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Virtue Ethics and the Place of Character Formation within Lutheran theology

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VIRTUE ETHICS

AND THE PLACE OF CHARACTER FORMATION

WITHIN LUTHERAN THEOLOGY

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 Philosophy

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by

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May, 2002

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CONTENTS

The Prominence of Good Works in the Confessions
   The Augsburg Confession
   The Apology
   The Smalcald Articles
   The Catechisms
   The Formula of Concord
Faith and the Spontaneous Production of Good Works
Justified in Order to Fulfill the Law
Melanchthon's Use of Aristotle within the Confessions
Approval of Aristotle in Melanchthon's Writing
Civil Righteousness in the Augustana and Apology
Formation of Christians in the Confessions
   The Catechisms
   The Formula of Concord
   The Apology
Support from Other Sources
Conclusion

   The Need for a Framework
   Motivation as a Framework
   Law and Gospel as a Frame
   Two Kinds of Righteousness as a Frame
   Three Kinds of Righteousness—Luther and Melanchthon
   Three Kinds of Righteousness—Toward an Effective Framework
   Conclusion

   The Creedal Frame
   The Trinitarian Basis
   Melanchthon and Luther and the Creedal Emphasis
   Gustaf Wingren and the Importance of the Doctrine of Creation
   Support from Other Lutheran Theologians
   A Proposed Framework
   Virtue Ethics within the Creedal Frame
   A Practical Illustration
   Conclusion

   Lutheranism's Ethical Challenge

The Place of Character Formation
The Relation between Faith and the Cultivation of Character
From Theory to Practice
Theology and Practice Reunited
Applications
  Instruction in Virtue
  Cultivation of Community
  Ethics for Ordinary Life
Conclusion

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

> Where there are things to be done the end is not to survey and recognize the various things, but rather to do them.
>
> —Aristotle (*Nichomachean Ethics* 10, 9)

The wisdom of Aristotle is certainly verified in the life of a graduate student; and it is only after accumulating significant debts to many that this particular effort has reached its end. I am grateful to those without whom this work would not have escaped that extended period of surveying and recognition.

At the outset, the people of St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Holt, Michigan, provided significant support through their words of affirmation as well as their financial gifts. In this regard, special thanks belong to Dr. Robert and Karen Schlueter. I am also grateful for God's provision of Roger Niekerk, who was opening doors long before I passed through them.

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and unflagging patience in the task of reading and rereading successive drafts of this work. Dr. Joel Okamoto and Dr. Paul Raabe consented to serve as readers and with their timely and insightful comments surpassed the expectations of duty. Dr. Robert Kolb's genuine interest in this project was coupled with many productive and relevant suggestions.

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This study has nurtured an increasing awareness of the remarkable work accomplished by my parents, Herbert and Karen Biermann. They live their vocation and exemplify faithful servanthood. A child with such parents would rightly be regarded as blessed. That my life has been wonderfully enriched by William and Myra Richardt is testimony to God's exceeding mercy. Undeserving of any qualifiers, they became for me not parents-in-law, but parents indeed. From his place in the Church Triumphant, my father by marriage continues to shape my life by his commitment to the highest standards of virtue. And my second mother embodies Scripture's description of a virtuous woman.

Certainly, my greatest debt is owed to those nearest me. The decision to pursue graduate studies asked much of my family. My

children—Jasmine, Justine, and Jess—cheerfully accepted not only the reality of a sometimes pre-occupied father, but also the total relocation of their lives.

Of course, of those to whom I owe much, none has played a more critical role than my wife, Jeannalee. The move from an ideal parish life to an uncertain future in a new city and state was met with willing enthusiasm as she embraced my goal as her own. It was her determined energies and her zeal for God's will that enabled me to do the things that needed to be done and bring this work to its end. To be so graced with a woman of noble character never fails to astound me.

Joel D. Biermann

ABBREVIATIONS

Ap	Apology to the Augsburg Confession
Bekenntnisschriften	Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche
Book of Concord	Kolb/Wengert Edition of the Book of Concord
CA	Augsburg Confession
Ep	Epitome to the Formula of Concord
FC	Formula of Concord
LC	Large Catechism
LW	Luther's Works, American Edition
SC	Small Catechism
SD	Solid Declaration
WA	Weimar Ausgabe of Luther's Works

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Each Sunday morning the scene is repeated incalculable times in locales scattered by culture, language, and heritage, yet one in their common malady. The pastor enters the pulpit ready to deliver himself of a week's labor on the prescribed epistle (a text, it should be noted, which derives from the latter portion of a Pauline epistle, a text accordingly rich with exhortation and practical counsel). Reflecting his years of education and experience, the pastor provides a homily undeniably solid— doctrinally correct, in keeping with the season of the church, scripturally accurate, and brimming from beginning to end with resplendent Gospel. Considering the text, this final feat is no small accomplishment, and the pastor is understandably pleased with his ability to salvage an otherwise dangerously moralistic text.

Yet, the pastor's triumph is the parishioners' privation. Seated in the pew are people struggling with the mundane realities of routine life. Their thoughts wander through the labyrinth of their challenges: tenuous and tedious job, lifeless marriage, disrespectful and thankless children, staggering credit card debt, insipidly banal—yet nevertheless effective— temptations. These are the woes that weigh on the person in the pew. So with enviable eloquence the pastor explicates the text and provides a stirring picture of the realities of faith...and speaks to none of the

parishioner's challenges in life. Still, perfunctory pleasantries are exchanged at the narthex door, the pastor's efforts duly acknowledged and appreciated. With clockwork predictability, the scene is repeated the following week.

While irrelevance has always been a threat to otherwise orthodox preaching, and pastors may for a variety of reasons be out of touch with their sheep, the problem displayed in the preceding Sunday scenario reflects a problem quite specific and quite disturbing. The concern is that this pastor, and many like him, has failed to address his congregants' needs, not by neglect or by oversight or by poor pastoral practice, but by intention. With careful planning and a satisfying sense of accomplishment, the pastor has made a point of avoiding any sort of teaching or preaching that might possibly be construed as moralistic. He is, after all, a servant of the Gospel, and he must not allow any hint of moralism to creep into his ministry—anything but that.[1]

The scenario, while fictitious, nevertheless accurately depicts a sad reality. There exists in some corners of the church today an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust toward moral exhortation.[2] One corner so afflicted is that occupied by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. This judgment is based on the writer's experience and on the

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[1] In some Lutheran circles, there is hardly a more derogatory vilification of a sermon or pastor than the label, *moralistic*—except perhaps the equally damning moniker, *legalistic*.

observations of others both inside and outside the denominational community. In this atmosphere of skepticism toward moral teaching, Christian ethics holds a dubious if not precarious position, indeed. A theological pariah, ethics is sometimes regarded as an inferior field of concern, significantly less important than 'real theology'. While the typical Lutheran reception to concerns of Christian ethics is indifference or ambivalence, outright hostility is not an unknown response. To some, ethics is the sworn enemy of theology.

This study was prompted by the author's own encounters with this spirit of discomfort with or distaste for the teaching of morality within the Christian church and by a desire to help in some way to overcome it. Though parishioners themselves may have grown to expect the concerns and challenges of their mundane existence to be all but ignored in the rarified atmosphere of the spiritualized congregation, they are, nevertheless, being ill-served by pastors who shun the task of teaching morality and building character. Faced with the relentless barrage of life's trials and woes, people certainly need the undiluted balm of the Gospel's comfort and assurance. Yet, faced with those same trials and woes, people certainly also need the challenging and directing standard of bona fide Christian ethics. People need practical answers to their utterly practical concerns. This is the province of Christian ethics.

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[2] This claim will be substantiated in the following pages. See especially chapter two.

Rightly understood, Christian ethics is not so much concerned with end-of-life questions or societal justice as it is with simply teaching what it means to live the Christian life.

In succeeding chapters, much consideration will be given to those who have made similar observations about the state of the contemporary Christian church, particularly its Lutheran manifestation and the role of ethics within that church. Two of the most important thinkers, however, provide interesting corroboration of the thesis that the church is marked today by a distinct distaste for questions of ethics. Stanley Hauerwas, who will be more fully introduced in the chapter that follows, observes that in the church today, "no matter how sincerely many believe what it is they believe about God, they in fact live lives of practical atheism."[3] Elaborating on his term, Hauerwas writes: "quite profound and sophisticated theological systems can be developed, but the theological discourse seems to 'float,' making no difference for how we live."[4]

Hauerwas's observation coincides with the scenario of the irrelevant preacher. The theological system is duly impressive, but it does not touch the daily lives of the people. What takes place in the sanctuary on a Sunday morning leaves no detectable impression on the remaining hours and days of the week. The mundane and ordinary

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[3] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2000), 140.

[4] Ibid.

struggles of living seem somehow unspiritual and untheological.

Consequently, life is met without the practical resources available to the

church; and Christians live, Monday through Saturday, in the routine of

life, as if God made no difference. Whether God exists or not is not the

point. Nor would any of these church-going people deny God's existence.

Regardless of the ontological reality, however, too many believers

continue to live as if God did not exist. Practical atheism is, then,

another way of describing the ethical difficulties of the church already

noted.

Reinhard Hütter also provides a memorable phrase in his attempt

to articulate the malady which he detects within the contemporary

church and within Lutheranism in particular. The current aversion to

ethical questions that is pandemic in significant portions of the church

Hütter terms "Protestantism's Antinomian Captivity."[5] Hütter contends

that in its unflagging quest for "freedom," Protestantism has shunted

away the law and with it any meaningful ethics. "When the ethics of

autonomy construes freedom to be the very core of subjectivity," argues

Hütter, "it—from the very outset—eliminates the law's otherness and

therefore reception."[6] What is left is the inevitable harvest of such

autonomy and rejection of the law: "individual sovereignty, will to power,

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[5] Reinhard Hütter, "(Re-)Forming Freedom: Reflections 'After *Veritas Splendor*' On Freedom's Fate in Modernity and Protestantism's Antinomian Captivity," *Modern Theology* 17:2 (April 2001), 117-161.

[6] Ibid., 120.

and license."[7] Hütter's description is essentially that of Hauerwas but considered from a somewhat different perspective. Unable to affirm or appreciate the place of the law, those captive to their antinomianism demonstrate the same sort of ethical failure, or practical atheism, identified by Hauerwas.

The licentiousness described by Hauerwas and Hütter is at bottom precisely the problem illustrated in the opening account of the irrelevant pastor. A distaste for the law, a Sunday-only Christianity, and a disregard for the practical concerns of daily living, are all different facets of the common problem—a problem well-known in today's churches. Personal encounters and routine engagements with that ethical malaise were the catalyst for this study. It is hoped that the research and conclusions that follow will help to treat the malady, end the atheism, and point a way out of the captivity. This study has as its object especially the parish pastor who, by virtue of his call, must contend with the realities of the current situation of ethical distrust. While pastors are no more easily generalized and classified than any other segment of humanity, virtually all those serving in parish situations have some sense of the reality and urgency of their parishioners' practical concerns. The awareness of this need is met with a variety of responses ranging from cavalier dismissal to the uncritical adoption of the latest theologically errant, but practically useful, teaching fads.

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[7] Ibid., 121.

This study strives to provide a way for all parish pastors to reconsider the task of providing ethical training in a parish setting. The intent of this investigation is to encourage a shift in perception that will allow training in ethics to be evaluated and eventually adopted as both practically positive and theologically valid. Failing that ambitious goal, the study can at least prompt further discussion of the appropriate place of training in ethics, that is, teaching the practical matters of living the Christian life. Understood scripturally, the goal is quite simply to provide a way for congregations faithfully to practice the Lord's parting instruction to make disciples—baptizing them, yes..., *but also* "teaching them to keep all the things which I have commanded you."

This paper will attend in particular to the concept of character formation. This emphasis is meant to further the understanding of Christian ethics as more the shaping of individual character and less the adoption of a set of basic rules of behavior or the provision of answers to perplexing moral dilemmas.[8] Ethical training is neither the anticipation and resolution of every conceivable quandary that a Christian may eventually encounter nor the development of an exhaustive list of right activity. Rather, ethical training is about equipping and shaping individuals to be people of character so that in whatever circumstances

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[8] The shaping of character should not be perceived, however, as antithetical to directions for living or commandments meant to guide behavior. The dissertation will make clear that they cannot be divorced. Nevertheless, the recent climate in which character and the virtues have been neglected argues for this study's special emphasis on character development and its place within the Christian life.

they may find themselves they act virtuously, that is, in conformity with God's will for his people.

A call for training in virtue and shaping of character is a defining characteristic of a contemporary school of thought known as virtue ethics. Virtue ethicists do not strike out into new territory but rather seek to retrieve what has in recent centuries been neglected or forgotten. Josef Pieper insists on this characteristic:

> In this realm, originality of thought and diction is of small importance—should, in fact, be distrusted. It can hardly be expected that there will be entirely new insights on such a subject. We may well turn to the "wisdom of the ancients" in our human quest to understand reality, for that wisdom contains a truly inexhaustible contemporaneity.[9]

The rise and essential tenets of virtue ethics will be considered in the first chapter of this paper. Special attention will be given to one of the most prominent proponents and outspoken voices of virtue ethics: Stanley Hauerwas. Hauerwas's significance for this study will be made clear as that chapter unfolds. Of special interest for this researcher is the challenge which virtue ethics presents to contemporary manifestations of Lutheranism.

Chapter two will listen to four important Lutheran theologians who have committed themselves to a careful analysis of Lutheranism's current struggles with the ethical task. Their observations of present day Lutheranism will support the importance, as well as the relevance, of this

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[9] Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), xii.

study. An attempt will be made to examine their proposed solutions and assess the various arguments' strengths as well as shortcomings, whether actual or potential.

The third chapter will turn to the first generation of 16th century Lutherans in an effort to discern their attitude toward the concept of shaping character and training in virtue. This chapter's investigation will center on Lutheranism's formative and norming documents: the Lutheran Confessions, particularly the Augustana's Apology. The intent of this chapter is to discern whether Lutheranism is, as some have charged, inherently incapable of providing a meaningful account of Christian ethics. That is, do the theological presuppositions and emphases of Lutheran doctrine require a de facto disqualification of any attempts to articulate a Lutheran understanding of ethics? Chapter three will seek an answer in the work of the Reformers.

Having considered the contemporary situation within the Lutheran church and the relative faithfulness of the current manifestation of Lutheranism vis-a-vis the teaching of the Reformers themselves, chapter four will consider possible avenues out of Lutheranism's ethical predicament. Possible solutions to the problem of locating ethics within Lutheran theology will be examined and evaluated, particularly in the light of the findings of chapter three. These will include readily recognized 'standard' solutions, as well as some less familiar.

Chapter five will continue the task initiated in the fourth chapter but will begin the constructive work of proposing and defending a framework that is able to overcome the shortcomings of those previously considered. Ultimately, the chapter will suggest a paradigm or framework within which one may ably conduct the tasks of theology and ethics in a way that is wholly faithful to Lutheran doctrine.

Finally, this paper's sixth chapter will articulate conclusions that can be drawn from the research presented in the antecedent chapters. Additionally, several practical applications of the study as well as avenues for further investigation suggested by the study will be presented. Far from perfunctory addenda, these suggested applications should be recognized as the compelling purpose which has fueled this study from the outset. It is the practical needs of parish pastors and their parishioners which motivated and directed this dissertation. And it is for their sakes that this paper has been produced.

Definitions

This study intends to demonstrate that Lutherans can benefit from and draw upon the work known as virtue ethics without compromising any of the treasure in their theological legacy. Further, the case will be made that virtue ethics provides a surprisingly helpful tool for the current struggle within Lutheranism (highlighted in chapter two) to

address meaningfully and adequately questions relating to the formation

of Christian character and consequent actions. With this in mind, then,

the basic terms, *ethics, virtue, formation,* and *character* particularly

require definition.[10] While the meaning of these terms has begun to

emerge in the preceding discussion, it is prudent to explore definitions

that are more explicit.

As used in this study, *ethics* refers to the overarching responsibility

of the Christian to live his or her life in conformity to Christ. Hauerwas

rightly avers that "ethics is never finally a matter of theory; rather it is a

reflective activity not easily learned."[11] Broadly considered, ethics can

rightly be understood as reflection on the subject of sanctification, or

discipleship, as those terms are popularly understood to name the

challenge of living in a way that is shaped by the scriptural account of

Christ heard within the church. Ethics is concerned with all that it

means practically to be a Christian in this world. Robert Benne provides

a succinct definition: "the disciplined reflection on Christian moral life,"

or "critical and constructive reflection on Christian moral practice."[12]

While this definition certainly leaves space for questions about what

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[10] The terms *narrative* and *practice* are also important for an understanding of virtue ethics. Definitions for these terms will be provided in the context of chapter one's discussion of virtue ethics.

[11] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), xv.

[12] Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme, eds. *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1998), 11.

should or should not be done in difficult "borderline situations," it reflects a greater interest in questions of Christian identity and the shape of the unexceptional routine of Christian living.

Less easily defined, *virtue* names the skills, habits, and ways of being that enable one to conform more nearly to an accepted standard or goal. Significantly, the goal is not to be assumed or understood as inherent or universal among human beings. Hauerwas's recurrent assertion that all ethics must be qualified by an adjective[13] articulates the truth that different communities adopt different understandings of the *telos* of human existence. The particular *telos* which is adopted or enforced in turn determines the virtues necessary to achieve or arrive at that *telos*. Hauerwas poignantly explains the particularity of a community's *telos* and subsequent virtues:

> Christian ethics is not written for everyone, but for those people who have been formed by the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus. Therefore Christian ethics can never be a minimalistic ethic for everyone, but must presuppose a sanctified people wanting to live more faithful to God's story.[14]

The fact that even Christians seem incapable of complete agreement on the *telos* of Christian life corroborates the claim that virtues are far from universal.

It is impossible, then, to define virtue by simply producing a list of noble skills or behaviors. As Brad Kallenberg observes, "the first step in

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[13] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 1.

[14] Ibid., 97.

ethics, therefore, is to identify the *telos* of human life."[15] Having done

that, virtues can be considered. After his own meticulous discussion,

Meilaender comes close to a precise definition of virtue:

> The moral virtues—those excellences which help us attain the
> furthest potentialities of our nature—are, then, not simply
> dispositions to act in certain ways. They are more like skills which
> suit us for life generally—and still more like traits of character which
> not only suit us for life but shape our vision of life, helping to
> determine not only who we are but what world we see.[16]

Virtues are the specific traits, skills, and behaviors that serve both to

define and guide those on the journey toward the agreed upon *telos*.[17]

Formation describes the process by which an individual is shaped

or nurtured into the adoption and espousal of a particular community's

telos and attendant virtues. Formation is a complex process which takes

place throughout life in virtually every area of life as the community

strives, intentionally or not, to conform a person to the way of life of that

community. Obviously, formation entails vastly more than a college

course on "values clarification," or fifteen minutes of basic morality

instruction at the outset of each school day. Formation is best

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[15] Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation, eds., *Virtues & Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 52.

[16] Gilbert Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 11.

[17] The illustration of an athlete in training is helpful. The *telos* is an Olympic gold medal. En route to that goal, however, the athlete must adopt and achieve a score of auxiliary goals requisite for the fulfillment of the desired end. Thus, goals, or virtues, are established relevant to strength, skill, speed, endurance, resilience, etc. While certain commonalities would no doubt arise, each sport would advance its own peculiar "virtues."

understood in the broadest possible sense as it includes a community's unique teaching, conversations, rituals, observations, and practices extending from infancy to death.

Without offering it as definitive evidence, it is interesting that Webster's etymology for *character* captures the intimate connection between formation and character: *"fr. charassein* to scratch, engrave."[18] Put too simplistically, character is the result of formation. More specifically, Webster helpfully provides this definition of character: "the complex of mental and ethical traits marking and often individualizing a person, group, or nation."[19] Traits or habits of thinking and behaving make up the composite of factors which combine to be described as character. Seeking to clarify the distinction between our doing and our being, Hauerwas writes, "character is a designation that marks the continuity present throughout the changes that constitute a complete human life."[20] Understood in a thoroughly practical way, character "is not a theoretical notion, but merely the name we give to the cumulative source of human actions."[21]

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[18] *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1979), 185.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 126.

[21] Stanley Hauerwas with Richard Bondi and David B. Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 29.

Character describes the matrix of personal traits which define, direct, and name an individual. Even more to the point, Hauerwas clarifies that character is roughly synonymous with what is understood by identity. A person does not exhibit character as an external reflection of his more central identity or agency. The person and the person's character are indistinguishable. They are one.

> Our character is not merely the result of our choices, but rather the form our agency takes through our beliefs and intentions.
> ...character is not a surface manifestation of some deeper reality called the "self." We are our character.[22]

Hauerwas makes this point even more emphatically, and given the importance of this definition, it is worth hearing him at length.

> Nothing about my being is more "me" than my character. Character is the basic aspect of our existence. It is the mode of the formation of our "I," for it is character that provides the content of that "I." If we are to be changed in any fundamental sense, then it must be a change of character. Nothing is more nearly at the "heart" of who we are than our character. It is our character that determines the primary orientation and direction which we embody through our beliefs and actions.[23]

Clearly, this definition of character offers no grounds for differentiating between an individual's identity and his or her character. Such psychological or anthropological distinctions appear arbitrary at best. To shape character, then, is to shape the person.

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[22] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 39.

[23] Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1975), 203.

Conclusion

The definitions suggested here raise important questions for the theologian, especially for the Lutheran theologian striving to maintain an unencumbered proclamation of divinely accomplished salvation by grace alone through faith alone. If God is the creator of our persons and the author of our renewal, in what sense can it be said that character is shaped and formed by human effort? If virtue is shaped by the particular *telos* embraced by the individual and the community, do Christians have anything to gain ethically from pagan philosophers, regardless of the possible civil nobility of those philosophers? And, what exactly is the *telos* for a Lutheran believer? The consideration of these and related questions will direct the investigation in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO VIRTUE ETHICS AND STANLEY HAUERWAS

The Rise of Virtue Ethics

William Bennett touched a national nerve in 1993 when he

published his bestseller, *The Book of Virtues*.[1] Many Americans seemed

to be longing for the sort of ethical foundation that Bennett endorsed.

The idea that there are enduring virtues that deserve to be taught

appealed to many who had lived too long in a climate of moral

uncertainty rife with ethical ambiguities. In Bennett's thick book, it was

reassuringly black and white. Here were stories with heroes to be

emulated and villains to be despised. Here was right and wrong that

could be grasped and taught. Of course, Bennett's contribution toward

the restoration of the moral fiber of contemporary culture is but the

populist tip of a significant corpus of work that has come to be called

virtue ethics, or an ethics of virtue.

The academic antecedents to Bennett's popular efforts began

several years earlier. Indeed, one can argue persuasively that an ethics

of virtue is as old as Aristotle or even Plato. It was Plato who identified

and Aristotle who thoroughly expounded what by the Middle Ages had

become the first four of the "seven cardinal virtues" (prudence, justice,

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[1] William J. Bennett, ed., *The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).

fortitude, and temperance). Aristotle's carefully considered ethics supplied the enduring framework for thinking about the virtues and their human manifestations. It was he who set the standard for virtually all subsequent virtue thinkers, including Christian teachers of ethics such as Thomas Aquinas and Philip Melanchthon. Contemporary virtue ethics certainly is interested in the classic virtues as presented by Aristotle and made complete with the addition of the three "theological virtues": faith, hope and love.[2] Still, today's interest in an ethics of virtue is about much more than the promulgation of anthologies describing virtuous individuals or the assignment of a virtue for each month in the academic calendar in the hope of encouraging the cultivation of correspondingly virtuous behavior.[3]

Overshadowed and displaced by the Kantian and later utilitarian directions of Enlightenment ethics, an ethics of virtue began a renaissance in the last part of the twentieth century. "The past fifteen years," wrote Gregory Trianosky in 1990, "have witnessed a dramatic resurgence of philosophical interest in the virtues."[4]

> The charge that modern philosophical thought neglects the
> virtues...once apposite, is by now outmoded; and the calls for a

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[2] The work of Josef Pieper serves not only as an excellent example of contemporary interest in the ancient virtues, but also provides an outstanding discussion of these virtues and their relevance to life in the church today. See Pieper, *Four Cardinal Virtues*.

[3] A practice in evidence on the roadside signboards of St. Louis area schools.

[4] Gregory Trianosky, "What is Virtue Ethics All About?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (October, 1990), 335.

renewed investigation of virtue and virtue ethics are being answered from many quarters.[5]

Of the many quarters providing answers to the call for a retrieval of virtue ethics, or at least the study of virtue, one of the most important is Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre is generally credited with fueling the resurgence of interest in an ethics of virtue by attracting the attention not only of the philosophical community but of the wider academic community and even, to some extent, the general public. With his sharp insight and compelling prose, MacIntyre fully deserves his continuing position of influence and prominence.

Alasdair MacIntyre and After Virtue

MacIntyre's *After Virtue* was published in 1981 and still inspires interest and discussion, as well as no shortage of detractors.[6] In this landmark volume, MacIntyre argues that without the moorings provided by a unified community that prizes and nurtures virtue, isolated moral imperatives make no sense. How can there be agreement on questions of morality when there is no agreement on what is good or virtuous? The

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[5] Ibid.

[6] MacIntyre recognizes that his critique of contemporary culture is an attack on the "Enlightenment Project," his label for the Enlightenment agenda which produced the present ethical collapse. Naturally, his work provokes the anticipated negative reactions from those yet committed to the tenets of modern liberalism. See, for example, Richard J. Bernstein, "Nietzsche or Aristotle?: Reflections on Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*," *Soundings* 67 (spring, 1984), 6-29. See also John Horton and Susan Mendus, eds., *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

result is social moral conflict that is "interminable." "I do not mean by this," writes MacIntyre, "that such debates go on and on and on—although they do—but also that they apparently can find no terminus."[7] He cites the ongoing cultural *angst* over abortion as a prime example. With essentially antithetical conceptions of what is good, it should be small wonder that opposing forces in the current debate find little room for agreement. Because unity cannot be achieved solely through reason, the tone of this and other moral debates inevitably becomes increasingly shrill.

MacIntyre's harsh analysis of modernity's moral paralysis rings with authenticity. Yet, the very truth of his critique provides not even a remote possibility for societal curatives. Indeed, MacIntyre holds out meager hope for the intentionally pluralistic society at large. Essentially abandoning the wider society, he advocates, instead, the founding and flourishing of intimate communities modeled on an Aristotelian standard. Recognizing the significant monastic contribution to medieval society, MacIntyre hopes that the modern refuges he envisions might replicate the monastic success and be bastions in which virtue can be taught, morality encouraged, and the future of civilization itself guarded.

While MacIntyre's cultural assessment may well be accurate and important, his contribution most of interest for theological ethics, and for

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[7] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 6.

this study, is his success in returning virtue to the forefront of ethical discussion and thought. En route to that end, he also served the development of virtue ethics by providing many of the concepts and terms that would make up the vocabulary of thinkers in virtue ethics. Two of most significant of these terms are *narrative* and *practice*. The ideas signified by these terms have become foundational for the movement which has come to be known as "virtue ethics." The tremendous influence of these concepts and their importance as underpinnings of the present study warrant a closer examination.[8]

By narrative, MacIntyre refers to the relationships, responsibilities, and experiences which combine into the particular shape taken by an individual's life. The narrative in which a person lives will in turn direct and explain much of what that person does. A simple example is that "getting dressed for work" and "warming up" will mean quite different things for a concert pianist and football player. Each lives in a different narrative, each of which in turn relates to a wider community of others in similar narratives. MacIntyre writes, "For the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my

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[8] Indeed, some Christian ethicists have seen "a *theory* of Christian ethics lurking in his [MacIntyre's] writings," and elaborated a Christian ethics accordingly. Murphy, Kallenberg, and Nation, xi [emphasis in original]. Kallenberg's essay which reviews the argument of *After Virtue* is quite helpful, but also acknowledges the difficulty of succinctly explaining MacIntyre. "The tricky part of his analysis is that each of the central concepts—*virtue, practice, narrative,* and *tradition*—can be defined only, finally, in terms of the other concepts." Ibid., 20.

identity."9. MacIntyre's concept of narrative is closely related to the idea of practice.

Though often referenced by subsequent thinkers in virtue ethics, MacIntyre's definition of a practice is less succinct or simple than one might hope.[10] A practice is:

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.

Brad Kallenberg, who derives a Christian ethic from the work of MacIntyre, helpfully identifies four central concepts in MacIntyre's definition. "First, practices are human activities," writes Kallenberg, and then, sharpening his observation, he adds, "In addition to being social, these activities are also complex enough to be challenging, and coherent enough to aim at some goal in a unified fashion."[11]

"Second," writes Kallenberg, "practices have goods that are internal to the activity."[12] While external goods, such as economic benefits, fame, or societal prestige, also attend some practices, "true practices are

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[9] MacIntyre, 221.

[10] Kallenberg accurately observes: "MacIntyre defines a *practice* somewhat tortuously." Murphy, Kallenberg, and Nation, 21.

[11] Ibid. Kallenberg gives several examples: "Building a house is a practice, while taking long showers is not. The game of tennis is a practice, but hitting a backhand is not." Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

marked by *internal* goods—those rewards that can recognized and appreciated only by participants."[13] So it is that baseball players have been known to testify that it is "the love of the game" that motivates their play regardless of the financial compensation.

Kallenberg's third observation is that "practices have standards of excellence without which internal goods cannot be fully achieved."[14] The internal goods are realized when what the "historical community of practitioners" have deemed as excellence has been realized.[15] "The joy of chess is in having played *well.*"[16] Finally, in his fourth point, Kallenberg notes that in MacIntyre's definition, "practices are systematically extended." Practices are not static, but demonstrate advances. The practice of medicine has progressed dramatically since the time of Hippocrates, and even since the accomplishments of Christiaan Barnard, yet the practice is still that of medicine and there is a continuity with and appreciation for what preceded. With a better grasp of MacIntyre's understanding of practice, one is able to appreciate another important contribution of *After Virtue*: MacIntyre's definition of virtue as

> an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which
> tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid. [emphasis in original].

[16] Ibid.

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not by duty but by what brings the greatest good to the greatest number.[19]

Christian ethics in the recent past typically had busied itself with the task of discerning the appropriate interface and emphases within the space marked out by these modern ethical approaches.[20] In Christian circles, the debate hinged on whether theological ethics was better described as doing a duty anchored in the divine nature or as focusing on the extrinsic goal of meeting the needs of others.[21] While questions of duty and utility deservedly retain a place within the dynamic of ethical discussion, the retrieval of virtue talk provides a way around the limits imposed by ethical systems that consider only these two possibilities. Virtue ethics is best seen not as an alternative, or third way, but rather as a wider view of the ethical task, one that encompasses the concerns and contributions of both deontological and utilitarian ethics.

Advocates of virtue ethics regard both deontological ethics and ethics of utility in their usual narrow manifestations as insufficient for

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[19] The best-known account is Mill's essay *Utilitarianism* first published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1861. One of many reprints can be found in Steven M. Cahn, ed. *Classics of Western Philosophy*, 5th ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999).

[20] For an excellent contemporary example of this constrained understanding of the purview of ethics see Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1989).

[21] While innumerable examples are available, two roughly contemporary representatives could be found in Joseph Fletcher, with his infamous dictum that love for neighbor overrides all else and Dietrich Bonhoeffer who concluded that "the Christian ethic begins with the divine command and obedience to that command." Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 177-179.

the most critical task of ethics. Describing the recent rise of virtue ethics, William Spohn observed that "almost all proponents of virtue ethics consider it more adequate than utilitarianism or neo-Kantianism because it provides a more comprehensive picture of moral experience and stands closer to the issues of ordinary life."[22] Indeed, this is the great strength and attraction of virtue ethics. Trianosky concurs: "Perhaps the most persuasive argument in favor of studying the virtues is simply that they are the stuff of which much of the moralities of everyday life are made."[23]

Rather than obsessing over moral quandaries arising out of difficult, though exceptional and rarely encountered ethical dilemmas, an ethics of virtue concentrates on the development of people who display virtuous character in the mundane routines of ordinary life. Proponents of virtue ethics find little value in plaguing students with artificial situations that demand a decision, such as the ubiquitous 'should a person lie to save a life?' Those who teach virtue ethics believe rather that it is far more important that students be nurtured by their communities, according to the norms and standards of those

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[22] William C. Spohn, "The Return of Virtue Ethics," *Theological Studies* 53 (March 1992), 60.

[23] Trianosky, 342. Hauerwas offers a more basic, if less flattering, explanation for the rise of virtue ethics: "For in effect the paradigm of ethics inherited from Kant has been burdened by so many anomalies, has died the death of so many qualifications, that a new alternative simply needed to be suggested. Thus some may well have been attracted to the emphasis on virtue and character because if offered a relief from boredom." Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 77.

communities, into people of virtuous character who will make ethically virtuous decisions in all the ordinary as well as the extraordinary circumstances of life.

Certainly, extraordinary moments of ethical perplexity do arise. Nonetheless, "an ethic of virtue," Gilbert Meilaender observes, "seeks to focus not only on such moments of great anxiety and uncertainty in life but also on the continuities, the habits of behavior which make us the persons we are."[24] Put another way, an ethics of virtue focuses on "being" while traditional ethics of duty or utility tend to focus on "doing." Stanley Hauerwas agrees that "Christian ethics is concerned more with who we are than what we do."[25] He adds, however, a clarification which eliminates any notion that virtue ethics is perhaps unconcerned about questions of behavior:

> This is not to suggest that our actions, decisions and choices are unimportant, but rather that the church has a stake in holding together our being and behaving in such a manner that our doing only can be a reflection of our character.[26]

Virtue ethics, then, strives to join the expected ethical questions concerning behavior and choices of right versus wrong with the broader issues of the formation of enduring character and the cultivation of virtue.

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[24] Meilaender, *Theory and Practice*, 5.

[25] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 33.

[26] Ibid., 33-34.

Another contribution of ethics centered on virtue is the recognition
that an individual's character has much to do with that individual's
perception of ethical situations. Put differently, the sort of virtues that
shape a person's life will determine how that person thinks about moral
questions. One man's paralyzing moral dilemma is another's black and
white conclusion. Meilaender notes, "what we ought to do may depend
on the sort of person we are. What duties we perceive may depend upon
what virtues shape our vision of the world."[27] Those who advocate virtue
ethics recognize that it is quite impossible to practice a deontological or a
utilitarian ethic without that ethic's being shaped by one's virtues or lack
of virtues. In fact, whether acknowledged or not, the essential truths of
virtue ethics have always been in operation even when the ethical task
was confined to questions of duty or utility. Contemporary virtue ethics
seeks to articulate these truths and so enrich the field of ethics and as
well as its wider contributions.

Virtue ethics, then, certainly is concerned with among other things
the promotion and cultivation of virtue. Obviously, however, this is not
virtue according to the usual popular understanding: that peculiar asset
of women who have lived chastely and maintained their sexual purity.
Neither is the understanding of virtue to be diminished into what
Meilaender terms the "cardinal virtues of our time, sincerity and

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[27] Ibid.

authenticity—in short, being true to oneself."[28] In contrast to a

subjective morality of individual autonomy, an ethics of virtue contends

that there do exist objective standards for human being, the pursuit of

which is encouraged and enhanced by the adoption of virtues. Virtues,

then, are significantly more than guidelines for polite human interaction.

Virtues "call attention not only to certain basic obligations which

we owe each other; they call us out on an endless quest toward the

perfection of our being."[29] Virtues direct individuals toward some goal or

standard. By way of definition, then, Meilaender refers to virtues as

"those excellences which help us attain the furthest potentialities of our

nature."[30] More than "simply dispositions to act in certain ways," virtues

are "like skills which suit us for life generally—and still more like traits of

character which not only suit us for life but shape our vision of life."[31]

Hence, virtue ethics encompasses the particular interests and emphases

of deontological and teleological or utilitarian ethics. There are

standards grounded in the authority of absolutes, and there is an end or

a *telos* which serves as a goal for human beings.

At first blush, it would seem that those within the church would

enthusiastically applaud the rise of virtue ethics. Certainly, virtue ethics

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[28] Ibid., 4.

[29] Ibid., 7.

[30] Ibid., 11. It is not difficult to detect the influence of MacIntyre in Meilaender's defintion.

[31] Ibid.

appears particularly attractive when considered in the light of the last great ethical fad that swept church and society. Traditional Christian believers found little to admire in the situation ethics of Joseph Fletcher. In Fletcher's hybrid ethics, where one's duty is to do the most loving thing, norms and mores that had been in place for millennia seemed to be carelessly jettisoned and the moral relativity of the culture justified.[32] By comparison, virtue ethics brings church and society back to an unapologetic affirmation of traditional morality and ethical education. How can the church argue with a movement that produces people of virtuous character, that is, people who live morally decent, upright lives, and support standards of thinking and acting which conform even to biblical norms?

The Place of Virtue in Christian History

It is worth digressing here for a brief consideration of the history, or the rise and fall, of virtue within the church. The current attempt to establish a place for virtue within Christian theology is actually better understood as retrieval rather than innovation. There was a significant period when virtue was encouraged as the superior explication of Christian ethics. In a helpful study, Robert Bast traces virtue's ascendancy to the second century, when Ireneaus contended that

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[32] Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: the New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966).

Christian ethics excelled Jewish Law, even as Jesus exceeded the limits

of the Decalogue with his amplifications.[33] In the late sixth century,

Pope Gregory the Great advanced the argument by drafting an entire

moral system based not on the Ten Commandments but on New

Testament imperatives. "Culling ethical imperatives and prohibitions

almost exclusively from the Gospels, the Epistles, and patristic theology,"

writes Bast, "Gregory created a patchwork of moral teaching organized

into seven virtues and seven vices (or "deadly sins").[34]

Christian ethics based on the virtues and their corresponding vices

held sway in the church for better than half a millennium. Thomas

Aquinas contributed to the secure position of the virtues with his own

explication of the virtues in the *Summa Theologica* and his affirmation of

Aristotelian ethics.[35] Gradually, however, through a combination of

many factors, the Decalogue regained its place within Christendom.

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[33] Robert James Bast, *Honor Your Fathers: Catechisms and the Emergence of a Patriarchal Ideology in Germany 1400-1600*, vol. 63 in *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, ed. Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 33.

[34] Ibid., 34. Gregory's vices were: Vainglory, envy, anger, melancholy, avarice, gluttony, and lust. Corresponding in number to these vices were the "highest virtues": prudence, temperance, fortitude, justice, faith, hope, and love. (Other "intermediary virtues," such as patience, chastity, humility, etc., were added as necessary to specifically combat the vices.) Peter of Waltham, *Source Book of Self-Discipline: A Synthesis of* Moralia in Job *by Gregory the Great: A Translation of Peter of Waltham's* Remediarium Conversorum, trans. Joseph Gildea in *American University Studies* Series 7, Theology and Religion 117 (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 86-87, 241-242. The remarkable influence of Gregory's system in subsequent centuries, indeed even down to the present, provides sufficient argument of its importance. Nevertheless, a more thoroughgoing analysis of his detailed proposal lies beyond the scope of the present investigation.

[35] MacIntyre observed that, "Aquinas' commentary on the *Nicomachean Ehtics* has never been bettered." MacIntyre, 178.

Bast credits Hugh of St. Victor and then Peter Lombard with the beginning of the reemergence of Christian interest in the Commandments.[36] This interest gained momentum in subsequent generations.

> Though it [the Decalogue] never entirely replaced the Gregorian system of the virtues and vices, by the fifteenth century it had become the single most popular guide for moral instruction in much of Europe—a position confirmed in the catechetical programs of Protestants and Catholics in the sixteenth century.[37]

Bast attributes the mounting interest in the Decalogue at the time of the Reformation to the unrest and chaos in society. The Commandments were "the intended tonic for a critically ill Christendom...a tool to fashion an ordered, godly society."[38]

It is interesting to note that at least through the Reformation period, the Commandments were not perceived as a replacement for the system of virtue. Rather they could be reckoned as complementary, the Decalogue providing guides for specific behavior, whereas the virtues "generally dealt with feelings rather than actions."[39] The Lutheran reformers, as later chapters will demonstrate, embraced the Commandments, yet continued to use the language of virtue. Eventually, however, interest in the system of virtues faded as the

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[36] Ibid., 35.

[37] Ibid., 36.

[38] Ibid., 43.

[39] Ibid., 44.

Commandments "became the normative guideline for teaching and

enforcing morality."[40] The virtues continued their decline, especially

within Protestantism, until today's present interest in virtue talk is

typically perceived as an innovation.

While there are relevant historical factors involved in the rise of the

Ten Commandments and erosion of the place of virtue talk, Josef Pieper

supplies perhaps the most compelling explanation for the present

displacement of virtue within Christian theology. He candidly observes:

> It is true that the classic origins of the doctrine of virtue later made
> Christian critics suspicious of it. They warily regarded it as too
> philosophical and not Scriptural enough. Thus, they preferred to talk
> about commandments and duties rather than about virtues.[41]

Pieper's goal is to make a compelling case for renewed study and

application of the virtues. He is convinced that a doctrine of virtue has

much to add to the understanding of the Christian's life.

> The doctrine of virtue...has things to say about this human person; it
> speaks both of the kind of being which is his when he enters the
> world, as a consequence of his createdness, and the kind of being he
> ought to strive toward and attain to—by being prudent, just, brave,
> and temperate.[42]

That others agree with Pieper accounts for what has come to be known in

recent times as virtue ethics. It was a time of cultural and civil crisis

that brought a resurgence of interest in the Commandments before and

during the Reformation. Perhaps the same motivations are driving the

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[40] Ibid., 45.

[41] Pieper, *Four Cardinal Virtues*, xi.

[42] Ibid., xii.

call for a return of virtue. There remain, however, a few crucial factors

which may militate against a Lutheran endorsement of virtue.

The Lutheran Dilemma

While churchly supporters of virtue ethics such as Josef Pieper are

increasingly common, a more considered evaluation quickly raises some

fundamental concerns. In the minds of some Christians, Lutherans in

particular, the idea of cultivating virtues is tied too closely to popular

notions of self-fulfillment.[43] People who achieve virtue are people who

have arrived at self-realization, and efforts at self-realization hardly seem

compatible with the New Testament's teaching of self-sacrifice. Virtue

ethics could be charged with complicity in the creation of the very

egocentric, self-serving individuals so prevalent in contemporary culture

over which the Christian church typically and loudly laments.

Meilaender clearly articulates a perhaps even greater concern:

> Furthermore, the very notion of character seems to suggest—*has*
> suggested at least since Aristotle—habitual behavior, abilities within
> our power, an acquired possession. And this in turn may be difficult
> to reconcile with the Christian emphasis on grace, the sense of the
> sinner's constant need of forgiveness, and the belief that we can have
> no claims upon the freedom of God.[44]

Could it be that virtue ethics actually promotes the most damnable and

dangerous of all enemies of Christian truth: self-righteous legalism?

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[43] See for example, Ivar Asheim, "Lutherische Tugendethik?" *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 40 (1998): 239-260.

[44] Meilaender, *Theory and Practice*, 6.

Indeed, doesn't any emphasis on behavior and virtuous character run the risk of advancing the works righteousness that lurks always just outside the door of orthodoxy?

These are weighty questions for any heir of the Reformation. For Lutherans in particular, the tenets of virtue ethics can arouse substantial theological concerns. An ethics of virtue elevates the pursuit of character and extols the practice of habituation as an integral aid in the cultivation of character. Of course, these were central concepts in the scholastic theology against which the reformers fought with such vehemence. In fact, a favorite teacher of many virtue ethicists is none other than Thomas Aquinas, the oft-quoted and misquoted patron of many of the scholastics whose works-righteousness the reformers found reprehensible. Luther, and the reformers who bore his name after him, placed the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone at the heart and center of their theology. Anything that threatened this doctrine was to be resisted and rejected. Of course, the actual practice of applying this central article of the faith while still encouraging a life of Christian obedience led to significant debates within Lutheranism even during Luther's life and certainly after his death. Nevertheless, the legacy of the article by which the church stands or falls continues to provide the essential shape of Lutheran doctrine and practice today. And, some would conclude that this legacy does not allow for the kind of emphases found in virtue ethics.

It is certainly to their credit that Lutherans teach the doctrine of justification with great zeal and devotion. But, does this legitimate priority of promoting and defending the central teaching of the church render impossible any meaningful appropriation of the benefits of virtue ethics? It is not without cause that jokes about the Lutheran reluctance or perhaps inability to handle theological ethics continue to abound.[45] There is enough truth behind the classroom comedy, however, that it can be rightly classed as gallows humor. Lutheranism's detachment from ethics is prompting an increasing number of contemporary critics to voice their concern over the apparent failure of Lutheranism to articulate a significant place for the ethical task within the work of the church.[46] *Ethical task* here refers not to questions of social action, moral management of new technologies, or guidance in making difficult decisions in borderline situations. The ethical task which seems too often beyond the grasp of Lutheran theologians is the fundamental, altogether practical, work of providing concrete guidance and intentional shape to the routine Christian life. Bill Bennett, a Roman Catholic, can do it, but can Lutheran theologians?

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[45] A case in point is the introduction of a speech delivered to fellow Lutherans by Gilbert Meilaender: "The letter of invitation...asked that I 'point with pride to some past Lutheran accomplishments' in the field of ethics and that I speak for about an hour. Taken together, of course, these requests might be thought to constitute a rather difficult assignment, but the letter bore no traces of irony, nor did it even hint that to combine 'Lutheran ethics' and 'accomplishments' might be what the logicians call a *contradictio in adjecto*." Gilbert Meilaender, "The Task of Lutheran Ethics," *Lutheran Forum* 34, 4 (Winter 2000), 17.

[46] Representative voices will be considered in the chapter that follows.

There are some who would conclude that they cannot. Remarkably, even some from within the Lutheran community question the ability of Lutherans to provide a compelling account of the Christian life and the ethics that describe that life. One of the clearest articulations of the Lutheran failure to handle the concerns of ethics, however, comes from the pen of a Methodist named Stanley Hauerwas.

An Introduction to Stanley Hauerwas and His Work

A brief consideration of the work of Stanley Hauerwas actually serves a twofold purpose within the scope of this paper. Not only does an examination of Hauerwas yield an increased understanding of the challenge that virtue ethics poses to some contemporary interpretations of Lutheran doctrine, but as a recognized representative of virtue-centered ethics, Hauerwas provides a fuller grasp of the concerns and contributions of virtue ethics. Currently teaching at Duke, Hauerwas is the Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Theological Ethics. Through his teaching and writing career, he has gained the deserved reputation as one of the prominent spokespersons of contemporary virtue ethics. John Berkman identifies him as "a seminal figure in the 'recovery of virtue' in theological ethics."[47] And, Nancey Murphy recognizes that "there has been a sea change in *Christian* ethics, due largely but not exclusively to

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[47] Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, 3.

the prolific Stanley Hauerwas."[48] Hauerwas is of further specific interest

in relation to this paper, however, in that he directly addresses the

apparent inability of Lutheran doctrine to handle the necessary

questions of growth in virtue and character development.

Not a clergyman, Hauerwas nevertheless regularly contends, with

some justification it seems, that he is more theologian than ethicist. "I

am a Christian theologian who teaches ethics," he writes, adding, "Being

a theologian has become a habit for me that I cannot nor do I wish to

break. I am also an ethicist, but I do not make much of that claim."[49]

Early in his academic career, Hauerwas characterized his own "central

concern" as the "task of finding the most appropriate means to articulate

how Christians have understood, and do and should understand, the

relationship between Christ and the moral life."[50] In words that have

proven to be normative for his subsequent career, Hauerwas described

his work and its emphasis:

> I have tried to reclaim and to develop the significance of character and
> virtue for the moral life. Character is the category that marks the fact
> that our lives are not constituted by decisions, but rather the moral

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[48] Murphy, Kallenberg, and Nation, 1. Prolific accurately describes the work of Hauerwas: "He has authored or edited over thirty books and well over three hundred and fifty scholarly articles." Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, 3.

[49] Stanley Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 201.

[50] Stanley Hauerwas, "The Ethicist as Theologian," *The Christian Century* 92 (April 1975), 409. Decades later Hauerwas confirmed his contention: "Given the nature of my subsequent work, I think it is apparent my primary agenda was and always has been theological." Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, 79.

quality of our lives is shaped by the ongoing orientation formed in and through our beliefs, stories and intentions.[51]

This is indeed a precise description of the work of Hauerwas and, it should be noted, of virtue ethics itself.

Raised as a Methodist, Hauerwas earned his doctoral degree at Yale and taught at Notre Dame before making the move to Duke. Confirming in his own life his insistence on the crucial significance of one's community in the shaping of character, Hauerwas's work amply evidences the influence of each of these communities.[52] Throughout the scores of published essays and books which bear his name, several themes consistently appear and reappear. Naturally, as an ethicist, Hauerwas is compelled to address some of the pressing ethical quandaries of the day including abortion, homosexuality, and the breakdown of the family. His impassioned advocacy of many traditionally conservative causes has led some to label him accordingly. Though Hauerwas does regularly occupy positions in sympathy with those of conservative Christians, he defies easy categorization.

Always near the forefront of his practical concerns is an appeal for Christian pacifism, or as he usually refers to it, nonviolence. Hauerwas consistently advocates the standard of thoroughgoing nonviolence for

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[51] Hauerwas, *The Ethicist as Theologian*, 411.

[52] Not surprisingly, Hauerwas is quite candid about the various influences which shaped him theologically and ethically. See, for example his "On What I Owe to Whom" in Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, xix-xxv.

God's people and church.[53] Hauerwas also regularly returns to the

question of the handicapped and the tremendous importance and

significance of their being welcomed into Christian families and

communities.[54] Finally, another representative issue occurring with

some regularity in the corpus of Hauerwas is a deep suspicion of the

modern capitalistic, democratic nation state. While Hauerwas is no

Marxist, he has concerns about the Enlightenment-formed foundation

that underlies the American experiment.[55] Throughout all of his

occasional writing, however, the recurrent and foundational themes are

the ones staked out in 1975: the importance of virtue and character.

Nancey Murphy concurs that these are the central aspects of Hauerwas's

efforts: "Hauerwas tends to talk about Christian morality in terms of

narratives and *community, virtue* and *character.*"[56] The twofold emphasis

on virtue and character is joined with the pair, narrative and community,

which receive particular emphasis in his discussions on church and

theology.

Hauerwas demonstrates an able competence in facing the

challenges posed by the discipline of theology. Trained at Yale by, among

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[53] For example, see his discussion connecting the resurrection of Christ to "the establishment of a kingdom of forgiveness and peace," in Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 87-91.

[54] Hauerwas, Bondi, and Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 147-156.

[55] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 72-86.

[56] Murphy, Kallenberg, and Nation, 1(emphasis in original).

others, Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, Hauerwas reflects common post-

liberal ideals such as the importance of the community in shaping

individuals and the centrality of narrative in theology. These are themes

that have been present in his work from the beginning. As he began his

career, he wrote of his hope that the church would

> "stand as an alternative society that manifests in its own social and
> political life the way in which a people form themselves when truth
> and charity rather than survival are their first order of business."[57]

In his only book aimed specifically at a popular audience, *Resident

Aliens*, Hauerwas and co-author William Willimon wrote: "The challenge

of Jesus is the political dilemma of how to be faithful to a strange

community, which is shaped by a story of how God is with us."[58] Here

both themes coalesce. The church is political in a broad sense in that it

is about people gathered together in community or *polis*. For Hauerwas,

the community in which a person should be shaped and formed in

character is none other than the church, and that community should be

shaped in turn by its faithful commitment to the story of Jesus as

recorded in the Gospels.

Hauerwas closely binds these twin concerns of narrative and

community in other places as well. In *A Community of Character*, he

writes:

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[57] Hauerwas, "The Ethicist as Theologian," 411.

[58] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 30.

The primary task of the church is to be itself—that is, a people who have been formed by a story that provides them with the skills for negotiating the danger of this existence trusting God's promise of redemption.[59]

This is such a prominent aspect of Hauerwas's work that it would be difficult to overemphasize it. In yet another place, he stated his position this way: "The nature of Christian ethics is determined by the fact that Christian convictions take the form of a story, or perhaps better, a set of stories that constitutes a tradition, which in turn creates and forms a community."[60] It is this emphasis on the creating and norming narrative of the church that guides Hauerwas to his critique of the way that Lutheran doctrine too frequently approaches questions of virtue and character formation. Hauerwas is convinced that ethics must be intimately bound to the doctrinal task of the church. He is also convinced that Lutheranism has too often shown itself ill suited for achieving and maintaining such a union.

Hauerwas's Critique of Lutheranism

It is important to recognize that the essence of Hauerwas's critique of Lutheran doctrinal practice springs from his commitment to the narrative nature of the Christian faith. In other words, Hauerwas contends that one must look at the Christian life not as two parts,

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[59] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 10.

[60] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 24.

namely what a Christian believes and what a Christian does. Instead, as

Hauerwas sees it, what a Christian believes and what a Christian does

are so thoroughly interrelated and interdependent as to be

indistinguishable. "Theological claims are fundamentally practical and

Christian ethics is but that form of theological reflection which attempts

to explicate this inherently practical nature."[61] Christian doctrine and

Christian ethics should not, then, be divided into two separate

disciplines. They are equally significant aspects of one unified story.

Hauerwas insists that the division between ethics and doctrine, so

commonplace in contemporary Christianity was not always so.

> Once there was no Christian ethics simply because Christians could
> not distinguish between their beliefs and their behavior. They
> assumed that their lives exemplified (or at least should exemplify)
> their doctrines in a manner that made division between life and
> doctrine impossible.[62]

This is not to say that it is impossible or imprudent to distinguish at

times between theology and ethics. "The task of the theologian,"

Hauerwas explains, "is not to deny that for certain limited purposes

ethics can be distinguished from theology, but to reject their supposed

ontological and practical independence."[63] Hauerwas takes sharp issue,

therefore, with seminary curricula which require the completion of

systematic theology as prerequisites for courses on ethics. "In such a

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[61] Ibid., 54.

[62] Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, 20.

[63] Ibid.

context theology begins to look like a 'metaphysics' on which one must get straight before you can turn to questions of ethics."[64] This alienation between theology and ethics, Hauerwas believes, leads to the diminution of both. Theology becomes increasingly theoretical and removed from the practicalities of Christian living. Ethics in turn struggles to find a ground which lends it legitimacy and significance in the life of the church.

Hauerwas recognizes a combination of factors which contributed to this unfortunate divorce between theology and ethics. A chief culprit was the Enlightenment, which eroded confidence in Christian truth claims and left theologians trying "to secure the ongoing meaningfulness of Christian convictions by anchoring them in anthropological generalizations and/or turning them into ethics."[65] Enlightened theologians abandoned the embarrassingly exclusive propositional claims of Christianity and embraced the universality of humanity's assumed common ethical foundation.

Hauerwas also finds fault with the Reformation itself, which he believes shares responsibility for the divide between ethics and doctrine that inevitably precipitated a cloud of suspicion around ethics.

> Yet the polemical terms of the Reformation could not help but reshape how ethics was conceived in relation to theology. Faith, not works, determines the Christian's relationship to God. Moreover works

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[64] Ibid., 32.

[65] Ibid., 30.

became associated with 'ethics,' particularly as ethics was alleged to be the way sinners attempt to secure their standing before God as a means of avoiding complete dependence on God's grace. So for Protestants the Christian life is now characterized in such a way that there always exists a tension between law and grace.[66]

It is worth noting, however, that Hauerwas does not credit this division with Luther. He states, "Neither Luther or [sic] Calvin distinguished between theology and ethics," and points to *The Freedom of a Christian* as his evidence.[67] The rift between theology and its practical form demonstrated in the Christian life, or ethics, came about, ironically enough, when a zeal to guard the Reformation's central doctrine led subsequent reformers into positions eschewed by the very forebears credited with the doctrine's rediscovery.[68]

Hauerwas indulges in historical consideration, however, only to reinforce his case that things are not now as they once were or should be. His concern is with the contemporary situation. He decries the ongoing failure of Christians to rectify the unwarranted division between theological truth and the ethical task. He levels his complaint against Protestantism in general and sharpens his thrust with a specific rebuke of contemporary Lutheranism. Lutheranism, he alleges, is particularly culpable for perpetuating the estrangement between ethics and theology. Presumably, Hauerwas is acquainted with a number of theologians who

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[66] Ibid., 27.

[67] Ibid.

[68] The teaching of the reformers, particularly Philip Melanchthon, will receive greater attention in chapter three and four.

might be considered Lutheran. However, it is Gilbert Meilaender and his work that receive particular consideration in essays by Hauerwas. Since Meilaender is one of the few Lutheran ethicists writing in support of virtue ethics, it is reasonable that Hauerwas would choose to interact with him. Further, Meilaender specifically addresses the relation of ethics to theology, providing Hauerwas ready material for evaluation. In at least two separate essays, Hauerwas takes up the argument of Meilaender and considers its merit. It is prudent, therefore, to offer a brief overview of Meilaender's case.[69]

The Christian life, as Meilaender sees it, may be pictured as both dialogue and journey. According to the dialogue paradigm, the Christian life is a movement back and forth between the two words of God: Law and Gospel. The Law condemns and convicts, driving the despairing believer into the Gospel. Comforted and confident in the wake of the Gospel encounter, the believer is freed to return to the Law—only to be crushed again and so driven back once more to the Gospel. And so it goes. Back and forth, back and forth. "On this model," writes Meilaender, "there can be no notion of progress in righteousness; for righteousness is purely relational in character."[70] Before God, *coram deo*, this is precisely the way that Christians experience life. Yet, this is

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[69] Meilaender and his work will be examined more thoroughly in the chapter that follows.

[70] Gilbert Meilaender, "The Place of Ethics in the Theological Task," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 6 (1979), 200.

but half the picture. The Christian life, Meilaender argues, can also be understood as a journey, that is, "the process by which God graciously transforms a sinner into a saint, as a pilgrimage (always empowered by grace) toward fellowship with God."[71] In this image, the Christian life is aiming at a particular goal. It is going *some*where, not just back and forth. Both portrayals have their strengths and weaknesses. Both testify to critical aspects of the Christian's life. Both find support in Scripture. Both, Meilaender insists, must be kept in tension in the Christian life: "The tension between these two pictures of the Christian life cannot be overcome, nor should we try to overcome it."[72] Hauerwas, however, is unconvinced and takes exception to Meilaender's Lutheran argument:

> This strikes me as what a good Lutheran should say—namely, that it is crucial to keep the two metaphors in dialectical tension so that the full range of Christian existence *coram deo* is before us. But I am not a good Lutheran, and I want to argue that the metaphor of the journey is and surely should be the primary one for articulating the shape of Christian existence and living.[73]

Concerned that "Meilaender's faithful Lutheranism" extends, and indeed exacerbates, the unfortunate divide between doctrine and ethics, Hauerwas presents a vision of the Christian life which joins Meilaender's two separate paradigms into one unified portrayal. From the perspective of Hauerwas, Meilaender's Lutheranism is no small part of his problem. "Meilaender's account of dialogue is too Lutheran for me," Hauerwas

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 210.

[73] Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, 87.

writes, "After all, a dialogue can be an ongoing conversation in which one can certainly make progress."[74] Hauerwas is dissatisfied with the seemingly endless circularity of Meilaender's account of dialogue and sees an emphasis on the journey metaphor as the way to escape this stultifying cul-de-sac. "The metaphor of dialogue only makes sense as a necessary and continuing part of the journey."[75] For Hauerwas, the truth of the Christian's forgiveness through Christ's life and resurrection belongs to the overall narrative of the Christian's life. What Lutherans name justification, in distinction from sanctification, Hauerwas makes part of, and normative for, the journey that is the Christian's story as it is lived in relation to Christ's story.

Hauerwas frankly admits that his concentration on the metaphor of journey and the incorporation of dialogue, and with it justification, into the journey image is susceptible to misconstrual. Writing with Charles Pinches, he concedes, "We no doubt appear to leave justification behind in emphasizing sanctification and the virtues it makes available."[76] Determined to dispel this appearance, however, Hauerwas strives to demonstrate that the Christian's forgiveness is at once the beginning as well as the context for the journey that describes the Christian's life.

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[74] Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 127.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues*, 116.

> Suppose we fix on what is perhaps the most rudimentary notion of justification imaginable: by justification we are made just before God. As Paul makes plain, something decisive has occurred in Jesus that has changed our status as God sees us. Put this way, we can see that "justification" begs for narrative display: what we were before, what are we now, and where is this change taking us?[77]

Far from negating the importance of justification, Hauerwas seeks to impart particular prominence to justification by considering it within an eschatological context. "Paul's emphasis upon justification, and virtually all else he says," according to Hauerwas, "is incomprehensible apart from his eschatology."[78] It is the Christian's life, his eschatologically oriented journey, which becomes the "narrative display" or the concrete shape of his justification, even when this is understood in a strictly forensic sense.

This emphasis on eschatology, pointing to the *telos* of the Christian narrative, bolsters Hauerwas's case for the sufficiency of the journey motif, without recourse to Meilaender's separate dialogue paradigm. "The metaphor of dialogue," Hauerwas argues, "only makes sense as a necessary and continuing part of the journey."[79] For Hauerwas, the truth of the sinner's justification before God is contained within and illuminated by the idea of growth or journey: "We can grow in Christian virtue, yet it is best to describe this as growth in grace, whose hallmark

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[77] Ibid., 117.

[78] Ibid., 118.

[79] Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, 127.

is forgiveness."[80]   This growth, of course, is bound up in eschatological

reality:

> If we refuse to be forgiven, we grow neither in virtue nor in grace.... Our acceptance of forgiveness is the means by which our souls are expanded so that we can hope. Through hope we learn to endure suffering, confident that God has given us the character faithfully to inhabit the story of the redemption of all creation, of which we are part.[81]

Dialogue, or justification, and journey or sanctification, blend into a

single narrated account. Thus, from Hauerwas's viewpoint, Meilaender's

portrayal of two distinct paradigms is not a helpful way of considering

the Christian life, but an unnecessary and unhappy division which

sustains the divorce between theology and ethics.

Hauerwas is insistent on the necessity of overcoming Meilaender's

tension between dialogue and journey because of his conviction that

ethics and doctrine, or practice and belief, must not be driven into

separate corners. He charges that Meilaender's (and Lutheranism's?)

approach needlessly sustains the divorce between ethics and theology.

"The problem," Hauerwas explains, "is that when either justification or

sanctification becomes an independent theological notion something has

gone wrong."[82] The correction of this wrong turn is a consistent concern

of Hauerwas and motivates his criticism of Meilaender's Lutheranism. In

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[80] Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 128.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, 127. As subsequent chapters will indicate, this is a statement which many Lutherans would willingly affirm.

The Peaceable Kingdom, Hauerwas explicitly expressed the importance of

adopting a structuring horizon for the Christian life wider than the

maintenance of perpetual tension:

> For the language of "sanctification'" and "justification" is not meant to
> be descriptive of a status. Indeed, part of the problem with those
> terms is that they are abstractions. When they are separated from
> Jesus' life and death, they distort Christian life. "Sanctification" is
> but a way of reminding us of the kind of journey we must undertake if
> we are to make the story of Jesus our story. "Justification" is but a
> reminder of the character of that story—namely, what God has done
> for us by providing us with a path to follow.[83]

The essential ideas of justification (what God does for us) and

sanctification (our response of holy living) are retained, but Hauerwas

places both in the wider context of a narrated theology. The Christian

life is not understood as a tension between theology and ethics, or

between dialogue and journey. Christianity, as Hauerwas sees it, is as

great and as simple as the Christian learning to make his story part of

Jesus' story. Justification and sanctification are merely components of

that wider frame.[84] Accepting as the norming horizon an irresolvable

tension between dialogue and journey or between doctrine and ethics,

Hauerwas would charge, leads inevitably to an ethics set adrift and

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[83] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom,* 94.

[84] Many Lutheran theologians would take exception to Hauerwas' definition of
justification and the inclusion of justification within the journey imagery. The Lutheran
concerns with Hauerwas' teaching on justification are considered more fully in the next
chapter (see page 17ff). For now, it is sufficient to suggest that from a Lutheran
perspective justification might better be understood as the fact that Jesus' story before,
and outside of, the believer is wholly sufficient for that believer's eschatological
acquittal, entirely independent of the believer's own subsequent efforts to live the story.

consequently a lackluster interest in the cultivation of virtue and character formation.

A thorough summary of Hauerwas's position appears in *The Hauerwas Reader*. It deserves citing at some length:

> I am aware that my claim for the priority of the journey metaphor for the display of the Christian life can only reinforce the suspicion of some that I have abandoned the central Christian contention of the priority of God's grace. I know of no way in principle to calm such fears. Moreover I am aware it is not sufficient to claim, as I have here and elsewhere, that I have no intention of qualifying the necessity of God's grace for the beginning, living, and end of the Christian life. What I hope is now clear, however, is that I refuse to think the only or best way to depict the priority of God's grace is in terms of the dialogue metaphor. This has certainly been the dominant mode among Protestants, but exactly because it has been so, we have had difficulty articulating our sense of the reality of and growth in the Christian life.[85]

Consideration of Hauerwas' Critique

Virtue ethics, it seems, poses a significant challenge to Lutheran theology. Lutheranism's proclivity for tension and duality is well known and readily documented. Equally recognized is Lutheranism's typical ambivalence toward issues of ethics, preferring instead to emphasize the church's central article of justification. Appearances notwithstanding, however, this study will demonstrate that contemporary virtue ethics has much to contribute to the Lutheran church of today and that, reciprocally, the field known as virtue ethics can learn important lessons

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[85] Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader*, 88.

from Lutheranism. Of course, a Lutheranism ready both to receive from and to contribute to an ethics of virtue will likely look substantially different from the one recognized by Hauerwas.

Interestingly, such a portrayal of Lutheranism may also be altogether unfamiliar to some of those who today bear the reformer's name. It is hoped, however, that while the account of Lutheran theology presented in this study may appear foreign to certain contemporary manifestations and understandings of Lutheranism, it will nevertheless prove to be one that the reformers themselves would have readily recognized. As the reformers knew and taught, there is a place within Lutheran theology for ethics. Today, that place is filled remarkably well by the ethics that focuses on the cultivation of character and the promotion of the virtues. Careful listening to notable representative voices within contemporary Lutheranism will occupy the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTEMPORARY LUTHERAN VOICES AND THE CHALLENGE OF

VIRTUE ETHICS

Lutheran Critiques of Contemporary Lutheranism

Since the days of Luther, Lutheranism has widely enjoyed a

reputation for meticulous, insightful, and often influential theology.

Roughly corresponding to this enviable reputation for profound theology

is the antithetical assumption that the cultivation of great ethical

thinkers is not to be expected from Lutheran soil. Of course, there have

been notable exceptions. The tribulation of Nazi Germany proved an

effective fertilizer for ethical reflection, and both Dietrich Bonhoeffer and

Helmut Thielicke evinced Lutheranism's capacity for the production of

capable ethical thinkers. Chapter three will present the case for similarly

considering Melanchthon and some of his contemporaries as Lutherans

who took seriously the questions and challenges of ethics. The present

chapter will consider current Lutheran theologians whose continuing

work may yet successfully overcome the common caricature of Lutheran

ethical inadequacy or inability.[1]

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[1] Typical of this caricature is the summarizing comment of Stackhouse and McCann in their rebuttal of Robert Benne's critique of their own work: "But we do not want to rub this in. It is difficult enough being a Lutheran ethicist—if one always has a bad conscience for speaking of good works." Max L. Stackhouse and Dennis P. McCann, "Responses to a Postcommunist Manifesto: Ethics, Economics and the Corporate Life," *The Christian Century*, 16 (January 23, 1991), 83.

Contemporary virtue ethics confronts Lutheran doctrine with a significant challenge, accusing it of a failure adequately to address important ethical questions with regard to the cultivation of Christian character and development of virtues within the individual Christian's life. Stanley Hauerwas has specifically charged Lutheran theology with complicity in the persistent rift between doctrine and ethics which in turn fosters widespread ethical ignorance and indifference among Christians. Undue obsession with the doctrine of justification is the regularly cited cause of Lutheranism's ethical difficulties.

In varying degrees, the writers considered in this chapter will take up the challenge posed by virtue ethics. Their willingness to address concerns similar or even identical to those raised by Hauerwas is the reason for their inclusion here. Certainly, it comes as no great surprise that a non-Lutheran theologian like Hauerwas would detect problems in Lutheran doctrine. It is noteworthy, however, that the thinkers considered below are also willing to recognize substantial shortcomings with the account of Lutheran theology sadly typical among both laity and clergy today. This chapter will examine the observations and diagnoses offered by four contemporary theologians. Their insights will demonstrate many affinities with the concerns of virtue ethics. A consideration of the proposed solutions will suggest possible space for the subsequent work of this study.

David Yeago

In 1993, David Yeago argued convincingly in his essay

"Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology," that today's

Protestant church is perilously infected with insidious forms of the

"isms" identified in his title. Their pervasive yet often unrecognized

presence within Protestantism he traces to a misconstrual of the polarity

between law and gospel.

> What I am contesting is the view that the distinction and opposition of
> law and gospel constitutes the last horizon of Christian belief, that the
> opposition of law and gospel to one another is the prime structuring
> principle which bounds and orders the conceptual space within which
> the coherence of Christian belief must be thought out. I am
> suggesting that the law/gospel distinction, however indispensable it
> may be is *not* the principle in terms of which Christian belief hangs
> together, and that to assume that it is such a principle has disastrous
> consequences which we can see all around us.[2]

Yeago argues that when law and gospel are set against one another, the

gospel inevitably gains its definition in antithesis to the law itself. The

gospel becomes our liberator not from our failure to keep the law and the

consequent just wrath of God; rather it becomes our liberator from the

law per se. Hence, any word that comes to a Christian as command,

direction, or guidance, is ruled out by the liberating gospel. "If the

law/gospel distinction is a final antithesis," Yeago concludes, "then *any*

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[2] David S. Yeago, "Gnosticism, Antinomianism, and Reformation Theology:
Reflections on the Costs of a Construal," *Pro Ecclesia* 2, 1 (winter, 1993), 38-39
(emphasis in original).

call for one ordering of life rather than another, will by definition be the law from which the gospel frees us."[3]

In this theological climate, antinomianism thrives. "Indeed," Yeago charges, "much twentieth century Protestant theology has been antinomian all along; the practical antinomianism now regnant in many churches is simply a long-standing theoretical antinomianism achieving the courage of its convictions."[4] Yeago's accusation of gnosticism derives from the same thesis of a misconstrual of the law/gospel dichotomy.

> The logic is simple: if form is enslavement, then a God who took form in history would be an enslaving God. The liberating God must therefore be a formless God, a God at most dialectically related to any particular form, a God who is everywhere and nowhere, whose faceless elusiveness frees us from the tyranny of the particular and ordered and definitive.[5]

Yeago maintains that this state of affairs is not inherent within Lutheranism. "Even in the sixteenth century," he observes, "the Reformers were well aware that there is more to the gospel promise than assurance that we will not be damned."[6] Along with comfort for guilt-ridden souls, Yeago argues, the gospel entails positive content: "the promise of the gospel is not simply that we will not be condemned; it is

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[3] Ibid., 42 (emphasis in original). Once freed from the law, it should be noted, people are at liberty to choose whatever pleases them and to take their cues about acceptable behavior from the culture or from whatever other source is convenient or comfortable.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., 44.

[6] David S. Yeago, "The Promise of God and the Desires of our Hearts: Prolegomena to a Lutheran Retrieval of Classical Spiritual Theology," *Lutheran Forum* 30, 2 (May, 1996), 25.

the promise that we will *live* in, with, and through Jesus Christ."[7] In

other words, the gospel has not only negative content, (freed *from*

something) but also positive content (freed *for* something). "The free gift

of God in Christ Jesus, we need to say is that we *get to do* all sorts of

splendid things as his priestly people."[8] This reformation view of the

gospel, Yeago asserts, stands in stark contrast to contemporary

understandings.

> After some years of listening to Lutherans argue about justification,
> sanctification, faith, and the sacraments, I have become convinced
> that the tendency to think of the gospel in negative terms, as "the
> word which lets us off," is quite widespread among us, often the tacit
> premise even of those who would be very embarrassed to say so
> explicitly.[9]

Yeago has no patience for the practices in ordinary church life,

which derive from the antinomian and gnostic theology present among

Lutherans. He laments the "contemporary tender-minded rhetoric about

all those 'hurting people' who need more than anything else to be

liberated from all order and absolved of all expectations by the

redemptive 'inclusivity' of the antinomian church."[10] Yeago also

denounces the effects on worship, education, and ethics as congregations

increasingly jettison extensive catechesis and ritual/liturgical

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[7] Ibid., 26.

[8] David S. Yeago, "Sacramental Lutheranism at the End of the Modern Age," *Lutheran Forum* 34, 4 (Christmass/winter, 2000), 14.

[9] Yeago, "Promise of God," 25.

[10] Yeago, "Gnosticism," 42.

observances in favor of formats deemed less 'demanding', more

contemporary and presumably more 'meaningful'. Interesting in this

regard is Yeago's own affirmation of a primary concern of Hauerwas.

> The simplest way to adapt Lutheranism to modern culture is to identify the substance of Lutheranism with a *doctrine*, a theological teaching, and to separate doctrine from practice so that the doctrine can live a disembodied existence in the mind. The notion of *adiaphoron* can then be summoned to establish the required distance between the inward essence of religion and its secondary outward expression.[11]

Two of Hauerwas's chief concerns with contemporary Lutheranism,

then, are acknowledged and reinforced by the observations of Yeago. Not

only does Yeago express concern over what he considers the routine

misunderstanding that allows only negative content to the gospel, but he

also regrets the split between doctrine and practice. Certainly, Yeago

offers an analysis of contemporary Lutheranism which agrees

substantially with the observations of Stanley Hauerwas.

Robert Benne

Robert Benne is another Lutheran willing to concede certain

"weaknesses and lacunae" within today's manifestations of Lutheranism

as it contends with the questions of Christian ethics.[12] Like Yeago and

Hauerwas, Benne believes that much of the problem stems from a

misappropriation of the definitive Lutheran emphasis on justification.

"Dazzled as they are by the wonder and profundity of God's justifying

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[11] Yeago, "Sacramental Lutheranism," 9 (emphasis in original).

[12] Bloomquist and Stumme, *Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 11.

grace in Christ," writes Benne, "Lutherans are tempted to think that the only really interesting ethical question is the motivational one."[13] He cites this Lutheran predilection for "soteriological reductionism," as he dubs it, as the reason for the commonly recognized "lack of ethical substance" in Lutheran doctrine.[14] The ethical life of Christians that results from this attitude lacks content and clarity. The believer is provided with little more than a vague notion of love which "becomes both a permissive affirmation of any behavior and a rather amorphous serving of the neighbor."[15]

It would be mistaken, however, to conclude that Benne is willing to concede the existence of an ethical Achilles' heel within Lutheranism or even ready to admit that Lutheranism is ill equipped for handling the serious business of ethics. Quite the contrary, Benne is fully prepared not only to defend the ethical sensibilities of Lutheran theology, but to argue forcefully that "perennial themes" in Lutheranism provide it "with a coherent and persuasive account of Christian ethics in both its personal and social dimensions."[16] The themes that Benne identifies as perennial would be readily recognized by any alumni of the most rudimentary instruction in Lutheran doctrine. While Benne

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[13] Ibid., 27.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 28. Again, the result of such a move is the triumph of culture or perhaps individual ego to supply any norms or specific direction for behavior.

[16] Ibid., 27.

acknowledges that a misconstrual of the doctrine of justification fosters serious problems, he does not hesitate to propound the doctrine's legitimate location at the core of theology and ethics. "The central principle of Lutheran ethics," he declares, "is identical with its central theological principle: justification by grace through faith on account of Christ."[17] In thoroughly Lutheran language, Benne exults in the gospel's determinative role in ethics:

> Our faith becomes active in love. This love expresses itself in deeds that follow spontaneously from faith and no longer from the compulsion of the law. Such love is creative and dynamic. It goes beyond the limits and structures of the law but does not violate them.[18]

Benne discloses the depths of his zeal for Lutheran theology by offering a spirited and substantial defense of one of Lutheranism's most unpopular and even despised teachings: the doctrine of the two kingdoms, or as Benne names it "the twofold rule of God."[19] Careful to affirm the reality of a duality without endorsing the liabilities of a dualism, Benne labels a dualistic misunderstanding a misuse of the twofold rule, and a "Lutheran heresy."[20] When rightly appropriated, however, "The doctrine of the twofold rule of God is more than useful....

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[17] Ibid., 12.

[18] Ibid., 14. Taken by itself, Benne's comment could yet lead one to a diminished understanding of the law assuming, as it seems to, that the law always and only compels or limits. This faulty idea will be addressed in what follows, most immediately in the discussion of Hütter's work.

[19] Ibid., 22.

[20] Ibid., 22.

It is deeply biblical and Christian and not a Lutheran oddity."[21] Handled

correctly, Benne argues, this biblical teaching casts bright light on God's

way of working in the lives of individual believers, Christian

congregations, and the world at large. Undeserving of its reputation for

producing quietists or internally divided believers, the teaching of the

twofold rule of God, Benne asserts, actually fosters unity beneath the

overarching rule of God. Benne is a theologian unashamed of his

Lutheranism.

Benne's unabashed Lutheranism, then, makes his observations

about ethical shortcomings within his doctrinal community the more

poignant. Lutheranism's soteriological reductionism is a serious

concern, particularly when coupled with the collapse of the old general

morality, which until recently had been cultivated by the surrounding

culture. Benne offers an excellent analysis of this significant factor in

Lutheranism's ethical difficulties:

> Like other mainstream Protestants, Lutherans have relied on the
> general culture to do their work for them. The general Protestant
> Ethic had established notions of marriage and sexual ethics, the
> calling, and humane values of justice and civility. But that
> established culture has been fractured by the new world that
> surrounds us. Lutherans need a more specific notion of the Christian
> life if they are to respond to this chaotic world. They cannot do that
> by relying solely on justification.[22]

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[21] Ibid., 23.

[22] Ibid., 28. It should be noted that the disintegration of what Benne calls the "general Protestant Ethic" lends urgency to the thesis of this study. When the surrounding culture is providing a sufficient standard of morality, it could be argued that the church need not so carefully or intentionally tend to the cultivation of ethical

Like Yeago, Benne recognizes the need for Lutheranism to attend to questions regarding the shape and structure of the Christian life. Yet, such an emphasis is fraught with serious obstacles for a Lutheran. Such an intentional effort at ethical instruction could appear to flout "the ecstatic notion of motivation with which they [Lutherans] have operated for so long."[23] The reach and strength of this difficulty is reflected in the fact that earlier in the same essay Benne himself seemed to have endorsed the very notion he later questions.[24] Benne represents well the peculiar ethical challenge confronting Lutheran theologians.

Reinhard Hütter

Bound in the same volume with the essay of Benne is a contribution from Reinhard Hütter. In large part, Hütter concurs with Benne's assessment of the ethical failings of contemporary Lutheranism, but of course, Hütter elaborates his own particular concerns. In line with both Lutheran theologians previously considered in this chapter, Hütter traces Lutheranism's ethical difficulties to a misuse of the doctrine of justification. Hütter sharpens the critique to a provocative point by declaring an ethics built solely from and by justification fallacious.

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behavior among its members; in a time of societal licentiousness, however, such a casual attitude toward character formation is no longer an option.

[23] Ibid., 29.

[24] On page 14, Benne had asserted that "love expresses itself in deeds that flow spontaneously from faith."

> The decisive core fallacy of modern Protestant ethics is a broadly shared assumption about justification: What makes Christian ethics "Protestant" is the conviction that everything must ultimately be framed by and derived from the one and only central article of Protestantism, namely, justification by grace through faith alone.[25]

As with Benne, however, Hütter could readily deflect any effort to charge him with a repudiation of his Lutheran heritage. He clarifies his critique of the mishandling of the doctrine of justification saying, "I am not challenging the centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith alone; instead I am seeking to safeguard it from the misuse of applying it beyond and against the Reformation's intention."[26] Certainly, this is the goal for Hütter. He seeks to do ethics the way that the reformers did.

Hütter's concerns with contemporary Lutheranism's mishandling of ethical issues are substantiated through a thorough consideration of the theology in question. Offering a brief historical analysis of the developments that led to the current misuse of justification, Hütter concludes that the contemporary culmination and manifestation of this misconstrual is a thoroughly negative understanding and appropriation of the law.

> The focus on an exclusively forensic understanding of justification fostered the assumption that the gospel had only a negative relationship to God's law. This primarily negative relationship, of course, had to have inherently antinomian consequences. If the gospel is interpreted as radically opposed to the law, the freedom that results in the gospel's acceptance can only be construed as a "negative freedom," as the freedom from all alienating, authenticity-

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[25] Bloomquist and Stumme, *Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 33.

[26] Ibid. The accuracy of Hütter's assessment of the reformer's view of justification will be considered in the chapter that follows.

inhibiting restrictions. The "law"—and not humanity under the condition of sin faced by God's law!—becomes the central problem.[27] This observation reinforces Hütter's specific thesis that the issue which most needs to be addressed and corrected before today's Lutherans will be able to deal with their widely recognized ethical challenges is "the deeply problematic opposition that many allege exists between 'freedom' and 'law.'"[28]

Hütter makes the point that an erroneous understanding of freedom as autonomy leads not only to the antinomianism already noted, but also to a denigration of form and structure. This line of argument meshes with the threat Yeago identified as gnosticism, the other half of the pair of evil infiltrators he discerns within today's Lutheranism. Yeago and Hütter share much common ground in their assessment of contemporary Lutheranism and its attempt to handle the challenge of providing a meaningful ethics.

Hütter seems to possess an accurate understanding of the sort of populist attitudes commonly cited among Lutherans who oppose a developed Christian ethic on principle. He knows his opponents well, observing that, "If there is one thing modern Protestant ethics is dogmatic about—with a very good conscience—it is the protection of human freedom from the dangers of legalism and works-

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[27] Ibid., 34.

[28] Ibid., 32.

righteousness."[29] These twin threats to personal autonomy, as much of

contemporary Lutheranism would have it; Hütter dubs the "one

unforgivable double sin in Protestantism."[30] Protestantism's abhorrence

of this 'sin' stems directly from its strict adherence to the "Protestant

fallacy" of making the doctrine of justification the "ceiling that has to

cover everything instead of the very floor on which we stand."[31] This

faulty view of justification, Hütter observes, fosters the disregard and

even aversion for serious consideration of ethics and morality so typical

in modern Protestantism. Any talk of commandment, direction, or even

responsibility is perceived as a threat to the flawed understanding of

justification as a declaration of individual autonomy.

Ironically, though, even the most ardent proponents of

justification-as-freedom-from-all-forms-of-autonomy-limiting-law

inevitably advance their own norms and rules for right behavior. Hütter

notes that "modern Protestant ethics has become antinomian and at the

same time very legalistic about particular 'correctnesses' that are

reflective of distinct social and political agendas."[32] So, for example, the

use of inclusive language or the ordination of women become issues

deemed worthy of impassioned defense and even church discipline, while

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[29] Ibid., 36.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 33.

[32] Ibid., 37.

concerns about chastity or doctrinal fidelity are considered passé and peripheral to "genuine" Christianity.

Hütter, of course, rejects antinomian versions of Lutheranism as antithetical to the position of the reformers themselves and argues for a retrieval of the law as commandment. Believing himself in hearty agreement with the reformers, he advocates the zealous study and appropriation of God's commandments as a great good. "Christian ethics in the tradition of the Reformation should, of course," Hütter declares, "always end with praise of God's commandments."[33] Happy to oblige, Hütter does so...literally, but not before joining Yeago and Benne in harshly criticizing popular notions of what it means for Lutherans to do ethics.[34]

Gilbert Meilaender

Finally, it is worth noting that Meilaender, who provided the foil for Hauerwas' critique of Lutheranism, is also quite concerned about the dismissive or even suspicious attitude toward ethics that exists in the church today. Though, he doesn't follow Yeago, Benne, and Hütter in

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[33] Ibid., 53.

[34] Ibid., 54. Hütter ends his essay by quoting the Psalmist: "Thy testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them. The unfolding of thy words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. With open mouth I pant, because I long for thy commandments. Turn to me and be gracious to me, as is thy wont towards those who love thy name. Keep steady my steps according to thy promise; and let no iniquity get dominion over me. Redeem me from human oppression, that I may keep thy precepts. Make thy face shine upon thy servant, and teach me thy statutes. My eyes shed streams of tears, because they do not keep thy law." Psalm 119:129-136.

expressly identifying a misconstrual of justification as the prime culprit,

he views their work sympathetically and is not to be numbered among

their opponents.[35] While affirming that ethics from a Lutheran

standpoint must always be vigorously anti-Pelagian, Meilaender also

adds a warning in the spirit of the Lutheran critics already considered:

> Quite probably we Lutherans suppose that this is our strong point.
> We are certainly anti-Pelagian. Eager to make the preaching of Jesus
> necessary, we will not want to deny our need for him. And there's
> something to that. From another angle, however, seeing only this
> may sometimes have been the bane of Lutheran ethics. Emphasizing
> so strongly that every form of order is finally disorder, we can only
> negate any and every piece of moral guidance as inevitably
> disordered.[36]

In this atmosphere of suspicion, every moral directive and every good

deed is ultimately deemed corrupt.[37]

Such a pessimistic view of ethics results in the conviction that

Christian use of ethics is properly and exclusively confined to a second

use of the law function. It serves purely as "propaedeutic to

preaching."[38] According to this understanding, ethics condemns sinners

and their actions but has nothing positive to say about the "form and

structure" of the Christian's life. The "hard work" of speaking to the

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[35] Gilbert Meilaender, "Reclaiming the Quest for Holiness," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (winter 1999), 488. Meilaender considers Yeago's "deconstructive analysis" considered above, to be "unanswerable."

[36] Meilaender, "Task of Lutheran Ethics," 20.

[37] Hence, the ring of truth in the well-circulated quip that "Lutherans' trouble with ethics is that they see no difference between helping a little old lady across the street and pushing her in front of an oncoming bus." The taint of sin clings hopelessly to both acts.

[38] Meilaender, "The Task of Lutheran Ethics," 20.

mundane and routine issues and questions of daily life is left to others.[39]

The inadequacy and disingenuousness of the position that all moral

guidance is inevitably disordered is starkly exposed by the free use made

of the efforts of these "others" when it comes to the pressing practical

concerns of moral conduct and behavior. Even greater is the irony that

this parasitic appropriation of the ethical efforts of others is frequently

complemented with disdainful criticisms of the theological deficiencies of

the very ones whose ethical contributions are being employed.

With the accuracy of an insider, Meilaender provides an insightful

account of the typical Lutheran attitude toward ethics. "We cannot talk

about progress in grace or growth in holiness," he charges, "without

immediately emphasizing that even the best of our righteousnesses are

as filthy rags—and that, therefore, our need is less for continued moral

analysis and reflection than for hearing the gospel."[40] This attitude he

labels the "peril of much Lutheran ethics in the twentieth century."[41]

Attuned to the sort of temptation peculiar to Lutherans, Meilaender

cautions against a now familiar malady stemming from Lutheranism's

difficulties with ethical concerns.

> We must be wary of the antinomianism that always lies near at hand,
> of an emphasis on motive that leaves no room for reflection upon the

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[39] Ibid., Meilaender names "Roman Catholic, Orthodox Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and (yes, even) Baptist brothers and sisters" among the "others." Ibid.

[40] Meilaender, "Reclaiming the Quest," 484.

[41] Ibid.

body and the created order, of a lingering complacency that is too ready to suppose that worldly wisdom is one thing and the mind of Christ another.[42]

Clearly, Meilaender is not unsympathetic to the concerns of his fellow Lutherans who desire to make room for an effective understanding of ethics within Lutheranism.

Meilaender strongly affirms the centrality of the gospel and faith which vindicates before God without any conditions being added, "as if something more were needed to enter the kingdom that Jesus establishes."[43] "Nevertheless, it would be a mistake," he continues, "to suppose that the Scriptures exist only to bear witness to Christ, as if they were the norm for the church's faith but not also for her life."[44] Like Yeago, Benne, and Hütter, Meilaender believes that the church can proclaim the gospel clearly without being compelled to succumb to ethical vacuity.

> The church's moral discipline does not set up conditions for entering the kingdom; rather, it offers a description of what the life of discipleship should be like—a description of what it means to follow Christ. In setting forth such a description of her way of life, in understanding that description as a discipline to be undertaken, the church does not raise any other standard than the Christ who is confessed.... We seek, that is, to give content and structure to the meaning of love.[45]

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[42] Meilaender, "Task of Lutheran Ethics," 22. The neglect of the created order as identified by Meilaender is a significant concern and will be addressed at length in chapter four.

[43] Gilbert Meilaender, *Things That Count: Essays Moral and Theological* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2000), 60.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 61.

The conviction that the church can provide meaningful ethical guidance without compromising the centrality of the gospel is common to all four Lutheran thinkers so far considered. While it appears that they and Hauerwas occupy substantial common ground, significant differences remain, particularly for Meilaender.

Lutheran Concerns with Hauerwas's Understanding of Justification

Despite the extensive agreement between Meilaender and Hauerwas regarding, among other commonalities, Lutheranism's ethical shortcomings, Meilaender is not prepared fully to endorse the approach of Hauerwas and grant that justification may be subsumed within the journey idea of Christianity. Meilaender's description of justification, his 'dialogue' image of Christianity, does not permit an understanding of justification as simply one element in the process of becoming part of the story of Jesus. Of course, this is precisely the way that Hauerwas suggests it be understood. To make Hauerwas's move, Meilaender believes, is ultimately to sacrifice the gospel's capacity to extend unadulterated comfort and unconditional assurance to sinful people. Meilaender insists that any attempt to resolve the tension between journey and dialogue, which he maintains is inherent within the Christian's life, will lead to a gift of grace that is "radically ambiguous."[46]

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[46] Gilbert Meilaender, *Faith and Faithfulness: Basic Themes in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 83.

The 'gift' will be inextricably tied to the tasks of the moral life. When the Christian fails to do what the gift generates, can he be confident that the gift is indeed his? There are times, perhaps many times, when Christians need precisely what the gospel has to give. "They need to hear," urges Meilaender, "the word of God's acceptance untrammeled by talk about progress in righteousness."[47]

It seems that Meilaender would find it necessary to disagree not only with Hauerwas, but with Yeago as well. Yeago, in his effort to join justification and ethics meaningfully, had insisted that "the free gift of God in Christ Jesus, we need to say, is that we *get to do* all sorts of splendid things as his priestly people."[48] This manner of description sounds strikingly similar to the sort of thing that by Meilaender's estimation may undermine the essential characteristic of justification as word of pure grace. Eager as he is to restore to Lutheran theology a vital place for the ethical task and character formation, Meilaender proceeds cautiously lest the gospel's power to speak comfort to afflicted consciences be diminished in any way.

> The danger, after all, is that the effort—traced here—to make place for serious attention within Lutheran theology to ethics and to the commanded shape of the Christian life could undercut our ability to offer a word of forgiveness to those who—seeing few evidences of holiness in their life—may be moved to doubt God's favor toward them.[49]

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[47] Meilaender, "Place of Ethics," 202.

[48] Yeago, "Sacramental Lutheranism," 14 (emphasis in original).

[49] Yeago, "Reclaiming the Quest," 491.

It bears reiterating that Meilaender's concern about the compromise of the gospel is not intended to quell efforts at resuscitating ethics within Lutheranism. Meilaender is consistently adamant about the need to overcome Lutheranism's ethical maladies. And, he is a strong advocate of the usefulness of training in virtue as a means toward this necessary end. Meilaender's reluctance to proclaim justification simply a part of "learning to live the story of Jesus" stems not from a misdirected though sincere Lutheran piety, but from a genuine and carefully considered concern for the gospel's unique work of speaking grace and comfort to those who know well the tenacious grip of sin.[50] As he sees it, the twofold solution is the only solution. The Christian life is dialogue, a word of undeserved grace...period. The Christian life is journey, a word of unmitigated challenge...for all. It is, and must be, both.

It appears that this issue is of some significance for Meilaender, as he has considered it at length in more than one essay. His contribution to a recent volume responding to John Paul II's *Veritas Splendor* reflects the depth and degree of Meilaender's wrestling with the topic and provides further insight into Lutheran concerns with Hauerwas's desire

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[50] One might supplement this concern with the equally compelling concern to fittingly laud Christ and his work of atonement accomplished in 1st century Palestine and recorded in the Gospel accounts.

to bring justification under the umbrella of the Christian life.[51]
Meilaender considers the believer who still struggles with sin and even
falls prey to the temptation of deliberate wrongdoing. The case of King
David in his sin with Bathsheba stands as a supreme example.
Meilaender insists on the necessity of distinguishing between the
"judgment of the person and judgment of the work."[52] What a person
wills and what he works may not be consistent, argues Meilaender. "To
one whose will we judge to be so deeply divided that he clings to Christ
even in his sin, another kind of response [as opposed to the kind of
response for one "smugly persisting in sin"] is necessary."[53] In other
words, the minister must be able to speak the law as well as the gospel
as the situation warrants.

The possibility of abuse is not lost on Meilaender, who readily
admits as much. Nevertheless, such risks are necessary, he believes, if
the work of the gospel is to enjoy its full range of application. Meilaender
considers this position to be peculiarly Lutheran: "a Lutheran, at least,
should be willing to run some risks in order to be certain that we are
theologically positioned to speak the gospel to anyone whose self is

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[51] Reinhard Hütter and Theodor Dieter, eds., *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics: Protestants Engage Pope John Paul II's Moral Encyclicals* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 60-83. For other examples of Meilaender's interest in this question, see Meilaender, "Place of Ethics;" Chapter 5 in Meilaender, *Theory and Practice*; Chapter 4 in Meilaender, *Faith and Faithfulness*; and Meilaender, "Reclaiming the Quest".

[52] Hütter and Dieter, *Ecumenical Ventures*, 79.

[53] Ibid., 78.

deeply divided and who seeks God's promise of grace."[54] Meilaender's

ardent defense of the gospel as sheer declaration of pardon stems from

his potent interpretation of *simul iustus et peccator.* "When we turn

away," he maintains, "we need the warning of the law, but we also need—

when our wills are sorely divided—a gospel that is not transforming

power but sheer declaration of pardon, a declaration that we are

pardoned precisely in our ungodliness."[55] Linking justification with the

Christian's life of discipleship, Meilaender fears, could well compromise a

vital aspect of the gospel.

Meilaender concedes that the distinction between law and gospel,

as he prefers to label his insistence on the purely declaratory potential of

the gospel, is no sort of foundation for an ethical system. "We should

not, I repeat, attempt to spin an ethic out of the distinction between law

and gospel."[56] Neither is the *simul* to be construed as an ethical

foundation. "To suggest, as I have," writes Meilaender, "that deliberate

intention to commit grave sin may sometimes coexist with saving faith is

not a claim upon which to build an ethic."[57] The veracity of these

theological truths does not legitimate their being pressed into the service

of Christian ethics. These truths serve another purpose. Meilaender

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[54] Ibid., 79.

[55] Ibid., 81.

[56] Ibid., 78.

[57] Ibid., 77.

reasserts the need for an ethical system capable of speaking

meaningfully to present day Christians:

> No Christian ethic can say everything that needs saying solely
> through the Reformation language of "faith active in love." If we dare
> never say for certain that a particular deed makes the *simul* of faith
> impossible, we ought not deny that our deeds do shape our
> character—and that they have the power to make of us people who no
> longer trust God for our security in life and death.[58]

Ethics, then, retains a prominent place for Meilaender, as does the ability

to speak words of pardon and forgiveness unencumbered by attachments

to the responsibilities of living Christianly. He insists on the

maintenance of the twofold reality. He resists the unifying proposal of

Hauerwas in order to assure that the uncomplicated purity of the

gospel's declaration of grace is in no way diminished.[59]

Proposed Lutheran Solutions

Gilbert Meilaender

To what extent the other Lutheran theologians considered here

would subscribe to Meilaender's position is not entirely clear. It is

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[58] Ibid., 82.

[59] Obviously, the concern to maintain the unique declaratory power of the gospel is not the only potential trouble spot between Lutherans and proponents of virtue ethics. One of the other more notable areas of contention is the charge that an ethics of virtue encourages egocentric self-development, in stark contrast to the gospel's preaching of self-sacrifice and a focus on the other rather than self. For a representative example of this critique, see Asheim, "Lutherische Tugendethik?". Meilaender is cognizant of this and other criticisms of virtue ethics and ably addresses them in his *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (see especially pages 13-17). While these issues will be considered more fully in a later chapter, it is worth noting that the charge of ego-centrism does appear to be somewhat preoccupied with the question of motive.

certainly possible that some would actually be more amenable to Hauerwas's account, and take issue with Meilaender. Regardless, Meilaender maintains his position and founds it upon solid Lutheran ground. Whether or not all would agree with Meilaender's assessment of the role of the gospel, there is universal agreement that a serious problem remains with the way that today's Lutherans, with unfortunate consistency, typically approach the ethical task. The usual frame is too limited. It is inadequate to the demand of proclaiming both the gospel of absolute unconditional forgiveness as well as a Christian ethic of lifelong formation which invariably necessitates ongoing transformation. What solutions, then, do these Lutherans offer?

Remarkably enough, Meilaender—who was the direct target of Hauerwas's critique for allowing his Lutheranism to disconnect ethics and doctrine and so render ethics ineffective, and who in spite of Hauerwas's criticism maintains the importance of the gospel's sheer declaratory power—actually suggests a view of the ethical life that bears a striking resemblance to the argument of Hauerwas. Meilaender steadfastly insists on the legitimacy and necessity of a twofold tension within the Christian life—and grants its shortcoming:

> On the one hand, our substantive virtues may be few, yet we may be accepted and righteous before God. On the other hand, our substantive virtues may be many, yet if we rely on them we may lack the faith which *is* virtue before God. There need be, it would seem,

little correlation between our virtue understood substantively and our virtue understood relationally.[60]

Yet, Meilaender is not satisfied simply to leave the issue in such an untidy state. Seeking some way to surmount this detrimental separation that provides "little correlation" between the gift of virtue and the pursuit of virtue, he writes of the certainty of a coming day when the author of our Christian life himself will resolve the tension.

> The tension between these several views of virtue cannot, I think, be removed from the Christian perspective. Its theoretical resolution lies in the narrative Christians tell and retell—a story, not yet finished, in which God is graciously at work transforming sinners into saints. But that story, because it is not yet finished, must be lived.[61]

Meilaender's "story that is lived" is, of course, precisely the recurrent theme of Hauerwas when he describes the Christian life as a narrative, a living out of the Christian story, or learning to make the believer's story part of Jesus' story. To help solve Lutheranism's ethical dilemma, Meilaender looks where Hauerwas looks and turns to the insights of a narrated theology.

Naturally, there is a thick and latently powerful eschatological element lying just behind this Lutheran theologian's talk of narrative and story. "The narrative of the Christian story which provides the contours for Christian living," writes Meilaender, "envisions a day when these several evaluations of our character meet, are reconciled, and no longer

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[60] Meilaender, *Theory and Practice*, 121 (emphasis in original).

[61] Ibid., 125.

stand in tension."[62] For Meilaender, the eschatological element provides the resolution between the two different ways of understanding virtue. "God," concludes Meilaender, "is committed to transforming people who are partly saint and partly sinner into people who are saints *simpliciter*— who are substantively what they are already in relation to him."[63] The eschaton will resolve the tension. This side, of the eschaton, though, no resolution should be expected. The use of narrative theology provides an ultimate answer for the ethical questions that nag Lutherans...once the narrative is concluded; in the meantime, however, the ethical solutions are perhaps a bit thin.

While they wait for the eschaton, Meilaender argues, Christians should strive for ethical improvement: "Until that day, however, we live within the constraints of a temporal narrative—adding virtues piecemeal, shaping being by doing, unable to see ourselves whole."[64] Christians do this because, as Meilaender explains, it matters to God: "He [God] is intent upon renewing us after the image of his Son, and we must therefore be just as intent upon seeking that renewal—that holiness—in our being and our doing."[65] Meilaender, it seems, is suggesting that one should be busy about the task of formation into Christian character for

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[62] Ibid., 122.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Meilaender, "Reclaiming the Quest," 490.

the simple reason that it is important to God. Since this is God's

intended goal for his people, he might say, one may as well get a decent

start on it now. No doubt, this is true as far as it goes, though it may not

go far enough. Still, the eschatologically-weighted narrative does supply

a way of managing Lutheran concerns for guarding the gospel of faith

while encouraging the practical need of providing ethical direction for life.

It is not altogether certain, however, that Meilaender's solution

provides an account of the relationship between the gospel and a life of

virtue that is at once comprehensible and compelling for the average

Christian parishioner.[66] Meilaender recognizes that finally what is most

important in thinking about virtue and ethics is not theory, but actual

practice, the doing. "Even if the approach I have taken is sound and is to

be recommended," he admits, "we need finally to acknowledge for

ourselves and fellows that the trick is not only to see or say this but to

live it."[67] Meilaender provides hints, however, that perhaps his own

efforts at a viable solution are not entirely satisfactory in exactly this

regard of ready applicability. "Even if the discussion above helps locate

the place of virtue in the Christian life," he concedes, "we need not deny

that it may prove difficult to translate theory into practice and find a way

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[66] Though, if one understands theology more as a grammar to direct conversation than as the conversation itself, this need not be considered a shortcoming.

[67] Meilaender, "Task of Lutheran Ethics," 22.

to do justice to both senses of virtue [what God gives, as well as what Christians achieve] in our lives."[68]

It seems that this may indeed be a serious shortcoming of Meilaender's proposed solution to Lutheranism's ethical ills. His assessment is accurate and his theory theologically precise. Yet in this case, the accuracy and precision are, perhaps, not coupled with an explanation of the ethical life of Christians that lends itself to effective implementation in a parish setting. While Meilaender succeeds in retrieving a Lutheran way of thinking about ethics, and even teaching virtue, his explanation is so intricately and densely woven that it could well prove impenetrable to some believers. Moreover, it is not apparent that Meilaender's solution would have a ready response to the inevitable "insight" that if God is going to complete the Christian's story by perfecting growth in virtue; then wouldn't the prudent course be to stay out of His way while He goes about his business and leave the entire job to Him? More needs to be done to defend the place of ethics accurately and meaningfully, yet in a way that is both immediately accessible and broadly compelling to the majority of Christians, clergy and laity alike.

David Yeago

After his broadside against the church's antinomianism and gnosticism that spring from its misuse of the law/gospel dynamic, David

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[68] Meilaender, *Theory and Practice*, 123.

Yeago makes a foray into providing a solution to the ailments of

Protestantism. His proposals span the theological spectrum from the

most unsophisticated and mundane of solutions to the most rarefied and

obscure of theological speculations. Yeago recognizes the insufficiency of

an ethic established only on the narrow foundation of divine

commandment. "If salvation is by free grace thorough faith alone,"

queries Yeago, "is it *necessary* for believers to live a renewed life?"[69]

Yeago considers four possible ways of understanding necessity. Two

possibilities, conditional and coercive, he dismisses as outside the pale of

Lutheranism. The third, the "necessity of commandment," Yeago deems

"inadequate."[70]

> "When the light turns red, it is necessary for all drivers to come to a
> halt." The new life is, of course, necessary in this sense, simply
> because God commands it, but this is not an adequate answer. A
> renewed life is necessary for *all* humans by necessity of
> commandment; our present concern is for the distinctive necessity of
> a renewed life for believers in particular.[71]

If Yeago dismisses this third sense of necessity perhaps a bit too handily,

it is because he believes a better solution is found in the fourth sense: a

"necessity of consistency."

As Yeago sees it, a renewed life is the only reasonable response to

the reception of the gift of salvation. There is a logical, or perhaps

ontological, connection which binds salvation to living the Christian life,

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[69] Yeago, "Promise of God," 27 (emphasis in original).

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., (emphasis in original).

Yeago contends, much as there is a connection between two people being in love and their choice to spend generous amounts of time with one another. The two necessarily belong together. The profession of love and the desire to be together are inseparable. So it is, Yeago asserts, with a believer and a life of steady moral renewal.

Still, Yeago clearly realizes that this life of renewal is not something that can flourish without direction. And the sort of direction deemed effective by Yeago comes in things as common as reading Bible storybooks and singing hymns in church.

> If we do not teach the catechism, if our people do not learn to participate in the liturgy, if our children do not know the Bible stories and cannot sing along in worship, if we do not begin to recover practices of formation, ways of prayer and meditation and fasting and celebration, that bind daily life with the worshipping assembly in a priestly mode of common life, then our churches will simply fade into spiritual inconsequence over the coming decades, however many new members we have and whatever the outcome of our ecclesiastical politics.[72]

It is the unheralded, indeed often disparaged, routine of church life which provides training in and strengthening of the necessary connection between salvific grace and Christian living. Yeago's high praise for the mundane yet powerful elements of parish life is certainly in order. However, his contention that salvation and Christian holiness are necessarily bound is made less convincing by his admission of the need for consistent training in the Christian life. If holiness follows necessarily, then why such an ardent plea for training in Christian

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[72] Yeago, "Sacramental Lutheranism," 16.

habituation? Meilaender's account of the *simul* which cleaves even the holiest of saints, seems to ring closer to reality than Yeago's perhaps overly optimistic rendering.

Yeago derives his more ethereal proposal for the recovery of a viable theological ethic within Lutheranism from the doctrine of the incarnation. "The notion of holiness expounds the conviction that by the union of our lives with the incarnate God we may be 'formed' to his image in specific and describable ways and, precisely in the concrete particularity of our finite lives, become the bearers of his Spirit."[73] This statement echoes Meilaender's move in the direction of virtue ethics, emphasizing the way that God conforms our story to his story. Yeago, however, binds the connection considerably more tightly than Meilaender or Hauerwas. In fact, it becomes apparent that Yeago seeks a meaningful solution in the world of theosis.

Recommending the work of Tuomo Mannermaa, Yeago establishes a critical connection between Christ's incarnation and the Christian's life of holiness.

> The reality of the incarnation grounds the reality of holiness: God has truly given his own life to humankind in the concrete flesh and blood of his Son Jesus, and so we may be truly "deified by grace" (as the Fathers teach us) through our *conformation* to that flesh and blood.[74]

While Yeago's attempt to establish Christian holiness in concrete realities is a laudable move, his advocacy of the Christian's deification

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[73] Yeago, "Gnosticism," 42.

[74] Ibid., 48.

unnecessarily obscures the picture he sought to illumine. An exploration

into the complexities of theosis lies beyond the scope of this study.

Moreover, it is hoped that a resolution of the Lutheran ethical dilemma

that is both meaningful and doctrinally accurate can be provided without

recourse to an explanation grounded in the intricacies, potential

vagaries, and manifest difficulties of a doctrine of theosis.[75]

Robert Benne

In his essay for *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, Robert Benne does

not attempt to offer a thoroughgoing solution to the ethical malaise he

correctly identifies within Lutheranism. This is no shortcoming,

however, since he makes clear that his task is simply review and

analysis.[76] He does, however, point the reader in the direction of an

increasingly popular avenue of inquiry.

> Lutherans need a more specific notion of the Christian life if they are
> to respond to this chaotic world. They cannot do that by relying solely
> on justification. Lutheran ethics will have to be more trinitarian.[77]

Without further elaboration from Benne, it is difficult to determine

exactly what he might intend by this reference to the Trinity.

Unquestionably, though, Benne identifies the frame of justification (or

perhaps law/gospel) as it is commonly employed by contemporary

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[75] For a critical assessment of theosis, see Reinhard Flogaus, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther: ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997).

[76] Bloomquist and Stumme, *Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 11.

[77] Ibid., 28.

Lutheranism to be insufficient. A more encompassing frame is needed.

Benne suggests that a frame capable of addressing Lutheranism's ethical

shortcomings should be sought in a trinitarian direction. Beyond this

initial, interesting nudge toward trinitarian theology, Benne himself does

not venture.[78]

Even in a more exhaustive treatment of Lutheranism's handling of

ethical questions, Benne is content to emphasize typically Lutheran

nuances.[79] It is evident that he places a great deal of confidence in the

maintenance of classic Lutheran paradoxes as fruitful avenues toward a

correct handling of ethics. Benne's paradoxical vision includes the *simul*

iustus et peccator, God's right hand and left hand rule, and the now-but-

not-yet reality of God's kingdom. It is in living out of these tensions,

Benne believes, that the Christian rightly meets and fulfills his ethical

responsibilities.

> Yet life in this world means inescapable responsibility for Christians.
> God has not abandoned the world, and the Christian calling is
> certainly not to reject responsibility within a world that God intends to
> preserve. While the world is not the final home for the Christian, it is
> an abode that God wants us to care for. This will mean that all
> people, Christians included, will be involved in some worldly
> responsibilities that will not appear directly as works of love.
> Christians may have to be soldiers. Luther thought they could be

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[78] It is precisely a broadly Trinitarian approach that this study will later [chapter five] consider and offer as an aid in properly locating ethics, specifically an ethics of virtue, within Lutheran doctrine.

[79] Robert Benne, *The Paradoxical Vision: A Public Theology for the Twenty-first Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

hangmen. Worldly responsibility will mean coming to terms with the finitude and fallenness of the world.[80]

Christians are to be involved in pursuing a course of ethical integrity simply because God desires citizens of the earthly kingdom so to act. Benne seems to be satisfied that this connection or relation between the believer's justification and her ethical responsibilities is sufficient. It would, however, be difficult to fault the individual who found this account of the relationship between the believer's life *coram deo* and *coram hominibus* to be less than compelling or meaningful.[81] It appears doubtful that Benne has entirely met the challenge of significantly positioning justification in relation to the living of the Christian life.

Reinhard Hütter

As recounted above, Reinhard Hütter is sharply critical of Lutheranism's inability to grapple with the place of ethics, contending that an inordinate aversion to the law is a primary underlying factor. This vilification of the law, Hütter argues, is neither scriptural nor genuinely Lutheran. Eager to enlist his skills in a counter offensive campaign, Hütter provides a significant contribution in the effort to administer a theological remedy for Lutheranism's ethical ills. He

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[80] Ibid., 85.

[81] *Coram deo* (before God) and *coram hominibus* (before men), are used to refer to the distinction that exists between an individuals' standing before God, and the individual's standing in the eyes of the people of the world with whom she interacts. The former is sometimes referred to as the vertical relationship while the latter is termed the horizontal relationship.

provides a strong defense of God's law (or, as he prefers to distinguish it,

commandment) as more than merely accuser.[82] Hütter advocates that

the church recapture the understanding of the commandments as being

a great good, indeed, something not to be hated, but loved. Ethics that

are genuinely Lutheran will actually prompt praise of the

commandments and embrace them "as creaturely ways of embodying our

love of God neighbor."[83]

For Hütter, the key to the Christian's ethical life is learning to see

the commandments of God not as a burden from which to be freed, but

as a great blessing. Turning to Luther for support, Hütter endorses a

dynamic and compelling understanding of the results of justification.

Drawing from Luther's *Freedom of a Christian*, Hütter writes, "Luther is

claiming that 'in Faith,' that is, 'in union with Christ,' the Christian is

restored to the original state of prelapsarian life with God."[84]

This is a significant point for Hütter who elaborates further:

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[82] In this essay, Hütter maintains his rejection of a 'third use' of the law. The term *law* he reserves for its application to man in the condition of sin. *Commandment*, on the other hand, describes "the goods constitutive of the way of life in communion with God." As Hütter further elaborates, "Yet by grasping Christ in faith, Christian freedom receives its distinct *gestalt* through a way of life according to the commandments: the Decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount, and the double-love commandment." Bloomquist and Stumme, *Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 182-183. Interestingly, in a subsequent essay, Hütter is less certain of the need tenaciously to preserve the distinction. "While I am basically sympathetic to it [Althaus' sharp distinction between Gesetz and Gebot] and have used it myself, I increasingly wonder about the merits of using the term "law" in an analogical sense which obviously brings me into the vicinity not only of Aquinas but also of the much and wrongly disparaged Melanchthon." Hütter, "(Re-)Forming Freedom," 160.

[83] Ibid., 43.

[84] Ibid., 42.

Now we are in a much better position to understand the radical perspective behind Luther's rather innocent-sounding claim that "in faith" human beings are "back in paradise": they are back in communion with God, back—*sola gratia* and *sola fide*—in that righteousness that God's commandment presupposes and to which God's commandment gives creaturely form and shape! And this is precisely why for Luther the "freedom of a Christian" never contradicts God's commandments and never comes without them, but rather rejoices in them and welcomes them as ways of creaturely embodying our love of God and of neighbor.[85]

The commandments of God (and in this term Hütter certainly includes the Decalogue) serve as the "shape and form of believers' lives with God."[86] For Hütter, the doing of the commandments is part of the Christian's relationship with God. "God's commandments," writes Hütter, "allow us to embody our obedience to God and our service to humanity in concrete historical practices and activities."[87] The divine commandment, then, serves a positive purpose in the Christian's life. It forms and shapes the believer according to the will of God.

The significance of Hütter's insight should not be underestimated. Not only has he salvaged a viable and prominent role for the commandments (or, less restrictively considered, the law) in the life of the believer, but he has also provided a significant correlation between the believer's justification *coram deo* and his life *coram hominibus*—and he has used Luther to do it. As Hütter sees it, it is authentically Lutheran to hold that justification returns the newly forgiven sinner to

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[85] Hütter and Dieter, *Ecumenical Ventures*, 109.

[86] Bloomquist and Stumme, *Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 44.

[87] Ibid.

God's original intent for humanity. Justification makes of the person the kind of human that God had created in the beginning. This restored creature serves God and fellow creatures according to God's plan for creation. "God's commandments," Hütter observes, "are nothing else than the concrete guidance, the concrete social practices which allow us as believers to embody—in concrete creaturely ways—our communion with God, which always includes God's other creatures."[88] Hütter provides an important contribution in the effort to claim a meaningful and relevant place for ethics within Lutheranism. In particular, his concentration on God's intent for creation is both helpful and hopeful.

Conclusion

In varying degrees, the Lutheran theologians considered in this chapter have recognized and then addressed the critique of Lutheranism's ethical difficulties implicit in virtue ethics and made explicit by Hauerwas. They all agree that typical contemporary expressions of Lutheranism are unable to address effectively the ethical challenge presented by virtue ethics and the need to speak authoritatively and meaningfully about the shape of the Christian life. These writers point in promising directions as they attempt to recover a viable place within Lutheranism for talk of ethics, cultivation of virtue,

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[88] Hütter and Dieter, *Ecumenical Ventures*, 108.

and formation of character. Meilaender's emphasis on the narrative shape of the Christian life, Benne's nudge toward trinitarian thinking, and Hütter's insights into the results of justification and the role of God's commandments are all important components in the attempt at providing an answer to the place of ethics within Lutheranism.

It is the intent of this study, however, to suggest a still broader and more thoroughgoing way to consider the ethical task and its relationship to Lutheran doctrine, a way that will draw upon the insights of each of the theologians reviewed in this chapter. In seeking answers to the ethical dilemma of Lutheranism, each of this chapter's four theologians looked back to the 16th century and sought guidance from the reformers themselves. Their example is worthy of imitation. Accordingly, the chapter that follows will examine the *Augsburg Confession* and its Apology from the standpoint of the reformers' understanding of the ethical task, particularly the place of virtue and the formation of character, within the church's teaching. The study will demonstrate that the confessional writers operated with a theological framework within which questions of Christian character formation appropriately fit.

CHAPTER THREE

AN ETHICS OF VIRTUE AND THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

A Consideration of the Confessions

Lutheranism today finds itself in an enduring struggle to locate

Christian ethics meaningfully within its justification-centered theology.

Already several centuries old, the struggle has evaded an entirely

satisfactory resolution, as witnessed in the variety of efforts surveyed in

the previous chapter. The reality and persistence of Lutheranism's

notorious quandary over ethics is readily admitted by Lutherans

themselves. While some Lutheran theologians such as Yeago and Hütter

seek and suggest remedies for this ethical impairment, there are others

who actually discourage questions of ethics, in particular the

encouragement of virtue, deeming it a threat to Lutheran doctrine.[1]

Such attitudes only serve to bolster the accusations of those like

Hauerwas who contend that Lutheran theology itself is the source of the

problem.[2]

Handicapped by justification-induced myopia, Lutheran doctrine,

it is charged, suffers from an inherent incapacity for ethical concerns

which leaves Lutheran believers poorly equipped to address practical

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[1] Cf. Gerhard O. Forde, "The Exodus from Virtue to Grace: Justification by Faith Today," *Interpretation* 34 (1980), 32-44.

[2] Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, 27-28.

issues of Christian living. While much of contemporary Lutheranism may very well substantiate the charge of proffering feeble or inadequate ethical tools, it is the contention of this study that the fault lies with current claimants to the legacy of Lutheranism and not with the doctrine itself.

In their effort to deflect the charge of Lutheranism's inherent ethical inadequacy, some of the theologians considered in chapter two have looked with success to the work of Luther himself. This move, however, does not entirely refute the charge against Lutheranism and its theology. Moreover, Lutheran pastors and teachers do not subscribe to Luther's extensive corpus, but to the Lutheran confessions. For several reasons, then, this chapter will specifically consider *The Augsburg Confession* and the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*. Penned by Melanchthon, these confessions are important by virtue of their priority in the confessional corpus historically and formatively. Further, these documents are of special interest since their foil is the Roman Church, a church that had carefully cultivated the idea of habits and disciplines of piety. It is helpful to explore Melanchthon's attitude toward the continued usefulness of such practices in the churches of the Reformation, especially in light of the Lutheran rejection of Rome's understanding of the Christian life and Rome's accusation that Lutheran theology was undermining morality.

Finally, contemporary Lutheranism's near universal recognition of the primacy and authority of the *Augustana* and its *Apology* confer a particular significance and sphere of influence on these confessions. If the charge that ethical incapacity is an intrinsic aspect of Lutheranism is accurate, one should legitimately expect to discover corroborating evidence within these foundational documents. If, however, these documents exhibit a concern for questions of Christian ethics, and an interest in formation of Christian character, not only will the charge collapse, but those Lutherans content to dismiss ethical issues will perhaps be obliged to reevaluate the propriety of their position. To that end, this chapter will consider representative passages from the Confessions, especially the *Augustana* and its *Apology*, which provide bridges to the concerns of contemporary virtue ethics. Chapter four will then suggest a framework within which to organize and understand these data.

The Prominence of Good Works in the Confessions

The Augsburg Confession

The Confessions' keen interest in encouraging good works is the most obvious "ethical" element in the symbols and provides a reasonable place to begin a search for potential bridges to virtue ethics. Little more than a cursory reading of the Lutheran Confessions is necessary to

recognize that the believer's life after justification was a significant

concern of the reformers. One needs to proceed no further than Article 6

of the *Augsburg Confession* for explicit evidence:

> Likewise, they teach that this faith is bound to yield good fruits and
> that it ought to do good works commanded by God on account of
> God's will and not so that we may trust in these works to merit
> justification before God.[3]

This Article on "The New Obedience" is supported by Article 20 of the

Augustana, "Concerning Faith and Good Works." Here, a similar

importance is attached to good works: "Further, it is taught that good

works should and must be done, not that a person relies on them to earn

grace, but for God's sake and to God's praise."[4] Even beyond these

Articles specifically committed to exposition of the significance of good

works, *The Book of Concord* contains a wealth of additional material that

highlights the reformers' keen interest in good works and the Christian's

life after justification.

The author of the *Augustana* emphasized the importance, indeed

the necessity of good works in several Articles primarily dedicated to

other issues. Article 12 of the *Augustana,* "Concerning Repentance,"

confirms that good works are the fruit of repentance:

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[3] Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) (hereafter cited as *Book of Concord*), 41(CA 6, 1).

[4] Ibid., 56 (CA 20, 27).

> Faith believes that sins are forgiven on account of Christ, consoles the conscience, and liberates it from terrors. Thereupon good works, which are the fruit of repentance, should follow.[5]

The Article on civil affairs (CA, 16) establishes that "lawful civil ordinances are good works of God," and reflects the central elements of the reformers' teaching of two realms and their corresponding kinds of kinds of righteousness.[6] Article 18 treats the topic of free will and further develops the doctrine of two kinds of righteousness: "Concerning free will they teach that the human will has some freedom for producing civil righteousness and for choosing things subject to reason."[7]

The Apology

Besides multiple passing references to the place and importance of good works, the *Apology* also contains several extended discussions about the good works of Christians and, of course, the two kinds of righteousness. Certainly, such an emphasis is hardly unexpected given the repeated accusations being leveled against the Lutherans that their

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[5] Ibid., 45 (CA 12, 5-6).

[6] Ibid., 49 (CA 16, 1). This confessional affirmation of two distinct kinds of righteousness, the righteousness of faith *coram deo* and civil righteousness *coram hominibus*, will prove to be a critical avenue in the present project of locating the ethical task within Lutheran theology. The righteousness of faith indicates the believer before God where she is the totally passive recipient of God's gift of salvation. Civil righteousness refers to the individuals in their interactions with other creatures and names the humanly recognized achievements of rightly ordered living.

[7] Ibid., 51 (CA 18, 1).

doctrine was undermining civil righteousness.[8] Friedrich Mildenberger outlines the logic of the charge against the Lutherans' doctrine:

> If salvation is the free gift of God's grace, then we have no need to trouble ourselves with trying to lead a God-pleasing life. Rather, we are free to do or not to do whatever pleases us. This reproach was close to the surface and was easily confirmed by experience—for people's religious and moral activities are always open to criticism. The statement that Lutheran preaching resulted in immorality was an effective argument and the Lutherans had to defend themselves against this accusation.[9]

Melanchthon took the charge seriously and addressed it at length. His argument begins with paragraph 122 in Article 4 of the *Apology* and runs for the remainder of the Article—almost 33 pages in the Kolb-Wengert edition. Exhibiting his skill as a dialectician, Melanchthon contends that good works and faith are not at odds, but intimately related. "Thus good works ought to follow faith as thanksgiving toward God. Likewise, good works ought to follow faith so that faith is exercised in them, grows, and is shown to others, in order that others may be invited to godliness by our confession."[10]

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[8] This was no small factor for Melanchthon, who was already defending the Lutheran position from such attacks by Erasmus. For an excellent account of Melanchthon's scholarly interactions with Erasmus, see Timothy J. Wengert *Human Freedom, Christian Righteousness: Philip Melanchthon's Exegetical Dispute with Erasmus of Rotterdam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), especially chapter 5.

[9] Friedrich Mildenberger, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Erwin L. Lueker, ed. Robert C. Schulz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 91.

[10] *Book of Concord*, 150 (Ap 4, 188).

The Smalcald Articles

Article 13 of *The Smalcald Articles* addressed both justification by

faith and the good works that are to follow. Here, Luther laid heavy

stress on the necessity of faith before any work could be considered good.

> Good works follow such faith, renewal, and forgiveness of sin, and
> whatever in these works is still sinful or imperfect should not even be
> counted as sin or imperfection, precisely for the sake of this same
> Christ. Instead, the human creature should be called and should be
> completely righteous and holy—according to both the person and his
> or her works—by the pure grace and mercy that have been poured
> and spread over us in Christ."[11]

Clearly, Luther's concern here is to reiterate the reality of a person's

righteousness before God which achieves a complete transformation.

The Catechisms

Within the confessional corpus, the *Small* and *Large Catechisms*

provide perhaps the most impressive evidence of the emphasis placed on

good works or Christian living in the teaching of the first Lutherans.

Scandalized by his firsthand experience during the 1528 church

visitation of electoral Saxony and Meissen, Luther hoped that the

catechisms and their place in the daily routines of believers would help

to lead the people out of their shameful state of licentiousness.[12] In his

preface to the *Small Catechism*, Luther complained that the "ordinary

person, especially in the villages," was woefully ignorant about the most

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[11] Ibid., 325 (SA 13, 2).

[12] Charles P. Arand *That I May Be His Own: An Overview of Luther's Catechisms*
(St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2000), 172-176. See also Bast, *Honor Your
Fathers*, 131-145.

basic tenets of the Christian faith. "As a result," Luther lamented, "they live like simple cattle or irrational pigs and, despite the fact that the gospel has returned, have mastered the fine art of misusing all their freedom."[13]

Similarly, in the *Large Catechism*'s longer preface addressed to "preachers and pastors," Luther identified a moral crisis as a precipitating force behind the catechism's production and urged the regular reading and teaching of the catechism.

> In this way they [preachers and pastors] would once again show honor and respect to the gospel, through which they have been delivered from so many burdens and troubles, and they might feel a little shame that, like pigs and dogs, they are remembering no more of the gospel than this rotten, pernicious, shameful, carnal liberty. As it is, the common people take the gospel altogether too lightly, and we accomplish but little, despite all our hard work. What, then, can we expect if we are slothful and lazy, as we used to be under the papacy?[14]

Particularly noteworthy is Luther's concern that the people are remembering too little of the gospel. Is it reasonable to conclude that Luther considered the people's moral lives to be included as an aspect of the gospel? David Yeago certainly understands Luther this way. "Even in the sixteenth century," he writes, "the Reformers were well aware that there is more to the gospel promise than assurance that we will not be damned."[15] The sense of Yeago's position seems accurate enough. It is

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[13] *Book of Concord*, 348 (SC Preface, 3).

[14] Ibid., 380 (LC longer preface 3-4).

[15] Yeago, "Promise of God," 25.

evident that the moral life of common Christians was critically important to the reformer. Still, to subsume this concern for Christian living within the "gospel promise" could unintentionally eventuate in the very diminution and distortion of the gospel that prompted the Reformation.[16]

The catechisms unquestionably demonstrate that Luther recognized a need not only for doctrinal education, but for training in the fundamental duties and practices of Christian living. "Luther's catechisms," notes Yeago, "display a clear awareness that doctrinal catechesis is part of a larger whole."[17] He points out that the *Small Catechism* provides instruction in prayer and private worship practice. Yeago neglects to mention an inclusion of even greater relevance for the question of Christian living. Quite willing to address the routine aspects of ordinary life with explicit dos and don'ts, Luther appended a *Haustafel* to his smaller catechism.[18] The *Large Catechism* reflects the same appreciation for the necessity of offering plain instruction in moral behavior. Fully one half of the *Large Catechism* is devoted to a practical exposition of the Decalogue. In the catechisms, Luther evinces his

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[16] As discussed in the previous chapter, this is precisely the concern with fully adopting Hauerwas' effort to bring justification under the umbrella of the Christian's journey toward ethical perfection.

[17] Yeago, "Sacramental Lutheranism, 15.

[18] For a detailed consideration of Luther's *Haustafel* and its significance in the Catechism, see Arand, *That I May Be His Own.*

capacity for the practice of unvarnished moralism.[19] That is, Luther

engages in the effort to shape character and behavior, as he considers

the realities of life from the perspective of the Christian's responsibilities

to his fellow creatures. This ethical emphasis of the catechisms will be

considered more fully in a section to follow.

The Formula of Concord

Naturally, the *Formula of Concord* also turns its attention to the

question of the Christian's life of good works. Article 4 specifically

addresses the necessity of good works, affirming (among other theses):

> We also believe, teach, and confess that all people, particularly those
> who have been reborn and renewed through the Holy Spirit, are
> obligated to do good works.[20]

Article 6 touches on the Christian life after justification as it settles the

issue of the third use of the law.

> We believe, teach, and confess that, although people who truly believe
> in Christ and are genuinely converted to God have been liberated and
> set free from the curse and compulsion of the law through Christ,
> they indeed are not for that reason without the law. Instead, they
> have been redeemed by the Son of God so that they may practice the
> law day and night (Ps. 119). For our first parents did not live without
> the law even before the fall.[21]

It must be conceded that throughout the *Book of Concord*,

justification and the absolute worthlessness of good works in meriting

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[19] Of course, in today's theological climate few criticisms are considered more disparaging or devastating than a charge of "moralism" (though "pietism" comes close!). This aversion to "moralism" is itself another symptom of the theological and ethical inadequacies of much contemporary Lutheranism.

[20] *Book of Concord*, 498 (FC Ep 4, 8).

[21] Ibid., 502 (FC Ep 6, 2).

righteousness before God actually occupy the bulk of the text.

Considering the historical context, however, this is hardly surprising. It

is important to appreciate, nevertheless, that the reformers were quite

concerned about the promotion of civil morality and Christian good

works. Holsten Fagerberg recognizes that for the reformers, "There was

general agreement that an upright life was required of everyone."[22]

Yet, recognition of the reformation's acclamation and endorsement

of Christian good works scarcely satisfies the objective of this study.

That the reformers were in favor of morality and good works should be

obvious enough. Would they, however, have endorsed the sort of

intentional training in virtuous works and deliberate cultivation of

Christian character that is advocated by the supporters of virtue ethics?

Is the exhortation to good works the same thing as the inculcation of

virtue? Did the reformers approve the idea that individual Christian

character could and should be formed through human effort, or did they

rely solely on the gospel's power of transformation? Was there a place

within the Christian faith and specifically within Lutheranism for the

teaching of virtue, or were Christian virtues the essentially automatic

fruit of the gospel and justification? One of the important factors to be

addressed is the support within the Confessions for the idea of faith's

spontaneous production of good works.

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[22] Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions (1529-1537)* trans.
Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 103.

Faith and the Spontaneous Production of Good Works

There are passages in the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Apology*

which appear to support faith's spontaneous generation of good works.

Immediately after insisting that it is "necessary to do good works,"

Melanchthon continues in Article 20 of the *Augustana*, "Moreover,

because the Holy Spirit is received through faith, consequently hearts are

renewed and endowed with new affections so as to be able to do good

works."[23] Here, one could argue, Melanchthon is endorsing the idea that

the simple presence of the Holy Spirit in the justified's life accounts for a

subsequent life of good works.

The concluding sentence from the same Article in the *Apology*

lends increased weight to the view:

> For we do not abolish the law, Paul says, but we establish it, because
> when we receive the Holy Spirit by faith the fulfillment of the law
> necessarily follows, through which love, patience, chastity, and other
> fruits of the Spirit continually grow.[24]

The critical word, of course, is "necessarily." In what sense, exactly, can

it be said that the fulfillment of the law necessarily follows the gift of

faith? Does it happen automatically, a sort of theological function: Holy

Spirit in—good works out? If such is the case, then there would appear

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[23] Ibid., 57 (CA 20, 29).

[24] Ibid., 237 (Ap 20, 15) "quia cum fide accepimus spiritum sanctum,
necessario sequitur legis impletio." *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen
Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), (hereafter cited as
Bekenntnisschriften), 316.

to be scant space for talk of growth in virtues or formation through habituation.[25]

Similarly, the discussion on "Love and the Fulfilling of the Law" in Article 4 of the *Apology* states that "the Spirit reveals Christ.... Then he also brings the other gifts: love, prayer, thanksgiving, chastity, endurance, etc."[26] Do the fruits appear as simply as that? Does one merely preach the Gospel and then wait for the guaranteed harvest of Christian character and virtue? It is surely conceivable that these confessional excerpts could direct a reader to such conclusions. Certainly, this is all the more probable in the light of Luther's memorable words quoted in the Solid Declaration of the *Formula*:

> Faith, however, is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God. It kills the old 'Adam' and makes us altogether different people, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. O, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them.[27]

Of course, this is not the only instance of Luther seeming to assert the ability of faith single-handedly to make a new man and produce good

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[25] It is interesting to note that moral theologians in the Roman Catholic Church have encountered similar perplexities in engineering a rapprochement between the idea of habituation in character and the teaching of infused virtue. See Romanus Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 94-125.

[26] *Book of Concord*, 141 (Ap 4, 132).

[27] Ibid., 576 (FC SD 4, 11).

works.[28] Obviously, Luther could muster compelling scriptural support for his position, thus increasing its plausibility.[29] Still, those insisting on the need for habituation and training in character are certainly not without recourse to their own collection of supporting scripture.[30]

Yet, the issue at hand is not the scriptural record, but the confessional corpus and the reformers. If the confessions themselves actually teach a Christian regeneration that excludes, whether explicitly or implicitly, all training or formation, then Hauerwas's criticism of Lutheranism traces to the reformers themselves. Consequently, ethical instruction and even concerns over morality are essentially removed from the purview of Lutheran theology—all that is really needed to help people to grow in virtue and Christian character is faith. When character is lacking, or virtues few, the solution is simply to preach more gospel, strengthen faith, and wait for the promised fruit. It is the contention of this study, however, that this constrained interpretation of the confessions is severely mistaken and that the characteristic scopes of virtue ethics and Lutheran theology are not de facto mutually exclusive.

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[28] Another example derives from *The Freedom of a Christian*: "As it is necessary, therefore, that the trees exist before their fruits and the fruits do not make trees either good or bad, but rather as the trees are, so are the fruits they bear; so a man must first be good or wicked before he does a good or wicked work, and his works do not make him good or wicked, but he himself makes his works either good or wicked." *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, American Edition, 56 vols. (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1958-86) (hereafter cited as LW), 31:361.

[29] John 15:1-8 and Matthew 3:10 among others.

[30] I Timothy 5 & 6 and Matthew 6 are representative of a potentially long list.

To substantiate this study's thesis, it is necessary to discern within the *Book of Concord* themes and ideas that may be read in sympathy with the concerns of virtue ethics and the desire to cultivate character. It must be demonstrated that the theology of the confessions provides at least the possibility—if not the outright endorsement—of the practice of habituation in virtue and formation of character.

Justified in Order to Fulfill the Law

An interesting confessional accent which provides a promising entrée for the concerns of virtue ethics and character formation can be discerned in the *Augsburg Confession*. As previously observed, Article 20, which discusses faith and good works, seems to support the idea that once the Holy Spirit is received through faith, the flow of good works is released automatically and continually. Yet, the close of the same Article provides another nuance when it indicates that the gift of faith actually leads the believer back to the Decalogue in order to *fulfill* the Decalogue.

> Hence, it is readily apparent that no one should accuse this teaching of prohibiting good works. On the contrary, it is rather to be commended for showing how we can do good works. For without faith human nature cannot possibly do the works of the First or Second Commandments.[31]

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[31] *Book of Concord*, 57 (CA 20, 35 & 36).

Faith allows the fulfillment of the Decalogue. In fact, the assumption of the confession seems to be that the Christian is justified in order that his newly created faith will lead and empower him to keep the law. Or, simply stated, the believer is justified in order to fulfill the law.

The assertion that God justifies in order that the justified may follow the law gains considerable momentum in the *Large Catechism*. As Luther introduces his teaching on the Apostles' Creed, he considers the propriety of locating the discussion of the Creed immediately after the exposition of the Decalogue.

> The Creed properly follows, which sets forth all that we must expect and receive from God; in short, it teaches us to know him perfectly. It is given in order to help us do what the Ten Commandments require of us. For, as we said above, they are set so high that all human ability is far too puny and weak to keep them. Therefore, it is just as necessary to learn this part, as it is the other so that we may know where and how to obtain the power to do this.[32]

Without equivocation, Luther declares that Christians are to be busy about doing the Commandments. Even more significantly, though, he advances the idea that the Creed actually serves the Commandments.[33] The Creed enables the observance of the Decalogue, which shapes and

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[32] Ibid., 431 (LC, 2, 2). "Welchs eben dazu dienen soll, dass wir dasselbige tuen können, so wir lauts der zehen Gebot tuen sollen." *Bekenntnisschriften.*

[33] Though they provide no reference information, John C. Mattes and Michael Reu relate another relevant comment of Luther. "There are three things which everyone must know in order to be saved. First, he must know what he ought to do and what he must leave undone. Then, as he has discovered that it is impossible for him to accomplish either with his own strength, *he must know where to obtain, where to seek, and find the power that will enable him to do his duty.* And, in the third place, he must know how to seek and obtain that aid." John C. Mattes and Michael Reu, eds. *Luther's Small Catechism: A Jubilee Offering* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1929), 15 (emphasis added). Here again, Luther stresses the idea of the Creed's enabling the fulfillment of the Commandments which are identified with the duty of the believer.

directs life in the civil realm. So the Creed, which Luther identifies with the proclamation of the gospel, can in some sense actually be understood as an auxiliary of civil righteousness—or perhaps better—active righteousness.

Luther fortifies the point by reiterating the same message in the conclusion of his discussion on the Creed.

> But the Creed brings pure grace and makes us righteous and acceptable to God. Through this knowledge we come to love and delight in all the commandments of God because we see here in the Creed how God gives himself completely to us, with all his gifts and power, to help us keep the Ten Commandments: The Father gives us all creation, Christ all his works, the Holy Spirit all his gifts."[34]

Coram deo, the Creed is all about God's grace—justifying sinners and delivering the gifts of salvation. But, as Luther stresses, this is hardly the extent of the Creed's purpose or application. It also serves the believer's growth in sanctification by enabling and empowering the observance of the divine law, which provides certain and formative directions for the shape of the Christian life.

James Nestingen concurs with this reading of the reformer's teaching on the Commandments, understanding the Decalogue in the context of creation. "In interpreting the commandments," he writes, "Luther attempts to read life from the bottom up, to get to the nonnegotiable requirements of the human condition."[35] Those

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[34] Ibid., 440 (LC, II, 69).

[35] James Arne Nestingen, "Preaching the Catechism," *Word & World*, 10, 1 (winter, 1990), 36.

requirements are articulated by the Creator in the form of the Ten Commandments. Using a phrase that will be more fully explored in a subsequent chapter, Nestingen calls the Ten Commandments the "explication of the ineradicable minimums of creatureliness."[36] Later, he asserts further that for Luther, Christ's work was "to restore us to the creatureliness lost in all of our attempts at self-transcendence."[37] Christ restores people to the life for which they were created—the life that is given its shape by the Commandments.

Christians are given the Creed, that is the gospel, specifically so that they may be able to fulfill the requirements of the law as spelled out in the Ten Commandments.[38] "Through the catechism," writes Charles Arand, "they [the reformers] laid a lasting foundation for shaping both the faith and piety of the people."[39] Concern for the shape of Christian lives was a consistent interest of the confessors. As they understood the

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., 37.

[38] This theme is reiterated in Article six of the *Formula*: "We believe, teach, and confess that, although people who truly believe in Christ and are genuinely converted to God have been liberated and set free from the curse and compulsion of the law through Christ, they indeed are not for that reason without the law. Instead, they have been redeemed by the Son of God so that they may practice the law day and night." *Book Of Concord*, 502 (FC, Ep. 6, 2). "Sondern darumb von dem Sohn Gottes erlöset worden, dass sie sich in demselben Tag und Nacht üben sollen." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 793. While a substantial argument could be advanced for the role played by the third use of the law in the promotion of good works and virtuous activity, such a pursuit lies outside the scope of the current investigation. For a study of the ongoing debate over the third use of the law, see Scott R. Murray, *Law, Life and the Living God: the Third Use of Law in Modern American Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002).

[39] Arand, *That I May Be His Own*, 81. See pages 133ff for a more complete account of Luther's understanding of the relation between the Decalogue and the Creed.

Christian faith, justified people are people under the gospel living lives

which are being conformed to God's will as revealed in the Decalogue.

While the Spirit prompts good works, the Decalogue gives those works

their shape. A Christian whose works are shaped by the Decalogue,

then, must know the Decalogue. The believer must be taught, indeed,

thoroughly indoctrinated, into the concrete and particular realities which

spring from the Commandments.[40] Such indoctrination in virtuous

living was a recurrent feature of Aristotle's ethical work. Hence,

Melanchthon's approbation of Aristotle, even within the confessional

corpus, warrants a close and careful investigation.

Melanchthon's Use of Aristotle within the Confessions

In the Middle Ages, and certainly even down to the present, the

most influential advocate and teacher of an ethics that promotes and

indeed requires the cultivation of virtue is the Greek philosopher,

Aristotle. Another hopeful point of connection between contemporary

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[40] Another topic relevant to, yet beyond the parameters of, the present discussion is the anthropology of a Christian. Article two of the *Formula* invites further investigation affirming, as it does, the believer's active role in the attainment of the knowledge of God's will and its pursuit. "After this conversion the reborn human will is not idle in the daily exercise of repentance, but cooperates in all the works of the Holy Spirit which he performs through us.... The will not only accepts grace but also cooperates with the Holy Spirit in the works that proceed from it." *Book of Concord*, 494 (FC Ep. 2, 17, 18). "Und dass nach sollicher Bekehrung in täglicher übung der Buss des Menschen wiedergeborner Wille nicht müssig gehe, sunder in allen Werken des H. Geistes, die er durch uns tut, auch mitwirke.... Dass er nicht allein die Gnade annimbt, sondern auch in folgenden Werken des Heiligen Geistes mitwirket." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 780.

proponents of virtue ethics and the author of the *Augustana* and the *Apology*, then, is a mutual respect for Aristotle. Beginning with Alasdair MacIntyre, contemporary supporters of an ethics of virtue have regularly turned to Aristotle for insight and clarification and commended his work.[41] As nearly all theologians before him, Melanchthon also granted Aristotle a significant place in his ethical study.

Melanchthon's approval of Aristotle was, it will become clear, within sharply proscribed limits. Still, the use of Aristotle in any capacity could be considered somewhat remarkable. Aristotle, or more accurately the misuse of Aristotle, was regularly subjected to ardent attack by the confessors. Luther's assessment of the philosopher was memorably harsh. In 1520, he offered his thoughts on Aristotle in his open letter, *To the Christian Nobility*:

> In this regard my advice would be that Aristotle's *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Concerning the Soul*, and *Ethics*, which hitherto have been thought to be his best books, should be completely discarded...nothing can be learned from them either about nature or the Spirit.... It grieves me to the quick that this damned, conceited, rascally heathen has deluded and made fools of so many of the best Christians with his misleading writings. God has sent him as a plague upon us on account of our sins.... His book on ethics is the worst of all books. It flatly opposes divine grace and all Christian virtues, and yet it is considered one of his best works. Away with such books! Keep them away from Christians.[42]

The passage of 23 years mitigated Luther's evaluation considerably, or perhaps the context within which he was writing simply

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[41] MacIntyre, 196-203.

[42] LW 44:200-201.

allowed a different expression of his sentiments toward the philosopher.

Whatever the reason, by 1543, in an exposition of Isaiah chapter 9,

Luther could actually commend the book and author he had once so

eloquently condemned:

> Cicero praeclare scripsit ac docuit de virtutibus, prudentia, temperantia ac reliquis, Item et Artistotles praeclare et erudite de Ethics; Utilissimi quidem libri utriusque et ad vitam hanc exigendam summe necessarii.[43]

The comment itself actually provides at least a partial explanation for the

shift in Luther's estimation of Aristotle. Luther continues his exposition

of the light dawning on "those walking in darkness" by contrasting the

value of the best human philosophy with what it cannot give: freedom

from sin, death and hell, peace for an anxious conscience, and the ability

to guide one to God's heavenly kingdom.[44] When it came to an

individual's standing before God, human philosophers had nothing to

contribute. For Luther and the other reformers, the chief concern was

always the encroachment of Aristotle into the *coram deo* domain—not

Aristotle, or his teaching per se. Within appropriate bounds, then, that

is when addressing questions of ethics or the Christian in his

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[43] *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gessamtausgabe,* 58 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883) (hereafter cited as WA), 40:608. "Cicero wrote and taught excellently about virtues, prudence, temperance and the rest; likewise also Aristotle excellently and very learnedly about ethics. Indeed the books of both are very useful and of the greatest necessity for the regulation of this life."

[44] Ibid. "Sed ex eorum scriptis quantumvis praestantibus vera tamen illa sapientia disci non potest, non enim docent me, quomodo liberari possim a peccatis, morte et inferis, non possunt conscientiam anxiam et pavitantem serenare et pacare, non possunt veram animo securitatem indere, non possunt viam perveniendi ad Deum in regnum coelorum commonstrare, non possunt vera Dei ac mei ipsius cognitione me imbuere."

relationship with the rest of creation ("ad vitam hanc exigendam"),

Aristotle does have a place—even within the Confessions.

Philip Melanchthon, the *Praeceptor Germaniae* (teacher of

Germany), was a student and instructor of Aristotle in the disciplines of

dialectics, rhetoric, and ethics.[45] Quite understandably then, his

appreciation for Aristotle is also manifest in his regular use of

Aristotelian vocabulary, terminology, and methodology in a theological

work like the *Apology*. For example, when clarifying the "real purpose"

for Christ's life and passion as the forgiveness of sins, he employs a term

from formal logic, calling forgiveness of sins the *"causa finalis."*[46]

Abraham Edel identifies this term as part of the technical terminology in

Aristotle's theory of causes. There is the material cause, the formal

cause, the efficient cause, and, the final cause. "The *final cause* is the

for-the-sake-of-which; health, for example is the final cause of surgery.

It is the end or goal (*telos*) toward which the thing is working or

moving."[47]

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[45] Philip Melanchthon, *Orations on Philosophy and Education*, ed. Sachiko Kusukawa, trans. by Christine F. Salazar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xv-xvii.

[46] "Thus it is not enough to believe that Christ was born, suffered, and was raised again unless we also add this Article, which is the real purpose of the narrative: 'the forgiveness of sins.'" *Book of Concord*, 128 (Ap 4, 51). "Itaque non satis est credere, quod Christus natus, passus, resuscitatus sit, nisi addimus et hunc articulum, qui est causa finalis historiae: remissionem peccatorum." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 170.

[47] Abraham Edel, *Aristotle and His Philosophy* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 62.

Likewise, Melanchthon readily turns to terminology employed by Plato and refined by Aristotle when he finds it useful in explaining the Mass and the concept of sacrifice in terms of genus and species: "What Is a Sacrifice, and What Are the Kinds of Sacrifice?"[48] Introducing Aristotle's *Topics*, Robin Smith writes, "From Plato's work and other sources, a certain standard structure for definitions can be inferred: a definition must locate the thing defined in its general class or type (its *genus*) and then specify what differentiates it from other things of that type (its *differentia*)."[49] Aristotle's ten categories brought the art of taxonomy to new heights, an art Melanchthon understood well, as evidenced by the very Aristotelian progression of his argument in *Apology* 24, 16-49 as he instructs his opponents about the true meaning of sacrifice. Indeed, perhaps the most telling evidence of Aristotelian influence on Melanchthon is the one easily overlooked. The very shape and method of Melanchthon's argument throughout the *Apology*

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[48] "But our opponents...hack to pieces the various parts of the concept 'sacrifice,' as our enumeration of the types of sacrifice will make clear. As a matter of course, theologians rightly distinguish between a sacrament and a sacrifice. Therefore, the genus that includes both of these could be either a 'ceremony' or a 'sacred work.'" *Book of Concord*, 260 (Ap 24, 16-17). "...adversarii...sacrificii membra corrumpentes, quemadmodum intelligi poterit, quum species sacrificii recensuerimus. Theologi recte solent distinguere *sacramentum et sacrificium*. Sit igitur genus horum vel ceremonia vel opus sacrum." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 354.

[49] Aristotle, *Topics: Books I and VIII with Excerpts from Related Texts*, trans. Robin Smith in *Clarendon Aristotle Series* ed. J. L. Ackrill and Lindsay Judson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), xxx.

conforms to the instruction in dialectic that Aristotle offers in his

Topics.[50]

Neither does Melanchthon hesitate to use a favorite concept of

Aristotle, the philosophical term *epieikeia*, that is, "fairness, equity,

clemency, or goodness" in an effort to clarify what Peter meant when he

taught that love covers a multitude of sins (I Peter 4:8).[51] Aristotle and

Stoic philosophers after him numbered e*pieikeia* among the virtues. "It

is not without reason," Melanchthon notes, "that the apostles speak so

often about this responsibility of love, which the philosophers call

'fairness.'"[52] When Aristotle's discussion of *epieikeia* in the

Nichomachean Ethics is consulted, Melanchthon's application in the

context of I Peter is reasonable enough. The man demonstrating

epieikeia says Aristotle, "is no stickler for his rights in a bad sense but

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[50] For example, Aristotle instructs: "It is useful to have examined in how many ways a word is said both for the sake of clarity (for someone would better know what it is he is conceding once it had been brought to light in how many ways the term is applied) and in order to make out deductions concern the thing itself rather than being about a word." Ibid., 18. Melanchthon argues, "Now there are two, and no more than two, basic kinds of sacrifice (sacrificii species). In this controversy and in other disputes, we must never lose sight of those two kinds of sacrifices, and we should take special care not to confuse them." *Book of Concord*, 261 (Ap, 24, 19-20). Melanchthon's reliance on Aristotelian dialectic for the construction of his argument presents a fertile field for further and more complete investigation. For the present study, however, it is sufficient to recognize Melanchthon's readiness to follow the instruction of Aristotle.

[51] *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon: Founded upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 291.

[52] *Book of Concord*, 157 (Ap 4, 243). "Neque temere de hoc officio dilectionis toties praecipiunt apostoli, quod philosophi vocant *epieikeian.*" *Bekenntnisschriften*, 207. Melanchthon also uses the term in CA 26, 14.

tends to take less than his share though he has the law on his side."[53]

Melanchthon recognized an affinity between Aristotle's description and Peter's exhortation.[54]

Approval of Aristotle in Melanchthon's Writing

Melanchthon's high regard for Aristotle's method and ethics is reflected most explicitly and pervasively, of course, in his academic work. Indeed, it would be difficult to exaggerate Melanchthon's appreciation for the peripatetic philosopher who is consistently praised throughout the academic writings of Germany's teacher. Commending the publications of a friend, Simon Grynaeus, Melanchthon admits his admiration: "For by your favour [sic] we have a more faultless and more refined Aristotle whom you know I admire, love and cherish greatly."[55] In a dedicatory letter for his work on moral philosophy, Melanchthon supplies at least a partial explanation for his robust sanction of Aristotle.

> Therefore, since in choosing a type of teaching one has to choose what is correct, true, simple, steadfast, well ordered and useful for life, I believe that young minds need to be instructed chiefly with Aristotelian doctrine, which in these qualities surpasses all other sects. Why? Because Aristotle's *Ethics* should also be loved, because he alone saw and understood that the virtues are middle states. By

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[53] Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. Sir David Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 134 (Book 5, 11).

[54] This is not to suggest that Melanchthon considered Aristotle's understanding of *epieikeia* to be the definitive interpretation, much less the source, for Peter's exhortation.

[55] Philip Melanchthon, *Orations on Philosophy*, 112.

that description he instructs us most learnedly that the impulses of the mind must be bent to moderation and held back.[56]

More than merely an example of Melanchthon's high regard for Aristotle, this passage also provides a significant insight into Melanchthon's understanding of virtue and its role in life. His approval of virtues as middle states will be explored more fully below.

The Wittenberg professor of Greek was convinced that Aristotle could rightly be considered a divine gift to school and church. "Even though some splendid books of his [Aristotle's] have perished," he told a graduating class, "I nevertheless reckon that those that are left—which at any rate are most fitting for schools—were preserved by divine providence in order that succeeding generations could be taught more correctly."[57] Specifically, Melanchthon urged the use of Aristotle's dialectic as "very useful, not only in the forum and in trials, but also in the Church."[58] As previously noted, Melanchthon himself proved his point by his own practice.

Certainly, Aristotle was also recommended for his ethical insight. In 1531, Melanchthon wrote, "Aristotle rightly and wisely said that the

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[56] Philip Melanchthon, *Orations on Philosophy*, 141. "Quid? quod hoc nomine etiam amanda sunt Aristotelis Ethica, quod unus vidit ac deprehendit, virtutes esse mediocritates. Qua descriptione eruditissime monet, impetus animorum ad moderationem flectendos et retrahendos esse." Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, Philipp Melanchthon, and Jean Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 86 vols.(Halle: C. A. Schwetschke and Son, 1836), 3:362.

[57] Philip Melanchthon, *Orations on Philosophy*, 208.

[58] Philip Melanchthon, *Orations on Philosophy*, 86. Aristotle provided his most explicit teaching on the art of dialectic in his *Topics*.

middle in virtue is of geometric proportion not arithmetic."[59] While

widely recognized as Aristotelian, the doctrine of the mean is

nevertheless often misunderstood. Edel gives this helpful explanation:

> The mean is a proper, just-right point between excess and defect. It is
> not an arithmetical mean but a mean relative to the individual. If ten
> pounds is too much for person to eat and two pounds too little, it does
> not follow that a trainer will recommend six for a particular athlete. It
> depends on the person and the purpose.[60]

Melanchthon applies this same principle to ethics, concluding that

Aristotle was correct in stipulating that what is ethically right for a given

individual may vary from what is right for another person. Aristotle gives

the example of the virtue of liberality. "The term 'liberality' is used

relatively to a man's substance; for liberality resides not in the multitude

of the gifts but in the state of character of the giver, and this is relative to

the giver's substance."[61]

It was shown that Melanchthon readily employed Aristotelian

method in his theological work, using tools that were no doubt familiar

and comfortable. Neither did Melanchthon make any effort to conceal

his implicit approval of Aristotle, finding opportunities explicitly to praise

Aristotle's contributions even while confessing the Lutheran faith. In the

Apology, Melanchthon declared, "Aristotle wrote so eruditely about social

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[59] Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen, eds., *Sources and Contexts of The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 140-143.

[60] Edel, 270.

[61] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 81 (Book 4, 1). See also *Nichomachean Ethics*, 112-114 (Book 5, 3) for Aristotle's discussion about the geometric proportion.

ethics that nothing further needs to be added."[62] Aristotle is also noted

as a worthy authority on things political. Referring to a letter sent by

Aristotle to Alexander, Melanchthon comments: "This is a most

respectable speech, and nothing better could be said about the public

office of a great prince."[63]

Aristotle had his place within Melanchthon's theological work, but

within limits. With Luther, Melanchthon allowed Aristotle no place in

discussions about man's relationship to God. In fact, Melanchthon did

not hesitate to criticize Aristotle when his teaching threatened theological

veracity. In Article 2 of the *Apology* Melanchthon is defending the

reformers' doctrine of original sin against the attacks of the Roman

Catholic opponents who argued that "nothing is sin unless it is

voluntary."[64] Melanchthon traced the problem to the opponents' use of

philosophy. "In the schools, however, they have taken over from

philosophy the completely alien notions that our passions make us

neither good nor evil, neither praiseworthy nor contemptible."[65]

Melanchthon's reading of Aristotle was on the mark. In the

Nichomachean Ethics Aristotle concluded:

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[62] *Book of Concord*, 122 (Ap 4, 14).

[63] Ibid., 160 (Ap 4, 252).

[64] Ibid., 119 (Ap 2, 43).

[65] Ibid. "Sed in scholis transtulerunt huc ex philosophia prorsus alienas sententias, quod propter passiones nec boni mali simus, nec laudemur nec vituperemur." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 155.

Now neither the virtues nor the vices are passions, because we are not
called good or bad on the ground of our passions, but are so called on
the ground of our virtues and our vices, and because we are neither
praised nor blamed for our passions (for the man who feels fear or
anger is not praised, nor is the man who simply feels anger blamed,
but the man who feels it in a certain way), but for our virtues and our
vices we are praised or blamed.[66]

Yet, even in this case, Melanchthon's quarrel is not so much with

Aristotle, as with his opponents' inappropriate use of Aristotle. "These

statements in the philosophers," Melanchthon asserts, "speak about the

judgement of civil courts, not about the judgement of God." Then the

reformer adds, "In its place, we do not object to this statement." The

'place' of course was in the civil realm, that is *coram hominibus*. The

central issue for Melanchthon was that his opponents "improperly

mingle[d] philosophical or social ethics with the gospel."[67] Aristotle was

not the problem; it was the imposition of Aristotle into a question of

theology *coram deo* that brought Melanchthon's rebuke. Melanchthon

understood the extent and the limits of Aristotle's usefulness.

A potentially fruitful correlation between today's advocates of virtue

ethics and the Lutheran reformers exists, then, in their shared

appreciation for the value of the work of Aristotle. But what agreement

can be detected regarding the crucial issue of the formation of character

through habituation and the practice of virtuous acts? Was

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[66] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 36 (2, 5).

[67] *Book of Concord*, 119 (Ap. 2, 43). "Hae sententiae apud philosophos de civili
iudicio dictae sunt, non de iudicio Dei. ... Id in loco dictum, non reprehendimus; ...
intempestive commiscent philosophicam seu civilem doctrinam de moribus cum
evangelio." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 156.

Melanchthon prepared to follow Aristotle's prescribed method of ethical

training whereby virtuous people are so made by the practice of virtuous

acts? Does Melanchthon endorse the idea that virtue needs to be

learned through the inculcation of habits and the repetition of regular

disciplines? Today's virtue ethicists embrace these teachings of

Aristotle.[68] What of the author of the Confession? How did Philip

Melanchthon treat habituation and the formation of character?

Civil Righteousness in the Augustana and Apology

Melanchthon's distinction between two kinds of righteousness is a

promising place to begin a closer investigation of Melanchthon's views on

habituation and character development.[69] There is a righteousness that

is civil, the Confessions acknowledge, and a righteousness of faith. Only

the righteousness of faith justifies before God, and it is wholly the work

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[68] It should be noted that the adoption of Aristotle by any form of Christian virtue ethics requires judicious editing. Christians typically count humility and patience as virtues. "Yet," MacIntyre observes, "in the only place in Aristotle's account of the virtues where anything resembling humility is mentioned, it is as a vice and patience is not mentioned at all by Aristotle." MacIntyre, 177. The Christian use of Aristotle is, as a rule, probably more formal than material.

[69] While scholars have insisted that the two kinds of righteousness is a subset of the distinction between law and gospel, [see Fagerberg, *New Look*, 109; and Edmund Schlink *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* trans. Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), XXI.] Charles Arand argues convincingly that "law and gospel is a subset of the two kinds of righteousness." Charles P. Arand, "Two Kinds of Righteousness as a Framework for Law and Gospel in the *Apology*," *Lutheran Quarterly* 15, 4 (winter, 2002), 22.

of God.[70] The righteousness of faith is righteousness *coram deo.* This is

the righteousness confessed in Article 4 of the *Augustana.* Civil

righteousness is concerned with the right actions of individuals in this

world.[71] It is righteousness *coram hominibus.* Melanchthon does not

hesitate to speak high praise for civil righteousness. Typical is the

comment in Article 4 of the *Apology:*

> Moreover, we willingly give this righteousness of reason the praise it
> deserves, for our corrupt nature has no greater good than this, as
> Aristotle rightly said: 'Neither the evening star nor the morning star is
> more beautiful than righteousness.'[72]

Of course, this study cannot be content merely to highlight the

frequent and abundant praise which Melanchthon accords to civil

righteousness. While it is true that the scope and concerns of virtue

ethics roughly mirror what Melanchthon names civil righteousness, the

goal of this paper is to suggest that certain tenets of virtue ethics can be

rightly and beneficially appropriated by Christians, specifically Lutherans

believers. It is not enough, therefore, to recognize Melanchthon's

approval of civil righteousness for unbelievers. It is necessary to

demonstrate that the Melanchthon and the Confessions commend the

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[70] Even when Melanchthon does not explicitly reference the two kinds of
righteousness, the distinction is determinative. Melanchthon's regular references to the
Christian's being justified *before God,* for example, imply another realm, (i.e. before
men) with its own kind of justification.

[71] Within the Confessions, civil righteousness may be referenced with one of a
host of synonyms which convey particular nuances of meaning; some of these include
philosophical righteousness, the righteousness of the flesh, of reason, of the law, of
works.

[72] *Book of Concord,* 124 (Ap 4, 24).

pursuit of civil righteousness with its moral habits and learned virtues even in the lives of believers. In other words, the Confessions must allow civil righteousness as specifically applicable not only to fallen mankind in general, but also to redeemed Christians in particular. The Confessions must permit a call for Christians to cultivate character by practicing virtues.

While they are not extensive, or expounded, there are several instances in the *Apology* where Melanchthon seems to bring the tasks of civil righteousness within the life of the believer. The references are distributed throughout the *Apology.*

In Article 16, Melanchthon chastises the opponents for approving monasticism and teaching that the gospel is something external. Encouraging people to forsake their civil ties and responsibilities, monasticism obscured the gospel by insisting on a higher "evangelical counsel" which amounted to a perversion of the gospel into a rarified law. Melanchthon countered, "For the gospel does not destroy the state or the household but rather approves them, and it orders us to obey them as divine ordinances...."[73] The problem, as Melanchthon assessed it, was that "they failed to see that the gospel brings eternal righteousness to hearts while outwardly approving the civil realm."[74] The gospel justifies before God and at the same time sanctions the believer's life in the world,

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[73] Ibid., 231 (Ap 16, 5).

[74] Ibid., 232 (Ap 16, 8).

where civil righteousness applies. Robert Kolb calls attention to the significance of this Article for Melanchthon's doctrine of civil righteousness: "Melanchthon here established the civil or earthly realm squarely upon the doctrine of creation...."[75] Christians should conform to the dictates of the civil realm simply by virtue of their place within creation.

The idea of the Christian's responsibility to fulfill his or her civil calling makes other appearances in the *Apology*. Expounding the difference between the two kinds of righteousness in Article 18 on free will, Melanchthon also indicates that the expectations of the civil realm are relevant for believers.

> Therefore, it is helpful to distinguish between civil righteousness, which is ascribed to the free will, and spiritual righteousness, which is ascribed to the operation of the Holy Spirit in the regenerate. In this way outward discipline is preserved, because *all people alike ought to know that God requires civil righteousness* and that to some extent we are able to achieve it.[76]

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[75] Robert Kolb "God Calling, 'Take Care of My People': Luther's Concept of Vocation in the *Augsburg Confession* and Its *Apology*," *Concordia Journal* 8, 1 (January 1982), 5. This foundation will help to form the basis for the framework developed in the next chapter.

[76] *Book of Concord*, 234 (Ap 18, 9) (emphasis added). "Prodest igitur ista distributio, in qua tribuitur libero arbitrio iustitia civilis, et iustitia spiritualis gubernationi spiritus sancti in renatis. Ita enim retinetur paedagogia, quia omnes homines pariter debent scire, et quod Deus illam civilem iustitiam requirat, et quod aliquo modo praestare eam possimus." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 312. Luther also taught a distinction between two kinds of righteousness. But, while Melanchthon typically distinguished civil righteousness from spiritual righteousness, Luther distinguished between active righteousness and passive righteousness. "But this most excellent righteousness, the righteousness of faith, which God imputes to us through Christ without works, is neither political nor ceremonial nor legal nor work-righteousness but is quite the opposite; it is a merely passive righteousness while all the others listed above, are active." LW 26:4. The similarities and differences between the two kinds of righteousness as taught by Melanchthon and Luther will be considered more fully in chapter four (pages 16-24).

No doubt Melanchthon's inclusive "all people" was meant to bring even unbelievers within the jurisdiction of civil righteousness. It is helpful to remember, however, that his "all" would not exclude Christians.

In the Article 21discussion about a fitting role for the saints in the lives of Christians, Melanchthon grants three types of appropriate honor. The first is offering thanksgiving for the mercy of God displayed in the lives of these individuals. The second is the way that the saints' lives serve to strengthen members of the church militant. "The third honor," Melanchthon writes, "is imitation: first of their faith, then of their other virtues, which people should imitate according to their callings."[77] Interestingly, Melanchthon's *imitatio sanctorum* would extend beyond the example of the saints' faith to include also other virtues (*ceterarum virtutum*). Stipulating that these virtues be practiced "according to their callings" indicates an orientation to the "left-hand" realm where Christians fulfill their responsibilities toward the rest of the created realm. While Melanchthon does not label this Christian pursuit of virtue as civil righteousness, it would certainly fit within the broad schema of righteousness before men with its distinct nuances.

Melanchthon's advocacy of saintly imitation thus supplies another connection with virtue ethics. The advocacy of *imitatio sanctorum* would obviously allow, if not demand, precisely the practices of habituation and

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[77] *Book of Concord*, 238 (Ap 21, 6). "Tertius honos est imitatio primum fidei, deinde ceterarum virtutum quas imitari pro sua quisque vocatione debet. *Bekenntnisschriften*, 318.

character formation under consideration in this study, but this will be considered more fully below. At present, it is sufficient to recognize that the context of Melanchthon's comment makes it abundantly clear that this call for the practice of the inculcation of virtue is issued to Christian people. Finally, returning to the emphasis on the civil realm, it seems safe to conclude that as present saints imitate previous saints, their unique callings are fulfilled in the left-hand or civil realm where its corresponding righteousness prevails.

In Article 27 of the *Apology*, Melanchthon addresses the Roman opponents' interpretation of Jesus' command to the rich young man to "sell your possessions...and follow me" (Matthew 19:21). Correcting Rome's tendency to find in Jesus' words a prescription for all disciples, Melanchthon writes, "Callings are personal, just as matters of business themselves vary with times and persons; but the example of obedience is universal."[78] Melanchthon summarizes his discussion by returning the obedient Christian to his unique station in life, presumably within the created realm, where each calling is accomplished: "So it is perfection for each of us with true faith to obey our own calling."[79] Kolb recognizes the

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[78] Ibid., 285 (Ap 27, 50). "Vocationes sunt personales, sicut negotia ipsa variant temporibus et personis; sed exemplum obedientiae est generale." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 392.

[79] Ibid., "Ita perfectio nobis est obedire unumquemque vera fide suae vocationi." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 392. "Perfection" here is drawn and defined by the context—the encounter of the 'rich young man' with Jesus (Matthew 19:21). Perfection, then, would be the fulfillment of God's will for an individual, or as Melanchthon summarizes, "to obey our own calling." The doctrine of vocation taught in this and the previously considered Article will be important in the next chapter's development of an overall

significance of this Article as it "reinforces this focus on the connection between faith and daily life...."[80] In Article 27, then, Melanchthon is insisting, "that proper and God-pleasing lives flow from the recognition of God as the good Lord of human living."[81] The sphere of activity for the practice of the Christian's vocation ("human living") is the wide, richly variegated world of creation, including the civil realm.

A final example surfaces in Article 28 of the *Apology*, the discussion of ecclesiastical power. The issue at stake was the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical authority. Seeking to curtail the overextended powers of bishops, Melanchthon argues, "Bishops do not have the power of tyrants to act apart from established law, nor regal power to act above the law."[82] Correcting the opponents' erroneous interpretation of Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders," Melanchthon avers that the text does not establish a power of bishops outside the gospel. Rather, "This statement requires obedience under the gospel; it does not create an authority for bishops apart from the gospel."[83] While Melanchthon's goal is to limit the scope of ecclesiastical authority, he

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framework. For an explication of the Lutheran doctrine of vocation see Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen, first paperback edition (Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 1999).

[80] Kolb, "God Calling," 8. This intimate connection will be useful in the final chapter which considers the implications of the study.

[81] Ibid.

[82] *Book of Concord*, 290 (Ap 28, 14).

provides an ancillary phrase which is quite potent in the light of this study. Melanchthon envisions that the life of a believer living under, or in relation to, the gospel (*erga evangelium*) will be characterized by obedience. Obedience to what? Obedience is to the will of God for his creation, that is, the Christian lives in obedience to the righteousness of the law.[84]

It is true that Melanchthon does not use the explicit language of civil righteousness when discussing the Christian's life of new obedience. Civil righteousness in Melanchthon's terminology typically describes the earned righteousness that prevails in the world, in contrast to the God-given righteousness of faith. Nevertheless, the *Apology* definitely does not exclude the morality of civil righteousness from the Christian's life. And it is possible that the reformers simply assumed that civil obedience or moral righteousness would be characteristic of believers. This moral

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[83] Ibid., 291(Ap 28, 20). "Haec sententia requirit obedientiam erga evangelium. Non enim constituit regnum episcopis extra evangelium." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 402.

[84] Though not part of the confessional corpus, it is noteworthy that in his Galatians commentary of 1535, Luther subdivides the "many kinds" of righteousness by listing three varieties of righteousness in addition to the crowning righteousness of faith; he notes political, ceremonial, and "the righteousness of the Law or Decalogue, which Moses teaches." About this last righteousness, Luther makes the significant comment: "We, too, teach this, but *after* the doctrine of faith." LW 26:4 [emphasis added]. "Hanc et nos docemus post doctrinam fidei." WA 40:40. In view of the Confessions' treatment of civil righteousness it seems reasonable to hear Luther saying that the righteousness of the Law is taught not only in subordination to the doctrine of faith, but, significantly, it is also taught to those who have learned the doctrine of faith. One might conclude that for Luther political righteousness and righteousness of the law were not synonyms, but descriptions of two different kinds of righteousness, one for all citizens of a nation, the other for believers. This topic will be considered more fully in chapter four beginning with page 16.

righteousness is precisely the purview of virtue ethics.[85] Contemporary proponents of virtue ethics and Melanchthon appear to occupy some significant common ground.

Formation of Christians in the Confessions

The confessors' recurrent emphases on the need to teach and encourage civil righteousness as well as the idea that the gospel leads Christians to an observance of the Decalogue provide linkage between the Lutheran Confessions and the concerns of virtue ethics. A still greater link is forged, however, when explicit talk of formation or habituation in virtuous practices can be discerned in the confessions.

The Catechisms

Disheartened by his firsthand experience of Christian impiety in Saxon congregations, Luther was prompted to compose his *Small Catechism.* His instructions for its use include heavy emphasis on thorough teaching. "Using such a catechism," Luther told the pastors and preachers, "explain each individual commandment, petition, or part with its various works, benefits, and blessings, harm and danger, as you

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[85] But, those interested in virtue ethics are not concerned exclusively with moral righteousness *coram hominibus.* Since it is God's justifying and redeeming work in the Gospel that makes a Christian and gives that Christian a new narrative and with it new practices, virtue ethicists are also concerned with the believer's righteousness before God, or passive righteousness. A framework that attempts to integrate civil righteousness with a believer's standing *coram deo* will be the subject of the next chapter.

find treated at length in so many booklets."[86] This teaching was to be

carried out with diligence and with the aid of "many examples from the

Scriptures where God either punished or blessed such people," so that

the hearers would be "orderly, faithful, obedient, and peaceful."[87] The

repetition, the exhortations, the scriptural threats, promises, and

examples were all intended to direct and affect the hearers, to help them

to grow in Christian character. The catechism was taught to the people

in order to shape the people.

The preface to the *Large Catechism* contains similar language.

Luther complains about the sorry state of affairs where even pastors,

"like pigs and dogs...are remembering no more of the gospel than this

rotten, pernicious, shameful, carnal liberty." Of course, the attitude of

the clergy is reflected in the people they serve.

> As it is, the common people take the gospel altogether too lightly, and
> we accomplish but little, despite all our hard work. What, then, can
> we expect if we are slothful and lazy, as we used to be under the
> papacy?[88]

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[86] *Book of Concord*, 349 (SC preface, 17). "Daselbst streich ein iglich Gebot,
Bitte, Stüd aus mit seinen mancherlei Werken, Nutz, frummen, fahr und Schaden, wie
Du das alles reichlich findeft in so viel Büchlein, davon gemacht" *Bekenntnisschriften*,
504.

[87] Ibid. (SC, preface, 18). "viel Exempel aus der Schrift, da Gott solche Leute
gestraft und gesegenet hat, enführen." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 505.

[88] Ibid., 380 (LC preface, 4). "dass sie gleichwie die Saü und Hunde nicht mehr
vom Evangelio behalten denn solche faule, schädliche, shcändliche, fleischliche freiheit.
Denn der Pobel leider ohn das allzu geringe achtet des Evangelii, und wir nicht
sonderlichs ausrichten, wenn wir gleich allen fleiss furwenden. Was sollt's denn tun,,
wenn wir lässig und faul sein wollen, wie wir unter dem Bapsttumb gewesen sind?"
Bekenntnisschriften, 546-547.

For Luther, the gospel and its way of life needed to be inculcated in the lives of the people. "Let all Christians drill themselves daily," he urged, "and constantly put it into practice."[89] That Luther intended the cultivation of Christian (or virtuous?) habits is evident from his admonition that his students should put into practice what they had gleaned from their study.

About the outcome of these efforts, the reformer was confident: "If they show such diligence, then I promise them—and their experience will bear me out—that they will gain much fruit and God will make excellent people out of them."[90] Luther was not so heavenly minded as to miss the importance of Christian formation in this life. Christians should desire and seek what God intends for them—that they attain the full potential for which they were created. Excellent people are people who are living as fully human, realizing in their own lives all that it means to live rightly before God and before men.

Later in the text of the *Large Catechism*, Luther concludes his treatment on the close of the Commandments with a reference to formative training:

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[89] Ibid., 383 (LC preface, 19). "sondern sich täglich wohl drinnen uben und immer treiben." "Quin potius quotidie his studiis exerceantur eademque sedulo inculcent." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 552-553.

[90] Ibid. (LC preface, 20). "Werden sie solchen fleiss tun, so will ich ihn zusagen, und sie sollen's auch inne weden, welche frucht sie erlangen werden und wie feine Leute Gott aus ihn machen wird." "Quod si hanc diligentiam adhibuerint, sancte ipsis promitto ac reipsa iidem etiam experientur, quod magnum inde fructum sint consecuturi et quod excellentes viros Deus ex ipsis facturus sit." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 553.

It is useful and necessary, I say, always to teach, admonish, and remind young people of all of this so that they may be brought up, not only with blows and compulsion, like cattle, but in the fear and reverence of God.... Therefore it is not without reason that the Old Testament command was to write the Ten Commandments on every wall and corner, and even on garments. Not that we are to have them there only for display, as the Jews did, but we are to keep them incessantly before our eyes and constantly in our memory and *to practice them in all our works and ways.* Each of us is to make them a matter of *daily practice* in all circumstances, in all activities and dealings, as if they were written everywhere we look, even wherever we go or wherever we stand.[91]

The inculcation of the Ten Commandments played a critical role in the formation of Christians young and old, a role limited not simply to their second, or theological, use. The commandments were to be urged, learned, and practiced so that Christians might become more nearly the kind of people that God willed them to be—internally, i.e. "in our memory," as well as externally. The goal was not mere outward conformity, but genuine inward renewal.

Luther's comments on the Second Commandment in particular offer another outstanding example of his high regard for spiritual habits that contribute to the formation of Christian character. In the exhortation to his readers, Luther extols the practices of piety. The remarkable extent and variety of habituation endorsed by Luther deserves consideration at some length.

One must encourage children again and again to honor God's name and to keep it constantly upon their lips in all circumstances and

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[91] Ibid., 430-431(emphasis added) (LC I, 330-332). "Sondern dass man's ohn Unterlass fur Uugen und in stetem Gedächtnis habe, in alle unserm Tuen und Wesen treiben, und ein iglicher lasse es sein tägliche Ubung sein in allerlei Fällen, Geschäfte und Händeln." *Bekenntnisschriften,* 645.

experiences.... This is also a blessed and useful habit, and very effective against the devil, who is always around us, lying in wait to lure us into sin and shame, calamity and trouble.... For this purpose it also helps to form the habit of commending ourselves each day to God.... From the same source comes the custom learned in childhood of making the sign of the cross when something dreadful or frightening is seen or heard, and saying, "Lord God save me!" ...Likewise, if someone unexpectedly experiences good fortune—no matter how insignificant—he or she may say, "God be praised and thanked!" ...See with simple and playful methods like this we should bring up young people in the fear and honor of God so that the First and Second Commandments may become familiar and constantly be practiced. Then some good may take root, spring up, and bear fruit, and people may grow to adulthood who may give joy and pleasure to an entire country. That would also be the right way to bring up children, while they may be trained with kind and agreeable methods.[92]

Luther grants a hearty endorsement to habituation—the practices of piety designed to form and shape Christian character. It is a tenet of virtue ethics: right practices oft repeated form habits which in turn serve to shape character. Luther describes it in different language: holy habits help the good to "take root, spring up and bear fruit," resulting in adults who bring joy and pleasure to a whole country. The terminology is different, but the idea is the same. The outcome of holy habituation is adults with good character.

Luther again makes it clear that he seeks more than outward conformity and is confident that what he seeks will be realized: "But this

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[92] Ibid., 395-396 (LC I, 70-76). "Solchs ist auch ein selige nützliche Gewohnheit und sehr kräftig wider den Teufel.... Dazu dienet auch, dass man sich gewehne, täglich Gotte zu befehlen.... Siehe, also möcht man die Jugend kindlicher Weise und spielens aufziehen in Gottes Furcht und Ehre, dass das erste und ander Gepot fein im Schwang und steter Ubunge gingen. Da künnde etwas Guts bekleiben ausgehen und Frucht schaffen, dass solche Leute erwuchsen, der ein ganz Land geneissen und froh werden möchte. Das wäre auch die rechte Weise, Kinder wohl zu ziehen, weil man sie mit Gutem und Luft kann gewehnen." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 578-579.

kind of training takes root in their hearts so that they fear God more than they do rods and clubs."[93] Through pious practices and holy habits, children are trained to obey the First and Second Commandments. Through this formation, they are shaped within—the training takes root in their hearts. Their character, or 'what they are in their hearts', is stamped by this process of learned obedience to God's commandments. So shaped, these children exhibit this character throughout their lives, and all, especially neighbors and nation, reap the reward.

The Formula of Concord

The next generation of confessors continued to affirm the validity and even necessity of this habituation and character formation, but did not limit its application to young Christians. Interestingly, one of the most ardent appeals to formation appears in Article 11 of the *Formula*, the Article on election.

> Next, the Holy Spirit dwells in the elect who have believed as he dwells in his temple and is not idle in them but impels the children of God to obey God's commands. Therefore, believers should in the same way not be idle either, much less resist the impetus of God's Spirit, but should practice all Christian virtues, godliness, modesty, moderation, patience, and love for one another—and should diligently seek to "confirm their call and election," so that the more they recognize the Spirit's power and strength in themselves, the less they doubt their election.[94]

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[93] Ibid. "Uber hie wurzelt es ins Herz, dass man sich mehr fur Gott denn fur der Ruten und Knüttel fürchtet." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 579.

[94] Ibid., 652 (FC SD 11, 73). "Und nachdem der H. Geist in den Auserwählten, die gläubig worden sein, wohnet als in seinem Tempel, der in ihnen nicht müssig ist,

For the framers of the *Formula*, to obey God's commands is to practice

Christian virtue; and to practice virtue is to give confirmation of the

Spirit's work within. The practice of virtue is of a piece with what it

means to be Christian.

The *Formula*'s Article on free will, Article 2, also calls on the

regenerate to be active in the pursuit of Christian works: "...after this

conversion the reborn human will is not idle in the daily exercise of

repentance, but cooperates in all the works of the Holy Spirit which he

performs through us."[95] As the confession affirms, Christians should be

busy with the business of Christian living, practicing with diligence "all

the works of the Holy Spirit which he performs through us." What can

the practice of such Christian works mean but the ongoing task of

learning and doing what is rightly named virtuous, in other words,

habituation in Christian character? The reformers expected believers to

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sonder treibet die Kinder Gottes zum Gehorsamb der Gebot Gottes: sollen die Gläubigen gleichergestalt auch nicht müssig sein, noch vielweniger dem Treiben des Geistes Gottes sich widersetzen, sondern in allen christlichen Tugenden, in aller Gottseligkeit, Bescheidenheit, Mässigkeit, Geduld, brüderlicher Liebe sich üben und allen Fleiss tun, dass sie 'ihren Beruf und Erwählung fest machen,' damit sie destoweniger daran zweifeln, je mehr sie des Geistes Kraft und Stärke in ihnen selbst befinden." "Et quia spiritus sanctus in electis, qui iam in Christum credunt, habitat ut in templo suo et in ipsis non est otiosus, sed impellit filios Dei ad obedientiam mandatis Dei praestandam: ipsos etiam credentes non otiosos esse, multo vero minus agenti et operanti spiritui sancto resistere decet. Exerceant igitur sese in omnibus virtutibus, homine Christiano dignis, in omni videlicet pietate, modestia, temperantia, patientia et caritate fraterna, magnamque diligentiam adhibeant, ut vocationem et electionem suam firmam faciant, ut tanto minus de ea dubitent, quanto efficacius spiritus sancti virtutem et robur in se sentiunt." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 1084.

[95] Ibid., 494 (FC Ep 2, 17). "...und dass nach sollicher Bekehrung in täglicher übung der Buss des Menschen wiedergeborner Wille nicht mükig gehe, sunder in allen Werken des H. Geistes, die er durch uns tut, auch mitwirke." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 780.

be both obedient to God's commands and zealous in the production of

Christian virtues. Virtue ethics would name this the cultivation of

character.

The Apology

While the brevity and purpose of the *Augustana* did not invite a

consideration of the issue of character formation, the *Apology* does

contain references to its importance. Certainly, the theological

convictions which prompted the explicit appeals to formation in the

catechisms and *Formula* also animated the *Apology*'s frequent call for

faith to be "exercised" in good works. Having asserted in Article 4 that

after teaching the gospel, "later we add also the teaching of the law,"

Melanchthon provides even more encouragement for this work of

formation in the Christian life. "Thus good works ought to follow faith as

thanksgiving toward God. Likewise, good works ought to follow faith so

that faith is exercised in them, grows, and is shown to others, in order

that others may be invited to godliness by our confession."[96]

The *Apology* acknowledges that good works serve an outreach or

evangelistic purpose. But they also provide a more personal benefit. The

active pursuit of good works, Melanchthon writes, helps to "exercise"

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[96] Ibid., 150 (Ap 4, 188). "Darum sollen gute Werke dem Glauben folgen als Danksagungen gegen Gott, item dass der Glaub dadurch geübet werde, wachse und zunehme, und dass durch unser Bekenntnis und guten Wandel ander auch verinnert werden." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 197. Perhaps Melanchthon's comment that "later we add also the teaching of the law," should be read with Luther's comment in his Galatians introduction about the righteousness of the law: "We, too, teach this, but after the doctrine of faith." LW 26:4.

faith. In other words, striving for good works helps to affirm and strengthen faith as the business of faith is practiced and demonstrated in concrete actions. Melanchthon offers the example of Abel and his God-pleasing sacrifice: "Indeed, he carried out that work in order to exercise his faith and by his example and confession to invite others to believe."[97] The pursuit of good works, or what might also be called striving to live virtuously, actually serves faith by or exercising, or expressing it. Faith is given tangible expression in God directed actions, and with the practice of those actions, Melanchthon asserts, faith grows. This should not be construed as a version of "faith formed by love."[98] The confessions are clear and adamant that saving faith is delivered whole and complete, in need of no supplement. Nevertheless, for that faith to continue and to grow in a human heart still plagued by sin, Melanchthon agreed with Scripture that faith should be exercised, or expressed, in the practice of virtuous habits.

The same 'exercise' terminology reappears later in the *Apology* in Article 15 on human traditions. Melanchthon affirms for Christians the dying and rising motif of the cross but then continues:

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[97] Ibid., 151 (Ap 4, 188). "das Werk aber tät er, dass er seinen Glauben übet und die andern durch sein Exempel und Bekenntnis zu gläuben reizet." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 198.

[98] For a helpful discussion of this term see Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 239-244. Melanchthon confronts and refutes this notion, typical of the medieval church in the *Apology* 4, 218-243.

Alongside this true putting to death, which takes place through the cross, a voluntary and necessary kind of exercise also exists, about which Christ says, "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation," and Paul says, "but I punish my body and enslave it...." We should undertake these exercises not because they are devotional exercises that justify but as restraints on our flesh, lest satiety overcome us and render us complacent and lazy. This results in people indulging the flesh and catering to its desires. Such diligence must be constant, because God constantly commands it.[99]

Melanchthon saw the need for the Christian to be involved in ongoing training, or exercising, of his faith. This exercise was undertaken in order to leash the flesh and would be practiced, then, in the external affairs of life in the world—*coram hominibus*. Without a doubt, works righteousness was a pernicious menace to Christian truth and faith, but so was its antithesis: complacency and laziness. The believer needed to be trained, to be shaped and formed in his piety.

One of the most direct references to this need for ongoing training or formation was encountered already under the discussion of civil righteousness. In Article 21 of the *Apology*, Melanchthon encouraged appropriate veneration of the saints through imitation: "first of their faith, then of their other virtues, which people should imitate according to their callings."[100] This idea of *imitatio sanctorum* implies, even

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[99] Ibid., 230 (Ap 15, 46-47). "Verum praeter hanc mortificationem, quae fit per crucem, est et voluntarium quoddam exercitii genus necessarium, de quo Christus ait: Cavete, ne corda vestra graventur crapula. Et Paulus: Castigo corpus meum et in servitutem redigo etc. Et haec exercitia suscipienda sunt, non quod sint cultus iustificantes, sed ut coerceant carnem, ne saturitas obruat nos et reddat securos et otiosos, qua ex re fit, ut affectibus carnis indulgeant et obtemperent homines. Haec diligentia debet esse perpetua, quia habet perpetuum mandatum Dei." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 306.

[100] Ibid., 238 (Ap 21, 6). "Tertius honos est imitatio primum fidei, deinde ceterarum virtutum, quas imitari pro sua quisque vocatione debet." "Für das dritte

necessitates, the encouragement of habituation. Habituation is the practice of virtuous acts and the cultivation of pious habits. *Imitatio sanctorum* describes this exactly. The call to imitate the saints is a plea to practice holy habits, or holy activities, that in turn will aid the formation of character.

This passage from Article 21 provides an ideal occasion to address a question which by now has swollen to the point of refusing to be ignored, viz., what is the relationship between good works and virtue?[101] Melanchthon comments in the Latin text that imitation of the saints should be first of their faith then "of their other virtues." This passage is translated from the German as "We honor the saints when we follow after their faith, their love, and their patient example."[102] In the German, the love and the patience of the saints are treated as synonymous with "other virtues." Thus, love which is regularly counted among good works is also counted a virtue. While a case could be made that there is no real distinction between virtues and good works, it seems that a different nuance does exist. Good works are perhaps best understood as deeds done in obedience to God for the good of the rest of creation. Virtue

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ehren wir die heiligen, wenn wir ihres Glaubens, ihrer Liebe, ihrer Geduld Exempel nachfolgen, ein jeder nach seinem Beruf." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 318.

[101] Of tangential interest is the history of the rise and fall of virtue within Christian theology. See pages 10-13 of the first chapter for a discussion of the historical place of virtue within the Christian church. Like others of his time, Melanchthon gives no evidence of a particular reluctance to use virtue terminology.

[102] *Book of Concord*, 238 (Ap, 21, 6).

describes the imprint such repeated obedience leaves on an individual's character. Not every good work is an indication of virtue, but a true virtue cannot exist without its attendant good works. "Good works" describes what is experienced externally; "virtue" describes the state of the character internally, but from the believer's perspective, the net result is essentially the same.

One more explicit encouragement of the pursuit of virtues appears in the discussion of monastic vows in Article 27 of the *Apology*. In this Article, Melanchthon decries the notion of the opponents that only the monastic life led one to perfection.[103] The influence of Luther and his doctrine of vocation are easily detected in the shape of Melanchthon's argument.[104] This passage also reinforces that for Melanchthon there was a remarkable affinity, if not identification, between good works and virtue.

> But the opponents cunningly seek to give the impression that they are modifying the common notion about perfection. They deny that the monastic life is perfection and instead say that it is a state for acquiring perfection.... If we follow this, the monastic life will be no more a state for acquiring perfection than the life of a farmer or an artisan. These, too, are states for acquiring perfection. All people, whatever their calling, should seek perfection, that is, growth in the

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[103] i.e. a life lived according to God's will.

[104] For an excellent discussion of Luther's doctrine of vocation and its place in the *Augustana* and *Apology* see Kolb's article, "God Calling." Kolb writes, "Against most of the sacred works of the medieval church Luther set forth the godliness of the activities of the profane realm, when performed by the person of faith." Kolb, "God Calling," 5. Of course, an even more complete treatment can be found in Wingren, *Luther on Vocation.*

fear of God, in faith, in the love for their neighbor, and in similar spiritual virtues.[105]

To grow in virtues is to grow into the will of God, which encapsulates the whole Christian, his faith as well as his relation to his neighbor. The growth follows a certain shape, given by the commandments of God, but also reckons with the unique contours arising from particular vocations.

Melanchthon's entreaty for a life marked by growth in virtues is not advice aimed only at the heathen in the civil sphere. Neither can this passage be understood as supporting the idea that good works are automatic and continuous in the life of a believer. Here, he is quite explicit. The spiritual virtues are something to be sought. Included in Melanchthon's broad understanding of spiritual virtues is love for neighbor, which is manifested in the acquisition and increasing display of the classic virtues—cardinal and theological.[106] Clearly, the Confessions recognize and encourage the need for Christians, all Christians, to be actively growing in their desire for and possession of virtues or moral habits which in turn shape Christian character.

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[105] *Book of Concord*, 283 (Ap 27, 37). "Omnes enim homines in quacunque vocatione perfectionem expetere debent, hoc est, crescere in timore Dei, in fide, in dilectione proximi et similibus virtutibus spiritualibus." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 389.

[106] Prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, faith, hope, and love.

Support from Other Sources

A wider reading of material from the pen of Melanchthon serves to
corroborate this study's reading of the Confessions as supportive of the
concerns and objectives of virtue ethics vis-à-vis habituation and
character formation. That Melanchthon was willing and indeed quite
eager to employ Aristotle for academic and for civil purposes has been
demonstrated above. But, there are further references worthy of
attention. By 1524, Melanchthon was already making the sharp
distinction between the two kinds of righteousness. This careful
distinction permitted him, as it permits any who grasp it, to address two
topics of perennial importance: the proclamation of justification by grace
through faith and the exhortation to civil righteousness.

Melanchthon—like his theological mentor, Luther—was concerned
above all to secure the undiminished comfort of the gospel for troubled
sinners. This is evident in a succinct "Summary of Doctrine" that
Melanchthon produced in 1524 at the behest of Philip of Hesse who was
eager to have the Wittenberger's opinion on the day's pressing theological
topics. Predictably, Melanchthon began with an exaltation of the gospel:

> See, moreover, how much comfort there is in this proclamation for
> miserable consciences when they understand that it is the truest
> possible righteousness to believe that through Christ our sins are
> forgiven without our own satisfaction, without our own merits. I have
> known some who had clearly thrown away all hope of salvation before
> they discovered this teaching because their conscience could not be
> lifted by satisfactions and feigned works. These persons, after the
> Gospel had illuminated the world much more clearly, again with a

strong spirit conceived the hope of salvation, and not only the hope but also the power or strength against sins.[107]

The gospel delivers inestimable consolation and assurance, lifting from troubled souls the burden of guilt and despair, assuring them of eternal salvation, and renewing them for life in the world. Certainly, it was Melanchthon's great delight to champion the pure comfort of the gospel.

Yet, this was not the end of the issue. Melanchthon was well aware that since faith, and therefore the righteousness of faith, were not the possession of all people, there remained a need also for the law. "Accordingly," Melanchthon instructed his reader, "besides Christian righteousness there is human righteousness, by which the wicked should be coerced."[108] Besides needing to establish the comforting work of the gospel, Melanchthon also needed to confront what Timothy Wengert calls, "the theological aberration he most feared."[109]

The Wittenberg theologian identified many of the same dangers described by the theologians of chapter two.

> But many today are preaching evangelical righteousness in such a way that a new wickedness is being born. For some wicked persons are feigning faith and are glorying in the name of Christ and conceiving a certain kind of carnal security by which they are being precipitated into great crimes, and they think that they ought not to be coerced. Both the training of children is being neglected and other things of this nature, although God has nevertheless subjected to this

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[107] Philip Melanchthon, *Melanchthon: Selected Writings*, trans. Charles Leander Hill *(Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), 96.*

[108] Ibid., 97.

[109] Timothy J. Wengert, *Law and Gospel: Philip Melanchthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over* Poenitentia (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 1997), 102.

schooling all who either are not in Christ or are weak, according to the position of Paul in Galatians 3 and 4.[110]

The church of the Reformation was plagued not only by the recently identified threat of people clinging to a righteousness of works, but also by the newly revived threat of people insisting that the gospel meant an antinomian variety of freedom which excused gross licentiousness. As the years elapsed, the latter threat, the antinomian abuse of the gospel, proved to be a perennial concern for the reformer.[111]

Even as Melanchthon allowed that civil righteousness served a thoroughly secular function as a hedge against impious people and immoral behavior, it is important, especially for the purpose of this study, to recognize that he also grasped its value as a tool for spiritual pedagogy:

> This training of the state is a certain righteousness which forms character and contains rites and human and civil duties. It accustoms children to the worship of God by teaching and exercise, and restrains foolish people from vices....[112]

As Melanchthon saw it, civil righteousness was not optional for Christians; neither was it in any sense antithetical to the "spirit of the gospel." Civil righteousness served Christians by forming character, equipping worshipers with fitting habits, and curtailing the casual

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[110] Melanchthon, *Selected Writings*, 97.

[111] While Melanchthon's wrestling with these issues is not without significance, they lie outside the scope of the present study. Timothy Wengert provides excellent details of Melanchthon's lifelong struggle against antinomianism in the work previously cited: Wengert, *Law and Gospel*.

[112] Melanchthon, *Selected Writings*, 97.

practice of sin. Divinely ordered civil righteousness did not "merit grace
or remission of sins," but it did "serve human need."[113] This service was
reason enough for Melanchthon to encourage the clear teaching and
practice of civil righteousness.[114]

A decade later, Melanchthon continued to echo familiar themes,
but went further by removing any lingering questions as to the place of
civil righteousness in the life of a Christian:

> Moreover it is generally acknowledged that everyone needs some
> teaching on morals and a description of virtues, so that we
> understand in our manners and in judging about human business
> what it is proper and what is not, what is done rightly and what is ill
> done. Accordingly, it is necessary to have forms and images of
> virtues, which we follow in all decisions and in our judgements on all
> matters. This teaching is strictly speaking to be called humanity, and
> it shows the way to live properly and as a citizen; those who do not
> know it are not very different from beasts.[115]

It was not complicated. Training in virtue was simply part of being
human. As God's creatures and lacking omniscience concerning God's
will for their living, Christians too were in need of "some teaching on
morals and a description of virtues." With his endorsement of the
teaching of two kinds of righteousness and his advocacy of civil

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[113] Ibid., 98.

[114] Historical circumstances, however, made the encouragement of civil
righteousness even more pressing. Throughout the 1520's, Melanchthon contended
with elements of the radical reformation—those who had little use for the civil realm or
political order. Sachiko Kusukawa relates Melanchthon's response: "Melanchthon saw
poor education and confusion of philosophy and theology as the root of the problem. ...
He needed to establish the distinction between theological truths and truths attainable
through human reason alone. ... Above all, he needed to prove that everybody, both
believers and unbelievers alike, had to obey civil authority." Melanchthon, *Orations on
Philosophy*, xvii.

[115] Melanchthon, *Orations on Philosophy*, 80-81.

righteousness, Melanchthon had shared many of the same interests and priorities as today's advocates of virtue ethics.

A final representative comment from the Melanchthonian corpus illustrates the extent of Melanchthon's support for the central concerns of virtue ethics. In thoroughly Aristotelian language, Melanchthon wrote in his 1542 *Rhetoric*: "What is virtue? It is a habit of the will inclining me to be obedient to the judgement of right reason."[116] While contemporary advocates of virtue ethics attempt more precise definitions, they should find little in Melanchthon's basic concept with which to quarrel.[117] Melanchthon was concerned as they are to foster the pursuit of habits which will influence behavior in the direction of obedience to the highest norm—helping man to realize his *telos*.[118]

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[116] Philip Melanchthon, *Elementorum Rhetorices Libri Duo* 1542, trans. Mary Joan LaFontaine, (n.p.: n.d.), 102. Aristotle wrote: "Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it." Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 39 (2, 6).

[117] Alasdair MacIntyre's thorough but unwieldy definition has been especially influential: "A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods." MacIntyre, 191. See the discussion in chapter one, pages 4-7.

[118] Clearly, this statement raises a host of questions about mankind's *telos* and the best route to be followed there. A Christian perspective curtails the bulk of these questions with the ready answers found in the Bible.

Conclusion

Stanley Hauerwas's charge that Lutheranism is incapable of presenting a viable Christian ethics may ring true when applied to some contemporary Lutherans. This chapter has demonstrated, however, that when the 16th century reformers and their confessions are considered, the accusation becomes untenable and evaporates. The primary concern of the Confessions was obviously the defense of justification by grace through faith alone. The contemporary context demanded it.

> In former times, consciences were vexed by the doctrine of works; they did not hear consolation from the gospel.... Consequently, it was essential to pass on and restore this teaching about faith in Christ so that anxious consciences should not be deprived of consolation but know that grace and forgiveness of sins are apprehended by faith in Christ.[119]

Melanchthon grasped the necessity of guarding and extending the gospel's ability to proclaim pure grace.

Still, this pervasive attention to the consolation of the gospel was not accomplished with a corresponding neglect or diminution of other pressing theological questions. In fact, the author and supporters of the *Augsburg Confession* and its *Apology* demonstrated an intense interest in the believer's continual, intentional growth in good works and corresponding virtues. While the Holy Spirit worked a life-altering regeneration, this work of the Spirit did not exclude the ongoing responsibility of the believer to grow in Christian virtues or of the church

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[119] *Book of Concord*, 55 (CA 20, 19 & 22).

to cultivate them. Spiritual formation and cultivation of Christian character were not and are not antithetical to the substance of the Confessions.

Not every aspect of contemporary virtue ethics is specifically articulated in the Confessions. This is no detriment, however. What the Confessions do say sufficiently provides what is needed for those Lutherans who seek to address the 21st century manifestations of the dangers that plagued the church five centuries before. The Confessions furnish the possibility and the justification for developing a theological frame wide enough to accommodate the concerns of faithful Lutherans who, like Melanchthon, strive to retain the pure gospel as well as those who, again like Melanchthon, advocate a Christian life that intentionally cultivates Christian character and actively pursues the virtues. A meaningful theological framework that endeavors to accomplish precisely this is the subject of the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SEARCH FOR A PARADIGM—A REVIEW OF LUTHERAN ATTEMPTS AT A GUIDING FRAMEWORK

The Need for a Framework

Lutheranism at the dawn of the 21st century faces an ethical challenge. Neither a peculiar moral conundrum that perplexes Lutheranism nor a particular denominational behavior or practice that invites charges of corporate immorality, this more fundamental challenge is simply that of finding a way to teach and encourage Christian ethics among its adherents. The accusation that Lutheran theology is incapable of engaging in the tasks of Christian ethics in any significant or meaningful way derives in part from academia, with Stanley Hauerwas serving as a singularly articulate representative voice.[1] Even Lutheran theologians admit the inadequacy of contemporary Lutheranism's approach to the ethical endeavor.[2] More importantly perhaps, the indictment of ethical irrelevance is substantiated, albeit unintentionally, by Lutheran laity, who attest to the meager ethical resources of their own

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[1] See chapter one, pages 19-28 for an account of Hauerwas and his critique of Lutheranism.

[2] See chapter two for four representative Lutheran voices.

confession by their ready consumption of the ethical and practical

guidance furnished by other Christian traditions.[3]

Some trace Lutheranism's ethical difficulties or perhaps

deficiencies directly to the Reformation, and conclude that Lutheran

doctrine itself is at fault—the fundamental emphasis on justification by

grace through faith alone irreconcilably at odds with any notions of

habituation, character formation, or ethical progress.[4] The previous

chapter attempted to refute this charge, contending that a careful

reading of the Lutheran Confessions reveals not an antipathy to ethics,

but—within the arena of Christian living—a keen interest in the ethical

task. The evidence simply does not support the charge that Lutheran

doctrine is inherently opposed or even merely poorly disposed to the

promotion and development of Christian ethics. The Confessions, in fact,

allow ample space for the application and practice of the vital and active

sort of ethical agenda typical of virtue ethics.

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[3] This can be seen in the steady popularity of such para-church organizations as Promise Keepers and the typical "Family Life Radio" fare that is avidly consumed also by Lutherans intent on living the Christian life.

[4] Gerald Strauss summarizes his research with an assertion that "fatal inner contradictions" doomed the success of the Lutheran efforts at pedagogy. "Preachers and catechists," argues Strauss, "had to steer cautiously through the perilous theological narrows separating man's fallen condition from the promise of his ultimate deliverance through no merit of his own." Strauss concludes, then, that the reformers were "torn between their trust in the molding power of education and their admission that the alteration of men's nature was a task beyond human strength." See Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 208 & 300. Hauerwas also seems to favor a version of this assessment, and Yeago and Hütter both recognize its manifestations in today's Lutherans. See the comments made in chapters one and two.

While the approval and even promotion of Christian ethics is not, as some may suppose, a concept or activity alien to the Lutheran confessions, it has yet to gain a secure footing in the practice of contemporary Lutheranism.[5] The reason for this disconnect between Lutheran confession and Lutheran practice has been the subject of assorted studies. Suggested culprits range from Enlightenment philosophy to over-zealous orthodoxy; and of course, there are those who yet insist that the problem is intrinsic to Lutheran doctrine itself.[6] Fascinating as this question is, the issue currently under consideration does not depend on a "why?" answer. This study does not seek an assessment of blame against either an individual or, as is more likely, a host of villains. The present task is simply to help contemporary Lutheranism find a way out of its ethical irrelevance—or put less critically, to reflect on the ethical task in a distinctively Lutheran way.

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[5] This is not to say that Lutheran seminaries do not teach courses on ethics or even theological ethics. They do. It is rather to say, that too often questions of morality and Christian living are perceived as somehow out of place or inappropriate for Lutheran men and women to consider. Hütter has labeled this tendency "Protestantism's Antinomian Captivity." See Hütter, "(Re-)Forming Freedom," 117-161.

[6] For a classic example of the latter see: Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning*. For just cause, Strauss' study is not without its critics, but Strauss will be considered more thoroughly in the following chapter. An altogether different, though nonetheless equally provocative, investigation leads David Yeago to point the finger of blame at Werner Elert. See Yeago, "Gnosticism, 37-49. Not surprisingly, David Scaer lays the blame at the feet of pietism. See his preface in Adolf Köberle, *The Quest for Holiness: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Investigation*, trans. John C. Mattes (Harper & Brothers, 1938, reprint, Evansville, IN: Ballast Press, 1998), ix. Perhaps the most balanced and compelling study is Reinhard Hütter's recent contribution. See Hutter "(Re-)Forming Freedom.

This task is not without its hazards. Meilaender supplies a forthright assessment of the dangers.

> The attempt to say something *uniquely* Lutheran sometimes succeeds but more often fails—and nowhere is that failure more likely or more costly than in ethics. Attempts to say a uniquely Lutheran word about the moral life are likely to end either in an ethics that concerns itself with motives alone and gives no guidance about what deeds ought or ought not to be done, or an ethic that leaves the wisdom found in the kingdom of the left hand entirely untransformed by the mind of Christ.[7]

Cognizant of the perils, this study will nevertheless endeavor to chart a course between the Scylla and Charybdis identified by Meilaender and, in the process, address both of his concerns.

Lutheran believers at the turn of the 21st century need some means for thinking about ethics in a way that is, for their lives, practical, relevant, and significant—and above all, meaningfully related to the central doctrine of justification. What is needed is a framework that can account for the wide range of material found in the Lutheran Confessions that is at once doctrinal and ethical.[8] Such a frame, it is hoped, would enable Lutheran believers to understand, manage, and meaningfully relate both the doctrinal truths of their faith, as well as the ethical

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[7] Meilaender, "Task of Lutheran Ethics," 17 (emphasis in original).

[8] "Framework" is meant simply as a label for the process or method of understanding or synthesizing whatever data are encountered in study or experience. "Framework" is roughly synonymous with a structuring horizon within which to place the data. The objective of the present study is not to efface the frame, but specifically to articulate and suggest a frame within which to understand the confessional data so far considered. Certainly, the proposed framework, should be capable of managing data from the scriptural record as well—the consideration of that material, however, lies well beyond the current purview.

implications which spring from that faith.[9] Put another way, this frame

must be capable of managing both the centrality of justification by grace

through faith alone, as well as the practically useful tools acquired from

the insights of virtue ethics.

Eventually, of course, an effective frame would serve to diminish,

or even altogether erase, the false and often disastrous disconnect

between doctrine and ethics identified by Hauerwas and others.[10]

Ultimately, a valid frame does not unite disparate parts, but provides the

means for recognizing the unity and connections that pre-exist when all

elements of the picture are rightly viewed within the context supplied by

the appropriate frame. This chapter will suggest a frame equal to these

demands. First, however, some important, yet not wholly sufficient

attempts to account for the data—particularly the seemingly disparate

relation between justification and ethics—will be considered.

Motivation as a Framework

One of the most enduring attempts at a rapprochement between

justification and Christian ethics, or the Christian's daily life, is the

suggestion that they are joined by the link of motivation. God grants

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[9] Of course, putting the matter this way runs the risk of abetting the cleavage between doctrine and ethics which Hauerwas has insightfully identified as a significant factor in the demise of vital Christian ethics. The use of this terminology should be understood not as an endorsement but merely as an acknowledgment of the status quo.

[10] See the discussion in chapter one and the discussion to follow in chapter five.

salvation purely by divine grace, and so overcome with the resultant

gratitude is the redeemed that the life of sanctification inevitably

blossoms. This approach to relating doctrinal truth with ethical realities

continues to enjoy wide popularity within Lutheranism among laity and

theologians alike. Generations of young confirmands have received their

pastor' s painstaking instruction that "good works are your 'thank-you

note' to God."[11] The commonly held belief that gratitude for God's gift of

salvation supplies the driving force and the lone link between God's work

of justification and the Christian's daily life gains further support from

within Lutheran academia.[12]

Despite its broad popularity, however, Robert Benne identifies this

interest in motivation as one of the obstacles to be overcome by a viable

Lutheran ethic:

> A persisting tendency in Lutheran ethics, is to reduce the whole of
> ethical life to the motivation touched off by justification. Dazzled as

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[11] For a concurring view, see Edward W. A. Koehler *A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism with Additional Notes* (River Forest, IL: Koehler Publishing Co., 1946), 187.

[12] Theologians loath to admit a third use of the law—that is a post-repentance use of the law as guide—are typically among this number. See William H. Lazareth, "Foundation for Christian Ethics: The Question of the 'Third Use' of the Law," in *Confession and Congregation* ed. David G. Truemper (Valparaiso, IN: Valparaiso University Press, 1978), 48-56 and the response by Theodore R. Jungkuntz which follows, 57-59. Though his account is rich in theological nuance and usefulness, a form of gospel reductionism supportive of a motivational framework can also be detected in the work of Gerhard Forde. See his contribution in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Christian Dogmatics* vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 395-469. For a good example of the gospel alone as appropriate motivation for Christian living in practical application, see Delbert Schulz "Law and Gospel in the Classroom," *Lutheran Education* 124, 3 (January/February, 1989), 151-156. A capable rebuttal is provided by S. Jay Lemanski "The Law in the Christian's Life—A Response" *Lutheran Education* 125, 1 (September/October, 1989), 43-48.

they are by the wonder and profundity of God's justifying grace in Christ, Lutherans are tempted to think that the only really interesting ethical question is the motivational one.[13]

In other words, since the Gospel is so overpoweringly and delightfully liberating, it eclipses all else, including any discussion of a continuing role of the law in the process of formation and training in righteousness. Benne labels this error a "a kind of soteriological reductionism that downplays the role of the First and Third persons of the Trinity."[14] Benne's observation is accurate, as is his conclusion that the ethics that results from this position lacks substance. "The gospel forgives and motivates," Benne notes, "but from what and to do what?"[15] The problem is that when Christian ethics is confined to a consideration of justification's motivation, Benne's rhetorical question elicits little more than stares of incomprehension from those intent on doing ethics from the Gospel alone.

The notion that the motivation sparked by justification is able to account for the ensuing Christian life of good works or growth in character faces its greatest challenge not from theological arguments, however, but from reality. In Romans 7, the Apostle Paul forthrightly admitted his ongoing struggle to maintain a life of Christian character

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[13] Bloomquist and Stumme, *Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 27.

[14] Ibid. Though Benne does not elaborate on this comment, the context indicates that he has in mind those who reduce their Christianity to the salvific work of Jesus Christ to the exclusion, or neglect, of the equally significant work of Father and Holy Spirit.

[15] Ibid., 28.

even after receiving the gift of justification.[16] Luther himself was

compelled to reconsider his dreams of a gospel-induced revolution of

Christian living after his eyewitness encounter with reality during the

Saxon visitation.[17] Neither should one casually dismiss the testimony of

countless multitudes of wise Christian parents who for generations have

relied upon more than the "gospel motivation" of justification in rearing

their children. Meilaender provides a blunt admission of this reality:

> The problem: Why do parents worry about where their children go to
> school, about their playmates and peers, about the ways they use
> their free time, about the television shows they watch? They worry
> because all of us know that Aristotle was—at least to some extent—
> right. Moral virtue *is* habit long continued. The inner spirit is shaped
> and developed by the structures within which we live, the things we
> see and do daily.[18]

It is interesting to note that Luther, the parent, also gave heed to

this reality. The same week that the Augsburg Confession was presented

to Emperor Charles, Luther penned a letter to his four-year-old son,

Hans. Its relevance warrants quoting it at some length.

> To my beloved son Hänschen Luther at Wittenberg
>
> Grace and peace in Christ! My beloved son: I am pleased to learn that
> you are doing well in your studies, and that you are praying diligently.

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[16] For an excellent account of Scripture's failure to conform to the notion that the motivation created by justification is sufficient to account for the whole of the ethical life see Paul R. Raabe and James W. Voelz, "Why Exhort a Good Tree?: Anthropology and Paraenesis in Romans," *Concordia Journal* 22, 2 (April, 1996) 154-163.

[17] See chapter three page seven.

[18] Gilbert Meilaender, *The Limits of Love: Some Theological Explorations* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), 36 (emphasis in original).

Continue to do so, my son [and] when I return home I shall bring you a nice present from the fair.

I know a pretty, beautiful, [and] cheerful garden where there are many children wearing little golden coats. [They] pick up fine apples, pears, cherries, [and] yellow and blue plums under the trees; they sing, jump, and are merry. They also have nice ponies with golden reins and silver saddles. I asked the owner of the garden whose children they were. He replied: "These are the children who like to pray, study, and be good." Then I said: "Dear sir, I also have a son, whose name is Hänschen Luther. Might he not also [be permitted] to enter the garden, so that he too could eat such fine apples and pears, and ride on these pretty ponies, and play with these children?" Then the man answered: "If he too likes to pray, study and be good, he too may enter the garden, and also Lippus and Jost.... So I said to the man: "Dear sir, I shall hurry away and write about all this to my dear son Hänschen so that he will certainly study hard, pray diligently, and be good in order that he too may get into this garden....

Therefore, dear son Hänschen, do study and pray diligently, and tell Lippus and Jost to study and pray too; then you [boys] will get into the garden together. Herewith I commend you to the dear Lord ['s keeping]. Greet Aunt Lena, and give her a kiss for me.

Your loving father Martin Luther[19]

Clearly, Luther was willing not only to allow, but to employ, inducements to the cultivation of good character other than simple appeals to the reality of justification by grace alone.

Certainly, there is no intent here to denigrate the regenerative power of justification, or its ability to foster genuine conversions of character and behavior. The extraordinary message of the gospel does spark remarkable transformations—justification does motivate a zeal for increasing holiness.[20] The problem comes when the whole of ethics is

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[19] LW 49:323-324.

[20] A point made with unparalleled eloquence and verve by Luther in his Romans preface and quoted in the Formula: "It [faith] kills the old 'Adam' and makes us altogether different people.... O, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing this faith." *Book of Concord*, 576 (FC, SD, 4, 10-12).

reduced to the question of motivation. As the previous chapter revealed, the reformers themselves appreciated this concern, following their ebullient praise for justification's life-altering power with exhortations for the exceedingly practical and often mundane business of disciplined Christian living.[21]

The tendency to limit Christian ethics exclusively to a motivation of gratitude is so prevalent that it is helpful to consider another dissenting voice. Adolf Köberle's classic, *The Quest for Holiness*, is sometimes regarded as an affirmation of those who would curtail the role of intentional Christian ethics, making ethics simply the automatic fruit of justification. Without question, the first portion of Köberle's work makes the quintessential case for sanctification as fully the activity of God. Yet, Köberle also acknowledges the scriptural emphasis on man's responsibility for his own morality and warns against any view of ethics that does not take this into account:

> But to make ethics depend only "on the slender thread of thankfulness" (Schlatter) would be to underestimate the terrible power of sin, whose nature according to the fine description of the Second Article of the Augsburg Confession consists in the lack of fear of God (*sine metu*), and so can be overcome only through the awakening of a holy fear.[22]

In words that sound oddly un-Lutheran, Köberle advocates complementing the motive of gratitude with the less attractive, yet highly effective, motive of fear.

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[21] Of course, this is also the established pattern for the Biblical writers.

[22] Köberle, 168.

At the end of days the judgement will actually be passed on the works of the sinner and of the righteous, and so the fear of displeasing God must accompany even the life of the believer as a holy fear and as an aid in overcoming temptation.[23]

Köberle is confident that the creation of this holy fear can restore ethics to its rightful place within the Christian faith.

When men are unequivocally taught that the saving faith that has been given through Word and Sacrament will be lost if it be without the actual following of Christ in obedience and love, then the antinomian misunderstanding that has followed in the steps of the Gospel like some dark shadow, even to our own day, will finally be overcome.[24]

Supplementing the motive of gratitude with the motive of fear provides a significant corrective for the moral laxity that can damn as capably as its antithesis, legalism.[25] Still, even with Köberle's necessary and helpful correction, motivation does not serve as an adequate framework within which to account for all that the Confessions, and for that matter the Scriptures, have to say about the Christian life. One significant problem is the subjective nature of the motivational emphasis. Whether the motivation is gratitude or fear, the arena of ethics hinges on internal psychological responses in the believer.

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[23] Ibid., 166. Köberle's counsel is not so different from Luther's stern admonition in his explanation of what is termed the close of the Commandments: "God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore we are to fear his wrath and not disobey these commandments." *Book of Concord*, 354 (SC, TC, 22).

[24] Köberle, 246.

[25] This move is further supported in the Confessions: "For the old creature, like a stubborn, recalcitrant donkey, is also still a part of them, and it needs to be forced into obedience to Christ not only through the law's teaching, admonition, compulsion, and threat but also often with the cudgel of punishments and tribulations until the sinful flesh is completely stripped away and people are perfectly renewed in the resurrection." *Book of Concord*, 591 (FC, SD, 6, 24).

Stanley Hauerwas elaborates on this liability of the motivation scheme. When "religious beliefs," Hauerwas contends, "are relegated to the motivational or subjective side of the moral life...they can have no possible bearing on the way the moral life is conceived or lived."[26] In other words, the Christian's faith can speak to *why* that Christian should live a "holy life" but can say nothing about *what* that life should look like, or *how* it should be cultivated. All that counts is motive. As long as the motive has a divine source, the shape or content of the ethics must remain an open question, to be answered according to the choices, or perhaps whims, of each individual. Overcome and displaced by the "why" of ethical behavior, the "what" of that behavior fades into insignificance and irrelevance.

Motivation proves to be inadequate when made to serve as an account for the whole of Christian ethics. A Christian ethics founded only on motivation fosters an obsession with elusive internal responses and tends to minimize external standards of behavior. To reduce the ethical question to one of motivation supplies a framework that not only fails to account for the breadth of the confessional and experiential data, but in fact further complicates and distorts the picture.[27] Motivation has its place in ethical discussions, no doubt. Motivation speaks

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[26] Hauerwas, Bondi and Burrell, *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 42.

[27] A motivational framework has no place for Melanchthon's use of Aristotle or the confessional encouragement of habituation as considered in the previous chapter.

meaningfully to the relation between a Christian's standing *coram deo* and his responsibility *coram hominibus.* But this is only part of the ethical picture. More remains to be said.

Law and Gospel as a Frame

The possibility of using the motivation initiated by the Gospel as a framework for understanding the scope and location of Christian ethics has been considered as a distinct option. In truth, the motivational frame should be recognized as a subset of a somewhat broader framework: the dynamic of law and gospel. Of course, no theological frame is so characteristically Lutheran as that of the law/gospel dialectic. In man's vertical relationship with God, the dynamic of the law which convicts, crushes and kills, and the gospel which forgives, comforts, and makes alive is the distinctive Christian frame that defines all else.[28] Yet, in spite of its critical importance to the paramount question of one's standing *coram deo*, the dialectic does not serve well as a comprehensive frame into which everything in theology and life can be made to fit.

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[28] Hence, this frame is critically important in many situations of pastoral counsel where the need is the conviction of sin and then the proclamation of grace and forgiveness. This was also the driving concern of Melanchthon in Article 12 of the Augustana and Apology. In the vertical dimension, it is the law's second, or theological, use that is in action. The law's third use, of course, applies to the horizontal realm.

The difficulty is that the duality's beneficial aspects are forfeited when it is pushed into a negative versus positive polarity and applied indiscrimately in all of life's circumstances. At that point, the otherwise beneficial paradigm actually forces apart what is intended to be kept together. This is particularly problematic in light of the propensity of theologians, or perhaps human nature generally, to gravitate to one or the other of the poles. Indeed, Köberle accurately recognizes, "the painful impression that theological perception is apparently unable to apprehend or express more than one statement in its entirety."[29]

The use of the law/gospel polarity as the universal frame for all theological and ethical thinking is liable to succumb to the tendency to embrace one pole to the exclusion of the other. The unintended fruit of a law/gospel framework may be either a legalistic absorption in self-justifying works, or at the opposite extreme, the very licentious and antinomian attitudes that prompted this study.[30] The duality proves difficult to maintain in practice; the balance is tipped, frequently, in one direction or the other, with predictable results. While few Lutherans are foolhardy enough to subscribe openly to legalistic or antinomian theories or theologies, practical legalists and practical antinomians abound. The theologians considered in Chapter 2, particularly David Yeago and

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[29] Köberle, 208.

[30] The history of Lutheranism provides examples of both extremes, with the law-consumed pietists of a past era contrasting with today's gospel-cloaked antinomians.

Reinhard Hütter, provide compelling accounts of the current

consequences of the misuse and misapplication of the potent dialectic of

law and gospel. Their analysis is clear: the balance today is tilted

sharply in the antinomian direction.[31]

There remains, nevertheless, no shortage of those who promote or

at least assume the adequacy of the law/gospel dialectic as the ultimate

and final structuring frame for Christian doctrine and life. While he does

not employ the framework vocabulary, Carter Lindberg essentially argues

for the sufficiency of the law/gospel dialectic. In an article specifically

addressing the Lutheran relationship between justification and

sanctification, Lindberg concludes:

> Do Lutheran theologians shout justification, but whisper
> sanctification? No. Their rejection of any concept of sanctification
> apart from justification is loud and clear. Leading contemporary
> Lutheran theologians follow Luther in rejecting all forms of theology
> *per modum Aristoteles*. The Christian life is not a progress from vice
> to virtue but a continual starting anew by grace, *simul iustus et
> peccator.*[32]

In Lindberg's view, Christian life—justification as well as sanctification—

can be fully explained and subsumed within the dynamic of Law and

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[31] It is intriguing to note the remarkable correspondence between the assessment of today's church offered by Benne, Hütter, Meilaender, and Yeago and the assessment of the church of the 1930's made by Köberle. Köberle wrote: "Today, in view of the crass weakness and unbridled license in nation and Church, at home and in heathen lands, the danger of luxury and debauchery must appear much greater than its legalistic opposite. The number of those destroyed by the mad zeal of monastic methods of seeking sanctification is small compared with the millions who are the victims of the lowest defilements of the flesh. A one-sided opposition that is directed exclusively against work-righteousness cannot for the time being be the task of theology." Köberle, 194.

[32] Carter Lindberg, "Do Lutherans Shout Justification But Whisper Sanctification?" *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (spring 1999), 15.

Gospel. From a perspective *coram deo*, Lindberg is right. But, this is only one perspective. And, by addressing the question of sanctification without also taking into account *coram hominibus* realities, Lindberg seems to endorse the sufficiency of Law and Gospel as an overall framework.

Gerhard Forde can be similarly read. He states, "If justification is unconditional and total, it explodes into love and good works."[33] Again, this is true—as far as it goes. But, it does not go far enough. Whether he intends it or not, Forde, could be heard as underwriting the idea that little or no further training or instruction in Christian living is necessary or even desirable. While both Lindberg and Forde offer important and accurate arguments for the centrality of the Gospel and its role in the Christian's life, their positions cannot account for all of the data compiled in the previous chapter's investigation of the Confessions.[34] Although the law/gospel dynamic might be assumed to be the authentically Lutheran framework, it is not only incapable of managing all the realities and challenges of life and doctrine but, used as an overall framework, is finally detrimental to the vitality of Lutheranism.[35]

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[33] Braaten and Jenson, 434.

[34] For example, the exhortation in the Apology: "All people, whatever their calling, should seek perfection, that is, growth in the fear of God, in faith, in the love for their neighbor, and in similar spiritual virtues." *Book of Concord*, 283. See the full discussion in chapter three, page 46.

[35] This was the crux of Yeago's important argument already considered above in chapter two.

Two Kinds of Righteousness as a Frame

The challenge of a Christian ethics that a Lutheran can embrace with confidence is finding a way to express a meaningful and dynamic understanding of the Christian's life that is vitally connected to the great truths of the gospel without in any way diminishing those truths. Two typical answers to this challenge have been considered and found wanting. The motivation answer (a new motivation sparked by the gospel simply produces good works) conveys elements of truth and accords with some scriptural and confessional statements, particularly the image of a good tree bearing good fruit. Still, it does not account for all the data. Likewise, the law/gospel dialectic is good and right in its appropriate sphere—*coram deo* issues of soteriology—yet inadequate when pressed into service as a norming frame for all doctrinal thinking and ethical living. Neither of these frames, for example, is able to provide a place for Melanchthon's approval and use of Aristotle. Another considerably more suitable frame derives from another great duality within Lutheranism: the two kinds of righteousness.[36]

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[36] Luther is generally credited with formulating this distinction. His sermon, "Two Kinds of Righteousness", from 1519 provided the terminology of "alien righteousness" and "proper righteousness", distinguishing between the righteousness passively received by the believer and the subsequent righteousness of life actively pursued by the believer. LW 31:297-306, WA 2:145-147.

As the previous chapter demonstrated, the duality of two kinds of righteousness was critically important for Melanchthon and the other reformers. This twofold understanding of righteousness provides a much more effective framework within which to consider the complexities of faith and life than does the law and gospel dialectic just considered. Expressing the distinction between the righteousness of faith and the righteousness of the law, as well as the legitimacy of both, helps to expand the theological and ethical horizon beyond solely *coram deo* questions to include also the concerns of living *coram hominibus*. In particular, the recognition of the propriety of civil righteousness within its realm provides a vantage for the consideration of life and activity in the kingdom of the left hand where Christians live and function.[37] The left-hand kingdom with its civil righteousness is certainly within the domain of ethics—Christian ethics, as well as non-Christian ethics.

Luther testified to the significance and usefulness of the duality of two kinds of righteousness in the preface to his 1535 Galatians commentary. In keeping with his historical context, Luther uses the distinction primarily to extol the wonder and glory of the righteousness of faith. "It is a marvelous thing and unknown to the world," he declares, "to teach Christians to ignore the Law and to live *before God* as though

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[37] Along with his two kinds of righteousness, Luther also taught the need to discern between two realms or kingdoms: one the kingdom of God, or the right hand kingdom, the other the kingdom of this world, or the left hand kingdom. A Christian inhabits both realms, under the jurisdiction of both kingdoms. The definitive treatment

there were no Law whatever."[38] Before God, not the law, but grace

prevails. In the world, however, Luther knew that it was a different

matter altogether: "On the other hand, works and the performance of the

Law must be demanded *in the world* as though there were no promise or

grace."[39] Two different realms require two different understandings of

righteousness. There is one kind of righteousness *coram deo* and

another *coram hominibus*. Luther's preferred terminology in his

Galatians introduction is to name the Christian's righteousness before

God passive, while the righteousness necessarily pursued before men in

this world he labels active.[40]

Robert Kolb grasped the scriptural basis and rich theological

potential in Luther's too often overlooked and undervalued distinction.

> In developing this contrast between passive righteousness—which
> expresses itself in faith—and active righteousness—which expresses
> itself in performing the deeds of God's plan for human life—Luther

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remains Luther's *Temporal Authority: To What Extent it should be Obeyed.* LW 45:81-129.

[38] LW 26:6 [emphasis added]. "Mira autem res est mundo inaudita, docere Christianos, ut discant ignorare legem, utque sic vivant coram Deo, quasi penitus nulla lex sit." WA 40:43.

[39] LW 26:6 [emphasis added]. "E contra in mundo sic urgeri lex et opera debent, quasi prorsus nulla sit promissio aut gratia." WA 40:43.

[40] LW 26:4-5. Luther's enumeration of the varieties of righteousness is, not atypically, somewhat less than thoroughly systematic. While he distinguishes two kinds of righteousness throughout the introduction, in the opening discussion he seems to suggest additional varieties of righteousness. "For righteousness is of many kinds. There is political righteousness.... There is ceremonial righteousness.... There is, in addition to these, yet another righteousness, the righteousness of the Law of the Decalog, which Moses teaches.... Over and above all these there is the righteousness of faith or Christian righteousness, which is to be distinguished most carefully from all the others." LW 26:4. The possible implications of these other righteousnesses will be considered later in this chapter.

was bringing to light a fundamental distinction that had escaped articulation by most theologians since the time of the apostles. This distinction recognizes and rests upon Christ's observation that human life consists of two kinds of relationship, one with the author and creator of life, the other with all other creatures (Matt. 22:37-39).[41]

The value of Luther's distinction is not lost on Kolb, who indicates the ability of the two kinds of righteousness to serve as a frame for all of human existence.

> God's human creatures are right—really human—in their vertical relationships because their faith embraces the God who loves them through Jesus Christ with the reckless trust of total dependence and reliance on him which constitutes their identity. They are right—really human—in their horizontal relationship with God's other creatures when they live a life which is active in reflecting his love through the deeds that deliver his care and concern.[42]

The teaching of two kinds of righteousness as articulated by Luther and further elaborated by Kolb addresses fundamental questions about human existence, purpose, and relation to God. This teaching provides a rich understanding of human life lived both *coram deo* and *coram hominibus*. Indeed, the kind of substantial treatment given the topic by Kolb very nearly provides precisely the kind of frame that will be sufficient for the development of a specifically Lutheran Christian ethic.

Nevertheless, an attempt to employ the two kinds of righteousness as a norming frame for all of theology and the Christian life is not without its difficulties. The previous chapter's reading of the Confessions

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[41] Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness: Reflections on His Two-Dimensional Definition of Humanity at the Heart of His Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 113:4 (winter, 1999), 452.

[42] Ibid., 453.

revealed that while Melanchthon commended the teaching of civil righteousness along with the righteousness of faith, at times his presentation can be read as limiting the application of civil righteousness solely to the unregenerate.[43] Civil righteousness seen as strictly an application of the Law's first use fails to embrace adequately all aspects of the believer's new life—particularly his *coram hominibus* responsibilities.[44]

Kolb avoids this criticism by following Luther in developing the distinction in terms of passive and active righteousness. "Active" righteousness provides a wider, and so more inclusive, term than does "civil" righteousness. The dichotomy of active righteousness and passive righteousness is, then, better able to handle both the *coram deo* elements as well as the *coram hominibus* aspects of the Christian's life. A strict emphasis on civil righteousness versus the righteousness of faith—as Melanchthon sometimes treats it—however, runs the risk of encouraging a rift between doctrine and ethics. Civil righteousness could be perceived as unspiritual—something exclusively for those without faith—thus

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[43] For example: "Therefore it is helpful to distinguish between civil righteousness, which is ascribed to the free will, and spiritual righteousness, which is ascribed to the operation of the Holy Spirit in the regenerate. In this way outward discipline is preserved, because all people alike ought to know that God requires civil righteousness and that to some extent we are able to achieve it." *Book of Concord*, 234 (Ap 18, 9).

[44] Nor does it create space for talk of growth in holiness or the cultivation of holy habits leading to greater Christian character.

lending credence to the unfortunate notion that Christians need not,

indeed *should* not, concern themselves with ethics.[45]

Talk of two kinds of righteousness, then, is burdened with a

certain amount of ambiguity, an ambiguity exacerbated by the

multiplication of synonyms for the various types of righteousnesses

produced by both Luther and his younger colleague. One could easily

compile a list of a score of righteousnesses named by the two reformers.

A way out of this difficulty begins by recognizing a distinction between

Luther's "righteousness of the Law" and Melanchthon's "civil

righteousness." The civil righteousness endorsed by Melanchthon in the

Apology is rightly understood in its most natural sense—a righteousness

governing the behavior of all humanity, redeemed and otherwise.[46]

Luther's references to righteousness of the Law, on the other hand, are

best interpreted in terms of the Christian who already possesses the

righteousness of faith, or Christian righteousness.[47] Though the label

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[45] This was the danger highlighted by Meilaender as noted as the outset of this chapter (page 4). See Meilaender's comments in Meilaender, "Task of Lutheran Ethics," 17.

[46] Melanchthon followed this distinction in his 1524 "Summary of Doctrine" where he wrote: "Accordingly, besides Christian righteousness there is human righteousness, by which the wicked should be coerced." Melanchthon, *Selected Writings, 97.*

[47] Consider the subject of the righteousness of the Law in Luther's Galatians discussion: "We set forth two worlds, as it were, one of them heavenly and the other earthly. Into these we place these two kinds of righteousness, which are distinct and separated from each other. The righteousness of the Law is earthly and deals with earthly things; by it we perform good works. But as the earth does not bring forth fruit unless it has first been watered and made fruitful from above—for the earth cannot judge, renew, and rule the heavens, but the heavens judge, renew, rule, and fructify the earth, so that it may do what the Lord has commanded—so also by the righteousness of

"two kinds of righteousness" applies to the distinctions of both Luther

and Melanchthon, it does not consistently mean the same thing for

both.[48]

Three Kinds of Righteousness—Luther and Melanchthon

One could endeavor to distinguish these two varieties of "two kinds

of righteousness" by labeling one as Luther's and the other as that of

Melanchthon. This would not be entirely accurate, however, since at

times, either can operate within the other's parameters.[49] Perhaps a

better way to clarify the issue is to impose a more precise systemization

and speak of three kinds of righteousness.

Interestingly, Luther did exactly this in his 1518 sermon, "Three

Kinds of Righteousness." Here the reformer paired three kinds of sin

(criminal, original, actual) with three kinds of righteousness (apparent,

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the Law we do nothing even when we do much; we do not fulfill the Law even when we fulfill it. Without any merit or work of our own, we must first be justified by Christian righteousness, which has nothing to do with the righteousness of the Law or with earthly and active righteousness." LW 26:8. It seems clear that Luther's "we" is referring to Christians, to whom active righteousness applies.

[48] It should be remembered that Melanchthon and Luther chose their respective twofold distinctions in light of their occasion for writing. Melanchthon sought to defend the Lutheran teaching of justification against charges that it bred moral laxity. Luther's distinction was made for the benefit of the Christian readers of his commentary.

[49] Also in his Galatians commentary, Luther writes, "Christian righteousness applies to the new man, and the righteousness of the Law applies to the old man, who is born of flesh and blood." LW 26:7. While this distinction does not exclude Christians from the righteousness of the Law, neither does it exclude unbelievers. See also the discussion in chapter three, pp. 29-36. Melanchthon's use of categories later endorsed by Luther will be examined in what follows.

alien, active, respectively). The first category, apparent righteousness,

had nothing to do with Christians:

> Secundo non deo sed sibi servit, nec est filiorum sed servorum
> iusticia, nec est Christianorum proprie, sed Iudaeorum et gentilium,
> nec Christiani ad eam sunt exhortandi, quia procedit ex timore
> poenae vel amore commodi sui, non amore dei.[50]

This first righteousness was the kind encountered in the civil world

operating without concern or regard for God. The second two kinds of

righteousness, on the other hand, are strictly for Christians. Luther

paired the second kind of righteousness with essential or original sin

and named it essential, original or alien righteousness.[51] Luther

described the unique aspects of this righteousness: "Haec [iusiticia] fit

nostra per fidem. ....Haec [iusticia] per baptismum confertur, haec est

propie quam Euangelium annunciat, et non est iusticia legis, sed iusticia

gratiae."[52]

The second righteousness having been explained, Luther

expounded his sermon's third kind of righteousness, the one which

corresponded to actual sin: "Iusticia huic contraria est actualis, fluens ex

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[50] WA 2:43. "Secondly, it serves not God, but itself, nor is it the righteousness of sons, but of slaves, nor is it a particular characteristic of Christians, but of Jews and gentiles, nor will Christians be exhorted to it, because it results from fear of punishment or from love of what is convenient for oneself, not from love of God."

[51] "Iusticia huic [peccatum] contraria similiter est natatlis, essencialis, originalis, aliena, quae est iusticia Christi." Ibid., 44.

[52] Ibid., 45. "This [righteousness] becomes ours through faith ....This [righteousness] is imputed through Baptism, this is characteristically how the Gospel announces, and is not righteousness of law, but righteousness of grace."

fide et iusticia essenciali...."[53] This third righteousness described the

believer's growth in holiness: "Quia illa tecia iusticia nihil aliud

quaeritue, quam ut peccatum originale expugnetur et corpus peccati

destruatur."[54] The third kind of righteousness, actual righteousness,

flowed from the faith characteristic of the second righteousness and so

was unique to believers, as they alone possessed faith.[55]

Thirteen years later, it was Melanchthon who set forth a similar

distinction of three kinds of righteousness in his disputation, "We Are

Justified by Faith and Not by Love."

> There are three kinds of righteousness. The first is that which is
> derived from reason. The second is that which conforms to the law of
> God. The third is that which the Gospel promises.[56]

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[53] Ibid. "The righteousness over against this [actual sin (peccatum actuale)] is actual, flowing from faith and essential [or alien (aliena)] righteousness."

[54] Ibid., 47. "Because that third righteousness is sought for nothing other than that original sin be overcome and the body of sin be destroyed."

[55] Why Luther later advocated two kinds of righteousness rather than three is a matter of speculation. However, the explanation could be as simple as addressing the need of the moment. Addressing Christians, Luther may have considered it unnecessary to discuss the first, and in his thinking irrelevant kind of righteousness. It is interesting, however, that in his Galatians introduction (LW 26:4) with its passive and active division, Luther first recognizes the existence of "many kinds" of righteousness, and one could easily group the first in his list (political and ceremonial) within the first category of the three-fold division advanced in his 1518 sermon. Thus, it is possible to detect a threefold division of righteousnesses even in his most explicit endorsement of a twofold division.

[56] Kolb and Nestingen, *Sources and Contexts*, 141 (thesis 6). "Triplex iusticia est, una rationis, altera quam les dei exigit, tertia quam Euangelium promittit." Johannes Haussleiter, ed., "Melanchthons *loci praecipui* und Thesen über die Rechtfertigung aus dem Jahre 1531," in *Abhandlungen Alexander von Oettingen zum siebenzigsten Geburtstag gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern* (Munich: Beck, 1898), 252. Note that Melanchthon's terminology and even order does not precisely cohere with that of Luther.

"The righteousness of reason," Melanchthon wrote, "is the righteousness of works, and reason produces it."[57] While people could understand the righteousness of reason, they could not comprehend the righteousness of the law which "consists of love toward God and neighbor."[58] The Gospel's righteousness is that which justifies: "It is certain that we are justified neither by reason, nor by the law, but by the Gospel."[59]

In this disputation, Melanchthon recognizes a difference between the righteousness of reason and the righteousness of the law. The latter depends on the righteousness of the Gospel:

> The promise is received by faith. For that reason we are first justified by faith, by which we receive the promise of reconciliation by faith. Thereafter we keep the law.

> Nevertheless, since we are born anew by faith and have received the Holy Spirit, the righteousness of the law is present in us, namely, love for God and neighbor, fear of God, obedience toward governmental authorities and parents, patience, and similar virtues.[60]

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[57] Kolb and Nestingen, *Sources and Contexts*, 141 (thesis 10). "Justicia rationis, est usiticia operum, quae ratio efficit." Haussleiter, 252.

[58] Kolb and Nestingen, *Sources and Contexts*, 141 (thesis13). "Justicia legis, est dilectio dei et proximi." Haussleiter, 252.

[59] Kolb and Nestingen, *Sources and Contexts*, 141 (thesis 7). "Constat nos neque ratione iustificari neque lege, sed Euangelio." Haussleiter, 252.

[60] Kolb and Nestingen, *Sources and Contexts*, 142 (thesis 17 & 19). "Promissio fide accipitur. Prius igitur fide iusti sumus, qua accipimus promissam reconciliationem, quam legem facimus." "Et tamen cum fide renati sumus, accepto Spiritu sancto fit in nobis iusticia legis, dilectioo dei et proximi, timor dei, obedientia erga magistratus, parentes, patientia, et similes uirtutes." Haussleiter, 253. Immediately before these two theses, Melanchthon wrote: "It is necessary, therefore, for the righteousness of the promise to be present before the righteousness of the law or reason" (thesis 16). "Necesse est igitur iusticiam promissionis adesse, ante iusticiam legis aut rationis." It is curious that Melanchthon added "or reason" since this seems to deny his earlier comment that the righteousness of reason could be apprehended by human beings even without knowledge of the Gospel, and it hardly seems likely in view of his careful distinction between law and reason that he means them here to be

The righteousness of the law excels that of reason, in that it includes also love of God and higher standards of obedience.[61] And while Melanchthon relates the righteousness of the law to the righteousness of the gospel, he maintains a stringent distinction between them:

> James rightly teaches, "We are justified by faith and works," because works justify according to the righteousness of the law, which certainly ought to follow faith. Nevertheless, this righteousness of the law is not righteousness *in God's sight* except on account of faith.
>
> And the resulting works, because they please God on account of faith, are also meritorious, not for righteousness or eternal life but for other blessings of body and soul.[62]

The difference is grounded in the recognition of the different realms within which the Christian functions: *coram deo* and *coram hominibus*. Righteousness of the law is particularly concerned with a Christian's life in relation to *coram hominibus* realities.

Three Kinds of Righteousness—Toward an Effective Framework

As a framework, the two kinds of righteousness is more than adequate for distinguishing the difference between man's righteousness *coram deo* and his righteousness *coram hominibus*. That is, a two kinds

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understood as synonyms. Perhaps the variant reading [Bretschneider'schen Textes im Corp. Ref.] which omits "aut rationis" should be preferred.

[61] The Christian virtue of humility, or the rule of love for one's enemy, are good examples of standards that surpass the expectation of reason.

[62] Kolb and Nestingen, *Sources and Contexts*, 143 (thesis 33 & 34) (emphasis added). "Iacobus recte dicit. Iustificamur fide et operibus, quia opera iustificant isuticia legis, quae certe fidem sequi debet, sed tamen haec iusticia legis, non est iusticia coram deo, nisi propter fidem." "Et haec sequentia opera, quia propter fidem

of righteousness frame sufficiently manages the spiritual realities of

man's relationship with the Creator. The advantage of a framework built

on three kinds of righteousness is that it makes it possible to distinguish

between differences in the kinds of righteousness *coram hominibus*.

Distinguishing three kinds of righteousness maintains the righteousness

before God and righteousness before men distinction but brings greater

clarity to the latter by also allowing a distinction between the *coram

hominibus* righteousness of believers and unbelievers.

Recognizing the desirability of a threefold framework does not yet

provide the particular details of that framework. Exactly how the three

kinds of righteousness should be described is a matter for some

consideration. Luther and Melanchthon offered two versions of three

kinds of righteousnesses with noteworthy differences. It is difficult to

select one as superior. Both Luther's and Melanchthon's threefold

divisions present useful elements, and favoring one over the other could

risk the forfeiture of the other's strengths. Starting with a righteousness

common to all people, then considering a person's righteousness before

God, and concluding with the Christian's righteousness before men,

Luther's order follows a familiar chronology of the salvation experience.

Melanchthon's account has the strength of clarity and precision,

particularly in distinguishing the righteousness of reason from the

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placent, etiam meritoria sunt, non iusticiae aut uitae aeternae, sed aliorum bonorum
corporalium, et spiritualium." Haussleiter, 254.

righteousness of the law. Aware of the hazards of innovation, this study will, nevertheless, draw on both Luther and Melanchthon, and offer a unique distinction of three kinds of righteousness designed for contemporary use.

The proposed threefold division follows both reformers. The sequence is Luther's, but the precision of distinction derives more directly from Melanchthon. For the sake of convenience and clarity, and to avoid identification or confusion with the familiar labels employed by the reformers, the three kinds of righteousness, at least initially, will be designated with a system as simple as it is unimaginative—using the ordinal numbers, first, second, and third.

In the proposed account of three kinds of righteousness, the first righteousness is the righteousness which applies to all people, regardless a person's standing before God, and recognizes the presence of God's will, i.e., the law in all of creation.[63] The second righteousness is the righteousness of salvation that comes from outside, through faith.[64] The third is the righteousness evident in the godly life of a Christian as he functions within the created world.[65] The order is that which is

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[63] Luther named this first righteousness apparent righteousness, while Melanchthon's term was righteousness of reason.

[64] The second righteousness Luther called, among other terms, alien righteousness. Melanchthon used the terminology, the righteousness of the promise and considered it third.

[65] This was actual righteousness in Luther's sermon, and Melanchthon labeled it the righteousness of the law.

commonly experienced: to begin, one lives in this world in accordance to the dictates of the first righteousness. Subsequently, by grace, the second righteousness bestows salvation and inaugurates a new life, one now cognizant of the third righteousness. It should be recognized as more than coincidental that the order as well as the respective purview of the first, second, and third righteousnesses closely correspond to the first second and third uses of the law (curb, mirror, and guide), as well as the first, second, and third articles of the Creed. This parallel lends strength to this study's contention that the three kinds of righteousness as proposed is not so much innovation as clarification and illustration.

If labels more descriptive than ordinal numbering are desired, the participles governing, justifying, and sanctifying, might be safely appended to the simpler designations of first, second, and third, respectively. These participles point to the activity—and the subject of the activity—involved in each righteousness as well as to the outcome of each kind of righteousness. It should be understood, however, that these designations are provided only for the sake of understanding with no intention of reconciling or coinciding with the preferred and sometimes ambiguous terms used by the reformers.
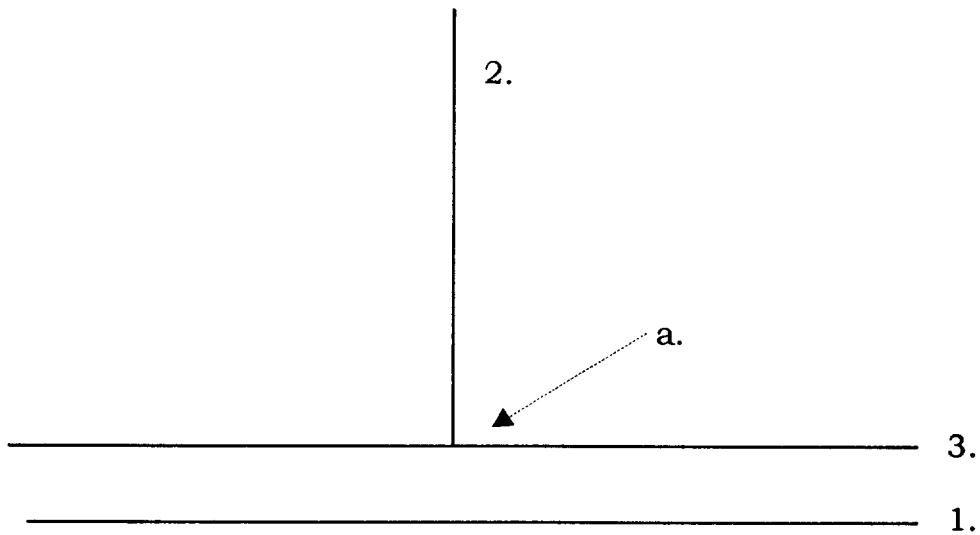
Three kinds of righteousness as described in the previous paragraph provides an effective framework within which to understand the data uncovered in the previous chapter, as well as other statements encountered in Scripture and theology. There is a righteousness based

on God's will, the first righteousness, which governs all of life in this world, and those who adhere to it attain a certain degree of righteousness according to the world. The second righteousness is entirely separate from the first kind of righteousness and delivers salvation to the wholly passive recipient. The second righteousness flows (through new "Christian" motivations of love for God and concern for neighbor) into the third kind of righteousness, which in its expression often looks similar to the first righteousness but is unique in its relationship to the second kind of righteousness.

There are clear relationships between the righteousnesses. [See Figure 1] As noted, in many respects, the third righteousness resembles the first; in fact, they are parallel and outwardly similar. Both are concerned primarily with horizontal relationships; that is, they are occupied with the inescapable realities of mundane existence in this world *coram hominibus*. Additionally, the intended subject of both first and third righteousness is recognized as human beings. However, another close relationship also exists between the second and third kinds of righteousness.

The second righteousness is concerned with *coram deo* realities, describing the vertical relationship between God and the individual—a relationship of grace through faith. In the second kind of righteousness God alone is subject and actor. Still, the third kind of righteousness is intimately connected to the second and is possible only because of the

reality of the second.[66] They are both, in a sense, the righteousness of Christians: the second, the righteousness that is passively received; the third, the righteousness that is actively lived. So, while the first and third kinds of righteousness are parallel and similar, they are marked by different motivations and most significantly by the unique activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer—a gift unknown to the unbeliever living only according to the first kind of righteousness.

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1. first righteousness (governing)
2. second righteousness (justifying)
3. third righteousness (sanctifying)
a. the connection between 2. & 3.

Figure 1

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[66] The figure rightly indicates the connection between the second and the third kinds of righteousness. However, an exploration of the nature of this connection surpasses the limits of the present investigation. The authors of the Confessions actually demonstrated little interest in explicating the topic and were content to recognize that the connection involved new motivations for the Christian as well as the indwelling activity of the Holy Spirit. Of course, they also made clear that the third kind of righteousness could contribute nothing to the God-worked reality of what is here termed the second kind of righteousness.

While the three kinds of righteousness framework capably manages the concerns and nuances of Lutheran theology, it also provides a connection with the insights and interests of virtue ethics. Alasdair MacIntyre highlighted the importance of narrative and practices for understanding ethical questions.[67] The three kinds of righteousness framework can readily incorporate the insight that there are a great many narratives in which people operate and so a great many practices which direct individuals.[68] The frame of a threefold righteousness accepts this truth, placing these multiple narratives within the first kind of righteousness as coplanar subsets. An accurate representation of these varieties of the first kind of righteousness would necessitate a three dimensional figure with these righteousnesses and their respective practices all occurring within a single plane. Naturally, these different narratives sometimes compete and conflict as they inevitably cross one another or make opposing claims on their adherents. Nevertheless, they all function within the common plane of the first kind of righteousness. Parallel to this plane, yet separate from it, is another plane, the plane of the third kind of righteousness which is connected to the perpendicular

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[67] See the discussion in chapter 1 beginning on page 3. Briefly stated, the particular narrative in which one is operating or living determines the desired outcomes or goods for that individual and so dictates the kind of practices (both activities and ways of thinking) which will concern and direct that individual so that the goods may be realized.

[68] Luther also acknowledged this truth, naming political and ceremonial as two specific kinds of active righteousness. LW 26:4. Virtue ethics would extend the list begun by Luther to include the practices intrinsic to such diverse activities as football, environmental activism, or membership in a monastery.

and only vertical element in the illustration, the second kind of righteousness.[69]

Conclusion

The strength of a framework utilizing three kinds of righteousness is the ability it possesses to handle the assortment of confessional and scriptural data—a *sine qua non* of an effective framework. The three kinds of righteousness framework allows the central truth of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone to be clearly articulated. Additionally, it can accommodate and make sense of such confessional teachings as the civil righteousness of unbelievers and the new life of obedience of believers, realities also borne out by common experience. The framework provides an effective and useful tool, then, equal to the twin demands of ethical relevance and doctrinal accuracy.

The assets of a three kinds of righteousness framework can be further strengthened, however, by recognizing that this paradigm is actually grounded in another crucial framework. Indeed, whether one adopts the suggestion of this paper and embraces a threefold understanding of righteousness or elects to retain the distinction of two kinds of righteousness, the framework of different kinds of righteousness

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[69] The same multiplication of narratives and attendant practices characteristic of the plane of the first righteousness would occur in the plane of the third kind of righteousness with the difference that they are all connected to justifying righteousness. This is the commonly experienced reality of different Christians providing more or less accurate accounts of the narrative of the Christian life. While this line of thinking invites further exploration, it exceeds the bounds of the present study.

is significantly enhanced when placed within the grounding framework of the Creed. This endeavor will occupy the investigation of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

A CREEDAL FRAMEWORK—ONE PROPOSAL FOR THE RECLAMATION OF ETHICS WITHIN LUTHERANISM

A directing premise of this paper has been the need to locate within Lutheran theology a place for the concerns, insights, and even practices of an ethics of virtue. The preceding four chapters have presented an overview of virtue ethics, considered contemporary Lutheran ethical thinkers, read the Confessions with attention focused on virtues and the inculcation of character, and finally examined potential Lutheran paradigms which could serve as avenues toward a revitalized ethics within Lutheranism. The present chapter will serve as the culmination of the thesis as it develops and defends a viable framework which opens room for the practice of an ethics of virtue within Lutheranism while maintaining doctrinal positions distinctive to Lutheranism. A significant element of the proposed framework was introduced in the previous chapter. That aspect of the overall paradigm will be elaborated and enhanced as it is grounded in the fundamental framework provided by the Creed.

The Creedal Frame

The quest for a framework within which to proclaim the truths of the gospel and seriously address the needs of Christian living while

demonstrating the interrelationship between both has proven to be a challenge. While the hope is that such a frame will serve the rejuvenation and development of Lutheran ethics, the typically Lutheran frames (gospel motivation, law and gospel, and even some versions of two kinds of righteousness) have been found, in varying degrees, not wholly satisfactory. An acceptable frame must be equal to the needs of contemporary Lutheranism while at the same time familiar and so accessible to all Christians. The framework of three kinds of righteousness as outlined in the previous chapter comprises a significant component in what will be offered as an overall framework able to answer the need. A consideration of the most basic features of the theological landscape yields the complementary component of this study's suggested framework.

A theological frame capable of accommodating the scope of Lutheran theology along with the significant practical concerns of virtue ethics is founded upon and shaped within what is perhaps the most expansive yet inclusive of all possible frameworks: the fundamental form of the church's Creed. This chapter will consider the Creed as a paradigm and then propose a single guiding frame which adopts the three kinds of righteousness framework and then roots that framework within the basic creedal paradigm. The presentation will demonstrate the ability of this newly described framework to receive, accommodate, and make sense of the sometimes disparate data that are encountered in

Scripture, the Confessions, and Christian experience. For the sake of convenience, this framework of three kinds of righteousness grounded in a creedal paradigm will be designated simply as the creedal framework. Thus, references to a creedal framework should not be construed as another competing frame over against the three kinds of righteousness framework. Rather, the three kinds of righteousness are grounded within the creedal frame.

Unencumbered by the propensity toward polarization inherent in all dualities, nor constrained by the attempt to make motivation say everything of interest about Christian life, and using language and concepts immediately recognizable to all Christians, a creedal framework has much to commend its adoption as the fundamental and norming frame. The Church's Creed, whether expressed as the Nicene Creed or the Apostles' Creed, provides a view comprehensive enough to encompass all of theology and all of life. Justification *coram deo* and the Christian's life in the world *coram hominibus* are not placed in polarity to one another, nor are they collapsed into a unity. Both are aspects of God's larger work of creating, redeeming, and restoring. The great strength and support of this frame is that it is founded upon and reflects the work of the Trinity itself.[1]

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[1] That is, not the ineffable, transcendent intra-trinitarian works of the Godhead, but the work of the economic Trinity on behalf of humankind and its salvation.

The Trinitarian Basis

Robert Benne suggested that to overcome its infamous ethical irrelevance, "Lutheran ethics will have to be more trinitarian."[2] Certainly, a creedal framework for doctrine and ethics is a significant move in a trinitarian direction. It would be a mistake, however, for the reader to identify the creedal framework being proposed here with what has come to be known as trinitarian ethics. Having imbibed much of the spirit of Jürgen Moltmann, trinitarian ethics as practiced today has developed into a specific approach to Christian ethics with distinct characteristics, some of which are at odds with the purpose of this study.[3] Noteworthy among these is the assumption, widespread among many doing Christian ethics, that the Trinity, especially the intra-

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[2] Bloomquist and Stumme, *Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 28. Unfortunately, Benne's essay does not elaborate on what he thought a more trinitarian Lutheran ethics might entail. That he intended the direction taken by this study is not assumed; nevertheless, his observation is relevant to the present investigation.

[3] Jürgen Moltmann espoused the "social doctrine of the Trinity" and reached several conclusions which might be summarized: 1. The Trinity must be understood in the sense of community 2. The monarchical view of God must be eliminated 3. 'Almighty" must be understood as a reference to God's love 4. The doctrine of the Trinity requires that the church be "free of dominion". See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), viii, 197-202. Liberation theologians capitalized on Moltmann's work. "The community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit becomes the prototype of the human community dreamed of by those who wish to improve society and build it in such a way as to make it into the image and likeness of the Trinity." Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Kent: Burnes & Oates, 1998), 7. Moltmann's social doctrine of the Trinity as articulated by Boff is now widely accepted by contemporary theologians as the norm for theology and society: "Christian ethicists as well as theologians speculating on the meaning of divine and human personhood must deliberate on the social order. To do any less undermines the point of a trinitarian doctrine of God." Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 288.

trinitarian relationship, is somehow normative for Christians and their

ethical life. L. Gregory Jones furnishes a representative example:

> Instead, the moral life, understood most adequately in terms of
> Christian life, should be lived in the mystery of the Triune God. From
> such a perspective, I suggest that the moral life involves an ongoing
> "perichoretic dance." Such a dance, grounded in the perichoretic
> relations of God's Trinity, requires and enables people to discern the
> overall pattern their lives are to take, to puzzle with others about what
> that patterning entails concretely, and to question received claims to
> truth from the standpoint of the Gospel.[4]

One of the flaws in the practice of this understanding of ethics is

that it may too easily become a subjective, or at best, an anthropocentric

ethic as people "puzzle" together about how exactly a trinitarian-shaped

life should look. If the trinitarian ethicists such as Moltmann and his

successors are any example, it seems that the answers that do eventually

emerge from such puzzling too often bear a remarkable resemblance to

the prevailing ethical sensibilities of society's most enlightened, that is

Enlightenment-bred, thinkers.[5] While a more complete investigation lies

outside the parameters of the present investigation, it is the conviction of

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[4] L. Gregory Jones, *Transformed Judgment: Toward a Trinitarian Account of the Moral Life* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 4.

[5] For example, David Cunningham concludes that a truly trinitarian view of the Christian life will lead "pastors and congregations...to demonstrate their willingness to provide the same kinds of pastoral care to committed same-sex relationships as they do to opposite-sex couples." David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998), 303. Thomas Marsh critiques this tendency, observing that those who advocate social and political action based on the Trinity may have allowed "their own notion of an ideal human society to influence their understanding of the Triune God." Thomas Marsh, *The Triune God: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Study* (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994), 186. About Moltmann, Alan Torrance concludes: "The tendency in Moltmann is for his theology to be shaped by a prior personalist, indeed socio-political, ontology." Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion: An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 249.

this writer, notwithstanding popular notions to the contrary, that neither Scripture nor the confessions offer the mystery of the intra-trinitarian relationship as the model for Christian living or the shape of Christian life.[6] The Christian life is shaped not by God's trinitarian nature, but by his revealed word and work.[7]

The efficacy of a creedal framework stems from its recognition of and grounding in the all-encompassing work of the Trinity. This frame advocates not an emulation of perichoretic intra-trinitarian relations, but an appreciation for the extent of God's activity as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. From the perspective of contemporary Lutheranism, the appropriation of a creedal frame points especially to a renewed appreciation for the importance of God's First Article work of creation. The creedal frame proclaims that all of life and theology fits into the universal scheme of God's creative task. The precedents for this creedal, creation-affirming solution to the Lutheran dilemma are many.

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[6] This conviction is nevertheless widely held, even by those considered to be conservative and evangelical thinkers. For example, note the work of Stanley Grenz who writes: "In this manner the Christian vision of God as the social Trinity and our creation to be the *imago Dei* provides the transcendent basis for the human ethical ideal as life-in-community. Consequently the reciprocal, perichoretic dynamic of the Triune God is the cosmic reference point for the idea of society itself." Grenz, *Moral Quest*, 238. For an insightful critique of 'trinitarian ethics' see Richard Bauckham, who stipulates that, "true human community comes about not as an image of the trinitarian fellowship, but as the Spirit makes us like Jesus in his community with the Father and with others." Richard Bauckham, "Jürgen Moltmann's *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* and the Question of Pluralism," in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 155-164, 162.

[7] Ethics, then, is not concerned with the *opera divina ad intra*, but with the *opera divina ad extra*.

Melanchthon and Luther and the Creedal Emphasis

In his 1521 *Loci Communes*, Melanchthon recognized the importance of sustaining a theological perspective wide enough to include creation.

> In moral works too we have to be on our guard so that just as you do not eat and drink in order to be justified, you do not give alms for your justification. But just as you eat and drink in order to provide for your bodily needs, you should give alms, love your brother, etc., in order to provide for the common need.[8]

Christian faith and life are not simply a Third-article personal appropriation of the universal redemption in Christ proclaimed in the Second Article of the Creed. Rather, the redeemed and sanctified individual who has been blessed with all the gifts of salvation is sent back again into the created realm to exercise and distribute those gifts. By virtue of the First Article, the Christian has a responsibility to care for the other members of the creation into which he has been placed.

When Melanchthon entered the arena of moral philosophy, his affirmation of the created realm is even more pronounced. Sachiko Kusukawa observes, "For moral philosophy, Melanchthon used parts of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* (especially book V) in order to argue that humans were created for a purpose and that that purpose was to obey

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[8] Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes Theologici,* in *Melanchthon and Bucer,* vol. 19 of *The Library of Christian Classics.* trans. and ed. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 126.

the divinely instituted order, such as civil governments."[9] Evidence for

Melanchthon's eager willingness to make use of Aristotle was presented

in the previous chapter. Another significant reference, however, is quite

appropriate here.

> Since Christians should cherish and support this civil society, this
> teaching of civic morals and duties has to be known by them. It is not
> piety to live like Cyclopes, without justice, without laws, without
> teaching, or without any of the other things helpful for life that are
> contained in literature. Therefore those who disparage philosophy not
> only wage war against human nature, but they also severely injure
> the glory of the Gospel, which commands that men be restrained by
> civic discipline; and nature decorates with the highest prizes the
> honourable [sic] institutions that contain the civil society of men.[10]

Melanchthon fully understood and appreciated the importance of the

realm of creation and its maintenance.

Of course, Luther also cherished the gifts of creation and like

Melanchthon recognized people as the fitting objects of our good works.

With his understanding of two kinds of righteousness near at hand,

Luther declares in his explanation of the Fourth Commandment, "In

God's sight it is actually faith that makes a person holy; it alone serves

God, while our works serve people."[11] In the preface to his 1535

commentary on Galatians, Luther again affirms the Christian's

responsibility to serve the rest of creation. Here, Luther roots the

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[9] Melanchthon, *Orations on Philosophy*, xviii.

[10] Ibid., 81.

[11] *Book of Concord*, 406 (LC I, 147). Though he overextends his argument into an exclusion of any individual pursuit of virtue, Ivar Asheim ably notes the importance of Luther's emphasis on good works being "exzentrisch." See Asheim, "Lutherische Tugendethik?."

redeemed Christian firmly in the created realm. It is here that the

believer's faith is given explicit and specific shape.

> When I have this [passive] righteousness within me, I descend from heaven like the rain that makes the earth fertile. That is, I come forth into another kingdom, and I perform good works whenever the opportunity arises. If I am a minister of the Word, I preach, I comfort the saddened, I administer the sacraments. If I am a father, I rule my household and family, I train my children in piety and honesty. If I am a magistrate, I perform the office which I have received by divine command. If I am a servant, I faithfully tend to my master's affairs. In short, whoever knows for sure that Christ is his righteousness not only cheerfully and gladly works in his calling but also submits himself for the sake of love to magistrates, also to their wicked laws, and to everything else in this present life—even, if need be, to burden and danger. For he knows that God wants this and that this obedience pleases Him.[12]

The justified Christian is returned to "another kingdom," the kingdom of

the "left hand," and is busy there with the varied and demanding affairs

of "this present life."

The redemption accomplished in the Second Article of the Creed

leads the believer back into the First Article world of creation, there to

follow the lead of the Holy Spirit, who carries out his Third Article work

of restoration and fulfillment. Both Luther and Melanchthon operate

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[12] LW 26:11-12. "Hanc cum intus habeo, descendo de coelo tanquam pluvia foecundans terram, hoc est: prodeo foras in aliud Regnum et facio bona opera quaecunque mihi occurrunt. Si sum minister verbi, praedico, consolor pusillanimes, administro sacramenta; Si paterfamilias, rego domum, familiam, educo liberos ad pietatem et honestatem; Si Magistratus, officium divinitus mihi mandatum facio; Si servus, fideliter rem domini curo; Summa, quicunque certo novit Christum esse iustitiam suam, is non solum ex animo et cum gaudio bene operatur in vocatione sua, sed subiicit se quoque per charitatem magistratibus, etiam impiis legibus eorum, et omnibus praesentis vitae, si res ita postulet, oneribus atque periculis, Quia scit Deum hoc velle et ei placere hanc obedientiam." WA 40:51. This passage also serves as another demonstration of the distinction between Melanchthon's typical use of civil righteousness and Luther's active righteousness of the Christian, as well as of motivation's place as part of the connection between passive and active righteousness (this would fit at point 'a' in Figure 1).

quite naturally within a creedal framework. It is not difficult to see how their two kinds of righteousness distinctions, or this paper's suggested threefold format, can be anchored within the creedal framework.[13]

Gustaf Wingren and the Importance of the Doctrine of Creation

The last century witnessed a renewed appreciation for this creedal frame that the reformers seem to have accepted as a given. The work of Gustaf Wingren does much to recapture the importance of the First Article for both theology and living. Wingren develops the idea that creation is the ground for all of theology and that redeemed man is being restored to God's original creative intent.[14] The Swedish theologian defined the results of faith according to the doctrine of creation: "Faith means a recovery of man's original and natural position, for which both he and Creation alike were destined and equipped."[15] And Wingren draws the good works of men into the same frame: "The purpose of all

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[13] This will be considered more fully below.

[14] Though his own argument begins in a different place and develops in reaction to the work of Iris Murdoch, it is noteworthy that Hauerwas also contends for the importance of the doctrine of creation for ethics. He is sure of "the difference the Christian account of creation ex nihilo makes for the Christian moral life." Stanley M. Hauerwas, *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-Century Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 157.

[15] Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 52.

human work is man's continued 'conformation' to the destiny which has

been appointed for him in Creation."[16]

Wingren's talk of destiny is significant and should not be too

quickly passed over, creating as it does, an opportunity to digress briefly

into a consideration of human purpose. That man has a destiny

indicates a goal, purpose, and end to his life, or, in the language of

ethics, a *telos* to it all. And, as Hauerwas points out, the *telos* of life has

everything to do with the ethics of life.

> Ethics is a function of the *telos*, the end. It makes all the difference in
> the world how one regards the end of the world, "end" not so much in
> the sense of its final breath, but "end" in the sense of the purpose, the
> goal, the result.[17]

Speculation about the existence and identity of a *telos* for

humanity has been a hallmark of philosophic argument since pre-

Socratic days. With the realization of individual self-awareness, the

search for individual purpose begins. While some casually dismiss any

notion of an objective, universal *telos* for humanity as yesterday's quaint

idea now wholly vacated by the scientific and societal triumph of

evolutionary theory and cultural pluralism, theology must continue to

affirm the scriptural truth: humankind has a God-ordained *telos*. This

telos, or destiny, Wingren argues, is intimately bound to each individual's

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[16] Ibid., 153. This "destiny" emphasizes and reinforces the fact that civil righteousness is *human* righteousness. God's plan for man is that he be fully human, not that he become divine.

[17] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 61-62.

place as a creature within creation. Simply put, man's destiny, his *telos* is to be all that God created him to be, in other words, to be fully human.

Obvious or not, Wingren's contention has important implications. Kolb connects this understanding of humanity's *telos* to Luther's explication of the two kinds of righteousness. "Also central to Luther's 'evangelical breakthrough,'" he writes, "was his discovery of what makes the human creature 'righteous' or right, that is, truly human."[18] This fulfillment of humanity takes place on two planes: passively before God, and actively before men. As Kolb notes: "Luther realized, however, that what made him genuinely right in God's sight had to be distinguished from what made him truly human—genuinely right—in relationship to other creatures of God."[19] True humanity is realized when individuals conform to God's will for this life, revealed, of course, in Scripture as his commandments. Ivar Asheim reaches a similar conclusion:

> The commandments of God set before us as normative in Scripture have as their aim the maintenance of humanity among men. The goal of ethics can therefore be defined as the *achievement of humanity*.[20]

Emphasizing the doctrine of creation in the way of Wingren clarifies the simplicity of man's *telos*, stemming as it does from his place as creature

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[18] Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds," 450.

[19] Ibid., 451

[20] Ivar Asheim, ed. *Christ and Humanity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 15 [emphasis in original]. This is true, of course, in the appropriate realm, *coram hominibus*.

within creation.[21] This digression is sufficient; the question will be taken up once more below.

Not only does Wingren champion a regained appreciation for the First Article's doctrine of creation, he also outlines explicit connections between the articles of the Creed, thus combating an overzealous partitioning of the different realms of God's activity and man's responsibility. The First and Second Articles are united by God's thoroughly consistent work on behalf of man.

> When it [the law] passes judgement upon me, it reveals throughout what I ought to have been. It bears in itself the image in which I have been created, and even as it accuses contains the original purity of Creation. The image of the law points forward to Christ, who is the image of God, and who can therefore make me human again.[22]

God's activity in creation is not to be separated from his continuing work of redemption. More than that, it should be seen as consonant with his Third Article work of restoration and fulfillment.

> But Creation at the beginning was Creation in Christ. Before He came in the flesh, man was created and destined for Him. This does not mean that the doctrine of Creation can be derived from the Gospel of Christ, crucified and risen. It means that God's work of Creation is continued in His work of Redemption, and that this work of Creation is perfected in the Incarnation and the fulfillment of God's mighty works which are described or awaited in the second and third articles.[23]

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[21] While not explicitly disagreeing with Wingren's stress on the importance of reestablishing the priority of the First Article, Fagerberg finds fault with Wingren for minimizing the role of God's commandments in shaping life in creation. "In Wingren one searches in vain for this direct connection with the word of Scripture, with him the command is a general demand for love of one's neighbor...." Fagerberg, 288.

[22] Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 181-182.

[23] Ibid., 161.

Though it is not a prominent theme in his work, Wingren does not oppose the eschatological element of God's activity. Man's redemption in Christ is not merely a return to prelapsarian conformity with God's will. In Christ, God's creation is raised to a higher plane, the full splendor of which is still being "awaited" as the Church confesses in the Third Article. Wingren writes: "As we saw earlier, Christ in His restoration of man is more than man. The new life which He brings is raised and heightened, as well as restored...."[24]

Support from Other Lutheran Theologians

Wingren's high regard for the doctrine of creation and the framework of the Creed is reflected in the work of subsequent Lutheran scholars. Ivar Asheim is among those who recognize the necessity of the doctrine of creation for a right understanding of Lutheran theology and ethics.

> To define the *content* of ethics we have to turn to the reality of the world around us. In the New Testament, the human relationships and social structures unquestionably presupposed, for instance, in the so-called Tables of Duties, are treated seriously and their particular importance even stressed in the name of Christ. In and through these relationships and structures Christians are to perceive God's demands. But the claim of the reality of the world upon Christians is not to be seen as Christ's hidden presence within the various human relationships and social structures. The basis for this claim, rather, is the fact that in the concrete reality of creation man as such is confronted by his Creator.[25]

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[24] Ibid., 61.

[25] Asheim, *Christ and Humanity*, 12 [emphasis in original].

Asheim later strengthens this idea of the claim of creation by relating it
to God's commandments.[26] Asheim's affirmation of the necessity of a
creedal frame becomes quite explicit. Seeking to direct a believer's
Christ-won freedom back into the world, Asheim states, "Ethics must be
firmly rooted in both the first *and* the second articles of the Creed, in the
doctrine of creation and in the doctrine of Christ."[27]

Friedrich Mildenberger also recognizes the importance of the
doctrine of creation. By demonstration, he commends a deliberate move
toward a creation—oriented understanding of man's responsibilities in
this world is. Mildenberger writes:

> The gospel reshapes the human will and establishes it on a new basis.
> In this new form, the will to live fits into the kind of human-being-in-
> the-world defined by God's activity and expresses its new orientation
> to the God-willed good works that we encounter in the doing and
> suffering that comes to us in the unavoidable realities of life.[28]

Life grounded in the created realm, then, becomes the impetus and
motivation for good works. The daily needs and occasional emergencies
of creaturely existence, most especially the needs of fellow creatures,
provide the arena for the practice of a virtuous Christian life, that is, the

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[26] "The commandments of God set before us as normative in Scripture have as
their aim the maintenance of humanity among men." Ibid., 15.

[27] Ibid., 14 [emphasis in original]. Asheim identifies the ethical implications of
the "doctrine of Christ" as "liberation from all legalistic ideals as well as from all utopian
dreams of social order and personal conduct. It thus enables us to accept the world for
what it really is. True, Christian freedom is freedom *from* the world. But precisely
because it is, it is also at the same time freedom *for* the world." Ibid. [emphasis in
original].

[28] Mildenberger, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, 167.

exercise of Christian ethics. As Mildenberger puts it, "living in this world is all that we need to require us to do what will support life."[29]

Another advocate of the creedal framework and the importance of the doctrine of creation for Lutheran theology is Charles Arand. Arand calls attention to a consistent emphasis on creation in the work of Luther. More than a peripheral aspect of Luther's writing, Arand notes that a creedal framework actually accounts for the overarching structure of the Small Catechism.

> By tying the Ten Commandments to the First Article and the Third Article to the Lord's Prayer, Luther has brought the three chief parts into a thoroughly Creedal and Trinitarian framework. In doing so, he has provided a way for Christians to make sense of their lives with God in light of the Baptismal Creed and the triune salvific work in creation and history.[30]

Again, the Creed supplies a frame sufficiently expansive to contain what needs to be said about faith and life while yet holding the different aspects together in a meaningful and consistent relation.

Another Lutheran theologian who recognizes the significance of a wide creedal frame is Robert Kolb. Like Arand, Kolb discerns the importance of the doctrine of creation for Luther, rightly connecting the doctrine of creation with Luther's teaching on vocation. "For Luther," Kolb writes, "the situations and responsibilities which structure human life are part of the doctrine of creation."[31] Luther's comments in the

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[29] Ibid., 168.

[30] Arand, *That I May Be His Own*, 136.

[31] Kolb, "God Calling, 6.

introduction to his 1535 commentary on Galatians fully corroborate

Kolb's claim. Creation provides the rich setting within which human

beings live out their lives according to God's plan—a plan wired into the

very structure and interrelationships of creation. But, Kolb also places

the events of the Second and Third Articles within the frame of creation.

> First, faith recognizes that God is a good and loving Lord. In sin we
> regard His will as our enemy, for His Law only condemns and curbs
> us. In faith we regard Him no longer as our enemy but as the loving
> Father and Friend who has beneficially created and ordered our
> existence. We embrace Him once again as the loving Creator whose
> wisdom for human living is reflected in the commands of His Law and
> in His Son's earthly life. We recognize His lordship by responding
> with a God-pleasing lifestyle which reflects our faith's conviction that
> He is our God.[32]

All of theology fits within the vast frame of creation. The law/gospel

dynamic is played out within this structure, likewise the Christian's new

life of obedience. Justification and the active pursuit of a virtuous, God

pleasing life are fully compatible elements within this frame.

A Proposed Framework

As noted at the outset of this chapter, the valuable framework of a

threefold righteousness considered in chapter four is fully compatible

with—indeed grounded in—the paradigm of the Creed. Taken together,

these two approaches provide the framework sought by this study, a

framework that can preserve the doctrine of justification while also

affirming the place of a Christian's ethical pursuit—a frame broad

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[32] Ibid., 10.

enough to handle the whole of theology. It is helpful to provide a

presentation that is not only verbal but also visual [see Figure 2].
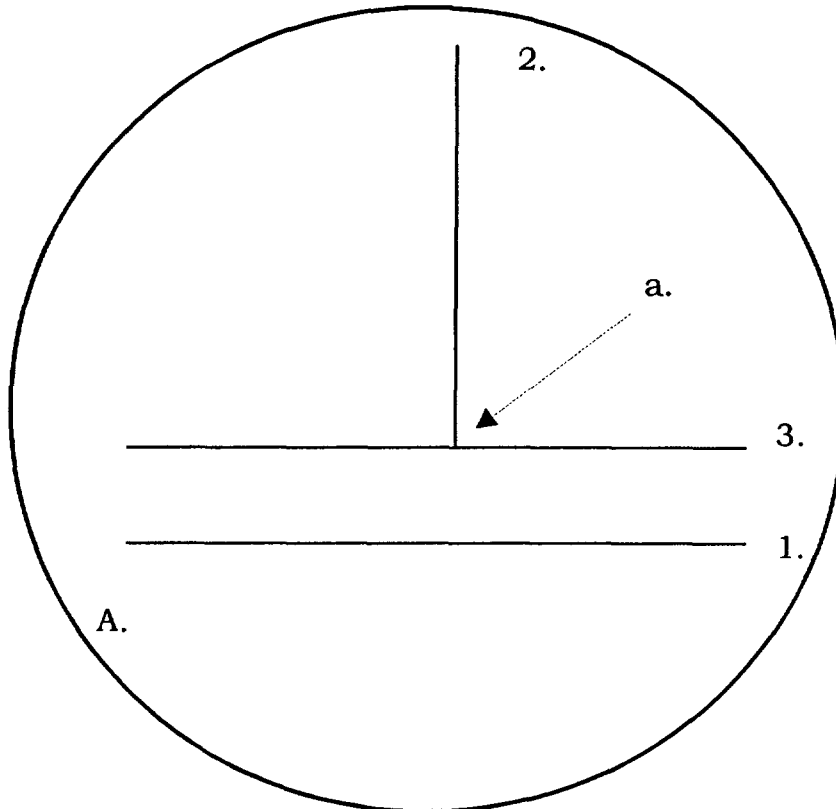
1. righteousness one (governing)
2. righteousness two (justifying)
3. righteousness three (sanctifying)
A. realm of creation
a. the connection between 2. & 3.

Figure 2

In Figure 2, the three kinds of righteousness are again present.

Righteousness 1 is governing righteousness, the morality of all people

coram hominibus, and finds its foundation in God's action of creation.

Righteousness 2 is justifying righteousness. It is here, in the vertical

dimension, *coram deo*, that the reality of the law/gospel duality reigns

alone. This vertical righteousness is declared by the Creed's Second

Article and bestowed in the Third. Righteousness 3, sanctifying, grows out of the divine monergism action of righteousness 2 and must be joined to it. The third kind of righteousness is uniquely Christian and driven by the truths of the Second Article, yet led back into the created world of the First Article. Here the Christian pursues a virtuous life *coram hominibus*, but one that is also certainly God pleasing. Love of God and the need of neighbor are both source of motivation. Finally, surrounding the entire scheme is the realm of creation, or the First Article. The encompassing sweep of the circle is meant to convey the truth that *all* of the righteousnesses are accomplished or practiced within the structure of God's created world.

This frame should not be regarded as an innovation but as an attempt to articulate and commend a directing paradigm that, consciously or not, has long guided much theology. A Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod study document on spiritual gifts furnishes one example of the creedal framework's effectiveness in addressing fundamental questions of theology and practice. In this document, a creedal frame is used extensively to offer a creation-based understanding of the charisms of the Holy Spirit. Particularly important for the purpose of the current illustration, however, is the document's use of and insight into the general need and value of a creedal view for theology.

> At times Christians may give the impression that they are "Second or Third Article people" who are only concerned with "personal salvation" and the life hereafter or those matters that pertain only to the realm of the church. As a result, the First Article and its implications for life

in this world recede into the background of Christian thought and practice. When this happens the danger arises that one not only distinguishes between the works of God but actually separates them from each other. The end result is that the gifts and works referred to in the First Article have little to do with the works of God presented in the Second and Third Articles and vice versa.[33]

In a similar way, it is this separation between God's various works outlined in each of the articles that has wreaked havoc on Lutheranism's ability to grapple with questions of Christian ethics.

The study document successfully employs a vital understanding of the importance of all three articles of the creed, or more specifically, the work of God confessed in each of the articles. Of course, it is the often undervalued or overlooked First Article which receives significant and appropriate attention. Most importantly, though, the document demonstrates the close interrelationship that exists between each of the articles. It is *through* creation, not in opposition to creation, that God redeems humanity.

> As he worked through creation to give us life and sustain our lives, so God redeems and sanctifies us through the elements of creation, through the incarnation of Christ, through water, and through bread and wine. Thus creation serves redemption and redemption fulfills creation. This means that one article of the Creed, in this case the First Article, informs and shapes the other two, which build upon it.[34]

This reaffirmation of the created realm and its close relation to God's work of redemption not only assists in an understanding of spiritual gifts but, as discussed above, holds great promise for the challenge of

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[33] The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Spiritual Gifts: A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* (n.p.: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1995), 46.

providing a meaningful place for ethics in relation to the doctrine of justification.

So, the Third Article work of the Spirit is not to overthrow or replace creation, but to restore it to God's initial creative intent. "As the forgiveness of sins and Baptism restore us to our proper place before God and place us under one head, Jesus Christ, they also free and recreate us to live as God intended."[35] The created realm is the place where Christians live and serve. God does not redeem people from creation, but for creation. "The Third Article sends us back into our daily lives within the First Article so that we may begin to live our lives as God intended his creation to work."[36] As the study document demonstrates, the creedal framework is remarkably capable and versatile.

Before turning to the task of specifically relating the creedal framework to the challenges and needs posed by virtue ethics, it should be noted that the creedal frame readily accommodates eschatological truth. The believer's restoration into the created realm should not be understood as the return arc of a closed circle that merely deposits church and creation back into Edenic existence. Luther acknowledged the continuity, yet heightening in God's plan of salvation:

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[34] Ibid., 46-47.

[35] Ibid., 56.

[36] Ibid., 68.

> For this is the righteousness [alien, justifying] given in place of the original righteousness lost in Adam. It accomplishes the same as that original righteousness would have accomplished; rather it accomplishes more.[37]

God's creation is moving not back to the garden, but forward to the eschaton.[38] With the incarnation, God's plan for creation was elevated and expanded in ways that could not have been anticipated by Adam— even in his state of perfection. Similarly, creation awaits still greater imagination-defying wonders as God's creative intentions blossom at the Parousia. While there is continuity between the articles as God relates to his creation, there is also purposeful, linear movement as all of creation is swept up into God's unfolding master plan of creation, restoration, and consummation.

Virtue Ethics within the Creedal Frame

The creedal framework, with its three kinds of righteousness as just outlined, provides a tremendous tool to help Lutheranism overcome its longstanding difficulties with Christian ethics. Lutheran theology is not by definition incapable of addressing ethical questions in vital ways. Indeed, Lutheran theology is even capable of providing a meaningful

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[37] LW 31:298-299.

[38] In his Antinomian Disputations Luther commented, "Quare non tollitur per Christum lex, sed restituitur, ut fiat Adam talis, qualis fuit et etiam melior." WA 39/1:354. Nestingen provides this translation, "Therefore, the law is not destroyed by Christ, but restored, so that Adam might be just as he was, and even better." James Arne Nestingen, "The Catechism's Simul," *Word & World* 3 (fall, 1983) 364-372.

connection between its theology and the cultivation of character and pursuit of virtue integral with the practice-oriented interests of virtue ethics. The concerns and tenets of Lutheran doctrine and virtue ethics can be related meaningfully and powerfully in the matrix of the Creed.

Christians have long regarded the virtues with keen interest, recognizing in them potential allies in the task of cultivating Christian character.[39] It is hardly surprising that Aristotle and his ethics were received by the medieval church with such interest. He was, as Charles Arand notes, "looked upon as the philosopher who had come the farthest with respect to ethical questions."[40] Aristotle offered practical ideas and lofty goals that could be embraced by Christians. And, Aristotle presented a system for the attainment of moral excellence that was both reasonable and workable. Arand summarizes Aristotle's program this way: "What we do determines who we are. Worthwhile activities make our lives worthwhile. By practicing virtue, we become virtuous."[41] So taught Aristotle, and so believed the church's teachers.

While Melanchthon was also willing to affirm the legitimacy and value of the great Greek philosopher, Aristotle's usefulness was always confined to the sphere of civil righteousness. For Melanchthon, Arand

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[39] See Pieper, *Four Cardinal Virtues*, xi. Of course, Pieper also admits "It is true that the classic origins of the doctrine of virtue later made Christian critics suspicious of it. They warily regarded it as too philosophical and not Scriptural enough." See also the discussion in chapter one.

[40] Arand, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 422.

[41] Ibid., 428. See Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* Book 2, 4.

observes, "a righteousness of works or virtuous habits could shape the conduct of a person, but not change the heart."[42] From Melanchthon's perspective, the mistake of the medieval church was obvious. As Melanchthon saw it,

> His opponents thus conceived of life not in terms of two perpendicular axes, (two different bases for two different kinds of righteousness), but as a single vertical continuum by which we ascend from this world to God. They had turned the horizontal axis onto its head and made it into a vertical ladder by which one ascended from earth to heaven.[43]

The two righteousnesses had been collapsed into one. Aristotle and his practical truth had been adopted as the single structuring frame for all of life. The Christian ideal of love, which surpassed any standard advocated by Aristotle, was nevertheless fit into the philosopher's system. With the two kinds of righteousness having been coalesced into one, the cultivation of the habit of love became the established route for the justification of the individual *coram deo*. This was the faith-destroying error Luther and Melanchthon endeavored to correct with their individual emphases on two kinds of righteousness.

The error of the medieval church, however, does not necessarily negate the validity or the usefulness of Aristotle's thinking on virtue and its cultivation.[44] Aristotle's observations and conclusions about human

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[42] Ibid., 435.

[43] Ibid., 428.

[44] Josef Pieper notes that by the time of Socrates, thinkers "took for granted not only the idea of virtue, which signifies human rightness, but also the attempt to define it in that fourfold spectrum [prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance]." Pieper, *Four Cardinal Virtues*, xi. Nevertheless, Aristotle is typically singled out because of his

character and its development are founded in his study of the reality of God's creation. A philosopher's insights into an aspect of creation are not nullified when it is revealed that in another sphere, *coram deo*, they are not only wrong, but damnably dangerous in that they obscure Christ and his redeeming work. What is true remains true...within the appropriate sphere. The judicious and salutary course, then, is to fit Aristotle's teaching about the importance of virtue and the cultivation of character—observations confirmed by thinkers in virtually every subsequent generation—into a distinctively Christian frame, rather than forcing Christian truth into Aristotle's frame as the pre-Reformation church had erroneously done. The Creed provides the ideal pattern. The Medieval church treated Aristotle as normative. Christian doctrine—whether the triumvirate of virtues: faith, hope, and love or the crucial issue of one's justification before God—was worked and sometimes twisted into the Aristotelian pattern. Instead, the Creed should be established as the normative, regulating frame, and Aristotle's contribution given its place as one aspect of the overall pattern supplied by the Creed.[45]

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extensive writing on the subject, and his subsequent influence in Western civilization, especially within the church.

[45] Certainly, as previously noted, the process of fitting Aristotle into a Christian—specifically a creedal—frame will sometimes require that Aristotle's contribution be trimmed or otherwise adjusted to square with the norming frame. The example of humility as a virtue presents itself as one case when this would be necessary.

The reformers did not attempt to correct the church's errant teaching by replacing the narrow *coram hominibus* frame with an equally narrow *coram deo* frame. Either frame, when made normative for all of human life and experience, collapses the righteousnesses into one and ends in error. The truth of both aspects must be maintained within the wider creedal frame which reflects God's will and activity on behalf of man in all areas of life. When a creedal framework is employed, it is immediately apparent that pursuing virtue and intentionally cultivating character are absolutely appropriate activities for Christians. The pursuit of virtue sustains the pursuit of righteousness *coram hominibus*, a pursuit that is thoroughly God pleasing and in conformity with Christian truth.

One of the strengths of the creedal framework is the compelling depiction that it provides of mankind's purpose or *telos*. Though the quest for a human *telos* is occasionally disputed and denounced by consistent evolutionary agnostics and atheists, most observant and reflective people still concur with Aristotle that it is a legitimate endeavor. Aristotle concluded that *eudaimonia* was man's *telos*. But, Aristotle was no hedonist. He understood happiness to be "activity in accordance with virtue," the best of which was the "life according to reason," or the contemplative life.[46] Based not on human reason, but on divine revelation, the Creed provides a profoundly more fundamental and

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[46] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book 10:6, 7.

encompassing *telos* than Aristotle's insightful yet reason-bound conclusions.

The Creed takes into account man's purpose from a divine as well as a human perspective and binds them under a singular goal: to become fully human. To be fully human, the Creed teaches, is to be righteous before God and before men, that is, to be rightly related to God and man. Reinhard Hütter ably captures the idea in his simple yet engaging definition of "genuine humanity" as "the truthful enactment of created existence."[47] This enactment takes place as people become all that God intends them to be *coram deo* and *coram hominibus,* which, of course, is precisely what it means to be fully human. Thus, righteousness may correctly be understood as a synonym for genuine humanity or being fully human. When one becomes all that God intends either *coram deo* or *coram hominibus,* then one has righteousness in that particular sphere.

Certainly, Aristotle's insights are not denied by the creedal *telos.* The creedal frame actually permits Aristotle's ideas to operate freely— within their fitting sphere. The activity of striving to attain virtue, the creedal framework would allow, is part of what it means to become fully human according to God's intentions for his creation. Asheim argues that "God's will expressed in the concrete demand bound up with particular situations, enable[s] us to define ethical action as being laid

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[47] Hütter, "(Re-)Forming Freedom," 119, 130.

upon us in and with our existence as human beings."[48] The virtuous

individual is the one who is living—at least *coram hominibus*—as truly

and fully human, that is according to God's will for his creation.

Incidentally, this application of the creedal frame provides a

reasonable way of reading the potentially enigmatic reference in Article 6

of the Augustana to good works "on account of God's will," or "for God's

sake."

> Likewise, they teach that this faith is bound to yield good fruits and
> that it ought to do good works commanded by God on account of
> God's will ....
>
> It is also taught that such faith should yield good fruit and good
> works and that a person must do such good works as God has
> commanded for God's sake....[49]

Good fruit is produced by a good tree. Virtuous people produce virtuous

acts. The fruitful living of Christians simply accords with the will of God

for all of his creation whether yet redeemed or not. This is why the good

works are commanded "on account of God's will." Nestingen concurs:

"That the Ten Commandments were given to Moses, that they are in the

Bible, that they are understood in the Old Testament as torah—all of this

is incidental to their explication of the ineradicable minimums of

creatureliness."[50] God's commandments are "hard-wired" into the

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[48] Asheim, *Christ and Humanity*, 15.

[49] *The Book of Concord*, 41, 40. "Item docent, quod fides illa debeat bonos fructus parere et quod oporteat bona opera mandata a Deo facere propter vooluntatem Dei...." Auch wird gelehrt, dass solcher Glaube gute Frucht und gute Werk bringen soll, und dass man musse gute Werk tun, allerlei, so Gott geboten hat, um Gottes willen...." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 60.

[50] Nestingen, "Preaching the Catechism," 36.

universe; thus, fruitful living in conformity to those commandments is the only option for those desiring to live rightly, that is virtuously. Those who are rightly related to God by grace through faith will also certainly conform to God's will for the right functioning of creation. The pursuit of virtue, then, is the pursuit of God's will for his creation.

To pursue virtue is to pursue the restoration of God's creation, the very reason for God's work of justifying fallen humans. Christians strive to grow in virtues and the consequent production of good works for their fellow creatures simply because this is their appropriate work as redeemed creatures. With an interesting correlation of duty and virtue Melanchthon spoke of this as the duty of virtue: "It is the duty of virtue to do what is right and be of use to others, even though the multitude may be ungrateful."[51] Indeed, it is the appropriate work of all creatures to seek this kind of virtue; Christians enjoy the advantage of being rightly related to the Creator, enabling them to live virtuously *coram hominibus* with greater intentionality and understanding.[52]

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[51] Melanchthon, *Orations on Philosophy*, 138. Melanchthon's juxtaposition of duty and virtue is interesting in that philosophical ethics, especially Christian ethics, has traditional held duty and virtue as almost antithetical ways of approaching the Christian life. See Pieper, *Four Cardinal Virtues*, xi-xii.

[52] This principle is illustrated in Figure 2 by the connection between righteousness 3 and righteousness 2. Righteousness 3 runs parallel to righteousness 1. They are similar in that both conform to the same will of God for all of His creation and in that both function in the *coram hominibus* realm. Yet, there is a difference. The Christian strives for standards that are at times higher and more intentionally in agreement with God's revealed commandments. Thus, righteousness 3 functions in its own distinct plane above the righteousness common to unregenerate humanity.

The necessity of the pursuit of civil virtue, or virtue *coram hominibus*, subtracts nothing from God's *coram deo* decree of forgiveness and righteousness. The quest for virtue is part of the reality of life in God's created realm. In this realm, Christians would do well to heed Aristotle and the wise counsel of his students in subsequent generations, as well as other moralists and teachers with insight into the realities of human life and relationships as they offer guidance in the way of *coram hominibus* righteousness.[53] Aristotle's place is in the First Article,[54] where understood within the creedal frame he poses no theological threat and actually can be pressed into the service of the Third Article. Aristotle does not supply the frame. God does. Yet, within God's creedal frame there is an essential place for the Aristotelian tools known today as virtue ethics.

A Practical Illustration

The creedal framework adequately satisfies the need for a frame within which to fit theological truth. Another test remains: the frame's capacity for handling the realities and experiences of actual life. A

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[53] Of course, as previously noted, the pursuit of a peculiarly Christian *telos*, will necessitate the adoption of a corresponding set of peculiarly Christian virtues. Some of these will correspond to the virtues enumerated by Aristotle, while others may gain definitions other than those intended by Aristotle, and still other Christian virtues will be at odds with Aristotle's catalog of virtues.

[54] Specifically, according to Figure 2, Aristotle's place is in *both* the parallel lines of righteousness 1 and righteousness 3.

fictitious long-haul truck driver will serve as a helpful example. This middle-aged laborer is not a Christian. Nevertheless, he is an upright and legitimately moral man, raised to place a premium on personal honor, small town kindness, and southern hospitality. These admirable traits are part of his character by virtue of the ceaseless training and example of parents and teachers. Naturally, this driver regularly displays his noble character by stopping to aid distressed motorists, telling the truth to fellow drivers, and obeying what he considers to be the spirit of the laws governing his business. *Coram hominibus*, the driver is righteous. He has a righteousness according to the first distinction, governing righteousness. Without realizing it, he is fulfilling a God-given calling within the First Article, conforming to God's will for creation. Indeed, by ably fulfilling his vocation he is serving God's creation—he aids in the delivery and distribution of goods, thus contributing directly and indirectly to the welfare of others.[55] Nonetheless, *coram deo* he yet remains a condemned sinner. He is, quite literally, good and damned.

One evening, however, the driver's life is dramatically changed during a break at a "Christian truck stop". Confronted with God's Word, he recognizes himself as a sinner and realizes the inadequacy and filthiness of even his greatest acts of kindness. Through the work of the

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[55] Through this unbeliever who possesses governing righteousness, God is preserving and protecting his creation, an example of God's *opera ad extra*.

Holy Spirit, he receives forgiveness in Christ and the multitude of blessings that come with faith. *Coram deo,* the driver is now fully righteous and rejoices in the truth. *Coram hominibus,* he is the same driver, though internally he is now reluctant to accept the world's judgment of his righteousness, aware as he is of a higher standard for his life in the world, a standard still far above him. The work of God the Holy Spirit according to the Third Article has brought the man to Christ, restoring him according to the divine intention for creation. Through faith, the driver is now rightly related to his Creator. God has accomplished His work; the driver now has the second righteousness—vertical righteousness before God.

Genuinely converted, the driver joins the fellowship of other Christians and worships with them. He steadily learns new aspects of what it means to be a Christian, that is one who is righteous *coram deo.* At the same time, the driver strives to conform more fully to God's vision for humanity as revealed in the Word, especially the Decalogue. Of course, as one who had previously lived as righteous *coram hominibus,* this is not an altogether new activity. Before becoming a Christian, he had sought, albeit in a limited sense and unwittingly, to conform to God's will for humanity because he had been so trained. Now, as a believer, he continues the endeavor but with new understanding and with new purpose. Indeed, he pursues the third righteousness, sanctifying righteousness, similar yet completely different from the righteousness he

once sought as an unbeliever.[56] Now, his desire is to be what God

created him to be—fully human, a creature rightly related to God

through faith and eager to demonstrate love for his fellow creatures. So

he follows the pattern of the One who fulfilled God's will for humanity.

Intentionally, he seeks a character more like that of his Lord.

Digressing for a moment from the illustration of the truck driver, it

is worth noting that both Hauerwas and Wingren, in their own ways,

endorse this tight connection between living as fully human and seeking

to follow Christ. Hauerwas writes:

> Furthermore, to be a Christian is not principally to obey certain
> commandments or rules, but to learn to grow into the story of Jesus
> as the form of God's kingdom. We express that by saying we must
> learn to be disciples; only as such can we understand why at the
> center of creation is a cross and resurrection.[57]

Gustaf Wingren considerably elaborates this link between Christ and

God's intentions for creation and substantiates his claims with an appeal

to New Testament texts.

> The Creator who lets man live and who thereby creates him, creates
> him in His image (Gen. I.26 f.), and this image in which every man
> has been created is Jesus Christ, who is "the image of the invisible
> God, the first-born of all Creation" (Col. I.15). The "new Man" whom
> the believer in Christ "puts on" (Rom. XIII.14; Gal. III.27) is Christ
> Himself. This is what God the Creator intended man to be in
> Creation. To become like Christ, therefore, is also to conform to God's
> will in Creation and to receive "life" (cf. Col. III.10; Eph. IV.24).[58]

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[56] Part of this new conformation will be the sometimes difficult task of forsaking old habits antithetical to his new identity (such as a penchant for pornography), while simultaneously striving to acquire new habits of holiness (such as daily Scripture reading).

[57] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 30.

[58] Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 35.

The insights of both theologians fit easily and comfortably within the creedal framework.

The newly converted truck driver learns about his Lord and follows him by doing the things that Christians do. He memorizes Scripture and the Catechism. He initiates the habit of daily personal devotions centered on Scripture and prayer. He reads Christian literature. He dialogues with other believers. In short, he avails himself of the blessings of Word and Sacrament. Consequently, his character, his guiding and directing morality, is further shaped.[59] It is the work of God through the Third Article that shapes his character in these new ways, complementing and fulfilling what had already been put in place via the First Article training he had received even before becoming a Christian— and yes, sometimes cutting away other parts of that character deformed by sin.

L. Gregory Jones offers helpful insights into this idea that Christianity brings about the transformation of a person's existing character. He writes:

> The new convert does not begin *de novo*. That is to say, she comes to Christianity as a person already habituated in certain perspectives; whatever else it is, the Christian context should not be described so much as moral formation as moral transformation. It is a *re*construction of humanity, a *re*orientation of moral perspective....

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[59] This pursuit of the Christian virtues certainly influences the cultivation of character. Roman Catholic moral theologians have long recognized this fact. See Cessario. Cessario writes: "Virtue realizes a deliberate and efficacious modification of a person's capacity for performing well. It consists both in qualifying a person for the business of being human and a Christian for the business of being a Christian," Cessario, 54-54.

> The Christian stake in moral formation is centered in the belief that formation can help to render a person's transformations intelligible and desirable.[60]

The character transformations brought about through God's Third Article activity do not only or necessarily oppose, but in some ways complement and fulfill what was already accomplished through his First Article activity even before conversion. Indeed, they take the individual to a higher, yet parallel plane, moving from the first righteousness to the third.

Certainly, there are occasions when God's activity in the life of a believer generates internal oppositions and conflict as the Old Adam resists the coming to life of the new man. As Hauerwas indicated with his comment, "at the center of creation is a cross and resurrection," one reality of conversion in Christ is the death of the old man and the coming to life of the new.[61] Following Christ, the disciple *will* die to self and rise to a new life, and the cost of following could entail a literal giving of his life. The image of the Christian's dying and rising provides an important description of God's activity in the life of the believer.[62] The present study's interest in the possible continuities between a person's virtues before and after conversion should not be construed as a denial of the validity and usefulness of the dying and rising motif. Rather, this

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[60] Jones, *Transformed Judgement*, 114.

[61] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 30.

[62] See Gerhard Forde's thorough treatment in Braaten and Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:406-412.

paper's concern is to describe and emphasize what, more specifically, this dying and rising means practically in the life of a follower of Christ.

Practicing virtues old and new, the new believer adds fresh and excellent contours to his character. His character is shaped by God even through the habits he learns and the deeds he performs. The good works he did before, he continues to do; only now, they are expanded in number, range, and quality. Now they are joined to the reality of his second righteousness, *coram deo.* True, he has new motives, both love of God and concern for neighbor, yet the presence of new motives is, in a sense, almost incidental. More significant is his possession of a new character, or more precisely, the same character now made, and being made, complete in Christ. He lives accordingly, active in the world of the First Article, ever aware of the salvific truths of the Second Article, and eager for the consummation promised in the Third Article—the glorious day when his standing *coram deo* and *coram hominibus* will become identical.

Conclusion

The framework provided by the church's Creed and the three kinds of righteousness accommodates both the concerns and contributions of virtue ethics as well as the truths of Lutheran theology. Using the perspective provided by the creedal framework, it is readily apparent that

Lutheran theology and virtue ethics are not mutually exclusive but are actually complementary. This framework also provides a significant challenge to the conventional wisdom about Lutheranism's ethical disability. The notion that the Lutheran emphasis on justification by grace alone through faith disallows any possibility of producing or practicing a viable ethics is blunted, indeed invalidated, by a Lutheran theologian who simply embraces the doctrine of his confessional heritage. Such a student of the Confessions is able to follow the example of the reformers. He can retain the central and attendant articles of his faith, even as he utilizes the tools and practices the arts supplied by virtue ethics. The creedal framework outlined in this chapter is sufficiently wide to encompass all that is involved with both Christian doctrine and Christian living. Indeed, as the next chapter will elaborate, a creedal framework does much to heal the disease that continues to infect much of Christendom—that is, the breech between doctrine and practice.

CHAPTER SIX

AN ETHIC FOR LUTHERANISM—SUMMARY AND APPLICATIONS

Lutheranism's Ethical Challenge

Since the beginning of the Reformation, Lutherans have

championed the centrality of justification by grace through faith alone.

This doctrine remains, quite rightly, a hallmark of Lutheran theology.

Nevertheless, even the earliest Lutheran theologians were aware of the

potential hazard of a lackadaisical licentiousness that abuses the central

doctrine and makes a mockery of the Christian life. The relentless tug of

sinful appetites is, as the Scriptural authors amply attest, simply a

reality of life in a fallen world. The struggle against the temptation to

sinful indulgence is challenge enough, though, without the complication

of a doctrinal position that, intentionally or not, actually serves the cause

of sin by denigrating God's law. Whether in the name of crass immoral

license, human freedom, individual autonomy, or even the protection of

the gospel, theologians commit a serious error when they endorse an

antinomian spirit which in any way disregards or diminishes God's

commandments.

Fully cognizant of the gravity of this errant move, the first

generation of reformers resisted the antinomian incursion, with both

Luther and Melanchthon involved directly in the battle. Reinhard Hütter

considers this battle to be a significant shift in the course and emphasis of the Reformation.

> It is important to at least explicitly acknowledge Luther's clear awareness of how radically the context in the course of the Reformation problematic changed from anxiety-driven works-righteousness to self-confident moral libertinism and indifferentism.[1]

The challenge did not abate during the next generation, and the framers of the Formula were compelled to devote two full articles (four and six) and portions of others to the defense of orthodoxy against antinomian interests and influences. The confessors suffered no illusions as to the significance of the threat.

> "For particularly in these last times it is no less necessary to admonish the people to Christian discipline and good works and to remind them how necessary it is that they practice good works as a demonstration of their faith and their gratitude to God than it is to admonish them that works not be mingled with the article on justification. For people can be damned by an Epicurean delusion about faith just as much as by the papistic, Pharisaic trust in their own works and merit."[2]

Notwithstanding such pointed admonitions endorsing the necessity of good works, while condemning the danger of a licentious Epicurean delusion, the antinomian foe demonstrated tremendous resilience. In

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[1] Hütter, "(Re-)Forming Freedom," 140. See also Luther's 1537 Theses against the Antinomians in WA 39/1, 342-358; and Wengert, *Law and Gospel.*

[2] *Book of Concord*, 499 (Ep. 4, 18) "Dann besonder zu diesen letzten Zeiten nicht weniger vonnöten, die Leute zu christlicher Zucht und guten Werken zu vermahnen und zu erinnern, wie nötig es sei, dass sie zu Unzeigung ihres Glaubens und Dankbarkeit bei Gott sich in guten Werken üben, als dass sie Werk in den Urtikeln der Rechtfertigung nicht eingemenget werden, weil durch ein epicurischen Wahn vom Glauben die Menschen sowohl als durch das papistisch und pharisäisch Vortrauen auf eigene Werk und Verdienst verdambt werden können." *Bekenntnisschriften*, 789. For a discussion of the Formula's suggested motivation for ethical behavior, see chapter four. It is worth noting that the word translated *discipline* (*Zucht*) can also be translated *rearing* or *cultivation.*

whatever fresh form it was given, the question about the law and its relation to the believer would be visited and revisited with remarkable regularity in subsequent generations. Indeed, the debate has become so closely associated with Lutheranism that some consider it a defining characteristic of Lutheran theology.

In the early decades of the 20th century this old Lutheran concern received renewed attention and enjoyed a fresh and extensive treatment in Adolf Köberle's thorough study known in English as *The Quest for Holiness*. Köberle left no doubt about his motivations for writing. The same antinomian spirit that had troubled the Reformation church was a compelling concern in Köberle's penetrating work, and he advocated an ambitious inculcation of morality intended to stem the tide of societal license.

> When, as at the present time, the desecration of Sunday is regarded as unblameworthy and a matter of course, when the proprieties in the relations of the sexes have ceased to exist and the fashions have become boundlessly indecent, such degeneration cannot be overcome by a single outburst of moral indignation. For custom whether it be noble, dead or repulsive always exerts a compelling influence over the collective consciousness of men; it has the power of producing an atmosphere by which thousands are consciously or unconsciously affected. It is always more powerful than a passing changing word. And, as Bruno Gutmann has correctly stated, "Only evil customs grow by themselves," while good customs need continual fidelity and renewed inculcation.[3]

The situation in church and world today is little different than it was when Köberle wrote in 1936. While comparisons between eras and

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[3] Köberle, 202.

generations is invariably a perilous undertaking, it seems safe to say that Köberle's observation and exhortation is as relevant at the dawn of the 21st century as it was in his own day.

The intentional cultivation of Christian character is, then, fully justified. As the expression of an individual's creaturely identity, character indicates the manifestation of an individual's self in his relations and activities *coram hominibus*. Thus, deliberate character development is an effective corrective against the danger of the licentious attitude that currently defines Western culture. From Köberle's perspective, this formation of character was, unquestionably, the business of the church.

> Because customs always possess such an overmastering and formative influence, that is so much stronger than mere admonition, it remains as an essential task of the Church to use the power of custom in her constructive work that it may here serve to overcome the evil spirits and bring a blessing, as there it serves to destroy.[4]

A "single outburst of moral indignation" is insufficient. The cultivation of character and the inculcation of admirable virtues require constant and consistent modeling, training, and practice. Köberle understood what Luther and Melanchthon recognized: the inculcation of righteous character necessitates purposeful and intentional formation and habituation.

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[4] Ibid.

The Place of Character Formation

This study demonstrates that Lutheran theology is able to provide a way to encourage habituation of character without undermining the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. Formation in character is not antithetical to the doctrine of justification. Shaping character through intentional inculcation of virtues is simply giving a God-directed form to the believer's life. Hütter correctly identifies this as a genuinely Lutheran position, since Luther himself did "not hesitate to put forth the Decalogue as the blueprint for the *gestalt* of Christian freedom."[5] What God declares, Christians live out. Directed and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, believers actively pursue God's intent for humanity. "It might come as a surprise to many," observes Hütter, "but clearly Luther assumes the original unity of Gospel and Law, of a creaturely freedom in communion with God that is practiced in obedience to God's commandment and thereby precisely receives its creaturely form."[6] Humans beings are created to be shaped by God's Law or commandment; Christians learn this and embrace it as the compelling and satisfying *telos* of life.

Martha Stortz provides additional insight into a Lutheran concept and practice of character formation. Like Hütter, she founds her argument on the writing of Luther himself, examining Luther's

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[5] Hütter, "(Re-)Forming Freedom," 138.

[6] Ibid., 143.

understanding of the appropriate relation between justification and the cultivation of character. Though it is commonly known that Luther was fond of the image of a good tree automatically bearing good fruit, Stortz calls attention to Luther's recognition of its limitations.

> In his catechetical material Luther trades organic metaphors for direct instruction. People are not plants; they both need and desire concrete ways of responding to divine initiative. In his pastoral counsel he exhorts pastors in their instruction to "lay the greatest weight on those commandments or other parts which seem to require special attention among the people where you are." Instruction and exhortation replace organic necessity.[7]

Stortz discerns a threefold approach to formation in Luther's work, referring to worship, catechesis, and individual prayer as "a three-legged stool on which Luther's approach to formation rests."[8] In another place, she terms this triumvirate "a trinity at the heart of Luther's work on formation."[9]

Stortz has no difficulty identifying examples of Luther's interest in formation and is satisfied that the evidence confirms what she regards as "Luther's obvious efforts in the work of formation."

> Rather than recruiting Aristotle in this enterprise, Luther turns to the practices of Christian discipleship or, in his own words, to the "marks of the church." These practices shape person and community for worship and witness. Virtues like responsiveness, gratitude, modesty, and joy come to characterize people and communities who engage in

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[7] Bloomquist and Stumme, *Promise of Lutheran Ethics*, 59. Stortz quotes Luther from the preface to the Small Catechism.

[8] Ibid., 63.

[9] Ibid., 71.

the practices. The Decalogue is the template for discerning concrete acts on behalf of the neighbor in the world.[10]

Stortz, perhaps, underestimates the extent to which Aristotle was safely and satisfactorily enlisted in the efforts of the Reformation church to shape character (and, it might be noted, the extent to which twenty-first century heirs of that church might beneficially use Aristotle). Nevertheless, she does help to make clear that at the outset Lutheranism allowed sufficient space for the development of Christian ethics, including the formation of character.

The willingness and even eagerness of churchmen to find a significant place for the work of character formation extended into later generations and locations of the Reformation. Though it was not the intent of his research, and though his conclusions have been rightly challenged by important scholars, the work of Gerald Strauss yet provides substantial evidence of the early reformers' tireless commitment to the task of habituation and character formation. Strauss' work, published as *Luther's House of Learning*, was subtitled, *Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation*. Strauss starts from a well-attested premise about the Lutheran Reformation in Germany:

> It embarked on a conscious and, for its time, remarkably systematic endeavor to develop in the young new and better impulses, to implant inclinations in consonance with the reformer's religious and civic ideals, to fashion dispositions in which Christian ideas of right thought and action could take root, and to shape personalities

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[10] Ibid., 70.

capable of turning the young into new men—into the human elements of a Christian society that would live by evangelical principles.[11]

The reformers, Strauss observes, sought to accomplish this goal through widespread efforts of education and catechesis.

Rich with primary source material and references, *Luther's House of Learning* documents the extent of the Reformation's pedagogical effort but ultimately judges the entire undertaking a dismal failure. Strauss bases his negative assessment on his reading of the visitation records still housed in the libraries of various Reformation cities. Here, as Strauss interprets the data, the sorry story of continued and persistent immorality and worldliness, despite the best efforts at Reformation indoctrination and inculcation, belies the efficacy of Reformation efforts at formation.[12]

One could certainly take exception to Strauss's interpretation. Lewis Spitz does—challenging Strauss' underlying assumption that the visitation records truly reflected an accurate picture of the entire society. Further, such a pessimistic interpretation is unwarranted, Spitz contends, since "the visitation reports are almost by virtue of their purpose apt to emphasize abuses and failures" rather than highlight positive outcomes.[13]

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[11] Strauss, 2.

[12] Ibid., 307.

[13] Lewis Spitz, "Gerald Strauss. *Luther's House of Learning*," *American Historical Review* 85 (February, 1980), 143.

For the purposes of this study, however, the veracity of Strauss' interpretation is virtually irrelevant. It is sufficient to recognize the remarkable attention and effort that the reformers dedicated to the task of formation. This truth is well documented by Strauss and not subject to dispute. Robert Kolb substantiates this claim, noting the practice of two second-generation reformers. "In any case," writes Kolb, "Spangeberg's and Musculus' calls for the repentance of nobles and burghers demonstrate the deep concern of Luther's and Melanchthon's students that their hearers live the Christian life according to strict moral standards."[14] Spitz goes further, arguing that the efforts may well have been quite effective.

> A vast body of other literature—devotional booklets for families, aids for catechetical instruction in the household (not just by the state), hymnbooks, prayerbooks, well thumbed in extant copies—suggests a vital religious life among the common people.[15]

Whether or not they were successful, and one should be reluctant to follow Strauss in denying any success, the early generations of reformers unquestionably made substantial attempts to promote the formation of Christian character through habituation. As Strauss concluded, "In practice, especially the practice of pedagogy, doubt was not allowed to weaken the proposition that right-thinking and right-living

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[14] Robert Kolb, "The Devil & the Well-Born: Proclamation of the Law to the Privileged in the Late Reformation," in *Let Christ be Christ: Theology, Ethics & World Religions in the Two Kingdoms*, ed. Daniel N. Harmelink (Huntington Beach, California: Tentatio Press, 1999), 170.

[15] Spitz, 143.

men and women would emerge from a systematic program of religious and ethical indoctrination."[16] The reformers not only proclaimed the Gospel; they also sought to shape character through concerted practices of habituation and inculcation.

Considering the evidence from the first wave of reformation, the subsequent generations of reformers, the confessions, and from more recent Lutheran thinkers, the conclusion is clear: a reluctance to promote actively and intentionally cultivation of character and formation in Christian virtue is evidence, not of fidelity to Lutheran theology, but of its betrayal.

The Relation between Faith and the Cultivation of Character

Another interesting discussion catalyzed by the material presented in this study is the relationship between faith and virtue. It should be evident from the present study that the development of character is not equivalent to growth in faith. Salvation and the faith that apprehends God's gift of grace are both divine works that transform the individual *coram deo.* There is nothing that demands development, nothing that permits development, in the Christian's standing before God. *Coram deo,* Scriptural and confessional integrity demand the maintenance of a strict

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[16] Strauss, 39.

divine monergism. Justification by grace through faith alone is the precious and enduring legacy of the Reformation.

Still, it must be granted that the shaping of character through the inculcation of right thinking and the exercise of right habits does—in some way—touch also the believer's relationship to God. The truth of this statement is borne out in the ordinary and obvious experience of an infant maturing in his Christian faith and learning to trust in his baptism. This increasing trust (not to be confused with justifying faith), wrought through the unflagging efforts of parents and parish, is a fruit of formation that certainly has a marked effect on the young believer's relationship with God. While it is supremely true that God accomplishes the gift of salvation and blesses individuals with their new identity—declaring them heirs of his grace in Christ—it cannot be denied that identity to some extent is also shaped by the practices and habits that result from intentional formation. The ingrained habits of regular church attendance and daily Scripture reading are two common examples of this process at work.

Gilbert Meilaender concurs with these observations and supports the idea that a Christian's actions and habits have an impact on that individual's identity and his character—character being, as noted previously, quite simply the manifestation of the person's identity. In his contribution in a collection of Protestant responses to *Veritas*

Splendor, Meilaender concentrates on the importance of the tension

inherent in Luther's *simul iustus et peccator,* and concludes:

> No Christian ethic can say everything that needs saying solely
> through the Reformation language of "faith active in love." If we dare
> never say for certain that a particular deed makes the *simul* of faith
> impossible, we ought not deny that our deeds do shape our
> character—and that they have the power to make of us people who no
> longer trust God for our security in life and death.[17]

This no mere passing thought for Meilaender; neither does he restrict the

influence or power of deeds to negative consequences—the loss of trust

in God. Extolling the value of C. S. Lewis for developing "a theology for

the everyday," Meilaender calls attention to the positive power of deeds.

> In good Aristotelian fashion, therefore, Lewis thinks of all the ordinary
> decisions of life as forming our character, as turning us into people
> who either do or do not wish to gaze forever upon the face of God....
> Every choice counts. Every choice contributes to determining what
> we ultimately love.
>
> Protestant readers may, I believe, be especially drawn to this picture
> because, though they might not articulate the matter this way, it
> supplies something that is often missing from standard Protestant
> talk of forgiveness and faith, pardon and trust. Lewis's picture
> suggests that our actions are important not only because they hurt or
> harm the neighbor, but also because—under grace—they form and
> shape the persons we are.[18]

Meilaender does not, however, need Lewis to escort him into an

affirmation of virtuous deeds shaping character. Later in the same

volume, he reiterates a similar Aristotelian sort of conviction.

> Because structure shapes spirit, moral virtue is simply habit long
> continued. The inner self—what we are likely to call "character"—is
> developed and molded by the structures within which we live daily.
> Only gradually do we become people whose character is established—

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[17] Hütter and Dieter, *Ecumenical Ventures,* 82.

[18] Meilaender, *Things That Count,* 131-132.

who, for better or worse, can be depended upon to act in certain ways.[19]

In good Lutheran fashion, though, Meilaender rightly tempers his affirmation of the power of habituation to shape character with an acknowledgement of the believer's continued and complete dependence on God.

> Just as God cannot be captured or possessed by our side in any partisan struggle, so true virtue cannot simply become our possession—as if the mysterious working of God's grace on our inner self had no part to play, as if the tree did not have to be made good before its fruit could be good.[20]

A Christian's identity, who he is in Christ, definitely drives his actions and cultivation of habits. This is the well-argued point made by Robert Kolb:

> The art of living the Christian life two-dimensionally is the art of recognizing that my identity—my "self," who I am—is a gift of God the Creator, never a product of my own or other human, creaturely hands, and at the same time—simultaneously—hearing God's voice which calls me to specific acts of obedience in response to specific calls to service. These calls come from him through the neighbor; they are opportunities for playing out our identity in the horizontal realm.[21]

Meilaender is concerned, however, that Kolb's analysis "may not probe the matter deeply enough." While Kolb's view provides a portion of the picture, Meilaender contends, as just noted, that "character is formed, in part, from the outside in."

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[19] Ibid., 187.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Robert Kolb, "Niebuhr's 'Christ and Culture in Paradox' Revisited," *Lutheran Quarterly* 10 (1996), 268.

Thus, true as it is to say that we are the person God declares us to be through the merits of Christ, we are also the person shaped by what – under grace—we do.[22]

The Christian's identity is shaped in Christ also in a reciprocal way—by his actions and the habits that have been developed. It is not entirely a unilateral event. Some habits and actions certainly do also affect the believer's standing *coram deo*.[23]

It is significant that Meilaender traces the central concern of this dissertation—the feeble understanding of character formation within Lutheranism—to an over-simplification of the relationship between a person's identity before God and his identity before men.

> So (1) I can be wrong with God even while treating the neighbor rightly, and (2) I can be right with God even while treating the neighbor wrongly. How can these two identities of mine be unified? Or do we end in paradox after all—able to say only that one must trust that one's "true" self is the one who, for Christ's sake, is right with God? If that is all we can say, and if it is rightly said of all who have faith, then holiness of life seems entirely irrelevant to our true identity. And, alas, Lutheranism has no ethic—as its detractors have sometimes suggested.[24]

Meilaender's assessment is accurate. It is important that strong and lively connections between the believer's life *coram deo* and *coram hominibus* be maintained. Yet, a clear delineation of these connections is not only difficult, but dangerous. Meilaender himself warned in an earlier essay against yielding to "the temptation to step across the gap

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[22] Meilaender, "Reclaiming the Quest," 486.

[23] For example, the Christian who fails to establish a pious habit of regular worship attendance could well cultivate a detrimental habit of neglect of the means of grace. Such an onerous habit would eventuate in the erosion and extinction of faith.

[24] Ibid., 487.

which divides inculcation of the virtues from shaping the soul."[25] The interrelationship between growth in virtue *coram hominibus* and individual identity *coram deo* remains at once tremendously dense and delicate, and one should resist becoming overly confident in offering descriptions of it. While a delineation of the relationship remains elusive, it is certain that a relationship does, nevertheless, exist.

One of the strengths of thinking within a creedal framework is the clarification of at least one connection that can be safely traced between the two potentially disparate aspects of faith and character. In the created realm into which the justified is sent, there is the possibility, indeed the expectation, of continual growth and development. The Christian's character becomes more Christian. The Christian life is marked by the production of abundant good works and the increasing practice of virtue. The development of character does not and can not win for the believer status before God, yet this status—granted by grace alone—has a decided impact on the believer's growth in character. As Kolb emphasized, what God declares about the believer unquestionably shapes the person he becomes in his activities *coram hominibus*.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer also grasped the importance of this truth. The Christian's life is shaped by the One who redeems and establishes the relationship of faith.

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[25] Meilaender, *Theory and Practice*, 126.

> What matters in the Church is not religion but the form of Christ, and its taking form amidst a band of men.... We have now seen that it is only with reference to the form that we can speak of formation in a Christian and ethical sense. Formation is not an independent process or condition which can in some way or other be detached from this form. The only formation is formation by and into the form of Jesus Christ.[26]

Christians strive for virtue not to perfect their nature or to achieve personal fulfillment, still less to win divine favor. They seek to gain a character stamped with virtue because they are acutely aware that this is the standard that Christ himself has established for humanity. And as the Creed makes manifest, man was created to be fully human. Fully human people are virtuous people seeking the character of the One who shows perfectly what it means to be human.

Meilaender explains it this way:

> Examining our deeds, it may, of course, sometimes seem paradoxical that an identity shaped by such deeds should be one with which God is well pleased. But the unity of our self—and the burden of seeing to it that this unity is one day manifest—lies in God's word of both pardon and power. He is intent upon renewing us after the image of his Son, and we must therefore be just as intent upon seeking that renewal—that holiness—in our being and our doing. Ethics matters— *coram deo.*[27]

Ethics matters to God because God has a will for his creation. His will for humanity is that each person be fully human—in possession of virtues which make him an able servant to the rest of creation. This is not a pursuit of virtue for the sake of virtue, but for the sake of

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[26] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 21.

[27] Meilaender, "Reclaiming the Quest," 491.

conformity to Christ who is the perfect standard of what it means to be human. There is ample room, then, within this framework to reclaim an appropriate understanding of the *imitatio Christi.*[28]

A complete pursuit of this potent topic of imitation would lead far from the path demarcated for this paper. It will be enough to allow Köberle to speak with his characteristic eloquence on the place and need for a Lutheran use of the *imitatio Christi.*

> It is necessary to remind ourselves most emphatically what a deep significance the concrete contemplation of the historic picture of the life of Jesus has four our sanctification. For us men who have daily to contend with flesh and blood it is of supreme importance to see how the Holy One of God conducted Himself amid the sinful, wretched, contentious realities of this earth and at the same time preserved His holiness.... For that reason only such an example has a liberating effect, which comes from a complete, real human life that was lived in this world and that has known and overcome the needs and trials of humanity. For the formation of the image of God within us, for the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 5:17), for the control of our emotions, for the determination of the manner and form of our conduct, the contemplation of the teaching, praying, healing, suffering Savior as He is portrayed in Scripture is indispensable.[29]

Thus, the Creed, with articles on creation, redemption, and restoration/fulfillment, pulls together the Christian's life *coram deo* and *coram hominibus.* Meilaender provides this succinct summary:

> Both identities find their unity in the one Christ, who brings the Father to us and us to the Father. The wholeness and oneness of our

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[28] Roman Catholic moral theology has, of course, a well-developed concept of the *imitatio Christi.* It is interesting to note that some of their scholars describe "a real participation in the *imitatio Christi*" as "the new 'form' which the infused virtue puts in the believer." Cessario, *Moral Virtues,* 112. This thought bears a remarkable affinity to the discussion of the present study regarding the difference that justification by faith makes in the every day life of the believer.

[29] Köberle, 158.

identity is God's work. Because he is seriously committed to it, we must also be so committed. Because he is seriously committed to it, we need not doubt that the gap between our two identities will one day be overcome.[30]

This rich understanding of the relation between faith and the Christian's life should not be mistaken for a mere motivational connection. Unity in the believer's life is found in Christ. Christ clothes his people with his righteousness. His people strive to become more fully like Christ—more fully human. It is simply what it means to be human.

The other members of God's creation which stand apart from humanity in consistently and correctly serving their Creator do so as they yield to instinct, doing "what comes naturally." By being appropriately creaturely, each conforms to God's creative intention for its kind. Thus, geese migrate with the seasons, salmon swim upstream to spawn and die, and bees gather nectar and inadvertently pollinate flowers. Every part of creation moves in conformity with the will of the Creator. So, then, should God's highest creation, man. For the unbeliever, whether moral or otherwise, this is little more than a matter of conforming, in varying degrees, to the internal knowledge that this is his created purpose—just as Paul has it in chapter two of Romans. For Christians the desire to be all that they were created to be takes on an intentional and purposeful nature. Aware of God's grace and God's will, they desire, both by "instinct" and by revelation, to be as God created

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[30] Ibid., 491.

them to be: fully human—that is, like Christ. Thus the believer's

standing *coram deo* and *coram hominibus* are once more tightly bound

and interrelated.

From Theory to Practice

Another objective of this study that has, to some extent, hopefully

been realized, is the provision of a way to proceed beyond theory to direct

application. Hauerwas once made the pointed observation that "too often

theologians spend their time writing prolegomena, that is, essays on

theological method meant to show how theology should be done in case

anyone ever got around to doing any."[31] Similarly, if a study on

theological ethics can not be translated into tangible application at a

parish level, its value and even validity must come under suspicion.

Meilaender is cognizant of the frequent disconnect between merely

presenting a sublime thought or theory and converting it into action.

> And one thing more: Even if the approach I have taken is sound and
> is to be recommended, we need finally to acknowledge for ourselves
> and fellows that the trick is not only to see or say this but to live it.
> As St. Augustine says at the end of Book VII of the *Confessions*: It is
> one thing to see from a mountaintop in the forests the land of peace
> in the distance...and it is another thing to hold to the way that leads
> there."[32]

Unfortunately, this application is not always easily accomplished.

While Meilaender is able to contend for the application of theory, he

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[31] Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, 34.

[32] Meilaender, "Task of Lutheran Ethics," 22.

readily admits in another place that this often proves to be an elusive goal. After offering one of his most thoroughgoing attempts at a description of the place of virtue in the Christian life, Meilaender concedes, "we need not deny that it may prove difficult to translate theory into practice and find a way to do justice to both senses of virtue in our lives."[33]

Still, perhaps Meilaender's desire to move from theory into practice is made more difficult needlessly by the tension inherent in his dual understanding of virtue as something that the Christian accomplishes as well as something that God alone can grant. Meilaender does make a move toward the unifying capabilities of narrative which "Christians tell and retell—a story, not yet finished, in which God is graciously at work transforming sinners into saints."[34] He does not, however, specifically fix his duality within a wider horizon that embraces both aspects in a practical way. It would indeed be difficult to apply his tension-based understanding in a parish setting. The teaching would be ripe for a harvest of confusion as people inevitably would resolve the tension by affirming one or other of the poles while diminishing the antithesis.[35]

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[33] Meilaender, *Theory and Practice*, 123.

[34] Ibid., 125.

[35] It is possible that this criticism applies also to Köberle's work. Köberle's understanding of the relation between justification and sanctification is grounded in an irresolvable tension that defies easy translation to the needs of parish ministry. See Köberle, 256-265.

What Meilaender hints at with his nod toward a narrative understanding of the Christian life which resolves the practical tensions of the Christian life at the eschaton, the creedal framework makes explicit. The Creed is, in fact, also a narrative.[36] It relates the account of God's relationship with this world. The story begins with God's action of creation, unfolds with the account of the redemption of God's rebellious and fallen creation, man, and culminates in the final restoration and consummation at the resurrection of the dead. This is the narrative that directs and explains not only this world, but the lives of individual Christians. With all the rest of creation, the Christian lives, only by the grace of the Creator, to serve the Creator, in anticipation of the Creator's promised consummation.

Gustaf Wingren memorably articulates the unifying capabilities that the narrative of the creedal framework lends to Christian faith and the Christian walk.

> While man lives in the world he continues to be affected by the Gospel and his Baptism, but in this he is one with the rest of the world in awaiting an event which will happen not only to him and to the Church, but to all men—the return of Christ, the Last Judgment, and the resurrection of the dead.

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[36] Dorothy Sayers recognized this fact and offered an eloquent description: "The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man—and the dogma is the drama. That drama is summarized quite clearly in the creeds of the Church, and if we think it dull it is because we either have never really read those amazing documents or have recited them so often and so mechanically as to have lost all sense of their meaning. The plot pivots upon a single character, and the whole action is the answer to a single central problem: *What think ye of Christ?*" Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Whimsical Christian: 18 Essays by Dorothy L. Sayers* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979), 20-21(emphasis in original).

> This last event has already begun with the work of the Spirit in the Church. Everything, therefore, that takes place in the Church takes place with the whole of Creation and for the whole of Creation. What happens in the Church is simply the continuation of what happened when Christ became man. And He became man in order to restore what God had created.[37]

Wingren's insight into the significance of creation provides unity to the Christian's life as it relates the two kinds of righteousness together in a meaningful way. Obviously, then, this creedal emphasis as it was expressed and further developed in conjunction with the three kinds of righteousness in chapter five has potential as a key to a retrieval of a Lutheran approach to Christian ethics.

Unencumbered by the polarizing tendencies of any of the usual dualities, the creedal framework provides a norming horizon, within which a believer's life *coram deo* and *coram hominibus* can be seen together as a unity. Instead of being concerned to balance some particular tension, the believer is able to see all of his life, before God and before men, as the unfolding of God's creative design. Justification, for example, is not regarded in tension with sanctification. Instead, God's proclamation of justifying grace is recognized as the restoration that enables the believer to return to the created realm with new insight into God's will, and new support for the privileged task of living as God always intended his creatures to live. There is no polarizing antithesis to

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[37] Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 197.

be maintained, no dichotomy to be balanced. There is simply the overarching work of God for his people and in his people.

Also of interest and relevance to this discussion about the work of God in creating, redeeming, and sustaining his creation and the responsibility of man to live as a fully human creature within God's creation is the work of William Placher. With a persuasive account of the historical factors involved, Placher argues that the first generation of reformers, as well as others who had gone before them, understood "human beings...as responsible agents in a process that yet owed everything to God."[38]

Placher supplies a helpful analogy:

> We can debate how many choices Willy Loman had in *Death of a Salesman* and what mix of forces and decisions shaped his tragedy. If someone interrupts our discussions of the relative importance of his family, the company that fires him, and his own character in his tragic fate, to say, "No, you all have it wrong—Arthur Miller was really the force that determined Willy Loman's actions," we do not feel so much that a new point of view has been introduced as that the interruption has changed the subject. *Of course*, the author determined all the characters' actions—but that is irrelevant to our discussion of the characters' motivations.

> Similarly, then, given the views of Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin, arguments about the relative weight to be assigned to chance and providence, free will and divine election, make no sense. The author is not one of the characters in the play, and those characters have their own motivations and freedom, independent of the divine author's determination of every outcome.[39]

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[38] William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 148.

[39] Ibid., 125 (emphasis in original).

When approaching a question of theology, then, it is vital to be certain from what perspective, or sphere, the question is being considered.

In an article that deserves to be widely read and applied, James Voelz offers like counsel with regard to the interpretation of Scripture.

> "Depending on your vantage point/your perspective, there seem to be two overall systems of theology with their own overall principles or truths. The *first* is characterized by what I shall call *God's initiative*, the *second* by *human concurrence*.[40]

Recognizing a similar truth in the world of physics, Voelz uses the shorthand labels, "Einsteinian" and "Newtonian" respectively, for these two systems. One describes the way that things truly are, the other the way that things are commonly experienced. The point is clear: both ways of seeing Scripture, or theology, or its application to individual lives, are appropriate and correct—within their sphere or perspective.

The correlation to the question of theological ethics is apparent. Certainly, God accomplishes the entire work of salvation without any contribution from the one he redeems. Yet, it is also true that in another sense—within the created sphere—the one redeemed is entirely responsible for the life he lives. This is altogether biblical, as Voelz observes, "Much of the Bible is 'Newtonian.' All of Paul's paraenesis is. And we avoid that like the plague."[41] The avoidance, of course, stems from the desire to protect what Voelz would term "Einsteinian" truths

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[40] James Voelz, "'Newton and Einstein at the Foot of the Cross': A Post-Modern Approach to Theology," *Concordia Journal* 25:3 (July, 1999), 267 (emphasis in original).

[41] Ibid., 275.

about man's relation to God. The perspectivalism gained from Placher and Voelz reveal the error in denigrating the ethical aspects of Christianity. Within the appropriate sphere, ethics matters a great deal—both to the creation, which depends on the service of the redeemed creature, and to the Creator, who places the redeemed into the creation with definite expectations.

Using the creedal frame, both perspectives—that which is theoretically accurate and that which is practically helpful—are readily embraced, and neither need be deprecated.

Theology and Practice Reunited

Among the list of grievances for which Lutheranism is considered culpable, Stanley Hauerwas includes exacerbating the breach between theology and practice that until recently has typified much of contemporary theology.

> Once there was no Christian ethics simply because Christians could not distinguish between their beliefs and their behavior. They assumed that their lives exemplified (or at least should exemplify) their doctrines in a manner that made a division between life and doctrine impossible.[42]

It is worth noting, then, that the creedal frame also proves useful in addressing this concern, helping to diminish the gulf between ethics and theology that exists in the minds and lives of many Christians today. In

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[42] Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them*, 20. The entire chapter surrounding this quote is important, see pages 19-36, especially pages 27-28 where Hauerwas traces the Reformation's complicity in the division between theology and ethics.

a sense, this is a corollary to the discussion of the previous section, but the weight of relevant material warrants a separate consideration here.

The effort to rectify the unfortunate divorce between theology and practice is the driving concern in the work of Ellen Charry. Her book, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, "is concerned with primary Christian doctrines—specifically, their character-forming intentions."[43] The bulk of Charry's work is simply a careful reading of classic and important texts from the church's history which are commonly considered to be doctrinal heavyweights, e.g. Augustine's *De Trinitate* and Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. Charry's examination reveals a common trait in all of these doctrinally profound theologians: "the irrepressible urge...to render theology of genuine use to believers, even as they are clarifying, organizing, and reinterpreting Christian claims about God, the world, the church, and ourselves."[44] Charry articulates and reinforces the truth that theology is not alien to the Christian life, but intimately intertwined with it.

What is typically perceived as the tension between God's declaration of man's identity and man's achievement of growth in character is also illuminated and challenged by Charry's study. "This work," she writes, "assumes that thinking of insight-oriented and practice-oriented options regarding the formation of virtue as a forced

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[43] Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6.

[44] Ibid., ix.

choice is a false dichotomy."[45] Elaborating on this interesting and

relevant line of thought, Charry argues:

> [Modern] theologians have by and large assumed that knowing God
> creates the proper conditions for loving God rather than the reverse.
> But concomitant with dedication to knowing God, the church has
> stressed participation in Christian community and practices as a way
> not only of reinforcing the knowledge of God but also of shaping the
> mind so that knowledge of the love of God fits into a life prepared to
> interpret it properly.[46]

In other words, Christian actions and practices teach the believer. Not

only does knowledge shape a person, and produce right or loving actions,

but those right actions or practices serve knowledge by opening the way

for its proper reception. To choose between what is known and what is

practiced is to perpetuate the diminution of the dynamic bond that

rightly exists between Christian faith and life.

Also significant is the study of theological education by Edward

Farley. In sympathy with Hauerwas's complaint about the divorce

between ethics and theology and supporting Charry's historical

assessment, Farley champions the need for fundamental change in the

current practice of theological education. Hoping to correct what he

considers a wrong turn in modern thinking about theology, he contends

that "theology is *practical*, not theoretical." [47] Taking the terminology of

Aristotle and his students, Farley describes theology as "a *habitus*, a

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[45] Charry, 4.

[46] Ibid., 28.

[47] Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 35 (emphasis in original).

cognitive disposition and orientation of the soul, a knowledge of God and what God reveals."[48] Theology is more than relevant for Christian living; it is integrally and intimately bound with it.

This desire to affirm and reestablish the union of theology and practice is thoroughly supported by the example of Luther. Luther operated with the assumption of the absolute relevance of theology for the life of the believer. Not surprisingly, this attitude is displayed especially in Luther's Catechisms. What is most interesting for this study, however, is the recognition and approval of this emphasis by contemporary Lutheran theologians. In his study of Luther's Catechisms, Arand calls attention to the practical nature of Luther's doctrinal efforts. "Luther provides a seamless integration of doctrine and life. In his day, doctrine had a dynamic and hermeneutical character that shaped and illumined life itself."[49] Certainly, the catechism was particularly intended for sculpting and directing life in the homes of ordinary Christian believers.

> To that end, the Small Catechism provides the household with something of a liturgy, that is to say, the parts of the catechism framed and shaped a Christian ethos for daily living: Upon waking, make the sign of the cross and say the invocation followed by thanks for protection the previous night with prayer to be kept from sin during the coming day. Go to work joyfully. At meals, fold hands and pray. In the evening, call upon the triune Name. Give thanks for the day. Pray for protection during the night. Go to sleep in peace.[50]

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Arand, *That I May Be His Own*, 20.

[50] Ibid., 96.

Theology was utterly practical, woven into the fabric of everyday life.

Arand indicates that this dynamic understanding of theology

should not remain a peculiarity of Luther and the reformers but should

find application among their spiritual descendants as well.

> Doctrine is not abstract theory to be contrasted with practical skills
> and how-to steps for daily living. If anything, the Reformers (and the
> church fathers before them) viewed doctrine as pastoral care. This is
> what made the study of doctrine so important. This is why they were
> willing to engage (however reluctantly) in doctrinal debates. Doctrine
> provides the Christian with a diagnosis of the innermost needs of
> human beings. It provides a framework for interpreting life and the
> experiences of life in the light of the triune work of God.[51]

This emphasis emerges as a consistent theme throughout Arand's study

of the Catechisms.[52]

Robert Kolb reaches a similar conclusion when considering the

confessors at Augsburg. Being "a verbal noun," Kolb explains, *confession*

"carries with it a sense of activity."[53] Obviously, that activity involved the

bold stance taken by the Lutheran princes and theologians at the diet in

the face of imperial power. But, the activity of confession extended

further. "It also encompasses their activities as they returned to their

castles and courts to exercise their God-given responsibilities."[54] The

confession of right doctrine was accompanied by the confession of a

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[51] Ibid., 114.

[52] Ibid., See especially pages 21, 81, 136, and 147.

[53] Kolb, "God Calling," 9.

[54] Ibid.

rightly ordered life. Doctrine and practice came together not only for Luther but for the other reformers as well.

Finally, David Yeago concurs with Arand and Kolb about the close bond that exists between doctrine and practice—a bond that is worthy of reinforcement. "The catechisms," writes Yeago, "not only contain instruction in doctrine, but instruction in prayer and sacramental practice."[55] Christianity, then, is substantially more than a correct exposition of metaphysical or theological truth. "The learning involved in becoming a Christian and persevering as a Christian includes a significant element of 'know-how,' the acquisition of skills related to practices."[56] Yeago is persuaded that this acquisition of "know-how," or training in practices, in conjunction with training in theology must be received as much more than merely a historical observation.

> If we do not teach the catechism, if our people do not learn to participate in the liturgy, if our children do not know the Bible stories and cannot sing along in worship, if we do not begin to recover practices of formation, ways of prayer and meditation and fasting and celebration, that bind daily life with the worshipping assembly in a priestly mode of common life, then our churches will simply fade into spiritual inconsequence over the coming decades, however many new members we have and whatever the outcome of our ecclesiastical politics.[57]

Regardless of the eventual veracity of Yeago's prophecy, he does ably capture the spirit of a number of Lutheran thinkers who are eager to

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[55] Yeago, "Sacramental Lutheranism," 15.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid., 16.

apply today the lessons that Luther and the other reformers seemed to have taken for granted in their day.

There is a marriage between theology and the Christian's life. The creedal frame, with its emphasis on God's work of creation and man's responsibility within that creation, enhances and advances this union. The Creed succinctly professes the core doctrines of Christian faith, yet by confessing God's work of redemption and restoration within the wider context of God's creating activity, the profound ontological and theological declarations of the creed are firmly grounded in the ordinary and historical aspects of life within creation. Theology if as much a part of routine life as the recitation of the Creed is a routine part of the Divine Service. Those seeking to overcome the divorce between doctrine and ordinary Christian life should find the Christian Creed an enormously beneficial norming horizon within which to operate. A creedal view of Christian faith and life makes space for an active and dynamic practice of ethics and in the process brings doctrine and practice nearer reconciliation.

Applications

Given the thesis of this study, a failure at least to consider some possible practical implications would be evident self-contradiction. Accordingly, this investigation will suggest several avenues which seem

to hold the promise of particularly fruitful returns on an investment of further study. Of paramount interest for this paper is the application of virtue ethics within a creedal framework in a parish setting; the following practical applications are proposed accordingly.

Instruction in Virtue

To begin, it is evident that a shepherd of God's flock must take stock not only of his opportunity but of his responsibility to provide the kind of training and teaching that people need if they are to grow in the acquisition of virtue. In many ecclesiastical circles, recent decades have witnessed a resurgence of interest in the need for careful and deliberate catechesis, especially for the young. The importance of faithful doctrinal instruction is now widely acknowledged. It is hoped that this study has demonstrated the legitimacy of providing training not only for the sake of spiritual knowledge and doctrinal maturity, but for the sake of intentional character formation and moral maturity. Masquerading under the guise of confessional faithfulness or historical orthodoxy, a visceral and immediate reaction against any form of "moralism" or "moralizing" continues to haunt many Lutherans. Confronted with this status quo, it is wise—even necessary—to emphasize the theological propriety of intentional and unvarnished training in virtue and cultivation of character.

Gilbert Meilaender is, once more, an able spokesman to a misguided suspicion toward ethics and to the eventual correction of this suspicion.

> Protestants, in particular, love to ring the changes on these crucial Pauline themes ["justified by faith apart from works of law," etc.]—almost suggesting, on occasion, that doing so could substitute for moral guidance and direction. ...Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to suppose that the Scriptures exist only to bear witness to Christ, as if they were the norm for the church's faith but not also for her life.[58]

To insist that the establishment or enforcement of any sort of norm is out of bounds for true Christianity is to eradicate ethics and eventually make it impossible "to distinguish between actions that follow Christ and actions that turn against him."[59] Not only is this move misdirected, but so too is the ostensibly orthodox thinking behind it.

> The church's moral discipline does not set up conditions for entering the kingdom; rather, it offers a description of what the life of discipleship should be like—a description of what it means to follow Christ. In setting forth such a description of her way of life, in understanding that description as a discipline to be undertaken, the church does not raise any other standard than the Christ who is confessed. ...We seek, that is, to give content and structure to the meaning of love.[60]

This study has demonstrated that this is not an idea unique to Meilaender. It should be no surprise, of course, to find Hauerwas in agreement with Meilaender's identification of an aversion to ethics, or a normed vision of the Christian life, in the contemporary church.

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[58] Meilaender, *Things That Count*, 60.

[59] Ibid., 61,

[60] Ibid.

In our time, what many call modern times, unbelievers and believers (and even some theologians who actually may be believers!) do not believe that theological claims do any work. I assume that helps explain that no matter how sincerely many believe what it is they believe about God, they in fact live lives of practical atheism. Accordingly, quite profound and sophisticated theological systems can be developed, but the theological discourse seems to "float," making no difference for how we live.[61]

Of course, Hauerwas concurs that intentional training in ethics—cultivating growth in character according to Scriptural standards and norms—is a significant step toward overcoming the disorder bred by Christendom's practical atheism. While it is not remarkable to find such ready support from Hauerwas, it is worth remembering that the same approval and endorsement of training in virtue is found in Melanchthon.

Since Christians should cherish and support this civil society, this teaching of civic morals and duties has to be known by them. …Therefore those who disparage philosophy not only wage war against human nature, but they also severely injure the glory of the Gospel, which commands that men be restrained by civic discipline.[62]

It is the repeated refrain and a certain conclusion of this study: Christian people need to be trained in virtue. A noble character does not simply happen. For the sake of believers and for the sake of the church, virtues must be cultivated and character shaped. Training in virtuous living should have a place within the church—ideally side by side with catechesis. And training in practical truths of virtuous Christian living that begins in youth should not cease with confirmation but be an integral component in the church's ministry to adults. Certainly, it

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[61] Hauerwas, *Better Hope*, 140.

[62] Melanchthon, *Orations on Philosophy*, 81.

would reflect remarkable ignorance—or perhaps hubris—to gainsay a serious study and adoption of the insights into virtue and the shaping of character to be gained from Aristotle and his Christian students in later generations.[63] Christians would not misstep by joining to their study of God's will for humanity revealed in the Commandments, a consideration of the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

Cultivation of Community

Beyond the (hopefully) obvious conclusion that training in virtue and the cultivation of character deserve to be considered as priorities in the ministry of a congregation, the parish pastor would also serve his flock well by taking to heart the important role of the community in the formation of individual character. This is, of course, a chief principle of virtue ethics.[64] Charry provides a lucid articulation of the role of community in the shaping of virtue.

> Excellent character doesn't just happen—it is formed, crafted among other things by literary or visual examples that companion, expand one's world, stimulate the imagination, engage the emotions, sharpen discernment, and promote practice vicariously.... Moral formation requires emotional engagement with concrete models for emulation and a social context within which to practice them.[65]

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[63] Naturally, Aquinas and Melanchthon are both to be counted in this number. For an important contemporary example, see Pieper, *Four Cardinal Virtues*.

[64] Hauerwas has devoted at least one entire book to this topic. See: Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995). See also Murphy, Kallenberg, and Nation, *Virtues & Practices*, especially chapters 1, 2, & 4.

[65] Charry, 26.

L. Gregory Jones draws the obvious conclusion: "Moral formation occurs through an induction into the friendships and practices of Christian communities."[66] Köberle also recognizes the role of the church in the shaping of morals. "This particularly applies to children," writes Köberle, "who are not to be preached at nor 'converted' but who are decisively formed and fashioned by the visible and tangible influences of the Church in which they grow up."[67] A Christian congregation is indeed the ideal community for the cultivation of character, unparalleled in its ability to supply the fullest possible expression of each of Charry's requirements. In the church there are concrete examples to be emulated and a social setting within which to hone one's skills. Neither is the character-shaping community of believers bound by the constraints of time or history. As The Apology indicates, included in the community of the church are the saints who have preceded those in the church yet militant whose memory and example can also serve the cultivation of character.[68]

Granted that many congregations already realize many of these character-shaping functions unintentionally, a concerted and purposeful practice of such shaping is rare in most parishes. Congregations and

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[66] Jones, 114.

[67] Köberle, 201.

[68] "Our confession approves giving honor to the saints. ...The third honor is imitation: first of their faith, then of their other virtues, which people should imitate according to their callings." *The Book of Concord*, 238 (Ap 21, 6).

their pastors need to realize the critical role they can play in the right shaping of individual character.[69] In typically bald and disarming language, Hauerwas bluntly expresses the import of this congregational task: "I want to be part of a community with the habits and practices that will make me do what I would otherwise not choose to do and then to learn to like what I have been forced to do."[70] Indeed, this is part of what a Christian congregation should be doing for its people. It is the reality of what it means to shape character and nurture virtue according to God's will for his gathered people.

As the congregation nurtures its role in character formation, it will also serve its responsibility to the community that lies beside and beyond the church. This is the intent behind Hauerwas's frequently quoted dictum pair: "the first social ethical task of the church is to be the church," and "the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic."[71] As the members of the Christian congregation strive to shape character according to God's will, they establish a standard and model for upright living and lend credibility to their first-order task of Gospel proclamation. "For the church," Hauerwas asserts, "is finally known by the character of the people who constitute it, and if we lack

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[69] In truth, all congregations, by virtue of their community influence, are to some degree shaping the character of their members. The question that warrants more careful attention is what *kind* of character are they shaping?

[70] Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 75.

[71] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 99.

that character, the world rightly draws the conclusion that the God we worship is in fact a false God."[72]

Of course, the pursuit of this vision of character makes the ethic of the Christian community unique and helps to explain its particular and community-oriented nature as well as both its attraction and repulsion to those yet outside. Hauerwas is consistent in insisting "that ethics always requires an adjective or qualifier."[73] In other words, there is no universal ethic, but only the ethics of particular people and communities in particular times and places. How this conviction relates to Christian ethics is explained by Hauerwas.

> Our ethic is distinctive, not because of the way we go about making decisions, or because it arises out of a tradition or a community.... Our ethic is distinctive in its content. Christian ethics is about following this Jew from Nazareth, being a part of his people. Therefore, this ethics will probably not make much sense unless one knows that story, sees that vision, is part of that people.[74]

So it is that as the church community makes a priority of shaping character according to its unique norm, it is faithfully accomplishing its divine duty to be salt and light in a sin-ridden world.

Ethics for Ordinary Life

An emphasis on the cultivation of character and growth in the virtues finds a fertile field of application in the everyday aspects of

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[72] Ibid., 109.

[73] Ibid., 1.

[74] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 102.

routine life. In this arena, the most daunting challenge is typically the mundane ordinariness of existence. Careful attention to the application of virtuous character in the normalcy of life stands in sharp contrast to the purview of typical ethical consideration. Ethics is generally and justifiably thought to be preoccupied with extraordinarily complicated, borderline situations rarely faced by most people.[75] The tremendous practical benefit of learning from thinkers in virtue ethics is their aversion to these theoretical speculations and their interest in the ethical needs and questions encountered in daily life. It is interesting and not surprising that Melanchthon too had little use for speculation about hypothetical borderline ethical dilemmas. In his 1521 *Loci Communes* he wrote:

> Cicero discusses the duty of the man who, after being shipwrecked, chances upon the same plank that a certain wise man is holding. Away with such stupid questions which hardly ever arise in actual human affairs![76]

When incorporating the insights of virtue ethics and practiced in the context of the creed, ethics is moved from irrelevant speculation into the ebb and flow of utterly practical routine living.

Emphasizing the need for continual growth in virtue and character leads people to understand life more comprehensively. In the context of

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[75] These artificial situations are a standard feature of many efforts at "doing ethics," and have become almost standardized. Two favorites are "Should a person lie to protect the life of innocent people from murderous pursuers?" and some form of the "overloaded lifeboat" in which students with minimal resumés of the "survivors" are asked to determine who should and should not retain a position in the boat.

[76] Melanchthon, *Loci Communes Theologici*, 148.

the wide horizon provided by the creedal framework, the continuous expression of God's salvific activity on humanity's behalf is detected in all of life. Believers thus taught to recognize the activity of God throughout the whole of creation will learn to reflect a corresponding interest in living all of their lives as godly people of virtue—increasingly conforming themselves to God's norm for his highest creation. In time, this perspective will overshadow and displace the fragmented view of life and ethics that results from attempts to discern the "right" decision to be made in a particular circumstance. Hauerwas captures this thought when he writes, "For the Christian life is more a recognition and training of our senses and passions than a matter of choices and decisions."[77] One does not live as he chooses and resort to ethical considerations only when faced with a perplexing dilemma or choice. All of life becomes a matter of ethics.

For the Christian believer, making ethics a way of life means seeking the standards of virtue—for no other reason than that this is God's will for his creation. The Christian recognizes that he is—in the most comprehensive sense—created for virtue. Ethics is not about choices and weighing options. It is a matter of being what God created the person to be. Josef Pieper also gives voice to the import of thinking about ethics in terms of virtue.

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[77] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 149.

With a doctrine of commandments or duties, however, there is always the danger of arbitrarily drawing up a list of requirements and losing sight of the human person who "ought" to do this or that. The doctrine of virtue, on the other hand, has things to say about this human person; it speaks both of the kind of being which is his when he enters the world, as a consequence of his createdness, and the kind of being he ought to strive toward and attain to—by being prudent, just, brave, and temperate.[78]

Understood in this way, ethics becomes an integral aspect of all life.

With this understanding of ethics in place in Lutheran congregations, the tired criticisms of Lutheranism's ethical irrelevance and ultimate failure could not long be sustained.

At the risk of stating the obvious, and broaching a topic beyond the consideration of this paper, spiritual habits such as daily prayer (yes, even the use of rote, memorized prayers), regular use of the liturgy, making the sign of the cross, and a prominently emphasized church year will all be welcomed as significant tools to be used in the formation of character. These spiritual habits also become a part of the believer's everyday life and directly influence both spiritual and moral development—if indeed the two may be so easily distinguished. An acknowledgement of the rightful place of character development and cultivation of virtue within the Christian congregation may even create the space necessary for a reevaluation of what constitutes a "good, Lutheran, sermon." Perhaps virtue ethics exercised within a creedal framework may so broaden ethical thinking and understanding in

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[78] Pieper, *Four Cardinal Virtues*, xii.

Lutheranism that homilies in the spirit of Luther's great catechetical sermons may once again be heard and appreciated, even in 21st century pulpits.[79]

Conclusion

Lutheranism has long and legitimately enjoyed a reputation for theological precision and profundity. It is not surprising, therefore, to find within the theology of the reformers and their heirs an able response to those who would charge Lutheranism with an inability to articulate a coherent and meaningful ethics. Perhaps more significantly, the rich heritage of Lutheran doctrine also reveals the serious error of those within Lutheranism who would dismiss or even castigate efforts at Christian ethics as a threat to the "pure Gospel." Lutheranism is indeed able to attend to the concerns of real people in real situations without in any way diminishing an accurate and effective proclamation of the Gospel. As the reformers knew and taught, even as faithful Lutheran

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[79] A shift in the perceptions exercised by a parish pastor is dependent in large part on a shift in the training he receives. One critically important implication of this study is that seminary instruction should not present the law/gospel dynamic as the ultimate norming horizon for all of theology and life. Instead, careful consideration should be given to teaching the much wider frame provided by the Creed as a paradigm broad enough to include all that needs to be done in the life of a congregation. Additionally, an acknowledgment and affirmation of the confessional validity of the Lutheran heritage of training in virtue and cultivation of character would also serve to promote the salutary exercise of these practices today. Considerably more could be said about the current shape and practice of seminary training, but this lies well beyond the scope of the present study. For excellent explorations of this topic see Farley, *Theologia* and chapter 7 in Murphy, Kallenberg, and Nation, *Virtues & Practices*.

pastors and theologians should proclaim the Gospel, so also should they attend to the concerns and situation of everyday routine life.

While the Lutheran church has for too long struggled to find its ethical voice, Lutheran theology is certainly equipped to present an ethic for daily life that is eminently practical. Most importantly, though, Lutheranism can expound Christian ethics that is meaningfully connected to the central doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. Within the framework provided by the Creed, the doctrine of justification can be proclaimed in all of its glory and comfort, and the insights of virtue ethics can be brought to bear on individual lives with all of their practical relevance. Wingren is right:

> What happens in the Church is simply the continuation of what happened when Christ became man. And He became man in order to restore what God had created.[80]

At the cross the restoration was accomplished—a fact wholly realized even now in the lives of believers, *coram deo*. And, a fact increasingly revealed, *coram hominibus*, as believers grow into God's will, becoming, incrementally, more of what God created them to be. This is the rich and unified reality available when Christian theology and Christian living are considered together within the context of the creedal frame—a framework that points to creation's ultimate *telos*—the consummation of God's will at the Parousia when reality *coram deo* and *coram hominibus* is made fully and finally one.

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[80] Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 197.

Lutheranism, then, should not be burdened by an ethical paralysis prompted by an unfounded fear of legalism. It is, no doubt, the result of many factors that the charge of Lutheranism's ethical irrelevance is too often vindicated by contemporary Lutheran theologians and pastors. A faithful appropriation of their theological heritage, however, is not one of them. Perhaps, on a not so distant day, a discussion of Lutheran ethics will not be greeted with indifference, hostility, or even amusement; and Lutheranism's ill-suited, if yet deserved, reputation for ethical irrelevance will at last be overcome. If this study serves that end, it will have accomplished its purpose.

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