be sure of the sincerity of his

⁴⁸See Leske, page 62, and especially page 71, where he writes: "An intensive study of Luther's 95 Theses exposes the fact that Luther uses 'penitence' and 'contrition' as synonymous and interchangeable terms. He easily glides from the use of one to the other in successive theses; and, where he does this, the related content of the neighboring assertions clearly enough reveals his intent, where he uses *penitentia* or *contritio*."

⁴⁹WA 1, 233, 13.

⁵⁰Although Luther does not use the italicized terms, they are most certainly implied in this thesis.

⁵¹"15 Contritionis veritas penas querit et amat, Veniarum autem largitas relaxat et odisse facit, saltem occasione" (Thesis 40). WA 1, 235, 16-17.

contritio and consequently salvation (Thesis 30), it is nevertheless the indispensable condition, and indeed only necessary condition for full remission of penalty and guilt (Theses 34, 35).⁵² Luther does admit the benefit of the merits of Christ, he does argue that these merits ". . . hec semper . . . operantur gratiam hominis interioris et crucem, mortem infernumque exterioris" (Thesis 58).⁵³ This *contritio* finds its greatest example in Christ upon the cross, and those who appeal to the cross are called to bear the sufferings of Christ through death and hell itself. Luther thus has the mortifications of the flesh in mind, along with the experience of pain and suffering as Christ himself suffered.⁵⁴ But their goal is heaven, unlike those

⁵²At this stage Luther seems still to speak with some of the earlier scholastic theologians such as Lombard and Hugh of St. Victor, by arguing that the exhibitiv forgiveness is a presumption of the priests. The pope can indeed only forgive because God has previously forgiven. See Thesis 6: "Papa non potest remittere ullam culpam nisi declarando et approbando remissam a deo." WA 1, 233, 20-22. Lohse argues that this is consonant with Luther's evangelical understanding of absolution as the proclamation of the Gospel. What will become clear below, however, especially in the discussion of Luther's tract *Von den Schlüsseln* of 1530, is that he understands the preaching of the Gospel itself to be exhibitiv. It is thus not possible to agree with Lohse when he boldly states: "Für katholisches Denken ist es hier ja so, daß die Vergebung Gottes vollmächtig und gültig durch den Mund des Priesters ausgesprochen wird. Da Luther die Absolution als 'Verkündigung des Evangeliums' versteht, kann dieses Verständnis für ihn nicht in Frage kommen." Lohse, 366.

⁵³WA 1, 236, 14-15.

⁵⁴See Leske's very helpful clarification of the meaning of "cross" in the context of Theses 58 - 95 on pages 74-77. Leske provides compelling evidence that Luther is

who depend upon the false security of an inner peace (Theses 92-95).

What becomes clear in these few examples is that Luther is standing firmly upon the foundation of his theology of *humilitas* and its attendant piety. Indeed, Luther is far from finding in this teaching of repentance the centrality and certainty of the forgiveness of sins. In fact, far from seeking certain forgiveness in Holy Absolution, Luther focuses upon *contritio* as expressed in its inner and outer manifestations of repentance in *humilitas* as the true source of hope for salvation. No words of faith are to be found in the Ninety-Five Theses. Doubtless the narrow focus of the Theses precluded Luther from dealing with the *form* and *effect* of the sacrament of penance itself, specifically the absolution.⁵⁵ Although the words of absolution are not in the forefront of Luther's thought at this point, their foundation in faith and the words of Christ are already a solid part of his theology, as will be shown below.

here not directing the reader ". . . to Christ's death for sinners so much as to the Christian's duty of crossbearing, denial of the flesh, self-abnegation, and acceptance of trials and afflictions." Leske, 75.

⁵⁵See p. 13 - 14 above; see also p. 28, n. 42.

CHAPTER II

HOLY ABSOLUTION AND FAITH IN LUTHER'S THEOLOGY 1517-1521

While the Ninety-Five Theses of October 31, 1517 may be most pivotal in Luther's career, these public theses provide only a hint of Luther's theological thought during this period. As indicated above, Luther's wrestling with the abuse of confession and absolution through indulgences would prove to be the very point of departure for his reformational discovery.¹ Noteworthy is the fact that the repentance which he defended so intently in the Ninety-Five Theses as a *condition* to the use of indulgences is not made the *sine qua non* without which someone may come to confession in order to obtain absolution. This may be seen in a number of his writings soon thereafter in 1518.

Sermo de poenitentia (1518)

In these writings Luther argued that not repentance but *faith* was the primary and necessary element in confession.² It is all the more remarkable that Luther pres-

¹See p. 2 above. Cf. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Sein Weg zur Reformation* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1981), 341.

²Cf. Julius Köstlin, *Luthers Theologie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: J.F. Steinkopf, 1901), 175. After pointing out Luther's emphasis on faith over contrition, he also notes that Luther says no-

ented this contention not in the scholarly, theological arena, as was the case with the Ninety-Five Theses, but in two sermons. In pastoral responsibility Luther did not put out from the pulpit ideas with which he himself was still wrestling. He presented confession and absolution in as pastorally encouraging a way as he could:³

Nam sententia illa debet esse rata et certa: ideo multo magis tibi hic videndum, quomodo nihil huic fidei desit, quam caeteris omnibus. Imo esto per impossibile, quod confessus non sit contritus, aut sacerdos non serio sed ioco absolvat, Si tamen credat sese absolutum verissime est absolutus. Tanta res est fides et tam potens verbum Christi.⁴

thing about the words of the priest as actually accomplishing what they say, nor if faith can receive the absolution apart from the priest's words. At this stage of Luther's theological development he is not able to affirm both.

³In August of 1519 Luther, who had by that time said much about the matter of confession and absolution, still brings forth this assessment of the sacrament of penance: "Non est in ecclesia negotium, quod aequae ut istud confessionis et poenitentiae indigeat reformatione. Nam hic omnes leges, quaestus, vis, tyrannis, error, pericula et infinita mala omnium animarum et totius ecclesiae grassantur pleno impetu, quod pontifices parum curant et sophisticis animarum tortoribus relinquunt." WA 2, 646, 10-14. Cf. Brecht, 342. These words clearly emphasize the urgency and intensity of his wrestling with confession and absolution not *in abstracto*, but as a pastor and teacher of the church in the two years following the indulgence theses.

⁴WA 1, 323, 30-35. Cf. Bernhard Lohse, "Die Privatbeichte bei Luther," in *Evangelium in der Geschichte: Studien zu Luther und der Reformation*, ed. Leif Grane, Bernd Moeller and Otto Hermann Pesch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 368, who emphasizes that Luther on the one hand establishes that the absolution is proclaimed for Christ's sake, but reaches its "goal" in the penitent through faith. "Aber zu ihrem Ziel gelangt die Absolution doch erst in der glaubenden Annahme des Menschen. Luther kann die Bedeutung des Glaubens nicht genug herausstellen." See also Alfred Galley, *Die Bußlehre Luthers und ihre Darstellung in neuester Zeit* (Gütersloh: Druck und Verlag von C. Bertelsmann, 1900), 129. Galley, who also notes Luther's

That it is *faith* which receives absolution is unequivocal. The question which needs to be asked is how this emphasis upon faith and the words of Christ fit into his *theologia crucis*. Yet the dissociation of *contritio* from the combination of confession and absolution in the context of his *humilitas* theology is not altogether surprising. In this theology Luther called for faith in the words of God, words which declare him to be a sinner. It is quite in keeping with the theology of *humilitas* that Luther called for humble submission to God's verdict over him. What appears evangelical in the above quotation is Luther's emphasis upon faith as that which goes beyond the anthropocentric, namely, psychological reference point of the *Reue* that would be experienced upon God's judgment. Therefore, even though the penitent fails to apprehend the gravity of his sinfulness and may in fact not feel sinful at all, faith which depends upon God's verdict and the words of absolution provide the basis for forgiveness. The question is, of course, whether Luther has at this point broken through to an evangelical confession of absolution, or if his emphasis upon faith and the words of Christ reflect a neo-Augustinian approach to the subject.

emphasis upon faith in this document, is yet sharply critical of Luther for not giving any indication as to where the penitent is to obtain such faith.

Sermon von dem Sacrament der Buße (1519)

That the latter is the case is made clear in a sermon from the following year, *Ein Sermon von dem Sacrament der Buße*, (1519) where Luther clearly espouses an Augustinian understanding of the *verba Christi* and of faith.

Czum sechsten. Nu seynd drey dingk yn dem heyiligen Sacrament der puß. Das erst ist die Absolutio, das seyñ wort des priesters, die zeygen an, sagen und verkunden dir, du seyest loß und deyn sund seyñ vor gott vorgeben, nach laut und krafft der obgesagten worten Christi zu s. Petro. Das ander ist die gnad, vorgebung der sund, der frid und trost des gewissen, wie dan die wort lauten. Darum heyst es eyn sacrament, eyn heylich zeychen, das man die wort höret eußerlich, die do bedeuten die *gestlichen guter ynnewendigk*, davon das hertz getrostet wirt und befridet. Das dritte ist der glaube, der so festiglich dafür helt, das die Absolutio und wort des priesters seyñ war, yn der krafft der wort Christi 'was du lösest, soll loß seyñ u.' *Und an dem glauben ligt es als miteynander, der allen macht, das die sacrament wircken, was sie bedeuten, und alles war wirt, was der priester sagt, dan wie du glawbst, so geschicht dir* (italics and emphasis added).⁵

Explicit is the *res -- res signata* schema which also appears

⁵WA 2, 715, 21-33. Clearly Luther regards the *verba Christi*, as they are spoken by the priest, to be the *signum* of the *res signata*. Thus St. Augustine's schema of the external words presenting the deeper true realities of an inward grace appear to be the way in which Luther is approaching the words of Christ in the absolution at this point. This must doubtless be kept in mind in the context of all the quotations which come from 1517 - 1520. This certainly parallels Luther's approach to the sacraments of the Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper during this time. Cf. Lohse, 369: "Scholastisch gesprochen, müßte man sagen, daß Luther also den Glauben geradezu in die Definition des Sakramentes mit aufgenommen hat, wie ja in den frühen Sakramentssermonen für Luther stets die Trias von Zeichen, Bedeutung und Glauben entscheidend ist."

in Luther's discussion of the sacraments in 1519.⁶ Also observable is Augustines distinction between a valid sacrament which may or may not be effective. The external words as sign are valid while faith evidences them to be inwardly effective. This very *signum - res signata* schema helps Luther to focus away from the subjective reference point of *contritio* to the *extra nos* focus of the heavenly realities of the Augustinian *res signata*.⁷ It is thus with

⁶See, for example, *Ein Sermon von dem hochwürdigen Sakrament des heiligen wahren Leichnams Christi und von den Bruderschaften* of 1519, WA 2, 738-758. Cf. Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen, "Die Augustinische Sakramentsformel in der Theologie Luthers" *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 1 (1970): 51. "Genaugenommen stehen bei Augustin im Sakrament ein verbum ad aures und ein verbum visibile ad oculus (Element) der innerlichen, geistigen *res sacramenti* als ontologisch difizente *signa* gegenüber, die zwar auf die *res sacramenti* verweisen, sie aber nicht vermitteln können. Augustins Wort- und Sakramentsverständnis bleibt seiner neuplatonisch gedachten Signifikationshermeneutik verpflichtet, nach der ein äußerlich erklingendes oder sichtbar werdendes Zeichen auf die bezeichnete geistige Sache nur zu verweisen, sie aber nicht zu vermitteln vermag." If it is thus true that Luther also approaches the words of Holy Absolution as such *signa*, it becomes evident why Luther also does not at this point look to the words of absolution as actually giving to the penitent the *res signata*, i.e. the forgiveness of sins, but pointing faith in that direction. Sacrament is here still Augustine's *signum*.

⁷Cf. Ernst Sommerlath, "Der sakramentale Charakter der Absolution nach Luthers Schrift *Von den Schlüsseln*," in *Die Leibhaftigkeit des Wortes: Festgabe für Adolf Köberle*, ed. Otto Michel and Ulrich Mann (Hamburg: Im Furche-Verlag, 1958), 223. Sommerlath notes that Luther does not regard the words of absolution as a mere declaration of a previously accomplished fact, but a contemporaneous action whereby the one who speaks the words proclaims and points it out, i.e. ". . . 'er macht die Lossprechung kund und zeigt sie auf.' Aber solches Wort gehört in die Linie der Äußerungen Luther über die Sakramente, in denen er, vor allem am Anfang, eine *signum*-Theorie aufstellt und in den Sakramenten bekräftigende Zeichen, d.h. Hindeutungen auf eine außerhalb ihrer

the help of Augustine that Luther placed such tremendous weight upon the *verba Christi* as being absolutely dependable, and indeed, upon faith which evidences such dependence.⁸ Faith thus becomes the indispensable *Bindeglied* which connects the *res* of the oral words to the *res signata* (i.e. the forgiveness of sins) which the words

liegenden Gnade sieht. . . . *Diese Theorie hat Luther aber später aufgegeben.* Wenn ihm die Sakramente auch immer Zeichen blieben, and denen der Mensch seinen Glauben aufrichten kann, so hat er in ihnen doch je länger, desto mehr Träger und 'Vehikel' der Gnade und der Gottesgabe gesehen" (italics added). As Sommerlath thus makes clear, though Luther here attains the vantage point of the *extra nos* character of the words of absolution, it is not until he abandons this strict schema that he can see the words as actually delivering what they say. Cf. Erich Roth, *Die Privatbeichte und Schlüsselgewalt in der Theologie der Reformatoren* (Gütersloh: C. Bergelsmann, 1952), 41 who rather anachronistically understands Luther too consistently, and even in 1518, to speak of the words as giving what they say: "Es wird daraus ganz deutlich, daß es sich immer um eine effektive, für das Heil kausative Anzeige handelt, wie das Evangelium überhaupt das göttliche Vorausgeschehen effektiv verkündigt." However, the data in this immediate context are clearly on the side of Sommerlath.

⁸In the above mentioned "*Sermon von dem Sacrament der Buße*," Luther cites St. Augustine "Nit das sacrament, sondern der glaub, der das sacrament glaubt, ablegt die sund. Also sagt s. Augustin: Das sacrament nympt die sund nit darumb, das es geschicht, sondern darumb, das man yhm glaubt." WA 2, 715, 36-37. Cf. Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen, 51 "Deshalb wirkt dieses das Sakrament konstituierende Wort auch nicht quia dicitur, sed quia creditur" (citing St. Augustine, CChr 36, 529, 10-11). It must also be emphasized at this point that Luther understands faith itself to be a gift of God. Cf. WA 2, 722, 28-30: Also ist es war, das eyn priester warhafftig die sund und schuld vorgibt, aber er mag dem sunder den glauben nit geben, der dye vorgebung empfehet unnd auffnympt, den muß gott gebenn." See also Lohse, 369, who emphasizes that faith does not here simply replace the role of contrition, repentance and satisfaction. "Vielmehr versteht Luther auch den Glauben streng als Gabe Gottes" (italics added).

proclaim.⁹ Without such faith, the benefits of the absolution can never become the "*geistlichen Güter inwendig*."¹⁰ That Luther still understands the oral words of Christ to be penultimate in the absolution is clear. It is thus imperative that this understanding of the *verba Christi* is borne in mind in the discussions which follow. As will be illustrated below, all of Luther's talk of the *verba Christi* and indeed of faith bear the freight of this Augustinian *schema*, even if it is not explicitly mentioned. Consequently Luther

⁹Cf. Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen, 59. "Der Glaube bringt das Zeichen und die res des Sakraments, d.h. die Gnade, zueinander und ist deshalb der rechte Brauch des Sakraments." Lohse expresses this correlation specifically in terms of word and faith. "Die Korrelation betrifft dabei nicht das Zeichen einerseits und den Glauben andererseits, sondern Wort und Glaube." Lohse, 369.

¹⁰Luther clarifies his earlier statements in his *Predigt von der Taufe* in 1534. "Aber das ist auch nicht recht gered, Denn sie meinen, das wort und wasser sey ein Sacrament, so ferrn die, so sie empfahen, den glauben haben, Und gründen die Tauffe nicht auff Gottes ordnung, sondern auff menschen, als solt das wort mit dem wasser nicht ehe krefftig sein, die Tauffe zu machen, es keme denn unser glaube dazu, und müsse also Gottes wort und werck seine macht und kraft aller erst von uns empfahen." WA 37, 634, 19-28. As zur Mühlen notes: "Das Sakrament ist nicht wirksam durch das innere Wort, auf das das hörbare und sichtbare Wort nur verweist, sondern gerade durch das geschichtliche von Christus eingesetzte, mündliche Wort der Sakramentsverheißung." Karl-Heinz zur Mühlen, 71. This emphasis upon the institution of Christ, i.e. His words will become clear very early in Luther's teaching on Holy Absolution. There are no *extra nos* elements as in the sacrament of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper to look toward. All therefore rests upon the words of Christ from the outset of his writings on absolution. It might therefore again be argued that this initial focus upon the words of Christ as being the dependable foundation of Holy Absolution will become the key with which Luther will eventually unlock the Gospel in the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

is at this point focusing upon the ultimate reliability of the *verba Christi*.¹¹ Accordingly, they can bear the full weight of faith. But the *verba* simply promise and point to that which Christ gives. They do not deliver nor give that which they say, and therefore cannot be understood as delivering the Gospel in and of themselves. Luther therefore remains consistent with the work of scholastic theologians such as Hugh of St. Victor and Lombard, who also

¹¹Cf. WA 2, 717, 6-11: "Darumb, so du glaubst des priesters wort, wen er er dich absolviert (das ist, das er yn Christus namen und yn seyner wort crafft dich löset und spricht, 'ich löße dich von deynen sunden'), so seyn die sund auch gewiß loß vor gott, vor allen Engelen und allen creaturen, nit umb deynen willen, nit umb des priesters willen, *sondern um des warhafftigen worts Christi willen*" (italics added). Klein implicitly makes the rather interesting assertion that Luther is at this point making a distinction between the words which the priest speaks and the *verba Christi* of Christ's institution. "Im Sermon vom Sakrament der Buße zeigt Luther, zwar noch verhüllt, aber dennoch untergründig klar, daß sich der Glaube des Poenitenten im letzten nicht auf das Absolutionswort des Priesters, sondern auf das Wort der Einsetzung der Absolution durch Christus bezieht." Laurentius Klein, *Evangelisch-lutherische Beichte, Leben und Praxis* (Paderborn: Bonifacius Verlag, 1961), 44. See also page 47, where he reiterates the point that not the spoken absolution, but the ". . . Einsetzung der Sündenvergebungsgewalt durch Jesus Christus" is the source of actual forgiveness for Luther. This is perhaps an alternative way of explaining Luther's view of Holy Absolution, where what is spoken by the priest (*ego te absolvo*) is then only the *signum* of the true *res signata*, the *verba Christi*. Ultimately then, there cannot be any essential identity between the two, nor can anything be given by the former. Faith must thus use the words of the priest to attain to the dependable words of Christ. This, too, is a temporary position, however, as will be shown below.

could not press through to an exhibitiv understanding of the *verba Christi* in Holy Absolution.¹²

Luther did, however, gain a new perspective on the location of God's work as implicitly applied to St. Augustine's phrase "accedit verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum" to the words of absolution.¹³ For on the basis of the insights which he won from St. Augustine, Luther was able to separate carefully faith in the *extra nos* words of Christ from the quantifiable reference point of *in nobis* repentance.

Czum siebenden, Darauß folget zum ersten, das die vorgebung der schult und das hymnlich ablas wirt niemant geben umb der wirdigkeit willen seyner rew for die sund, noch umb der werck willen der gnugthuung, sondern alleyn umb des glaubens willen yn der vorsprechung gottis 'was du lösest, soll loß seyn u.' Wie woll die rew und gute werck nit nach zulassen seyn, ist doch auff sie keynerweyß zu bawenn, sondernn alleinn auff die gewisse wort Christi, der dir zusagt, wan dich der priester löbet, soltu loß seyn. *Dein rew und werck mugenn dich triegenn, und der teuffell wirt sie gar bals umbstossen ym todt und yn der anfechtung. Aber Christus, deyn gott, wirt dir nit liegen noch wancken, und der teuffell wirt yhm seyne wort nit umbstossen, und bawst du darauff mit eynem festen glauben, so stehst du auff dem felß, da widder die pforten und alle gewalt der hellen nit besteen (italics added).*¹⁴

¹²Cf. Theodor Kliefoth, *Liturgische Abhandlungen: Die Beichte und Absolution* (Schwerin: Verlag der Stiller'schen Hof-Buchhandlung, 1865), 237 and Albrecht Peters, "Buße-Beichte-Schuldvergebung," *Kerygma und Dogma* 28 (1982): 58, both of whom trace the theological movement toward the exhibitiv understanding of the the words of absolution through these scholastic theologians.

¹³See p. 40, n. 11 above.

¹⁴WA 2, 716, 1-12. Cf. WA 1, 323, 23-28: "Secundum vide, ne ullo modo te confidas absolvi propter tuam contritione (sic enim super te et tua opera confides, id est,

Luther's focus in this document is thus upon faith and forgiveness, precisely because one can depend upon the words of Christ.

Dan, wie gesagt, ym sacrament wirt gottis wort gehoret und der glaub yhe mehr und mehr gesterckt, Und ob eyn schon nichts beychtet, dannoch were die absolution und gottis wort vill mals zu horen nutz umb desselben glaubens willen, das man also sich gewendet, der sund vorgebung zu glauben. Darumb hab ich gesagt: der glaub des sacraments thuts gar, die beicht sey vill odder zu wenig. Es ist alls besserlich dem der do gottis sacrament und wort glaubt.¹⁵

Clearly the forgiveness of sins is delivered to faith with the absolution that the *verba Christi* speak of.

Since all depends upon the words of Christ and faith, Luther can argue further that the certainty of forgiveness is not dependent in any way upon any ecclesiastical office or *menschen Amt*, any more than upon the individuals

pessime praesumes), sed propter verbum Christi, qui dixit Petro: Quodcunque solveris super terram, solutum erit et in caelis. Hic inquam, confide, si sacerdotis obtinueris solutionem, et crede fortiter te absolutum, et absolutus vere eris, quia ille non mentitur, quicquid sit de tua contritione" (*italics added*).

¹⁵WA 2, 721, 38 - 722, 6.

sincerity or contrition.¹⁶ Absolution thus cannot depend upon any kind of earthly authority.

Czum achten, Folget weyter, das die vorgebung der schult auch nit steht widder yn Bapsts, bischoffs, priesters, noch yrgend eyns menschen ampt odder gewalt auff erden, sondern alleyn auff dem wort Christi und deynem eygenen glauben, dan er hatt nit wollen unßern trost, unßere seligkeit, unßer zavorsicht auff menschen wort odder that bawen, sondern allen auff sich selb, auff seyne wort und that (*italics added*).¹⁷

¹⁶While it does not depend upon any "*Menschenamt*," the office of the ministry is, however, the location of which Luther usually thinks when absolution is spoken. It must therefore be mentioned here, as will be discussed below, that Luther does in fact speak of the words of Christ spoken in the absolution as being given "*amtsweise*," where the *Amt* is understood to be *Gottesdienst*. In the *Resolutione Lutherianae super propositionibus suis Lipsiae disputatis* in 1519, Luther can say: "*Ideo fateor, ea conferri ministeri altier in absolutione culpae: ibi enim res spiritus agitur, ibi merita Christi operantur ad verbum sacerdotis, si credat peccator, alias nequaquam*" (*italics added*). WA 2, 428, 6-8. In contrast to the rather concrete approach to the matter of absolution Luther here casts it into more abstract categories. Perhaps this is not altogether surprising, since these theses are, after all, written in Latin (unlike much of the material discussed above) and written explicitly for debate. What does become clear, however, is that Luther does not renounce the office of the ministry as the sure location of the gifts of Christ, including the absolution. He indeed regards this *Amt* to be the place where consolation for the conscience of those who seek absolution by the application of the loosing key is to be found. "Es ist war, dy schlüssel seind sant Peter geben, aber nicht ym alß seiner person, Bundern in person der christenlichen kirche, und sein eben mir und dir geben zu trost unßerm gewissen: sanct Peter odder ein priester ist ein diner an den schlüsseln, Die kirch ist die fraw und brawt, der er sol dienen mit der schlüssel gewalt." WA 2, 248, 33-37, *Ein Sermon von sanct Peters und Pauls fest Doctoris Martini Luther (1519)*.

¹⁷WA 2, 716, 13-18.

These words provide a firm foundation, one upon which faith can build. ". . . *So wirt dich das wort behalten, unnd müssen deyn sund also vorgeben werden*" (italics added).¹⁸

This focus upon faith and the *verba Christi* had immediate consequences for Luther's view of the ministry. Since everything depends upon faith in the words of Christ, it is the faith which apprehends that which the *verba* speak of. Thus the reliability of the words of absolution is not to be bound in a sacerdotal manner. They have authority and are reliable because of Him who has given them to be spoken. Although Luther usually thought of the priest as the one who speaks these words,¹⁹ it is not because he is a priest, but

¹⁸WA 2, 716, 20-21. He goes on to say, ". . . das wort muß yn allen absolution seyn, ja alle absolution hangen darynnen." WA 2, 716, 35.

¹⁹See Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Luther*, translated by Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 316-317: "'Even when I turned to the called servant of the word -- and Luther usually thinks of him -- I ask for a brotherly service.' Luther sees the priest as the brother, who, when he hears confession, also always shares the burden of sin." Cf. WA 8, 184, 27-29: "Ja ich sag weytter und warne, das yhe niemand eynem priester alß eynem priester hymlich beycht, sondernn alß eynem gemeynen bruder unnd Christen." Althaus notes that Luther seems to be thinking of confession to a priest in the sermon cited above. He goes on to say that Luther often speaks simply of confessing to the "brother," whereby the priest is meant. Cf. WA 15, 488, 30-32: "Denn wilchem wiltu deyn gebrechen klagen denn Gott? wo kanstu yhn aber finden denn ynn deynem bruder? Der kan dich mit worten stercken und helfen, das ist recht gebeychtet." In this connection Althaus draws upon J. Köstlin, who also noted that Luther "often deliberately speaks of the priest as our neighbor or our brother." Luther, Althaus states, rejects the hierarchical understanding of the priestly office as contrary to the gospel. Referring to Jesus' promise in Matthew 18:18, Luther says that he is there where two or three are gathered in his

name: "Darumb last unß nur firsch und frolich erwegen auff seyne klare wort, und eyner dem ander beychten, radte, helfen und bitten, was unß ymer an ligt heymlich, es sey sund odder peyn, und yhe nit tzweyffeln an solcher liechter, heller tzusagung gottis. . . ." WA 8, 184, 22-24. Althaus' summation that Luther rejects an "hierarchical understanding of the priestly office" is valid only if it is seen in the context of Luther's confession of the *verba Christi* as being the sole authority for the absolution which is given to faith. In other words, Luther rejects the subjection of these words to any anthropocentric reference point. Absolution is thus given not because he is the priest, but because he is the one who speaks the words of Christ. See also the discussion of Fred L. Precht, "Changing Theologies of Private and Public Confession and Absolution" (Th.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1965), 81, in his note 46, where more questions are raised than answers given, though he can conclude that ". . . confession to a brother is considered by Luther as an emergency procedure" toward the end of his life. See also the full discussion of this question by Köstlin, 249-251. He, too, does not come to a definitive conclusion because of the greatly divergent data. A very extensive discussion of who should be the one who speaks the absolution is provided by Jos E. Vercruysse, "Schlüsselgewalt und Beichte bei Luther," in *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526-1546*, ed. Helmar Junghans (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 162-163. Vercruysse introduces his deliberations with the disclaimer that ultimately a clear answer cannot be given on the basis of Luther's writings when taken as a whole. One can only attempt to trace Luther's view at various stages of his work. "Wenn man die Stücke des Dossiers überschaut, muß man sagen, daß auf diese Frage keine eindeutige Antwort gegeben wird." The word itself determines its use, and cannot be subject to any human order or legalistic institutions. "Die Oberherrschaft des Wortes ist grundlegend für alle weiteren Überlegungen. Der Spender verschwindet als Diener des Wortes hinter diesem Wort." Yet Luther does nothing to undermine confession to a priest and in fact continues to speak of the priest as the one who ordinarily speaks the words of absolution. "Trotzdem stellt man fest, daß Luther auch nach 1525 laufend der überlieferten Ordnung folgt und durchaus unproblematisch, bloß beschreibend, den Priester als regulären Spender der Lossprechung erwähnt." Whether the absolution can therefore be spoken by a lay-person in case of emergency or as a matter of course cannot be answered because of the diversity of texts. "Ob man den Notfall entweder als eine Ausnahme und einen Grenzfall oder als eine Öffnung zu einer freieren Evangeliumsverkündigung betrachtet, ist u. E. eine Ermessensfrage, die sich letzt-

because Christ has given him the words to speak that the words can be depended upon by faith to give the certainty of having been absolved.²⁰

Ja, wo eyn priester nit ist, eben sovill thut eyn iglich Christen mensch, ob es schon eyn weyb oder kind were, dann wilch Christen mensch zu dyr sagen kan 'dyr vorgibt gott deyne sund, yn dem namen u.' und du das wort kanst fahen mit eynem festen glauben, alß sprechs Got zu dyr, So bistu gewiß yn dem selben glauben absolvirt: So gantz und gar ligt alle dingk ym glauben auff gottis wort.²¹

lich nicht mit stringenten Luther-texten beantworten läßt. Im Lichte der Großzügigkeit, die Luthers Darlegung der Absolution und des durch sie wirkenden Wortes Gottes durchzieht, neigen wir zu der letzten Deutung." Lohse, 375, notes that Luther himself never confessed to anyone other than a pastor. Cf. Lohse, 365, where he finds Luther's reason for opening the absolution to the priesthood of all believers in the institution of Christ itself, not in the authority of the ordained clergy. For further discussion on the question of the brother as the one who speaks the words of absolution see Peters, 66; H. Fuglsang-Damgaard, "Die Wiederbelebung der Privatbeichte," *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Kirche* 11 (1933/34): 487; Hans Hartog, "Die Privatbeichte und die Schlüsselgewalt in der Theologie der Reformatoren," *Monatschrift für Pastoraltheologie* 46 (1957): 362; Bertil Werkstrom, *Bekennelse och avlosning* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1963), 38.

²⁰See Precht, 82. Cf. Lohse, 365.

²¹WA 2, 716, 27-32. Cf. WA 15, 486, 17-19; 25-28: "Das Euangelion soll on unterlass schallen und klingen durch aller Christen mund, darumb soll mans mit freuden annemen, wo und wans man hören kan, die hende auffheben und Gott dancken, das du es ubiral hören kannst. . . . Hie ist gleich soviel er sey eyn priester und ym ampt zu predigen odder sonst eyn Christen, das wort, das er redet, ist nicht seyn, sondern Gottis wort, und Gott helt auch so fest druber, als er es selbs redte. Also hat er seyn heyliges wort ynn alle winckel gesteckt." Luther therefore points to the mouth of the neighbor (which, as indicated above, is usually understood to be a priest) as the place to which the penitent can look to receive forgiveness and consolation. Luther maintains that every Christian does have the authority (*Macht*) to absolve again in the *de Captivitate Babylonica* in 1520. It appears to be all important for Luther at this point not to put any restriction on the location of Christ's words. He

From the vantage point of the *verba Christi* which are spoken and faith which builds upon and trusts what they say Luther had therefore won a new view of absolution and its distribution. Neither the subjective reference point of *contritio*, nor the hierarchial structures of the church can provide the basis for certain absolution. The *verba Christi*, as the institution of Christ himself, provide the certain foundation for absolution as a *signum* by way of which faith apprehends the forgiveness of sins.²² It is on the basis of

is speaking against the Roman doctrine of a sacerdotal priesthood and its restrictions. "Poinde, ego non dubito, eum esse a peccatis suis occultis absolutum, quisquis sive sponte confessus sive correptus veniam petierit et emendaverit coram quovis privatim fratre, quicquid contra haec insanierit pontificum vilitia, quando Christus et manifesta dedit absolvere cuilibet suo fideli. . . deinde, de occultis audiendae confessionis facultatem permittant liberrimam omnibus fratribus et sororibus, ut peccator cui voluerit suum peccatum revelet, veniam et solatium, id est verbum Christi, ex ore proximi petiturus" (italics added). WA 6, 547, 17-20; 27-30.

²²A distinct shift in emphasis can be noted in Luther's confession of the *verba Christi* in relation to absolution in 1521 after the arrival of the bull of excommunication. See p. 50, n. 28 below. In writings prior to this year, Christ's words to Peter and the disciples (Matthew 16:19; 18:18) were interpreted by Luther primarily as establishing the *extra nos* certainty that the words of the priest give what Christ has promised to give through his mouth. Although Luther does not withdraw from this position, he does emphasize a further reason for these words: they call for faith in the words which have been given by Christ to speak. And what Christ has given to be spoken can be depended upon. It is this which makes the heart certain that the absolution of the priest is indeed the absolution of God himself, not that he is the priest or even that he holds a particular office. Again, as Luther writes in his tract *Wider die Bulle des Endchrists* in 1520, what is obtained depends upon faith, not upon priestly power. "Das hab ich gesagt, anzutzeygen, wie not und nutz der glaub sey in der busz, wie wol es nit muglich ist, das

of the certain words of Christ upon which faith builds that Luther can thus go on to give practical instructions as to how one should confess and receive Holy Absolution.

Kurze Unterweisung, wie man beichten soll (1519)

In the tract *Kurze Unterweisung, wie man beichten soll* from 1519, Luther presents some practical instructions on how to prepare for confession on the basis of the Ten Commandments, which in themselves help to focus upon God and not man:²³

der glaub on rew sey, wen es aber muglich were, so were er doch allein gnug, den Christus sagt 'was yhr gleubt, das geschicht euch'. Es stet nit in des priesters glauben oder gewalt, sondern in meinem glauben, was ich erlangen sol. Aber die buben, die gerne wolten das unser trost und heil auff yhnen stund, das sie uns mochten schinden und schenden, wie sie biszher than haben, vordammen solchen Christlichen glauben, *und stellen alle ding auf yhr ertichte verlogene gewalt*" (italics added). WA 6, 628, 26 - 629, 3.

²³Upon the urging of Spalatin, Luther had in 1519 written a number of instructions on how to confess, the *Kurze Unterweisung, wie man beichten soll* WA 2, 59-65. These preliminary thoughts were published in a much revised form in Latin in March of 1520 under the title *Confitendi Ratio* (WA 6, 157-169), which Spalatin in turn translated into German. In the 1519 *Kurze Unterweisung*, as in the statements of 1517-18, Luther urges that one is not to look at one's own confession, but look to God. Luther indeed cuts through the jungle of Medieval penitential injunctions and urges that, on the one hand, the laws of God and not men should be focused upon for the preparation for confession; and on the other, that the mercy of God should be the focus of one's certainty in the absolution. "Darumb sollen wir unser gewissen gewenen got tzuvertrawen, wann alles das der meynung geschidt, das man got glaubt und vortraweth, das ist got gantz angenehme, unnd das ist gottes ere, das wir in gottes barmhertzickeit auff's allersterckst vortrawen." WA 2, 64, 23-26. Noteable is Luther's focus upon an attribute of God, that is, his mercy, rather than the locatedness of the cross.

Tzum tzehenden stet die gantz Summa in dem, das die menschen selig sein, die yr vortrawen in got setzen, unnd fust wider yn yre werck, noch eynige Creaturn. Derhalben sol der mensch lernen, das er grossers vortrawen in gottes barmhertzyckeyth, dann in sein beicht oder fleysz habe, dann man kan nicht tzuvil thun, vornemen unnd vorwenden wider das vormaldeyete vortrawen in unszere werck.²⁴

In its Latin revision, *Confitendi ratio* of 1520, which will be discussed below, Luther continues to emphasize the theocentric character of the confession. Luther argues beyond trust in God's mercy and in keeping with tracts such as *de Captivitate* focuses upon the promise of God which is to be kept in mind. It is upon this promise which faith itself builds. Far from trusting in the confession itself, Luther therefore urges on to the certainty ". . . tota fidei plenitudine confidat, certissimus videlicet, quod qui confessuro peccata sua promisit veniam, promissionem suam fidelissim praestabit."²⁵ Again, the focus cannot be the confession itself, but the God who has promised to forgive, as Luther illustrates with a large number of Biblical citations. Since it is God before whom one wants to confess, Luther counsels to do just that: confess one's sins to

²⁴WA 2, 64, 18-23. The German translation of Luther's Latin revision of this work was dedicated to Duke John by Spalatin, who did the translation. In the introduction, Spalatin emphasizes that the tract will contain much that is salutary: "Denn ich bin ungezweifelt, E.F.G. werden mancherlei gute und heilwärtige Lehre, Unterricht und Unterweisung, das tröstliche Sacrament der Buße und der Beichte belangend, darin befindend." SL 19, 786-787.

²⁵WA 6, 158, 10-12.

God.²⁶ Before God, nothing can be or need be hid, for God loves us more than we love ourselves.²⁷

Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute (1518)
Pro veritate inquirenda et timoratis conscientiiis
consolandis conclusiones (1518)

Luther had also argued for the dissociation of a quantified *contritio* in favor of the sure words of God as the criterion for certain absolution in a number of other tracts which he wrote in 1518. Thus, for example, in his *Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiarum virtute*, Luther wrote: "Itaque non tam necessarium est absolvendo dicere 'doles?' quam illud 'credis tete absolvi a me posse?'"²⁸ Faith is certain of that which the absolving words say, and doubt is dispelled when confronted by the sure words of

²⁶WA 6, 159, 21-29.

²⁷WA 6, 159, 30-35.

²⁸WA 1, 596, 17-18. Upon the arrival of the bull of excommunication in 1521 Luther and his writings stood under condemnation. With the burning of Luther's books in a number of German cities, specifically in Meißen and Merseburg, the confessional became a place of inquisition. Spalatin again requested Luther to provide help for those who were placed under duress to confess the possession of Luther's books. In February of 1521 his *Ein Unterricht der Beichtkinder über die verbotenen Bücher* appeared. Luther notes in this tract that the father confessor is there to absolve, not to torture the conscience of the penitent. And he is certainly not to be a policeman. When asked about his books, Luther urges to ignore the questions. And if it appears that an absolution is not forthcoming, he urges the penitent to leave without it. For in this case, the desire to receive absolution can in fact be substituted for its actual declaration. For those who are willing to admit to be in possession of his books, Luther counsels to request absolution at their own risk. It is the father confessors who will have to give account for their actions on the Last Day. Cf. WA 7, 290-298. See also Brecht, 409. See also p. 47, n. 22 above.

Christ. Luther restates this view of absolution in a number of theses published in the same year. In the *Pro veritate inquirenda et timoratis conscientiiis consolandis conclusiones* of 1518 he urges faith and the words of Christ in contrast to the Reue and quality of the absolution which was presented. Indeed, the priest is again urged to point to the *verba Christi* and away from the individuals self-perception. Death itself is a preferable alternative to the doubting of the certain words of Christ, though every creature be thereby rendered doubtful.²⁹ Luther, who himself had tried

²⁹"14 *Quantumlibet incertus sit tam sacerdos quam peccator de contritione, rata est absolutio, si credit ses absolutum.*

15 *Certum est ergo, remissa esse peccata si credis remissa, quia certa est Christi salvatoris promissio.*

16 *Absolutus per clavem potius debet more et omnem creaturam negare quam de sua absolutione dubitare.*

17 *Dubitans, absolutionem suam deo gratam esse, dubitat simul, Christum fuisse veracem dicendo: Quodcunque &c.*

24 *Potestas Clavium operatur verbo et mandato dei firmum et infallibile opus, nisi sis dolosus.*

25 *Evidentia contritionis signa satis habet sacerdos, si peccatorem sentit petere et credere absolutionem.*

26 *Immo longe magis exquirendum est ab eo, an credat sesse absolvi quam an digne doleat.*

28 *Illud Christi potius est inculacandum ei 'confide, fili, remittuntur tibi peccata tua', quam dignitas eius exquirenda" (italics added). WA 1, 631, 15 - 632,6. In evidence in this document are the intimations of a new way of speaking and looking at confession and absolution. Luther begins to speak of the words of Christ as more than dependable when, as above, he speaks of them in terms of *promissio*. As the documents of the years 1518 -1521 will show, the words of Christ when seen as *promissio* provide a new focus: the *externum verbum* which comes from the mouth of another. Furthermore, dependability of the words in *abstracto* begins to make way for the certain locatedness of the words as they are spoken *pro me* through the mouth of those who speak according to the *mandato dei*.*

to find the assurance of salvation in himself,³⁰ now warned of any dependence for the certainty of God's absolution upon experience *in nobis*, or indeed to seek peace with God "in re." "Pax enim nostra Christus est, sed in fide."³¹ The "res" of which Luther speaks in his *Resolutiones* does not consist only of one's *in nobis* experience, however, but includes the priest who speaks the words of absolution. Faith does not look for a *character indelibilis* in the priest nor is the absolution contingent upon the priest who is most assuredly less than impeccable. Luther's sole reference point are the words of Christ and the faith which receives them from him who gives them as promise.

³⁰Cf. WA 40 II, 15, 15-23: "Ego Monachus studebam summa diligentia vivere iuxta praescriptum Regulae, solebam, semper tamen ante contritus, confiteri et recensere omnia peccata mea et saepe iterabam confessionem ac poenitentiam iniunctam mihi sedulo praestabam. Et tamen conscientia mea nunquam poterat certa reddi, sed semper dubitabat et dicebat: Hoc non fecisti recte, non fuisti satis contritus, hoc inter confitendum omissisti etc. Quo igitur longius conabar humanis traditionibus mederi incertae, imbecilli et afflictae conscientiae, hoc indies magis reddebam eam incertiore, imbecilliore et perturbatiore."

³¹WA 1, 541, 9. Cf. WA 1, 540, 41 - 541, 8: "Absolvendus vero omni studio caveat, ne dubitet sibi remissa esse apud deum peccata sua, sitque quietus in corde: nam et si prae suae conscientiae confusione sit incertus (sicut regulariter oportet fieri, si compunctio vera est), tamen stare tenetur alterius iudicio non propter ipsum praelatum aut potestatem eius ullo modo, sed propter verbum Christi, qui mentiri non potest dicendo: Quodcunque solveris super terram. fides enim huius verbi faciet pacem conscientiae, dum iuxta illud sacerdos solverit. *Qui vero pacem alia via quaerit, utputa experientia intus, hic certe deum videtur tentare et pacem in re, non in fide velle habere.* Tantum enim habebis pacis, quantum credideris verbo promittentis [of the one who promises]: quodcunque solveris &c" (italics added).

Nec hic oportet cogitare 'quid, si sacerdos erraret?' quia non in sacerdote, sed in verbo Christi nititur remissio illa. ideo sive sacerdos id faciat lucri vel honoris causa, tu modo optes remissionem sine fictione et credas promittenti Christo: immo etiam si ex levitate absolveret, adhuc obtineres pacem ex fide tua, sicut baptismum seu eucharistiam dat, sive ille lucrum quaerat sive levis ac ludens sit, tua fides plenum accipit. Tanta res est verbum Christi et fides eius.³²

Luther can indeed go as far as saying that even if Reue were completely absent and the priest a complete scoundrel, the absolution remains certain because of the *verba Christi*.³³ Only the unbelief of the penitent, who in his unbelief does not let himself be given the forgiveness of sins which the words of absolution promise to him, can reject the absolution. This, at least, is his conclusion in his already discussed *Sermon von dem Sakrament der Buße* in 1519.

Und so du nit glaubst, das war sey, dein sund vorgeben und loß seyn, so bistu eyn heyde, unchristen und ungläubig deynem herrnn Christo, das die aller schwerest sund ist widder gott. Und bey leyb, gang nit zum prierster, so du seyner absolution nit glaubenn wiltt, du vorwirckst deynen grossen schaden, mit deynem unglauben, Dan mit solchem unglauben machestu deynenn gott als eynen lugner, der dyr durch seynenn prierster sagt 'du bist loß von sunden', und sprichst "Ich glaubs nit adder zweyffel dran', gerad, als werest du gewisser yn deynem duncken, dan gott yn seynen worten . . . O gott, behutt alle menschen fur solchem teuffelischen unglauben.³⁴

³²WA 1, 543, 35 - 544, 1.

³³Cf. Luther in *de captivitate Bablylonica*, WA 6, 571, 2-5: "Fides enim suscipientis non errat, quantumlibet minister erret. Si enim ioco baptisans aut absolvens, hoc est, non absolvens quantum ad ministerum pertinet, revera absolvit et baptisat, si credat baptisandus et absolvendus."

³⁴WA 2, 717, 12-25. It is noteable that some of Luther's Latin vocabulary, e.g. *promissio*, has not yet found its way into his German sermons, doubtless a reflection of his already mentioned pastoral concern. See p. 34 above.

Faith thus depends upon the words; unbelief calls into question this certain ground and indeed the one who has spoken them. In other words, Luther clearly does confess the one who speaks the *verba Christi* to be speaking *in statu Christi*. To stand before what the *verba* promise with unbelief is to deny not the man who speaks them, but Christ himself who has given them to be spoken. While faith is promised forgiveness and thereby confesses God to be true to his words as the giver of the absolution, unbelief not only fails to receive forgiveness, but indeed denies that the God who has given these words to be spoken is truthful. Not to believe the words of the one who speaks *in statu Christi* thus makes not the speaker of these words, but God himself a liar. Unbelief is thus not innocuous. It creates "great damage." For it calls into question the God who has given his words to be spoken. And a God who lies is no God at all. Not to believe in the forgiveness of sins is thus the most grave sin against God, for it denies his goodness, his words, his absolution, ultimately God himself.

Faith, on the other hand, confesses God's words as being most certainly true. Luther continued to write about

Thus talk of the veracity of God's words and their ultimate dependability continues in his German work, while he moves onto new ground in his Latin work. Cf. WA 1, 632, 21-29: "36 Sed non ideo absolutio est nulla, nisi fides simul absoluti esset nulla. . . . 39 Sacerdos etiam levis ac ludens seu scienter contra restrictionem agens vere tamen baptisat et absoluit. 40 Finge casum (per impossibile), sit absolvendus non contritus, credens tamen sese absolvi, hic est vere absolutus."

this faith which hears the *verba Christi* in the absolution spoken *in statu Christi* by the priest. In his "Sermon von *Bereitung zum Sterben*" of 1519 Luther casts his teaching about absolution into a pastoral setting. Again he emphasizes faith and the *verba Christi*. But he also points to the mouth of the priest as the location of the words of God. He speaks *in statu Christi*. Because it is God who speaks, and since God's words are not only true, but spoken *pro me*, the forgiveness of sin is certain. The one who receives God's absolution therefore can live or face death with the certainty that the grave and hell itself have thereby been rendered impotent.

Sundern auß lauter gnaden bawet er dich unwirdigen auff seyn *wort und zeychen*. Daran halt nur fest und sprich 'Der mir seyn *zeychen und wort* gibt und geben hatt, Das Christus leben, gnad und hymel meynen tod, sund, hell mir unschedlich gemacht ahbe, der ist gott, wirt mir die ding woll halten. Hatt mich der priester absolvirt, So vorlaß ich mich drauff als auff gottis wort selber. Seynd es dan gottis wort, So wirt es war seyn, da bleyb ich auff, da stirb ich auff'. Dan du solt eben so fest trawen auff des priesters absolution, als wan dir gott eyenen besondern engel odder Apostell sendet, Ja als ob dich Christus selbs absolviret (*italics added*).³⁵

In short, for Luther the words of absolution are not only dependable as they are found in the Scriptures, but especially certain *pro me* when these same words are found in the mouth of the priest. They are certain, because they are the

³⁵WA 2, 694, 8-16. Most notable in this quotation is the renewed emphasis upon "Zeichen" as a corollary of the words of God. This is something more than we saw earlier where the words were regarded as the *extra nos signum* of the inner (spiritual) reality of the *res signata*.

words of Christ, spoken by the one whom God himself has sent. The words of absolution, the *verba Christi*, spoken *in statu Christi*, heard by and received by faith allow one to be certain of what is promised: the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation.

In all of the above, Luther's emphasis has been upon the reliability of the *verba Christi*. Even though Luther by this time may be regarded as having come to his so-called "reformational discovery," he does not yet seem to have broken through to the confession of the *verba Christi* as being the actual *means* as *verba externa* by which God actually *gives* his gifts. This indeed parallels Luther's theological development with respect to the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And as with that development, a clear confession of the forgiveness of sins as being given with the words only comes to break through slowly and in the context with his struggle against the abuses to which confession and absolution had been subject.

Confitendi Ratio (1520)

At the end of March of 1520, Luther therefore set his sights upon removing confession from the demands of (canon) law, as was seen in his tract "*Confitendi ratio*," already mentioned above. Luther approaches the matter of a dictated confession on the basis of the required intent (*Vorsatz*) of bettering one's life before coming to confession. He thus notes his observation that it is a patent

fact that many come to confession without such an intent.³⁶ The consequence is the creation of a false *securitas*, based on an *ex opere operato sine propositum* understanding of confession.³⁷ Rather than plunging people into such a state of *fictionis*,³⁸ Luther urges self-examination prior to coming to confession.

Nam si quispiam sese non invenerit serio affectum bono proposito, nescio an tutum sit confiteri. Nec scio, melius sibi esse, si abstineret a confessione.³⁹

This is not to say that Luther himself is positing such a *Vorsatz* as a condition for making confession or receiving absolution. Luther's primary concern in this query is hypocrisy, that is, confession as a matter of fulfilling church law in contrast to faith which seeks the forgiveness which God promises. Luther can therefore go on to state that no one can ultimately be sure of the sincerity of his intent for betterment. Indeed, if someone should desire absolution and finds that he does not have the desire to better his life, Luther counsels that this too can be confessed to God. For the God who forgivess is also the God who creates the desire for betterment. With St. Augustine he is to say: "'Domine deus, non habeo quod debeo, nec possum.

³⁶"Timendum certe, multos Ecclesiastici praecipti timore accedere, quibus tamen vita prior mala ex corde placet." WA 6, 160, 9-10.

³⁷WA 6, 159, 23-35.

³⁸WA 6, 159, 29.

³⁹WA 6, 159, 36-38.

Da quod iubes et iube quod vis'."40

The question which needs be asked here is whether Luther is looking for something else in confession beyond the absolution which is the focus of the promises of God. Luther himself sought to proceed cautiously when dealing with this matter of the *Vorsatz*.

Verum ista de proposito volo caute intelligi. Propositum enim bonum dupliciter fieri debet: Primum de manifestis mortalibus tantum, ut sunt adulterium, homicidium, fornicatio . . . *Horum enim vitandorum propositum proprie pertinet ad confessionem sacramentalem et coram deo ad quodlibet statim momentum, postquam perpetrata sunt, . . .* Secundo de omnibus peccatis, quae venialia vocant, de quibus infra, prorsus vanum est laborare ad propositum formandum, quia, si recte sese consyderet, inveniet impossibile, si saltem in carne vivere velit, cum (ut Augustinus ait) haec vita sine talibus non possit agi . . . (italics added).41

What becomes clear is that Luther does not posit the *Vorsatz* as a condition for absolution, nor as the means by which absolution, once given, is made sure.⁴² Rather, the *Vorsatz* is the appropriate response to sin, and therefore synonymous with repentance (a word most noticeably absent from this tract!). It is itself the *status* of faith which agrees with the judgment of God upon sin, and upon having

⁴⁰WA 6, 160, 25-26.

⁴¹WA 6, 160, 29-39.

⁴²The key word in this tract is in fact *fides*, as Öberg points out in his treatment of *Confitendi Ratio*. Such faith will desire not only to carry out the *Vorsatz* mentioned above, but also desires to make confession of sins. Cf. Ingemar Öberg, *Himmelrikets Nycklar och kyrklig Bot i Luthers Teologie 1517-1537* (Uppsala: Appelbergs Boktryckeri AB, 1970), 266-270.

received absolution, it desires to "go and sin no more" (John 8: 11).

Clearly the documents which have been examined above show how Luther's wrestling with the forgiveness of sins in confession and absolution proved to be the fertile soil in which Luther's reformational thought developed and ultimately burst forth. That he never left this ground, but continued to reap from it all the benefits which Christ had placed there for his church will be the subject of that which follows below.

CHAPTER III
THE *PROMISSIO* OF HOLY ABSOLUTION IN THE THEOLOGY
OF LUTHER DURING THE YEAR 1521

In the debates and struggles leading up to the year 1521 we have seen Luther probing toward confessing confession and absolution as gift and grace, first of the way of Augustine and then beyond him. With such growing resources, Luther was now able better to defend the faithful against the duress which the church then exercised in and with private confession. What came to be of paramount concern for Luther in early 1521 was the second half of confession, that is, the absolution. What was clear for Luther was that absolution had been given by Christ to his church, and that the *verba Christi* are given to the priest to be spoken by him as their servant and instrument to those who come to him for forgiveness. Such absolution, as has been discussed above, cannot be bound to any *in nobis* condition, whether *attritio*, *contritio* or even the *Ansatz* for the amendment of life. The desire for absolution, which is in itself a confession of faith that the words spoken by the priest are Christ's words *pro me*, was the sole disposition for receiving the forgiveness of sins. As Luther's tract *Unterricht an die Beichtkinder* of 1521 will therefore show, he regar-

ded the retention of sins upon the express desire for absolution a most grievous arrogation of the gifts of Christ. The father confessor is, after all, merely the one who delivers the gifts. The extraction of a confession, in this case the wresting of information from the penitent about the possession of Luther's books, is for Luther a most grievous abuse of a blessed gift for the church. He therefore wrote the tract out of pastoral concern, and in the process is led to confess his teaching on absolution even more clearly.

Unterricht an die Beichtkinder (1521)

Throughout the "*Unterricht an die Beichtkinder*" Luther's focus is upon the absolution of which the priests are depriving the penitent. Ostensibly the father confessors were using the confessional as a place of inquisition. Luther therefore provides those who do have his books with the "humble" answers they should give the investigating priest.

Lieber herr, ich bit, wolt mich nit ynn die Strick und ferlickeit iagenn. Ich bin nit kommen zur peicht das yr mich bestricken, *szondern loszen sollet gebet mir mein absolution, die yhr mir schuldig seit, und haddert yhr darnach mit Luthern, Bapst und mit welchem yhr wolt: macht mir nit einen hadder, disputation und far ausz dem heiligen sacrament der peicht (italics added).*¹

The heart of the matter for Luther is ultimately the Gospel

¹"*Luthers Unterricht an die Beichtkinder*," February, 1521, WA 7, 291, 4-7; 17-19.

The heart of the matter for Luther is ultimately the Gospel which is to be delivered clearly and unconditionally. It is for this reason that Luther contends against the requirement that all sins must be enumerated if they are to be absolved, that requirement in confession which had caused him so much grief in his early years in the monastery. Neither an inquisition, nor the impossible baring of the soul can be required by the priest.² That is a matter between God and the penitent. For God alone examines "heart and kidneys" (Psalm 7:11). The father confessor indeed should rejoice at this, for no longer need he probe people's lives. Rather, they need simply listen and absolve. ". . . und sie solten got dancken, das sie solcher far des forschensz uberhaben werenn, szo sie nit mehr den horen und absolvieren schuldig sein."³ Ultimately one can only be called to faith, not coerced toward it.

The foundation for the desired absolution can therefore not be sought at any other location, especially not in the bulls of the papacy which were causing the penitents so much grief. Again Luther urges that the penitents point their father-confessors to the certain ground of the sacrament, that is, the absolution. "Ich bin nit schuldig auff solch wancken und ungewiszen handeln euch zu folgen. *Gebt mir meine Absolution, die ist mir gewisz, . . .*"⁴ As the

²See p. 70, n. 18 below.

³WA 7, 292, 3-4.

⁴WA 7, 292, 17-18.

priest is not the indispensable condition for the absolution but its locatedness,⁵ the penitent has received in faith that which he has desired from God even when the priest withholds the absolution.

Wo er noch nit wolt ablassen, wolt ich ymn seine absolution lassen und ehe von yhm gehen alsz von dem, der sich mit Lucifer an mast, uber seyn stand und ampt ynn gottes gericht zu fallenn und heymlickeit der hertzen zu forschen, des nit gewalt hat, und sol nichts sich drumb bekumern. *Wo mensch nit absolviert, da absolviert got.* Zu gleich alsz wenn die tauffe und das sacrament das altarsz yemant von dem priester pitte, und ers nit geben wolte, hette sein glawb und begirde doch gnug darvon empfangen, *alsoz ob der beichtvatter nit wolt absolvieren, so doch er frolich und sicher sein der absolution, die weil er gepeicht und sie begerett und gesucht hat* (italics added).⁶

In other words, no one can rob the one who in faith desires that which God has promised.⁷ If Holy Absolution should be

⁵See p. 52 above.

⁶WA 7, 293, 3-11. Another passage in the same document reiterates the same thought, albeit in more forceful terms: "Er [the one who has sought but not been granted absolution] ist fur got gewiszlich absolviert und musz den raub seiner absolution gedultig und frolich leiden, wie er leiden must einen leiplichen raub." WA 7, 294, 15-17. Luther again appeals to faith as that which will not not be given the gifts which God distributes, even if the hand and mouth of the priest should withhold them. "Die sacrament mag man unsz nemen, vorsagen unnd vorpieten, aber die crafft und gnade der sacrament mussen sie unsz ungepunden unnd ungenommen lassenn. Got hat nit ynn yhre gewalt und mutwillen, szondernn ynn unszern glawben gestellet unszer heyl und seine gnade, wie er sagt: 'glewbt nur, das yhr empfhahet, was yhr bitet, szo habt yhrs gewisz.'" WA 7, 294, 17-21.

⁷Cf. Bernhard Lohse, "Die Privatbeichte bei Luther," in *Evangelium in der Geschichte: Studien zu Luther und der Reformation*, ed. Leif Grane, Bernd Moeller and Otto Hermann Pesch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 371-372. "Vielmehr ist hier darauf hinzuweisen, daß für Luther derjenige, der die Absolution begehrt, ja gerade als

withheld, the father confessor is to be regarded as a thief and a robber, since he is taking and withholding that which belongs to the penitent by virtue of Christ's gift. Nevertheless, one can still boast that absolution has been granted by God, and joyfully go to the Lord's Supper.⁸ If the absolution is to be granted only on the condition that Luther's books are going to be disposed of, Luther counsels the appeal to conscience and the unrelenting request for absolution. "Lieber Herr, absolvirt mich auf meine Fahr, ich will die Bücher nicht lassen, denn ich sündigte wider mein Gewissen." Luther has more harsh words for those who would

Glaubender dieses Verlangen hat. Auf Grund seines Glaubens aber hat er nicht nur Reue und den Vorsatz der Besserung, sondern bereits die Rechtfertigung. Diese scheinbar extremen Aussagen über den Anspruch, den der Poenitent auf die Absolution hat, erklären sich also auf dem Hintergrund von Luthers Theologie."

⁸WA 7, 293, 12-15. What applies to the absolution in confession is reiterated in relation to the Lord's Supper. If the elements should be withheld, despite the humble plea of the one who faithfully comes to the altar, he nevertheless has received that which he has come to receive. Luther counsels the abandonment of everything in favor of the word of Christ. ". . . lasz faren sacrament, alter, pfaff und kirchenn, denn das gotlich wort yn der Bulle verdampt, ist mehr denn alle dingk, wilchs die seele nit mag emperen, mag aber wo das sacraments emperen. Szo wirt dich der recht bisschoff Christus selber speysen geistlich mit dem selben sacrament, . . ." WA 7, 295, 2-5. There is no need to argue that Luther here places the spiritual eating above the *manducatio oralis*. Luther speaks to a specific situation where the elements are withheld despite the desire for faithful eating (in the same manner as he does when he writes to those in Prague, cf. *De instituendis ministris Ecclesiae*, WA 12, 169-196). His concern, as he clearly states at the outset of the tract under discussion, is the consolation of those who are being deprived of the means of grace, not grace itself, which still comes to them through the *externum verbum*.

refuse to give absolution, as he reminds them that they will have to give account for how faithfully they administered the office which they occupied: ". . . will er nit absolvierenn, szo lasz ersz und geb er rechenschafft am jungsten tag *seines vorsageten ampts und beraubtes sacramentes, den er es schuldig gewesen. . .*" (italics added).⁹ Therefore those who have sought absolution are truly absolved because of the faith with which they had come to receive the gifts. Conversely, those entrusted to distribute the gifts stand judged because of their unfaithful refusal to deliver the absolution which they have been called by Christ to give.¹⁰

Clearly Luther's instruction is a renewed emphasis upon the faith which is given the gifts which Christ has given his church, all of which are bound to the *verba Christi* as the means by which the forgiveness of sins is actually given. Many of the themes of his earlier works ring through the document, albeit without the Augustinian character which his earlier documents bore. There is therefore no overt mention of any *res* or *res signata*, nor the appeal to faith as a *Bindeglied* between outer and inner realities. The sure words of Christ indeed now give to faith

⁹WA 7, 294, 11-13.

¹⁰It is this very point of refusing to grant absolution *privatim* which will be the point of issue in the *Berliner Beichtstuhlstreit* that will involve Spener some 150 years later which will be discussed at length on pp. 236-237 below.

what they promise, and no human agency can withhold Christ's gifts *pro nobis*.

Von der Beichte, ob die der Pabst Macht habe
zu gebieten (1521)

Luther's protective exile at the Wartburg later in 1521 saw him turn again to the subject of confession and absolution. In this lengthy tract Luther's primary concern was the theological, that is, biblical foundation for such confession. The tract is dedicated to Franz von Sickingen with gratitude for his intercession on Luther's behalf. It also shows that the Diet of Worms had clearly left its mark on Luther. His central thesis throughout the tract is the rejection of all things that are not consonant with the words of Christ and his teachings. Luther thus turns to the question of the annual demand for confession, that is, the *Beichtzwang*, by disposing of the allegorical exegesis of Matthew 8:4 and a number of other proof texts which substantiated the practice.¹¹ *In summa*, Luther establishes that

¹¹With respect to the Matthew passage, Luther argues that the priesthood of the old law had no power to forgive sins: "Item, war doch der selb priester Moses priester ym alten gesetz, der keyne macht hat sund zuvorgeben, den das ist alleyn dem newen testament mit den schlusselnn geben. Es hetten yhn billicher die Apostel absolvirt." WA 8, 153, 32-35. Luther does make an interesting concession with respect to James 5:16, much to the chagrin of the papal theologians. He agrees that in this passage, unlike the others cited, sin and confession are truly dealt with. But he notes that it is a confession of sins one to another. "Aber er setzt eyynn seltzamenn beychtvatter, der heysset 'Alterutrum', der gefelt dem Bapst und Papisten gar nichts. Alterutrum heyst 'eyner dem andernn' odder 'unternander' und

there is no scriptural mandate for the Roman practice of auricular confession (*Ohrenbeichte*). Furthermore, the same themes observed in Luther's earlier tracts on confession and absolution are restated here: that confession is a gift and therefore to be used freely; that the complete enumeration of sins is not a condition for absolution; that there is indeed confession which is ultimately made before God; finally, that the authority to forgive sins is not only given to those who are priests or indeed the pope, but to the whole church and all its members.¹²

Two aspects of this tract need to be looked at more closely in this context, however: firstly, Luther's contention that the confession cannot be made a matter of compulsion; and secondly, that the absolution given in confession provides certainty of forgiveness which is other than that

meynt unß alle sampt, darauß dann folget, das die beychtvetter sollen den beychtkindern beichten, und das sie nit alleyn pfaffen, bischoff, Bapst seyn, sondernn eyn iglicher Christen were Bapst, bischoff, pfaff, und der Bapst must yhm beychten." WA 8, 155, 33 - 156, 4. Luther notes that rather than concede this *alterutrum*, they would rather argue that it says nothing about *private confession*. And with this Luther agrees, placing the passage parallel with forgiving one another's sins in the Lord's Prayer, and Jesus' exhortation toward reconciliation in Matthew 5:23-24.

¹²See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Ordnung und Abgrenzung der Reformation*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1986), 28. Hereafter Brecht, II. Cf. Georg Eduard Steitz, *Die Privatbeichte und Privatabsolution der lutherischen Kirche aus den Quellen des XVI Jahrhunderts, hauptsächlich aus Luthers Schriften und den Alten Kirchenordnungen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Karl Theodor Volcher, 1854), 28-29.

found in a secret (*heimlich*) confession made before God by oneself.

Luther first argues that confession cannot be a matter of compulsion because there is no scriptural command or mandate which requires it. He dismisses the argument that John 20: 22-23 demands such an interpretation, for, as Luther notes, this passage is clearly about absolution, and not private or public confession which is indeed instituted with these words. Luther can thus contend that forgiveness is not tied to the demand for a confession before the priest. He does grant, however, that he who seeks absolution will doubtless want to confess his sins. But both the confession and the absolution are given freely to the one who comes for absolution.

Das vorgeben ist an die peycht gepunden, und die vorgebung sol folgen unnd sich lenckenn nach der beycht: wil ich hymlich beichten, ßo bistu mir schuldig heymlich vorgeben, wil ich offentlig beychten, so bistu schuldig offentlig zu absolvirn. *Meyn beycht steht nit yn deynem, Bondernn meynem wilkor, datzu die absolution steht yn meynem und nit deinem recht. Ich hab recht unnd freyheit sie zu foddernn, du hast nicht recht sie zu vorsagen, Bondernn schuld unnd nod zu geben. So hat Christus seyne ubirsten zu knechten gemacht, ßo kerestu es umb unnd wilt mich zum knecht machenn, beheltist dir recht und gewalt ubir meyn beycht und absolution. Sieh, das ist vorkeret ding (italics added).*¹³

Nothing in the text permits compulsion. Indeed, Christ does not say, "'kumpt unnd beychtet', odder 'geht hynn, heysset sie beychten yhre sund', Bondernn 'welchen yhr die sund vorgebt, denn sollen sie vorgeben seyn'."¹⁴ The only

¹³WA 8, 157, 4-13.

¹⁴Ibid., 14-16.

compulsion in the text is placed upon the priest to forgive the sins of the one who desires absolution.¹⁵ "Nit mehr dringt das wort, den das du schuldig bist die sund zuvor-geben, wer es begert, *und bist eyn knecht datzu gesetzt*" (italics added).¹⁶ Luther clearly presupposes that the gift has been given, and that the priest is merely the distribution point. Furthermore, the absolution is not the *proprium* of the priest, but remains God's gift; a gift given to the church and to all within it who desire it in faith. On the other hand, since absolution is a gift, it cannot be imposed. Since it is grace, it can be resisted. All is left to the need of the one who comes to be given the gift in faith.

Aber dem beycht kind ist wilkor gelassen und solch vorgebung zu gesagt, das er yhr mag brauchen, wen, wie und wo er wil, wil er nit, ßo hastu yhn nit tu treiben, den niemant kan noch sol geben yemand an seynen danck

¹⁵Luther has clearly been bowled over by the Gospel in Holy Absolution, and releases the consequences of a full-blast Gospel upon the priest. Lohse summarizes the response to Luther's gospelled stance when he writes: "Was sodann die Absolution und den Glauben angeht -- diese beiden müssen hier zusammen behandelt werden --, so hat Luther nicht selten aussagen gemacht, die vor allem auf katholischer Seite, gelegentlich aber auch von evangelischer *als schockierend empfunden sind*. Diese Äußerungen bringen alle in der einen oder anderen Weise zum Ausdruck, *daß der Priester dem Beichtenden die Absolution geradezu schuldig ist*" (italics added). Lohse, 371. This overt focus on Holy Absolution will also become a *skandalon* for Spener, as will be discussed on page 187 below.

¹⁶WA 8, 157, 16-18. See also p. 60 above.

und willen. *Absolution aber ist eine grosse gabe gottis.* Gleich alß zu dem glauben kan und sol man niemant zwingen, Bondern yderman furhalten das Euangelium und vormanen zum glawben, doch den freyen willen lassen tzu folgen odder nit zu folgen. *Es sollen alle sakrament frey sein yderman* (italics added).¹⁷

Thus it is a false exegesis (*falsche Glossen*) which demands confession, and within confession the enumeration of all sins.¹⁸ For it is not on the basis of the knowledge of sins, but on the basis of the promise of forgiveness that sins are actually forgiven. The unequivocal difference between Luther's teaching of confession and absolution and that of the Roman church is the latter's turning Gospel into Law, gift into imposition, and freedom into bondage. Indeed, there is an altogether different object of focus. For the Roman church confession is a psychological act,

¹⁷WA 8, 157, 18-25. The implicit subject in this citation clearly points to God as the one who has promised (*zugesagt*) the absolution to the one who desires to make use of it. It might also be noted in this context, that Luther also addresses the question of the retention of sins. The retention of sins Luther regards to be an open act, addressing sins which are public and for which there is not yet repentance. In this case, the individual to be bound is not asked for his consent. For this is not his jurisdiction. "In dissen offentlichen sunden ists war, das die macht ist by der gemeyn (!) odder dem Pfarrer an stat der gemeyn, tzu pinden den sunder auch on seynen willen, und soll yhn lösen, ßo erbß begerd." WA 8, 160, 10-13. Luther is thus completely consistent. The Law and its verdict cannot be resisted. However, the Gospel and its gifts can be resisted and remain in the "Willkür" of the penitent.

¹⁸WA 8, 159, 9-15. Cf. WA 8, 168, 24-27: Datzu die tzwey wortle 'Ale seyn sund' und 'seynem eygen priester', hilfß gott, was haben die yamer angericht! wie ist man darauff gefallen, wie hat man die elenden gewissen zu unmuglichen sachen trieben, alle sund zu beychten! wilch eynn mehrstrom buchter hat das eynige wortlin 'Omnium' gemacht!"

where the keys are the means by which the secrets of the heart are unlocked and the conscience of the penitent is laid bare. For Luther confession is made *coram Deo*, and the keys therefore do not address the conscience but sins; their purpose is not to lay bare the heart, but to open heaven.

Ich streyt nur darob, das die peycht odder bekentniß nit zu foddern, sondern auffzunehmen sey. Die schlüssel sollen mit den sunden tzu thun habenn, nit mit den hertzen odder gewissen, unnd sollen nitt hetzenn odder gewissen tzu schliessen oder auff schliesse, sondern den hymel. *Es heysen nit hertzen schlüssel oder gewissen schlüssel, sondern hymel schlüssel (italics added).*¹⁹

The present context clearly demands that Luther's understanding of the loosing key be dealt with. For Luther is here, as he did in *de captivitate Babylonica*, struggling against the bondage to which the gifts of God had been confined. Thus not only the duress of confessing all sins is dealt with, but the very arrogation of the absolution by the priests themselves. In other words, the absolution has not only been made conditional upon confession, but is held captive by the Roman understanding of the institution of the priesthood.

In this document Luther clearly speaks of all Christians having been given the keys. All Christians therefore have the authority to absolve, even though he usually thinks of the priest as the one who regularly delivers the absolution. The priest thus uses the keys (loosing and binding) only as a servant of the church, to whom the keys have been

¹⁹WA 8, 161, 1-5.

given. But they remain the church's keys. Luther makes this emphasis because he seeks to focus upon the church as the place where the keys are certainly found, since the church is confessed as the *locus* of the Holy Spirit. There where the Spirit of God is to be found, there is the church, there is the forgiveness of sins. Thus the locatedness of forgiveness cannot be found in an hierarchy which stands above the church, but is in the church itself. It is in the church as the *communio sanctorum* that the forgiveness of sins is distributed by and through the keys.

Da ist keyn zweyffel an, das niemand sund bind odder vorgibt, denn alleyn, der den heyligenn geyst so gewiß habe, das du und ichs wissen, wie disse wort Christi alhie ubirzteugen, das ist aber niemant, denn die Christliche kirche, das ist die vorsamlung aller glewbigen Christi: die hatt alleyn diße schlüssel, da soltu nit an zweyffeln.²⁰

In other words, Luther's main concern expressed with these words is the *Heilsgewissheit* which cannot be located in any one person, but alone in the church of Christ. *Extra ecclesia nulla salus est*. Of the presence of the church one can always be certain, for it is there where the word and sacraments are being proclaimed and distributed. Yet one cannot be certain of the individual, whether priest, bishop, pope, or layman. Luther therefore points to the one thing sure: the church which the Spirit of God has created and himself sustains. To wrest from the church that which makes the forgiveness, which it delivers, certain and to bind it

²⁰WA 8, 163, 2-6.

to a man is to remove it from the foundation of certainty which Christ himself has laid.

Unnd wer yhm daruber die schlussel tzu eygend, der ist eyn rechter abgeseympter sacrilegus, kirchen rewber, eß sey Bapst odder wer es woll. Von der selben kirchen ist yderman gewiß, das sie den heyligen geyst habe, . . . Heylig ist sie umb des heyligen geysts willenn, den sie gewißlich hatt. Darum soll niemant eyn Absolution vom Bapst oder Bischoff empfaen, alß seyn sei es, die da absolvirn. Behut gott fur des Bapsts und Bischoffen absolution, der itzt die welt voll ist. Es sind des teuffels absolution. . . . Alßo wenn ein steinn odder holtz mich kund absolvirnn inn dem namen der Christlichen kirchen, wollt ichs annehmen, widderumb wenn mich der Bapst im namen seiner gewalt in den ubirsten kor der Engel setzt, wollt ich beyde oren stopffen und yhn fur den grossisten gottis lesterer halten.²¹

Clearly Luther's emphasis is to point to the locatedness of the gifts of Christ. The certain location of the forgiveness of sins as being freely available, not iconoclasm, leads him to challenge the arrogation of the absolution by pope and priest. The forgiveness of sins is therefore not to be found in human institutions, nor in the arrogated power of those who deem themselves above the Christian church, but in the Christian church which is the creation of God himself through the Holy Spirit. The one who therefore uses the keys does so as a servant of the keys which remain located in the church and its possession.

Er [the pope] ist ein knecht der schlussell wie alle andere priester, sie sind aber alleyn der kirchen. Ein herr mag leiden, das sein knecht sein wapen fure, ßo fern er nit vormeß, [das] das wapen seyn fur allen knechten und ydermann. *Alßo die Christliche kirche gibt*

²¹WA 8, 163, 6-22. Cf. p. 77, n. 25 below, where the pure instrumentality of the one who speaks the words of absolution is discussed further.

*die schlussel dem Bapst und befihlt ynn yhrem namen sie tzu furen und brauchen, aber sie lessit sie nit darum seyn seyen (italics added).*²²

At issue for Luther is therefore the arrogation of the keys, and their removal from the true ground of certainty of the forgiveness of sins, that is, the Christian church. Luther thus appeals to the creed itself, and argues that the article concerning the forgiveness of sins must stand after the article about the Christian church, which in turn stands after the confession of the Holy Spirit. No Spirit of God, no Christian church, no forgiveness of sin.²³

²²WA 8, 163, 22-27. This quotation, taken out of its context, could be interpreted as supporting an *Übertragungslehre*. But Luther's focus in this tract must be taken into account: the arrogation of Christ's gifts by a sacerdotal priesthood, placing the forgiveness of sins upon the spurious foundation of the priesthood itself, and not the church which God created through the Spirit.

²³It is this focus of Luther's upon the church that has led a number of scholars, including Lohse, to locate and draw Luther's teaching of Holy Absolution from his ecclesiology. Lohse can thus say: "Die Privatbeichte ist ein Kristallisationspunkt für zahlreiche theologische und kirchliche Probleme. Für die Privatbeichte ist nicht nur die Lehre von Sünde und Gnade wichtig, sondern zugleich auch die Ekklesiologie, wobei insbesondere auch die Auffassung vom Geistlichen Amt und von der Schlüsselgewalt von Bedeutung ist." Lohse, 357. Cf. Laurentius Klein, *Evangelisch-lutherische Beichte, Leben und Praxis* (Paderborn: Bonifacius Verlag, 1961), 42-43, who sees in this locatedness in the church the clear distinction of Luther from the *Schwärmer*. See also M. J. Arntzen, "Biecht en Vergeving van Zonden." *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 60 (1960): 91, who notes Luther's connection of the Holy Spirit to the church and in turn to the forgiveness of sins: "De apostolische geloofbelijdneis, aldus Luther, heeft daarom ook dese volgorde: Erst, Ik geloof in de Heilige Geest, daarna een heilige christleikjke kerek en dan vergeving van zonden. Zonder H. Geest is er geen kerk ein zonder h. kerk geen vergeving van zonden."

Also ist nit war, das der Bapst die schlussel habe, sondernn alleyn die kirche. Und nit er, sondernn sie alleyn bindet unnd abolvirt, darynnen er yhr dient und alle priester. Darauß folgett, das der Bapst ynn seynem ampt sol seyn ein knecht aller knecht, wie er sich rumet und och nicht thut, *das auch eyn kind ynn der wiegen mehr recht tzu den schlusselln hatt, und alle die den heyligen geyst haben, denn er (italics added).*²⁴

²⁴WA 8, 163, 32 - 164, 2. Cf. WA 8, 163, 26-27:

"Darumb so ist eyn iglich Christen mensch eyn beycht vatter der heymlichen beycht, . . ." All the above cannot be pressed to address the office of the ministry, which at this point is not a matter of concern for Luther. To press for an *Übertragungslehre* from what is stated above would be to say more than what Luther is actually saying in this context. Furthermore, one might argue that Luther is arguing for freedom from unbiblical restrictions, rather than for a new order. His actual practice also bears this out. Thus he speaks at the end of this tract as though one would ordinarily confess to a priest or monk, but that this does not have to be so. God has located his gifts more liberally. "Die drytte freyheyt: wo du nit mochtist eynem pfaffen odder munch beychten, so nym fur dich eynen man, er sey ley odder priester, tzu dem du dich gutts vorsihest, und thu nit anderß, denn alß wolltistu trewen radt und trost dyner seelen holen, wartten, was got dyr durch yhn sagen wollt, und wie diyr der sagt ynn gottis namen, so folge und laß dyrß eyn absolution seyn und bleyb drauff, such keyn ander absolution. . . . *Christus selbs absolvirt yhn alhie alleyn damit, das er seynen bruder horet und werden der sache eyniß . . .*" (italics added). WA 8, 182, 23-28; 183, 13-14. It is therefore the *congregatio* of the two or three gathered by his name, as Christ has promised, which can be certain of the forgiveness located with them, for the promise of Christ is to be located there with them. "Christus ist da, der vatter erhoret, so nur tzween alleyn bitten ynn Christus namen vorsamlet, was sie wollen odder durffen. Darumb last unß nur frisch und frolich erwegen auff seyne klare wort, und eyner dem andern beychten, radten, helffen und bitten was unß ymer an ligt heymlich, es sey sund odder peyn, und yhe nit tzweyffeln an solcher liechter, heller tzusagung gottis, . . ." (italics added). WA 8, 184, 19-24. Thus the true and certain basis of forgiveness are the words of Christ, there with Christ, located in the mouth of the brother: ". . . sondern das wyr ynn krafft dißer wortt Christi beychten, wem wir beychten, eß sey ley odder pfaff, und darauff unß kecklich lehnen und trosten, das wenn tzweyn mitteynander sich ynn seynem namen vorsameln, das Christus sey, was sie thun yhm gefall, was sie bitten, vom vatter geschehe, daran yhe nit tzweyffeln." WA 8, 184, 30-34.

The church, created by the Spirit of God, is therefore the sole locatedness of the forgiveness of sins. Any other ground is dubious. In other words, to affirm that the whole Christian church has been given the authority to forgive sins is not to say that everyone in the church actually uses the loosing key. Luther is contending against the Roman teaching of the church which regards the priest as the sole bearer of the authority to forgive sins and he sets out to present as unbiblical the contention that the priesthood is the sole locatedness of forgiveness. One is therefore not to seek the forgiveness of sins from the priest because he is a priest, but because he is a member of that church, created by the Holy Spirit, to which has been given the forgiveness of sins. "Ja ich sag weytter und warne, das yhe niemand eynem priester alß eynem priester heymlich beycht,

The question of the *Übertragungslehre* cannot be dealt with in detail in this context. See, however, the statements of Hans Hartog, "Die Privatbeichte und die Schlüsselgewalt in der Theologie der Reformatoren." *Monatschrift für Pastoraltheologie* 46 (1957): 362, who distinguishes between the private (*heimlichen*) act and the public act. Therefore the lay-person is not excluded from the use of the keys, yet in cases of open sin, the *Amtsträger* is responsible. See also Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics, ed. Robert D. Preus and John R. Stephenson, no. 9 (Fort Wayne: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, 1990), 112-119, who outlines Luther's position, traces its interpretation in later Lutheranism, and some of the consequences of both. Cf. the already indicated *loci* in Jos E. Vercruyssen, "Schlüsselgewalt und Beichte bei Luther," in *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526-1546*, ed. Helmar Junghans (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 162-164.

Bondern alß eynem gemeynen bruder unnd Christen."²⁵ This

²⁵WA 8, 184, 27-29. The discussion on this point has already been initiated on pp. 44-46, n. 19 and p. 76, n. 24 immediately above. It might further be noted here, however, that aside from one reference in the Large Catechism, Luther does not speak of the giving of absolution as a brotherly act after this tract, but consistently locates it in the office of the ministry. This is doubtless not to be restrictive, but to point to the sure locatedness of Christ's gifts in view of the contention of the *Schwärmer* who refused to acknowledge any *extra nos locus*. See also Klein, 46, who draws the conclusion that the one who distributes the absolution on the basis of a twofold authority: "Der Spender der Abolution handelt nach Luther daher stets in der doppelten Funktion als Beauftragter der Gemeinde (d.h. jedes einzelnen Christen) und als Beauftragter Christi." In the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the one giving the absolution does so because he is a "minister of the Church of Christ and by his authority." Cf. *LBW*, 56. One might compare this with the absolution found in *Lutheran Worship*, which confesses with Luther the one who speaks the words to be ". . . a called and ordained servant of the word." Cf. *LW*, p. 158. Klein, however, qualifies his assessment with reference to the *verbum Dei* which stands behind the absolution, whereby the one declaring the absolution is acting as *vicarius Christi*. God himself is thus the one who actually gives the absolution to the one who believes. As confession is made before God, so absolution delivers the words of God. (Cf. BSLK 519, 22-26). Indeed, Klein also notes that Luther's teaching concerning the *verba Dei* stands in the background of his teaching on absolution. It might be contended, however, that they stand in the foreground for Luther, since he consistently argues that the Holy Spirit, by means of the word and sacraments, creates, sustains, sanctifies, and forgives the church. (Cf. Luther's explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, BSLK, 511, 46 - 512, 13.) The one who absolves is thus the one who is the bearer of the *verba Dei* on the basis of the word of Christ himself. Absolution is given through and with the words. The church itself is the location where the words are heard. The one who delivers the words is thus not the church, but the Lord himself through his minister/ servant/ instrument. See p. 73, n. 21 above. In the final analysis, it is the words of God alone which deliver absolution. The status of the speaker of the words is therefore secondary to the words which are spoken. The distinction which is made between Christians thus becomes one of order, not right. (Cf. WA 9, 486, 25-27; WA 12, 184, 31 - 185, 15. Both of these passages speak of absolution on the basis of the one who is bearer of the word). Luther had already contended for a distinction

contention of Luther for confession to the brother in Christ will be of great importance in the discussion which is to follow with respect to Pietism, where the *mutual consolation of the brethren* will play such a dominant role.

Confession and absolution are therefore located most certainly in the church where they can be freely used as the gifts of grace which they are. Luther indeed lauds private confession, and laments the very thought of being deprived of such a precious gift.

Die heymliche beycht acht ich wie die Jungpfferschafft und keyscheyt, eyn seher kostlich heylsam ding. O es soltt allen Christen gar leyd seynn, *das die hymliche*

for the sake of order in the *Freedom of the Christian*: "Dan weyl wir alle gleich priester sein, musz sich niemant selb erfur thun und sich unterwinden, an unszer bewilligen und erwelen das zuthung, des wir alle gleychen gewalt haben, Den was gemeyne ist, mag niemandt on der gemeyne willen und befehle an sich nehmen." WA 6, 408, 11-17. For what is gift may not be taken or arrogated by anyone. Again, as has already been stated above, Luther continues to regard the pastor as the ordinary distributor of the absolution. Confession before the Christian brother is most often referred to as a *Notfall* (Cf. in 1540, where Luther counsels the seeking of a *Seelsorger* " . . . oder (so die Not so gros ist, das du yhn nicht haben kanst) von deinem nehesten Christen menschen" WA 49, 146, 35 -40. The absolution is then to be declared " . . . durch ein offentlich Ampt den beruffenen Dienern und in der not einem jglichen in sonderheit" WA 49, 147, 2-4). That Luther thinks of this one as ordinarily [*kata taxin*] being the bearer of the *Predigtamt* has already been discussed. In other words, though certainly serving the church, the one who speaks the words of Christ *in statu Christi* is also the one who has been "*beauftragt*" by Christ. It is therefore one thing to say that the one who speaks the words of absolution serves the church with the words of absolution (which is certainly Luther's intention), and quite another to be presented as a servant of the church who speaks *in statu ecclessiae*. Luther's confession of Holy Absolution cannot be reconciled with this latter position.

*beycht nit were, und gott auß hertzen danckenn, das sie uns erleubt unnd geben ist (italics added).*²⁶

Yet while rejoicing in the gift of confession and absolution, he also continues to be as vehement that such a gift is imposed only at the expense of making God into a fool.

Denn die hymliche beycht ist eyn auffgethaner gnaden schatz, darynnen got fur hellt unnd anbeut seyn barmhertzickeit und vorgebung aller sund, unnd ist eynn selige reyche gottis tzu sagune, wilche niemand tzuwingt noch dringt, Bondernn yderman lockt und rufft. Szo plumpistu da eynher mit deynem frevel und tzuwingist alle wellt tzu solchen guttern, und weyssist unnd sihest, das sie derselben noch nit begirig seyn. Nehmen sie auch nit, behalten sie auch nit: was machstu hie anderß,

²⁶WA 8, 164, 15-18. Despite these words, Aland finds an ambivalence in Luther's position, where his praise of private confession is tempered by implicit restrictions and qualifications. "Wenn Luther im Anschluß an diese scharfe Absage an die Privatbeichte fortfährt: 'Nu last unß die hymliche Beycht handelln und leren, as wir der selben seliglich brauchen' [WA 8, 175, 16-17], so ist die eigentliche Inkonsequenz nicht zu übersehen, aber sie kann nach dem Vorangegangenen nicht überraschen. Bezeichnend auch, daß Luther die Empfehlung sogleich wieder einschränkt." Kurt Aland, "Die Privatbeichte im Luthertum von ihren Anfängen bis zu ihrer Auflösung," chap. in *Kirchengeschichtliche Entwürfe* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1960), 460. This alleged "Inkonsequenz" and "Einschränkung" is only apparent. In light of the fact that this whole tract wrestles with the question of the *Beichtzwang*, which Luther categorically rejects as the imposition of grace. Grace cannot be forced. Nor can the forgiveness of sins be imposed as a matter of Law. Grace, Christ, forgiveness of sins, Holy Absolution are gift. And it is this giftedness which Luther consistently praises, while at the same time rejecting confession as a matter of duress. This is also Werkström's contention when he writes: "Naturligtvis är allt tvång Luther fjärran, och hans tal om biktens nödvändighet får inte uppfattas så some om han ville tvinga någon till bikt. Men om man vill ingå i Guds rike och vara en sann kristen, vilket inte heller det är ett tvång, ty Gud tvingar ingen, så bör man inte förakta bikten utan bruka den." Bertil Werkström, *Bekennelse och avlosning* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1963), 90. If anything is implicit at this juncture, it is the clear distinction between Law and Gospel which will become completely explicit in due course.

denn das du got fur eynen narrn heltist, der seyne tut er umb deyniß tzwingens willen soll vorschutten, bring-ist yhm vil hawssen fur, den er geben soll, und ist niemand der seynn begere.²⁷

Nor does it benefit the one who receives the gifts. Thus, what is touted as a yearly reformation of Christendom is in fact an aberration. Luther yields nothing to the giving of God's gifts to faithless hearts. Indeed, the unfaithful come only to their own detriment, and far from reforming hearts, the Pope himself is herding people to destruction with his command.

ya wenn die frumckeyt stund ym gang zum Altar, mochtistu auch woll eyn saw und hund frum machen! Furwar, wer willig und lustig datzu ist, darff keyniß gepottis, wer unwillig und unlustig datzu ist, dem hilfft keyn gepot noch tzwang, ya machts nur erger.²⁸

Not papal decrees, but the preaching of the Law and the Gospel is therefore called for by Luther. For both have their source in the words of God. It is thus the *viva vox* of the proclamation which draws people to absolution, when and where God wills.

Darumb solt der Bapst mit den syenen das lassen seyn erbeyt seyn, auff tretten, mundlich predigen und dem volck die far und schaden der sunden und gottis gericht fur hallten, da neben preysen und loben die sacrament gotlicher gnaden, dasselb on unterlaß ymmer predigen,

²⁷WA 8, 166, 27-35. The forcing of absolution upon the unbelieving heart in an *ex opere operato* manner is, according to Luther's exegesis of Matthew 7:6, the casting of pearls before the swine. ". . . es sind sewischen hertzen, di noch nit begirig sind der sacrament und haben noch lust tzur sunden, und müssen die sacrament doch empfahren und beychten, on yhren danck und willen." WA 8, 167, 26-28.

²⁸Wa 8, 168, 4-7.

und also das volck von sunden abschrecken und fruntlich reytzen tzu den sacramenten, das sie auß ansehen yhrß schadens und nutzß bewegt williglich kemen. Da wurden sie denn gott hollt, unnd erckneten yhr untugent und gottis gnaden recht: das wurden rechte Christen. Also sollt die beycht frey bleyben ydermann und yhrer nutz neben der sunden ungluck gepredigt werden, wer denn keme, der keme, wer nit keme, der bleyb außen.²⁹

²⁹WA 8, 169, 11-20. An examination of Luther's call to confession is made by Klein. Most interesting is that Klein reinterprets what Luther calls a "*freundliches Reizen*," as a "*Vermahnung*." What follows in his discussion is a rather unfortunate misinterpretation of Luther's position, based in no small degree upon chronological inversions. He notes that Luther realized that people were taking confession lightly, even staying away from it, especially after the reforms of Carlstadt. He thus quotes Luther's "*Von der Beicht, ob die der Pabst Macht habe zu gebieten*," (written at the Wartburg) to point out that here we find ". . . ein starkes Drängen, das Aufzeigen einer 'inneren Notwendigkeit' der Beichte, ja noch mehr als das" Klein, 73. What Luther had put forth as reasons for drawing people to confession, Klein cites as reasons which exercise a "*Drang zur Beichte*." Finally, Klein notes Luther's calling into question the faith of those who are not prepared to be humbled by coming to confession. Luther's negative emphases are indeed contrasted to the positive wording of the 21st Canon of Lateran IV (He refers to Denzinger, 437). The neglect of private confession, Klein hears Luther say is tantamount to rejecting the sermon which one therefore does not want to apply to oneself. (Klein, 74) All evidence, it appears, is marshalled to establish Luther as being manifestly inconsistent in his teaching on confession and absolution as being completely free and without duress. A number of quotations from the Large Catechism are cited to bear this out (cf. the citations from BSLK 731, 37-38; 732, 11-20; 732, 40-42).

Yet it might indeed be argued that Luther is indeed consistent. When Luther thus says, "Wer denn käme, der käme; wer nicht käme, der bleibe außen," he is indeed saying something about freedom, i.e. that grace can be resisted, and that those who want to exclude themselves from the absolution are free to do so. They do so at their peril, for they "remain outside," i.e. excommunicate. But they cannot be forced in. Even when Luther does use a word such as "*vermahnen*" in the Large Catechism, the emphasis is laid upon the gifts which are placed before us, which are again rejected only at the greatest peril. For when the gifts are given, their rejection is nothing other than unbelief. For this reason Luther can indeed say "Denn du verachtest, das

Luther maintains this Law and Gospel approach to draw people to confession throughout the rest of this tract. Even when he counsels self-examination before coming to confession, he urges that people be desirous of God's forgiveness before they come.³⁰ In other words, coming to confession, as coming to the sacrament of the altar, ". . . fodert eitel gläubige Herzen."³¹ On the other hand, where there is any hint of external, that is, ecclesiastical duress, whereby not faith but necessity calls for confession and absolution, Luther urges abstention from the sacraments. Grace cannot be forced.

Derhalben ist hie weytter meyn trewer rad, das eyynn Christen mensch auff die fasten und osteren nit beicht noch tzum sacrameant gahe, und denck alßo: Sihe da, die weyl das eyn mensch, der Bapst, gepotten hat, ßo will ichs eben darumb nit thun, und wenn erß nit gepotten hett, ßo wollt ichs thun, wilß aber auff eyn ander mal thun, da erß nit gepotte hatt, wenn und wie mich meyn frey lust und andacht rüret. Und wilß darumb thun, das ich nit mich an menschen gepot gewene, und ich fur yhn furchten oddern auff solche werck lerne vorlassen und trosten, *da mit meyn glawbe und traw tzu gottis gnaden vorletzt wurd* (italics added).³²

Thus the participation in a confession demanded by the laws

kein Christen verachten soll, und machest damit, daß du keine Vergebung der Sünden haben kannst. Und ist ein gewiß Zeichen, daß du auch das Evangelium Verachtest" BSLK 732, 11-20.

³⁰WA 8, 170, 5-17.

³¹BSLK 521, 10-11.

³²WA 8, 172, 25-32. What Luther counsels here, he himself actually does when he confronts the "Wittenberg reforms" initiated by Karlstadt during the week of Invocavit in 1522. The seemingly evangelical reforms of Karlstadt were exposed as new laws by Luther, who with sermons and actions showed forth the true nature of evangelical freedom.

of men is not simply a matter of indifference. It is detrimental to faith, and injures faithfulness to God's grace. What has been exchanged is the gift of God for the works of men. Indeed, divine faith has become man's faith, a faith engendered by laws and decrees.³³ Indeed, such a faith has as its object the fulfillment of laws of men, not the deeds of Christ *pro nobis*. Such a faith cannot stand before God, for far from letting itself be given the gifts of God, it asserts itself on the basis of the decrees of men. Such faith cannot receive the gifts which Christ seeks to distribute with the absolution, and therefore cannot stand before God.

Nu mag solcher glawb nit bestehen mit Christlichem glawben, wilcher nit auff unß thung, sondernn auff Christus thun sich bawet, unnd hellt fest dafur, der mensch sey darumb frum, das Christus fur ihn allis than habe, und seyne werck hynfurtt seyen nur frey folge unnd frucht solchs glawbens unnd frumkeyt (*italics added*).³⁴

Faith alone is thus the sole criterion for going to confession. Anything which deters from that which lets itself be only given the gifts and injects some element of duress, and consequently trust in something other than Christ, Luther categorically eschews. Faithful confession will desire the absolution freely and requires no law. And Luther thus

³³"Wer macht dyr den glawben und solch gewissen, denn der Bapst mit seynem gesetz? Denn wo seyn gesetz nit were, zso hettistu des glawbens unnd gewissens nit." WA 8, 172, 17-19.

³⁴WA 8, 172, 20-23.

presses on to show how such faithful confession is made and absolution is received.

The foundation of all confession, and thus the ground of all certainty in the reception of absolution, is that one confesses one's sins *coram deo*. Luther therefore points the penitents to that confession which cannot permit any other interpretation: the secret confession, *not* before a priest, but in solitude, before God himself. No revealing of sins before the priest is necessary, as the scriptures clearly show in the case of the saints of the Old Testament.³⁵ Confession is thus used in a blessed manner when it is made before the face of God, faithfully receiving the absolution from the God who promises to forgive the one who confesses his sins.

It is on the certain basis that God himself desires to forgive that Luther can go on to note two specific causes which stimulate confession before a *Beichtvater* who delivers the *viva vox evangelii pro me*: the first is tied to the cross of Christ, the second is the promise of absolution by God in the words of the Scriptures.

Luther begins his discussion of the factors which kindle a desire for confession with language reminiscent of his *theologia crucis*. Before the cross the penitent comes to naught and is exposed in all of his shame *before someone else*. Such shame becomes manifest before another tangible

³⁵WA 8, 175, 16 - 176, 4.

human being, where this other stands *in statu dei*.³⁶ It is a shame which reduces the individual to a humility which honors God because it erases all human self-assertion. Shame before the other is indeed the blessed cross which one is called to bear.

Die erst, das heylig Creutz, das ist, die schand und scham, das der mensch sich williglich empossset fur eynem andern menschen und sich selb vorklagt und vorhonet, das ist eyn kostlich stuck von dem heyligen Creutz. O wenn wyr wisten, was straff solch willige scham rodt fur keme, und wie gnedigen got sie machet, das der mensch yhm tzu ehren sich selb so vornichtiget und demutiget, wyr wurden die beycht auß der erdenn graben und ubir tausend meyl holen: die gantz schrift betzeugt, wie gott den demutigen gnedig und hollet ist. Nu ist demut nichts anderß, denn zu nichte und zu schanden werdenn. *Es kan aber niemand baß tzu nichte werdenn, denn mit emplossung seyner sundenn* (italics added).³⁷

While the language of the *theologia crucis* is clearly in evidence in these words, their content is altogether different in this document. Rather than merely agreeing with God's *iudicium*, and in consequence happily enduring God's *poena* in *humilitas*, Luther's focus is here upon the faithful

³⁶This theme resounds throughout those who have experienced the blessing of private confession and absolution. We may think of Löhe and Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer thus can write in his *Gemeinsames Leben*: "Solange ich im Bekenntnis meiner Sünden bei mir selbst bin, bleibt alles im Dunkeln, dem Bruder gegenüber muß die Sünde ans Tageslicht. Weil aber die Sünde einmal doch ans Licht muß, darum ist es besser, es geschieht heute zwischen mir und dem Bruder, als daß es am letzten Tag in der Helle des jüngsten Gerichtes geschehen muß." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1979), 100.

³⁷WA 8, 176, 6-15.

disposition which is not prepared to receive punishment, but absolution.

Es ist keyn fastenn, keyn beten, keyn ablaß, keyn wallen, keyn leyden nymmer so gut, alß diße willige scham und schand, darynn der mensch recht grund tzu nicht, *demutig, das ist, der gnaden begreiffig wirt* (italics added).³⁸

The humility of which Luther now speaks is here interchangeable with the word faith, for it is to faith alone which grace is given. In other words, shame is not an anthropocentric disposition which prepares for grace, but itself a gift of God which dispells man's self-assertion.

The faithful confession which leads to shame furthermore takes on an eschatological character. For to be ashamed before one person here in this life precludes the far more grievous shame to be endured before God, and all the hosts of heaven and earth at the last judgment.

Unnd was ists, das wyr unß fur eynem eynigenn menschen so fast schemen, so wir doch am sterben (da nit lang hyn ist) solch scham auß stehen müssen fur got, allen Engelln unnd teuffelln, da es wirt tausent mall schwerlicher tzu gehen, wilchem wir allem mit dißer geringen scham fur eynem menschen leychtlich mugen tzuvor kummen?³⁹

Thus, while to confess before God in secret can provide the certainty of the forgiveness of sins, it falls short of apprehending both the total shamefulness of sin on the one hand, and the full joy of forgiveness on the other. Luther is therefore not making a distinction of degrees of forgive-

³⁸WA 8, 177, 6-9.

³⁹WA 8, 177, 13-17.

ness objectively. Rather, Luther regards confession and absolution as a means by which sin and its forgiveness cannot be spiritualized away. Sin affects the whole person. Christ came into the world in the flesh *pro nobis* who are also flesh and blood. Confession and absolution in the teaching of Luther thus has sin located *in nobis*, and has Christ meet us *extra nos*. In other words, Luther confesses the forgiveness of sins there where Christ has mandated it to be given out, by his ministers to the penitent sinner, an absolution *in concreto* before another person.

It is the absolution delivered by another on the basis of the promises of Christ in the Scriptures which provides the second reason for desiring private confession and absolution. Again Luther's concern is *Heilsgewißheit*, which one cannot have outside of the promises of God delivered *pro me*. He thus proceeds to list the Scripture verses which institute absolution and their *call* to faithful confession of sins: "Wilchen solch lieplich und trostlich wortt nit bewegen, der muß freylich eyn kalten glawben haben und eyn loßer Christ seyn."⁴⁰ Absolution is thus given to be spoken by the mouth of the *Beichtvater* because of the certainty of forgiveness and the consolation which such absolution promises. What is at stake, therefore, is not the degree of forgiveness, but the degree of certainty of such forgiveness. Certainty rests solely on the promises

⁴⁰WA 8, 178, 6-8.

of the *verba Dei*, and faith founded upon the words thus spoken can be certain that forgiveness has indeed been given. No ground of certainty can be found in us. That lies only *extra nos* and is given us from outside ourselves by way of the *verbum externum*. Confession in secret has no such certainty, for what is promised is certainly there for the church, but not necessarily *pro me*. In other words, what is there for everyone remains the prerogative of God to offer to the individual. Such offering of forgiveness certainly takes place in the absolution.

Denn ob woll eyn iglicher bey yhm selb got beychten mag und sich mit gott heymlich vorsunen, so hat er doch niemand, der yhm eyn urthyl sprech, darauff er sich tzu frieden stell und seyn gewissen stille, muß sorgen, er hab yhm nit gnug thann. Aber gar feyn und sicher ist, *das er gott ergreyffe by seyner eygenn wortten und tzu sagen, . . .* Sihe, eyn solchen trotz und sicherheyt kan der nit haben, der bey sich alleyn gotte beycht, denn diß tzusagung gottis sind gestellet auff zween, drey und wie viel yhr seyn mugend. . . . *Darumb ist solch gotliche warheyt ynn seyner zusagung gar eyn ubir-schwencklich, kostlich, reych und starcke sicherheyt, die niemand lessit sincken noch tzappelln (italics added).*⁴¹

⁴¹WA 8, 178, 7-12; 23-25; 28-30. Cf. Otto Hof, "Die Privatbeichte bei Luther," *Schriftauslegung und Rechtfertigungslehre* (Karlsruhe: Evangelischer Presseverband für Baden e.V., 1982), 32-33. Hof writes that private absolution is especially needed by those in *Anfechtung*, where even the confession before God does not help, ". . . weil da das von außen [extra nos] kommende Wort der Vergebung fehlt . . . Luther weiß aber weiter daß es Christen gibt, die das tröstende Vergebungswort in der Predigt nicht hören können, und daß jeder Christ einmal in solche Not der Anfechtung kommen kann. . . da ist die innere Situation, in der die Privatbeichte ihre besondere Bedeutung und ihren Segen erweist." He goes on to provide a number of diverse quotations which underline the certainty of forgiveness which is found in private absolution, e.g. WA 50, 632, 5-7; WA 15, 486, 30-35.

Clearly the key word in this quotation is the word "Zusage." As with baptism during the year 1521, Luther's focus is upon the promise which God has placed in the sacrament. The words of God, which are completely reliable, thus promise what they say. This is still, however, some way from actually saying that these words actually deliver what they promise. In other words, what Luther confesses in and with the absolution is that the promise of forgiveness is given, which faith then apprehends as forgiveness *pro me*.⁴² Absolution is thus still a word about forgiveness, rather than the actual forgiveness of sins given with the words themselves. Nevertheless, there is here a focus upon the certainty of salvation which is sure because of the delivered promises of God. All other ground leaves one dangling in uncertainty.⁴³ What becomes clear is that Luther's main contention in this whole tract has been *Heilsgewißheit* with the words of absolution, and the elimination of all of those elements which locate forgiveness anywhere else but in the faith which lets itself be given the absolution promised by God in the Bible. In Luther's own words:

Und summa summarum: Wer eyn recht Christen ist, der danck gott, das er solch beycht haben kan, und brauch yhr mit freuden unnd lust, unangesehen des Bapsts narren

⁴²Cf. Werkström, 83-90.

⁴³See Hof, 33.

werck und gepot, wenn und wie offft er will odder darff.⁴⁴

⁴⁴WA 8, 181, 3-5. In light of Luther's many statements which rejoice in the gift of absolution, it is again difficult to agree with Aland's summation of this document: "Es ist nicht verwunderlich, daß man in Wittenberg und anderswo, wo die Ohrenbeichte noch in altem Brauch stand, aus dieser Schrift vor allem *das Negative heraushörte*" (italics added). Aland, 461. That there is much criticism of the Roman practice with its *Beichtzwang* is not to be disputed. Yet Luther tirelessly emphasizes the positive, that is, the gifts and blessing which such confession and absolution gives. Cf. p. 81, n. 29 above where Luther speaks of confession as a ". . . freundliches Reizen."

CHAPTER IV

LUTHER'S CONFESSION OF HOLY ABSOLUTION 1521-1529

Luther's thoughts about confession and absolution did not only find expression on paper, however. He saw no alternative but to leave the Wartburg and go to Wittenberg and deal with the radical reforms which had swept through Wittenberg at the instigation of Carlstadt in 1521.¹ The *Invocavit* Sermons of 1522 were a gospelled response to Carlstadt's "evangelical" impositions. For the most part, the old forms of the Mass were reinstated in the traditional manner. Yet consistent with his statements on confession and absolution in the tract which has just been discussed above, Luther did not reinstate as mandatory confession and absolution prior to the reception of the Lord's Supper. His eighth *Invocavit* sermon specifically, preached on Remi-

¹It is again most telling that Aland lays the burden of responsibility for that which took place in Wittenberg at the feet of Luther. "Zwar war hier [with the abolition of confession] weithin nur das durchgeführt, was er selbst gelehrt und gefordert hatte, aber anders, als er das für richtig halten konnte." Kurt Aland, "Die Privatbeichte im Luthertum von ihren Anfängen bis zu ihrer Auflösung," chap. in *Kirchengeschichtliche Entwürfe* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1960), 72. It is most difficult to agree with Aland, since Luther most clearly sought the abolition of the abuses, that is, the *Beichtzwang*, the focus upon the *in nobis* disposition of contrition and repentance, and the like. He struggled for the correction into the way of the Gospel and not the abolition of confession.

niscere Sunday, dealt with private (*heimlichen*) confession as a gospel institution.

Von der Beicht (1522)

In the context of this sermon, Luther dealt with three forms of confession: the sin and forgiveness among the brethren according to Matthew 18; the secret confession before God alone in private; and confession before the ears of another, where the words of absolution are to be heard.² Concerning the first type of confession Luther lamented that it has sadly fallen into complete disuse. Its reinsti-
tution, however, would be a " . . . köstlich gut Werk."³ Luther praises this form of confession as a means by which erring brothers could be restored in the manner outlined in the Gospel of Matthew. Yet he also comments that he does not trust himself to reestablish it himself. The second form of confession is summarized in one sentence: it is simply

²That Luther usually speaks of these three forms of confession is also noted by Jos E. Vercruysse, "Schlüsselgewalt und Beichte bei Luther" in *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526-1546*, ed. Helmar Junghans (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 159; Otto Hof, "Die Privatbeichte bei Luther," chap. in *Schriftauslegung und Rechtfertigungsglaube*, with a Forword by Edmund Schlink (Karlsruhe: Evangelischer Presseverband für Baden e.V., 1982), 28; and Fred L. Precht, "Changing Theologies of Private and Public Confession and Absolution," (Th.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1965), 74-75. Precht, however, posits four types of confession, including what he calls "public confession," or the *Offene Schuld*, though he notes that Luther usually does not speak of all four. Cf. WA 15, 483, 19 - 485, 25, the *Palmsontag Predigt* from 1524, where Luther also expounds these three types of confession.

³WA 10 III, 59, 28-29.

the pouring out of the heart before God, to be done every moment of one's life. Psalm 32:4-5 is cited as an example of how this was indeed practiced in the Old Testament by David. Finally, Luther turns his attention to private confession, where one Christian confesses his sins to the other, ". . . auff das er von jm ein tröstlich wort höre, damit er sein Gewissen stille."⁴ Consistent with the tract discussed above, Luther reiterates that he has both renounced the pope's duress and himself refuses to go to confession at the pope's behest. Yet far from avoiding confession, Luther again sings a paean to the blessings which confession has given him.

Aber dennoch wil ich mir die heimliche Beichte niemand lassen nemen und wolte sie nicht umb der gantzen Welt schatz geben, denn ich weis was sterck und trost sie mir geben hat. Es weis niemand was die heimliche beicht vermag denn der mit dem Teufel oft fechten und kempffen mus. Ich were lengst von dem Teufel überwunden und erwürget worden, wenn mich diese beicht nicht erhalten hette.⁵

The key word in this whole sermon is *Trost*.⁶ What

⁴WA 10 III, 61, 24-25.

⁵WA 10 III, 61, 32 - 62, 18. Cf. Vercruysse, 160. For the alternative reading of this text see p. 15 above.

⁶Vercruysse emphasizes that this is a key phrase for Luther wherever he speaks of the forgiveness of sins. "Die Absolution spricht Sündenvergebung zu. Deswegen schenkt sie *consolatio* oder *Trost*. Beim Lesen von Luthers Erörterungen zur heimlichen Beichte stößt man immer wieder auf das Wörtlein 'Trost'. Die Lossprechung zielt auf die Tröstung des bangen, klagenden und sogar verzweifelten Gewissens . . . Im Mittelpunkt dieser Tröstungsworte und Ratschläge, die in Gottes Namen gegeben und im Glauben empfangen werden, stehet letztlich das einzige Wort, auf das es ankommt, das gewißlich tröstet und das bange Gewissen zur Ruhe bringt: die persönlich zugesprochene Lossprechung und Sündenver-

Carlstadt had manifestly assaulted with his repudiation of confession was a readily available source of consolation given by Christ to his church.⁷ For where the brother is, there confession can be made, there Christ is, and the certain consolation of God is given. "Wenn dir denn da ein trost widerfert von deinem Bruder, den nim an und gleube jm, als wenn dirs Gott selbs gesagt hette, . . ."⁸ This *Trost* is thus the consequence of the absolution which has been given upon the promise of Christ *in statu Christi*. This is the absolution which is most needful, most bountiful and

gebung." Vercruysee, 162. An inversion of Vercruysee's position is found in Galley, who can argue that Luther understands salvation itself as the *Trost* found in the forgiveness of sins. "Es ist das Charakteristische an Luthers Bußlehre, daß er das Heil als *Trost* faßt Darum setzt er an das Ende des 'Weges zur Erlösung' die Gewißheit des im subjektiven Glauben ergriffen Trostes der Sündenvergebung." Alfred Galley, *Die Bußlehre Luthers und ihre Darstellung in neuster Zeit* (Gütersloh: Druck und Verlag von C. Bertelsmann, 1900), 35. The distinction is subtle and yet significant. Galley casts Luther's theology of Holy Absolution in psychological rather than soteriological terms. "Steht also für Luther am Ende des Weges zur Erlösung die Gewißheit des Trostes [rather than *Heilsgewißheit!*] so ist der Ausgangspunkt die Trostbedürftigkeit." Galley, 36. With the data assembled throughout this study it should, however, become clear that Luther's *Ausgangspunkt* is the desire for the certain forgiveness of one's sins, *extra nos, propter Christum, in Christo*, through the cross.

⁷Luther indeed rejoices in how lavishly God bestows his forgiveness. "Unser Gott is nicht so karg, das er uns nur eine absolution und nur einen trostspruch gelassen hette zu stercke und tröstungen unsers gewissens, sondern wir haben vil absolution im Euanglio und sind reichlich mit viel tröstungen überschüttet, welche tröstungen und zusagungen wir nicht verachten sollen, sie von unsern brüdern zu foddern und zu hören." WA 10 III, 63, 25-30.

⁸WA 10 III, 62, 25-26.

sure. This is what is contradicted by any effort to forbid or even hinder someone from private confession.⁹ The certainty of forgiveness is again based upon the *Zusage* of God's words of absolution which have their locatedness in the mouth of the brother. For God himself has promised not to count the sins of the one who has confessed his sins against him.

Gibt er dir nu ein Absolution und saget dir zu: Deine Sünde sind dir vergeben, du habest einen gnedigen Gott und barmhertzigem Vater, der dir deine Sünde nicht wil zurechnen, so glaube dieser zusage und Absolution frisch und frölich und bist gewis, das dir Gott solche zusage selbs thu durch deines Brudern mund.¹⁰

Clearly Luther still speaks of the words of absolution in terms of the *Zusage* of God. The absolution of which Luther is speaking here must therefore be understood in terms of the *promissio* of God, which again does not itself deliver, but promises ("saget dir zu" = *Zusage*) the forgiveness of

⁹"Wir müssen auch viel Absolution haben, damit wir unser blödes Gewissen und verzagtes Hertz gegen dem Teufel und fur Got stercken und trösten mögen. Darumb soll man die heimliche Beicht nicht verbieten noch jemens davon halten." WA 10 III, 62, 30-33.

¹⁰WA 10 III, 63, 14-18. It is most interesting that Luther speaks of the forgiveness of sins and their non-imputation in one and the same sentence. What is clear with these words is that Luther is actually seeing the "nicht-zurechnen" of sins in terms of the actual forgiveness of sins. He also looks at the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Body and Blood of Christ in terms of the forgiveness of sins in the following paragraph. Cf. WA 10 III, 63, 31 - 64, 22. A further clarification and strengthening may be observed in Luther's use of the word *Gewiß* in favor of the word *sicher* as seen in the documents of 1521 and before. It appears that Luther has moved beyond speaking of assurance, which might be located in man, toward a confession of certainty which is then referenced *extra nos*.

sins, and with them, a gracious God. This is not to say that Luther does not confess the actual forgiveness of sins. Rather, assurance of forgiveness is brought to the individual via the *Zusage* of the Gospel, which in turn insures one of a gracious God. For Luther confession and absolution indeed stands with the sacrament of Holy Baptism and the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ as the *locus* of certain forgiveness of sins and a defence against despair in temptation.

Also sehet jr das die heimliche Beicht nicht zuverachten ist sondern ein trefflich ding sey, der ich meinet halben nicht geraten wolt umb die gantze welt.¹¹

Luther thus continued to laud confession and absolution as a source of consolation in the face of temptation and as the certain location of the promise of the forgiveness of sins.¹² That is not to say, however, that such

¹¹WA 10 III, 64, 23-24.

¹²"Got selbs rede, denn Got hat sich also demuetigt unnd herunder gelassen, das er seyn heylich gottlich wort dem menschen ynn mund legt, das er gantz nit woll zweyffeln, das ers selb sage. Darumb sollen wirs auch also annemen, alls thete er selbs, er hat dirs zu gut than, denn du künsts villeicht nit leyden, wen er selbs mit dir redet: wie wurdstu lauffen biß ans end der welt, wen du horist, das got selbs da redet; das hastu daheym fur der thur, warumb siehstus den nicht? und ist eben so gewiss, als dort, ja noch gewisser, denn do hab ich seine zusagung, dort het ich sie nicht" (italics added). WA 12, 493, 5-13. What is most notable in this quotation is Luther's finding of a greater certainty of forgiveness in the God who is located in the mouth of the father confessor than if God himself would speak directly, simply because the former has God's *Zusage*, upon which one can depend. The *externum verbum* way of bestowal inheres in the Gospel way. Here the *Knechtsgestalt* of the *externum verbum* is rejoiced in as Augustine never could.

absolution is not certain anywhere else. It is indeed there where the Gospels mouth of the evangelical preacher is found:

Wer an Christum glewbt, dem sollen seyn sund vergben seyn, Also das eyn Christlicher prediger nymmer das maul auffthuen kan, er muss eyn absolution sprechen. Also thuet auch der Priester uber dem altar, wenn er spricht 'Pax vobis', das ist 'ich verkundig euch von Gott, das yhr fride habt und vergebung der sunden durch Christum' das ist euch eben Euangelion und die absolutio.¹³

Because it is gift, he refuses to let it be placed into the realm of duress (that is the Law), and leaves confession to be freely given to those who desire it.¹⁴ For over two years, that is, from Christmas of 1521 to Easter of 1524, one could therefore go to the Lord's Supper in Wittenberg without prior confession.¹⁵ Yet this concession of Luther to his own desire for a confession which was completely free was tempered by his pastoral concern for the laity in so much need of instruction. For the most part their sole instruction in the faith was within the context of confession. In other words, Luther's theological desires as expressed above address Christians who know what temptation

¹³WA 15, 485, 31 - 486, 1.

¹⁴Cf. WA 10 III, 61, 27-28: "Dis nötigen und zwingen hab ich verworffen und hart angegriffen, da ich von der Beicht gepredigt und geschrieben habe." He continues to do so as illustrated in a sermon on Maundy Thursday of 1533, WA 12, 492, 11 - 493, 2.

¹⁵These dates are somewhat in dispute, as Bezzel points out. The alternative is that the practice ended a year earlier, at Easter 1523. Cf. Ernst Bezzel, *Frei zum Eingeständnis: Geschichte und Praxis der evangelischen Einzelbeichte*, (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1982), 11.

in the face of sin, death, and the devil is, and who therefore seek the promise of the forgiveness of sins which is given in absolution. For such as these, as will be shown below, Luther presents confession as a blessed gift in the face of their temptation. Yet the actual conditions of the parish required that many, if not most parishioners first needed to be taught concerning the gift given both in confession and absolution as well as the Sacrament of the Altar.¹⁶ Consequently, to preclude the possibility of a *manducatio indignorum* by those who might come to the altar of the Lord unfaithfully, Luther sought to guard the sacrament and those who come to receive it by suggesting a *Verhör* at the time of the announcement of one's intent to come to the Lord's Supper.¹⁷ It clearly became Luther's intent to determine the *status fidei* of the individual and his under-

¹⁶Cf. Walter Uhsadel, *Evangelische Beichte in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, (Kassel: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1961), 36. WA 10 III, 64, 25-33: Luther here compares his experiences with those of the congregation which has disposed of private confession at the behest of Carlstadt. "Weil wir den viel tröstung haben müssen, so wir wider den Teufel, Tod, Sünde, und Helle streiten und auch bestehen sollen, so müssen wir uns keine Waffen nemen lassen, Sondern unsern Harnisch gantz bleiben und die tröstung uns von Gott gegeben unverrückt lassen sein. Den jr wisset doch nicht was es für mühe und arbeit kostet mit dem Teufel zu streiten und jn zu überwinden. Ich kenne den Teufel wol, hettet jr jn ach so wol erkand als ich, jr hettet die heimliche Beicht nicht also in den Wind geschlagen" (italics and emphases added).

¹⁷Cf. Roth, 95-96. "Diesen der *manducatio impiorum* im Abendmahl analogen Tatbestand konstatiert Luther auch im Bußsakrament." The consequences of rejecting the gifts of God in Holy Absolution by unbelief will be discussed below.

standing of the Lord's Supper.¹⁸ On Maundy Thursday of 1523 Luther outlined his reasons for what must therefore be understood as an essentially pedagogical and pastoral practice:

Ich will es hie noch ein mal geschehen lassen auff diß jar, da yeglicher hynzu gehe nach seyner andacht, aber ein ander mal muessen wirs also ordnen, das man niemand zum Sacrament geen lasse, man frage yn dan vor und erkunde wie seyn hertz steet, ob er zuch wisse, was es sey und warum er hinzu gehe.¹⁹

Formula Missae et communionis (1523)

Later during this same year, Luther elaborated upon this *Verhör*.²⁰ In his "*Formula Missae et communionis*,"

¹⁸This is not to say that Luther wants to execute a judgment of "worthiness." He is not seeking to extract an *ecclesiola* from the church, but to spare those who despise the sacrament from coming to the Lord's Supper. Cf. WA 12, 216, 17-19: "De illis enim contemptoribus loquor, qui inverecunde et sine timore peccant et magnifica nihilo minus de Euangelio iactant."

¹⁹WA 12, 477, 20 - 478, 4. Cf. Bezzel, 12-15, who provides a very helpful analysis of Luther's pastoral and theological motives in establishing this *Verhör*, as well as its ramifications. Cf. WA 12, 215, 32-34: "Nam hoc ritum illud cavere volumus, ne irruant ad caenam domini digni et indigni, . . ."

²⁰See the discussion of this document by Bernhard Lohse, "Die Privatbeichte bei Luther," in *Evangelium in der Geschichte: Studien zu Luther und der Reformation*, ed. Leif Grane, Bernd Moeller and Otto Hermann Pesch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 376-377. Cf. Aland, 464. Both authors find occasion to criticise Luther, perhaps rightly, that he did not make a clear distinction between the *Glaubensverhör* and the confession of sins and absolution in this document. The renewed *Beichtzwang* of Lutheran Orthodoxy is therefore traced back to Luther's lack of clarity by both authors. Whether or not Luther was altogether unclear on this matter will be discussed at some length below.

specifically the section entitled "*De communionem populi*" a number of suggestions related to the Lord's Supper are made, among them the announcement of the intended communion to a bishop or pastor.²¹ They are thus charged not to allow anyone to the Lord's Supper " . . . nisi rationem fidei suae reddiderint et interrogati responderint."²² This questioning is to inquire concerning three things: "quid sit caena domini, quid praestet, quo usus illa velint potiri."²³ Notable, however, is that Luther does not equate this *Verhör* with confession itself. Clearly Luther suggested that this examination was a preparation for the Lord's Supper, not an act of confession.²⁴ Confession is indeed discussed as something quite distinct from the suggestions made for the reintroduction of a *Verhör* prior to the Lord's Supper. As concerns confession itself, Luther maintains that it must remain free:

De confessione vero privata ante communionem sentio, sicut hactenus docui, esse eam scilicet nec necessariam nec exigendam, utilem tamen et non contemnendam, quando

²¹WA 12, 215, 8-21.

²²WA 12, 215, 21-22.

²³WA 12, 215, 22-23. Cf. Bezzel, 12.

²⁴That this same concern is still with Luther in 1529 is clear in his explanation to the Sacrament of the Altar, in answer to the question "Wer empfähet denn solch Sakrament wirdiglich?" Luther answers: "Wer den Glauben hat an diese Wort: "Für Euch gegeben" und "vergossen zur Vergebung der Sunden". . . . Denn das Wort "für Euch" fordert eitel gläubige Herzen." BSLK 521, 1-11. Cf. Bezzel, 14.

nec ipsam caenam dominus necessario exergeit aut lege firmaverit, sed cuique liberum permiserit²⁵

Although thereby discussing confession only in passing, Luther nevertheless locates it at the same place as the *Verhör*, i.e. prior to the Lord's Supper.²⁶ Whether Luther thus intended it to be the case or not, the appearance is nevertheless created that the "mandatory" examination prior to the Lord's Supper can be followed by a confession which, in distinction to the *Verhör*, may not in any way be demanded.²⁷ Clearly Luther's urging a *Verhör* which was

²⁵WA 12, 216, 29-34.

²⁶Roth makes the observation that Luther indeed did not see it helpful to establish another institution beside private confession: "In diesem Zusammenhang gehört nun jene Unterweisung, das sog. Glaubensverhör, welches Luther zunächst als Abendmahlsvorbereitung gedacht hatte, jedoch kein besonderes Insitut neben der privatbeichte einrichten wollte. Denn er war der Meinung, daß die Aufgabe des Predigers, welche dahin geht, daß er 'die leute unterweiset und höret, wie sie glewben, beten, lernen'; daß er ferner erfahre, ob der Kommunikant weiss 'was er hole und warumb er hingehe . . . am fuglichsten ynn der beicht geschehen' könne" (WA 19, 521, 11-12). Erich Roth, *Die Privatbeichte und Schlüsselgewalt in der Theologie der Reformatoren* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1952), 56. Cf. Bertil Werkström, *Bekennelse och avlosning* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1963), 12.

²⁷Bezzel, 14. The word "mandatory" needs to be qualified at this point. Luther himself goes out of his way to maintain that he does not want to establish a new law, but a means by which good order is maintained in the church and the sacrament honored. "Quamquam ne hic quidem legem figere velim, sed id sum monstrare, quod honestum ac decorum sit a Christianis libere praestari." WA 12, 216, 29-30. Aland again construes this only as a "theoretical freedom," and that Luther is in effect speaking out of both sides of his mouth. "Es wird deutlich, daß er die Freiwilligkeit unterstrichen und festgehalten haben will, aber ebenso, daß die Freiheit nur noch eine theoretische ist." Aland, 467. He goes on to muster a number of quotations of Luther which express both points of view, apparently to establish

mandatory prior to coming to the Lord's Supper and his desire to maintain the confession of sins as completely voluntary must therefore be seen in their respective contexts: the former as didactic and catechetical, the other as pastoral and *seelsorgerlich*. For what is didactic can indeed be made a matter of necessity; what is grace, however, cannot be imposed or commanded. Yet despite this fundamental distinction, temporal connection of the *Verhör* with the *Beichte* itself led to a terminological equivocation and ultimately to the identification of the *Verhör cum* absolution as being the *Beichte* itself.²⁸ Thus the immediate location of the *Verhör* and of confession in practice led to what has been regarded as an unhappy confusion of the two.²⁹ Indeed, the didactic *Glaubensverhör* and a subsequent

Luther's inconsistency. Yet, as will become clear below, within the context of Law and Gospel they are quite consistent and in no way conflict with the freedom to confess and receive absolution.

²⁸"Ab 1524 haben wir also im Luthertum wieder eine Privatbeichte, die in dieser Form, der Koppelung des katechetisch bestimmten Glaubensverhörs mit der seelsorgerlich ausgerichteten Beichte, die spezifische 'Privatbeichte der lutherischen Kirche' wurde." Bezzel, 14.

²⁹Aland summarizes this development and its "inevitable" consequences: "So kann Luther von der Freiheit und Freiwilligkeit der Privatbeichte reden -- aber wohin die Entwicklung führen mußte ist deutlich: Reduzierung der Privatbeichte im engeren Sinne auf die Ablegung vor dem Geistlichen, Erledigung dieser eigentlichen Privatbeichte durch das Pflichtbeichtverhör vor dem Abendmahlsgang, dafür Ausdehnung des Pflichtbeichtverhörs auf möglichst alle Kommunizierenden ohne Unterschied der Person und Übernahme der Aufgaben der eigentlichen Privatbeichte durch die offizielle Institution." Aland, 466.

voluntary confession which is put into practice by Luther in Wittenberg with the help of Bugenhagen in 1524 later comes to be called *die Beichte* by Luther himself.³⁰

Yet despite the connection of the *Verhör* with the *Beichte* in practice, and even the subsequent terminological confusion, it can still be argued that Luther himself retained a clear distinction between that which is *Verhör* and that which is *absolution*.³¹ In other words, while the

³⁰Bezzel, 20, also notes that Luther, in the tract "*Sermon vom Sakrament des Leibes und Blutes*" (1526), speaks of two parts of the *Beichte*: "*Beichte und Verhör, Absolution und Unterweisung.*" Cf. WA 19, 520, 16 - 521, 13. Aland, at the conclusion of his section which deals with confession and the *Verhör*, regards his thesis of Luther's contribution to the disintegration of private confession as established: "*Die Privatbeichte des späteren Luthertums als Vereinigung vom Glaubensverhör mit der Beichte im eigentlichen Sinn und als offizielle Institution für jeden Gemeindeglied hat sich bereits zu Luthers Lebzeiten grundsätzlich herausgebildet.*" Aland, 471. On this point, Lohse is also in agreement with Aland: "*Die oft als verhängnisvoll bezeichnete Verquickung von Beichte und Glaubensverhör geht also auf Luther selbst zurück und ist nicht erst von der Orthodoxie hergestellt worden.*" Lohse, 377. Cf. Klein, 77-81. See also Uhsadel, who seeks to extricate Luther from these depictions of inconsistency: "*Aber man darf zweierlei nicht übersehen: erstens, daß es ihm nicht um eine moralische Gewissenserforschung geht, die eine Beichte aller Sünden erzielen will; zweitens, daß er hier von der Jugend redet.*" Uhsadel, 24. He goes on to point out that young people certainly require more pedagogical help than *Seelsorge*. "*Diese vermag das Glaubensverhör im Rahmen der Beichte Jugendlicher zu leisten.*" Ibid.

³¹Klaus Harms actually says that Luther distinguished between *Beichte* and *Verhör* clearly: "*Luther hat dieses beides (die freie seelsorgerliche an den Gang zum Abendmahl nicht gebundene Privatbeichte oder die vor dem Abendmahl erforderliche . . . private Vorbereitung) gut und fein unterschieden. Die Vermengung setzte aber bald ein.*" Cited by Werkström, 13, note 29. See also Wilhelm Maurer, "*Der Pietismus und die Privatbeichte,*" *Evangelische Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 10 (1956): 218. Maurer says of Luther:

Notbedarf of the parish necessitated the introduction of the *Verhör* in conjunction with confession itself, Luther distinguished all the more clearly between that which is required, and that which is gift. However much the act of confession itself may be qualified, whether as a *Verhör* or

"Er schloß die Privatbeichte an jenes kirchenzuchtliche Abendmahlsverhör an, ohne sie jedoch sachlich in ihm aufgehen zu lassen." Maurer concedes that Luther was unable to foresee the impending *Beichtzwang*, especially in the situation of large parishes. Cf. Precht, 90-92. Precht is very helpful in establishing that Luther does maintain the distinction. He notes that the form of confession in the Small Catechism especially refers to private confession in the strict sense and not to the *Glaubensverhör*. Cf. Vercruysse, 165. Vercruysse points out that there is no immediate connection made between the *Verhör* and confession in the *Formula Missae* specifically. Yet in both cases there is a question with respect to Holy Baptism: "Hic autem servandus est ritus, qui in baptismo servatur." WA 12, 215, 18. "Die Beichte selbst wird an einer anderen Stelle ohne Verweis auf das Glaubensverhör gewertet. Wollte Luther also verhindern, daß seine Hörer die angekündigte Neuordnung des Kommunionsempfanges mit dem überlieferten, aber kräftig zurückgewonnenen *Beichtzwang* verwechselten?" Vercruysse, 165. He goes on to cite a number of other examples, and again concludes: "In Luther's Darstellungen werden Sündenbekenntnis, Ratfragen und Glaubensverhör nicht scharf voneinander getrennt. . . . Doch bleiben Sündenbekenntnis und Ratfragen frei, während das Glaubensverhör zu einer objektiven Verpflichtung werden kann, wenn man zur Kommunion zugelassen werden will. *Beide Aspekte sind aber wesentlich verschieden und sogar auseinandergehend.* Als ein Angebot der Absolution und des Trostes wendet sich die Beichte an den geistlich bewegten Christen Das Glaubensverhör dagegen richtet sich an . . . die eine sehr mangelhafte Kenntnis der elementaren christlichen Lehre haben. . . . Die Beichte gehört in den Bereich der freien christlichen Spontaneität. Das Verhör gerät mehr und mehr in den Bereich der verbindlichen Kirchenordnung." Ibid. See also Klaus Harms, "Die Einzelbeichte," *Monatschrift für Pastoraltheologie* 42 (1953): 380. Harms basically reiterates what has been noted by Vercruysse above, although he also points out that the temporal connection of the *Verhör* with the absolution led to the eventual reintroduction of a *Zwangsbeichte* prior to the Lord's Supper.

as catechetical instruction, the absolution stands apart from all that is anthropocentric as the sure work and word of God that proclaims forgiveness.³²

In defence of the *Verhör* one might ask what could be a better way of drawing a sinner away from preoccupation with himself to surer ground than drawing him into confession of the faith. This direction of pastoral care is evident in the following sermon.

Indeed, in a number of sermons from 1524 onward, Luther continues to make a distinction specifically between the act of confession itself, and the absolution which gives consolation as the voice of God himself is heard.

Darumb hab ich gesagt, das man die zwey wol scheidt soll, die beycht und die absolutio, die du hörst, das du auff die absolutio am meysten achtung habst und nicht umb des gepots willen zur beycht gehist, noch darumb, das du mit deynem beychten woltist eyn gut werck thuen, und als solten dyr umb des willen die sund vergeben werden, sonden alleyn darumb, das du da gottis wort hörst und davon eyn trost entpfahist. Da reyche die oren zu und lass dyrs eynghehen, wie Gott durch den menschen redet und vergibt dyr deyne sund. Dazu gehoret denn der glawbe. . . Die sund sund sollen alle hynweg seyn durch die absolutio . . . Siehe, das wort, das ich dyr sage an Gottis stat, mustu mit eynem rechte glawben fassen.³³

³²"Dem Reformator ging es auch in jenem Glaubensverhör um das Geständnis menschlicher Verlorenheit und um das gläubige Bekenntnis zur göttlichen Gnade und Hilfe. Von solchen Voraussetzungen aus vermochte er in seelsorgerlicher Weisheit den Weg vom Verhör zur Beichte und Absolution zu finden." Maurer, 218. Maurer appears to be closer to Luther's intent for the *Verhör* than Uhsadel in his seeing the *Verhör* restricted to young people.

³³WA 15, 488, 11-18; 21; 24-25.

As in some of his earlier works, Luther again teaches to look away from one's own confession as that which is unsure. Rather, one is to focus upon the sure words of God as that onto which one can hold. "Darumb halt dich alleyn auff die absolutio, und nicht auff dyn beychten" ³⁴ This emphasis upon the absolution itself must therefore be kept in mind in all of Luther's writings on confession during the 1520s. ³⁵ Therefore far from abandoning the *Seelsorge* of the church by connecting confession and catechesis, Luther continues to distinguish clearly between that which is necessary and that which is gift precisely by emphasizing absolution and the certainty of forgiveness which it gives. ³⁶ The absolution is the very heart of confession

³⁴WA 15, 489, 29-31.

³⁵Cf. Aland, 452; 456. The centrality of absolution is clearly emphasized throughout the rest of Luther's theological writings.

³⁶Uhsadel mounts extensive criticism of Luther's approach, specifically the *Verhör* which inquires about the faith and the understanding of the individual. Uhsadel, who himself would have liked a more definitive statement as to the sacramental nature of confession, regards the whole catechetical enterprise as subjective and inconclusive. Nor does he find Luther helpful when he, in the *Formula missae*, teaches private confession to be neither needful yet not to be abolished because it is helpful and not to be underestimated. "Es kann leider nicht bestritten werde, daß durch eine solche Aussage die Gemeinde seelsorgerlich im Stich gelassen wird." Uhsadel, 25. He does, however, give Luther the benefit of the doubt by noting in the next sentence that the polemical situation in which he found himself, and his overt concern to eschew any remnant of legalism, pushed Luther in this direction.

At the same time, even this qualified criticism can be contested. Far from abandoning the *Seelsorge* of the church, Luther instead moves away from the dubious ground of

with which Luther is here concerned. It can indeed be said again that it is ultimately for the sake of the absolution alone that Luther contends for the retention of confession.³⁷

Sermon von dem Sacrament des Leibes und Blutes Christi
wider die Schwärmgeister (1526)

It is against the renewed attempt of the *Schwärmer* to dispose of confession that moves Luther to take a stand for confession once again. The third and last part of his

casting confession into a new theological construct. Luther therefore does not try to establish the "sacramental character" of confession, whereby it could attain a recognizable doctrinal status. It is the promise of forgiveness, as it is found in the words of absolution and delivered by the mouth of the *Beichtvater in statu Christi*, which provides the certainty of forgiveness. As concerns the practice of confession itself, there is no mandatory scriptural manner in which it *must* be done or by which it is required. That is Luther's criterion as he indeed seeks to provide the *Seelsorge* of the the Gospel to the church. Since the absolution is that which is primary, all that precedes invariably becomes subject to the criterion of good order and usefulness in the situation. It is for this reason that Luther can indeed bring catechesis into connection with confession, all of which prepare for the hearing of the absolution. Cf. Luther, *Sermon vom Sacrament des Leibes und Blutes Christi*, (1526), "Zum ersten die Absolutio, das dich dein nehister frey spricht an Gottes stat, das gleich also viel ist, als Gott selbs spreche; das uns solt ja trostlich sein. . . . Zum andern dienet sie fur die einfeltigen kinder. . . . Darumb wenn sie gleich nirgent zu gut were, so ist sie yhe dazu gut, das man die leute unterweiset und höret, wie sei gleweben, beten lernen etc.; sonst gehts dahin wie das vieh. Darumb habe ich gesagt, man soll das Sacrament niemand geben, er wisse denn bescheid zugeben, was er hole und warumb er hin gehe. Solchs kan nu am fuglichsten ynn der beicht geschehen" (italics added). WA 19, 520, 15- 521, 12.

³⁷Cf. Bezzel, 20. It is thus absolutely clear that Luther looks to confession as an expedient place for the instruction of the "gemeine Pöbel" only as a matter of necessity and never as the primary reason for the *Beichte*.

Sermon von dem Sacrament des Leibes und Blutes Christi wider die Schwärmgeister, (1526) is devoted to his evangelical confession of the *Beichte*. As such, it adumbrates many of the thoughts which Luther will reiterate in the Large Catechism three years later.

The three types of confession which have already been discussed above³⁸ again provide the outline for his discussion. First of all Luther attempts to provide an etymology for the word "*beichten*."³⁹ His contention is that it is derived from the word "*jahen*," which in turn leads into meaning "*bekennen*." The "*Beichtiger*" thus is the one who is the "*Bekenner*." What it is that is confessed Luther discusses in that which follows.

Again Luther begins with the confession of sins before God. For it is God, through his word, who declares all of human kind sinful. "*Wer nu bekennt, das er vom weib geboren sey, mus Gott die Ehre thun und sagen: Ich bin nichts, denn ein sunder. . . .*"⁴⁰ To deny one's sinfulness is to blaspheme God by calling him a liar. The confession of one's sinful nature is in fact the continual *status* of the Christian, which is "*. . . citra intermissionem faci- enda est.*" Such a continual confession is indeed a *nota*

³⁸See page 92 above.

³⁹WA 19, 513, 15-19. In 1533 Luther continues to maintain this etymology and the consequences which he already drew here. See WA 30 III, 567, 29 - 568, 9.

⁴⁰WA 19, 513, 24-25.

Christianaes. "Darumb thut niemand solch bekenntnis, denn die Christen und heilig sind."⁴¹ It is in this context that the *simul justus et peccator* of Luther's *theologia crucis* appears in a new form. It is no longer self-accusatory, nor self-abegnation, but a confession of sin in view of the certain words of forgiveness in Holy Absolution. Luther regarded it a marvelous thing that the one who is truly faithful (*fromm*) before God and who has the Holy Spirit should say that he is a sinner.

Nu ists ein wunderlich ding, das, der fur Gott frum ist und den heiligen geist hat, sagen sol, er sey ein sunder. Es ist also recht, er bekennt, was er gewesen ist und das er auch noch ist. Er hat den heiligen geist, ist aber dennoch noch ein sunder umb des fleisches willen (*italics added*).⁴²

Of this confession before God alone Luther can indeed say that it is commanded by God and necessary for all the world, and yet it is done only by Christians.⁴³

The second form of confession concerns the forgiveness of sins among the brethren. The paradigm for such forgiveness is the Lord's Prayer. Essentially Luther again deals with the *mutuum colloquium et consolationem fratrum* according Matthew 18:22 and Matthew 5 and 6. This too is a

⁴¹WA 19, 515, 18-19.

⁴²WA 19, 515, 19-22.

⁴³"Diese beicht ist nu gepoten und nötig, und die gantze welt schuldig zu thun; es thut sie aber niemand denn die Christen." WA 19, 516, 13-15. The world remains in its refusal; the Christians confess and are absolved, only they. the clarity of the destinction between Law and Gospel is now evident on every page.

nota of the Christian, who seeks the well being and consolation of the brother. As with the first kind of confession discussed, it too is to be carried out without ceasing.⁴⁴

The third form of confession, then, is the *heimliche Beichte*. Luther goes on to explain the origin of this type of confession, and understands it to have derived from the lax application of the first two types discussed above.⁴⁵ The practice, as he understands it, took place in such a way, that each confessed to the other openly, that is, before God and his people, prior to coming to the Lord's Supper. However, due to the scant number of Christians, the practice of private confession replaced the former "Offene Schuld."⁴⁶ Luther therefore argues that if the former two types of confession, before God and the brother are practiced, one is not bound to go to private confession. "Gott weis doch deine sunde wohl. Wenn du sie nur fur yhm und darnach vor dem nehisten bekennest, sind die sunden vergeben."⁴⁷ Such is the *allgemeine Priestertum*; before God and for the brother. Yet Luther still finds it possible to laud the blessings of private confession, and to retain it for the sake of those who know and desire its benefits. He cites three distinct reasons for its retention: the

⁴⁴WA 19, 519, 23-34.

⁴⁵WA 19, 519, 25-31.

⁴⁶Ibid. Cf. Uhsadel, 26; 55-57.

⁴⁷WA 19, 520, 14-16.

absolution, the catechesis, and the consolation which it gives.⁴⁸ Such is the Gospel. Holy absolution, *in statu Dei*, is located most certainly in the mouth of him who speaks the words of God, "*ex mandato dei*."⁴⁹ There is no talk even of *Zusage* or of the dependability of God's words in this context. Here the words give what they say. From the mouth of men, the words of God, forgiving sin and delivering consolation to troubled consciences. Luther would have no one deprived of such gifts. It is notable, too, that in speaking of the *heimliche Beichte*, he is focusing upon that which he deems to be central to it: the absolution itself. *Verba dei extra me*. In this way, as has already been discussed above, Luther precludes the possibility of people sliding into a false *securitas* through

⁴⁸As has been cited above, Luther is comforted by the certainty that God speaks through the mouth of the neighbor. Such a certain locatedness of God's words *pro me* cannot simply be passed over, however. Cf. WA 19, 520, 13-23: "Wenn ich wuste, das Gott an einem ort were und wolt mich selbs frey sprechen, wolt ichs nicht einmal noch an einem ort, sondern so oft ich ymmer kunde, daselb holen. Solchs hat er nu ynn menschen mund gelegt, darumb es gar trostlich ist, sonderlich den beschwereten gewissen, solchs da zu holen." Implicit is again the Luther's contention that the words of God which are located and come to the believer *extra nos* alone can provide certainty and consolation. Moreover, Luther rejoices that this mouth is not only the place where God has located himself, but that God has at this *locus* made himself so freely and readily accessible *pro me*.

⁴⁹WA 27, 96, 36.

a *Selbstvergebung*.⁵⁰ The certainty of forgiveness is there where God is for sure, speaking his words *pro me, extra me*.

Of the confession itself as an institution, Luther goes on to note its didactic possibilities. It just so happens that confession affords a helpful time for the catechizing of people.⁵¹ That in itself would warrant the retention of confession, although, as has been shown, Luther clearly regards it as more than a didactic medium.

Finally, private confession provides consolation to the troubled conscience. What is made available is God's word itself, and with the reception of this word consolation, the strengthening of faith, instruction, teaching, as well as counsel in all need. This again is a reason why only faithful (*fromme*) Christians make use of confession. "Denn es müssen solche leute sein, die so fulen, das sie gerne wolten rad und trost holen."⁵² Therefore if anything can be said to be lacking in confession, it was the disregard for the absolution in favor of "our" work and the manner in which confession was made, including the required enumeration of sins.

Confession, then, specifically as that which gives the gifts of God in absolution, but also teaches and con-

⁵⁰Cf. Bezzel, 19.

⁵¹WA 19, 521, 11-12.

⁵²WA 19, 521, 18-19.

soles, cannot be commanded.⁵³ It is given to be freely used by those who faithfully seek the gifts of God, and who are willing to be given them there where they can be found. Luther indeed cautions those who come without faith to stay away from any type of confession: "Es gehört nur frommen Leuten zu; sonst ist's besser, man lasse es anstehen; es ist doch nicht rechtschaffen, sondern verdamlich."⁵⁴ In other words, there is also a *confessio indignorum*. The faithful eating is paralleled by the faithful hearing of the absolution. Far from therefore eliminating confession, Luther continued to maintain the blessings which it provides to those who will come to hear the words of absolution from God

⁵³Cf. WA 15, 488, 11-16, which has already been cited on p. 105 above.

⁵⁴WA 19, 522, 27-29. Yet Luther does not say that the one who *knows* himself weak in faith should actually stay away, simply those who refuse to believe. Indeed, the weakness of faith should encourage the going to confession and the reception of absolution all the more. Thus he can say in 1524: ". . . kanstu den glawben nicht haben, so lass deyn beychten anstehn, doch nicht also, das du darumb nicht soltist hyngehen, wenn deyn glawbe zu schwach were, und da trost und stercke foddern. Kanstu nicht gleuben, so klag es auch deynem bruder, dem du beychten wilt, . . . Den wilchem wiltu deyn gebrechtn klagen denn Gott? wo kanstu yhn aber finden denn ynn deynem bruder? Der kan dich mit worten stercken und helffen, das ist recht gebeychtet, Und wolt Got, das die gantze welt nur so weyt bracht were, das yderman bekennete, das er nicht kund glewben." WA 15, 488, 25-34. Luther therefore points to the sole source of faith, God himself, who can be found no more certainly than his locatedness in the brother (by which the priest as the one who knows how to apply the words of Scripture is implied).

pro me in faith, freely.⁵⁵ The years between 1524 to 1526 thus reveal how clearly Luther comes to confess the gifts which the absolution delivers.

The Large Catechism (1529)

Most clear, however, is Luther's "*Kurze Vermahnung zur Beichte*" at the conclusion of the Large Catechism of 1529. Here more so than in any previous tract, Luther argues that confession itself cannot have anything else but absolution as its goal. One might indeed designate this section as an appeal to let oneself be given the absolution of God. In other words, Luther puts forth once more in an unequivocal manner that "Lutheran" confession exists alone for the sake of *private absolution*.⁵⁶

⁵⁵"Denn in der bycht hastu auch diss vorteyl wie ym sacrament, das das wort alleyne auff deyn person gestellet wird. Den yn der predig fleugt es ynn die gemeyne dahyn, und wi wol es dich auch trifft, so bist seyn doch nicht so gewiss. Aber hie kan es nyemand treffen denn ich alleyn. Soltistu aber nicht hertzlich fro werden, wenn du eyenen ort wustest, da Gott mit dyer selb reden wolt? Jha wenn wyr eyenen Engel mochten hören reden, so wurde wyr wol byss an der welt ende lauffen. Sind wyr aber nicht tolle, elende und undanckbare leute, die nicht hören was man uns sagt? Da stehet die schrift und bezeuget, das Got durch uns redet, und das es jha so viel gilt als wenn ers mit seynem mund redet Da spricht Gott selbs die absolutio, wie er das kind selbs teuffet, und du wilt sagen man durffe das beychten nicht? Denn ob du gleych dasselb ym sacrament auch hörst, soltu es dennoch darum nicht hynweg schlagen, sonderlich weyl es dich (wie gesagt ist) alleyn betrifft." WA 15, 486, 30 - 487, 15; 18-22.

⁵⁶The centrality of Holy Absolution for Luther is consistently reiterated. Cf. Gustav F. Pfisterer, *Luthers Lehre von der Beichte im Zusammenhange und mit Luthers Worten* (Stuttgart: Samuel Gottlieb Liesching, 1857), 72: "Die Absolution wird von Luther überall als die *Hauptsache*

As in the previously discussed tracts, Luther reiterates his three-fold division of confession: the confession before God in secret, the confession of sin before the neighbor, and private confession. The former two are again described as an ". . . öffentlich, täglich und nötige Beichte. . . ,"⁵⁷ beyond which nothing new is added from the earlier expositions which Luther had made.⁵⁸ Yet with respect to private confession, Luther lets the fullness of

in der Beichte dargestellt. Sie ist es auch, die der Beichte überhaupt statt des gesetzlichen Charakters einer schweren eigenen Leistung den evangelischen Charakter einer trostreichen Gabe und Gnade Gottes verleiht, und den Christen vornehmlich bewegen soll, sich der Beichte zu unterziehen." See also Hof, 28: "Um der Absolution willen geht der Christ zur Beichte: damit er das Gnadenwort höre und sein Glaube gestärkt und so sein Gewissen getröstet werde. Dazu sind Beichte und Absolution geordnet." Cf. Werkström, 8; Laurentius Klein, *Evangelisch-lutherische Beichte, Leben und Praxis* (Paderborn: Bonifacius Verlag, 1961), 38. See also Wilhelm Maurer, *Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession*, translated by H. George Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 411. Maurer simply asserts that the consolation of the absolution became the principle element of confession. Indeed, in the absolution one grasps that on which all else depends: the forgiveness of sins. He goes on to note that if it were not for the absolution, confession would abandon people to the wrath of God. Only because of the absolution can private confession be an evangelical institution.

⁵⁷BSLK 728, 27-28.

⁵⁸It might perhaps be noted that Luther again quite strongly emphasizes that these two forms of confession are indeed comprehended by the command of God. He thus contrasts private confession, which can never be a matter of duress, to these former two types: "Denn es ist nicht in Gepot gefasset wie jene zwo, sondern einem iglichen, wer sein darf, heimgestellt . . ." BSLK 728, 37-39. Cf. the Latin of the same text: "Neque enim haec confessio praecepto comprehensa est ut duae priores, sed unicuique libera facta, . . ." Ibid., 14-16.

the Gospel burst forth when he speaks about the blessings of Holy Absolution.

Und ist daher kommen und geordnet, daß Christus selbs die *Absolutio seiner Christenheit in Mund gelegt und befohlen hat, uns von Sunden aufzulösen*. Wo nu ein Herz ist, das seine Sunde fühlet und Trost begehret, hat es hie eine gewisse Zuflucht, da es *Gottes Wort findet und höret, daß ihn Gott durch Mensch von Sunden entbindet und losspricht* (italics added).⁵⁹

Nor does Luther confuse the *Verhör*, or the actual confession of sins with that which is truly Gospel. The private confession of which he speaks has two distinct parts: one which is "our work,"⁶⁰ the other which is a work which God does through the words which he has placed into the mouth of people. Thus the confessing of sins, even the *desire* for consolation and for the release from sins is separated from the forgiveness of sins which God brings about with the words which are spoken.

Darümb sollen wir's also ansehen, daß wir die zwei Stück weit voneinander scheiden und setzen und unser Werk gering, aber Gottes Wort hoch und groß achten und nicht hingehen, als wollten wir ein köstlich Werk tuen und ihm geben, sondern nur von ihm nehmen und empfangen (italics added).⁶¹

Luther therefore does not speak of a word about absolution, but the word which actually bestows what it says, because it

⁵⁹BSLK 728, 40-46 - 729, 1-3.

⁶⁰It might again be mentioned that Luther and the confessions usually speak even of this first part as being the work of God. Cf. Ernst Kinder, "Beichte und Absolution nach den lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften" *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 9 (1952): 544-545. Implicit is the work of God through the Law which brings forth true contrition.

⁶¹BSLK 729, 42-46 - 730, 1-3.

is God himself who says it. The absolution is therefore more than just a *verbum efficax*. It is a *verbum medium*, which actually bestows what it says, because it is the Gospel *verbum Christi*. Where the words of Christ are, there Christ is,⁶² and where he is nothing can be contingent.⁶³

⁶²See Precht, 83, note 54, who cites Roth and Arthur Carl Piepkorn as speaking of the "real presence" of Christ in the absolution. Cf. Hof, 36; Werkström, 75; Klein, 46; Kinder, 545; Roth, 82. Roth's exposition we may find pushing beyond the evidence. "Das ist die Realität oder noch richtiger die *Realpräsenz Christi*, in einer zeichenhaften Sichtbarkeit -- *verbum visibile* -- bei der Absolution dargestellt." Yet Roth runs the very real danger of actually identifying the words with the speaker, rather than as the locatedness of Christ's words. He indeed goes on to emphasize a *communicatio idiomatum* as taking place in the Christian who speaks these words. Roth, 83. He can then conclude the sacramentality of confession and absolution, because in the person of the *Beichtvater* one can find the *verbum visibile*. "So ist auch die Privatbeichte durchaus *verbum visibile*." Ibid. Luther, however, is clearly focused primarily upon the words. Rather than even speaking of the person per se, Luther frequently just speaks of the mouth, i.e. that the mouth is the place where Christ's words, and so Christ himself is to be found. Cf. WA 30 II, 498, 2-4, where Luther speaks of the keys to be found in Peter's mouth. "Peters mund ist mein mund, und seine zunge ist meiner schlüsselbeutel." This is some way from identifying the person of Peter with Christ himself. Cf. BSLK 729, 15-20: "Das ander ist ein Werk, das Gott tuet, der mich durch das Wort, dem Menschen in Mund gelegt, losspricht von meinen Sunden [quod in os hominis posuit, a peccatis meis absolvit]."

⁶³So understood, absolution can never be uncertain, for it is not based upon the confession which precedes, but the God who speaks the words to faith. Bezzel helpfully points out that Luther passionately strove against the *clavis conditionalis*, or the *clavis errantem*, both of which were invariably contingent upon the integrity of the confession, not upon the words of God. He cites Luther in the tract, "Von den Schlüsseln," of 1530: "Denn ungewisse Absolution ist eben so viel als keine Absolution, Ja es ist eben so viel als lügen und betrug." WA 30 II, 480, 24-26. Cf. Bezzel, 20.

The gifts are therefore most certainly given to the one who has come to be given to.⁶⁴

And because the absolution is so clearly gift, Luther again precludes any element of duress. "Wer nicht willig und ümb der Absolution wille zur Beicht gehet, der lasse es nur anstehen."⁶⁵ From the perspective of grace,

⁶⁴Cf. WA 43, 525, 10-15: Sed benedictio promissionis et fidei et praesentis doni haec est. Ego absolvo te a peccatis tuis in nomine patris et filii, et spiritus sancti, hoc est, reconcilio animam tuam cum Deo, aufero a te iram et indignationem Dei, et constituo te in gratiam, do tibi haereditatem vitae aeternae et regnum coelorum. Ista omnia sunt potestatis prasenter et vere tibi donatis, si credis, quia non sunt opera nostra, sed Dei per ministerium nostrum. *Non igitur benedictiones imprecativae, sed collativae*" (italics added). It is the collative and exhibitiv character of the absolution which Köstlin also discusses at some length. See Julius Köstlin, *Luthers Theologie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, 2d ed. (Stuttgart: Druck und Verlag von J.F. Steinkopf, 1901), 246; 248. Cf. Pfisterer, 82; and Roth, 41. Roth, in bringing together assorted texts which speak of Holy Absolution is able to speak of Luther's "exhibitiv" understanding prior to 1520. Yet what he says, if taken by way of summary to Luther's final understanding is certainly valid: "Die Privatabsolution ist mithin ein Wort, welches nicht nur ein Hinweis auf eine Sache ist, sondern auch gibt was es bezeichnet." It is, however, noticeable that Roth's statement is much informed by the *signum* talk of Luther's early theology which he is using as his sources. One would again have to conclude that Roth is therefore speaking anachronistically. Öberg, 289, also concludes that Roth's conclusions about Luther's exhibitiv understanding are premature. Cf. Precht, 78-79.

⁶⁵BSLK, 730, 25-27. Cf. Gustav Eduard Steitz, *Die Privatbeichte und Privatabsolution der lutherischen Kirche aus den Quellen des XVI Jahrhunderts, hauptsächlich aus Luthers Schriften und den Alten Kirchenordnungen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Karl Theodor Volcher, 1854), 7-8. Steitz notes: "Insofern die Absolution in der lutherischen Kirche mit dem Institute der Privatbeichte verbunden war in ihren wichtigsten Bestandteil bildete, war sie wesentlich Privatabsolution."

Luther therefore has to warn anyone from coming to confession for any other reason than to be given the absolution.⁶⁶ For ultimately any other reason for coming to confession would be one of unbelief and hypocrisy, where one neither sees one's need, nor the gift which is being given. At the same time, those who will not come to receive the gifts therefore also make a confession: namely that they despise the gifts of God. For Luther this rejection of the gifts is clearly an expression of unbelief. While he on the one hand calls for nothing other than the free reception of the absolution, he also cautions the unbeliever to stay away, yet thereby notes that such a one shows his true colors.

Welche es aber nicht achten noch von ihm selbs kommen, die lassen wir auch fahren. Das sollen sie aber wissen, daß wir sie nicht für Christen halten.⁶⁷

In fact, as the title of this section suggests, Luther does more than call; he casts his plea for the continual reception of the absolution in the form of an exhortation.⁶⁸ He

⁶⁶"Das Wort, sage ich, oder Absolution, sollst Du ansehen, groß und teuer achten als ein trefflicher großen Schatz, mit allen Ehren und Dank anzunehmen." BSLK 730, 35-37.

⁶⁷BSLK 731, 36-40.

⁶⁸Though the language Luther uses is strong, it is nevertheless not the imposition of a new law. It is the apostolic appeal of the Gospel itself (cf. 2 Cor. 5, 19-20). Cf. Klein, 70-75, who seizes upon these words as implying a telling inconsistency with Luther. Klein therefore compares the positive, consistent, and, in his opinion, much more helpful 21st Canon of Lateran IV to Luther's attempt to keep confession totally as gift, while at the same time urging

deems those who do not desire absolution to be *porci*,⁶⁹ who are therefore not to be admitted to the Lord's Supper either.⁷⁰ In other words, the despising of such a ". . . .
trefflich, köstlich und trostlich Ding"⁷¹ as confession is itself an *indicium*⁷² that one is not a Christian.

Denn du verachtest, das kein Christen verachten soll,

people not to neglect it with appeals and invectives. Clearly Klein feels that Luther abandons the church to uncertainty, which is precisely what Lateran IV sought to eliminate. Yet far from creating uncertainty, Luther is in fact confessing the only ground of certainty: the forgiveness of God in absolution. Grace, which can be resisted can therefore never be made a matter of policy via a man-made institution. It is therefore clearly in keeping with the Gospel to urge the reception of absolution because of human kind's constant need, and to reject the legislated necessity of confession at least once per year. Cf. Roth, 46-47; Werkström, 90. See also Aland, 470. Aland speaks along with Klein in noting this inconsistency. Yet, to restate what has already been mentioned, Luther is consistent in his approach in the context of Law and Gospel. Clearly those who will not be given to, i.e. the unbelievers, cannot be held to be Christians. Nor will grace be forced upon them. While they need not come, their self-exclusion from the gifts excludes them from the church which exists because of the forgiveness of sins.

⁶⁹BSLK 726, 35. Lohse evaluates Luther's valuation of private confession as remarkable, especially since Luther admitted that it is not mandated in Scripture. He also notes Luther's rather sharp words, which he attributes to his not being able to conceive of a Christian who would not go to confession. "Er hat nicht nur mit freundlichen Mahnung zur Beichte aufgefordert, sondern hat vor allem in dem Großen Katechismus mit scharfen Worten zum Ausdruck gebracht, daß er sich einen Christen, der auf die Privatbeichte verzichtet, nicht vorstellen könne." Lohse, 373. This is to no small degree due to the benefits of the absolution in which Luther rejoices.

⁷⁰BSLK 732, 1-20.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²That is the word which is used in the Latin text of this section, BSLK 732, 19. It does not have *signum's* lower level to upper level.

und machest damit, daß Du keine Vergebung der Sunde haben kannst. Und ist ein gewiß Zeichen [indicium], daß du auch das Evangelion verachtest.⁷³

One therefore cannot be forced to come to confession, any more than one can be forced to believe, or to be a Christian. What is gift can be rejected, what is grace can be resisted. Unbelief can thus be maintained even in the face of such precious gifts. It is for this reason that Luther can again conclude with a total disavowal of any duress: "Summa, wir wollen von keinem Zwang wissen."⁷⁴ At least not any compulsion to receive absolution. Yet in a most Gospel way, Luther turns the spear of compulsion around. For there ought indeed be compulsion! But not on the part of the penitent. The Roman church indeed had laid its command on the wrong group of people. For it is actually the pastor, the one called upon to give absolution, who is under compulsion to deliver the gifts. The insistence of the penitent to be given the absolution which Luther had already counseled in 1521⁷⁵ is therefore reiterated here in graphic terms.

Wärst Du ein Christ, so solltest Du froh werden, daß Du möchtest über hundert Meil darnach laufen und nicht Dich lassen nötigen, sondern kommen und uns zwingen. Denn da muß der Zwang ümgekehret werden, daß wir ins Gebot und Du in die Freiheit kommest; wir dringen niemand, sondern leiden, daß man uns dringet, gleichwie man uns zwinget,

⁷³BSLK 732, 15-20.

⁷⁴BSLK 732, 22-23.

⁷⁵See page 62-64 above.

daß wir predigen und Sakrament reichen müssen (italics added).⁷⁶

Only the Christian knows of his sin. Only the Christian seeks the forgiveness which God distributes through his word, the absolution, and the sacrament.⁷⁷ The *Beichte* to which he calls is nothing less than the confession of being a Christian, *simul iustus et peccator*, continually in need of the forgiveness which the absolution delivers. "Darümb wenn ich zur Beichte vermahne, so tue ich nichts anders, denn daß ich vermahne, ein Christen zu sein."⁷⁸ The one

⁷⁶BSLK 732, 27-37.

⁷⁷Luther cites the 42nd Psalm as an example of the thirst for the presence, viz. forgiveness of God for which the faithful (*fromme*) Christian pants for in his desire to be freed from sin. Cf. BSLK 733, 1-14. In the context of this passage, it is most striking that Luther speaks of a desire " . . . nach Gottes Wort oder Absolution und Sakrament etc." (italics added). BSLK 733, 13-14. The whole phrase is not found in the Latin. What the German says, however, is that the words of God, at least in this context, are understood in terms of absolution and sacrament, that is, as the Gospel.

⁷⁸BSLK 732, 40-43. Cf. SL 13b, 2496: "Darum ist dies eine hohe Predigt und himmlische Weisheit, daß wir glauben, *unsere Gerechtigkeit, Heil und Trost stehe ausser uns, nämlich daß wir vor Gott seien gerecht, angenehm, heilig und weise, und ist doch in uns eitel Sünde, Ungerechtigkeit und Thorheit. . . .* So ist es auch mit der Vergebung der Sünde. Ich fühle, daß ich ein böser Bube gewesen bin, und bins noch, und soll dennoch sagen: Alle meine Sünden sind mir vergeben; denn das Wort ist über mich gesprochen, welches also lautet: 'Dir sind dein Sünden vergeben'" (italics added). Cf. Albercht Peters, "Buße-Beichte-Schuldvergebung." *Kerygma und Dogma* 28 (1982): 63: "Die Reformatoren suchten die Spannung auszuhalten zwischen der unauslotbaren Urverklavung und den akthaften Verstößen." Cf. Lohse, 364, who says of Luther: "Seinen zugespitzten Ausdruck findet dieses neue Sündenverständnis in der Auffassung, daß der Christ gerecht und Sünder zugleich ist." See also Klein, 49.

who thus makes use of the *Beichte* as the *locus* of absolution is indeed *in statu confessionis*, a sinner before the very God who delivers to him the absolution through the mouth of another.⁷⁹

The Small Catechism (1531)

The very practical instructions of how evangelical confession is thus to be made, and how one is to receive the words of Holy Absolution faithfully is found in Luther's Small Catechism. The focus is twofold: the confession of sins and the reception of absolution from the *Beichtvater in statu Dei*.⁸⁰ Immediately Luther urges that one should not doubt, but believe firmly that such absolution also takes place in heaven before God. For absolution and faith belong together, as indeed the confession itself has as its goal the forgiveness of sins by him who is called to deliver it.⁸¹ Luther indeed can consent to the use of a "general

⁷⁹"Diese Allwirksamkeit Gottes im menschlichen Wort ist gerade, . . . die Grundlage für die Herausstellung der Absolution als Herzstück der Beichte." Vercruysse, 156. He goes on to restate that Luther consistently emphasized this locatedness of forgiveness in the mouth of the pastor: "Anschließend an die Darstellung der Schlüsselgewalt -- wovon die Lossprechung in der Beichte eine privilegierte Anwendung ist -- betont Luther ständig, daß im Absolutionswort nicht der Mensch, sondern Gott selbst im Menschenwort redet." Vercruysse, 161.

⁸⁰BSLK, 517, 11-17.

⁸¹"Wirdiger, lieber Herr, ich bitte Euch, wollet meine Beichte hören und mir die Vergebung sprechen umb Gottes willen." BSLK, 518, 6-8. What is notable in the address is that Luther is clearly thinking of the pastor in this confession, as does the concluding remark that the

confession," general in the sense of not naming any specific sins, when no specific sin comes to mind. For nothing should hinder the reception of the absolution:

Weißest Du aber gar keine (doch nicht wohl sollt' möglich sein), so sage auch keine insonderheit, sondern nimm die Vergebung auf die gemeine Beicht, so Du für Gott tust gegen dem Beichtiger.⁸²

Thus the *Beichtvater* asks, "Do you believe that my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?" "Yes, dear sir," is the penitent's answer. It is therefore upon the confession not only of sins, but of faith that in the mouth of the *Beichtvater* is found the forgiveness of God that the absolution is spoken *without conditions*, solely by the

Beichtvater would well know which verses to use for the comfort of the penitent. BSLK, 28-34. See also note 2 on page 518, which points to WA 30 III, 570, 20 - 571, 15 (*Sendschreiben an die zu Frankfurt*) where he defends his use of "würdiger herr." Indeed, lamenting the disrespect for authority among the "jungend und dem pöbel" and its consequences in the rebellion against authority as fomented by Thomas Müntzer, he states: "Ich wolt, das man die jugent und pobel nicht allein gewehnet zu sagen 'Wirdiger herr', sondern auch 'Heiliger herr, heiliger vater' und müsten die Bejcht heilig, die Absolution heilig, die predigt heilig und alles, was zum wort gehöret, heilig heissen." WA 30 III, 570, 37-40. Luther again urges good order, and therefore the acceptance of authority in contrast to the *Schwärmer*: "Die Auffrur stinckt jn zum halse heraus, und wolten gern alles gleich und kein unterscheid leiden, doch so fern, das sie allein zu lezt Wirdige herrn hiessen und sonst niemand." Ibid., 33-35. That Luther therefore understands the *Beichtstuhl* to be occupied by such a one goes without saying, even though the *Notfall* does not preclude the absolution by the brother, as has been discussed in some detail above.

⁸²BSLK, 519, 5-9.

mandate of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the name of the Holy Trinity.⁸³

⁸³BSLK, 519, 15-26. Cf. Ingemar Öberg, *Himmelrikets Nycklar och kyrklig Bot i Luthers Teologi 1517-1537* (Uppsala: Appelbergs Boktryckeri AB, 1970), 280, and especially the sources he cites in note 7. Öberg summarizes that all careful investigations have concluded that absolution is indeed a divine instituton, based directly upon the office of the keys, i.e. the mandate to loosen from sins. " Likväl hävdas i de allra flesta undersökinigar om privatbikten hos Luther, att avlösningen (!) är ett gudomligt institut, direkt baserad på Kristi instiftelse av nyckelmakten, dvs. befallningen att lösa syndare från synd."

CHAPTER V

HOLY ABSOLUTION AND *HEILSGEWISSEHEIT* 1530-1537

For Luther this absolution, the *viva vox evangelii pro me* thus ultimately derives from the mandate of Christ, that is, the office of the keys, specifically the loosing key. Luther in fact uses the terms "the keys" and absolution interchangeably.¹ This becomes especially clear in his 1530 tract, *Von den Schlüsseln*, which proves to be one of Luther's most careful and mature treatments of Holy Absolution.²

Von den Schlüsseln (1530)

Central to the tract is Luther's confession of the words of absolution as words which actually give what they say, namely the forgiveness of sin.³ Such absolution is

¹Such is explicitly the case in the Smalcald Articles, BSLK, 453, 2.

²Sommerlath goes as far as suggesting that this tract is the most extensive and carefully thought through treatments of absolution. See Ernst Sommerlath, "Der Sakramentale Charakter der Absolution nach Luther's Schrift 'Von den Schlüsseln,'" in *Die Leibhaftigkeit des Wortes*, Festgabe für Adolf Köberle, edited by Otto Michel and Ulrich Mann, (Hamburg: Im Furche-Verlag, 1958), 211.

³Cf. Sommerlath, 215. In the case of the sermon, Luther speaks of the "*Lehrschlüssel*," one which leads to knowledge concerning Christ and how we are to serve him. ". . . und dieser schlüssel sey nichts anders, denn der Lere

not just proclamation of a general reconciliation which is available as a possibility, but actually gives forgiveness.⁴

schlüssel, das ist Lere ampt, Predigt ampt, Pfarr ampt, dadurch man die leute zum erkenntnis füren sol, das sie lernen und wissen, wie sie Gott dienen und selig werden sollen" WA 30 II, 491, 19-22. It might be noted here that Sommerlath, following E. Roth, is attempting to establish the case for Luther's confession of absolution as a sacrament not only in word, but as a theological proposition. He thus seeks to make a fundamental distinction between the proclamation of the reconciliation of God with sinners inherent in the sermon and even in the privately spoken consolation given by the brother. Yet the data is perhaps being pushed further than what is actually being said by Luther, specifically with respect to the distinction of the absolution in the sermon and in private absolution. As will become clear in the discussion of the Nürnberg *Beichtstuhlstreit*, Luther will not countenance a quantifiable distinction between private and generally proclaimed absolution. The distinction comes in the manner of delivery of the gifts, i.e. that absolution is either given *pro nobis* in the sermon, where the believer knows that these word are for him as a member of the "holy catholic church" which believes in the forgiveness of sins, or *pro me* in private absolution, where this forgiveness is delivered most certainly as Christ does to the individuals in the Gospel. It is the same absolution, ". . . welchs dem gantzen volck sol den himel auff thun und verkündigen." WA 30 II, 492, 2-3. See also the discussion in the footnotes on pages 118 and 123 above.

⁴That is not to say that Luther makes a quantitative distinction between the forgiveness of sins which is proclaimed in the sermon and the forgiveness which is given in private absolution. As will be shown in the discussion concerning private and general absolution at Nürnberg, Luther regards the divine word of forgiveness to be one and the same wherever it is given. In other words, private absolution does not give "more" than the absolution given in the preaching of the Gospel. In either case, faith is given *totus* forgiveness, though generally in the sermon, while quite specifically *pro me* in private absolution. See Otto Hof, "Die Privatbeichte bei Luther," chap. in *Schriftauslegung und Rechtfertigungsglaube*, with a Forword by Edmund Schlink (Karlsruhe: Evangelischer Presseverband für Baden e.V., 1982), 31-32. Cf. Luther from WA 15, 486, 30-33, where he notes in a sermon from the year 1524: "Denn in der beycht hastu auch diss vorteyl wie ym sacrament, das das wort alleyne auff deyn person gestellet wird. Den yn der predig fleugt es ynn die gemeyne dahyn, und wie wol es dich auch

The words of absolution thus carry and deliver the full freight of the Gospel *pro me*.⁵ The keys which Jesus thus gives to St. Peter are specifically to be used for the benefit of sinners.

Darumb ists vom gemeinen Predigamt gesagt, welchs dem gantzen volck sol den himel auff thun und verkündigen. Aber die schlüssel Sanct Petri gehen allein uber etliche, nemlich die sunder, Darum sollen wir nicht die schlüssel so jnn einander mengen, . . . Sondern wol und fein unterscheiden.⁶

Sinners thus receive in Holy Absolution the forgiveness of sins most certainly, since it is Christ himself who speaks through the mouth of the father-confessor with the words he himself has put into the *Beichtvaters* mouth.⁷ Christ's words are sure words, but more, words which give what they say:

trifft, so bistu seyn doch nicht so gewiss. Aber hie kan es nyemand treffen denn dich alleyn."

⁵Sommerlath refers to Hans v. Campenhausen, "Die Schlüsselgewalt der Kirche," *Evangelische Theologie* (1937): 147-148, who there argues that a mere general announcement of forgiveness which demands faith with the words, ". . . du sollst der Vergebung glauben," would turn out to be nothing more than a new law. Instead he argues that what is needful is a proclamation which actually creates forgiveness, i.e. one which delivers it truly and makes it present reality. Sommerlath, 215.

⁶WA 30 II, 492, 1-6.

⁷Köstlin notes that it is here alone that Luther finds unconditional certainty. "Klar genug ist jedenfalls die Hauptsache, auf welche es Luther hier ankommt: das ist die unbedingte Gewißheit und Sicherheit, womit ein nach Gnade und Seligkeit Dürstender an das Wort der Vergebung sich halten darf und soll, das Gott ihm speziell und mit Bezug auf seine besonderen Zustände und Bedürfnisse auf diese Weise darbietet." Julius Köstlin, *Luthers Theologie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, 2d ed. (Stuttgart: Druck und Verlag von J.F. Steinkopf, 1901), 249.

Sondern widderumb, das unser rew, werck, hertz und was wir sind, sollen sich auff die schlüssel bawen und mit gantzem erwegen getrost darauff verlassen, als auff Gottes wort, und bey leibs und seelen verlust ja nicht zweiveln, *Was dir die schlüssel sagen und geben*, Es sey so gewis, als rede es Gott selber, *wie ers denn gewislich selbs redet*, Denn es ist sein befehl und wort und nicht eins menschen wort odder befehl (*italics added*).⁸

Thus the forgiveness of sins can never be regarded as a mere possibility when the absolution is spoken, but is itself *Gottesdienst*, given to faith. Unbelief, even doubt, calls God a liar, and denies the gifts which have been given. For unbelief and doubt build not upon the certain words of God, but one's own repentance or worthiness.⁹ Nor does unbelief let Christ be found there where he has located himself. That is the case in the Lord's Supper, as well as in Holy Absolution. For with the words of absolution Christ locates himself in the mouth of the *Beichtvater*. Here Christ is to be found, located most surely *pro me*.¹⁰ Luther makes

⁸WA 30 II, 496, 29-34.

⁹"Zweivelstu aber, so lügenstraffest Gott, verkerest seine ordnung und bawest seine schlüssel auff deine rew und wirdigkeit." WA 30 II, 496, 34-36.

¹⁰Luther locates Christ and his work in the words of absolution. "Darumb mus jnn den schlüsseln Christi verborgen ligen sein blut, tod und aufferstehen, damit er uns den himel eröffnet hat, und teilet also durch die schlüssel den armen sündern mit, was er durch sein blut erworben hat." WA 30 II, 468, 6-9. Cf. Fred L. Precht, "Changing Theologies of Private and Public Confession and Absolution," (Th.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1965), 83, especially note 54. He there quotes E. Roth who attempts to speak of a "real presence" of Christ in absolution on the basis of Luther's words from WA TR IV, No. 5176, where Luther asserts that it is Christ who sits to hear confession and who answers, not a man. Cf. Roth, 76. See also the discussion on page 117, note 62 above.

much of this earthly locatedness.¹¹ To human beings, living on this earth he has given the keys. They are indeed not a duplicate of a set of keys which are also found in heaven. They are in fact the only set of keys which exist, and both the loosing and binding key have been delivered to the church on earth.

Was gafestu gen himel nach meinen schlüsseln? Hörestu nicht, das ich sie Petro gegeben habe? Es sind wol himels schlüssel (das ist war), Aber sie sind nicht im himel. Ich hab sie herunter auf erden gelassen, Du solst sie nicht im himel noch jrgend anders wo suchen, Sondern jun Peters munde finden, Da hab ich sie hin gelegt. Peters mund ist mein mund, und seine zunge ist meiner schlüsselbeutel, Sein ampt ist mein ampt, Sein binden ist mein binden, Sein lösen ist mein lösen, Seine schlüssel sind meine schlüssel, Ich habe kein andere, weis auch von keinen andern, Was die binden, das it gebunden, Was die lösen, das ist los, nicht anders, denn als were sonst kein binder odder löser jm himel noch auff erden.¹²

Here on earth are therefore *the keys*, with which Christ himself binds and looses through those whom he has called to use them. "Bindet ihr und löset auff erden, So wil ich *mit binden und lösen im himel*" (*italics added*).¹³ The keys therefore are not used to shore up what Christ has done in heaven, nor does Christ make valid in heaven the use of the keys which has taken place on earth. Christ himself

¹¹Luther refers to the keys as the tabernacle of God, where Christ's blood is daily being distributed. ". . . die schlüssel, das rechte heiligthum, welche der edelsten, heiligsten kleinot eins sind, Gottes, Christi und der Kirchen mit Christus blut geheiliget, und die noch teglich Christus blut austeilten." WA 30 II, 501, 3-5.

¹²WA 30 II, 498, 1-10.

¹³WA 30 II, 497, 11-12.

works through the keys on earth. One therefore does not merely come to recognize God's grace in Holy Absolution, but actually receives it. The use of the keys therefore does not simply imitate a previously accomplished reality, nor symbolize some previous event of forgiveness, nor simply confirm what has already been accomplished.¹⁴ That,

¹⁴See Sommerlath, 222-223. Here he helpfully points out that the word of God is never simply cognitive. As already mentioned, he goes on to explain that Luther's Augustinian *signum* theology no longer surfaces in his later writings at all. "Es ist nicht nur ein Zeichen, an dem ich den Gnadenwillen Gottes erkennen kann und durch ein sinnenfälliges Wort dessen gewiß gemacht werde. Das Absolutionswort soll nicht nur eine Deklaration einer vorhergegangenen Rechtfertigung sein." Cf. Holsten Fagerberg and Hans Jorissen, "Penance and Confession," in *Confessing One Faith*, ed. George Wolfgang Forell and James F. McCue (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 241 who stands in agreement with Sommerlath when he speaks of the *vera vox evangelii* as giving what it says. Most remarkable is the objection to this whole line of questioning by Lohse and Klein. Lohse, for example, emphasizes that one cannot make a distinction between a deklarative and effective absolution in the writings of Luther. "Nun wäre es gewiß nicht angebracht, im Sinne Luthers zwischen einer nur deklarativen und einer tatsächlich effektiven Absolution zu differenzieren." Bernhard Lohse, "Die Privatbeichte bei Luther," in *Evangelium in der Geschichte: Studien zu Luther und der Reformation*, ed. Leif Grane, Bernd Moeller and Otto Hermann Pesch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 367. He therefore comes to agree with Klein, whom he cites in this context as rightly saying: "Die oft aufgeworfene Frage, ob die Absolution die Vergebung bewirke oder 'nur' erkläre, ist insofern keine echte Frage, als sie den Faktor des Glaubens auszuklammern sucht. Die Absolution ist nach Luthers Auffassung in jedem Falle Gottes Wort, gleich ob sie lautet 'Ich vergebe dir deine Sünde' oder 'Ich verkündige dir, daß Gott dir vergeben hat', und verhilft als solche dem Sünder zum Glauben, der allein in der Lage ist, durch die Annahme des Wortes die Vergebung zur eigentlichen Heilswirklichkeit werden zu lassen." Laurentius Klein, *Evangelisch-lutherische Beichte, Leben und Praxis* (Paderborn: Bonifacius Verlag, 1961), 49. In light of the present document, one would have to disagree with both. Indeed, there is precisely such a distinction to be made between the writings of the early Luther to the Luther who writes *Von den*

according to Luther, would actually create a renewed uncertainty. For no one can know what God has done in heaven. Yet what God does on earth according to his word, that indeed is certain.

Wenn wolten wir erfahren, was Gott jm himel bünde odder lösete? Nimer mehr, Und weren die schlüssel vergebens und kein nütze. Sprich auch nicht: 'Ihr solt wissen was ich jm himel binde und löse.' Wer wollts odder kundts wissen? Sondern so spricht er: 'Bindet jhr und löset auff erden, So wil ich mit binden und lösen jm himel, Thut ihr der schlüssel werck, So wil jchs auch thun. Ja, wenn jhrst thut, so solls gehtan sein, und ist nicht not, das jchs euch nach thue, Was jhr bindet und löset (sprech ich), das wil ich wedder binden noch lösen, Sondern es sol gebunden und los sein on mein binden und lösen, Es sol einerley werck sein, mein und ewers, nicht zweierley, Einerley Schlüssel, meine und ewre, nicht zweierley, Thut ewer werck, so ist meins schon geschehen, Bindet und löset jhr, so hab ich schon gebunden und gelöset.

Er verpflichtet und verbindet sich an unser werck, Ja er befihet uns sein selbs eigen werck. *Warum solten wirs denn ungewis machen odder umbkehren und furgeben, Er müsse vorhin binden und lösen jm himel?* (Italics added).¹⁵

*Schlüssel*n. As the following quotation in the text above will show, Luther is emphatic that the absolution is *not* merely the relation of some heavenly reality, but the actual forgiving of sins. The manner in which the absolution is spoken therefore does make a difference, though not, as Klein rightly indicates, to the extra nos word of God, but to the certainty (or its lack) of forgiveness which is given to the penitent. Nor is Klein correct in asserting that it is faith which actually makes the absolution *Heilswirklichkeit*. For Luther the absolution is at all times *Heilswirklich*. Faith receives but does not make it so; unbelief rejects it. In order to make these two statements into one, one would first have to destroy the distinction between Law and Gospel.

¹⁵WA 30 II, 497, 7-21. Cf. Luther's Thesis 6, WA 1, 233, 20-21. Here Luther states precisely the opposite, emphasizing that the pope can only forgive because of the prior forgiveness of God. Lohse, however, appeals to this thesis as definitive for Luther's position. "In den 95 Thesen heißt es bereits, daß der Papst nur so Schuld vergeben kann, daß er erklärt, daß sie bereits von Gott vergeben ist"

Clearly there exists a *praedicatio identicia* between the words and works of the one using the keys and Christ himself.¹⁶ While no man can therefore forgive sins, by Christ's command he can speak these words *in statu Christi* since he himself has given them to be spoken. For God uses means, *extra nos* means to locate and distribute his gifts: in the Lord's Supper, in Holy Baptism, and in Holy Absolution.¹⁷ Forgiveness is found most certainly *extra nos*. *In nobis* lies the danger of a *Selbstvergebung*, one which arrogates God's absolution without faithfully confessing the *totus* damnableness of one's sins. Although Luther can speak thus of the confession and absolution in private

(italics added). Lohse, 366. Yet clearly in the quotation above, Luther has come to an undeniably exhibitiv understanding of Holy Absolution. Cf. Fuglsang-Damgaard, 488, who is not merely speaking of objective justification when he writes: "Die Rechtfertigung ist ein Akt, der in *foro coeli* geschieht." He indeed goes on to say that in the absolution one receives God's promise that one has a right to receive this justifying grace in *foro cordis*, as though it is merely the appropriation of the pre-existent reality. Köstlin, on the other hand, speaks in consonance with Luther when he writes: "Gott befehle uns sein eigen Werk und binde sich hiemit an unser Werk, in welchem wir das seinige vollziehen." Köstlin, 248.

¹⁶Sommerlath points out that it was Luther's deepest desire to make it impossible to separate the divine and human words in Holy Absolution. "Es liegt ihm alles daran, sich des Lösewortes getrösten zu können, das ein von Menschen gesprochenes Wort ist, zu gleicher Zeit aber und seinem eigentlichen Wesen nach ein Gotteswort ist." Sommerlath, 226. He again goes on to urge that this points to the same *unio sacramentalis* of the divine and human which is found in the other sacraments.

¹⁷See the discussion on the Smalcald Articles beginning on p. 148 below.

before God as being the daily and most necessary act of the Christian,¹⁸ he himself is not content with such a confession before God alone.¹⁹ He looks for that certainty which comes *extra nos*. It is Holy Absolution, instituted by Christ, indeed, Christ's words themselves which preclude any such deceptive "*Innerlichkeit*."²⁰ This stands in marked contrast to the *Schwärmer* who appeal to the Holy Spirit: "Der geist, geist, geist mus thun."²¹ Luther again points to the sure words of Christ.

Bleibe du bey den Worten Christi, Und sey du gewis, das Gott keine andere weise hat, die sunden zu vergeben denn durch das mündliche wort, so er uns menschen befohlen hat, Wo du nicht die vergebung jm wort suchest, wirstu umb sonst gen himel gaffen nach der gnade odder (wie sie sagen) nach der jnnerlichen vergebung.²²

¹⁸See p. 115 above.

¹⁹Luther can thus say that while his conscience may continue to accuse him, the *extra nos* absolution, i.e. the *verba Christi* provide certainty of forgiveness. "Dagegen hat er diese ertzney gesetzt: . . . Den Löseschlüssel, das wir auch nicht jnn sunden verzweiveln müsten und uns also damit auff der mittel strasse zwisschen vermessenheit und verzagen jnn rechter demut und zuversicht erhalten . . . Und das ist der trost, das Alle, Ja Alle sunde (keine ausgenommen) sollen Petro odder dem Schlüssel unterworffen sein, wenn er sie bindet und löset, wenn gleich da wider sich streubten alle Teuffel, alle welt, alle Engel, alle gedancken und verzagen unsers herzten, alle anblick des todes und alle böse zeichen, das ein blödes hertz sich darauff kecklich verlassen und widder sein eigen böses gewissen zur zeit der not also sagen könne: Wolan, meine sunde, wie viel und gros sie sind, sind sie mir doch alle los gesprochen durch den schlüssel, da verlas ich mich auff und wil von keiner sunde mehr wissen, Alle aber, alle vergeben alle vergessen, Der mir zusagt: Alles, was du lösest, sol los sein, der leuget mir nicht, das weis ich." WA 30 II, 504, 15-19; 505, 13-23.

²⁰Sommerlath, 218.

²¹WA 30 II, 498, 34.

²²WA 30 II, 498, 26-30.

Therefore to let oneself be given these sure words is to be restored to the innocence which was first bestowed in Holy Baptism. By tying the absolution to Holy Baptism, Luther can go as far as saying that one is born anew through the words of Holy Absolution, where a new and sanctified saint emerges.²³

Gleubstu aber an jhr urteil, so bringen sie dich widder jnn die unschuld deiner tauffe, wirst von newen widder geborn und ein rechter newer heiliege, Denn Gottes wort is heilig, die schlüssel sind heilig, sie müssen auch heiligen alles, was dran gleubet.²⁴

It is thus faith which is given the certain forgiveness which the sure words of Holy Absolution bestow. Faith

²³Vercruysse provides a summary of Luther's connection of confession and Holy Baptism. What is most striking (though unstated by Vercruysse) is that Luther relates the "Sakrament der Buße" to Holy Baptism, where Baptism becomes the beginning of a life of repentance in his writings from *de captivitate Babylonica* to the Large Catechism. Yet it is the absolution which again comes primarily into focus when Holy Absolution is confessed as a return to the new life which Holy Baptism has given. "Diese intime Bindung ermöglicht grundlegend, auf die Taufe zurückzugreifen und in der Absolution die immer notwendige Lossprechung der Sünden zu hören: 'So oft dein hertz der sünden halb will blöd und forchtsam werden, so nimm den Bund für dich, welchen Gott mit dir in der Tauff anfencklich gemacht hat,' [WA 26, 214, 32-36] *Durch die Abweisung eines wesentlichen Unterschiedes zwischen Taufe und Absolution will Luther die Beichte keineswegs aushöhlen. Er will sie im Gegenteil in der Taufe fest verankern*" (italics added). Jos E. Vercruysse, "Schlüsselgewalt und Beichte bei Luther," in *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526-1546*, ed. Helmar Junghans (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 164. Cf. Albrecht Peters, "Buße-Beichte-Schuldvergebung," *Kerygma und Dogma* 28 (1982): 52 and p. 18 n. 19 above. The connection of Holy Baptism and Holy Absolution is also discussed by Bertil Werkström, *Bekennelse och avlosning* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1963), 72; Köstlin, 246; and Walter Uhsadel, *Evangelische Beichte in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus (Gerd Mohn), 1961), 24.

²⁴WA 30 II, 505, 29-32.

which is given the gifts therefore does nothing to create what God so graciously gives. The words give what they say, because they are his words, spoken in his name. And again, where his name is, there is he.²⁵ Believer and unbeliever alike are given the gifts. Faith is given great consolation and blessing; so is unbelief, yet to one's damnation as unbelief rejects the gifts.²⁶ For Luther, in opposition to the Roman church, all depends upon confessing that the absolution does not fail in any circumstances. It always gives what it says, unconditionally.

So reden wir auch jzt nicht, wer den schlüsseln gleubt odder nicht, Wissen fast wol, das wenig gleuben, Sondern wir reden davon, was die schlüssel thun und geben. Wers nicht an nimpt, der hat freilich nichts, der schlüssel feilet drumb nicht. . . Ein König gibt dir ein Schlos, Nimpstu es nicht an, So hat der König darumb nicht gelogen noch gefeilet, Sondern du hast dich betrogen, und ist deine schuld, Der König hats gewis gegeben.²⁷

²⁵In a sermon on Easter Tuesday, 1531, Luther can therefore say: "Also gehet die absolution auß Christus munde. Nam non dicimus: Ego absolvo te in meo aut tuo nomine, sed in Christi nomine. Hoc idem est, ac si Christus ipse diceret, das dw gewißlich vorsehest, das dus durch Christum hast." WA 34 I, 307, 28-31.

²⁶"Meinstu aber, das der nicht gebunden sey, der dem Binde schlüssel nicht gleubet? Er sols wol erfahren zu seiner zeit, das umb seines unglaubens willen das binden nicht vergeblich gewest ist, noch gefeilet hat. Also auch, Wer nicht gleubet, das er los sey und seine sund vergeben, der sols mit der zeit auch wol erfahren, wie gar gewis jhm seine sund jzt vergeben sind gewest, und ers nicht hat wöllen gleuben. S. Paulus spricht Ro.3: 'Umb unsers unglaubens willen wird Gott nicht feilen.'" WA 30 II, 498, 34 - 499, 1.

²⁷WA 30 II, 499, 1-8. See p. 193, n. 23 below, where Spener uses the example of a debt forgiven in analogy to Matthew 18 and again plunges into uncertainty that which Luther is here confessing to be so sure.

Clearly faith is not a matter of indifference, however. For only faith is given what the words deliver. Not letting oneself be given what the words say is in effect calling God a liar.

Es ist Gotts wort und urteil, dem kein grösser unehre geschehen kan, denn so man des nicht gleubt, welchs eben so viel gesagt ist als: Got du leugest, Es ist nicht war, was du sagest, Ich gleubs nicht, Und mus also Gott sein lügener sein.²⁸

Luther therefore goes a long way to warn against any air of uncertainty bred by unbelief which may surround either confessor or penitent. For unbelief which rejects the forgiveness given with the absolution is not just a matter of indifference, but leads to damnation.²⁹ Thus, as with

²⁸WA 30 II, 500, 14-17. Whereas Luther urges faith in the certainty of the words which always give what they say, Spenser seems to do the same, yet in the same breath urges that they may not be actually given by the pastor nor received by the penitent because of the condition of the latter's repentance. See also Luther's writing to the Frankfurters some three years later, WA 30 III, 569, 14-17: "Das ander stück jnn der Bejicht ist die Absolutio, die der Priester spricht an Gottes stat, Und darumb ist sie nichts anders denn Gottes wort, damit er unser hertz tröstet und stercket widder das böse gewissen, und wir sollen jr gleuben und trawen als Gott selber."

²⁹"Denn wer da bindet und löset, gleubt aber nicht, sondern zweivelt, ob ers troffen, gebunden odder gelöset habe, odder denckt so leichtfertig dahin: Oh, trifft, so trifft, der lestert Gott, verleugnet Christum, tritt die schlüssel mit füßen, Und ist erger denn ein Heide, Türck oder Jüde, Des gleichen thut der auch, so gebunden odder gelöset wird, wo er nicht gleubet, zweivelt odder geringe achtet, Denn man sol und mus Gottes worten gleuben mit gantzem ernst und mit aller zuversicht. Wer nicht gleubet, der lasse die schlüssel mit frieden, Er möcht sonst lieber mit Judas und Herodes jnn der Helle sein, Denn Gott wil ungeschmeht sein durch unsern ungleuben. Es ist warlich nicht eins jedermans ding, der schlüssel wol brauchen." WA 30 II, 499, 38 - 500, 8. Cf. Erich Roth, *Die Privatbeichte und Schlüsselgewalt in der Theologie*

the Lord's Supper, the proper preparation for the words of absolution "for you" are believing hearts.

For Luther the Roman contention that one must first effect a degree of repentance, or anything else for that matter, to validate the absolution is therefore completely unbiblical. For it is that contention which has created the so-called "*Wankelschlüssel*," that is, the *clavis errans*, which is conditional upon the *in nobis* state of repentance of the individual.³⁰ In such circumstances the *Beichtvater* is compelled to play "*blinde Kuh*" with the penitent, throwing about the absolution in such a way that the penitent who is fumbling about in the dark can only hope he will grasp it.

Ey daher haben wir jhn: Gott schweigt stille und sagt uns nichts, ob deine rewe recht odder die ursachen zu lösen und dispensieren gnugsam seien, So können wirs auch nicht erraten. Sollen nu die schlüssel nicht ver-rosten, müssen wir also im zweifel dahin handeln, trifftts, so trifftts, feilts, so feilts, wie man der blinden kue spielet. Was sol ich sagen? Spielet ihr als der blinden kue mit unsern seelen, leib und gut, und maust jm finsternis.³¹

der Reformatoren (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1952), 95 where he discusses the impious use of Holy Absolution in a manner parallel to the *manducatio indignorum* in the Lord's Supper.

³⁰See Roth, 49-51. Roth again emphasizes the dubious nature of an absolution which is based upon any other criterion beside faith which desires the forgiveness of sins, providing a substantial number of references. It might be noted that most of his quotations are from the early, that is, pre-1520 writings of Luther.

³¹WA 30 II, 479, 19-25. Cf. Köstlin, 248 who outlines Luther's rejection of any key which is not certain and contingent upon the disposition of the penitent.

The uncertainty spawned by the focus away from the sure and certain *verba Christi* and the conditionality engendered by the *clavis errans* is absolutely intolerable for Luther. Much of the tract is therefore devoted to the establishment of the untenability of the existence of any other but the binding and loosing key.³² Indeed, the clear and bare words of God cannot endure the "*Fehlschlüssel*."³³ "Denn ungewisse Absolution ist eben so viel als keine Absolution, Ja es ist eben so viel als lügen und betrug."³⁴ An absolu-

³²As concerns the binding key, Klein is right when he states that Luther thinks primarily of the loosing key. Klein, 37; 69. The *locus* of the binding key is not confession, where the penitent comes to receive forgiveness. The withholding of absolution is, after all, not the same thing as binding. And Luther would have nothing to do with the withholding of Holy Absolution from him who faithfully desired it. Cf. Lohse, 359; 371 where he points out the fact that Luther never speaks about the retention of sins in confession: "Es wurde ja schon darauf hingewiesen, daß Luther in seinen Aussagen über die Beichte von einem Behalten der Sünden eigentlich niemals spricht." See also Köstlin, 254-256: "Er [Luther] bemerckt auch einmal, daß die Schlüssel noch mehr zum Lösen als zum Binden dienen und wir hieraus lernen sollen, wie auch Christus viel mehr zu jenem als zu diesem geneigt sei."

³³"Denn Gott hat fest und gewiß zugesagt durch Christum: 'Was jhr bindet auff erden, sol gebunden sein jm himel, Und was jhr löset auff erden, sol los sein jm himel'. Das sind klar, helle, dürre wort, die leiden kenen Clavem errantem, Feil Schlüssel. Er spricht, Er solle gewis sein und nicht feilen." WA 30 II, 481, 31-34.

³⁴WA 30 II, 480, 24-26. Luther introduces these words with the statement that the conditional and uncertain absolution of the papacy has indeed filled hell. "Sondern, so viel an jhm gewest mit dem Feil schlüssel und ungewisser Absolution die Helle gefüllet." 480, 23-24. It is most significant that Spener will use similar words, only with the most startling affirmation of the papal position. For it is Spener's contention that the absolution, albeit indiscriminately spoken and always depended upon, has filled hell. See p. 188 and especially p. 230, n. 11 below.

tion which is thus based upon anything but the sure words of Christ must necessarily be conditional, uncertain, and indeed, no absolution at all. And although Luther expects that the penitent will indeed be contrite and repentant when coming to be given the forgiveness of sins, contrition and repentance are never the foundation upon which the certainty of that forgiveness rests.³⁵

Rewen soltu (das ist war), Aber das darumb die vergebung der sunden solt gewis werden und des schlüssels werck bestettigen, das heisst den glauben verlassen und Christum verleugnet, Er wil dir die sunde nicht umb deinen willen, sondern umb seins selbs willen aus lauter gnaden durch den schlüssel vergeben und schencken.³⁶

Because the forgiveness of sins rests solely on the gift and not the *in nobis* disposition of the penitent, the *tentatio* of a quantifiable and inadequate repentance and contrition is overcome by the certainty of what Christ gives. This also

³⁵Cf. Peters, 61. Rather than the demanded *contritio* or *compunctio cordis* which focuses back upon the self, Luther sought ". . . eine radikale Exzentrizität auf Christus hin zu gewinnen." Again, repentance is called for, but not as a basis for forgiveness. Cf. H. Fuglsang-Damgaard, "Die Wiederbelebung der Privatbeichte," *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Kirche* 11 (1933/34): 483: "Diese Gewißheit [wie ich die Vergebung gewiß werden kann] kann niemals auf irgendeiner Beschaffenheit meiner selbst gegründet werden, also nicht psychologisch motiviert sein. Eine solche Gewißheit wäre Ungewißheit. Die unumstößliche Gewißheit kann nur in Gott gegründet und von Gott geschenkt werden. Was Gott tut und was Gottes ist, das steht fest, alles andere wankt und fällt."

³⁶WA 30 II, 496, 36-40.

precludes that the pastor can in any way impose a condition upon the absolution which he gives.³⁷

Ist meine reue nicht gnugsam, so ist sein wort gnugsam,
Bin ich nicht wirdig gnug, so sind seine schlüssel
wirdig gnug, Er ist trew und warhafftig, Meine sunde
sollen mir jhn nicht zum lügner machen.³⁸

The faithful use of the keys, specifically the loosing key, thus gives what the words of Holy Absolution say: the forgiveness of sins, and with them, eternal life and salvation, indeed, *Heilsgewißheit*.³⁹ And though these words are not Luther's last words on the subject of Holy Absolution, they indeed prove to be his definitive position, one which he will continue to confess in answer to the questions raised by Osiander and the Nürnberg Council concerning private and public confession, and in his own confession in the Smalcald Articles.

³⁷"Wohl aber ist wichtig, daß sich aus Luthers Auffassung von der Absolution ergibt, daß der Pfarrer keinesfalls irgendwie in bedingter Form die Vergebung erteilen darf. Jede Redeweise, daß etwa die Absolution 'um der Reue willen' oder 'um des Bekenntnisses willen' oder unter welcher Voraussetzung auch immer gegeben wird, würde aus der Absolution doch wieder einen richterliche Akt machen. Zudem würde dann der Anfechtung neue Nahrung gegeben werden, weil bei dem Poenitenten so erneut die Frage wichtig werden müßte, ob denn seine Reue oder sein Bekenntnis wirklich ausreichend und echt gewesen sei." Lohse, 368.

³⁸WA 30 II, 505, 23-26.

³⁹This ultimately is the goal of Luther's teaching of Holy Absolution: the certainty of forgiveness of sin, and consequently certainty of salvation. Cf. Köstlin, 254: "Die Hauptsache, für welche Luther auch bei diesen Fragen über die Absolution zu kämpfen sich berufen fand, ist die *Gewißheit der Vergebung und Seligkeit*, die dem Sünder jedenfalls in Christi Heilswort und dem Glauben an dieses zu teil wird" (italics added).

Private Absolution and the Nürnberg
Absolutionsstreit (1533)

When in 1533 Andreas Osiander began to attack the general confession which was practiced next to private confession at Nürnberg, Luther and the Wittenberg faculty were called upon to provide a *Gutachten* which would set the matter right.⁴⁰ The theological question fundamental to the debate was whether the absolution was itself a sacramental and therefore a special type of proclamation, or simply another form of the proclamation of the Gospel distinguished only by its liturgical *locus*.⁴¹ At the heart of the question for Osiander was indeed the teaching of justification itself. For when God sees the Christ *in nobis*, who has joined himself to the believer through the sacraments, including the absolution, he forgives him for Christ's sake.⁴² One is therefore made righteous by the indwelling Christ. It was therefore unthinkable for Osiander that an absolution could be given in an indiscriminate general manner, for it is neither scriptural nor conducive to the use of the binding key. He therefore asks how one can

⁴⁰The historical circumstances and problematics of the *Absolutionsstreit* in Nürnberg are well documented, most extensively in an article by Dietrich Stollberg, "Osiander und der Nürnberger Absolutionsstreit," *Lutherische Blätter*, 86 (1965): 153-168. Cf. summary references in the introductory notes of WA Br VI, 446-534; Precht, 86-87; Hof, 31-33; Vercruyse, 157-158; Klein, 168; M. J. Arntzen, "Biecht en Vergeving van Zonden," *Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift* 60 (1960): 95, et al.

⁴¹Stollberg, 165.

⁴²Stollberg, 153.

absolve a very diverse crowd which along with believers contains unbelievers, *Schwärmer*, the unrepentant, adulterers, and the like.⁴³ A general absolution casts pearls before the swine.⁴⁴ And Osiander, with Luther, could not tolerate the conditions attached to the absolution which sought to make a general absolution acceptable.⁴⁵ Osiander ultimately concludes that the unbiblical general absolution which is of the Devil and leads to hell must go, and himself steadfastly refuses to proclaim it. The use of his pulpit to make this point of view known soon drew the ire of the Nürnberg city council, which in turn appealed to the University of Wittenberg for a *Gutachten*.⁴⁶

The response which came from Wittenberg sought to be conciliatory. On April 18, 1533, Luther and Melanchthon respond that one should not dispense with general absolution, but should also maintain private absolution.

⁴³Summarized by Stollberg, 157.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵The absolution formula which was in use at Nürnberg, and continued to be in use there for some two-hundred years, was drafted by Wenzeslaus Link. Stollberg cites the entire formula, which calls for confession of sins, the forgiveness of the neighbor, and faith that God forgives sins. It continues with the conditional absolution: "So ihr solches thut, entbind ich euch nochmaln, an statt der heiligen Christlichen Kirchen, und aus Befehl und Zusagen unseres Herrn Jesu Christi, . . ." Stollberg, 157, note 18b.

⁴⁶The church-political motives of the Nürnberg council need not to be discussed in this context. It might suffice to mention that it was not primarily a theological concern which motivated the city counsellors, but, among other things, the fear of renewed ecclesiastical control via the confessional, as had been the practice of the Roman church.

Denn auch die predig des heiligen Euangelij selb ist im grund und eigentlich ein absolutio, darinn vergebung der sunden verkundiget wirt vielen personen in gemein und offentlich oder einer personen allein offentlich oder heimlich.⁴⁷

Whether in private or publicly, only faith is given what is proclaimed.⁴⁸ Yet even in the context of the general proclamation, everyone is to be taught that what is given, is given to faith *pro me*.⁴⁹

Denn man mus die gewissen unterrichten, das der trost des Euangelij einem jeden in sonderheit gelte, und muß

⁴⁷WA Br VI, 454, 6-7. Cf. WA 15, 485, 31 - 486, 1, from 1524, which has already been discussed on p. 97 above.

⁴⁸Cf. WA Br VI, 454, 12-16: Denn ob woll nit alle daran glawben, darumb ist die absolutio nit zu verwerfen, denn alle absolutio, sie gescheh in gemein oder besonders, mus doch also verstanden werden, das sie glawben fodder und denen hulfft, so daran glawben. . . ." Cf. Detlef Lehmann, "Bemerkungen zu einer Fehlentwicklung in der Beichtpraxis," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 3 (1979): 89, who evaluates the inclusion of a general absolution in its agendas as contrary to Lutheran intentions. "Der eigentlich lutherisch-reformatorischen Intention entsprach eine solche allgemeine Absolution jedoch nicht. Luther hat sie darum auch in seinen eigenen liturgischen Entwürfen nicht vorgesehen." He therefore has sympathy for the position held by Osiander on his struggle against a general absolution.

⁴⁹Vercruysse emphasizes that Luther and his co-workers did not actually take a position for or against either private or public absolution. Rather, they emphasized that the Gospel cannot be restricted to any one means, as it is faith which is given to by both. "Für sie sind beide Absolutionsarten gleichwertig. Trotz ihrer Eigenarten sind beide im Grund nur zwei Anwendungen der einen Predigt des Evangeliums, . . . Wie wir noch sehen werden, erhält der persönliche Glaube hier eine Schlüsselstellung. Die aktuelle Wirksamkeit der Absolution ist vom persönlichen Glauben bedingt." Vercruysse, 158. It might be noted that Vercruysse appears to speak of Luther in light of his earlier Augustinian categories here, as he speaks of "Wirksamkeit" viz. effectiveness. Absolution is thus effected by faith, which is not at all what Luther, nor the Wittenbergers are saying at this time.

derhalben das Euangelium durch wort und Sacrament in insonderheit jedem applicirn, wie yhr als die verstendigen wißt, das in sonderheit ein jedes gewissen darob streittet, ob yhm auch diese grosse gnad, die Christus anbeut, gehor. Da ist leichtlich zu verstehen, das man die privata absolutio daneben nit soll fallen lassen
⁵⁰

The answer given did not censure Osiander in the way that the Nürnberg city council had hoped, and indeed all the more underlines that the forgiveness that is given in absolution is *pro me* most certainly when it is spoken to the individual.⁵¹ Osiander thus continued his struggle against general confession, and by October of 1533 the council requested another letter which is to explain theologically why private confession should be mandatory. The answer came as a faculty response signed by Luther, Melanchthon, Bugenhagen, Jonas and Cruciger, to which Luther appended some personal letters addressed to Link, Osiander, and the ministerium. In unequivocal terms, these theologians affirm

⁵⁰WA Br VI, 454, 22-28.

⁵¹Jacoby, however, feels that the answer was more definitive. He notes that the reformers took the side of the city council by agreeing to the general absolution which was in practice. For although they also urge the greater certainty of private absolution, the same forgiveness is given in both. For Jacoby it was this both/and answer which led to the conclusion that private absolution could be done without: "So mußte die Privatabsolution doch auch für die frommen Christen entbehrlich erscheinen, da sie ja täglich die Absolution unmittelbar aus Gottes Hand begehren mußten, da die Privatabsolution nichts mehr gab als Predigt und allgemeine Absolution." Pr. Jacoby, "Beichte, Buße, Sündenbekenntnis im Zeitalter der Reformation und der protestantischen Orthodoxie," *Zeitschrift für Pastoral-Theologie* 25 (1902): 1-15; 26 (1903): 5.

that private absolution is not the sole *locus* of forgiveness.

Wiewohl wir die Privat-Absolution für sehr christlich und tröstlich halten, und daß sie soll in der Kirchen erhalten werden, . . . so können und wollen wir doch die Gewissen nicht so hart beschweren, als solt keine Vergebung der Sünden sein, ohn allen durch Privat-Absolution.⁵²

Again it is reaffirmed that the preaching of the Gospel also has as its work (*auch das Werk habe*) to bring about the forgiveness of sins in the heart of those who have a smitten conscience and seek to be consoled and raised up in faith.⁵³ Since the Gospel is in itself a general absolution,⁵⁴ the general absolution cannot be forbidden or condemned as unchristian.⁵⁵ Nor is it valid to assert that there are unbelievers among those who are absolved, whereby the absolution is compromised. Since the condition of faith applies to the whole of the Gospel and all that it gives, only the faithful will say yes to the forgiveness given them.⁵⁶ Consequently a general absolution is no less

⁵²WA Br VI, 528, 18-23.

⁵³WA Br VI, 528, 49-53. Cf. Arntzen, who notes the response of the Wittenberg collegium to entail three *loci* for the absolution: "In de prediking. . . . De genadever-kondiging na de preek. . . . De private absolutie." Arntzen, 89.

⁵⁴"Also ist das Evangelium selbs eine gemeine Absolution." WA Br VI, 529, 62.

⁵⁵Ibid. Cf. note 47 above.

⁵⁶"Und eine jede Absolutio, beide gemein und privat, hat die Conditio des Glaubens; denn ohn Glauben entbindet sie nicht, und ist darumb nicht ein Feilschlüssel. Denn der

Biblical than private absolution. Osiander is therefore encouraged to desist from his attacks upon the other clergy who use the general absolution, but he himself is not to be compelled to use it against his conscience.⁵⁷

What is therefore clear in relation to Luther's confession of Holy Absolution is that he himself sees it as a special application of the generally preached Gospel. What the words of absolution give privately cannot be distinguished quantitatively from what they give in the public proclamation. Any quantification would indeed be evidence of the Law. In both cases only he who is faithful is given the gifts. It is solely for the sake of the greater

Glaube bauet nicht auf unsere Wirdigkeit, sondern ist nur so viel, daß einer die Absolution annimmt und Ja dazu spricht." WA Br VI, 529, 80-84.

⁵⁷The historical events need not be pursued any further at this point. What might be said is that Link's general absolution prevailed with the implicit support of the Wittenberg faculty. It should perhaps be mentioned that an attempt was made by Melanchthon in 1540 to amend the absolution formula to the satisfaction of all parties. However, it did not prevail, as the use of Link's formula till 1722 attests. See Stollberg, 164. See also Klein, 172. Klein makes the not altogether unpartisan assertion that Luther lacked the capacity to deal with Osiander's question. "Alles in allem kann man sich des Eindrucks nicht erwehren, daß Luther in der Beichtfrage Osiander nicht gewachsen war." It was not, however, a matter of theological acumen as much as faithfulness to the whole Gospel, as the discussion above has attempted to show. In fact, it appears that Klein cannot bring himself to give faith the role that Luther ascribes to it, which, after all, lets itself alone be given to. Whether general absolution or sermon, it is to faith, and to faith alone which the forgiveness of sins is given. To forbid such absolution because of its undirected application is to miss the point that it is always given to faith, whether *privatim* or in public.

certainty which is given when the absolution is proclaimed *pro me* that the encouragement is given not to let private absolution fall into disuse. In other words, for Luther private absolution is a particular way in which Christ has mandated and instituted the giving out of the forgiveness he won for sinners on Calvary. What can only be said of it is *its proprium*, given out for the sake of *Seelsorge*.⁵⁸

The Smalcald Articles (1537)

It is "Seelsorge" which also becomes the goal of Luther's confession of Holy Absolution in the context of his Smalcald Articles of 1537.⁵⁹ Again Luther first turns his attention to the extrication of *Buße* from its sophistic trappings. He does so in two ways: first by eliminating any quantification of sin, since the Law declares everyone

⁵⁸Cf. Stollberg, 167: "Die Privatabsolution hat also keinen systematisch=exegetischen, sondern einen praktisch-seelsorgerlichen Grund." That private absolution has no systematic or exegetical basis cannot be argued from Luther, who, quite to the contrary, begins with the *verba Christi* which cannot be dissociated from the cross. In other words, it is a matter of both: the systematic and exegetical which flows into the practical and *seelsorgerlichen Grund*. For Luther the latter cannot exist without the mandated institution of the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁹Cf. Ernst Kinder, "Beichte und Absolution nach den lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 9 (1952): 543. Luther writes in the article *Von der Beicht*: "Weil die Absolutio oder Kraft des Schlüssels auch ein Hulfe und Trost is wider die Sunde und bose Gewissen, im Evangelio durch Christum gestift, so soll man die Beicht oder Absolutio beileib nicht lassen abkommen in der Kirchen, sonderlich umb der bloden Gewissen willen, auch umb des jungen, rohen volks willen, damit es verhoret und unterrichtet werde in der christliche Lehre." BSLK, 453, 1-7.

guilty before God, and secondly by establishing the Biblical basis of repentance as *metanoia* and as itself a gift of God.

It is the work of the Law to smite the conscience with terror and despair. Such is not the work of man, but God's work, therefore not an *activa contritio*, a self-created contrition, but a *passiva contritio*, which is true sorrow, suffering and the feeling of death.⁶⁰ For Luther it had become clear that without the full-blast Law which declares everyone totally damnable, there was no *totum euangelion*.⁶¹ Yet such indeed is God's work of the Law and the Gospel, which in turn works repentance and faith.⁶²

⁶⁰BSLK, 437, 2-4.

⁶¹Cf. Lohse, 362-364.

⁶²"Und fur ihm her Johannes wird genannt ein Prediger der Buße, doch zur Vergebung der Sunden. Das ist, er sollt' sie alle strafen und zu Sunder machen, auf daß sie wußten, was sie fur Gott wären und sich erckneten als verlorne Menschen und also dem HErrn bereit wurden, die Gnade zu empfangen und der Sunden Vergebung von ihm gewarten und annehmen." BSLK, 437, 15-21. Some three years before, writing to the Frankfurters, Luther had explicitly stated precisely this Law and Gospel approach to confession: "So brauchen nu wir der Beicht als einer Christlichen ubunge. Im ersten stück uben wir uns am Gesetz, Jm anderen am Euangelio, Den im ersten stück lernen wir des Gesetzes recht brauchen, nemlich die sunde erkennen und hassen, Jm andern stück uben wir uns am Euangelio, lernen Gottes verheissen und trost recht fassen und bringen also jnns werck, was man auff der Cantzel predigt. . . . Und ob wol der zuhörer auch alles beides jnn der predigt höret, Noch fasset ers viel stercker und gewisser, wens jm jnn sonderheit als einer entzelen person gesagt wird, . . ." WA 30 III, 570, 7-12; 16-19. Cf. Kinder, 545; 546. See also Roth, 92: "Die Privatbeichte erscheint ihm als die Einheit von Gesetz und Euangelium." Lohse elaborates upon this statement of Roth's when he writes: "Das gelte insofern, als die Beichte einmal ein Bekenntnis zu Kreuz und Gesetz sei, als sie aber zum andern in der Absolution dem bekennenden Sünder den Trost des

The repentance taught in the Roman church was therefore false and detrimental for two reasons: it refused to confess sin as *totus*,⁶³ and in consequence was able to partition repentance in relation to this *partim* understanding of sin. Yet no one knew just how extensive repentance was supposed to be.⁶⁴ The great uncertainty which this bred was reflected in the inability to give an unqualified absolution, since not faith but the ability to recount sin provided the foundation for absolution.⁶⁵

By contrast, true repentance is neither *partialis* nor *mutilata*. Such repentance teaches the recognition of sin as *totus*, that all is lost, and everything must change.⁶⁶ It is the *totus* repentance which comes from the knowledge of one's total sinfulness which is given the faith that in turn lets itself be given the certain gift of forgiveness which Christ gives.

Diese Buße ist nicht stucklich und bettelisch wie jene, so die wirklichen Sunde bußet, und ist auch nicht ungewiß wie jene: den sie disputieret nicht, welchs Sunde oder nicht Sunde [ist] sei, sondern stoßt alles in Haufen, spricht, es sei alles und eitel Sunde mit uns. Was wollen wir lange suchen, teilen oder unterscheiden?

Evangeliums spende." Lohse, 358. See also Fagerberg, 239, and Werkström, 55.

⁶³See BSLK, 438, 8-14.

⁶⁴BSLK, 439, 17-18.

⁶⁵"Hie war auch kein Glaube noch Christus, und die Kraft der Absolution ward ihm nicht gesagt, sondern auf Sunde-zählen und Schämen stund sein Trost. Es ist aber [hie] nicht zurzählen, was Marter, Buberei und Abgotterei solch Beichten angericht hat." BSLK, 441, 10-13.

⁶⁶BSLK, 446, 14-18.

Darumb so ist auch hie die Reu nicht ungewiß; . . .

Desgleichen kann die Beicht auch nicht falsch, ungewiß oder stucklich sein; denn wer bekennet, daß alles eitel Sunde mit ihm sei, der begreift alle Sunde, läßt keine außen und vergisset auch keine. Also kann die Gnugtuung auch nicht ungewiß sein; denn sie ist nicht unser ungewisse, sundliche Werk, sondern das Leiden und Blut des unschuldigen "Lämmlein Gottes, das der Welt Sunde trägt."⁶⁷

From *totus* repentance Luther can thus move to the *totum euangelion*, the certainty and centrality of which is again his primary concern.

Yet it is also a certainty in which he rejoices, for God has richly given means by which help against sin can be found. Luther is clear that no one of these means can be played off against another. It is always the same Gospel, the same forgiveness, the same gift that is given in God's grace.

Denn Gott ist reich in seiner Gnade: erstlich durchs mundlich Wort, darin gepredigt wird Vergebung der Sunde in alle Welt, welchs ist das eigentliche Ampt des Evangelii, zum andern durch die Taufe, zum dritten durchs heilig Sakrament des Altars, zum vierden durch die Kraft der Schlüssel und auch *per mutuuum colloquium et consolationem fratrum*, Matth. 18.: "Ubi duo fuerint congregati" etc.⁶⁸

⁶⁷BSLK, 446, 19 - 447, 10.

⁶⁸BSLK, 449, 7-14. Most notable in the fact that Luther does not equate the keys with the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren, but sees here another *locus* for the gifts of God. This is certainly consistent with his tripartate division of confession and absolution, this being the second form of confession discussed on pp. 92 and 109-110 above. Cf. Kinder, 549, who writes: "So kennt auch Luther . . . den brüderlichen Trostzuspruch als etwas von dem Schlüsselamt Verschiedenes." He goes on to say that this is indeed a departure from Luther's position in *De Captivitate Babylonica*, where he still advocated that every Christian could confess to and absolve the other. In the

Of the keys Luther goes on to say that they are both the office and power given to the church of Christ to loose and bind from sin,⁶⁹ by which the Scriptures mean all sins.⁷⁰ The *locus* of their use Luther discusses in the context of confession.

Luther here not only uses the word absolution interchangeably with the power of the keys but also with the *Beicht*.⁷¹ Consistent with his, and the Augsburg Confession's understanding of confession, the keys and indeed confession exist for purpose of the absolution.⁷²

confessional writings, only the Large Catechism, (BSLK, 728, 27-36) still has the *expressis verbis*, "wenn auch nicht mehr so emphatisch," suggestion that the Christian brother should absolve the other *zu seiner Not*.

⁶⁹Kinder writes: "Durch das Schlüsselamt, als von Christus eingesetzt, ist die Absolution als vox Dei legitimiert, und sein einziger Inhalt ist das Evangelium, die Vergebung der Sünden." Kinder, 548.

⁷⁰BSLK, 452, 9-20.

⁷¹See BSLK, 453, 2; 4.

⁷²Cf. Kinder, 547. Kinder here notes that confession is retained for the sake of the absolution, which in turn becomes the determinative factor in confession: "Diese Einschränkung in bezug auf die Beichte (die in den luth. Bek.-Schr. häufiger und dringlicher sind als ihre positive Forderung und Empfehlung) bringen zum Ausdruck, daß die Beichte in ihrem konkreten Vollzug nicht so unmittelbar ein göttliches Mandat hat, iure divino ist, wie die Absolution, sondern stets von dieser bestimmt und beherrscht wird. . . ." Cf. Kinder, 545: "Die beiden Stücke, Reue und Glauben, auf die die Buße reduziert wird, und die Beichte und Absolution einschließen, werden von Gesetz und Evangelium her verstanden. Und wie das Evangelium das opus proprium ist, so liegt auch in der Konkretion der Schwerpunkt deutlich bei der Absolution." He goes on to say again that the absolution is ultimately the center of confession in the Lutheran confessions, and one might add, in the theology of Luther.

Luther therefore urges that the absolution not fall into disuse, on the one hand because it derives from the office of the keys,⁷³ and on the other because of its usefulness to give the certainty of forgiveness to weak consciences.⁷⁴

To this certainty Luther devotes the rest of this article by tying the absolution originally to the *vocale et externum verbum*. As Luther has already emphasized against the *Schwärmer* as well as the Roman church,⁷⁵ there can be no certainty of God's gifts or actions *in nobis*. The words of absolution are therefore to be heard as external words, "mündlich, äußerlich," and are the sole means through which

Cf. Ernst Bezzel, *Frei zum Eingeständnis: Geschichte und Praxis der lutherischen Einzelbeichte* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1982), 28. "Die Absolution ist der Gipfel und das Ziel der Buße. Das Evangelium ist der genuine Inhalt der christlichen Botschaft. Hier aber, in der Absolution, soll das ganze unverkürzte Evangelium laut werden. . . ." See also Vercruyssen, 158; Peters, 57; Hof, 28; Wilhelm Maurer, "Der Pietismus und die Privatbeichte," *Evangelische Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 10 (1956): 218; et al.

⁷³BSLK, 453, 13.

⁷⁴BSLK, 453, 5-7. Luther speaks of the *Glaubensverhör*, absolution, and *Beicht* in one breath, doubtless because of the practice which had all three take place during the same session. The consequences of this terminological combination have already been discussed in some detail on pp. 104-105 above.

⁷⁵In his *Open Letter to the Frankfurters* Luther emphasizes that the *Schwärmer* care nothing for the *extra nos* gifts of God because they have not come to know the *in nobis tentatio* and despair of the self. Instead they are satiated with themselves, consider themselves holy, and therefore do not require either God or his word. He concludes by warning: "Hütt du dich fur jnen." WA 30 III, 569, 35 - 570, 6. Cf. WA 30 III, 570, 20-36. Cf. Vercruyssen, 162.

God gives his Spirit and grace.⁷⁶ For it is through the external word and sacraments that God has located himself most surely *pro nobis*.

Darumb sollen und müssen wir darauf beharren, daß Gott nicht will mit uns Menschen handeln denn durch sein äußerlich Wort und Sakrament. Alles aber, was ohn solch Wort und Sakrament vom Geist gerühmet wird, das ist der Teufel.⁷⁷

The connection to Holy Absolution is therefore explicit. Here with the *extra nos* words of forgiveness, God is giving his gifts. Since God himself is there with his words, giving what they say, faith looks for God nowhere else, especially not in the uncertain world of inner experience either of repentance or the Spirit. In unequivocal terms Luther's confession of the *Beichte* in the Smalcald Articles therefore establishes as central that which is ultimately essential and certain for the Christian in life and death: Christ, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, salvation, *Heilsgewißheit*, given *extra nos* with the words of Holy Absolution, *pro me*.⁷⁸

This overview of Luther's teaching about Holy Absolution has sought to trace its development on a

⁷⁶"Und in diesen Stücken, so das mündliche, äußerlich Wort betreffen, ist fest darauf zu bleiben, daß Gott niemand seinen Geist oder Gnade gibt ohn durch oder mit dem vorgehend äußerlich Wort" BSLK, 453, 16-20.

⁷⁷BSLK, 455, 31 - 456, 5.

⁷⁸In Hof's words: "Bei ihm [Luther] ist zu lernen, daß es bei der Privatbeichte um nichts anders als um das Evangelium und den Glauben geht." Hof, 27.

contextual and chronological basis, seeking to establish when and how he comes to confess Holy Absolution as Gospel. Clearly the vital years of development proved to be prior to 1524, while the mid- to late 1520s, and indeed the years to the end of Luther's life, do not reflect any substantial change to the insights won at the end of that initial period. The isolated references, as well as the major statements about Holy Absolution in the Catechisms and in the tract *Von den Schlüsseln*, at best clarify, re-emphasize, and put into practice these insights.

Throughout his life Luther thus consistently dealt with the subject of confession, primarily for the sake of the forgiveness of sins which Holy Absolution gives. Luther came to confess that in the mouth of the *Beichtvater* the certain words of absolution were to be found, and with them Christ himself, giving the forgiveness of sins. This gift received works faith. The Gospel itself is thus defined in terms of the absolution which gives the forgiveness of sins generally wherever it is proclaimed, and most unmistakably when given to the faith of the penitent *privatim* in confession. Such absolution precludes the arrogation of forgiveness and *Selbstvergebung*. It also prevents the conditionality of any *in nobis* reference point, be it contrition or the sincerity of the confession itself. Yet it gives *Heilsgewißheit* because these *extra nos* words are Christ's words which give the forgiveness of sins *pro me*.

From this point of view Luther can therefore emphasize the freedom of the Christian to confess,⁷⁹ and to enjoy in all its *loci*, in Word and Sacrament, the *totus* forgiveness which God has located there for those who will let themselves be given to.

The confession of Holy Absolution is thus the confession of the Gospel itself for Luther, and in the context of private confession, it is the confession of Holy Absolution as the forgiveness of sins given most certainly. In this light it becomes quite clear why Luther could not in any way compromise and certainly not dispose of private confession: for here in Holy Absolution Christ himself is speaking his words, giving his forgiveness, bestowing eternal life and salvation, *pro me*.

⁷⁹Bezzel most appropriately entitled his study of evangelical confession *Frei zum Eingeständnis*.

PART II

PHILIPP JAKOB SPENER'S THEOLOGY OF HOLY ABSOLUTION

CHAPTER I

SPENER'S YOUTH AND EARLY THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

Philipp Jacob Spener (1635-1705) is not only the universally acknowledged father of German pietism, but also a child of the aftermath of the devastating Thirty-Years War which was not to end until he himself was thirteen years old. These first thirteen years of Spener's life saw him grow up in the aristocratic circles of Straßburg and under noble tutelage. Spener also grew up with Johann Arndt's *Wahres Christentum* in hand; this was all the rage in Straßburg during the time of his youth. Spener's personal piety was indeed most influenced by Johann Arndt's *Wahres Christentum*, which he kept next to his Bible.¹ In Straßburg he also came to know the *Erbauungsliteratur* which came from England. He nevertheless was not guided toward theological studies, but under the influence of the courtpreacher

¹Erich Beyreuther, *Geschichte des Pietismus* (Stuttgart: J.F. Steinkopf Verlag, 1978), 62. Beyreuther is also the source of the biographical details noted above. Cf. Martin Schmidt, *Pietismus* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1972), 75. Among the most comprehensive and thorough studies of Spener's life up to the publication of the *Pia Desideria* is Johann Wallmann's *Philipp Jakob Spener und die Anfänge des Pietismus* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1970). What follows is not a critical history of Spener, but an attempt to see him against the backdrop of some of the major philosophical and intellectual movements of his time.

Joachim Stoll (1615-1678) and his jurist father Johann Philipp Spener (1590 [?]-1657) he matriculated into the philosophical faculty of the University of Straßburg in 1648. It was Stoll who also placed the writings of Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) and Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) into his hands. From these we may learn what was to chart the course for much of Spener's later work.² It was Lipsius, specifically, who had with his handbooks opened the door to Neo-stoicism for much of seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe.³ Thus, while the faithful held fast to the reality of God in order to stave off despair, a parallel stoic *constantia*, characterized by *patientia et temperantia* was pursued by many in order to face the harsh realities of the ravages of the war. Inner fortitude was the order of the day.⁴ It is not surprising that that which became a major social force also found its expression in the religious life of seventeenth century Germany. Thus fallen man, delivered up to his own sinful passions, was seen to require discipline and resolute conquest. In this theological and philosophical climate, Spener, at age eighteen in 1653, received a master's degree in philosophy. For this he was obligated to read in the areas of ethics and politics. By this route Spener came to be engaged in providing a refutation of the positions espoused by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). Spener's initial struggle turns out to be with this

²Ibid., 42-44.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 63.

incipient atheism. It is on the basis of Romans 1:20 that he argues for the inner knowledge of God. Present in every human being is an "*unzerstörbarer Funken einer Gotteserfahrung.*" As Spener argues, not even theoretical atheists can extinguish this spark completely, even if they can manage to darken it.⁵ Yet far from meeting the challenge of atheism, which came to be mounted ever more aggressively from the 1670s onward, with a theoretically cohesive system, the attempt was made to use the highly praised empiricism of the day as an apologetic for the reality of God.

Spener points to the Holy Scriptures which themselves encourage such empiricism, specifically to John 7:17: "If any man wills to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself." Spener calls to engage in this experiment, whether or not this claim is substantiated. Experimentation, it appears, was part of the *Zeitgeist* of the time.⁶ What is clear is that experience comes to be the focus of the certainty of God *pro me*:

Die Erfahrung des Wirkens Gottes im Wirken des Menschen tritt nun an die Stelle des ontologischen Gottesbe-

⁵Ibid., 66.

⁶Ibid., 68. Beyreuther cites the writing of August Hermann Francke, who uses answered prayer as such a proof: "Die Fußtapffen Des noch lebenden und waltenden liebevollen und getreuen GOTTES/ zur Beschämung des Unglaubens/ Und Stärkung des Glaubens/." Zinzendorf, also citing John 7:17 appeals to experience, as do Bengel and Oetinger.

*weises: Diese Erfahrung soll den Atheismus widerlegen.*⁷

The experiment of John 7:17 was thus offered as the experiment which would dispell doubt and refute the atheist. But the individual experience of God also countered the deistic relegations of God to that of a disinterested creator. Pietism pointed to the God whose presence was both felt and awesome in one's experience. God could be counted upon to give his aid, lead through trial and temptation, and give faith and hope. The foundation for individulistic, victorious Christian living was laid, even though this was certainly not the conscious intent of men such as Spener or Francke.

Experience also came to be the measure for the ultimate source of truth. Though it was not denied that the intellect and reason could pursue that which is true, ultimately only truth which is lived was seen to be convincing. The "despisers of religion" were therefore already met by experiential truth in the seventeenth century. It is also not surprising that the extreme scepticism which spread all over Europe in the eighteenth century was blunted in Germany by Pietism and its marriage of truth and experience.⁸ This will have particular bearing upon the whole subject of

⁷Ibid., 68.

⁸Ibid., 69.

confession and absolution, specifically with respect to the determination of the authenticity of one's repentance.

Spener as Theologian and Pastor

Spener began the study of theology in Straßburg in 1658, and, in order to widen his horizon, went to Basel in the following year. Most notable is the influence of men like Sebastian Schmidt (1617-1696), regarded as one of the fathers of Biblical theology and Johann Buxtorf (1599-1664), a Hebrew scholar at Basel. Spener's focus was therefore the study of Holy Scripture, rather than the pursuit of systematic theology. His specific focus was indeed the life of the early church, as he found it in the epistles of the New Testament. Such would continue to be the focus of later Pietist exegesis.⁹

Spener's further academic journey took him to Geneva where he sought to improve his French under the Calvinist Antoine Leger. Here he also met the ex-Jesuit Jean de Labadie (1610-1674), who had been called to Geneva as preacher in 1659. Geneva regarded him as a Calvin *redivivus*, while Spener himself was much impressed by Labadie's desire to reform the church according to the model of the ancient church.¹⁰ Upon his return to Straßburg, Spener proceeded to complete his doctorate in theology. On the basis of Galatians 4:19 he was to refute Theophil (Gottlieb)

⁹Ibid., 73. ¹⁰Ibid., 74.

Großgebauer's (1627-1661) teaching about regeneration, which the latter felt was a conscious, inner act apart from Holy Baptism. Spener himself continued to confess baptismal regeneration.¹¹ He obtained his doctorate in theology on June 24, 1664.

The remainder of Spener's life was spent not at the university, but in the parish. First in Frankfurt (1666-1686), then briefly in Dresden (1686-1691), and finally in Berlin (1691-1705). It was in Frankfurt that Spener came to be the very influential and prolific champion of Pietism. With the help of the Frankfurt publisher David Zunner, Spener was able to be heard even as far afield as the Baltic states. At Frankfurt, Spener was the *episcopus* over some twelve pastors of the ministerium, all of whom respected and worked collegially with Spener. Yet it was Spener's sermons which received his greatest effort. One can go as far as saying that in order to know Spener, one must know his sermons.¹² It is also not surprising that Pietism itself manifested itself as a preaching movement. Spener's sermons were each written out *verbatim* prior to their going into the hands of the publisher. These sermons therefore constitute a primary source in the analysis of Spener's theology.

On the other hand, Spener's catechetical reforms can

¹¹Ibid., 76.

¹²This is indeed what Beyreuther asserts. See Beyreuther, 80.

also not be overlooked. Later in Dresden, amidst much derision, Spener gathered some 1000 children each Sunday to have them instructed in the Christian faith. This, too, was to be paradigmatic for Pietism, both at home and abroad, to which both Francke's *Weisenhaus* and *collegia* attest, as well as Ziegenbalg's work in India. What was taught was Luther's Small Catechism, through which "God spoke as he speaks in the Bible."¹³ As far as Spener was concerned, he who did not understand the catechism, could not understand the sermon. At the request of his colleagues he therefore composed a book of some 1283 questions under the title *Einfälltige Erklärung* in order to aid housefathers in the instruction of their children.

The Pia Desideria

It was also at Frankfurt that Spener published his most famous work, the *Pia Desideria*, which is essentially the magna charta of Pietism. As a document, it was written expressly to serve as a new introduction to Johann Arnd's much read *Wahres Christenthum*. Yet within months of its appearance, it attained a stature which indeed rivaled the book that it was intended to introduce.¹⁴

Even though Spener begins the *Pia Desideria* with a

¹³Johann Arnd, *Wahres Christenthum*. Cited by Beyreuther, 82.

¹⁴See Beyreuther, 94-95, for a summary of the origins of the *Pia Desideria*.

lament about the sorry state of the church and its pastors, it is a book marked by a remarkable optimism. It consequently begins with words such as "hope" based upon the "inheritance" which God has entrusted to the church and its pastors.¹⁵ The God who has therefore given his church a purpose and goal also equips it with the means by which that goal can be achieved. This teleological orientation, with the understanding that it can be attained because of God's working in history through the Holy Spirit, is the fundamental premise for Spener's reformatory program.¹⁶

Spener's diagnosis of the church begins with the conclusion that the body of Christ is critically ill.¹⁷ Deliberation on Spener's program was to provide the medicine by which the body is to be healed. The focus, in other words, is on the members of the body of Christ, not its head.¹⁸ It is each one of these members, both the Christian in the pew and the pastor, as well as the professor,

¹⁵Philipp Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, ed. Kurt Aland, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1955), 2. Hereafter cited as PD. See also Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, edited and translated by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 30. Hereafter cited as PDT.

¹⁶See Martin Schmidt, "Spener's 'Pia Desideria,'" *Zur Neueren Pietismusforschung*, ed. Martin Greschat, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977), 116-117. Hereafter Schmidt, *Pia Desideria*.

¹⁷PD 3-4. PDT 31-32.

¹⁸Cf. Schmidt, *Pia Desideria*, 117-118, who traces this line of thought back to Melancthon in the Apology VII, 5.

who needs to be healed, renewed. In other words, rather than changing structures and institutions, Spener aims to change the individual, that is, how to effect the transformation of the entire man.

Das vornehmste aber achte ich dieses zu seyn / weil ja unser gantzes Christenthum bestehet in dem innern oder neuen menschen/ dessen Seele der Glaube und seine würckungen die fruchten deß lebens sind: Daß dann die Predigten insgesamt dahin gerichtet solten werden.¹⁹

Spener thus proceeds to isolate this man in relation to the world around him. A polarity is created, where the world stands over and against him who has received the new birth. What for Luther was thus an ever present threat to the man of faith (i.e. the world, the flesh, and the Devil), all stand as overcome and impotent before Spener. *Extra nos* is the world, the Old Adam, and the Devil, all of which have been conquered by the Christ in him who has been "born again." Since all of these are mere external threats, they can also be successfully shunned and kept at bay. A new vocabulary is thus created. Spener speaks of *Weltgeist*, *Weltlust*, *Weltliebe*, all of which stand in opposition to God.²⁰ Luther still struggles against the Old Adam who is *in nobis*, yet overcome by daily repentance and contrition given by the *extra nos* certainty of the forgiveness of sins. Spener, on the other hand, preaches against the individual

¹⁹PD 79,34-37. PDT 116.

²⁰See Schmidt, *Pia Desideria*, 121 for a full catalogue of these terms. For the above terms see PD 17,4; 71,27; 71,30. PDT 45; 107.

extra nos expressions of the world and its sinfulness: greed, drunkenness, love of honor, and the like, to guard the *in nobis* disposition of the regenerate man.²¹ Two spheres thus confront one another: the sphere of the world and the sphere of salvation.²² Within this latter sphere the possibility of the actual maturing of the inner man can take place. It is for this reason that he resolutely rejects as inadequate the confession that faith alone can be the means by which the Christian relates to God.²³

Der Glaube vermag keineswegs den gesamten Inhalt des neuen Seins zu tragen, er bedarf der Ergänzung durch seine Früchte, durch die Liebe oder auch durch das entscheidende Beiwort "lebendig."²⁴

This new man is therefore the goal of all Christian activity, whether in the life of the individual Christian, the public ministry, or education. Concerning the Gospel given in word and sacrament, it benefits only the inner man, that is, him who is actively pursuing the doing of the will of

²¹PD 17,4-7; 71,26; et al. PDT 45; 107. Cf. Schmidt, *Pia Desideria*, 122.

²²Schmidt, *Pia Desideria*, 122.

²³Schmidt, *Pia Desideria*, 123. Cf. PD 34,30. "Gleich wie nun die vergebende einbildung deß glaubens als deß von unser seiten einigen mittels der Seligkeit grossen schaden thut / also von seiten der göttlichen mittel deß worts und Sacramenten komt eine andere schändliche einbildung deß operis operati darzu. . . ." PDT, 65. See also PD 35,3-19; 36,10-25. PDT 66; 67.

²⁴Schmidt, *Pia Desideria*, 123. Spener speaks about the fruits of faith in PD 17,22; 35,9; (PDT 46; 96); of love in PD 18,1; 28,9, 61,14; (PDT 46-47; 57; 96); and of *lebendig* in PD 28,21. (PDT 57-58).

God.²⁵ Thus the word and sacraments do not gather around themselves the church (AC 5 and 7), nor are they the means by which the church is built up. Instead they become the means of individual edification (*Erbauung*),²⁶ again with the goal of strengthening the inner man. It is for this express purpose that the office of the public ministry also exists. The pastor's purpose is to equip the congregation for this blessed living before God.²⁷ The study of theology itself must therefore be nothing less than a *habitus practicus*,²⁸ devoid of disputations and confessional pole-

²⁵PD 66,3. (PDT 101). Schmidt, *Pia Desideria*, 123.

²⁶Schmidt again cites a large number of references to this point, among them PD 5,26; 7,4; 27,20; 59,30; (PDT 32; 35; 56; 94) et al. Schmidt, *Pia Desideria*, 124. See also Spener's tract *Der neue Mensch*, edited by Hans-Georg Feller (Stuttgart: J.F. Steinkopf Verlag, 1966), 199, where Spener encourages the remembrance and attendance of baptism as an aid to the inner man, which is then also applied to the Lord's Supper which is to nourish and strengthen him who is reborn. Again there is no talk in this context about the forgiveness of sins. This will also be one of the primary foci of Spener's theology of confession and absolution, as will be shown below. See, for example, TB, II³, 162.

²⁷Pastors are charged " . . . diese wichtigste Arbeit / wie die wahre gottseligkeit zu befördern / mit Ernst vorzunehmen / und eine Zeigtlang solches ihre vornehmste Arbeit seyn zu lassen / daß sie heilsame Mittel nach der Regel göttlichen Worts ersinnen / untersuchen / und wie sie werckstellig gemacht werden möchten / reifflich nachdencken wolten." PD 7,5-10. (PDT 34).

²⁸" So gelte es vielmehr in dem geistlichen / wo einmal /weil *Theologia* ein *habitus practicus* ist / alles zu der *praxi* des Glaubens und Lebens gerichtet werden muß." PD 69,7-9; (PDT 105).

mics.²⁹ Not theoretical knowledge, but the sincere disposition and piety of the students were to be the prime criteria for the pastoral office.³⁰ This piety itself was to be informed by the *Lebensregel* which Christ has given the church through his apostles, and according to which the students could also measure the progress of the inner man.³¹ Only such men could therefore become good pastors, since only they who live an exemplary life of godliness can have a true divine call.³² Ultimately only that pastor who is himself a true Christian can lead people rightly in the

²⁹PD 27,2; (PDT 56). Cf. Schmidt, *Pia Desideria*, 126.

³⁰PD 71,36 - 72,26. (PDT 107-108). See especially 72,21-26 (PDT 108): "Es möchte euch etwa nicht übel seyn / wo alle *Studiosi* von jeglicher *Universität* zeugnüssen mitbringen müsten / nicht aber nur allein der geschicklichkeit und fleisses / sondern auch gottseligen lebens."

³¹Cf. PD 76,23-30; (PDT 112) "Dahero nicht allein wünschete / daß in gewissen *Collegiis* solche Materien fleissig / **sonderlich auß den Lebensregeln** / die wir von unserm liebsten Heyland und von seinen Aposteln aufgezeichnet haben / gehandelt / und den *Studiosis* eingeschärffet: sondern ihnen auch an die hand gegeben würde / wie sie gottselige betrachtungen anstellen / **wie sie in prüffungen ihrer selbs sich besser erkennen / wie sie den lüsten deß fleisches widersterben / wie sie ihre begierde zähmen / der welt allerdings absterben . . .**" (emphasis added). See Schmidt, *Pia Desideria*, 128, who here has a very helpful footnote which traces this self-examination of the reality of the inner man according to such rules as clearly having its origin in English Puritanism. That Spener would have had access to these books both in Straßburg and in Frankfurt is indubitable, especially due to the virtually free influx of European literature to Frankfurt's yearly bookfair. See Beyreuther, 79.

³²PD 8,6; 18,9; (PDT 36; 47).

ways of God.³³ As guide, he therefore becomes the *primus inter pares*, who is in fact the director, the older brother to all priests in the faith.³⁴ Thus the pastoral office is not so much a *Predigtamt* as the means by which a godly example and encouragement provide concrete help for the formation of the inner man.

As the pastor is therefore to be judged by his life, so is the church itself. Not its teaching is the main question, but the life that it lives. "Sie ruht auf der Vorbildlichkeit ihrer Pfarrer, auf der Liebe ihrer Glieder, auf der Strenge und Sorgfalt ihrer Kirchengzucht."³⁵ The *notae ecclesiae* are therefore not the Word and the Sacraments, but the love of the members.³⁶ Yet as Spener sees the church, it is a body suffering from a universal

³³Spener therefore expects that things will only get worse, unless pastors would be ordained, ". . . die zum allerförderisten selbs wahre Christen seyen / und dann die Göttliche weißheit haben / auch andere auff den Weg deß HErrn vorsichtig zu führen;" PD 67,8-10; (PDT 103). He goes on to say that any other man who does not measure up should not as a result be called at all. PD 67,11-17; (PDT 103).

³⁴PD 60,10-14; (PDT 94-95).

³⁵Schmidt, *Pia Desideria*, 136.

³⁶"Unser liebe Heyland hat uns vorlängst das merckmahl gegeben / Johan. 13: 35 Hie wird die liebe zum kennzeichen gemacht / und zwar eine solche liebe /die sich öffentlich hervor thue / und nicht bloß in dem vorwandt einer in dem hertzen habenden oder unfruchtbahren liebe / 1. Johan. 3:18 bestehe." PD 28,9-14; (PDT 57).

illness,³⁷ which manifests itself in its superficial life and the *Streittheologie* of its members. Spener therefore calls for the recovery of the true unity of the church: not in a renewed focus on the one head of this body, but the *Lebensregel Christi* and its corresponding fruits.³⁸ The consequence of such a recovery would be nothing less than the realization of a measure of perfection of Christ's church on earth.³⁹

For Spener the New Testament itself comes to serve as a paradigm of how this perfecting actually began to come about. It is notable that this is the primary focus of the New Testament for him: not the words of God, that is, the *viva vox evangelii*, but a description of the life of the early church.⁴⁰ It is therefore also not surprising that

³⁷So Schmidt, *Pia Desideria*, 136. He goes on to state: "Ihre irdischen Lebensbedingungen werden wichtiger genommen als ihre himmlische Nahrung, Wort und Sakrament." Cf. PD 52,29; (PDT 85).

³⁸PD 62,30 - 63,35; (PDT 95-96). Schmidt elaborates: "Die Einheit der Kirche beruht auf diesen jetzt wiederentdeckten Grundforderungen, auf der Lehre und Praxis der Gottseligkeit. . . . Die Einheit beruht nicht auf Jesus Christus, dem Haupte der Kirche, nicht auf dem Worte Gottes, das die Getrennten einigt, im strengen Sinne der Reformation, sondern auf der Christlichen Ethik." Schmidt, *Pia Desideria*, 139.

³⁹Spener talks about ". . . einem grad der vollkommenheit." PD 48,15; (PDT 80).

⁴⁰Schmidt notes that there is indeed a loosing between the Holy Spirit and the proclaimed words of Scripture as Luther had understood it. "Mit der Betonung der Verheissung, der promissio, stimmte Spener ganz mit Luther überein. Jedoch entfernte er sich von ihm -- wieder in Richtung auf den mystischen Spiritualismus, -- dadurch, daß

so much of Pietist exegesis and preaching will concentrate precisely upon the Epistles of the New Testament, rather than the Gospels. The emphasis of the word is thus primarily paradigmatic for Spener, rather than kerygmatic as it was for Luther. What was thus "the Word of the Lord" becomes "the Lesson" to which the individual members of the church are to conform themselves by the renewing assistance of the Holy Spirit; a renewing which Spener circumscribes with the term *Wiedergeburt*.

Spener and His Teaching About *Wiedergeburt*

At the heart of Spener's teaching is the *Wiedergeburt* of the individual.⁴¹ Indeed, it can be argued that the teaching about *Wiedergeburt* is itself the central teach-

er das enge Verhältnis von heiligem Geist und Wort der Bibel lockerte." Martin Schmidt, "Philipp Jakob Spener und die Bibel," *Pietismus und Bibel* (Witten: Luther Verlag, 1970), 19.

⁴¹See Beyreuther, page 85, for a full discussion of this subject. Note 13 is especially important for this chapter, as Beyreuther argues against Martin Schmidt's contention that *Wiedergeburt* is the central teaching of Spener's theology. Of the 2997 recorded sermons of Spener, only 97 deal expressly with the subject of *Wiedergeburt*. What needs be measured, however, is not the number, but the effect. What is not said by Beyreuther is that many of these 97 sermons were bound together into a book on the subject of *Wiedergeburt*, and as such exercised a much more widespread and decisive influence than his sermons in general. Cf. Martin Schmidt, "Spener's *Wiedergeburt*slehre," in *Zur Neueren Pietismusforschung*, ed. Martin Greschat, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977), 9-33. (Hereafter cited as Schmidt, *Wiedergeburt*slehre.)

ing of Spener's theology.⁴² In Spener's own words:

Wo eine materie unsers Christenthums nöthig is/ so ist es gewiß diejenige von der wiedergeburt/ als in welche unsere bekehrung/ rechtfertigung/ und der anfang unserer heiligung mit einlaufft und sie auch der Grund ist aller übriger heiligung/ oder der bronnen/ aus dem alles/ was in unserm gantzen leben von uns oder an uns gutes ist oder geschiehet/ nothwendig herfließen muß. Daher wer denselben unter uns recht verstehet/ verstehet gewiß sein gantzes Christenthum auch recht.⁴³

It is in fact clearly distinguished from justification, the distinction itself being paramount to what Spener comes to understand as central to the Christian faith.⁴⁴ Indeed,

⁴²Schmidt calls the *Wiedergeburt* the "innere Mitte" of Spener's theology. "Die Auszeichnung dieses Bildes [der Wiedergeburt] wird überall in Speners Schrifttum bestätigt." Schmidt, *Wiedergeburtstheorie*, 14. He also argues that Luther and the Pietists both agreed on this emphasis about regeneration as the transforming of man, and the connection of faith and works, but with some important distinctions: "So stimmten Luther und die Pietisten in der grundlegenden *Thematik*, der Wiedergeburt als der umfassenden Änderung des Menschen, und in der grundlegenden Orientierung, der Zusammengehörigkeit von Glauben und Werken, von Rechtfertigung und Heiligung, von Befreiung und neuem Gehorsam miteinander überein, *nicht aber in der Betonung*. Die *Früchte des Glaubens* wurden für die Pietisten wichtiger als ihr Ursprung, der Glaube, an dem für Luther alles gelegen war (italics added)." Schmidt, *Pietismus*, 18-19. This very difference cannot be emphasized enough!

⁴³*Der hochwichtige Articul von der Wiedergeburt*, 2nd ed., 1715, 1. Cited by Schmidt, *Wiedergeburtstheorie*, 13. Hereafter *Der hochwichtige Articul*, ²1715.

⁴⁴This, however, in a qualified sense. At times Spener seems to come very close to identifying this regeneration with justification itself. "An sich selbs aber ist meinem begriff nach in beyden einerley art / und bestehet sie [die Wiedergeburt] also darinnen: daß GOTT nach seiner grossen barmhertzigkeit um Christi willen durch seinen H. Geist / dorten vermittels des wassers und des worts in dem Wasser **Eph. 5:26**. hier aber durch das angehörte oder gelesene göttliche wort des Evangelii den glauben in der seele entzündet / daruff solchen glaubigen die sünde vergibt / und Christi gerechtigkeit zurechnet / und eine neue natur / die

because justification is in itself forensic and *extra nos*, it requires qualification and the addition of regeneration.

Hier mercken wir nun so bald aus der krafft des worts selbst/ daß also die wiedergeburt etwas würckliches seye/ *dadurch etwas in den menschen gewircket wird / das darnach vorhanden ist und bleibet / da hingegen in der rechtfertigung dergleichen nicht geschiehet / sondern dieselbe allein in einer zurechnung dessen/ was der mensch sonst nicht hätte/ und in einer nichtzurechnung desjenigen/ was warhafftig bey dem menschen ist / bestehet/ ohne wirckliche änderung oder schaffung etwas gewisses in dem menschen / so aber nothwendig in der widergeburt seyn muß (italics added).*⁴⁵

Certainty is therefore not to be found in the forgiveness of sins, that is, their non-imputation, but in the actual creation of a new *habitus* which remains within the person. Ultimately Spener is concerned with the empirically ascertainable fact of a new man who has actually been created, in distinction to justification which exhausts itself in being a juridical declaration *coram Deo*. It is also not surprising that Spener therefore does not concentrate his preaching upon the theoretical nature of the *Wiedergeburt*, but the actual life and fruits of the new

der **neue mensch** heisset / in denselben wircket. So bald dieses geschehe / so ist die wiedergeburt verrichtet." Philipp Jacob Spener, *Theologische Bedenken*, vol. 1 (Halle: Im Verlage des Weysenhauses, 1700), 179. Hereafter TB, I. Spener goes on to explain that this regeneration must be constantly renewed in order to be sustained, even as creation itself.

⁴⁵*Der hochwichtige Articul*, 1715, 6. Schmidt, *Wiedergeburtstheorie*, 14.

man.⁴⁶ Though implicitly teaching perfectionism, Spener is nevertheless confronted with the reality of sin even in the life of the regenerate. Yet he, unlike Luther, cannot maintain the tension of the justified man as *simul iustus et peccator*.⁴⁷ What is therefore perceived as sin in the life of him who has been *wiedergeboren* is dealt with in two ways: either it is a temptation which is deceptive, since it is the spirit and not the flesh which is the actual *locus* of

⁴⁶Schmidt notes that of the 66 sermons contained in *Der hochwichtige Articul von der Wiedergeburt* some 57 deal with the new life of the regenerate man, while only 8 deal with the subject of *Wiedergeburt*. The one remaining sermon describes the unregenerate man. Cf. Schmidt, *Wiedergeburtstlehre*, 17, note 23.

⁴⁷"Und zwar eben wie hier / wo GOTT die sünde vergiebet soll er sie allezeit auff einmahl alle. Er vergibt nicht etwa nur eine oder die andere sünde / sondern alle zumahl. Welches daher kommt / weil die vergebung sich gründet auff das verdienst Christi / also werden / so oft uns die sünde vergeben werden / allezeit alle diejenige vergeben / vor welche das verdienst Christi ist geleistet worden. Das sind aber nicht nur eine und andere / sondern alle sünden zumahl. *Sonsten müßte man sagen / welches gantz ungereimt / daß ein mensch zum theil einen gnädigen / zum theil noch zornigen GOTT hätte / welches unmöglich*" (italics added). Philipp Jakob Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht von dem Amte der Versöhnung, und insonderheit von der in der Evangelischen Kirche gebräuchlichen Privat-Absolution; in unterschiedlichen Predigten vorgestellt* (Frankfurt am Mayn: Zunnerisch- und Jungischem Buchladen, 1716), 71. Though Spener here presses toward the confession of a forgiveness that is *totus*, he does so by placing this forgiveness *in nobis*, to which God's favor is then directed. For Spener, as for Luther, a *partim* gracious and wrathful God is of course impossible. But for Luther it is not impossible to confess a *totus* gracious God for the one declared righteous, who is at the same time the *totus* God of wrath toward sin and the sinner, including the Old Adam *in nobis*, whom Spener, however, sees as being ever more displaced. Cf. BSLK 448, 8 - 449, 4, and especially BSLK 448, 26-27. See also page 118 above.

this new man;⁴⁸ or they become expressions of weakness, which are referred to as *peccata passiva*.⁴⁹ In other words, true faith and a sinful life cannot co-exist. The existence of willful sin, in distinction to passive or latent sin, proves that faith is not authentic.⁵⁰ On the other hand, authentic faith, that is, the faith of the "inner" regenerate man (the *locus* of which is the soul "als

⁴⁸Cf. how Spener answers the question about Romans 7, i.e. whether St. Paul is here speaking about the regenerate man or someone who is not. Spener holds to Paul's speaking about the regenerate, but as one who is *tempted* by sin, while in no way giving in to it. In other words, sin is no longer a damnable reality in the life of the regenerate Christian. "Ein wiedergeborener ist nicht unter dem gesetz. Gal. 5:1. **Antw.** Er ist nicht unter demselben weder nach dessen fluch noch nach dem zwang: dann er hat aus dem glauben die vergebung der sünden / auch den freudigen willen das gute zu thun. 2. Aber **das fleisch ist noch** immer unter dem gesetz . . . Es nimmt ihn das gesetz der glieder gefangen unter der sünden gesetz / daß er sich dessen nicht gnugsam erwehren kan / ob er wol denselben nicht dienen will / noch sich darzu bringen lässet. Indessen ist er auch frey gemacht von dem gesetz der sünden / daß er gleichwol nicht / wie einen unwiedergeborenen zur sünde zwingen kann / daher er auch nicht in den todt fället." TB, I, 168-169. And if this should not be clear enough, Spener concludes this section by relegating sin to the external fleshly sphere which cannot touch the regenerate in his being. According to Spener, it should therefore not create any difficulty that " . . . Paulus als ein wiedergeborener sage / er diene mit dem fleisch dem gesetz der sünde: dann solches kommt freylich Paulus zu / nicht als einem wiedergeborenen / sondern als einem der zwahr wiedergeboren seye / aber solches orts betrachtet werde / nach dem noch **anklebenden fleisch.**" Ibid., 170.

⁴⁹Schmidt, *Wiedergeburtstheorie*, 18.

⁵⁰" . . . der wahre, lebendige glaube der mit dem sünden-leben nicht bestehet." *Der hochwichtige Articul*, 2¹⁷¹⁵, 841. Cf. Schmidt, 18.

dem vornehmsten theil des menschen"⁵¹) manifests itself in his external physical life. The goal is ultimately the identification of Christ himself and the regenerate man, whereby both sin and Satan are overcome.⁵² Such a unification again cannot tolerate the co-existence of sin and necessarily presses on toward a consummate perfectionism,⁵³ where the inner man wants to come forth externally, knowing that the God who chooses and loves the sinner, can ultimately only accept the perfected righteousness of life.⁵⁴

Spener has therefore managed to initiate an anthropology which stands in marked contrast to that of Luther. Luther sees the Old Adam *in nobis*, constantly assaulting faith and tempted by the world and the devil. *Extra nos* is Christ, who covers man with his righteousness, and who renews the believer daily. Thus at all times the true Christian remains *simul iustus et peccator*. Spener

⁵¹*Die neue Creatur*, 1701, 42. Cited by Schmidt, 19.

⁵²See Schmidt, *Wiedergeburtstheorie*, 21.

⁵³Schmidt summarizes this position in a most telling manner: "Gott kann eine unvollkommene Gerechtigkeit, wie sie die Rechtfertigung als Glaubensgerechtigkeit schafft, nicht anerkennen. Es drängt alles nach Vollkommenheit, nach Endgültigkeit und darum nach Lebensgerechtigkeit. Eine völlige Vereinigung zwischen Christus und dem Gläubigen muß das begonnene Verhältnis krönen, nicht nur -- wie im klassischen Bilde Luthers -- eine geistliche Ehe mit Gütergemeinschaft (WA 7, 25-26), sondern ein 'seeliger Wechsel der Personen,' die Einwohnung der Dreieinigkeit im Herzen." Schmidt, *Wiedergeburtstheorie*, 23.

⁵⁴Schmidt, *Wiedergeburtstheorie*, 33.

turns this man inside out. *In nobis* is the new man, Christ in us.⁵⁵ *Extra nos* is the flesh, that is, the body, which is exposed to sin, the world, and the devil. But because the latter have been overcome, and because the law and the flesh to which it is subject no longer have any damning effect over the true inner man who can shield himself from these external elements, the keeping of God's laws is possible and a measure of perfection is attainable.⁵⁶ And it is in this context of Spener's *Wiedergeburtstheorie* and its attendant anthropology that the question of confession and absolution must be addressed.

⁵⁵And here a certain connection with Osiander might be seen. See Schmidt, *Wiedergeburtstheorie*, 24-25.

⁵⁶According to Schmidt, *Spener und die Bibel*, 39, Spener understands the Law to be for those who are *wiedergeboren* as the goal of life and as such constitute the *Lebensregel* themselves. See Schmidt, 35. This stands in marked contrast to the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, VI7, where the Law is confessed as to be directed against the Old Adam. Cf. BSLK, 964.

CHAPTER II

BEICHTE AND BÜßE IN THE THEOLOGY OF SPENER

Our first task is to outline the historical framework for the discussion of Spener's understanding of confession and absolution;¹ many of the apparent abuses will find mention in Spener's own works.² Lutheran

¹Among the works which deal with the history of confession and absolution, there are a number which might be mentioned here that are particularly instructive as to the specific abuses of confession and the objections raised about the practice by Pietism. See Ernst Bezzel, *Frei zum Eingeständnis* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1982); Kurt Aland, "Die Privatbeichte im Luthertum von ihren Anfängen bis zu ihrer Auflösung," chap. in *Kirchengeschichtliche Entwürfe* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1960); Helmut Obst, *Der Berliner Beichtstuhlstreit: Die Kritik des Pietismus an der Beichtpraxis der lutherischen Orthodoxie* (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1972); Laurenzius Klein, *Evangelisch-lutherische Beichte: Lehre und Praxis* (Paderborn: Bonifacius Verlag, 1961).

²A very helpful compendium of Spener's theology of confession and absolution, and a means of tracing its development, is to be found in a book by Philipp Jacob Spener entitled *Gründlicher Unterricht von dem Amte der Versöhnung, und insonderheit von der in der Evangelischen Kirche gebräuchlichen Privat-Absolution; in unterschiedlichen Predigten vorgestellt* (Frankfurth am Mayn: Zunnerisch- und Jungischem Buchladen, 1716). This book contains thirteen sermons about private confession which span the years 1666 to 1699, in other words, most of Spener's public ministry in Franckfurt and in Berlin. In the process, Spener made use of the common Gospel readings to address the subject of confession and absolution. Although this compendium is certainly not all that Spener had to say on confession and absolution, it does provide the primary source on the basis of which his teachings on this subject may be approached in an historically cohesive and theologically comprehensive

confession and absolution since the time of Luther had retained the character which was given it by Luther in the Wittenberg reforms of 1524: it invariably preceded the Lord's Supper, was usually made at the time of the *Anmeldung*, and had as its content a *Beichtverhör*, sometimes a catechesis, and concluded with the absolution and subsequent deposition of the *Beichtgeld*. A *Beichtzwang* for all who desired to receive the Lord's body and blood was in effect for both confessor and penitent. In other words, the parishioners were obligated to confess, and the pastors were duty-bound to exercise the office of the keys. The usual *locus* of this confession was the confessional chair, though the aristocracy could (in certain places) reserve for itself either the parsonage or the sacristy. These, then, in the most general terms, were the usual elements of Lutheran

manner. Hereafter this work will be cited as Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, where the Roman numeral which follows will signify the number of the sermon and the Arabic numeral, the page numbers. Appendix B at the back of this dissertation contains a complete list of texts, dates, and location of the texts used in the course of the following discussion which originate in the *Gründlicher Unterricht*. Among the other texts which will be used in the following discussion are: Philipp Jakob Spener, *Theologische Bedenken*, vol. 1 (Halle: Im Verlage des Weysenhauses, 1700), hereafter cited as TB, I; *Theologische Bedenken*, vol. 2, 3d ed. (Halle: Im Verlage des Weysenhauses, 1716), hereafter cited as TB, II³; and finally Philipp Jakob Spener, *Schriften*, edited by Erich Beyreuther, *Letzte Theologische Bedencken*, vol. 1-3 (1711) (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1987), hereafter cited as LTB, I, II, or III; finally Spener's Catechism, the *Enfälltliche Erklärung der christlichen Lehr nach der Ordnung des kleinen Catechismi des teuren Manns Gottes Lutheri (1677)*, edited by Erich Beyreuther (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1982). It will be cited as *Einfälltliche Erklärung*.

confession by the end of the seventeenth century. As far as a general complaint about confession is concerned, pastors were most distressed that the penitents did not sit on the *Beichtstuhl* as though they were confessing *coram deo* or receiving the absolution *in statu Christi*, while the penitents were disturbed by the lack of privacy, and at times dignity, which the current practice afforded them.³ Finally the payment of the *Beichtgeld* might be mentioned. It constituted a special *scandalon* for the Pietists, as it was not merely an extra source of income for the pastor (one which they guarded jealously it seems, especially when it came to the position and wealth of the penitents) but a

³Bezzel, 151. Bezzel provides a number of pages of examples. Only a few will be recounted here. As concerns the penitents, a pastor in Saxony complained " . . . daß etliche für dem Beichtstuhl stehen und lachen . . . Etliche stinken im Beichtstuhl von Taback wie die Landsknechte; etliche aber wollen sich mit ihrem Nächsten nicht zuvor aussöhnen, noch ihnen vergeben." Another laments that they ". . . laufen zur Beichte / lassen kein demütig Wort aus ihrem Halse gehen / fangen in der Beichte mit dem Pfarrherrn an zu zancken / als wenn sie sich zu ihm auff die Bierbank gesetzt. . . ." The pastors themselves were admonished to hear confession appropriately prepared and vested: "Er soll nicht in rothen Pantoffeln, weißen Strümpfen oder im Reise-rock sich bei der Beicht sistieren; er soll nicht im Pfarr-hause, noch weniger im Schlafrock Beichte und Absolution aussprechen." A multiplication of examples is certainly not necessary. Yet these, it appears, are illustrative of some of the problems which seventeenth century parishes faced with private confession. Some of the problems on an even more serious note can be found in Klaus Harms, "Die Einzel-beichte" *Monatschrift für Pastoraltheologie* 42 (1953): 381-382. He cites Christian Hohburg, who laments that Holy Absolution was given indiscriminately to "Säufer, Räuber, Hurer, . . ." and all ". . . wider besseres Wissen und Gewissen."

practice which created the impression that absolution and the *Beichtgeld* were in some way connected.⁴

Spener's contention with confession and absolution was of a completely different nature, however. He, too, has objections to the practice, some of which parallel those mentioned above.⁵ But his criticism and reinterpretation

⁴See especially Spener's discussion of the *Beichtpfennig* in his LTB, I, 606-610. Cf. Theodor Kliefoth, *Liturgische Abhandlungen: Die Beichte und Absolution* (Schwerin: Verlag der Stiller'schen Hof-Buchhandlung, 1865), 468-469. Kliefoth goes on to explain that all talk about the *Beichtpfennig* had the *Beichte* itself in view. "Indem man über das Beichtgeld verhandelte, verhandlete man über die Beichte; indem man das Beichtgeld als odios hinstellte, suchte man die Beichte als odios hinzustellen; indem man die Abschaffung des Beichtgeldes anstrebte, suchte man die Abschaffung der Beichte." Kliefoth, 469.

⁵Cf. Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 297: Here Spener laments the abuses which confront him and his fellow pastors ". . . indem meistentheils nichts weiter geshiehet / als daß einerseits das beicht-kind eine außwendig gelernte formul / die es manchmal nicht versteht / was damit gesagt seye / ja die sich oft auff die person in vielen stücken gar nicht schicket / her erzehlet / ohne dran zu gedencken /" In other words, as far as he sees the matter, no sins are actually confessed. Furthermore, he is also concerned that there are not enough pastors available to hear confession, neither is there sufficient time to instruct nor was the location appropriate to afford the desirable privacy for confession. "Indem die beichtstühle meistens also gebauet / daß beicht-vatter und beicht-kind nicht gegeneinander ihr hertz also außschütten können / wie sichs geziemet / ohne daß andere es auch hören und gewahr werden." A strange word in the above context is the word "gegeneinander." Spener seems to be saying that a mutual, fraternal confession would thus be going on, which would lead to reciprocal edification and encouragement. Kliefoth also notes that Spener's understanding of confession pointed in this direction. "Er [Spener] faßte erstens die seelsorgerliche Beichtunterredung etwas anders, als die Reformatoren gethan hatten, nemlich pietistischer, . . . als ein gegenseitiges Ausschütten der Herzen; und dafür gab ihm auch die richtig gehaltene Privatbeichte nicht den Ort und die Zeit her." Kliefoth, 441. Spener suggested the study of

of the *Beichte* directs itself to its relation to the life and practice of the *wiedergeborene innere Mensch*. This criticism and reinterpretation can be most clearly assessed when seen in the light of what must be regarded as Spener's key *Oberbegriff* in his discussion of confession and absolution: *wahre or rechte Buße*.⁶

the pastor would provide a more fitting place for such a conversation. What is most notable, therefore, is that Spener attempts to have the second type of confession (see page 92 above), that before the brother, subsume the *Privatbeichte*, which is therefore reinterpreted in terms of a *mutuum colloquium et consolationem fratrum*. Though it is not to be denied that the Gospel can be given in such circumstances, as Luther indeed states in the Smalcald Articles (BSLK, 449, 6-14), lost is Luther's contention that confession takes place *coram Christi*, where it is the ear of Christ that hears, and Christ's mouth which gives absolution. See page 117, note 62 above. Spener's suggestion for a place to meet which would give opportunity for such counseling met with little favorable response during his lifetime, as people were concerned to preserve the "unverdächtigen Ort" which the church sanctuary afforded them, and to thereby confess that the *Beichte* is indeed a public act located there where all of God's gifts are distributed through the servant who has been called and ordained to give the gifts there. One might also add that the question of the place of confession is therefore not altogether a matter of adiaphora, as Fuglsang-Damgaard suggests. H. Fuglsang-Damgaard "Die Wiederbelebung der *Privatbeichte*," *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Kirche* 11 (1933/34): 482.

⁶It is striking that, according to Hof, Luther's central purpose in retaining confession was to lead to the *in statu Christi* absolution. See Otto Hof, "Die *Privatbeichte* bei Luther." Chap. in *Schriftauslegung und Rechtfertigungs-glaube*, with a Forword by Edmund Schlink (Karlsruhe: Evangelischer Presseverband für Baden e.V., 1982), 27-28; 36. By contrast, Spener's purpose is to lead to a deeper kind of repentance.

Wahre Buße

Throughout Spener's preaching and teaching about confession and absolution, the term *rechte* or *wahre Buße* recur and designate that which is fundamental to the Christian life, indeed, to faith itself. *Buße* is thus not merely a *status*, but an actual *habitus* for him who is *wiedergeboren*, one which in fact defines faith. Spener argues as one faithful to the confessions, that true repentance consists in the following: (1) **Reue** seiner sünden. . . . (2) **der glaube**⁷ But this confessional formula is usually expanded upon in practical application, through which Spener seeks to verify repentance. Repentance is thus true if it meets the following three criteria: ". . . du bist deiner sünden von hertzen feind / glaubest wahrhaftig an JESum CHristum / und hast einen ernstlichen vorsatz dein

⁷Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VI, 137. See also pages 182-183 where Spener defines *Buße* in terms of faith, i.e. that which attains the *Gnadenkindschaft* and an obedient heart ("ein **gehorsames hertz**"). See also page 241. This is in contrast to the misunderstanding of *Buße* which Spener sees as so prevelant: "Die buß / meynen gewißlich ihrer viele / seye nur eine solche äusserliche ceremonie / daß auffs höchste einige bußgebete lese / etliche tage in die kirche gehe / und seine beicht herspreche; das heisst dann buß getan." Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VIII, 189. Cf. BSLK, 260, 5-27. Important to add, however, is that Melancthon regards these two in terms of Law and Gospel, both of which are the works of God. "Haec enim sunt duo praecipua opera Dei in hominibus, perterrefacere, et iustificare ac vivificare perterrefactos." BSLK, 261, 43-45. See also Kliefoth, 264-265.

leben zu bessern."⁸ Repentance is thus in constant need of being examined as being true, lest there be a lapse into passive belief without the active hate of sin "*von grund der seelen*"⁹ and a failure to amend one's life. A vow of obedience to God's commandments may also be added as a further element to that which is true repentance.

Du must vor GOTT dein gelübde thun / in deinem gantzen leben dich des gehorsams gegen seine gebote zu befleissen. Das heisst bußfertig sein. *Manglet dirs an einem dieser stücke / sonderlich / wo du noch in deinen sünden fortfahren wilst / so seye versichert du bist unbußfertig . . .*" (italics added).¹⁰

⁸Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XIII, 406. These three elements, to be an enemy of sin with all one's heart, to believe in Jesus truly, and to have the earnest desire to amend one's life, consistently recur wherever Spener speaks about determining the nature of one's repentance. They are thus the *nota* of true Buße, and as such the *sine qua non* of absolution.

⁹Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VI, 155. Spener therefore clearly urges an active repentance, which needs and seeks to establish its own veracity. Luther, notably, warns of such a repentance and speaks instead of a *passiva contritio*. Cf. BSLK, 437, 2-4.

¹⁰Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VI, 137; 182-3; 214. See also pages 155-156. See also *Einfälltige Erklärung*, 808, where Spener asks: "**Was gehöret dann zu der beicht?** Daß der beichtende seine sünde bekenne / und die reue über dieselbe bezeuge: so dann die vergebung bitte / mit gläubiger beruffung auff die gnade CHristi / und verspruch deß neuen gehorsams" (italics added). This matter of "bezeugen" of repentance is most dubious. It almost would appear that Spener was completely ignorant of Luther's strong stand against such an emphasis upon repentance. Cf. Luther preaching on Matthew 18 in the late 1530s, WA 47, 334, 24-33: Of the loosing key the Roman church had taught: ". . . die Absolution kondte zuweilen irren. Das ist ein rechter Widerteuferissher grieff gewesen. Lehrete also: ich Absolvire dich von allen deinen Sunden, wen du gnug die sunde bereuet hast, und als dan ist die Absolution recht, so du aber nicht gnugsam bereuet bist, so ist sie nicht recht. Wer kan nun alhier sagen, das ehr gnug reu und Leidt uber

Indeed, to be "unbußfertig" certainly means to be incapable of receiving absolution, even if one should believe otherwise. In fact, he goes as far as saying that to trust in the absolution simply is not enough, for such belief does not at all meet the criteria for proper reception:¹¹

Es heist aber wahre buß / dardurch wir der absolution fähig werden / nicht nur daß man / ehe man zur beicht gehe / einige gebete lese / darnach die beicht hersage / das übrige anhöre / und die absolution mit vertrauen annehme / wie weit es etwa insgemein kommet: sondern die buß muß eine gantze änderung des hertzens seyn; nemlich in demselben zu wircken / daß du nimmermehr deine vorige sünde wiederum begehen / hingegen dich in allen stücken eines gottseligen lebens befleissen wollest: Wo dieser vorsatz nicht redlich und ernstlich ist / so bist

seine sünde getragen hab? und ich sol gleichwohl nicht eher absolviret sein, es sey dan, das ich gnug bereuet hab, und vorher gehe die Bekendtnis aller sünde, eine gnugsame reue und Contrition. *Ich kan nimer mehr wissen, das ich recht alles gebeichtet und bereuet hab. Stellet also der Bapst die krafft der Absolution auff die reue* So wisse jederman, das man Gottes vergebung nicht bauen solle auf meine Beicht und reue, wie der Bapst und seine Doctores gethan, und hie in diesem stücke naturlich Widderteuffer gewesen sind. . . . *Den ich kan der vergebung der sünde nicht versichert werden, weil ich nicht weiss, wen ich gnug bereuet hab"* (italics added). And that is precisely Spener's point when it comes to Holy Absolution: it does not give certainty of forgiveness because of the uncertainty of one's repentance. Cf. Hof, 30.

¹¹Luther's sole criterion is faith, which is manifested by virtue of the penitent coming to confession of his own volition: "Auch hatt der priester gnugsam zeychenn unnd ursacht, zu absolvirenn, wan er siht, das man vonn yhm begeret der Absolution. Hoher ist er zu wissen nit verbunden." WA 2, 719, 26-28. It must be kept in mind that Spener is confronting a *Beichtzwang*, and therefore meets people who are there under duress. Yet his theological position goes beyond the one who is compelled to confess, as his intended audience are the regenerate who want to be Christians in earnest. Cf. Fred L. Precht, "Changing Theologies of Private and Public Confession and Absolution," (Th.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1965), 78.

*du nicht bußfertig / wenn du auch das gantze gebätbuch außgelesen / und deine beicht gar mit thränen und auf den knien gethan hättest. . . . Nun / ohne solche buß ist aber allezeit die absolution einem menschen nichts nütze (italics added).*¹²

Spener goes on to meet the objection of those who would protest that they come to confession believing the words of God as actually giving what they say by affirming that the words are indeed dependable. Yet for him it is critical to understand that these words are to be depended upon not by the one who simply believes, but only by the one who repents properly:

Ja, spricht einer / es ist aber gleichwol die absolution ein göttliches wort / das muß denn wahr seyn / und ich nehme es in glauben an / so habe ich ja dessen krafft.
Antwort: Die absolution an sich selbst ist ein unbetrügl-
 ich Göttliches wort / aber dero verrichtung auf dich /
 wenn du unbußfertig bist / ist ein menschlicher fehler
¹³

¹²Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 304-305.

¹³Ibid. Thus Spener clearly affirms the *dependability* of the words of God, but places the onus of their appropriation upon the repentant disposition of the penitent. Cf. *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 302-303, where Spener laments that people do not come to church to hear the sermon or to study the word of God, but are content with absolution and the Lord's Supper, admitting that they are sinners, but have no desire for amendment of life. This leads to false security, what to him is an *ex opere operato* understanding of the sacraments: ". . . also bekenneten sie freylich / sie lebten nicht wie sie solten / begehrten sich auch dessen nicht zu befleißigen / aber Christus habe darzu den beichtstuhl verordnet / und seinen Aposteln und allen predigern befohlen / die sünde denjenigen / die sie bekennen / zu vergeben / mit der theuren versicherung / was sie vergeben das solle warhafftig auch vor ihm vergeben seyn." Cf. TB, I³, 196, where Spener also expresses this fear: ". . . nemlich / daß wir zum öffteren in den predigten gelegenheit nemen / den leuten ihren falschen wahn von der *absolution* und dem *opere operato* in derselbigen zu benehmen / hingegen ihnen nachdrücklich zu zeigen / daß ob wol die *absolution*,

Thus the *Beichtvater* would make a frightful mistake by absolving what might be an *impenitent believer*.¹⁴ The believer who wants to receive what the words of God proclaim without first being certain of the integrity of his repentance runs the risk of plunging into a false security which ultimately can lead to damnation.

Ach daß doch jederman dieses hertzlich erwegte! da hingegen gewiß / viele hundert und tausend darüber ewig verlohren gehen / daß sie sich immer auf die beicht und *absolution* verlassen / und daß ihnen ihre sünde vergeben worden / betrieglich geglaubet haben; da sie doch niemals zur wahren buß gekommen / und also immer in ihren sünden stecken geblieben / auch wol darinen gestorben sind. Denen geholffen hätte werden können / wann sie den *betrug ihres falschen vertrauens auff die absolution bey unbußfertigem stand hätten erkannt und fahren lassen / und dadurch zur wahren buß angetrieben worden wären / aus ihrer vorigen sicherheit zu entfliehen* (italics added).¹⁵

The proper preparation for confession and absolution is therefore to examine oneself, not for one's sins, however, but as to the nature of one's repentance. This alone can

als ein wort Gottes gesprochen / ihre krafft in sich habe / daß sie dennoch keinem zu statten komme / als welcher wahrhaftig bußfertig ist /" Cf. Precht, 138-139.

¹⁴This most dubious oxymoron is indeed implied by what Spener says here. Spener notes that such misapplication of the absolution to the alleged believer who is perceived to be unrepentant is in effect the delivery of absolution contrary to the order of God. This practice has led to the damnation of many. Nor does the present practice give the opportunity to instruct and warn of misapplying the absolution to oneself if a true repentance is not present. It is this pastoral consideration which leads Spener to instruct his parish and readers with these sermons. Cf. Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VIII, 192.

¹⁵TB, II³, 157-158. See p. 69, especially n. 15 above. See also p. 139, especially n. 34.

give assurance that what is spoken by the pastor *in statu Christi* can indeed be safely applied to oneself.

Also wo du wilst versichert seyn / daß die absolution auch dir ein wort Gottes seye / so ists nicht genug / daß sie dir vom prediger gesprochen werde / sondern daß du auch in redlicher prüfung deiner selbst versichert seyest / daß es dir mit deiner buß ein redlicher ernst seye: welches man wohl bey sich finden kann / ist also deine buß aufrichtig / du bist deiner sünden von hertzen feind / glaubest wahrhaftig an JESUM CHRISTUM /und hast einen ernstlichen vorsatz dein leben zu bessern / so gilt dir die absolution von Gottes wegen / und ob sie wohl von einem menschen empfangen / ist sie doch gewiß / als hättest du sie vom himmel unmittelbar herab gehört. *Da ist sie auch mit der Zueignung auff dich Gottes wort (italics added).*¹⁶

It is this *Zueignung* of which Spener speaks here that requires some further examination.

The words of absolution spoken after the confession are words of God that one can apply to oneself safely only if all the criteria of true repentance have been met. Any other *Zueignung* would be presumption. Implied by all of this is that the words of God must be appropriated, namely, claimed for oneself, rather than letting oneself be given what they say. In other words, they are not the words of God *pro me* until one has met the proper conditions which

¹⁶Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XIII, 406. See also a Sermon found in his *Theologische Bedenken II* from October 10, 1697. The text is a virtually verbatim repetition of the above citation. What is to be noted, however, is that Spener urges the examination not only *before* the confession but also *after* the absolution. What the absolved are to obtain is the " . . . zeugnuß ihres gewissens . . . daß es ihnen mit ihrer buß ein ernst seye." If all criteria are in order, they can be assured of the validity of the divine absolution: " . . . so sind sie alsdan der absolution und dero gültigkeit göttlich versichert." TB, II³, 157.

actually enable the individual to appropriate them to his benefit. Thus Spener draws the analogy of the *Zueignung* of absolution to a debt which is due to be paid, and casts it into an eschatological framework: Ultimately the debt is only paid up for those who are truly penitent. The heart which is truly repentant can take this bill (the words of absolution) as being applied to one's self. On the other hand, for the one who is not properly repentant, the bill is invalid. Even though one understands it to be paid, God will instead add to one's debt the guilt of misappropriation as well. In other words, an absolution received without the right repentance becomes a stolen absolution which multiplies guilt. There is for Spener therefore a *confessio indignorum* as there is for Luther,¹⁷ albeit with this most startling difference: for Luther the sole criterion was faith, that is, whether or not the individual lets himself be given the forgiveness which the words of absolution deliver;¹⁸ Spener, on the other hand, goes beyond faith to

¹⁷See page 98 above.

¹⁸This is not to deny the role of repentance, i.e. the *Reue* of which Luther speaks in the Smalcald Articles. But Luther speaks of a *passiva contritio*, worked by God's Law, which as such cannot be quantified in any way, nor defined in terms of a set number of criteria. BSLK 437, 1-4. Cf. Luther's rejection of any *partim* repentance: "Diese Buß ist nicht stucklich und bettelisch wie jene, so die wirklichen Sunde bußet, und ist auch nicht ungewiß wie jene; . . . Darumb so ist auch hie die Reu nicht ungewiß; denn es bleibt nichts da, damit wir mochten was Guts gedenken, die Sunde zu bezahlen, sondern ein bloß, gewiß Verzagen an allem, das wir sind, gedenken, reden oder tun etc." BSLK, 446, 19 - 447, 3. Thus a confession of sin which is *totus*

the proper attitude as reflected in true repentance, namely, *contritio in nobis*. Yet unlike Luther, for whom the receiving of absolution in unbelief leads to damnation, Spener leaves the unrepentant as simply without the gifts. In other words, he fails to press forward to the full consequence of unbelief: damnation.¹⁹ When Spener does speak of damnation, it is not for rejecting the absolution in unbelief, but for misrepresenting one's repentance:

Kommt jetzt einer / der in der that unbußfertig ist /
thut aber seine beicht als ein bußfertiger / wird also
von uns als ein solcher absolviret / so hat er uns zwar
so fern betrogen: Aber die absolution nutzt ihm nicht
ein haar vor GOTT, sonder verdammt ihn so viel schwerer
/ weil er noch GOTT hatt betrügen wollen.²⁰

Spener indeed goes on to emphasize that true repentance thus requires a conscious effort, without which one is simply not capable of receiving absolution:

Also bleibts einmahl vor allemahl dabey / so lang du
nicht auff gedachte maß wahrhaftig bußfertig bist /

leads to certain *Reue*, followed by a *totus* absolution which is given to faith.

¹⁹"Nach lutherischer Lehre wirkt das Wort der Absolution nicht allein bei dem Bußfertigen sondern auch bei dem Unbußfertigen, nur natürlich bei dem Letzteren nicht zum Segen sondern zum Gericht. Dies bestreitet Spener. Es kommt ihm sehr darauf an, . . . daß nur der Bußfertige wirkliche Frucht von der Absolution habe. . . . Er sagt nicht mit Luther, daß Gott in der Absolution um seines Wortes willen wahrhaftig auch dem Unbußfertigen Vergebung der Sünden beilege, . . . und das derselbe . . . im folgenden Gericht . . . erkennen werde, wie ihm in der That Vergebung der Sünden sei gegeben gewesen und er sie nicht genommen habe; sondern er [Spener] sagt, daß die Absolution an dem Unbußfertigen gar Nichts wirke: sie 'geht an ihm vorüber.'" Kliefoth, 445. Cf. TB, I³, 84.

²⁰Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VIII, 200.

bist du auch keiner absolution fähig / und wo dir in solchem stande auff deine beichte der vornehmste prediger in der welt die hand aufflegte / und nicht nur eine sondern zehn-zwanzigmal die wort der absolution in dem name des heiligen GOTTES vorspräche / so wird dir nicht eine einige / geschweige alle / deine sünde / vergeben / und was du also vor vertrauen auff die absolution setzest / betreugest du dich in allem selbst: ja du wirst nur desto mehr in deinen sünden gebunden (italics added).²¹

One's faith is thus placed squarely not upon the absolution, even though Spener agrees that the sure words of God *potentially always* give what they say,²² but upon one's own repentance. For Spener this *in nobis status* of repentance thus becomes the sole ground of assurance for the forgiveness of sins. The absence of repentance points furthermore to the fact that the regenerate man who alone can receive absolution worthily is not actually present. For such an unregenerate person, that is, one who does not meet the criteria of true repentance, to sit in the *Beichtstuhl* is thus altogether deceptive. This is also the case for those who

²¹Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 306-307. Cf. XI, 284-285: "Der mißbrauch aber ist der / daß sich alle leute / sie seyen bußfertig oder unbußfertig / diese zu ihrem großen schaden / auff die beicht und absolution verlassen." This state leads to the deceiving of those who think they are absolved, but really are not. "Worinnen aber bestehet der betrug: darinnen: Sehe / wir haben oben gehöret / daß kein mensch der vergebung der sünden fähig sey / ohne buß und glauben: Daß auch der HErr die sünde keinem andern zu vergeben / den predigern macht verliehen habe / als den bußfertigen: so gilt dann auch die absolution keinem als dem bußfertigen."

²²For Luther the matter was not so contingent: Christ's words always give what they say, though unbelief *de facto* rejects the gifts toward damnation. See the discussion pages 113-115 above.

make confession due to fear, not on the basis of the true inner birth. For what appears to be contrition to the eye, might indeed be no more than the attrition, that is, fear of punishment.²³ Spener thus warns those who do not possess the proper sorrow for sins, who lack faith, or whose intent for amendment is not earnest, of ever increasing bondage to sin rather than absolution from them. Such as these should stay away from the *Beichtstuhl*.

Erstlich / die **absolution** nutzt keinem menschen / oder werden einigem einige sünden vergeben / *der nicht wahrhaftig bußfertig ist*. Also wer nicht wahrhaftig bußfertig ist / als der nicht seine sünde nunmehr hasset / und alle mit ernst lassen will / im wahren glauben stehet / und zu einem wahrhaftig-gottseligen leben sich resolviret / und solches alles von grund der seelen / demselben nutzt keine absolution / und wann der heiligste mann in der gantzen welt ihm dieselbe hundert mahl in einem tag spräche. Sondern / weil er noch dazu bey seiner unbußfertigkeit GOTT gleichsam die vergebung abtrotzen oder abpracticiren will / so wird er in sünden nur immer so viel härter gebunden / weil immer noch mehr dazu thut (*italics added*).²⁴

²³In a sermon from 1666, Spener preaches on the Unjust Steward of Matthew 18. According to Spener, Jesus teaches through the example of the servant that a false repentance can be created when "the water reaches his kneck". Thus he shows that all wicked people, ". . . sich können einer obwohl falschen / oder doch nicht gnugsamen gewurzelten buße annehmen." And he observes that upon such false repentance, sin is actually not forgiven, ". . . weil auf bloß heuchlerische buß die sünde nicht verziehen wäre." Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, I, 10. On the other hand, Spener does recognize that the truly penitent can experience fear because of their sins, given that it is joined to the other criteria discussed above. He thus states that those who have felt fear because of their sins ("der seine sünde wegen angst gefühlet hätte") and desire absolution certainly have it. Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 289. Compare this to Luther's confession of the unconditional certainty of forgiveness on pp. 135-136 above.

²⁴Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VIII, 199.

Since the absolution is expressly given upon the condition of one's *Buße*, it also necessarily remains conditional.

*Also ist alle unsere absolution / sie werde mit worten abgefasset / wie sie will / an sich selbst so fern contitionata / das ist mit dieser bedingung wofern der mensch wahrhaftig bußfertig ist; dann wir haben von GOTT keine weitere macht / als nur den bußfertigen die sünde zu vergeben (italics added).*²⁵

However, if all criteria are in order, one can go and receive great consolation from the absolution.²⁶ Again the sole criterion for absolution is not *faith* in the extra

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶The criteria for true repentance have already been discussed above. Most telling, however, is that Spener continually adds elements to the list of criteria. From the three basic elements, i.e. hatred of sin, the desire to amend one's life, and faith in Jesus Christ, Spener goes on to put forth the following criteria: a) hatred toward sin; b) sorrow that one has offended God; c) knowledge that one has earned damnation; d) shame before the heavenly Father; e) desire for the grace of Christ; f) a heartfelt desire to better one's life; g) to put away everything that has been discovered in the self-examination; h) to resolutely carry out all the demands of the "*christliche lebensregel*," g) knowing that the Holy Spirit has led one to make this resolution. "Findet ihr nun bey solcher euer prüffung / daß ihr wahrhaftig durch die betrachtung eurer sünden zu einem haß dagegen erreget werdet / daß es euch leyd thut / GOTT dermassen beleidiget zu haben / daß ihr erkennet / wie ihr die verdammnuß verdienet / und dem lieben Vatter zu wider gewesen seyd / daß ihr deßwegen eine forcht und kindliche schaam vor ihm fühlet. Findet ihr auch ein hertzliches verlangen / nach der gnade JEsu Christi / und suchet in demselben allein eure seligkeit / fühlet auch eine sehnliche begierde euer leben in der wahrheit zu bessern / alles abzuschaffen / was ihr in der prüffung unrechts befunden / oder was auch noch ferner euch gezeiget werden möchte / hingegen ohne außnahm euch zu allem nach allem vermögen zu verstehen / was euere christliche regeln von euch fordern / und treibt euch der Geist GOTTES solchen entschluß bey euch zu fassen / so seyd gewiß / daß sich die wahre buß bey euch finde / da möcht ihr dann getrost zu der beicht kommen / und euch der absolution versichern." Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VIII, 202-203.

nos verba Christi pro me, as was the case for Luther, but the *in nobis* true repentance, the authenticity of which is established only by the most careful introspective scrutiny.²⁷ The qualifying "wahrhaftig" is again most notable, since it implies that such "Buße" must meet the said set of criteria to be authentic.²⁸ Spener thus

²⁷"Und zwar / daß ihr wisset / es muß eine **redliche busse** seyn / nicht ein angenommenes wesen / es muß euch eure sünde von grund der seelen leyd seyn / daß ihr sie auch dermassen hasset / daß ihr sie mit willen die tag eures lebens nicht mehr begehen wollet. Ihr müsset so hertzlich an Christum glauben / daß ihr seine / und also die geistliche güter so erkennet / daß ihr alle eure seligkeit darinnen allein sucht. Es muß ein solcher vorsatz seyn / daß ihr mit redlichem verschweren aller wissentlichen sünden euch zu einem heiligen leben resolviret. *Mangelt eines unter denen / so seyð ihr ohne buß / und kommet bey leib nicht zum beichtstul / dann die absolution findet an solchem keinen platz*" (italics added). Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VI, 153-154. Here again is a checklist, which explicitly demands all elements to be present, with a warning that even one may not be missing. When faith is mentioned in the context of this list, it too is qualified by the anthropocentric and therefore quantifiable "hertzlich" which cannot but lead to further uncertainty. Kliefoth points to the contrast provided the Lutheran church, which simply took the penitent at his word. "Die lutherische Kirche hatte Dem, dessen Unbußfertigkeit nicht thatsächlich feststand, die Aufrichtigkeit seiner Beichte nicht angezweifelt; sie hatte ihn verwarnt, daß er Reue und Glaube haben müsse, wenn ihn nicht die Absolution zum Gericht werden solle; aber wenn er dennoch bei seinen guten Worten blieb, hatte sie ihn absolvirt unbedingt, ernstlich, wie Gottes Wort." Kliefoth, 463.

²⁸It might be mentioned, however, that the Augsburg Confession, XII also speaks of "wahre rechte Buß." BSLK, 66, 15. What must be distinguished, however, is that the confessors are seeking to distinguish the repentance which God works and gives through the Law, the *passiva contritio* of Luther's Smalcald Articles, from the anthropocentric repentance called for by the Roman penitential system. Spener, on the other hand, is looking for authenticity, which ultimately turns out to be a renewed anthropocentricity.

demands the existence of a true *contritio*, that element of the sacrament of penance which Luther had left behind precisely because it was not possible to determine its extent or ultimate authenticity because of its location in *nobis*.²⁹ In this, Spener has come full circle and made central the very bane which Luther sought to eschew from confession and absolution.³⁰ And yet he demands it for the

²⁹See pp. 40-47 above.

³⁰Maurer reaches this very poignant conclusion when he writes: "Luther hat die größte Gefahr für die Beichte darin gesehen, daß einer auf seine eigene Buße die Gewißheit seiner Vergebung gründe: *Cave ergo, in contritionem tuam confidas aut dolorio tuo tribuas remissionem peccatorum*. Gerade das hat Spener gelehrt und getan." Wilhelm Maurer, "Der Pietismus und die Privatbeichte," *Evangelische Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 10 (1956): 220, citing WA 6, 545, 25-27. That Spener indeed did not understand Luther's *Anliegen* becomes clear when one reads his evaluation of Luther's reasons for the retention of private confession. "Es ist offenbahr / daß diejenige ursachen / warum unser liebe Lutherus die beicht behalten / damit ein Prediger mit einem jeden beicht-kind nach nothdurfft handeln / den zustand dessen seelen / so viel ihm nöthigen / erkundigen / es unterrichten / straffen / vermahnen / rathen / und dergleichen an ihm ausrichten / also beyde mit einander vertraulich handeln solten . . ." (italics added). TB, II³, 162. As has been shown above, far from exploring the state of the soul, Luther simply sought the confession of faith which confesses both sin and lets itself be given the absolution, the ultimate reason for retaining confession. Luther can indeed say: "Darnach dencke, das die schlüssel oder vergebung der sunden nicht stehet auff unser rew oder wirdigkeit, wie sie leren und verkeren, Denn das ist gantz Pelagianisch, Türckisch, Heidnenisch, Jüdisch, Widder-teuffisch, Schwermerisch und Endchristlich, sondern widderumb, das unser rew, werck hertz und was wir sind, sollen sich auff die schlüssel bawen und mit gantzem erwegen getrost drauff verlassen, als auff Gottes wort, . . . Zweifelstu aber, so lügenstraffestu Gott, verkerest seine ordnung und bawest seine schlüssel auff deine rew und wirdigkeit. Rewen soltu (das ist war), Aber das darumb die vergebunge der sunden solt gewis werden und des schlüssels werck bestetigen, das heisst den glauben verlassen und Christum ver-

purpose of suring-up (*Versicherung*) what ultimately cannot ever be completely sure because of its *in nobis* locatedness.³¹

Wo ihr auch davon kommt / so nehmet auch die versicherung / daß euch die absolution warhafftig angehe / *allerdings wieder aus der versicherung der busse*. Denn obwol die vergebung der sünden / die ihr in der absolution empfanget / nicht eigentlich eine frucht ist euerer busse / sondern ein gnaden-geschenck GOTTES / *welches der glaube in der busse ergreiff*, so ist doch die busse dasjenige stück göttlicher ordnung / so uns zu dem glauben tüchtig machet / *und das vor dem glauben erfordert wird* (*italics added*).³²

leugnet. . . " (*italics added*). WA 30 II, 496, 26-31; 34-38. With Maurer one is compelled to agree that this is precisely what Spener is setting out to do, that is, not to deny Christ, but to build upon repentance and effectively being forced to doubt the words of God. Yet according to Luther, in complete opposition to Spener, one is clearly to look away from one's repentance and depend solely upon the words of absolution as giving what they say. Cf. Hof, 37. See also Precht 84; Ernst Sommerlath, "Der Sakramentale Charakter der Absolution nach Luthers Schrift *Von den Schlüsseln*," in *Die Leibhaftigkeit des Wortes: Festgabe für Adolf Köberle*, ed. Otto Michel and Ulrich Mann, (Hamburg: Im Furche-Verlag, 1958), 229; Jos E. Vercruysse, "Schlüsselgewalt und Beichte bei Luther," in *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526-1546*, ed. Helmar Junghans (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 154. Cf. pages 60-61 above.

³¹Cf. Albrecht Peters, "Buße-Beichte-Schuldvergebung," *Kerygma und Dogma* 28 (1982): 58. See also Peters, who on the basis of Luther's thought summarizes: "Rechtes Vertrauen schwingt sich über jegliche pharisäische Selbstgewißheit aber auch über alle skrupulöse Selbstbeobachtung hinaus und birgt sich rückhaltlos hinein in Gottes Gnadenzusage." Though Spener certainly avoids the former, his entire focus is on the "Selbstbeobachtung" in which the pastor is then to provide assistance.

³²Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 312-313. As in this *locus*, Spener argues for the necessity of repentance while in the same breath affirming the unmerited grace of Christ in absolution in other sermons, e.g. III, 70.

The requirement for receiving absolution is thus consistently a truly repentant heart of which one is cognisant, where the extent of one's repentance must be constantly ascertained. Yet a most dubious "aber" also imposes itself upon the absolution even after it has been given:

. . . Gott vergiebt uns die sünde willig / *aber also / daß er darneben fordere / daß wir ihm auch davor gehorsam werden / und unsern nächsten auch solches wiederum geniessen lasse sollen* (italics added).³³

That it is not in fact the absolution which is important to Spener, but the betterment of life characterized by obedience which is promised by the penitent will be discussed below. The uncertainty of this *in nobis* repentance with its dependence upon the amendment of life, which amounts to a new *satisfactio*, thus cannot but cast an equally dubitable light upon absolution itself. Yet it is precisely this absolution which is to give assurance of forgiveness when it is proclaimed according to the so called divine order.³⁴

Buße and Divine Order

Although *Buße* and *Demut* are argued as not meritorious nor the means of salvation per se, they are again

³³Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, X, 248.

³⁴"Und da ist alsdenn nicht zu zweiffeln / wo eine absolution in göttlicher warheit ertheilet wird / daß die selbe aus göttlicher wahrheit auch gewiß und vor GOTT gültig sey. Also ist die absolution an sich selbst / wo oder wem sie / *gleichwohl nicht wider göttliche ordnung / ertheilet wird / vor GOTT als seine einsetzung gültig*" (italics added). Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 289.

necessary presuppositions *due to divine order*, to which is added faith.

Dazu aber soll nachmal der wahre glaube kommen / welcher allen solche vergebung erlangt und annimmt / da das vorher erforderte alles zwar stücke göttlicher ordnung / nicht aber die mittel selbst gewesen sind.³⁵

On this point Spener sees himself to be secure in the tradition of orthodoxy.

Wie nun dieses die stücke sind / welche göttliche ordnung von uns erfordert / so ist nun von ziemlicher zeit her in der kirchen eingeführet / und zwar auch bey unserer Evangelischen kirchen beybehalten worden / das man vorhin bey einem prediger beichten müsse / welche beicht dazu solle dienlich seyn / daß der prediger die bußfertigkeit eines solchen menschen darauß abnehme.³⁶

Spener thus places next to the means of grace a prevenient order, namely, an *ordo salutis* in which each condition must be met in the prescribed order so as to ensure the validity of all that follows.

So ist auch göttliche ordnung in dieser sache / daß die absolution und vergebung keinem solle ertheilet werden / als den bußfertigen: Darum hat Christus **predigen lassen busse und vergebung der sünden** / Luc. XXIV, 47. die dürffen wir nicht umkehren oder trennen / Apost. Gesch. V, 31. Es ist der glaube allein dasjenige / wodurch wir unser seiten gerechtfertiget werden / das ist / vergebung der sünden erlangen / . . . also ist keiner von seiner seiten der vergebung / sie zu erlangen / fähig / als der den lebendigen glauben hat: Dieser aber ist bey keinem / ausser der busse stehet: **Thut busse / und glaubet dem Evangelio** / Marc.I, 15. Es muß aber auch eine wahre und ernstliche busse seyn; die nicht in einigen äusserlichen ceremonien oder wercken bestehen / sondern in einer gantzen änderung des herzens. Daß

³⁵Ibid. Cf. *Gründlicher Unterricht*, IX, 236: "Wir haben oben bemercket / daß göttliche ordnung die buß und vergebung genau mit einander verbinde / daher sie nicht voneinander trennen lasse. . . ."

³⁶Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht* IX, 231.

nemlich der mensch allen seinen sünden von grund der seelen feind seye / und sie hasse / auf Christum sein vertrauen setze / nimmermehr einiger sünde mit willen diene / sondern sich allen / wie lieb sie ihm auch sonst seyn möchten / mit ernst widersetze / und ein solche leben / darinnen er in allen stücken nach GOTTES geboten einher gehen wolle / antrette / 1 Joh. II, 3.4. *Wo eines under diesen mangelt / und man die gnade GOTTES in Christo JESU nicht so hoch hält / daß man deßwegen sich gern des sünden-dienstes begeben wolle / da ist keine wahre busse / und also nach Göttlicher ordnung auch keine gültige vergebung oder absolution vorhanden (italics added).*³⁷

It is clear that this "order" necessitates and legitimatizes the *exploratio* for which he calls in confession.³⁸ Thus he can maintain the power of the absolution, yet restrict it as being given only to the truly repentant according to the divine order. An absolution which is given outside of this order remains completely invalid before God:

Wo also ohne wahre busse die absolution gegeben / oder vermeintlich angenommen wird / gilt es vor GOTT nichts; dann GOTT darff nach seiner wahrheit keine andere seiner diener verrichtungen genehm halten / als wo sie nach seiner ordnung verfahren haben. Was ausser solcher ordnung und instruction gehet und von ihnen gethan wird / ist an sich selbst ungültig.³⁹

³⁷Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 289-290.

³⁸"Daß vor solcher absolution eine gewisse beicht vorhergehe. Dessen ursach diese ist / weil die vergebung keinen andern als den bußfertigen gehöret / daß der prediger / welcher solche sprechen solle / *einigerley massen ein zeugnuß der busse habe / darauff er seine absolution gründen möge* / da sich der andere als einen bußfertigen durch die beicht anzeigt; wiewol leider solches zeugnuß sehr gering ist" (italics added). Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VIII, 186.

³⁹Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 304. Cf. Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VI, 155: "Wir lassen der absolution die völlige krafft / aber vor die bußfertigen / vor die sie verodnet ist."

Spener thus seeks to emphasize that if all the conditions are not met, in this case a proper penitential *status* and a proper examination by the pastor, absolution may have been given, but such absolution has no validity before God. And the use of the terms "*gültig/ungültig*" may in themselves be a telling point. It is therefore essential to examine Holy Absolution and its "validity" in relation to Spener's exposition of *Buße*.

CHAPTER III

HOLY ABSOLUTION AND THE CERTAINTY OF FORGIVENESS

In a manner which recalls his evaluation of the practice of coming to the Lord's Supper in the *Pia Desideria*, Spener thus must call into question Holy Absolution as a source of the certainty of the forgiveness of sins.¹ The uncertainty of the true state of the repentance of the penitent necessitates an equally uncertain absolution. This is not to say that Spener understands the words of absolution to be untrue. Instead, they become uncertain because of the uncertainty of him who receives them:

Zum ändern / daher ist unsere absolution / die wir nicht als herren zu geben haben / sondern als diener Gottes ankündigen / und nicht in die hertzen der menschen sehen / wie fähig oder unfähig sie derselben sind / ungewiß / sondern wegen desjenigen / welchem sie gesprochen wird.²

Spener goes on to explain that the absolution remains true, ". . . dann die [Absolution] ist nichts anders / als eine verkündigung / wie die sünden um Christi verdienstes will vergeben seyen / welches eine ewige wahrheit bleibet."³ The

¹See pages 168-169 above.

²Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VIII, 200.

³Ibid. See also Laurentius Klein, *Evangelisch-lutherische Beichte, Leben und Praxis* (Paderborn: Bonifacius Verlag, 1961), 110. Klein notes of Spener: "Spener machte

absolution therefore is itself never false, but is falsely applied when it is granted to him who is neither repentant nor intent upon changing his entire life.

[Die Absolution ist] . . . aber doch falsch angewandt / wo sie einem gesprochen wird / welcher nicht wahrhaftig bußfertig ist / sondern dem es nur darum zu thun / daß er der gewohnheit ein genügen thue / oder die vergebung erlange: *begehret aber durchauß nicht / sein gantzes leben zu ändern / und der welt abzusagen. Da gehet die absolution / so zu reden / bey ihm vorüber / und weil sie bey seiner beicht als ihm gesprochen ist / gehet sie allein einen solchen an / der so wäre wie er sich außgiebet bußfertig zu seyn* (italics and emphasis added).⁴

Spener therefore counsels that any absolution which is to be proclaimed ought to be conditional.⁵ He goes on to advise

einen Unterschied zwischen der 'Absolution an sich' und dem Spenden derselben. Die Absolution als solche ist immer sicher, die Spendung, d.h. die Applikation, jedoch nicht." Spener's agreement with Luther is thus only a superficial one. That these words are Christ's words is therefore not in dispute. In dispute is that Christ actually gives the forgiveness of sins through the mouth of the *Beichtvater* when the proper conditions in the penitent are not met.

⁴Ibid. Again Luther can never say that such absolution simply passes by the hearer. The words always give what they say, much to the dismay of the unbeliever at the Last Judgment: "Die Absolution ist wahrhaftig gewiss und ewig, wen du auch gleich dran nicht gleubst, wie den auch die sonne warhaftig am Himel scheineth und leuchtet und die recht Sonne ist, ob du sie gleich nicht sihest odr du in keller kröchest, das du sie nicht sehen kondtest, welches den nicht der sonnen, Sondern deine schuldt ist. . . . Wir empfangen oft die Absolution on glauben, aber sie wirdt darumb nicht zu asschen und dreck, sonder ist gottes gabe. Dargegen wirdt der Ban oder Binde schlüssel mich am Jungsten tage auch reichten, und wird nicht gelten, das ich da sagen möchte: Ej, ich habe die Schlüssel veracht und hab nicht drang gegleubet, darumb ists nichts mit der Schlüssel gewalt." WA 47, 335, 21-25; 34-38.

⁵This again stands in distinction from Luther, who vehemently fought against anything which even resembled the *Fehlschlüssel* of the Roman church. A conditional absolution ultimately is no absolution. Cf. Theodore Kliefoth,

pastors to attach to any form of absolution clauses which would rock the false security of the penitent and leave the position of the *Beichtvater* uncompromised:

Denn alle *absolutionen* der prediger / so in die hertzen nicht sehen / noch daselbs die wahrheit der buß erkennen können und daher sich nach den worten der beicht richten/ mit was vor worten sie auch abgefaßt würden / seyen allezeit dem verstand nach *conditional*, . . . wo alsdenn auch die *absolution* so *verclusuliret* werden mag / nicht nur zur verwahrung des gewissens des predigers selbs / sondern auch wegen des beichtenden / entweder noch dadurch sein hertz zur busse zu rühren / oder doch ihm die ruhe zu nehmen / die er sonst zu hegung seiner sicherheit in der *absolution* suchen will.⁶

For Spener the absolution therefore cannot be the primary purpose of confession, nor the forgiveness of sins as the

Liturgische Abhandlungen: Die Beichte und Absolution (Schwerin: Verlag der Stiller'schen Hof-Buchhandlung, 1865), 463. See also Fred L. Precht, "Changing Theologies of Private and Public Confession and Absolution," (Th.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1965), 84. Cf. WA 30 II, 480, 24-26. Klein again notes: "Nach seiner Lehre liegt also die Unsicherheit in der Applikation, so daß diese die bedingte Absolution fordert. Auf keinen Fall darf durch die Absolution die Unbußfertigkeit der Leute bestärkt werden, denn viele kommen zur Beicht ohne rechte Bußgesinnung, indem sie die Glaubenspredigt mißversehen oder mißachten. Darum mußte das Heiligtum der Absolution geschützt werden. Dies könne nur dadurch geschehen, daß man sie bedingt spendete, indem man die Buße, deren Fehlen man ernstlich fürchten mußte, zur Bedingung machte. Diese existentielle Seite der pietistischen Absolutionslehre darf nicht übersehen werden." Klein, 111. Compare Luther, however, on pp. 136-7 above.

⁶TB, I³, 197. Spener goes on to say that he in fact would like to be more forceful in removing the "rock," presumably which blocks the way to a true repentance. Cf. Luther in a sermon from the 4th of April, 1540: "Und was jm denn der saget in Christus Namen aus der schrift, dem gleube er, Wie er nu gleubt, so widerferet jm, Gleubt er der Absolutio, damit er jn los spricht von seinen sunden im Namen Christo, so ist er absolvirt u." WA 49, 147, 23-26. It is simply astounding how Spener seeks to preclude the finding of certainty of forgiveness in the absolution, and conversely how Luther urges precisely that.

reason why confession should be retained.⁷ Instead, the heart of confession becomes the repentance which manifests itself in the fulfillment of the vow to amend one's life, in short, that which contributes to the edification of the truly repentant.⁸

Also dencket nicht zu erst an die **absolution** / sondern an die wahre buß und besserung / daß ihr in derselben stehet / und zwar redlich / als vor GOTT. Stehet ihr dann recht in einem bußfertigen hertzen / so habt ihr die vergebung / wann ihr auch schon keine prediger haben könntet / der euch dieselbige spräche. Ist aber die buß nicht redlich bey euch / und ob ihr hundertmahl beichtet / und ich oder ein anderer euch hundertmahl in einem tag absolvirte / so wäre euch nicht eine einige sünde ver-

⁷This stands in marked contrast to AC XXV, where it is for this very reason that confession is retained. Cf. BSLK, 100, 5-11. Cf. Kliefoth, 440, who also points out that this examination is the primary purpose of confession for Spener, and ". . . daß ihm nicht wie den Reformatoren das ganze Beichtwesen 'vornehmlich um der heiligen Absolution willen' da war. . . ." Far more scathing is Luther, who sees in any conditionality the source of all the abuses of in confession specifically and faith as a whole. Here the disparity between Luther and Spener is perhaps most striking of all. Cf. Otto Hof, "Die Privatbeichte bei Luther," chap. in *Schriftauslegung und Rechtfertigungsglaube*, with a foreword by Edmund Schlink (Karlsruhe: Evangelischer Presseverband für Baden e.V., 1982), 41.

⁸Thus the pastor can then not only provide consolation in the *Beichtstuhl*, but ". . . so wol seine buß durch vorstellung der schwere der sünden befördern / als allerley rath / wie er diesen und jenen sünden widerstehen / wie er die gelegenheit meiden / und wie er die übung seines Christenthums am weißlichsten anzustellen hätte / ertheilen könnte. . . auch besonders zu eines jeden erbauung anwende möchten." Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 296. The same thought is voiced in his *Theologische Bedenken* when he writes: "Ich leugne auch nicht / wann damit [der Beichte] wohl und gottselig umgegangen wird / daß sie bey manchen etwa ein mittel einer erbauung seyn möchte." TB, I³, 196.

geben / sondern ihr stehet in der ungnade / und bleiben die sünde gebunden.⁹

Holy Absolution and Faith

To depend alone upon the words of absolution as being a word of God *pro me* simply on the basis of faith is most spurious for Spener.¹⁰ He is much concerned that such dependence may be based upon what is for him the dubious foundation of a faith which *may* itself be nothing more than intellectual assent.¹¹

⁹Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VI, 153. Cf. Hof, 30. As has been mentioned, the Confessions state that it is precisely for the sake of the absolution that confession is retained. Cf. Ernst Kinder, "Beichte und Absolution nach den lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 9 (1952): 545.

¹⁰Spener is concerned that the absolution is declared too indiscriminately, and therefore secures people in their sinful life. Instead, confession and absolution should be used to the encouragement of true repentance. ". . . die busse der beichtenden / ohne welche ihre absolution nichts seyn würde / zu befördern / und also zu der prüfung derselben die beste anleitung zu geben / damit es nicht auß ihrer schuld gesehe / das unbußfertige durch die absolution in der sicherheit gestärcket werden. . . ." He therefore wants to make clear that the mere confession of sins does not secure forgiveness, which is indeed what the masses believe: ". . . daß der grosse hauffe insgemein in den irrwahn geräthet / darvor zu halten / es habe der beichtstuhl diese krafft / daß wo der mensch nur gebeichtet / die absolution auch darauff empfangen habe / und gewiß glaube / nunmehr sey ihm seine sünden vergeben / so seye auch solches wahrhaftig also / und er vor GOTT gerechtfertiget / er möge auch in seinem hertzen beschaffen seyn / wie ers wolle / ob er auch nimmer inwendig geändert würde. Welche einbildung ich vor einen der schändlichsten betrüge halte / die der teuffel jemahl erfunden haben kan" (*italics added*). Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XII, 363-363.

¹¹"Glauben verstehen sie dasjenige / daß der mensch glaubet wahr zu seyn / was von Christo gelehret wird / und sich / ob er schon im vorigem leben bleibet / die ein-

Also lassen sich doch alle dieses gesagt seyn / welche zum beicht-stuhl kommen / daß sie vor der beicht / und auch nach der beicht / sich auff's hertzlichste prüffen / ob sie in aufrichtiger buß und glauben stehen oder nicht: daher sich nicht eher des trosts der *absolution* annehmen / als bis sie das zeugnuß ihres gewissens haben/ daß es ihnen mit ihrer buß ein ernst seye; . . . *Ach daß doch jederman dieses hertzlich erwegte! da hingegen gewiß viele hundert und tausend drüber ewig verlohren gehen / daß sie sich immer auff die beicht und absolution verlassen / und daß ihnen ihre sünde vergeben worden / betrieglich geglaubet haben (italics added);*¹²

On the other hand, Spener does confess that true faith is the sole means by which the forgiveness of God is received and appropriated, albeit with the qualification that repentance and acknowledgement of sin are indispensable addenda to true faith.¹³ He therefore urges not only the examination

bildung machet daß er durch ihn selig werde / welcher glaube doch nichts göttliches in sich hat / noch in fruchten sich zeigt;" Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VIII, 189. For the nature of the connection of faith and good works in Pietism, see Manfred Roensch, "The Impact of Martin Luther on the History of the Christian Church," *And Every Tongue Confess*, ed. Gerald S. Krispin and Jon D. Viecker (Dearborn: The Nagel Festschrift Committee, 1990), 104-107. See also Kliefoth, who concedes that the practice of the late 17th century indeed could lead to the impression, ". . . daß man durch das äußerliche Beichtgehen Vergebung der Sünden erlange." Kliefoth, 425.

¹²TB, II³, 157-158.

¹³"Ja dieser [Glaube] ist das einige mittel / wodurch wir solche wohlthat von Gott empfangen und annehmen: und obwohl die erkantnuß und reue über die sünde / auch von demjenigen erfordert wird / dem diese vergeben werden solle (wie dann einem nicht vergeben werden kan / woran er noch seine freude und wohlgefallen hat) so ist doch solche reue nicht das mittel jener wohlthat; sonder es bleibe dabey [Rom. 3:24-25]. . . . Daher wir dem glauben in solcher absicht kein ander mittel beyzusetzen macht haben." Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, IX, 216-217.

of a true repentance, but also counsels careful scrutiny in order to determine the authenticity of faith itself.

Es soll billich auß öfffterer wiederholung so bekandt seyn / daß jeglicher selbst sich dessen erinnern und täglich darauß prüffen könne: damit er sich nicht betrüge und meyne er seye glaubig / und demnach der vergebung der sünden fähig / da er doch den wahren seligmachenden glauben nicht hat / *denn kein glaube ist seligmachend der nicht auch lebendigmachend ist / und ein neues leben würcket* (italics added).¹⁴

As with repentance, there exist distinct *indicia* which can point to the presence of true faith, primarily the willingness to forgive as one has been forgiven oneself.

Sondern also verhält sich unsere vergebung zu der göttlichen / daß / da wir unserm nächsten vergeben / *ist solches eine frucht und kennzeichen / daß die wahre liebe in unserm hertzen seye / die liebe aber ist uns ein zeugnüß / daß wir den wahren lebendigen glauben in uns haben / welches will GOTT uns unsere sünden auß gnaden verzeihet* (italics added).¹⁵

This willingness to forgive can in fact be called an indubitable witness of the true faith which exists *in nobis*.¹⁶

¹⁴Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, III, 80-81. Cf. *Einfälltige Erklärung*, 814. Noting that the absolution is powerful (*kräftig*) in itself, he adds that God may offer it, but because the person is unrepentant, and therefore an unbeliever, he receives no benefit. ". . . weil er unbußfertig ist / und also den glauben nicht hat / so kan er auch dasselbe nicht annemen / noch ein solches gut sich würcklich zueignen." Faith is here clearly defined in terms of repentance.

¹⁵Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, II, 4.

¹⁶"Die wir also mögen einrichten / daß es seye eine würckung der christlichen liebe / da ein wiedergebohrnes kind Gottes auß antrieb des heiligen Geistes die beleidigungen / so ihn und die seinigen angehen / dem nebenmenschen verzeihet / und aller rach sich begiebet / alles um Gottes willen und nach der *regul* der liebe." Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, I, 23-24. The Holy Spirit indeed displaces feelings of vengeance in the child of God, and his

For such a one most certainly does not lack the prevenient forgiveness of Christ without which one simply would not readily forgive the neighbor.

Hingegen christliche gemüther / die da um ihres Erlösers willen / der ihnen ihre sünde vergiebet / ihren beleidigern vergeben / haben den trost / daß dadurch zwar ihre sünden nicht vergeben werde / dann solches ist die gnade Gottes selbst / *sondern sie doch dessen dadurch bey sich versichert / das solche wahrhaftig geschehen seye.* Denn solche liebe / welche diese vergebung würcket / ist ein unzweiffentlich zeugniß des wahren glaubens by ihnen / welchem es an vergebung nicht kan mangeln (italics added).¹⁷

presence is confirmed by the the desire to forgive. But not so with the Old Adam. "Der alte Adam weiß von keinem vergeben nicht / sondern allein von rach. Muß also GOTT der heilige Geist / die rechte liebe erstlich unsere hertzen zur liebe bewegen. Also sagen wir / es müsse seyn ein wiedergeborener Christ / ein glaubiges kind Gottes." Ibid. Or, to put the matter negatively, the reluctance to forgive is a sure sign of not being a child of God and signals his attendant impending damnation. "Den lasst euch denn alle / die ihr Christen heissen wollet / angelegen seyn. Es ruffet jeglichem der heilige Geist in der schrift zu: **Vergibe deinem nächsten / oder du bist verdammt.** Ein mensch / der einige beleydigung seinem neben-menschen nicht vergeben will / der gedенcke / daß dieß schon ein funcken seye der höllischen flammen / die in ihm anfängt zu brennen." Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, I, 32-33.

¹⁷Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, I, 36-37. Cf. *Gründlicher Unterricht*, II, 59: "Zum andern / **ist uns dieses vergeben ein rechtes zeugnüß / daß wir Gottes kinder seyen /** der uns auch vergibt. Dieses zeugnüß beruhget unser gewissen / und versichert auch unsern neben-menschen daß unser Christenthum uns ein ernst seye; solches zeugnüß ist nicht wenig werth." Spener goes on to reassure those who are plagued by an unforgiving heart, who have forgiven, yet cannot forget and struggle to maintain the true Christian forgiving attitude that God is satisfied with this struggle. Such is Spener's contention, for the inability to forget sins which have been committed against one is merely a recognition of a "sinful weakness" which is rightfully lamented. "Wann du 1. zum fördersten solche deine schwachheit recht als eine sündliche schwachheit erkennest / und so offft dir ein eigener widerwillen auffsteiget / gleich gedенckest und seuffzest: Ach! ich elender mensch. . . . Das

To receive the words of absolution *pro me* without a faith which exhibits both repentance and the criteria discussed above thus can be a deceptive road to a false *securitas*, one from which people need to be rescued.¹⁸ The failure to awaken people from this false security and to grant such individuals absolution in fact comes to impede the way to true repentance and its consequent *Wiedergeburt*.¹⁹ Spener can therefore affirm that people do come into the *Beichtstuhl* who confess with their heart and actually believe that the words of the absolution give them the forgiveness of sins. But even with faith, it is possible to lack the desire and the actual attempt to amend one's life,

ist des fleisches verderbnüß (italics added)." Ibid. It is interesting that in this context Spener speaks of the necessity to forgive daily, because we ourselves require forgiveness daily. Yet what is to be forgiven is analogous to a "krankheit" or "schwachheit." Though only given as an example of solidarity, this analogy actually becomes the definition of that which requires forgiveness in the Christian, as has been indicated above. "Zum vierten / sollen wir auch ansehen unsere eigene noth. Wir bedürffen ja selbst täglich vergebung der sünden / so müssen wir ja auch erbarmung haben mit denen / die vergebung von uns bedürffen. Wir sehen ja sonst zum exempel / welche einerley leibliche kranckheit oder schwachheit haben / tragen mehr mitleyden mit einander / so sie von einem hören / der eben solche schwachheit auch hat;" *Gründlicher Unterricht*, 50-51.

¹⁸"Hingegen glaube gewiß / wo die falsche einbildung / die sich die leute von ihrer beicht / und der darauff empfangenden absolution / machen / auß dem hertzen getilget würde / solten sehr viel mehrere noch der verdamnüß ent-rissen werden." Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 277.

¹⁹Cf. Wilhelm Maurer, "Der Pietismus und die Privat-beichte," *Evangelische Lutherische Kirchenzeitung*, 10 (1956), 220. Maurer goes as far as to say that all the other ostensible abuses were but a smoke-screen for this, the true theological objection to the *Beichtstuhl*.

namely, true repentance, and therefore to face damnation because this faith turns out to be nothing other than a false *securitas*. Spener thus seeks to awaken those who sin willfully and seek no amendment of life, and still expect to be forgiven. Such a person has no faith, for he does not to put off the sinful nature.

So ist auch kein glaube bey ihm / als der die sünde nicht herrschen liesse. Und was ist das vor eine unsinnigkeit / gedencken / ja GOTT darum anruffen / daß er die sünde von uns nehmen / das ist uns vergeben wolle / *wo wir sie selbst nicht ablegen / sondern mit allem ernst behalten / und an ihnen noch lust haben wollen* (italics added).²⁰

It is this discontinuity between faith and repentance which has therefore put Christians into a secure sleep, one which will ultimately lead to their damnation precisely because they placed their faith in an absolution which has become an opiate for the people.²¹

Also kämen sie zum beichtstuhl / beichteten von hertzen / um vergebung der sünden zu erlangen / nähmen auch die absolution mit solchem festen glauben / daß sie sich so gewiß versicherten / daß ihre sünden ihnen vergeben seyen / als hätten sie es auß Christi munde selbst gehört. Damit seyen sie frey; ob sie dann wohl darnach ihr leben wieder anfangen / wo sie gelassen hätten / so seyen die vorige sünden gleichwol vergeben / die auf dem neuen kerb-holz möchten sie nicht eben gleich um Gottes gnade und in die hölle bringen / Das ist der weg so vieler in dem gemeinen hauffen. Und da macht sie also die einbildung von der krafft der beicht und absolution ihr lebenslang sicher / und betäubet sie der süsse schlaff-trunck / auß dem solche leute in sünden immer fort schlafeten / und sich niemahl bekehren / oder von

²⁰Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, III, 80.

²¹Again, in contrast to Luther, for whom it was the source of certainty and consolation. Cf. Hof, 38; Kinder, 545.

der sünden auffwachen/ weil sie es nicht nöthig halten.²²

Clearly this is a key passage in Spener's understanding of the connection of faith, repentance, and absolution. For although he has affirmed faith as the sole *means* of salvation, the freight which his definition of faith carries, being organically tied to a quantifiable *in nobis* repentance, makes it impossible to say that he confesses with Luther an absolution which is received *sola fide*.²³

Spener indeed regards a faithful absolution that is not a fruitful absolution to be demonic. "Das heist ja eine schändliche / ja teufflische verkehrung einer heiligen göttlichen wahrheit von der krafft der absolution."²⁴ The power of the absolution is thus not in its gift of the forgiveness of sins, but in the manifest life of faith it effects as demonstrated by the fruits of that faith.²⁵

²²Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 303.

²³In certain *loci* Spener indeed puts faith into the context of subjectively engendered works, such as in his *Einfälltige Erklärung*, 810. Here he asks "Mit was hertzen muß dann solche beicht vor dem Prediger geschehen / wo sie GOTT gefällig seyn solle?" He answers with five points: "1. Mit betrübtem hertzen. 2. Mit hertzlicher Demuth. 3. Mit andacht. 4. Mit wahrem glauben. 5. Mit fleissiger erwegung / daß er GOTT ein neues gelübde künfftigen neuen gehorsams ablege. . . ."

²⁴Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 303.

²⁵"Den glauben aber hat man auß seinen früchten zu erkennen." *Einfälltiger Unterricht*, 814.

Holy Absolution and the Forgiveness of Sins

According so Spener, absolution is not an act which declares the penitent forgiven, except in the case of him who experiences the rebirth in the *Beichtstuhl*.²⁶ Forgiveness is a *hapax*, one which can be given at the time of Holy Baptism (where it is immediately joined to regeneration) or at a later time, when the word of God works repentance and revitalizes the justified state in a conscious manner. The absolution therefore strengthens and provides continuity with this justified state through repentance and contrition. And since only the new man can be a worthy recipient of the absolution which is spoken, it is also this new inner man, as a child of God, who seeks consolation and *confirmation* of the continuation of that which has already been given him.²⁷ What the words of absolution actually do, Spener

²⁶"Andere aber kommen so darzu / daß sie vorhin durch sünde wahrhaftig in Gottes zorn gefallen waren / weil sie derselben gedienet hatten / und also bedörffen / daß / so zu reden / die stricke der sünden erst durch die vergebung entzwey gerissen werden: *Da ist die vergebung eine wahre und eigentliche vergebung seiner sünden / die biß dahin auff ihnen gelegen war . . .*" (italics added). Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, IX, 235. It follows, as will be seen below, that those who are in a state of grace do not need actual forgiveness, only the confirmation of that reality.

²⁷"Sondern weil das verdienst Christi auf gleiche weise vor allen sünden geschehen ist / auff dessen krafft aber sich alle absolution gründet, so kan jeder alle sünden den bußfertigen vergeben; massen alle vergebung nichts anders ist / als die zueignung der genugthuung Christi." Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 284-285.

therefore explains in terms of the application of an existing *factum*:²⁸

Dann des predigers *absolution* hat an keinem krafft / als der bußfertig und gläubig ist / in welchem augenblick aber buß und glauben vorhanden / da ist GOTTES vergebung bereits da /welche der *absolution* nur von dem prediger auf den bußfertigen **gezogen und geleget** wird / aber was bey GOTT geschehen / schon *præsupponiret* (emphasis added).²⁹

²⁸In a discussion concerning original, viz. inherited sin (*Erbsünde*), Spener urges the prayer for forgiveness of this as well as all actual (*wircklichen*) sins. He does so with the understanding that asking for the forgiveness of these sins, though they already have been forgiven in Holy Baptism, gives assurance to the conscience. "Ob er dann wol weiß / daß bereits auch in der tauff solche schuld ihm vergeben / so bedarff sein glaube der versicherung so wol dieser / als anderer *wircklichen* sünden." TB, II³, 167-168. Cf. Kliefoth, 235-237, where Kliefoth traces the movement of a declarative understanding of the *absolution* to an exhibitivive one. Most interesting are the parallels which can be drawn to Spener's reasoning in the quotations under discussion. For example, Gratian understood forgiveness to be given the penitent even before he comes to confession, based upon the desire of his heart. Peter Lombard bases the *absolution* upon inner repentance, and thereby comes very close to Spener's teaching. "Petrus Lombardus hält, . . . daß jedoch dem Sünder um seiner inneren Reue willen schon, ehe er den Mund zur Beichte öffne, Vergebung zu Theil werde. Hiernach kann er der priesterlichen *Absolution* nur *epideictische, nicht exhibitivive Kraft*, nicht die Bedeutung der Ertheilung der Vergebung zumessen." Kliefoth, 237. Hugh of St. Victor is not prepared to follow Lombard in this declarative understanding of *absolution*, however. He posits a twofold bondage, the first of which is loosed by God, the second by the priest according to the mandate of God in holy *Absolution*. These scholastics, as does Spener, thus argue for a prior loosing by God, which is followed by the confirming declaration of the priest, viz. pastor. Cf. Albrecht Peters, "Buße-Beichte-Schuldvergebung," *Kerygma und Dogma* 28 (1982): 58, who provides a similar summary.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 200-201. See note 3 above where Spener speaks of the forgiveness of sins through the merits of Christ as ". . . eine ewige Wahrheit. . . ." Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VIII, 200. Cf. Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, IX, 225: "Hie sehen wir: 1. ist eine versöhnung vorgegangen / daß sich GOTT durch Christum mit der welt

Spener therefore can speak in terms of the pastor giving the forgiveness of sins *in statu Christi* with the absolution, yet in the qualified sense of proclaiming the reality of justification and forgiveness which already exists for the truly repentant penitent.³⁰

versöhnet / dieser der göttlichen gerechtigkeit vor alle menschen gnug gethan / und GOTT solche versöhnung und gnugthuung angenommen hat. Darmit ist also ein reicher schatz der vergebung aller sünden vorhanden." See also *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 286-287: "In dessen ist der natur nach die vergebung GOTTes die erste / und so bald der mensch in dem bußfertigen stande stehet / daß ihm seine sünde vergeben / dann glaube und vergebung hangen unabsonderlich aneinander: aber nach der offenbahrung gehet die vergebung des predigers voran." In other words, while the pastor appears to be first in proclaiming one's sins forgiven, he is in actuality only confirming the forgiveness which already exists for him who is repentant.

³⁰"Was anlangt der prediger vergebung in der absolution, kan ich sagen / daß sie vergeben / ich kan auch sagen / daß sie nicht vergeben: Je nachdem ich das wort **vergeben** nehme. Nehme ich das wort im schärfsten und eigentlichsten verstand / wie es von GOTT gesagt würde / der in der vergebung seinen zorn und ungnade fallen läßt und sich seiner gerechten straffe begibet / ist unmöglich / daß es von dem prediger gesagt werden könnte / sondern diese vergebung bleibt GOTT so eingen / als sein richter-ampt niemand eigentlich mitgetheilet wird" (italics added). TB, I³, 199. Cf. Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, III, 68-69: "**Wer kan sünde vergeben ohne der einige GOTT.** Denn daß seine diener in der heiligen absolution uns unsere sünde vergeben / thun sie nicht auß eigener macht / sonder auß befehl und in dem namen ihres HERRN." Kliefoth explains that Spener understands the absolution as ". . . collativ und exhibitiv." Kliefoth, 445. And yet, the language Spener uses implies no more than that they give confirmation, rather than actually the forgiveness of sins. On this point Luther is consistently unequivocal. See, for example, WA 43, 542, 10-15: Sed benedictio promissionis et fidei et praesentis doni haec est: Ego absolvo te a peccatis tuis in nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti, hoc est, reconcilio animam tuam cum Deo, aufer a te iram et indignationem Dei, et constituto te in gratiam, do tibi haereditatem vitae aeternae et regnum coelorum. *Ista omnia sunt potestatis praesenter et vere tibi donatis, si credis, quia non sunt*

Holy Absolution and the Verba Christi

That the word of God is in itself descriptive, as has been discussed above,³⁴ also has an impact on this understanding of the absolution. Though these words may therefore be found in the mouth of the pastor and be valid before God,³⁵ they are equivalent to the general proclamation of the above discussed prevenient grace.

Es kan aber auch die **vergebung verkündigen** heissen / einem andeuten / daß ihm hiermit in dem namen GOTTES die sünde sollen vergeben seyn / in dem man ihm hierdurch die vergabung überreicht an statt GOTTES; dan weil derselbige sie allen bußfertigen und gläubigen verheissen hat / so eignet der prediger solche seine verheissung damit thätlich denjenigen zu / welche er vor gläubig und bußfertig erkennet.³⁶

Because they are public proclamation, Spener argues with Luther that only in the case of emergency should a layman absolve a penitent.

Also kommt die macht sünde zu vergeben in Gottes namen eigentlich zu den von Gott gesandten / ob wol durch die kirche beruffenen / dienern / die das Evangelium predigen: Wie dann die absolution eine predigt des Evangelii ist. Es gehöret zu dem **amt / das die versöhnung**

³⁴See pp. 170-174 above.

³⁵Spener goes no further than saying that the absolution which has been spoken is counted before God as valid: "Und da ist alsdenn nicht zu zweiffeln / wo eine absolution in göttlicher wahrheit ertheilet wird / daß die selbe aus göttlicher wahrheit auch gewiß und vor GOTT gültig sey." Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 289.

³⁶TB, I³, 199-200. Most telling is that this "strengthening" and "sealing" can also be understood in terms of response to what God has accomplished in Christ. "Also ists nicht genug / daß GOTT sich mit uns versöhnet hat / sondern wir müssen uns auch mit ihm wieder versöhnen; dazu buß und glauben gehören." Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VIII, 199.

prediget / [2.Cor. 5:18-19]. Zwar in dem nothfall hat jeder Christ die macht / da kein prediger vorhanden ist / den andern zu absolviren / und ihm die sünde zu vergeben. Welches nicht allen unser Lutherus sonst oft lehret / sondern auch in den Smalkaldische articul / die unter unsern Symbolischen büchern stehen / gesetzt hat: Ausser dem nothfall aber hat niemand dem prediger auch in dieser sache einzugreifen.

Rechts wegen aber sollen es seyn solche/ die den heiligen Geist haben/ der sich auch in solchem wichtigen werck regiere/ weißlich darinnen zu erfahren.³⁷

On the other hand, the reason for this insistence is found not so much in a confession of the office of the ministry, but, as already indicated in the above quotation, in the experience which such a pastor would have which would make him much more readily able to discern the veracity of the repentance in the penitent.³⁸ He goes on to argue that

³⁷Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 283. Cf. TB, II³, 167: "Sie sind nicht alle bothschaffter an Christi statt. Wann es dann heisset: **daß ein Priester in puncto der absolution nicht ein haar mehr gilt / als ein gemeiner Christ:** hat es . . . den verstand / daß eines gemeinen Christen absolution / die er in einigem *nothfall* / der unterschiedlicher art seyn kan / dem andern ertheilet / eben so kräftig seye / als die absolution eines Predigers. . . . So bleibt das geistliche Priesterthum in seinen schrancken / und hilfft der göttlichen und kirchlichen ordnung / gegen die es nicht zu mißbrauchen ist." Cf. H. Fuglsang-Damgaard, "Die Wiederbelebung der Privatbeichte," *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Kirche* 11 1933/34): 473, who notes that Spener is here speaking completely in the spirit of the Reformers.

³⁸"Der Heiland gab den heiligen Geist . . . sie aufs neue zu stärken, . . . auch in den amts Gaben/ daß er ihnen die weißheit bescherete / hinkünftig mit ihrem amt recht / wie es am fruchtbarsten wäre umzugehen." Ibid. How Spener understands what he calls the *geistliches Priestertum* in relation to the office of the ministry is exhaustively presented by Hans-Martin Barth, "Einander Priester sein," in *Kirche und Konfession*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 54-78. Regretably, Barth makes no mention of confession and absolution specifically in the context of his study.

although the word and sacraments are certainly valid even if given by those without the Holy Spirit, *the fruit and results cannot be the same*. For example, one cannot teach, nor lead by example, nor pray for blessings in the same way as the pastor who certainly has the Holy Spirit.

Da sonst ausser solcher weißheit / die gleichwohl eine weißheit, die gleichwohl eine weißheit des heiligen Geistes ist / der rechte unterschied / so doch fruchtbarer verrichtung des amts höchst nöthig ist / nicht gehalten werden kan.³⁹

Yet he strives to agree with the Augsburg Confession that the character of the minister in no way affects the absolution itself. "Daß also niemand an der krafft der absolution / ob auch der prediger böse wäre / um desselben willen zu zweifeln hat."⁴⁰ Rather, he speaks of the validity of the words which are spoken, again appealing to a pre-existent state of forgiveness.

Und zwar ist solche [Vergebung von Menschen gesprochen] so gültig / als von Gott selbst außgesprochen / dann sie ist auch wahrhaftig Gottes: *und noch darzu ist sie eine versicherung / daß die sünde nicht erst vergeben werden sollen / sondern schon vorher vergeben seyen* (italics added).⁴¹

Since the appropriation of this confirmation ultimately depends upon the proper disposition of the individual and

³⁹Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 284.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XIII, 414. Cf. *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 317: ". . . also kan hingegen ein bußfertiger sich versichern / die absolution / die ihm besprochen worden / sey ihm so gewiß / nicht anders als hätte er sie auß GOTTES eigenem mund angehöret." Cf. TB, II³, 165.

his personal appropriation of the absolution, it is also not surprising that Spener can opt joyfully for the institution of a general confession.⁴² It is the same word about forgiveness that is proclaimed here as in private confession.

Sondern weil das verdienst Christi auf gleiche weise vor allen sünden geschehen ist / auff dessen krafft aber sich alle absolution gründet, so kan jeder alle sünden den bußfertigen vergeben; *massen alle vergebung nichts anders ist / als die zueignung der gnugthuung Christi (italics added).*⁴³

⁴²He can therefore rejoice in the general promise of forgiveness which is there for all those who are repentant without a specific word of absolution. "Und ist eine nicht geringe Gnade / ob ich wohl auß allgemeinen gnaden verheissung / die allen bußfertigen und glaubigen geschiet / auch ohne äusserliche absolution der vergebung der sünden versicherung auß dem glauben selbst habe / damit ich mich auch täglich tröste. . . ." (italics added). Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, IX, 233. This is not to say that he is disparaging of the consolation which is given by the personally applied words of absolution. He does indeed confess that these are the words of God *pro me*, given that all the conditions have been met, and as such are of great help in one's "weakness." "Hingegen beleibet noch der **trost** denjenigen / die auff vorige art bußfertig zu der absolution kommen / daß diese ihnen so gewiß seye / als hörten sie sie / wie dieser gichtbrüchige / auß GOTTES eigenem munde. Dann sie ist an sich ein wort GOTTES / so allezeit wahr ist an den bußfertigen: daß ihr aber bußfertig seyet / habt ihr das hierinnen unfehlbare zeugnuß eures hertzens: und da heissts: **Niemand weiß / was im menschen ist / ohne der Geist des menschen / der in ihm ist** / [1 Cor. 2: 11]. Da kan sich euer glauben halten / nicht nur an das allgemeine wort GOTTES / wo den glaubigen solche gnade zugesagt worden / daran ihr auch im fall der noth ohne die absolution gnug haben könntet: sondern an desjenige absonderliche wort GOTTES / das der HErr durch seinen diener zu dir reden / und um deiner schwachheit zu hülff zu kommen / es absonderlich auff dich anwenden lassen" (italics added). Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VIII, 203-204.

⁴³Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XI, 284-285.

Yet it is a word which is directed specifically to the repentant believer, which reassures him of his state of grace:

Daher bedörfften sie nicht erst einer solchen vergebung / daß sie von einer sünden los gemacht wurden / die sie in göttlichem zorn verhaßtet hielte / sondern da ihnen / wann sie doch zur beicht um mehrern trostes willen kommen / der prediger die **absolution** spricht / *ists allein eine stärckung ihres glaubens / und versicherung der vergebung / die stäts in göttlicher gnade über sie währet* (italics added).⁴⁴

At the same time this *Versicherung* is worked through the *extra nos* means of the word and sacraments, though the *in nobis* of the Spirit is also called upon as witness.

Es versichert sie [die Vergebung der Sünden] dieselbe / Gottes geneigtes hertz zur vergebung / Christi verdienst / Gottes verspruch / sein wort / die tauff / die heilige absolution / das heilige abendmahl / das innerliche zeugnüß des Geistes auß dem wort und in demselben. Das sind so viel zeugen / die unwidersprechlich sind / und solte dann der teufel / die welt und unser eigen fleisch die vergebung wollen zweifelhaftig machen / so sind doch diese zeugen so hoch / daß wir uns auff sie vestiglich / wider alles jener eingeben / verlassen mögen.⁴⁵

In other words, Spener's understanding of the absolution, and consequently all the means of grace, is clearly that they are the continual reaffirmation of the once and for all

⁴⁴Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, IX, 235. Of these people who are in a perpetual state of grace Spener can say that they have not sinned since their last absolution. "Einige kommen dazu / die biß daher bereits im gnadenstand gewesen sind / und sich von voriger absolution / mit keiner sünde also beflecket haben / daß sie in Gottes zorn gefallen wären / sondern / weil sie in Christo JEsu geblieben / nicht nach dem fleisch / sondern nach dem Geist / gewandelt haben / ist keine verdammnuß oder nichts verdammliches an ihnen." Ibid.

⁴⁵*Gründlicher Unterricht*, III, 81-82.

act of forgiveness which has given birth to the new man.⁴⁶ The pastor is thus technically the mouth-piece for the reiteration of God's words once spoken. Therefore to invert the phrase: whatever has been loosed in heaven, that will be loosed on earth. The condition for this earthly loosing is the certainty that the heavenly loosing has preceded for the one who is being absolved. The absolution therefore turns out to be the proclamation of God's grace on the basis of God's eternally wrought plan, but it does not actually forgive sins in all situations. For the repentant believer it simply presents and confirms the reality of the previously existent heavenly *Tatbestand*;⁴⁷ a *Tatbestand*

⁴⁶As mentioned above, only in the case of the one who has fallen from the state of grace does the absolution become actually delivered forgiveness. Yet for Luther these words always actually do what they say. Cf. Ernst Sommerlath, "Der Sakramentale Charakter der Absolution nach Luthers Schrift *Von den Schlüsseln*," in *Die Leibhaftigkeit des Wortes: Festgabe für Adolf Köberle*, ed. Otto Michel and Ulrich Mann (Hamburg: Im Furche-Verlag, 1958), 223: "Das Wort der Absolution hat daher auch keineswegs nur eine kognitive Bedeutung. Es ist nicht nur ein Zeichen, an dem ich den Gnadenwillen Gottes erkennen kann und durch ein sinnenfälliges Wort dessen gewiß gemacht werde. Das Absolutionswort soll nicht nur eine Deklaration einer vorhergegangenen Rechtfertigung sein. . . . So wird für Luther auch die Absolution eine effektive, wirksam zuteilende Gnadengabe. *Man erkennt in ihr nicht nur Gottes Gnade, sondern man empfängt sie*" (italics added).

⁴⁷Cf. Sommerlath, who says of Luther's position: "Wie diese Gegenwart Christi in der Absolution eine Gegenwart des Ortes ist und er hier auf Erden mit uns handelt, so ist sie auch eine Gegenwart der Zeit. Was Christus einst in der Zeit seines Erdenwallens uns leidend und büßend erworben hat, das wird für diesen Augenblick, in dem das Absolutionswort gesprochen wird, gleichzeitig und volle Gegenwart. . . . Wie es hier in der Absolution geschieht, so geschieht es auch jetzt in diesem Augenblick und täglich; Raum und Zeit

which will have consequences for pastors and how they deal with the penitents in the *Beichtstuhl*.

verschwinden vor der Gegenwart des ewigen Herrn der Kirche, der im sakramenten Gnadenmittel da ist." Sommerlath, 221.

CHAPTER IV

HOLY ABSOLUTION AND THE REGENERATE PENITENT

Spener protests that the practice of confession, where the Law is applied to all indiscriminately in such a way that everyone is reduced to "children of wrath," is an affront to the new creation of God in the regenerate man. As new creations of God the truly repentant do not need their sins forgiven per se, but, again, simply need to have the forgiveness of sins confirmed.¹ The pastor is charged to diligently differentiate, and administer his absolution accordingly.

. . . wobey diese beyde stücke zu betrachten sind: I. Daß derer / welche zu der beicht kommen / zweyerley leute sind: Einige kommen dazu / die biß daher bereits im gnaden-stand gewesen sind / und sich von voriger absolution / mit keiner sünde also beflecket haben / daß sie in GOTTES zorn gefallen wären / sondern / weil sie in Christo JESU geblieben / nicht nach dem fleisch / sondern nach dem Geist / gewandelt haben / ist kein verdammnuß oder nichts verdammliches an ihnen / [Rom. 8:1]. Daher bedörfften sie nicht erst einer solche vergebung / daß sie von einer sünden los bemacht wurden / die sie in göttlichem zorn verhafftet hielte / sondern da ihnen / wann sie doch zur beicht um mehrern trostes willen kommen / der prediger die absolution spricht / *ists allein eine stärckung ihrers glaubens / und versicherung*

¹Kliefoth points out that it was also Großgebauer's position that as long as one who is regenerate remains in faith and therefore stood under the grace of God, no further absolution would be required. Theodore Kliefoth, *Liturgische Abhandlungen: Die Beichte und Absolution* (Schwerin: Verlag der Stiller'schen Hof-Buchhandlung, 1865), 478.

der vergebung / die stäts in göttlicher gnade über sie währet. Andere aber kommen so darzu / daß sie vorhin durch sünde wahrhaftig in Gottes zorn gefallen waren / weil sie derselben gedienet hatten / und also bedörffen / daß / so zu reden / die stricke der sünden erst durch die vergebung entzwey gerissen werden: Da ist die vergebung eine wahre und eigentliche vergebung einer sünden / die biß dahin auff ihnen gelegen war. . . . Wo auch beicht-vättern solcher beyderley arten beicht-kinder vorkommen / haben sie sich so in dem zuspruch als absolution darnach zu richten (italics added).²

Spener thus sees a need for the reform of the *Beichtstuhl* whereby the pastor himself must make a distinction between

²Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, IX, 235. Spener also speaks of the possibility of actually delivering the forgiveness of sins anew in the case of those who have fallen away from the faith. Spener explains that even though all sins are forgiven, unbelief digs these up again. It is not so much that God recalls the forgiveness of sins, but that man in unbelief has dug these up again and placed them before God anew. God's righteousness comes to bear upon such sins. "Daher solten wir wieder sagen / daß nicht so wohl die vergebung zurück gezogen wird / als daß vielmehr der mensch nur auffhört derselben zu geniessen. . . . und muß [GOTT] nach seiner gerechtigkeit wiederum dasjenige straffen / was ihm wiederum von dem menschen vor augen gelegt wird." *Gründlicher Unterricht*, III, 74. Or, stated in a more active sense, he can also state that the sinful act itself reactivates sins previously forgiven: ". . . so werden alle seine vorige sünden / welche er vorhin gethan / wiederum auff ihn / und werden gleichsam wiederum lebendig: Ob schon sie einmal vergeben gewesen / weil der mensch sich selbst wiederum gleichsam erneuert hat." *Gründlicher Unterricht*, II, 46-46. He can therefore speak about the resurrection of sins, which previously had been "eternally forgiven." "Nemlich **erstlich** / daß die vorhin geschenckte vergebung der sünde wiederum zurück gezogen werde. Da wohl zu mercken ob wol nun GOTT dem menschen seine sünde vergibt / und also in seinem namen auch seine lehrer und prediger solche vergebung ankündigen / und seine meynung ist / daß dieselbe auff ewiglich soll vergeben seyn / und dero nimmermehr gedacht werden / so werden doch die vorhin verziehen / und gleichsam getödeteten sünden wiederum neu und lebendig wann wir auff die neue in bößheit fallen / und dem lieben Gott so muthwillig undanckbar werden . . . also kommen auch die vorher vergabene sünden nicht weniger abermal empor." *Gründlicher Unterricht*, I, 22.

those who are regenerate and those who are not, that is, those who are in need of confirmation of their forgiveness or who actually need it.³ Furthermore, those who are children of wrath, that is, those who are unrepentant, cannot receive absolution at all. He thus complains that most pastors fail to make the proper distinction between regenerate and unrepentant, as well as those who actually need forgiveness and those who only require such confirmation. Instead, pastors carry out their office without differentiating, as though the Law makes everyone into a child of wrath.

. . . ohne unterschied alle also tractiret würden / ob müßten sie jedesmal erst in dem beichtstuhl aus kindern des zorns / kinder der gnaden / und die sünden / die ihnen noch zugerechnet wären / erst vergeben werden; *dessen doch das gewissen diejenige / die in stäter buß und glauben einher gehen / gantz anders versichere* (italics added).⁴

³Spener is quite concerned that a pastor cannot possibly know all the members of his congregation well enough to make the decision to absolve. He therefore makes the suggestion that a *collegium* of elders be established who are charged with the *exploratio* of the members of the congregation. See TB, I³, 197. Cf. Kliefoth, 444, and especially 449-451.

⁴TB, II³, 149. Cf. Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, I, 5-6, where he explains that the Law is to be used to call the penitent to account, i.e. to serve as a means of examination. What is not stated is whether such self-examination leads beyond the reckoning to the actual verdict of condemnation which the Law brings. "Er fordert aber rechnung von uns / so oft wir das wort seines gesetzes hören oder lesen / und dannhero uns erinnern müssen und sollen / wie wir mit ihm stehen; sonderlich wenn wir irgend vor den beichtstuhl treten; ja auch / so oft wir um vergebung der sünden beten; . . . das sind lauter sachen / die Gott mit uns rechnen will / und wir uns nicht anderst einbilden sollen / als ob gleichsam wir vor den richterstuhl Gottes / daselbst

Confession and absolution thus must become a means by which intention, sincerity, authenticity of repentance and faith, in short, the heart of people is to be explored. The pastor has to distinguish between the authentic and inauthentic, whether there is indeed a *Wiedergeburt* that has preceded and if this individual still lives in a state of grace. Only such a one can hope to receive the absolution for his benefit. Only such a one can receive "assurance" (*Versicherung*) from *his conscience*, for he cannot receive it from the pastor who can never be sure of what is in the heart of the penitent.

Deßwegen kan zwar der mensch / dem die absolution gesprochen wird / ohne einigen zweifel gewiß seyn / daß die absolution an ihm kräftig seye / weil er in redlicher prüfung seiner selbst erkennen kan / *ob er in wahrer buß stehe oder nicht / daran es alles liegt.* Aber der prediger der ist der sache nie so gewiß / daß nicht möglich wäre / daß nicht seine absolution an dieser und jener person fehlen möchte (*italics added*).⁵

Clearly only a pastor who himself is privy to the same experience can make the determination whether he should even give the absolution.⁶ For he, unlike Christ who forgave

rechnung zu thun / gefordert würden."

⁵Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, VI, 147.

⁶"Es ist aber in acht zu nehmen / daß bey solchem amt sünde zu vergeben zweyerley erfordert werde / einmal die nöthige weißheit / zu erkennen / welchen die sünden zu vergeben oder zu behalten seyen / item wie diejenige / welche die vergebung verlangen / darzu bereiten seyen / damit sie dero fähig werden: nebst demselben auch die gültigkeit der *absolution* oder vergebung selbst. Was das *erste* anlangt / so ist allerdings der H. Geist dem prediger nöthig / damit er sein amt auch in solchem stück nicht mißsondern recht gebrauche." TB, I³, 201. He goes on to explain that

unconditionally because of his omniscience, cannot see into the heart,⁷ and must thus diligently examine the penitent, and in certain circumstances undertake measures by which true repentance can be made to surface.⁸ It is not so much

the absence of the Holy Spirit would obviously preclude leading someone to true repentance, although the words of absolution spoken to one who is truly repentant are not themselves affected by this lack.

In the case of a pastor who has the Holy Spirit and who has made the determination that the penitent is not truly repentant, he is to retain the absolution and bring the matter to the consistorium. "Wo er also sein unrecht nicht erkennen will / ist er unbußfertig / und vor GOTT der absolution fähig / und kan ihn daher . . . so blosser dings nicht zu der absolution admittieren / welches er in seiner seelen vor unwürdig hält." LTB I, 545.

⁷Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, IX, 237: "Christus sahe in das hertz / und absolvirte also keine / die nicht in ihrer seele wahrhaftig bußfertig gewesen wären. Der prediger aber kan nicht in das hertz sehen" He then goes on to say that the absolution could thus become invalid for the individual who is absolved because of the pastors improper diagnosis.

⁸In order to ensure true repentance, Spener counsels another pastor to keep a penitent excommunicate until clear signs of a "truly deep repentance" can be ascertained: ". . . nicht allein weil man nach dergleichen schweren fällen billich eine zeitlang mit forschung seines hertzens / ob / und wie ernst die buß seye / zuzubringen / und dem H. Geist seine wirckung / daß die reue recht gründlich werde / und desto länger gute früchte bringe / zuzulassen hat / ehe man zu dem trost eile" (*italics added*). LTB I, 554. Cf. LTB I, 561: "Würde er bewegt / und verspräche die busse / wäre ihm doch eine zeit zu setzen / in dero man den ernst seiner buß prüffen wolte / und wo er in socher frist sich wol bezeuget (der prediger aber hätte inner solcher frist es an absonderlichen zusprüchen nicht mangeln zu lassen) er alsdann zu admittieren." Hof cites Luther's position as to the role of the pastor, who is by Luther counseled to ask for nothing other than a confession of faith so as not to put the forgiveness of sins on a spurious *in nobis* foundation: "Die Gewißheit der Vergebung kann und darf nicht auf der Reue des Beichtenden, sondern nur auf dem Wort Gottes ruhen. Darum schilt Luther die Priester hart, die immer nur nach der Reue fragen statt nach dem Glauben und damit die Beicht-

because of the penitent, who is thereby in danger of falling prey to a false security, but because the pastor himself becomes culpable for a misapplied absolution. It is to escape the judgement of God upon the one who delivers absolution without due care and examination that Spener urges such warnings.⁹ Yet the absolution which he speaks will necessarily always be conditional, i.e. conditional upon the penitent's sincerity and the authenticity of his repentance.¹⁰

kinder geradezu vom Glauben auf die Werke führen, vom gewissen Wort auf ungewisse Gefühle und damit in die Verzweiflung. . . . Als Luther seinem kleinen Katechismus bei der Ausgabe von 1531 ein kleines Formular für die Privatbeichte einfügte, ließ er darin den Beichtiger nur eine Frage and den Beichtenden stellen: 'Gläubst du auch, daß meine Vergebung Gottes Vergebung sei?' (BSLK, 519, 15-17)." Otto Hof, "Die Privatbeichte bei Luther," chap. in *Schriftauslegung und Rechtfertigungsglaube*, with a Forword by Edmund Schlink (Karlsruhe: Evangelischer Presse-verband für Baden e.V., 1982), 40.

⁹See Aland, who writes: "Alle Einwände [against bringing forth true repentance] verfangen nicht, weder der, daß die Absolution doch einer gültigen Verheißung Gottes entspräche, noch der, daß der Geistliche sich mitschuldig mache, der unberechtigt die Absolution zuspreche." Kurt Aland, "Die Privatbeichte im Luthertum von ihren Anfängen bis zu ihrer Auflösung," chap. in *Kirchengeschichtliche Entwürfe* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1960), 503. See also Klein, who notes that with Spener there is indeed a major difference from Roman theology: fear has been transferred from the penitent to the Beichtvater: "Die Ängstlichkeit ist vom Empfänger auf den Spender übergegangen. Die Diener des Wortes machten sich ein Gewissen daraus, die Absolution zu spenden." Laurentius Klein, *Evangelisch-lutherische Beichte, Leben und Praxis* (Paderborn: Bonifacius Verlag, 1961), 111.

¹⁰In case of any doubt, a conditional absolution is spoken, in order to guard the integrity of the words of absolution. "Dann mit solcher condition bleibets eine göttliche wahrheit / ob sie wol an ihn aus seiner schuld nicht

Und dieses ist der oben angeregt unterscheid unter Christi und unser der prediger absolution. Christus sahe in das hertz / und absolvirte also keine / die nicht in ihrer seele wahrhaftig bußfertig gewesen wären. Der prediger aber kan nicht in das hertz sehen / und also kans leicht geschehen / ja geschicht nur allzu viel / daß er solche leute absolviret / *die sich vor bußfertig angeben / und es doch nicht sind.* Daher zu merken ist /daß alle absolution / die ein blosser mensch spricht / mit was worte sie auch abgefasset werden / dem verstand nach *conditional* oder bedingt seye / wo er nemlich ein solcher seye / wovor er sich außgibt / nemlich ein bußfertiger. Ja es solte auch die formul bey denen / an welchen der beicht-vatter einen ziemliche zweiffel hat / und sie oder sonsten nicht abweisen kan / auff eine solche bedingte art / um ihnen das gewissen desto mehr zu rühren / außgesprochen werden / darmit sie wissen / in welchem zustand sie sich der vergebung zu getrösten haben oder nicht (*italics added*).¹¹

gleichsam hafftet." LTB I, 556. Also protected by such a conditional absolution is the integrity of the pastor himself, who would not be sinning by absolving someone whose repentance is not readily obvious: ". . . also ist auch die bedingte absolvirung eines solchen / der sich vor bußfertig angibet / seine buß aber von dem beichtvater nicht erkannt werden kan / nicht an sich sündliche / sonder würde es alsdann erst / wenn man ihn von dem / was man ihm schädlich glaubet / anders abhalten hätte können." LTB I, 571. Ultimately the penitent is therefore to be dismissed upon his own recognisance, " endlich die absolution spreche und seiner fernern verantwortung überlasse." Ibid. Cf. Hof, 38. See also Luther and his already discussed evaluation of such conditionality, e.g. WA 30 II, 499, 36 - 500, 8.

¹¹Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, IX, 237. He basically states the same some years later when he writes: "Daher alle absolution / wie sie von einem menschen einem prediger/ der in das hertz nicht sehen / und darinnen die buß unfehlbar erkennen kan / gesprochen wird / welcher formul nemlich mit außgetruckter bedingung oder nicht / sich auch der prediger gebrauchet / ist doch in ihrer natur so fern bedinget / daß sie alsdan nur gültig seyn / wofern der beichtende wahrhaftig bußfertig seyn / wofern der beichtende wahrhaftig bußfertig ist / wie er sich davor in seiner beicht dargibet. Ist derselbe es nun nicht / so gehet ihn solche bedingte absolution auch nicht an / und betreugt er sich / da er sie auff sich appliciret / und annimmt" (*italics added*). Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XIII, 406. Spener goes on to explain that it is for this reason that the conditionality of the absolution must be emphasized to

Notable again is that no absolution should be spoken if a negative determination is made, not because of unbelief per se, but for fear that the unregenerate would otherwise be led to believe that a *Wiedergeburt* characterized by true repentance is unnecessary. In short, the purpose of the confession is to probe the conscience, to determine the authenticity of the faith of the penitent as reflected in the sincerity of his repentance, and to awaken from false security those who are illegitimately applying the absolution to themselves.

Zweytens daß sie die sache nicht zu hegung ihrer sicherheit / sonder übung der buß / und daher zum grund legen / weder beicht noch absolution helffe sie etwas / sie seyen dann selbst von hertzen bußfertig; daher die meiste sorge seyn muß / wie man bußfertig erscheine / und / daß es uns mit der buß ein ernst seye / eine zuverlässige versicherung in dem hertzen habe: **daran liegt uns alles . . .** (*italics and emphasis added*).¹²

the penitent: " . . . zur verwahrung außrücklich bedingt außgesprochen / und das beicht-kind zur prüfung seiner selbst angewiesen werde." Cf. page 385 where he also speaks of the infallible absolution of Christ, in comparison to the conditional absolution of the preacher. See also page 137-139 above.

¹²Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XIII, 412-413. For Luther everything depended not upon the earnestness of repentance, but precisely upon the certainty of the *verba Christi* in Holy Absolution. See Jos E. Vercruysse, "Schlüssel-gewalt und Beichte bei Luther," in *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526-1546*, ed. Helmar Junghans (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 161: "Wie existentiell die Seelennot einen auch angreift, liegt hier doch nicht das Herz der Beichte. Um die Absolution geht es. Auf die Lossprechung zielt das ganze Geschehen: 'Hoc est praecipuum in confessione, . . . [WA 17 I, 170, 28] Sie ist Gottes großes Werk, 'das heubtstück und das beste jnn der Beicht' [WA 30 II, 287, 28]." Clearly Luther's *Anliegen* and that of Spener also diverge at this point. Cf. Hof, 28.

Again it becomes clear that the *Beichte* is therefore not retained for the sake of the absolution, but for the sake of the examination and its ultimate goal: the assurance of the inner birth on the one hand, and the awakening from false security on the other.

It is thus unequivocal in that which has been discussed above that Spener was unable to live with the fundamental tension of man as *simul iustus et peccator*. His approach to confession is indeed reflective of an attempt at resolving this tension in favor of a movement of the one to the other. In other words, according to Spener the one who is justified is indeed justified *coram Deo*. And while he does not expressly speak contrary to the Lutheran Confessions by stating that this justification is *located in nobis*, his virtual equivocation of *Wiedergeburt* and creation of a new inner man with the act of justification leads him to essentially say just that. What he does say *expressis verbis* is that all forgiveness depends upon repentance and faith, " . . . die was innerliches sind."¹³ Consequently Spener is compelled to relocate Luther's *in nobis peccator*

¹³"Daher ihnen allein eine verischerung solcher vergebung alsdann zukommet: und andern theils / daß man auch ausser dem beichtstuhl so oft man sich in buß und glauben zu Gott dem HErrn wendet / der kräftigsten vergebung theilhaftig werde: also henge alle vergebung an buß und glauben / die was innerliches sind: Der beichtstuhl aber und was drinnen vorgehet / diene allein zur übung der buß und stärkung des glaubens" LTB I, 557.

to the *extra nos* flesh.¹⁴ Man is therefore not regenerate because he is *en Christo*, but he is regenerate because Christ is *in nobis*. Spener thus finds it possible not to quantify justification itself, since it is tied to Christ, nor sin, because it is tied to Christ's *totus* forgiveness.¹⁵ But he is compelled to relativize sin by the removal of the *simul*. The Law of God which kills no longer addresses the inner man of the "truly" penitent, but something external to him. Confession and absolution therefore has nothing to do with the actual giving of the forgiveness of sins, but merely confirms the *status* of the *iustus* as being truly *wiedergeboren*. Confession thus attains the function of a pastorally guided self-analysis which seeks to establish the integrity of the *Wiedergeburt* and the progress of the inner man in repentance, while the absolution confirms his *Wiedergeburt* and the possession of the forgiveness

¹⁴He therefore uses expressions such as "*anklebende sünde*," as though sin is something which continues to stick to man, albeit on the surface. Cf. *Einfälltige Erklärung*, 655.

¹⁵"**Zum dritten / die art der absolution bestehet nun darinnen / daß dem menschen die sünde ergeben werden; und zwar / welches wohl zu merken ist / allemahl alle sünde zugleich. . . . wo Gott verzeihet / da sind allezeit alle sünden auff einmal vergeben / das macht / weil alle vergebung / die uns von Gott widerfähret / sich gründet auff das verdienst und blut JESU Christi / welches rein macht von aller sünde** [1. Joh. 1:7]." Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, IX, 233. Coming to faith, he goes on to explain, is to partake of God's grace in Christ, his merits, and therefore the forgiveness of all sins.

of sins.¹⁶ Since it is ultimately the individual himself who must examine the integrity of his repentant state and appropriate the absolution, instructions for such self-examination given from the pulpit and an absolution in the form of a general proclamation were for Spener a helpful alternative to displace what for him was a sorely misused adiaphoron.¹⁷ Not so much the *viva vox evangelii*, but

¹⁶It might not be going too far to regard Spener's practice of confession as a verbal parallel to the spiritual diary of English Puritanism. What comes to be confessed, therefore, are *Fehlritte* rather than sins, and what is given is guidance rather than the forgiveness of sins. At the very most absolution becomes a mere confirmation of the forgiveness of sins which has occurred at the time of the *Wiedergeburt*. Thus Spener, in a sermon from 1697, can say: "Wann aber nachmal einem solchen bußfertigen die *absolution* gesprochen wird / sie vor GOtt in seinem gericht bereits geschehene vergebung bekräftiget / und sein glaube damit versichert." TB, II³, 157.

¹⁷Spener, in his defence of Casper Schade, cites a number of points which provide something of a summary of his position on confession and absolution. As therefore concerns confession and absolution, Spener can say that since they are not divinely established, they are adiaphora. See Kurt Aland, *Spener-Studien*, volume I, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1943), 136-146. This entire document is helpfully summarized by Helmut Obst, *Der Berliner Beichtstuhlstreit* (Witten: Luther Verlag, 1972), 83-87. What is most interesting in these points *pro* and *contra* the freedom to go to private confession are the reasons given for each position. Speaking for *Beichtfreiheit* are the Scriptures, Luther, History, and current practice in other Lutheran lands. Speaking against it are constitutional and political objections (including the Augsburg Confession, articles XI and XXV, where the emperor is assured that no one is admitted to the Lord's Supper without prior confession), the conscience of the pastors reluctant to give absolution, the danger of schism, and finally, the potential breakdown in discipline. As concerns his suggestions for a resolution, Spener concludes by proposing a compromise. Those who seek a general confession should nevertheless personally announce their intent to the pastor and therefore provide the possibility of a personal conversation. At the

exhortation, instruction, and comfort are therefore put forth as the reason for listening to the preacher:

Sechstens man höre dem prediger mit fleiß zu / und nehme vermahnung / unterricht und trost / da solche in Gottes wort gegründet / mit andacht / willigkeit und Gehorsame an: sonderlich aber die absolution (da uns unser hertz in der prüffung des zeugnus der buß gibt) mit getrostem glauben.¹⁸

Spener can therefore go as far as to place his stamp of approval to the practice of a *Beichtanrede*, whereupon everyone was first absolved en masse, only to come to private confession afterward.¹⁹ Private confession was therefore only maintained as a further option, and soon easily displaced by the *allgemeine Beichte*.²⁰ When the compromise

end of this conversation with each individual, a general absolution is spoken over all the participants. After this, provision for private confession and absolution should be given. What becomes clear is that Spener's suggestions did have considerable influence in the edict which was published in November of 1699 which proposed precisely such a parallel track for general and private confession.

Another helpful analysis of Spener's writings during this period is found in Aland's already cited article *Die Privatbeichte im Luthertum*, 496-504. On the basis of two of Spener's writings, his introduction to the "Christlichen Lehr-Beicht- und Betbüchlein für gottselige Communicanten" and the already discussed sermon of August 7, 1685, sermon XI in the *Gründlicher Unterricht*.

¹⁸Spener, *Gründlicher Unterricht*, XIII, 412-413.

¹⁹This was indeed similar to the very suggestions which he had made in his *Gutachten* for Casper Schade discussed above.

²⁰See Kliefoth, 465 and especially 468, where he notes Spener's encouragement of a general confession and freedom from private confession wherever possible. Cf. Detlef Lehmann, "Bemerkungen zu einer Fehlenentwicklung in der Beichtpraxis," *Lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 3 (1979): 88-89 for some of the theological difficulties of such a general confession and absolution. He can indeed go

edict of November 16, 1699 was thus published in Prussia to end the *Beichtstuhlstreit* which had been instigated by Casper Schade's rejection of private confession,²¹ Spener was notably most pleased.²² For with the *Beichtstuhl* went the false security and the deleterious effects upon repentance and the life of Christian as a whole. Nor is anything

as far as saying that it is contrary to Lutheran tradition to include such a confession in the *Hauptgottesdienst*. He also takes note that Luther never included this kind of general confession or absolution in any of his liturgical work.

²¹The historical circumstances and implications of the *Berliner Beichtstuhlstreit* itself are well documented, especially in the already mentioned publication of Helmut Obst, n. 17 above. This work is replete with primary sources which shed much light on the matter of the *Beichtstuhlstreit* itself, yet contribute little more to the data of Spener's theology of confession and absolution itself. The most helpful aspect of Obst for the present work is his analysis of the already discussed eleventh sermon from the *Gründlicher Unterricht*, Obst, 23-27; 114-116. See also Kliefoth's summary of the *Beichtstuhlstreit*, 470-475 and that of P. Jacoby, "Beichte, Buße, Sündenbekenntnis im Zeitalter der Reformation und der protestantischen Orthodoxis," *Zeitschrift für Pastoral-Theologie*, 25 (1902): 18-22; see also Ernst Bezzel, *Frei zum Eingeständnis: Geschichte und Praxis der lutherischen Einzelbeichte* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1982), 164.

²²Wilhelm Maurer, "Der Pietismus und die Privatbeichte," *Evangelische Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* 10 (1956): 220. In his *Theologische Bedenken* Spener indeed pointed out that that it is only in Germany that private confession was retained, yet simply as an "edifying ceremony." "Daher bekannter massen by der Reformation Lutheri unsre Evangelische kirchen meistentheils die privatbeicht als eine erbauliche ceremonie behalten / aber sie even deßwegen nicht für ganz nöthig geachtet / weil sie diejenige gemeinden / die insgemein ausser Teutschland / theils aber auch in Teutschland / solche absonderliche beicht nicht angenommen oder behalten / für gut Evangelisch erkennen." TB, II³, 162. Cf. Kliefoth, 438. Compare also Luther's position on p. 65 above.

lost thereby.²³ Spener points out that the *Beichtstuhl* is, after all, not the only *locus* of forgiveness, and indeed does not exist according to God's order or Christ's institution.²⁴ With this latter point he is certainly in

²³This might be qualified somewhat. Spener does note that the betterment of an individual is more easily accomplished in the one on one encounter of the *Beichtstuhl*. "Denn da die ordentliche abhaltung eines unbußfertigen / ihn darmit von sünden abzuhalten / noch einen nutzen zeigt / wird hingegne durch die verwandlung der *privat-* in eine *allgemeine absolution* nicht ein einiger böser gebessert / oder von sünden abgehalten / sondern was hierzu gehöret / kan bey der *privata* noch eher als der *publica absolutione* geschehen." LTB I, 560. But what this qualification shows is, in Kliefoth's words, Spener's complete reinterpretation of private confession in Reformed categories. "Aus dem Allen konnte . . . bei dem großen Einflusse Speners auf die Kirche nichts Anderes resultiren, als die allmähliche Abschaffung des lutherischen Beichtwesens und die Umwandlung desselben in die reformirte Gestaltung desselben als sogenannte allgemeine Beichte und Absolution. . . ." Kliefoth, 469.

²⁴Spener argues against confession as an institution; confession and absolution had become an idol to even the misinformed council dealing with Schade, since they focused upon the *Beichtstuhl* as the source of forgiveness. Now, however, they have come to see that such an understanding is contrary to the intent of Luther, who urged freedom to confess and the institution of Christ, who did not interject confession as a condition to the Lord's Supper. "Sie hätten: ehe sie besser informiret worden / aus dem beicht-stuhl gleichsam einen abgott gemacht / und darvon gehalten / daß ausser demselben und der ohren-beicht keine vergebung der sünden zu erlangen wäre; nunmehr aber wüsten sie sich wol zu bescheiden / daß zwahr confessio und absolutio in der kirchen notwendig bleiben müsten / aber deßwegen der beicht-stuhl und ohren-beicht nicht eben nöthig seyen. Weil aber ihre gemüther und seelen nicht wenig durch diese verunruhiget worden / hingegen sie von den Predigern ohne privatbeicht / die auch Herr D. Luther frey haben wollen / und Christus sein heiliges Abendmahl ohne dieselbe eingesetzt haben / zu dem tisch des HErrn nicht zugelassen werden möchten / bitten sie es dahin zu richten / daß es ihnen frey stehen möge / jedem nach befindung seines gewissens sich der beicht in specie zu gebrauchen." TB, II³, 146-146. He therefore urges that access to the Lord's Supper be given even

agreement with Luther. He also stands with Luther when he places as divine mandates the confession of one's sins to God and forgiveness of the neighbor.²⁵ Yet he does not, as Luther, laud the great comfort of the absolution which is given in private confession, and is therefore all too willing to point to its superfluity in contrast to those which have a divine mandate.²⁶

without prior confession. Cf. Obst, 75-76.

²⁵Spener also acknowledges the three types of confession which Luther describes in the Large Catechism. In Spener's Catechism, which is structured according to Luther's Small Catechism, the question is asked: "**Wie vielerly ist die beicht? Dreyerley / gegen Gott / gegen den nebenmenschen / und gegen den Prediger.**" Philipp Jakob Spener, *Schriften*, volume II.1, "Einfälltige Erklärung der christlichen Lehr," (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1982), 805. Hereafter *Einfälltige Erklärung*. Spener then goes on to explain the nature of each type of confession. Of these types, it is again the first two that are necessary for salvation. Of the confession before the pastor, Spener asks: "**Ist solche schlechter dings zur vergebung der sünden noth-wendig? Nein: Dieweil wir dessen keinen außtrücklichen befehl haben / weil sie aber darzu dienlich ist / damit die Prediger den ihnen gegebenen befehl / die vergebung der sünden den bußfertigen zu verkündigen / so ist sie von unsern Evangelischen Kirchen / als ein nütliche ceremonie / behalten worden**" (italics added). *Einfälltige Erklärung*, 805.

²⁶What he does praise is the the "grossen nutzen." ". . . damit der Prediger seinem Beicht-kind über solche sünde mit so viel besserem unterricht deß gewissens / heilsamen rath und kräftigem trost begegnen und zustatten kommen könne." *Einfälltige Erklärung*, 809. An interesting aside to the matter of divine mandate is Spener's understanding of his own actions. According to Wallmann, Spener actually perceived his actions to be consonant with the will of God. "Daß Spener sein eigenes kirchenleitendes Handeln mit dem Willen Gottes identifizierte --diese problematische Seite pietistischer Personalpolitik soll hier nicht verschwiegen werden." Johannes Wallmann, "Philipp Jakob Spener in Berlin 1691-1705," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 84 (1987): 78.

Diese beyde beichten sind recht göttlicher ordnung und einsetzung / daher wir alle dazu verbunden sind / da wir gleichwol nicht alle an die kirchen-beicht verbunden / und deßwegen wol viele selig werden / die ihr lebenslang keinem Prediger gebeichtet / ja wol an solchen orten / da sie nicht im brauch ist / nichts davon gewust haben. . . . also daß der beicht-stuhl ja nicht der einige ort der vergebung ist.²⁷

Indeed, ultimately Spener's work and the edict were to prove the death-knell of private confession.²⁸

²⁷TB, II³, 163. Cf. TB, II³, 146-147, where Spener points out in a defense of Schade's actions that he himself had not made confession until age 25, and appeals to the example of many other congregations which are well satisfied with general confession.

²⁸Aland makes the observation that Spener did not only want to retain private confession, but expand upon it. This is doubtless true. Yet it is precisely the removal of confession and absolution from its Reformation foundation and using it for purposes other than the confession and forgiveness of sins that ultimately lead to its demise. "Dennoch ist es eine unbestreitbare Tatsache, daß der Pietismus den Untergang der Privatbeichte im deutschen Luthertum heraufgeführt hat. Und zwar paradoxerweise nicht deshalb, weil er sie zu geringgeschätzt hätte, sondern deshalb, weil er sie ganz ernst nahm. . . . Er versuchte, die Formeln mit Inhalt zu füllen, Beichte und Absolution bestimmungsgemäß zu verwalten. Da war, aufs ganze gesehen, nicht mehr möglich." Aland, *Die Privatbeichte im Luthertum*, 507. Again, it could be contended that it was precisely the theology with which Spener attempted to fill the "empty formulas" which carried within them the sentence of death for private confession. This is not to deny the abuses, nor Spener's sincerity or piety. It is, however, doubtful that he actually understood Luther's *Anliegen*, and therefore was in no position to provide a new impetus for a renewal of private confession. This latter point is indeed Kliefoth's contention. He takes note of Spener's knowledge of Lutheran theology to which he pays lip-service, while his heart is with the Reformed. "Spener hat nicht allein eine sehr genaue Kenntniß lutherischen Wesens, sondern unläugbar auch Verständniß dafür; . . . Aber Neigung, Liebe zu lutherischem Wesen hat er dessungeachtet nicht; jenes Verständniß ist etwas Erlerntes; sein Herz gehörte dem reformirten Wesen." Kliefoth, 436. Klein says, not directly of Spener but of those about him: "Bei alledem ist zu beachten, daß die Kreise um Spener nicht unbeeinflußt von

Spener's pious desires for the reform of private confession thus failed not so much because of a sorely misused institution concerning which there was evidence of drift into the ways of the Law,²⁹ but because he managed to relocate the penitent *coram hominibus* in a most subtle manner.³⁰ Luther's *coram Deo* confession and *in statu Christi*

calvinistischer Lehre waren. Dieser hatte in der Front gegen Rom gelehrt: 'Man muß auch weiter bedenken, daß die ganze 'Lösung' (von den Sünden) aus Glauben und Buße besteht; und diese beiden Dinge entziehen sich der Erkenntnis des Menschen sofern man über einen andern urteilen soll; . . . denn der Diener am Wort kann, wo er sein Amt recht verrichtet, nur bedingt lossprechen [Calvin, *Institutio*, III, 4, 18, cited by Klein]." Klein, 111, note 27. This point is also Jacoby's contention with respect to confession and absolution specifically: "Die Privatbeichte war ihm, bis er nach Frankfurt kam, also bis zu seinem 31. Jahre, ein fremdes Institut geblieben; und als er dasselbe amtlich zu verwalten hatte, ist es ihm innerlich fremd geblieben. Er hatte keine Sympathien für dasselbe." Jacoby, 20. Of Pietism's effect upon private confession and absolution as a whole, Jacoby says with Aland: "Der Pietismus hat die Privatbeichte tödlich getroffen, die Folgezeit zeigt ihr allmähliches Absterben." Jacoby, 70.

²⁹A point which certainly cannot be denied with respect to the practice of confession and absolution following the turmoil of the Thirty Years War. Wet one has to disagree with Aland when he writes: "Eigentliches und Wesentliches gegen die Privatbeichte in ihrer damaligen Gestalt hat nur der Pietismus zu sagen gehabt." Aland, *Die Privatbeichte im Luthertum*, 519. It cannot be denied that necessary criticism was voiced. But it is precisely the substance of that critique which wrested from it its very heart: the certainty of the forgiveness of sins in the words of Holy Absolution. Universal depictions are suspect.

³⁰For an historical evaluation of Spener's attempt at the reform of private confession, see Kliefoth, 421-423, and especially 436-438. Kliefoth outlines Spener's attempts at reform as ultimately being adaptations to Reformed models. "Wenn er dann aber . . . einen Mangel oder Mißbrauch findet, so macht er vielleicht einen flüchtigen Versuch, die lutherische Ordnung in der Kirche wiederherzustellen, den Mißbrauch in lutherischer Richtung zu beseit-

absolution was replaced by Spener with an *exploratio*, the purpose of which was more in keeping with medieval piety than the giving of *Heilsgewißheit* to troubled consciences.³¹ Far from providing the *certitudo* of salvation, Spener indeed poured the foundation of a new *securitas* in the human spirit upon which the Rationalism of the following century was able to build.³²

igen; oft aber macht er auch einen solchen Versuch gar nicht; und selbst wenn er ihn macht, gibt er ihn stets bald auf, und fängt statt dessen an, nach neuen Wegen und Mitteln umzusehen, die alten lutherischen Einrichtungen und ihres Mißbrauchs willen als unheilbar darzustellen und liegen zu lassen, und neue Einrichtungen vorzuschlagen; *diese neuen Mittel und Einrichtungen sind dann aber stets reformirten Vorbildern entnommen und angepaßt*; natürlich fügen sie sich denn in die lutherischen Landeskirchen nicht ein; und dann seufzt er über die schlechten Zeiten;" (*italics added*). Kliefoth, 437. In summary Kliefoth goes on to say that Spener's entire attempt at the reform of confession and absolution was based upon, ". . . die persönliche Anmeldung der Communicanten beim Pastor, durch welche er das Beichtverhör ersetzen und verbessern [wollte], und auf die Einrichtung von Aeltesten-collegien, als 'Kirchengerichten.'" Kliefoth, 452-453. The implications of this *collegium* as alien to a Lutheran ecclesiology are subsequently dealt with by Kliefoth. Precht is therefore doubtless right when he concludes that "Spener's theology of confession and absolution is the result of his doctrine of conversion and of the church." Fred L. Precht, "Changing Theologies of Private and Public Confession and Absolution," (Th.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1965), 139.

³¹Maurer, 220.

³²See Kliefoth's analysis of the legacy of Pietism's struggle for freedom from private confession, 475-476.

CONCLUSION

The Augsburg Confession faithfully declares that confession should not fall into disuse in the church of the Reformation, "for the sake of the absolution." For it was indeed Holy Absolution which became the heart of Luther's theology of confession, and initially precluded its disappearance, despite his intense opposition to the abuses of the Roman church. Yet this clear confession was most unfortunately muted by the historical circumstances of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and ultimately silenced by the legacy of Spener's opposition to the abuses he saw in the *Beichtstuhl* of the Lutheran church. Both Luther and Spener confronted the practice of confession and absolution within the context of their own churches: Luther as a child of the Roman church; Spener as a son of the Reformation. Here, however, the similarity ends, though it touches again at points such as the *Beichtzwang*, which itself was quite dissimilar in the two churches. Luther and Spener approached the *Beichtstuhl* from two completely different perspectives: Luther came as one who thirsted for the certain forgiveness of sins which Holy Absolution delivered to him so certainly through the mouth of the *Beichtvater*; Spener came dutifully as one who was secure in the knowledge

of forgiveness, satisfied with the *in nobis* testimony of forgiveness which he felt came immediately from God. What was indispensable for Luther was quite dispensable for Spener. Luther ultimately can look past the abuses of the *Beichtstuhl* which had propelled him toward the Reformation and rejoice in Holy Absolution as the Gospel *pro me*. Spener does not see past the abuses, and he finds no particular cause for rejoicing in Holy Absolution, nor regret at its absence. Holy Absolution appeared to him as nothing other than a cheapened and automatic grace because it did not take into account the value of true repentance and regeneration. It was grace without life; no grace at all if the conditions of true repentance and regeneration have not been met. Yet Luther knew nothing of cheap grace either. Holy Absolution is costly grace, because it is Christ's grace; and it is certain grace, because in, with, and under the words which come from the *Beichtvater* is Christ himself speaking and with his absolving words, loosing from sins, giving eternal life and salvation. Spener did not enter the confessional in order to be given to, however. All of these he had; Holy Absolution was for him the Amen of Christ. An Amen which could be heard throughout the church, and confirmed by the very fruits of repentance which were the very proof of the Christian life. In light of the abuses and the dangerous false security which Holy Absolution engendered, Spener sought the safety of conditionality, and ultimately no

private absolution at all. An institution remained. *Beichtstühle* stood in churches. Yet Christ was not allowed to be there. Spener ensured that the Pastor would take that place, with his counsel, with his guidance, preferably in private, in the office where a heart to heart talk could take place. One human heart to the other. Fraternally, *coram hominibus*. Souls are bared, consolation spoken. Yet the one thing needful, Holy Absolution, the forgiveness of sin spoken *in statu Christi pro me*, has disappeared. Such is the triumph of the human spirit over the Holy Spirit, for he is the resistable Spirit of grace and truth.

Evidently the church can survive even when one of the *loci* of Christ's gifts is ignored. For as the Reformers themselves agreed, the Lord continues to give himself in the Holy Supper, his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, most certainly *pro me*. Absolution *pro nobis* is also in the Sermon, in the *pax vobiscum*, whenever and wherever the Gospel is proclaimed. And the faithful will be eager to be given the absolution wherever it is given. One returns therefore to Luther and the Confessions: private confession for the sake of private absolution. Such will always be the *status* of the faithfully confessing church.

In welcher Christenheit er mir und allen Gläubigen täglich alle Sünde reichlich vergibt und am jüngsten Tage mich und alle Toten auferwecken wird und mir sampt allen Gläubigen in Christo ein ewiges Leben geben wird; das ist gewißlich wahr.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF THE CITED WORKS OF MARTIN LUTHER

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| WA 1, 94-99 | Predigt Lukas 19:8 (1516) |
| WA 1, 138-141 | Predigt Matthew 11:25 (1517) |
| WA 1, 158-220 | Die sieben Bußpsalmen mit deutscher Auslegung, 1517. |
| WA 1, 233-238 | Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiorum, 1517. |
| WA 1, 319-324 | Sermo de poenitentia, 1518. |
| WA 1, 525-628 | Resolutiones disputationum de indulgentiorum virtute, 1518. |
| WA 1, 630-633 | Pro veritate inquirenda et timoratis conscientiiis consolandis conclusiones, 1518. |
| WA 2, 59-65 | Eine kurze Unterweisung, wie man beichten soll, 1519. |
| WA 2, 244-249 | Ein Sermon gepredigt zu Leipzig auf dem Schloß am Tage Petri und Pauli, Matthew 16:13-18. June 19, 1519. |
| WA 2, 391-435 | Resolutiones Luterianae super propositionibus suis Lipsiae disputatis, 1519. |
| WA 2, 685-697 | Ein Sermon von der Bereitung zum Sterben, 1519. |
| WA 2, 713-723 | Ein Sermon von dem Sakrament der Buße, 1519. |
| WA 2, 738-758 | Ein Sermon von dem hochwürdigen Sakrament des heiligen wahren Leichnams Christi und von den Bruderschaften, 1519. |

- WA 3, 11-652 Dictata super psalterium, 1513-1516.
- WA 4, 1-462 Dictata super psalterium, 1513-1516.
- WA 6, 157-169 Confitendi Ratio. D.M. Luther, 1520.
- WA 6, 497-573 De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium, 1520.
- WA 6, 614-629 Wider die Bulle des Endchrists, 1520.
- WA 7, 290-298 Ein Unterricht der Beichtkinder über die verbotenen Bücher, 1521.
- WA 8, 138-185 Von der Beichte, ob die der Papst Macht habe zu gebieten. 1521.
- WA 10 III, 58-64 Von der Beichte, March 16, 1522.
- WA 12, 169-196 Die instituendis ministris ecclesiae ad senatum Pragensem Bohemiae, 1523.
- WA 12, 205-220 Formula Missae et communionis pro ecclesia. M. Luther 1523.
- WA 12, 476-493 Ein Sermon D.M. Lutheri am Gründonnerstag, April 2, 1523.
- WA 19, 482-523 Sermon von dem Sakrament des Leibes und Blutes Christi wider die Schwarmgeister, 1526.
- WA 15, 481-497 Ein Sermon von der Beichte, vom Gebrauch des Sakramentes, March 20, 1524.
- WA 17 I, 170-173 De confessione et sacramento, April 9, 1525.
- WA 27, 95-99 Über die Beichte und Abendmahl, April 4, 1528.
- WA 30 II, 268-356 Vermahnung an die Geistlichen, versammelt an dem Reichstag zu Augsburg. 1530
- WA 30 II, 435-507 Von den Schlüsseln, 1530
- WA 30 III, 558-571 Ein Brief and die zu Frankfurt am Main. D.M Luther 1533. Ende 1532.
- WA 34 I, 301-310 Ostergeschichte, April 11, 1531 (Easter Tuesday).

- WA 40 I, 33-688 In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas
commentariou, ex praelectione D.M.
Lutheri collectus, 1535. (1531)
- WA 40 II, 1-184 In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas
commentariou, ex praelectione D.M.
Lutheri collectus, 1535. (1531)
- WA 41, 578-590 Zwo Predigten vom Zorn, 1536.
- WA 43, 1-695 Genesis-Vorlesung, June 3, 1535 -
November 1545.
- WA 47, 326-336 Sermon Matthew 19:13ff n.d.
- WA 47, 436-442 Sermon Matthew 23:1ff n.d.
- WA 49, 111-160 Zwo Predigten D. M. Luthers auf der
Kindertaufe des jungen Herrn Bernhard
[von Anhalt]. 1540.
- WA 50, 509-653 Von den Konziliis und Kirchen, 1539.

APPENDIX B

THE SERMONS OF PHILIPP JAKOB SPENER'S
GRÜNDLICHER UNTERRICHT

- I *Notwendigkeit der Versöhnung, Matt. 18:23-35. Frankfurt, November 11, 1666.*
- II *Die Art und Beweg-Ursachen der Bruderlichen Vergebung, Luke 6:36- 42. Frankfurt, June 26, 1670.*
- III *Wie Gott nach dem Vorbild des Königes die Sünde vergibt, Matt. 18:23-35. Frankfurt, November 19, 1671.*
- IV *Ursachen so uns zu williger Vergebung bewegen sollen, Matt. 18:23-35. Frankfurt, February 2, 1672.*
- V *Unarth der Menschen in Widersetzung gegen die leiblichen Strafen, Matt. 22:15-22. Frankfurt, November 2, 1673.*
- VI *Worinnen die Absolution Christi und der Prediger übereinkommet und von einander unterschieden ist, Matt. 9:1-8. Frankfurt. October 14, 1683.*
- VII *Die Versöhnlichkeit mit dem Nächsten, Matt. 5:20-26. Frankfurt, July 6, 1648.*
- VIII *Der Privat-Absolution rechter Gebrauch und Mißbrauch, Matt. 9:1-8. Frankfurt, October 25, 1685.*
- IX *Die Absolution oder Loßsprechung von Sünden, Matt. 9:1-8. At St. Nicolai, Berlin, October 18, 1691.*
- X *Die Nothwendigkeit der Christlichen Vergebung aller Beleidigungen, Matt. 18:23-35. St. Nicolai, Berlin, November 4, 1694.*
- XI *Des Beichtwesens rechter Gebrauch und Mißbrauch, John 22:22. St Nicolai, Berlin, August 7, 1695.*
- XII *Des Beichtwesens Gebrauch und Mißbrauch, Matt. 26:71-75; Mark 14:68-73; Luke 22:58-62; John 18:19-27. St Nicolai, Berlin, February 14, 1695.*

XIII *Viel schädliche Irrthüme und Mißbräuche der Beicht,*
Matt. 9:1-8. St Nicolai, Berlin, October 15, 1699.

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